



(Reg. charity no 239899)

**Ymgyrch Diogelu Cymru Wledig Cangen Sir Trefaldwyn  
The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales Montgomeryshire Branch**

**Position Paper on Montgomeryshire post-COVID19**

**Landscape**

Landscapes matter and belong to everyone as an integral part of who we are and how we feel. This has never been clearer than in this time of pandemic. Montgomeryshire landscapes are of inestimable economic, well being and spiritual value. It is axiomatic that such spectacular varied landscapes should be valued, nurtured and managed appropriately and sensitively for and by present and future generations. That Montgomeryshire is sparsely populated does not make it expendable; it is not open for industrialisation that would destroy the close interrelationship of landscape, biodiversity, agriculture, heritage and community.

Montgomeryshire landscape is typified by visual tranquillity, immense variety and a topography that permits far reaching and largely unspoilt, panoramic views combined with wildness/ wilderness and timelessness. It confers a strong sense of place for communities and enthral the many visitors who boost the rural economy. The value the public place on landscape has been clearly demonstrated in these challenging times.

Post - pandemic, CPRW Montgomeryshire's vision is of :

1. A special, diverse and highly valued landscape with the protection and recognition it deserves. This is implemented through the planning system, the agricultural payments regime and proper management as a carbon and water store, a biodiverse environment and a resource for physical and economic well being.
2. The Shropshire Hills AONB extended into the Welsh Borderlands, which are of equal or higher landscape value as recognised by Hobhouse in his seminal report on protecting landscapes. The creation of a unique cross-Border protected Welsh Marches AONB. In the west an increased value and protection placed on the Dyfi Biosphere.
3. A designated body having responsibility for landscape working with local landscape partnerships.
4. A programme of sensitive and planned mixed deciduous / coniferous planting to enhance aspects of the topography and create wildlife reservoirs interconnected with Wildlife Trust reserves, SSSIs and SACs by hedgerows. Significant oak planting and the restoration of the Montgomeryshire Oak as the principal deciduous tree reflecting its historic prevalence, the importance of the biodiversity it supports and its longevity as a carbon store.
5. Significant areas of woodland pasture recognising the high value of ffridd, meadow and grassland in the absorption of carbon dioxide, biodiversity and support of at risk species as well as landscape value
6. Carefully sited new agricultural buildings that form clusters with older farm buildings, blend in to the topography and vegetation of the surroundings and, where necessary, are sited away from villages
7. Small scale housing development reflecting local community needs and sensitive to the topography and the vernacular. Emphasis on sites for development that reflect the current settlement pattern and do not overwhelm existing buildings or the landscape.
8. Industrial structures developed on discrete designated industrial sites not in open countryside.

**The following specific points predominately flow from the vision for landscape and a vibrant rural economy:**

## **Localism**

Rural areas have suffered from relegation to second class with funding and policy directed to urban needs and challenges despite Equalities legislation stipulating that no community should be disadvantaged. A post-COVID rethink must challenge the old stereotypes and hierarchy; devolve more to the communities who understand the strengths and needs of their locality. Rural District Councils potentially reinstated to avoid conflating rural and urban issues and provide a more local response. It is those that live and work in rural communities who are best placed to understand how growth, economy and rurality can be interwoven protecting what is best and designing and delivering the services to meet the demands of a sparsely populated area.

## **Sense of Place and community/ a good living environment**

People of Montgomeryshire retain pride in their community and its Welsh heritage and culture. Local communities strengthened through:

- An integrated and planned rural medical service providing access to the services required and a 'spine' of infrastructure for specialist provision in Powys. Funded to recognise costs of delivery in a dispersed rural area.
- Clean air and water and freedom from noise and nuisance.
- Community engagement in local planning and engaged in drawing up their Local Plan to determine direction and development. Vibrant community councils with more devolved responsibilities from the county council in line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel (2019).
- Communities that celebrate their cohesiveness, so well demonstrated in these challenging times. Young people fully engaged in their communities and their skills and contribution valued and recognised.
- Volunteering adding value to, rather than replacing, employment.

## **Housing**

- Local Plans providing the information required for appropriate development and the avoidance of over-development risking the loss of the sense of community so strongly evidenced in Montgomeryshire villages.
- Likely increase in demand for rural housing. Growth permitted only where there is appropriate existing infrastructure and employment opportunities avoiding large green field sites. Building that considers the local topography and the vernacular.
- All new build to the highest energy / water efficiency / zero carbon standards. The planning system to deliver on reducing energy need rather than increasing energy production. Existing housing stock upgraded for efficiency creating real employment and reducing fuel poverty and carbon footprint.
- More use of housing co-operatives to support affordable housing and housing for older people near to facilities and their communities.
- Provision of first class Broadband in rural areas across the region to support local or home employment and remote working which is likely to become the given for many.
- Support for resurgence of the village shop, which has played such a vital community role in the crisis and recognition of the crucial part played in community life by the village school and the community centre.
- Local facilities to reduce need to travel .

## **Transport**

- Public transport infrastructure with appropriate services including use of minibuses, improved frequency; more routes, and evening transport.
- Consideration given to disused railway routes (protected in the LDP) for possible reinstatement . Potential for additional stations and halts on existing routes with adequate parking and cycle facilities at stations.
- Creative thinking on railways – e.g. sleeper to Cambrian Coast.
- Active travel a consideration in all communities with increased safe cycling and walking routes to village facilities/ stations / schools/ industrial and business sites and leisure facilities. Farmers paid to create and maintain such routes adjacent to existing roads.

