

Tourism - A Way Ahead For Llanfair



**Produced for Llanfair Caereinion Town
Council**



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A Tourism Ethos for Llanfair Caereinion in the 2020s

"A town which welcomes a growing number of tourists from close to home and far away, encouraging them to spend the maximum time as possible here to explore our culture, local ethos and businesses"

Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Llanfair Caereinion Town Council as a result of the Tourism Project funded by Arwain to examine ways of increasing the numbers of visitors to the town and their spend once here.

The report has been compiled following both desk research and local consultation with business owners, organization representatives and other stakeholders. Its sections include:

- A short summary of Llanfair Caereinion's tourism position today.
- Results from the consultation sessions held with local stakeholders.
- An introduction to audience targeting.
- Three case studies from other small towns to demonstrate what is possible in locations such as Llanfair.
- Practical steps which can be taken for the short, medium and long terms to develop tourism in the town.
- Two appendices on further tourism data and insight published elsewhere and summaries of promotional methods used in the early 2020s by other tourism-encouraging bodies.

Llanfair Caereinion's Tourism Position Today

The town has a small but stable tourism industry as of early 2022.

The industry is supported in the main by the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway which operates steam-hauled services from its base on the edge of the town for tourists in the traditional visitor attraction season. The railway attracts approximately 25,000 visitors per annum, employs a number of paid staff and has volunteers from around the UK who regularly visit to conduct duties on the line. These volunteers can themselves be considered tourists particularly as many extensively use local facilities such as shops, petrol stations, pubs and eateries.

The Cloverlands Model Car Museum is to be added to the W&LLR's site in Llanfair in 2022 which, in its previous location, attracted approximately 2,500 visitors per year.

A number of visitor accommodation facilities exist in the area. These are a combination of rented self-catering cottages, bed and breakfast rooms, caravan parks, lodges and campsites. No large hotel exists in the town though proposals for such facilities in both Newtown and Welshpool and likely to have a positive effect on the overall provision of accommodation in the Montgomery shire region.

Three pubs exist in the town - the Red Lion, Black Lion and The Goat Hotel. All three offer ales, spirits and soft drinks with food also offered.

Deri Woods, on the western outskirts of the town, offers a carpark and a number of gravel trails through scenic woodland which may offer promotional opportunities in the future for walkers, those breaking journeys and local residents. Work in recent years in the woods has been coordinated with volunteer support giving some notably local backing to their preservation.

Mid Wales Alpacas, based on a farm in the town, offers trekking experiences with alpacas for adult and family groups. It has a well laid out, clear website and operates daily through the tourism season. A number of lengths of experience are offered which gives potential for targeting varied audiences.

Several businesses within Llanfair Caereinion exist to primarily serve local residents but that may benefit somewhat from tourism. These include a post office / shop and petrol station with shop facilities.

Investment in the town is ongoing on community facilities which could improve the broad base of opportunities for the 'stop-off' market. These include the new playground for which plans are, at time of writing, progressing quickly.

Results of Consultation

Three consultation sessions were held during January 2022 with residents of the town and surrounding areas.

Invitations were widespread as a deliberate way of encouraging the broadest possible 'buy-in' for tourism development in the town and to avoid some of the negative impacts that growth in visitor numbers can bring.

It is important to say that a number of key businesses and local organizations, such as local pubs, were not represented in the consultation sessions. Invitations were issued and the nature of the project stressed but nevertheless these organizations were unable to join the sessions. This is perhaps indicative of some skepticism locally about the potential to develop tourism in the town though not about the benefits of it which appear to be broadly accepted.

It is also very important to reflect that the building of tourism spend within the town is unlikely to, at least initially, be sufficient to deploy long-term paid resources which means that any additional activity to encourage visitation will need to be delivered by engaged local people.

The sessions encouraged attendees to first consider the 'why' of tourism. This was designed to provoke reasons to promote tourism from attendees rather than, initially, to seek their ideas for the 'how' to achieve tourism. The sessions then moved to allowing attendees to provide their ideas and concepts for practical measures and steps which could be used to promote tourism in the town.

On the 'why' encourage tourism, the following were mentioned:

- To give visitors a positive impression of our area leaving them with pleasant, definitive memories of Llanfair. Particularly engaging visitors with all of their senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight).
- Present visitors with authentic, local voices to give them a sense and understanding of our heritage and culture.
- To support existing local businesses and to promote new ones all while sustaining a recently reduced offer of town amenities.
- To bring people together for common cause and enjoyment in the beautiful surroundings of the town and local area.

