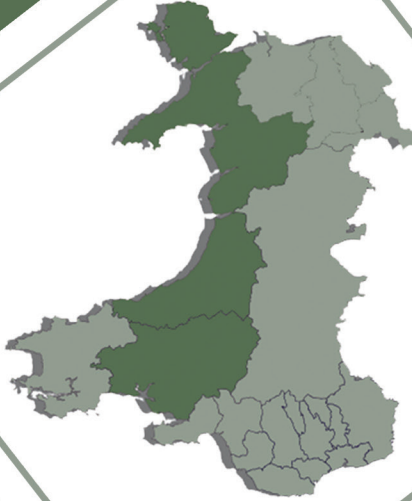




Plaid
Cymru | Party of
Wales



DISCUSSION PAPER
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FUTURE OF THE WEST

CO-OPERATING FOR
BENEFIT OF THE
ECONOMY &
LANGUAGE

Following the 2017 local elections Plaid Cymru leads Councils in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. This is a real opportunity for our Western councils to work together as the areas face huge challenges as a result of leaving the European Union.

In the West are some of Wales' poorest areas; young people are leaving and the Welsh language is devastating as a weak economy. It is a crisis situation but through regional collaboration we can ensure that the needs of the area are addressed and receive investment in order to grow and strengthen. This discussion paper contains a paper from Assembly Member Adam Price on Arfor. Adam's vision and the concept of Arfor were introduced for the first time in 2013; it was included in the 2016 National Assembly manifesto. The idea of working between western councils was accepted by the

Labour government was accepted in the summer of 2016. This year Plaid has secured £2million of government funding to begin formalising Western co-operation.

At the Anglesey National Eisteddfod, a seminar from Plaid Cymru was held to discuss the matter further and here we publish the three papers that underpin that discussion: Adam's paper on Arfor; the response of former MP of Cynog Dafis, Chair of the Future of the Language; and a paper by Professor Gareth Wyn Jones, Bangor, who discusses the idea of the 'Ardal y Fenni' as one of the potential growth zones that are central to the vision for the West.

I hope these will stimulate further discussion. Adam and I are looking forward to hearing your response and contributions to the discussion.

Sian Gwenllian, Plaid Spokesperson for Welsh and Local Government.

ARFOR - A concept first published by Adam Price in 2013. Together with Sian Gwenllian, Adam set out their vision of 'Arfor' at the National Eisteddfod in Ynys Mon:

Wales is on the verge of a new era of regional governance. Although there has been several u-turns since the Williams Commission Report and the compulsory merger policy of Leighton Andrews, in 2018 the Welsh Government will legislate to create a map of new regions. This map will shape economic development strategies for years to come, and will influence wider issues such as transport and public services.

At the moment the suggestion is that the new map will broadly follow the pattern set by the two City Regions in the South, the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Mid Wales Growth Partnership - but combines the Swansea City Region and Mid Wales to create one region for Mid and West. A particular recommendation from the Welsh Government will be to create three Joint Governance Committees (under the 1972 Government Act) that will be responsible for economic development, skills, transport, and possibly wider functions such as land planning and strategic planning, housing, administration and public services more broadly.

This would result in the four counties where Welsh is strong - Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Ynys Mon - being included in regions where

English is the majority language. Our most rural areas will be included with the most urban areas. The danger is that the specific needs of 'West Welsh', and in particular the close association between economic prosperity and linguistic-cultural viability, are neglected by regional strategies where these considerations are literally marginal.

This should be a cause for concern because the economic, linguistic and political situation of the West has reached a point of crisis:

1. There is a clear pattern of economic decline and linguistic decline in the Western areas
2. The link between the two phenomena is clearly visible in the population of young people
3. There is also evidence of a lack of public investment by the Welsh Government in the areas of the South West and North West
4. There is now even recognition by Labour members that there isn't a focus on the unique needs of Rural Wales in the current economic strategy of the Government.
5. There is a tendency to over-emphasize the West-Eastern and cross-border links with England in our national economic strategy by downgrading South and North links.