## **Economy:**

### **1. Agriculture**

- Farming remains the bedrock of the economy and Montgomeryshire communities. Farming is part of the solution to climate change and to ensuring a vibrant rural economy and a player in the tourism industry. Young people supported to remain on the farm and work with the land adopting both innovative and traditional farming methodologies.
- Sustainable farming for biodiversity is rewarded through payment schemes in which the importance of meadow land, ffridd, hedgerows, deciduous planting is recognised for biodiversity / connectivity.
- Views of farmers and the varied agriculture types across Wales are taken fully into account in devising and supporting a new and fair farm payments system. Intensive farming not perceived as the route to survival. Payment of realistic prices for food and agricultural subsidy rewarding farmers for good land / water management and food production. No reversion to headage schemes and consequent over-grazing. Farmers not factory hands.
- Value added high quality Welsh produce – build on reputation and work towards organic, low intervention, healthy stock through good husbandry (low use of antibiotics etc.) and doing what Montgomeryshire farmers are good at - sheep and cows with ethical micro-dairies, uncompromisingly high food standards, local abattoirs, reduced imports.
- Support local growing and low food miles with farm shops / local markets and value placed on high quality products and animal welfare standards.
- Flagship tertiary education centre including national specialism in agriculture

## **2. Tourism**

Tourism is an important part of Montgomeryshire GDP and supports rural infrastructure and provides diversification. Montgomeryshire can capitalise on increases in staycations providing sustainable, high quality, environmentally friendly tourism opportunities where social distancing is practicable. Montgomeryshire has its Unique Selling Point in its peaceful landscape and outdoor opportunities. Tourism will support rural infrastructure, provide employment and additional income:

- Walking, cycling, horse riding / pony trekking and quiet outdoor pursuits
- Wildlife sites to visit (MWT)
- A preferred venue for events in beautiful and historic settings - regular festivals promoting music, literature and arts inspired by the landscape, heritage, outdoor activity and local products Montgomeryshire is different and does not need contrived 'attractions'
- Small welcoming businesses offering high quality local produce, service and a Welsh welcome
- Opportunities for exploring the heritage and culture (including use of phone apps)
- Range of accommodation types sited sensitively and discretely in small clusters with low impact on landscape, environment and existing communities
- A venue for the discerning visitor, many returning and higher spending
- Sustainable travel cycle routes for commuting and leisure e.g. Montgomery Canal; Newtown – Llanidloes -Llangurig cycle path

## **3. Sustainable economic growth**

Montgomeryshire is characterised by Small and Medium Enterprises (several being world class), entrepreneurship; self-employment, and remote working and an excellent rate of business start – up retention, which are at the heart of the Mid Wales Growth Deal.

- The thriving economy of Montgomeryshire is talked up and valued building on the high skills level (highest in Wales with Ceredigion). Capitalise on global strengths in biomedicine; veterinary science; informatics etc.
- New enterprise and markets supported with fast and stable connectivity. Re-developing existing under- used industrial and business sites to provide for 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses rather than expanding to new sites. Industrial businesses in and around communities regulated to avoid villages being overwhelmed.
- A rebalanced economy following exiting from EU with investment attracted from private sector.

## **4. Rights of Way (RoW)**

- Invest in access and maintenance of our public rights of way. Powys RoWIP with a clear plan to open closed RoW and enforcement to ensure all access routes on the definitive map are accessible.

- Circular routes for walkers and bridleways for equestrians. More designated riding routes like Prince Llewellyn's Way.
- A Montgomeryshire Way from the Borders to the Dyfi 'coast' for walkers.
- Walking and riding providing significant income from day and longer visits from across the UK.

## **5. Heritage**

- Conservation Areas are seen as an important part of our heritage and given full protection through planning to preserve their integrity whilst allowing individual properties to be sensitively adapted to 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements of living and energy efficiency.
- SAMs, important heritage sites and the architecture of Listed Buildings are well protected and understood. Particular recognition for the wealth of Montgomeryshire hill forts. Where necessary good access is secured and information available for interpretation. Both the monuments and Assets themselves are protected along with their settings.
- Museums are supported and seen as an important facet in interpreting and learning from our past.
- Tourism value of Montgomeryshire's rich heritage and its Registered Historic Landscapes is recognised and promoted.

## **6. Climate Change**

- The major importance for water and carbon retention of upland plateaux are acknowledged and not compromised by inappropriate industrialisation. Carbon dioxide retention by grassland is recognised for its efficiency, which is greater than even forestry.
- Montgomeryshire is seen as a prime area for peatland restoration.
- There is a balanced approach to renewable energy generation and any development is carefully assessed against potential long term environmental and economic harm.
- There are small scale, local generation schemes requiring minimal transmission infrastructure and directly benefiting the community with energy rather than income. Montgomeryshire self-sufficient in energy but not a net exporter.
- Solar panels obligatory on all new public and private build and farm buildings. All buildings (new and retro-fit) are designed to the highest energy and water efficiency specifications rather than industry standard.

All of the considerations above will impact positively on climate change. They are not quick fixes and will involve a complete rethink of the pre-COVID Wales draft NDF, planning and agricultural subsidy regimes. They are the long term and sustainable solutions Wales needs to move forward confidently post- COVID and capitalise on changes that are already beginning.