Broadly, the ideas and concepts put forward can be segregated into several areas:

Events

- Events were the most popular and frequently suggested way through the three sessions of encouraging visits to the town. It was broadly thought that they can be used to achieve a number of objectives at once or even, occasionally, all.
- Suggestions for events included:
 - Music events, sessions and concerts.
 - Expansion of the town's Gala event.
 - Heritage tours and talks.
 - Markets in the town. This was considered particularly popular.
 - Outdoor and indoor cinema sessions. *It is noteworthy that the rural cinema offer in nearby Llanfyllin was closed in late 2021 because of a lack of interest in it after a number of years suggesting this is another example of a local service that would rely partly on tourism to thrive.*
 - Runs, cycles and walks around the town and area. It was suggested that the 'Race the Train' event involving the town and steam railway could be reinvigorated.
 - Car club visits. *This is likely to grow in number, size and interest upon the opening of the new Cloverlands Model Car Museum at the site of the steam railway in 2022.*

Heritage & Culture

- With one of the emergent objectives of stakeholders being to share our local traditions and culture with visitors, this area attracted comment across all sessions.
- One session took particular interest in the music of our area and how this can be conveyed to visitors.
- Some comment was made about the potential for the town's Institute to be used as a basis for history tours of the town as well as a signpost to visitors.
- One contributor reflected that the interest in genealogy and tracing family histories could be used to promote visiting the area. *Given Llanfair's small population, it is difficult to see how this could be actively promoted but potential links to local history archives could be welcome.*
- It was felt that the town's heritage and culture could be more prominent through interpretation in the town. *This has been largely solved by the combination of the Town Trail and tourism project outputs.*

- Some concern about reticence about using the town's central church for activities when this prominent and visually striking building could be attractive to visitors. *Investigation and discussions could be led by the Town Council in this area on the potential of the church forming a place for tourists to visit.*
- Promoting local produce and its origins, potentially through selling it in the town in the increasingly popular farm-shop-style vending machines.

Scenery & Active Visits

- A number of stakeholders, across all sessions, commented about the beautiful scenery which surrounds the town which could be used to promote visitation.
- Boosting promotion of the newly installed Town Trail funded by CADW and the National Lottery Heritage Scheme which was delivered recently, though in pandemic conditions and restrictions.
- Improved access to and promotion of fishing licenses was considered one route to create attract a market for special interest tourism.
- The increase in visitors being interested in bringing pets on holidays and for leisure activities was mentioned as a potential area for encouragement.
- One large-scheme suggestion put forward was for the development of a riverside walk. *This would be a large, difficult and costly scheme but may be worth scoping through a feasibility study if funding became available in the future.*
- Suggestions were made to create a cycle path or track in the town. *Again, this could be considered for a future feasibility study.*

Facilities / Amenities

- Being on the main A458 road which connects England with popular tourist destinations on the coast, the opportunity to get visitors to break their journey in the town was considered worth pursuing.
- Some comment was made about the closure of the Banwy Bakery and Cafe in town which was considered a loss of visitor amenity. It is noteworthy that this prime site has been on sale for a considerable period.
- Further improved signage was suggested both on roads and in the town itself for pedestrians. The wider tourism project will improve provision

for walking visitors. *With a significant number of brown signs already, further additions to these may have little impact.*

- Improve the provision of drop-in centres to encourage local day visits to the town by local people thus boosting secondary spend locally.
- A review of the town's parking options and their attractiveness to tourists would be welcome.

One particularly insightful discussion focused on how to measure the impacts of tourism on the town. As the benefits of tourism to towns are widely spread around a wide number of businesses and stakeholders, it can be difficult to measure these in a meaningful way. To make progress in this area, further effort is needed to ensure detailed consultation and data reporting with businesses, many of whom were unable to attend the sessions.

A number of points were raised that were, while important to the local community, are likely to have a limited impact on tourism for most audiences. These included:

- Knitting clubs.
- Public transport provision.
- Provision for local young people of meeting facilities.

While these areas may warrant investigation and improvement by the Town Council and other local stakeholders, these have been set aside from the remainder of this report in order to maintain manageable, deliverable objectives.