At the same time the Government White Paper states: "Ensuring that the Welsh language is an integral part of the regional economic development agenda is important to the robustness of the communities where Welsh is strong."

But a strategy follows a structure. So, there is a need for us to create a structure that combines economic development and language planning together, and makes the West a focal point, not on the outskirts of larger regions. It is time to resurrect the idea of Arfor, which was raised in an outline paper by Adam Price some years ago and adopted in a conditional form in the Plaid manifesto at the 2016 Assembly Elections.

The areas share a number of common features:

- A high percentage of Welsh speakers
- Inflow of older people, outflow of young people
- Rural, dependence on agriculture, food and tourism
- Market towns and university towns
- A high percentage of public sector jobs
- Lowest wages in Britain, and among the lowest wages in Europe

There has been some official support for the idea of an economic region to the West. The government's "Language, Work and Bilingual Services" Report, led by Rhodri Glyn Thomas, recommended that a linguistic-economic strategy be developed for the counties of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

The "Welsh Language Impact Assessment" published in conjunction with the White Paper on Regions states: "Flexibility in regional working arrangements would allow for such a mechanism to be considered.

The government's Language Strategy also says: "Providing a regional focus will help all parts of Wales, including Welsh speaking communities, benefit from prosperity and develop attractive places that people want to live, work, learn and invest in."

The Welsh Government has said that it is open to the idea of authorities working across regions in developing a linguistic economic strategy for the West. There is £2 million earmarked over the period 2018/19 and 2019/20 for the construction of a secretariat and supporting investment in the "Arfor economic region".

In practice this is what we can be talking about over a period of time:

- Create a formal Joint Committee consisting of the 4 core counties to allow regional collaboration;
- Arfor to act in parallel to the other regional

structures (Swansea City-Region, Mid Wales Growth, North Wales Economic Ambition Board)

- Invitation to neighbouring counties - Conwy, Pembroke, Powys, Denbigh, Swansea - join or send observers;
- Create a central, specialised and effective secretariat to co-ordinate a strategy and work program in the fields of economy, language, connectivity, housing and planning.
- Present a Rural Growth Deal to the UK Government and Arfor;
- Begin preparing for joint proposals for the UK Government's New Prosperity Fund;
- Creating a Strategic Development Plan for the West of Wales recognising growth projections and extending the principle of pioneered local housing markets (for the first time in Wales) in the Gwynedd and Anglesey Local Development Plan;
- Creating sector specific Strategies, e.g. for agri-food and tourism;
- Create a tracking plan and attract young people to the West (following the successful Llwybro trial in the 90's)
- Building on the Young Access to Agriculture Scheme (Plaid Cymru secured £5m for this in our latest Pre-Budget Agreement with the Government)
- Implementation of a pilot in the field of the Foundational Economy. (This was secured for £1.5million in the Plaid Cymru Pre-Budget Agreement this year.)
- Create a Tourism Academy with a working Hotel teaching hospitality through the medium of Welsh;
- If the Welsh Government introduces a tourism levy it is devolved to the region to re-invest in the tourism, infrastructure, culture and local economy sector (a levy of £1 per night could generate around £30m per year).
- Create a Community Bank for the Region on the model of the Hampshire Community Bank in England;
- Creating a Language Scheme across the Region

for the public sector within the Region, that is to turn Welsh into an internal administration language following the example of Gwynedd within local government;

- Create the South and North merger scheme, by lobbying and co-financing with the Welsh Government (possibly through bonds) to create the National Railway Line reopening the Aberystwyth-Carmarthen, Pwllheli-Caernarfon and Bangor-Caernarfon lines to re- connect Wales, South and North, for the first time for over fifty years, bringing our connections into the 21st century with a fibre-optic corridor for gig-a-byte connectivity in the towns along the lines. Additional emphasis on investing in the A487, A470 and A40 to improve road connectivity (compare the success of the former Standing Committee for the Heads of the Valleys by lobbying to dual the road of the same name).
- Significant devolution of powers from the Assembly - as in the case of devolution to the elected Mayors of England
- Mid-term consideration of different governance models: a combined authority, an elected leader, regional assembly as a possibility for future debate
- Create an agency or regional development corporation with responsibility for developing areas of growth in the region in order to attract young people back e.g. the Ardal y Fenai project, Aberystwyth, Carmarthen.

