

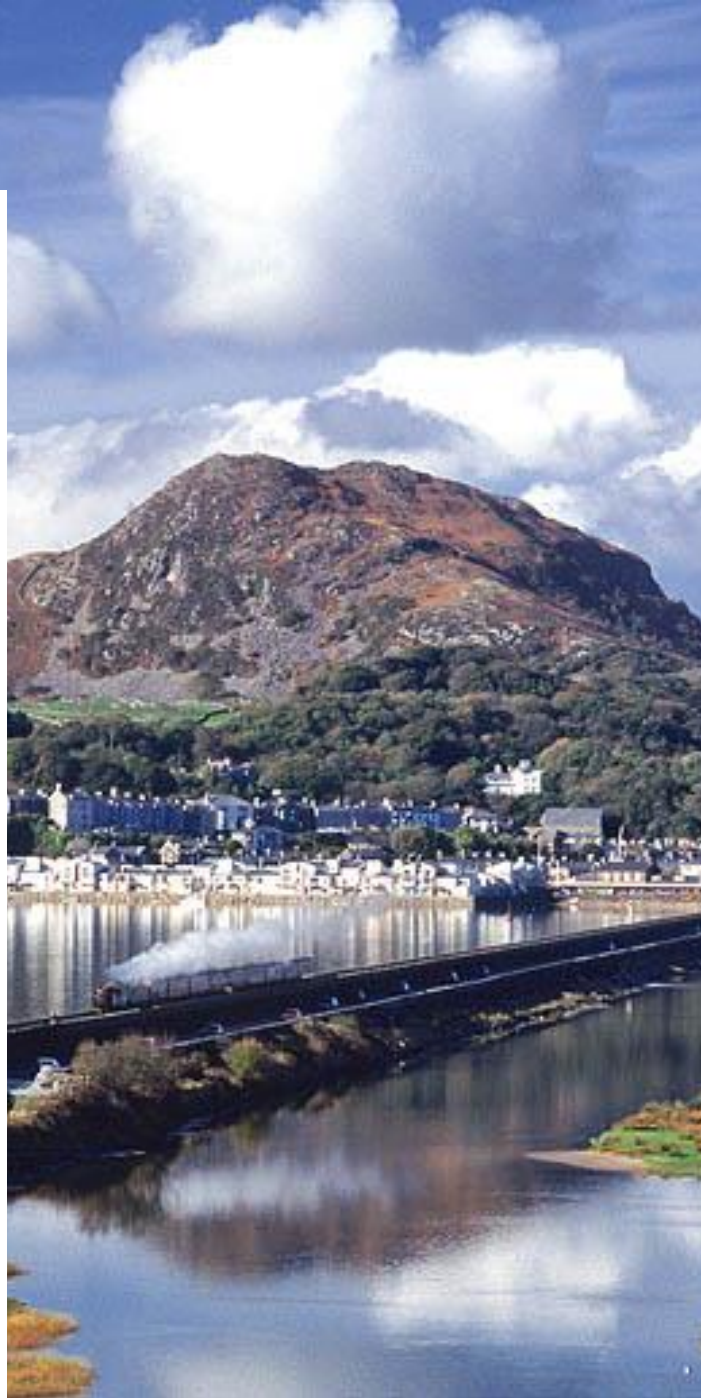
# AN 'ECO'NOMIC PLAN FOR DWYFOR- MEIRIONNYDD

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JUNE 2019

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Mabon ap Gwynfor





### A 9-point plan to strengthen the Dwyfor-Meirionnydd economy

Dwyfor Meirionnydd is replete with a wealth of resources – be they natural resources or human resources. Yet, north west Wales continues to be one of the poorest regions in northern and western Europe.

In fact, Dwyfor-Meirionnydd has the lowest income throughout the whole of the UK, with average earnings of £420 per week. Yet on the other hand, the average house price in Abersoch and Aberdovey last year was £325k.

This results in a large percentage of our young people moving away to look for work, and the low wages paid here means that people can't compete for houses because the housing market isn't regulated.

The result is loss of culture and language.

We must therefore tackle the economic question and take steps to develop a stronger economy.