Considering Audiences

One area which it is important for the town's stakeholders to consider and establish is the variety of audiences that it may wish to attract.

Audience-targeting of services, events and anything else planned for tourism provision is of real importance. It is often tempting for areas to say that they would like to target and encourage everyone to visit the area but this broad brushstroke can be difficult to achieve practical actions or results from.

Recommendation - The Town Council and individual local businesses or organizations' should review the information published by The

Audience Agency in their 'Audience Spectrum' when planning projects or promotional campaigns. These can be found by using the information provided in Appendix Two.

Case Studies from Elsewhere

In order to provide a clearer idea of how a town can make progress in its tourism offer, develop improvements and boost visitor numbers, the report considers three case studies from elsewhere.

These case studies are all covering towns with a number of things in common with Llanfair. This is particularly important as if local stakeholders feel that they are being asked to achieve things similar to those delivered elsewhere when that other location is not comparable they are likely to be concerned about the achievability of the goal.

These locations have in common:

- They are towns with a population of a few thousand.
- They are in areas which, while reasonable close to centres of tourism, are themselves at least 30 miles removed from the main 'hotspot'.
- They have a single large 'anchor' attraction in the town which is typically why a significant majority of visitors come to the area.
- Each has a number of businesses that can benefit from tourism but which primarily exist to serve local residents even if this market is weak in the long term.

Bodmin, Cornwall

Although in one of the UK's largest tourism counties, the town of Bodmin in Cornwall has struggled because it lacks the glamour or romance that most visitors associate with the seaside destinations close by.

The tourism body for Cornwall focuses its promotion for Bodmin specifically on the accommodation, of all types, offered locally. By this method, they can encourage visitors who may have stayed in other areas to use Bodmin as a base for their visit to North Cornwall thus encouraging spend in the town. Llanfair Caereinion could be promoted in a similar accommodation-first type approach which naturally delivers on some of the objectives expressed by local stakeholders in the consultations.

Bodmin has focusses heavily on its heritage as the home of a famous South West prison which has benefits and detractions. While it may result in visitors being drawn to the town, it can also mean that visits are solely planned around that attraction with other local organizations benefitting little from the visit. In Llanfair Caereinion, there is a noteworthy desire to improve town centre visitor numbers and so the opportunity to promote solely on our largest local attraction, the steam railway, may not be welcomed.

Alford, Aberdeenshire

Located in the North East of Scotland, Alford is a small town of 2,520 residents. It is located approximately 50 minutes by car from Aberdeen, which is the only major city within a 60 mile radius. The town has a large attraction in the Grampian Transport Museum with a number of pubs, local shops and amenities as in Llanfair Caereinion.

The town and the largest attraction there have made a significant effort in recent years to partner with the Visit Aberdeenshire, the county's destination management organization but it has struggled to reach prominence or parity with the undeniable attractions of surrounding castles and estates. In this, the circumstances of Alford are somewhat comparable with Llanfair Caereinion's position in being located close to Powis Castle.

Powys's lack of a public-facing single promotional body or tourist board may be limited its ability to attract visitors in a crowded marketing landscape for leisure activities. The Town Council in Llanfair Caereinion could lobby for improvements in this area. While Mid Wales Tourism does notionally cover Llanfair Caereinion, its results are not discernable for the town to-date. That said, the Town Council has joined MWT and it is also a place where lobbying for more effective promotion of the town should be deployed.

Alford's efforts and experience in attracting international tourists can should also be reflected in plans for Llanfair Caereinion. Despite marketing spend by the Grampian Transport Museum abroad and extensive efforts by Visit Aberdeenshire, visitors from countries targeted were sporadic and occasional suggesting that promotional internationally was of limited benefit.

Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria

Kirkby Stephen is a town in the Eden Valley in Cumbria that has a population of 1,822 and is surrounded by a number of hamlets and other small towns. While the tourism potential of Cumbria may at first sound attractive, visitation to the town is hampered by its distance from and physical barriers such as the M6 motorway which separate the popular Lake District. In this, it mirrors Llanfair Caereinion's relationship with Snowdonia and the area surrounding Llangollen to the north which may seem close in distance terms but nevertheless difficult to target.

The town has made extensive use of events to bring visitors who would otherwise not have visited the area to visit. The small steam railway centre here hosts gala and Easter rally events that attract approximately 2,000 special interest tourists. Llanfair Caereinion should consider for each audience type which events may be best suited and how they can be reached. While Llanfair Caereinion's own steam railway has been a centre for events in previous years, it may be possible for other venues to also be utilised which are closer to the main streets of the town thus improving secondary spend in town-centre businesses.