Our intention is to hold a special conference on the concept of Arfor assembled by Plaid but open to everyone over the next few months and commission a piece of research giving more meat on the bones presented above.

Response from Cynog Dafis to the proposals set out by Adam Price a Sian Gwenllian

The idea of creating a new region from Anglesey to Carmarthen Bay where economic development and language planning would be coordinated is an exciting vision and I applaud it. I would like to contribute some background

comments and note two dangers that will need to be avoided.

Bilingualism

Words such as 'creating a bilingual community' will form part of the argument in favour of creating Arfor. However to make the concept believable, care will have to be taken to ensure that the expression is not used in the vague, ignorant and unintelligent way that is too customary.

A useful place to start would be to remind ourselves that social bilingualism is very often a temporary phenomenon. Traditionally it occurs when two linguistic communities come into contact with each other. Languages in Contact is the title of a classic early investigation by Uriel Weinreich. As a rule the partnership of force between two languages is unequal, and the tendency is for this to deliver a process which is called a language shift- replacing one of the languages with the other over three or four generations. By using Joshua Fishman's terminology, ensuring 'permanent bilingualism' relies on the existence of particular social circumstances, and 'reversing the language shift' (which appears to be the Welsh Government's policy) is a challenging feat, but one that is not impossible.

In this respect the existence of a 'linguistic community' is essential. For any language to be socially alive, it needs a community of people who use it regularly, if not invariably, and engage with each other. Therefore the practical definition of reviving a language is to foster a linguistic community.

An emphasis on the territorial linguistic community is at the heart of Adam Price's recommendations and the intention would be for the Welsh language to over time become a normal mode of communicating throughout at least a large part of Ar For's territory. Succeeding in doing this, whilst reviving the region economically would be excellent and would place Wales on a new solid foundation.

The practical challenge

The first step is to get political acceptance to implement a language plan throughout the region. Connecting the idea with an exciting and credible scheme to regenerate the economy will help. But the language shift has travelled far in many parts

of the region and there are areas where Welsh, on the ground, is in the minorities. There will be a need to politically tread skillfully and be willing to compromise.

Danger 1: Eastern Exclusion

The alienation of eastern Wales from the west on a linguistic basis could be a threat to the unity of the nation.

Adam Price introduces Ar For partly as a way of counteracting the divide between the North and South and that is a very admirable. North Wales and South Wales, a colonial device dating from the Conquest period, has deeply penetrated into the Welsh psyche - and also Welsh. Countering, if not abolishing, this split should be a significant part in the process of raising the unified Welsh nation.

But without a clear, conscious intention to prevent that, the East West split, confirmed through a language policy, could be even more of a serious threat. Already the process of snatching our North East from Merseyside and the Midlands in England, and our South East across the Severn from Bristol is underway. Alun Cairns no less was recently heard expressing the importance of that strategy.

Counteracting these trends, facilitated by the nature of our geography, building Wales into a dynamic, successful entity, is absolutely fundamental if the national project is to succeed. In order to do that, the nation must be networked internally in every which way, by attaching its regions together and in particular the development of nation career pathways. In that project it's highly possible that the A470 may be a higher priority than the A487.

Therefore, the concept of Ar For needs to be framed in terms of the national project and the unity of Wales.

Danger 2: Over the rainbow syndrome

An associated danger is that a perception has been created that revitalizing the Welsh language is a matter for the western Welsh heartland, whilst the East is free to follow other priorities. Therefore, we must reject such perception and remind ourselves that all parts of Wales (with a few exceptions) are 'traditional Welsh areas'. Until very recently large parts of the East were 'natural Welsh communities', and in many of them there is a campaign to restore

the language into a living project.