Gwynedd County Council, under Plaid Cymru's control, are doing all that they can to attract investment and ensure that the climate is suitable for entrepreneurs to develop their businesses here. The fact that Gwynedd CC has ensured that its staff are paid the Real Living Wage, and that procurement policies support local firms is to be welcomed. But as much and as hard as Plaid Cymru try to tackle the economic problems facing this area on the Council, this invaluable work is being hampered by a lack of political leadership from the Welsh Government and a total lack of interest from the Westminster Government.

The intention with this plan is to suggest ways that we can invest in our indigenous talent and resources while also ensuring that we do our bit to tackle climate change. The recent example of Ford in Bridgend shows, once again, why we should avoid risking investing in large multi-nationals. We should, instead, look show confidence and invest in our people and communities. That's the thrust of this document.





Here are some suggestions which, if acted upon, could see our economy strengthen, leading to job creation opportunities, and more money in the pockets of our people in Dwyfor-Meirionnydd.

1. Transformative Fund
2. Electrify Gwynedd
3. Infrastructure
4. Decentralisation
5. Railways
6. Agriculture
7. Building
8. RiverSimple
9. Ownership



### 3. Mabon ap Gwynfor



### Transformative Fund

The demand for Independence is increasing. But to be truly independent we must first think and act as if we're independent. This is what our communities in Dwyfor Meirionnydd have been doing for several generations, with our people building our communities from the bottom up.

This is the story of Awen Meirion, Awen Meirion, Antur Aelhaearn, Antur Stiniog, Nant Gwrtheyrn, Hufenfa De Arfon, Tafarn y Fic, Tafarn yr Heliwr, Tafarn y Plu, Pengwern and a host of other examples. Our people – our most valuable resource – have taken it upon themselves to take control and invest the little that they have, be it capital, time or ability, to insist that their communities survive and thrive.

These are examples of best practice that should be shared to develop more.

Because, the best way of strengthening our economy is by building it from the bottom up. Community Cooperatives are far more robust and are rooted in their communities, unlike large multinational companies that are attracted by promises of free money to re deploy only for them to take flight when the funds run out.

Staff and customers of community enterprises are far more loyal, because the business is part of the community in which they live.

It also makes economic sense to invest public money in such enterprises. Only 44% of private enterprises survive the first few difficult years of trading, while 80% of cooperatives succeed and survive for many years.

We must therefore invest in our communities. The Welsh Government should allocate £0.5bn to develop and assist community cooperatives, which should be led by the communities themselves. This is consistent with steps that are already being taken. The Welsh Government is already funding Cooperative Social Care, while it's expected of Local Authorities to develop and support the development of cooperative companies in the care sector.

This money should not be earmarked, because it should be entirely community led. Such a programme, if managed properly, should look several hundreds of jobs in the constituency.





### Electrifying Gwynedd

Wales already exports more electricity than what we use. In fact, Wales is amongst the largest exporters of electricity in the world. The same is true of Dwyfor Meirionnydd. The potential for electricity generation is enormous.

We already have the infrastructure and capacity to generate 20,000kw of electricity from Hydro sources alone, which is enough to provide electricity to nearly every household in the constituency. The capacity within photovoltaic is something similar as well, not to mention wind and wave potential.

But our communities, overall, don't benefit from this.

One problem facing community run energy schemes is land availability. We must therefore ensure that the Welsh Government frees up land that it has available to community run energy cooperatives so that they can develop energy schemes for their community's benefit.

The new Ynni Twrog enterprise shows how communities can work together for a common good. Ynni Llyn, Ynni Ogwen, and the Corwen Electricity Company are also good examples which could be followed.

But, we also need to develop local grids. OFGEM needs to be devolved and the National Assembly and Welsh Government should have the powers to manage and create electricity grids in Wales. This would also result in less electricity being lost (over 5% of electricity is lost in transit over long distances).

Such local energy cooperatives would provide much needed community revenue. But, by developing local grids, electricity could be provided straight to the homes, resulting in more money for households to spend on other things, and creating sustainable jobs as well.

It's estimated that every community in Wales spends over £2m a year on household electricity. This money would therefore be reinvested back into the community that generates the electricity.

We should also invite Cardiff University to expand their research into heat extracted from mine water. Several successful projects have been developed across the world using heat extracted from mine water to heat homes. The post-industrial nature of some of our communities here is perfect to develop a similar project in Dwyfor Meirionnydd. This would result in households getting cheaper heating and pulling people out of fuel poverty and free up money for households to spend on other essentials. This would in turn help maintain jobs in the retail sector in areas like Blaenau Ffestiniog and Corris.