Kirkby Stephen has an impressive website to encourage tourism to the area from which lessons can be applied (www.kirkby-stephen.com):

- The use of impressive but also informative imagery in promotion is impactful.
- A clear and regularly updated 'What's On' section can be used by both potential tourists and local people.
- A consistent colour scheme and branding should be applied to pan-stakeholder materials such as those put together by Town Councils.

The town is also a member of the Walkers are Welcome scheme that recognises the needs of walkers and promotes to them the routes within the locality. Four of these towns or villages are already established in Powys. Investigating membership of the scheme for Llanfair Caereinion would be welcome.

Kirkby Stephen's Town Plan expresses the local community's plan for developing tourism through the various facilities, amenities and interest areas that can help in achieving this. Publishing plans, as this one could be, has the

advantage of continuing the consultation of local people and improving their 'buy-in' for tourism development.

Practical Steps - Short, Medium & Long-Term

In a town of Llanfair Caereinion's size with its limited resources - human, physical and financial - it is important that clear and achievable objectives are set for tourism development. This section lays out potential short, medium and long term steps that could be taken to advance tourism in the town.

Short Term - To end of 2023

- Establish clearly the audiences based on the research of The Audience Agency and others that the town and / or individual organisations wish to target in their promotion and activities. Consider the links that can be made between the offers of these organisations to create a cohesive 'product' offer for potential visitors.
- Conduct a review of the town's parking provision in light of the emergent needs of the audience analysis.
- Maximise promotion of the Cloverlands Model Car Museum when added to the town's tourism offer.
- Develop tours of Llanfair which encompass a number of different themes - history, ghosts, Welsh food and drink - that can be ticketed and thus effectively advertised and promoted.
- Continue with production of printed and online literature.
- Deliver the tourism-specific website for the town.
- Establish a process or system for feeding through best practice in tourism to relevant organisations and businesses locally so that their adoption can be encouraged.
- Lobby Powys County Council for increased tourism promotion and funding, particularly of a promotional organisation.
- Establish a working group - involving both Town Council members and key local figures - which can consider, plan and review the range of events which have been submitted by stakeholders.
 - Make an early priority for this group to investigate the potential for town markets.

Medium Term - To end of 2026

- Assess the possibility of employing ongoing support from an agency or part-time worker in promotion of the town, potentially alongside funding opportunities to begin with.
- Consider the larger tourism-related projects that could be delivered in the town (in order to meet emergent funding opportunities) and commission feasibility studies to ensure that projects are 'ready to go' as funding is made available.
- Renew town signage and materials as appropriate with a full review to ensure continued relevance to target audiences.
- Review again in a formal, consultative way the direction of tourism in the town, the communities desired outcomes and how these can be achieved.
- Overhaul the town's tourism website in line with widely understood lifespans of websites being approximately four to six years.
- Establish a flagship event used to promote the town in the region and more broadly.

Long Term - To end of 2031

- Have established a venue for tourism in the town which can act as an events, information and amenities centre.
- Review again in a formal, consultative way the direction of tourism in the town, the communities desired outcomes and how these can be achieved.
- Overhaul the town's tourism website in line with widely understood lifespans of websites being approximately four to six years.

A Tourism Ethos for Llanfair Caereinion in the 2020s

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Appendix One - Resources for Future Reference

The Town Council, as are other local bodies within the UK, is fortunate to be able to access a wide range of tourism analysis, research, data and case-studies through a variety of sources. Some of the most relevant and useful sources are compiled below for reference. While Llanfair Caereinion is definitively a Welsh town, it is also worth considering the research published

by Visit England and a number of English Destination Management Organisations as much learning can be drawn from them.

StatsWales / Welsh Government -

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Tourism>

The Audience Agency Visitor Segmentation -

https://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-finder-data-tools/audience-spectrum#Explore_Segments

Visit Britain's Inbound Data Centre - <https://www.visitbritain.org/inbound-research-insights>

The Tourism Alliance - <https://www.tourismalliance.com/index.cfm>

Appendix Two - Potential Promotional Methods

This section is included as an appendix to the report because, while not specifically mandated under the report's scope, it may aid the Town Council in considering potential promotional methods for activities in the future. It considers these potential methods in short summaries.