Ar For must therefore be seen as a part (exemplar and lead perhaps, but not unique) of a strategy to restore Welsh as a national language. The Welsh community must exist and grow in the form of a network beyond Ar For boundaries. It would be hoped that the members of that network community would also use the Welsh language by using it invariably at every possible opportunity, both institutionally and socially.

Take the National Assembly, make it a bilingual setting where every convenience is to use Welsh. Imagine the impact, transformative perhaps, if all Welsh speakers of that organization use it at every possible opportunity.

To close, the feat that has to be done in order to put the Welsh language on a growth pathway will be to connect Ar For Welsh speakers and the rest of the country's speakers into one language community whose members aspire vivacity and confidence from each other. When that commences, the commendable vision of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050 will begin to seriously gain substance.

Dinas y Fenai - Gareth Wyn Jones

It is useful to consider the potential of a mini-conurbation around "Y Fenai" as a single 'domain' or 'zone' capable for supporting a robust, resilient and sustainable, local economy and vibrant social and cultural and indeed scientific scene.

The Menai Straits currently forms the boundary between two local authorities Gwynedd and Ynys Mon but internationally such waterways are often the sites of development provided there is clear integrated vision and coherent plan. My contention is that this domain, 'Ardal y Fenai', with its adjacent region [hinterland] extending for some 20 to 30 miles including Snowdonia and a wonderful coast line, could provide both an exemplar for rural Wales and a counter-balance to the pull of urban areas in south and north east Wales.

If successful, Ardal y Fenai would help balance the emerging Welsh economy and ameliorate the east-

west divide and, importantly, provide an urbanised heartland where the Welsh language and culture can flourish. Given my pessimistic take on the global economy and environment it could also be a progenitor for a more sustainable and people-friendly development paradigm.

1. Considerations:

1.1 While Mon is jealous of its island distinctiveness, the reality on the ground is that both the north and south banks of the straits are closely integrated economically, socially and culturally. Many travel from or to the island during the morning and evening rush hours, mostly by car, and there are discussions about a third road crossing at a site yet undecided. The integration is not only about 'travel to work' but is social and cultural. The northern and southern shores are in reality one entity; be it in relation to e.g. health [Ysbyty Gwynedd], shopping, Ysgol Glanaethwy, theatre attendance or choir membership and eating out. Bangor University and the Further Education establishment [Grwp Llandrillo/Menai] span both sides. The case for a single coherent development plan or authority from Caernarfon to Beaumaris is compelling. Arguably the UK Parliamentary Boundary Commission have recognised this pattern in their proposals for a new 'Mon ac Arfon' seat.

1.2

It is worth enumerating the assets this 'region' already enjoys and why it should be a priority "development domain".

- Population approaching 70,000:
- Major University with a strong research base:
- New Research Centre ~£10m (albeit located on fringe of the Domain):
- Parc Menai Business Park and the undeveloped Bryn Gegin site as well as the Cribyn, Llandegai and Cefni Estates; with some successful start-up and established companies, both on these estates and in Llanberis, for example.
- A well-established well regarded Further Education College – although now integrated into Coleg Llandrillo/Menai Grwp.
- District General Hospital with specialist teaching links to Cardiff.
- A strong enterprising Welsh-language community embracing many sectors including

media and publishing etc.