I would also campaign to establish a Mondragon University Campus in the constituency, to celebrate and build on the role that cooperatives have played here and ensure that best practice is learnt and shared.



## Infrastructure

This constituency has suffered because of a chronic lack in infrastructure spend by the Governments at both ends of the M4 corridor. Gwynedd County Council have done everything possible to attract investment and develop roads, bridges, and public buildings, but this commitment by the Local Authority has not been matched by assistance from the Welsh and Westminster Governments.

Spending on infrastructure has a multiplier effect, and the IPPR estimates that infrastructure spend results in x1.4 benefit to the economy.

We must therefore ensure that the Government's infrastructure spend is distributed fairly across the countries of the UK and throughout Wales.

This is a coastal constituency, with several small ports. Yet, today these small ports have developed into being seaside towns, instead of gateways to the world. We need an investment programme in our small ports to allow their original roles to be realised once again.

Improving the availability of broad-band and mobile phone reception (3G in many parts, let alone 5G!) would revolutionise our rural economy.

According to the latest statistics 17.1% of the workforce in Dwyfor-Meirionnydd is self-employed, compared to the Welsh average of 5.8% and the UK average of 7.1%.

The Welsh Government's project in association with BT to ensure that communities across Wales receive Superfast Broadband has left many of our communities down. Consequently, some communities have decided to take their own steps to improve the situation. Guifi, in rural Catalunya, have led the way in developing community owned telecommunications networks.

This Guifi model should be followed here, and the Welsh Government should look to provide capital and expertise to allow communities to develop their own networks here. This would allow people to work from home; and give local entrepreneurs the ability to develop their businesses from home confident in the knowledge that they can communicate and sell to the rest of the world without hiccups.





## Decentralisation

Plaid Cymru has always supported devolution. The victory in 1997 which resulted in the creation of our National Assembly and the devolution of some powers to Wales was but one step on a very long journey for us. As a party that believes in devolution, we must ensure that this devolution continues beyond Cardiff.

The Welsh Government must devolve and decentralise more powers to our Local Authorities and ensure the equivalent funding as well. The Government must aim to increase the funding to Local Authorities by at least 1% above inflation, to ensure that our Councils have the capacity to invest in local projects. This money should be provided as part of the RSG without first being earmarked by the Government, allowing our Councils to use this money according to their local priorities. This would mean a several millions more a year for Gwynedd CC annually.

As well as this we should aim to locate public offices in Gwynedd. The Welsh Government recently announced their intention of creating a new Planning Inspectorate for Wales. This office should be based in this constituency. Not only would this bring quality employment to the area, but it would also mean that the officers would have a different world-view when it comes to planning. It would be a world-view through the prism of rural Welsh communities as opposed to the Cardiff Bubble prism.

The Westminster Government have over 500 public and arms length organisations, and the Welsh Government have approximately 30 such bodies. Where possible, these bodies, as well as other public bodies, should be based outside of Cardiff.





## Railways

Beeching tried his best to decimate the rail infrastructure in Wales, yet we're fortunate that this Constituency continues to be served by two railways, and the north Wales and mid Wales lines offers important economic opportunities as well. The UK is the only State in Europe that separates freight from public transport. This is the result of the privatisation of the Railways that happened in the 1980s.

Developing the ability to carry freight along our railways would give business the confidence they need to open bases in Gwynedd, while also giving an economic boost to local haulage and road freight firms, such as Hughes of Ffestiniog and OJ Jones, Porthmadog.

There have already been calls to increase the load capacity on the Ffestiniog line. Several reports have been published referencing the potential advantages. More research must be carried out to look at the capacity and load ability of both the Pwllheli and Ffestiniog lines – they both pose problems because of geographic and structural issues. I would call for a feasibility into both lines to see what the economic benefits or negatives would be.

But what should be pushed without doubt is the development of Intermodal Terminals at Bangor and/or Llandudno Junction on the north coast line, and Caersws on the Cambrian line. These have the potential to develop a freight service (called 'intermodal terminals' or 'Trans-shipment Terminals' – when road freight meets rail freight).