It is worth saying that the marketing of the town, and broader activities to encourage tourism, are not just undertaken by the Town Council but by the range of businesses in the area who may also wish to - or already do - use the methods below.

Own Website

As the centre point or 'funnel' for information, a well-functioning, clear website is essential to the promotion of a town and its amenities. The website acts both as a place in itself where destinations and their resident organisations market experiences and services (thanks to the direct access to it afforded by Google) and the place where visitors who have picked up other literature (such as our leaflet) most often come before visiting.

In order to ensure that the website performs well against its key functions, it is important that the following are carried out on a regular basis: website page updates (with new information and to ensure they remain current), promotion through other channels (widespread use of the web link on social media, in leaflets and through other tools) and that the information on usage of pages and sources is monitored and analysed. The Town Council should also seek to incorporate our best reviews of the town and individual businesses into its

website as their potency in the decision-making of potential visitors is not to be underestimated.

Leaflet Distribution

Leaflets for visitor attractions and locations have traditionally served a dual purpose. They market the organisation and the reasons to visit the area and then act as a guide, either while on the site or ahead of return visits, to events, dates and other information.

It has been long established that some towns use paid distribution services to display leaflets in a variety of locations and that the quantities distributed are substantial. The reduction of choice in the leaflet distribution market and the increase in online promotion has reduced the case for this approach. In Powys, only one large paid distributor of leaflets remains, namely Pear Distribution.

The range of options offered by distributors has also changed somewhat. Now, individual locations cannot be targetted as previously but bundles of leaflets into each accommodation suite / caravan / apartment are widely used. Previous research I have conducted has suggested that the decision on where to visit is made in the accommodation itself which implies that a focus here would be sensible.

Facebook Advertising

Paid social media advertising, in this case through Facebook, is very effective for a wide number of businesses and organisations. The cost of this form of advertising can be low, an accurate set of analytics data is provided in real time and adverts can be adapted continually. Adverts on Facebook can be targeted at certain key demographic audiences, such as by age, gender and location. These adverts work best when promoting a particular event to a particular audience but would have much less positive or noteworthy results in a generic, non-purchased linked campaign.

Newspaper Advertising

The demise of local and regional press is well documented and recognised, in line with other trends such as the growth of internet news. A number of local newspapers still exist which cover our region. These organisations often have very small editorial teams, who are keen to attract 'drop in' stories where the press release and images provided can be reproduced almost exactly as

submitted. While the readership of these titles is declining, and is often predominantly older (60+), advertising prices remain high and do not represent good value for money.

Glossy Magazine Advertising

Glossy regional magazines have grown in prominence in recent years, including stories about local life and lifestyle, with a large proportion of advertising. They are generally distributed through supermarkets, where they are sold, and through a subscriber base. A number of relevant ones for the Welsh borders. The Audit Bureau of Circulations has not published readership or print figures for the magazines for many years. Advertising in these magazines can be very expensive and thus securing editorial in these publications is always welcome where possible.

Free Guide / Joint Leaflet Promotion

A number of organisations distributed leaflets and promotional materials that advertise a number of attractions and tourism businesses. These are distributed broadly in the same way as an organisation's own leaflet through racks and packs but are likely to have greater pick-up as a result of their reaching people who would not first think to pick up the literature of town councils.

These publications previously varied in their size, complexity and print style but in recent years have become more standardised as a DL-sized booklet featuring a map at either the start or end and listings throughout.

The promoters of this type of leaflet can be both tourism boards / destination management organisations and private companies though where possible the former option is preferable. The 'rhythm' of publication of these guides has been substantially impacted by COVID so we should hope that they return to more normal and expansive delivery in 2022.

PVC Banner Advertising

PVC banners can be placed in a variety of locations, including railway stations, in pedestrian areas, along roads and in other 'spots'. Their cost is relatively low, given the exposure of the public to them, and in an increasingly digital world, they can really 'pop'. A number of these in the local area to promote events or activities such as at high-footfall locations like farm shops and

supermarkets could be useful. Landowners are surprisingly willing to allow this kind of promotion, which is much more impactful than leaflet dropping alone. It is crucial that PVC banners are not allowed to fade in-situ and so they must be replaced every 12 months. It is also vital that the design is clear and concise - the temptation to overload on words must not be allowed to prevail!