- Innovative cultural sector especially Y Galeri, William Mathias Music School, Ysgol Glanaethwy and now Pontio [£50 m investment] – media and theatre companies and many choirs.
- High proportion of youth and a strong cosmopolitan element mainly linked to the University.
- A wonderful, beautiful location along the Straits and good micro-climate especially around Beaumaris.
- Good transport links to London [3h; rail] and Manchester airport [~1:30h; road]; but unfortunately poor and inadequate road and rail links to Cardiff [see later]. High-speed broadband and digital connections in most of the domain. Holyhead is the main link between Dublin (pop; >>1m) and rest of Ireland with the island of Britain and the European mainland. (The impact of Brexit on this needs monitoring).
- Excellent recreational opportunities especially sailing, walking mountaineering (Snowdonia) and magnificent beaches.
- A rapidly improving gastronomic sector with a few Michelin starred restaurants. The Porthaethwy/Menai sea food and now Caernarfon food fairs are very successful. The food sector (e.g. Halen Mon/Mon-ar-Lwy/ local cheeses, breweries and wines etc.) are creating a hub while in the locality there is Hufenfa De Arfon etc. i.e. in total, a diverse and enterprising food and drink sector and both farm and marine foods within 20 to 30 mile radius which are complementary to the tourist sector.
- In the University, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru, local science/technology based companies, CAST?, the Gaerwen science park, there is the kernel of a science-base domain and the potential for the evolution of consultancy and other services operating on a Wales, UK and international basis.
- Strong classical Tourism sector and UNESCO World Heritage site (The Anglo-Norman Castles), National Slate Museum, narrow gauge railways and another sites being promoted [Slate Quarries]). Supplemented by a growing adventure- holiday sector.
- Energy hub/ "Energy Island" – substantial on-

shore and offshore renewable energy potential. Pump storage facility for electricity storage.

- Development of local grid supplies based on local renewable energy e.g. Ynni Ogwen at commercial rates well below that agreed for Hinckley C.
- The domain and its adjacent hinterland has the potential to enjoy a relatively large degree of energy and food and of course water self-sufficiency and well as enjoying trade links with Wales and beyond including Ireland.

1.3.

Most of the assets noted above are capable of enhancement but there are of course unresolved problems; some noted below.

While there is active cooperation between Mon and Gwynedd and WG operated a Mon-Menai Regeneration Programme, I am aware of no coherent development plan for 'Y Fenai', with the WG economic development zone being limited to Mon. I am not aware of "Menai" business organisation e.g. integrated Chamber of Commerce although the Management Centre in UB could provide a catalyst.

Given the importance of Cardiff as the national capital, home of Welsh Government, of many national facilities and of Wales' rugby and football team (heavily supported within this region), transport links are unacceptable poor. Piecemeal progress has been made to improve the A470 and A 487 and the railway link remains slow with poor to appalling rolling stock. The Valley/Cardiff air link has its value but it is not an effective mass transport system and has a high carbon footprint and would not survive a carbon tax (such as is being implemented in many jurisdictions).

It is recognised that the service sector is now the dominant part of any advanced economy and is an important driver of prosperity. It also can operate at a low carbon intensity, which will become increasingly important in next 2 decades to fulfil the obligations of the UN Paris Climate Change agreement. However the region has low economic multipliers and in common with many rural areas with very high economic leakage rates. These arise in the retail sector from competition from Llandudno and Chester and even Manchester, the lack of some specialised services in setting up companies and

relevant law expertise. Also the policies around public purchasing does not maximise the local impact of that spend by the local authorities, the University, the hospital board etc. Much day-tourism and even caravan parks and camping grounds provide only a small economic impact.

The tourist economy has befitting from initiatives such as the wire rides in Bethesda and the trampolines in Llechwedd, Rib Ride – Porth Aethwy but the economic returns to the communities around the park e.g. Bethesda, Waunfawr, Penygroes are poor, partly because there is a preponderance of day visitors and campers dominantly arriving and departing by cars. The integrated vision advanced in Snowdonia Green Key project, which would have combined increase economic opportunities with a lower carbon footprint, has not materialised. In it Bethesda, Llanberis and Penygroes would have been inner gateways and Bangor and Caernarfon outer gateways to Snowdonia.

Limited asset use: e.g. cannot much more use be made of Castell Caernarfon. With modern lightweight temporary construction is it not possible within Caernarfon and Beaumaris Castles to build in a covered "amphitheatre and stage" for summer productions? Could not part of the Eagle tower not in time be a small 'parador'? How can the Pontio facilities be put to better use out of the university term?