Such developments are usually market led, but by pump-priming with public funds, this would give confidence to the market creating a positive environment for private firms to invest.

Not only would this open access to more of the UK market, but it would also allow access to the European Market, because of the direct access to the trans-continental land bridging route of Ireland-the Channel Tunnel.

Added to this, developing such intermodal terminals would create direct jobs on site, and be a valuable addition in our fight against climate change, with more products being carried via the more environmentally friendly rail.





### Agriculture

The Agricultural sector is facing the most uncertain future that it has had to face in modern times. Between Brexit on the one hand, and a Labour Government who have no understanding of the agricultural community on the other, a very grim future faces today's Welsh farmers. Brexit and our Land, the Welsh Government's proposals to overhaul agriculture here, could lead to the demise of many of our small family farms.

The public sector has a role to play in ensuring a vibrant future for our farming community. We must ensure that we have stronger public procurement policies, ensuring that they offer Welsh produce.

Whether we remain in the EU or are part of a new UK funding regime, the system must have more flexibility, and allow farmers to develop the most appropriate produce for their lands and get it to market.

As things stand the EU subsidises red meat production here. The terms for milk producers have improved slightly in recent years, but only a few years ago milk producers were locked in crippling contracts with the large buyers. There is no flexibility within the system, which results in farmers constantly facing an uncertain future. Farmers need to be given that flexibility.

The RDP (Rural Development Funds) should be more evenly distributed to allow every farmer to benefit from it. This fund could also be used to help develop new crops and produce.

A report published by Bangor University tells us that land in much of Wales is ideal for growing flax, but that flax production is unprofitable. Red meat production is unprofitable, but the funding regime means that this is the only game in town for many farmers. Providing more flexibility, by allowing farmers to experiment with 'new' crops or trial new techniques, could open new markets for our farmers ensuring that more diversity and a more secure future.

The Government should work with our Universities and Agricultural Colleges ensuring that they get the proper investment to allow them to work with the agricultural sector to develop new products and techniques.

We must ensure the continuation of our family farms because of the vital role that they play in the nation's cultural ecology.





### Building

Local companies often find themselves locked out of the tendering process and can't compete with large contractors. These large contractors also have enough capital, or credit, to allow them to build large estates or large build projects. This results in smaller local firms losing out on well-paid contracts.

The planning and contracting regime must change. Contracts must be broken up, where possible, and a system put in place which would allow smaller companies to cooperate as one to bid for contracts. More value must be added to the economic value of local firms and this should out-weigh low value bids of larger external companies.

We should also look to allow the system to prioritise local building firms, and not large external firms when it comes to housing development.





### River Simple

It was a Welsh scientist, William Robert Gove, from Swansea, who invented the hydrogen fuel cell, and Wales continues to lead the world in the use of hydrogen as a fuel source. The RiverSimple company, in Llandrindod. Have developed a hydrogen car and is about to finish their on-road trials and get the car to market. They are also in the process of developing their hydrogen van. Their intention is to build a factory in Llandrindod which will build 5,000 cars a year. This would employ 400 people directly and about the same amount indirectly. It would also mean that some 13,000 tonnes of carbon would be taken out of the atmosphere every year because 5,000 less fossil fuel cars would be on the road.

They are entirely committed to Wales. We must ensure that they are included in the Mid Wales Growth Bid to ensure that they access £60m necessary to finish their product and develop their factory. I would also help develop a relationship between them and the Snowdonia Enterprise Zone in order that they can bring their van production here, which would lead to the creation of many hundreds of high quality direct and indirect jobs in this area.





### Ownership

Brighter Foods, Tywyn, is an excellent example of how giving ownership of a company to the workforce can completely change the fortunes of a company, following the closure of Halo Foods six years ago.

The Welsh Government should create a unit within the newly formed Welsh Development Bank with a reserve fund, but primarily expertise, that would advise and assist the workforce of any business that found itself near bankruptcy or intending to close, to ensure the continuation of that business and that the skilled workforce is retained in our communities.

Such a fund and department would have been beneficial for electricians at Falconer, for instance, to allow them to take ownership and restructure the business. Of course, the fact that the staff found new employment at AER, another local company, was excellent news. But by assisting the staff when their former employer was finding itself in difficulties would have resulted in a further 6 jobs in the area.