Local rivalries, not just between Mon and Gwynedd but between communities in the domain and/or adjacent, are certain to impede and integrated plan.

While good bus services have existed in the area, they are threatened by austerity. Already the area is characterised by excessive car-based commuting.

Part of the housing stock is poor and difficult to insulate due to stone and solid-brick walls.

1.4.

The context for this discussion is rapid social, political and environmental change. Wales will gain a mix of tax raising and spending and legislative powers, which will necessitate a much greater emphasis on broadening and growing the tax-base within in Wales i.e. our businesses must flourish. This would be assisted by better internal multipliers, both nationally and regionally as well as successful

export and/or service provision. Rural Wales suffers enormous economic leakage and this maybe increased by e-commerce. Part of the problems is small dispersed populations; competition instead of cooperation between small towns and communities.

Many major international retailers e.g. large multiple chains, appear to extract monies from the local economy and undermine the viability of local businesses, which might generate much larger local multipliers. In addition we have the issues of in-migration especially retirees in "Costa Geriatrica" and the challenge of climate change and of moving in some 20 years to a low carbon economy.

A limited number of strategic Development Domains as exemplified by "Y FENAI" would be vital in addressing these issues.

2. Possible policy initiatives:

Overall the issue resolves as much around the multiple service sectors as the classical industrial/commercial sectors and on encouraging local spend and enlarging the multipliers and on exploiting local renewable assets in relation to renewable energy, food and drink, and small specialist science and technology manufacture and consultancies and the large multi-lingual cultural and educational sectors. The evidence is that large developments e.g. Dinowig, Aluminium Mon, Trawsfynydd and Wylfa Power station only offer temporary respite from the regions long-term problems. Developing a long term viable service sector has many aspects – obviously mobility, access, transport, parking and town centre planning/design are vital. In this context planning for our mixed weather is crucial (both to make best use of the good times and to shelter people in poor weather). Neither Bangor nor Caernarfon shopping streets can be accessed from the multi-story car parks without going into the wind and rain. And the streets offer no shelter. The Victorian arcades and bondos were a better idea!! Parking is deemed expensive and alternative public transport, cycling and walking not easy either.

Local food and drink has potential but on the whole the supermarkets are dominant and only pay lip service to local products. Local renewable energy combined with a local municipal grid, as occurs in Germany, offers an important opportunity and a way into electrified (or fuel cell) affordable local transport.

Below I note a few specifics but clearly all will need to be developed in detail, costed and prioritised.

- A Domain-based development plan agreed by LAs and WG covering commercial development, realistic housing demands, promotion of use of Welsh etc.
- A single authority, or if not feasible, a joint development plan.
- Strategic public investment e.g. "Ardal y Fenai" could have been promoted by investment in/ attracting a WG administrative unit.
- Investment in weather-proofing of the pedestrian zones in Caernarfon and Bangor to encourage local trade.
- Domain-wide plan for energy saving – in transport, space heating etc.
- Local smart electricity grid using local renewable energy and provision of EV charging points.
- Integrated local transport plan, which may include new bridge over Y Fenai. However as much of problem arises from local commuting a variety of answers must be considered; e.g. reopen rail links to Llangefni, Amlwch and Caernarfon as light railways/tramways?
- Much better North/South communication in Wales to allow some better interaction with Cardiff [i] by road see IWA plan (anticipating that cars will be powered by electricity or H2 and [ii] trains. The Bangor to Cardiff journey should be down to 3 to 3:30h with good on board facilities.
- Plan to enhance local and more seasonal food chain[s] and critically involving the large retail outlets.
- Create a local food brand image cf Halen Mon. Can the Traeth Lafan mussels be processed locally and help develop a local provenance?
- Snowdonia Green key revisited to generate low carbon sustainable tourism that brings money into local communities.
- Many opportunities in the cultural/ entertainment/educational sectors including bilingual/ multi lingual expertise.