

The Rhos & L District



Action Plan



Ariennir a hwylusir Gweithredu dros Gymunedau Gwledig gan Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Rural Community Action is funded and facilitated by the Welsh Assembly Government



THE RHOS & DISTRICT

ACTION PLAN

Prepared by

THE RHOS & DISTRICT COMMUNITY

in conjunction with



**Pembrokeshire Local Action Network
for Enterprise and Development**

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This Action Plan was agreed at a Public Meeting held on 21st June 2006 following the circulation of the Draft Action Plan to all households in the community.

Background to the Action Plan

In 1992 **The Rhos and District Community Association** worked with SPARC (the predecessor to PLANED) to prepare the first Action Plan for the village.

A Community Appraisal questionnaire was distributed and the resulting information was circulated in report form. A draft Action Plan was prepared which 'identified the opportunities facing the community at the present time and assessed the needs for the future.'

Among the proposals that were realised were:

- A village enhancement scheme – seats, planting scheme and notice board.
- A lease was secured to create a village green
- Local history - a village leaflet was published.
- An Interpretation board was sited on the 'village green'.
- Assistance offered to Church Hall.
- An attempt at traffic calming.



Village enhancement included planting and seats

In 2006 it was agreed by the Community Association that the Action Plan should be updated. To encourage community participation, two Visioning Workshops were organised in The Rhos Church Hall. The workshops, facilitated by PLANED, took place in March 2006. A well attended Youth Visioning also took place. The findings and information provided by local people at these workshops is presented in this Action Plan.



Traffic calming on the approach to The Rhos

Adoption of the Action Plan, which will be circulated in draft form with an invitation to a Public Meeting, will give The Rhos an agreed programme for development.



Distinctive village centre cottages at The Rhos

T H E A C T I O N P L A N A R E A

The Rhos, with its row of distinctive cottages, the only village in the ancient parish of Slebech, lies in a rural, forested position, on the eastern arm of the River Cleddau. Residents emphasise that the name is ‘The Rhos’, not just ‘Rhos’. They describe it as ‘a quiet and tranquil safe haven.’

Two estates, Picton Castle and Slebech Park, lie within the parish boundary and the area includes the hamlets of Millin, Hillblock and outlying farms and cottages. It is rich in wildlife, heritage and interesting architectural features. Picton Point and Picton Ferry are valued as places of local interest.

The Rhos village is located along one ‘street’ which once included a primary school and post office. Today there is one retail outlet in the village – The Rhos Garden Centre, whilst Creamston Aquatics lies a couple of miles to the west. Since Slebech Parish Church was closed, worship takes place in a small Church Hall but there is no formal village hall or community centre. There is a Presbyterian Chapel at Millin Cross and Baptist Chapel at South Dairy, on the north side of the A40 road.

Despite its deeply rural setting, The Rhos is only a mile and a half south of the busy A40 and four and a half miles east of the County town of Haverfordwest, where the nearest schools, shops and services are situated. There is a telephone box, post box, some benches, an interpretation board and two old notice boards. There is no local bus service, apart from school transport and no shelter for the students that use it. A mobile library calls every third Friday.

The Rhos is in the Slebech Community Council area and Wiston electoral division which is within National Parks area.

H i s t o r y o f T h e R h o s

The Rhos village consisted of only a couple of houses well into the nineteenth century but it grew after the school and post office were established. Both are now closed.

The name 'Rhos' is, however, ancient, forming a link with the period before the Normans settled in the area. It seems likely that the 'Rose' names which occur in the wedge of land between the Eastern Cleddau and the Millin Brook are anglicisations of the Welsh 'Rhos' meaning 'moorland', 'heath' or 'promontory'.

The old school building is now a private residence. Originally known as 'Slebech and Picton Castle School', it later became Slebech Voluntary Controlled School. It operated from 1866, with support from the Philipps family of Picton Castle, was taken over by the Education Authority in 1930's and closed in 1985, with only 11 pupils on the register.

Slebech parish is unusual in that it has two estates, Picton Castle and Slebech Park within its boundary. Between them the two estates owned most of the land and properties; many of the farmers were their tenants and the cottagers their employees. Every important development was under the patronage of one or the other. The Picton Castle Estate was the biggest overall but Slebech Hall had the larger estate in the parish and the extra status of being patron of the living.

Slebech Park is the site of the ancient commandery of the Knights of St John, established during the twelfth century. In 1540 the fate of the Hospitallers was sealed by an Act of Parliament. The Commandery was dissolved and Slebech was bought in 1546 by the two Barlow brothers, Thomas and Roger. It later passed to the De Rutzen family through marriage and eventually to the Philipps family – the present owners.

Picton Castle was built in the 13th century, probably by Sir John Wogan, an Irish justiciary. During the Civil War the castle was garrisoned for the King by Sir Richard Philipps and is still occupied by descendants of the family. The Castle and grounds have been open to the public during the summer for many years.

The ancient ruins of St John the Baptist church, where the Knights Hospitallers once worshipped, stand on the banks of the river. A service is held there once a year. The Church of St John, situated on the A40 trunk road, was opened in 1848 but was closed in the 1980's, due to the deterioration of what was once a fine Victorian building. A feature of The Rhos is that weekly worship continues at the small Church Hall.

Sources:

- The Rhos 1992 Community Action Plan
- The Rhos 'Secret Waterway' village leaflet.

The Action Planning Workshops

The 2006 Community Visioning Workshops consisted of the following exercises:

- Sense of Place – celebrating the qualities of The Rhos.
- A Community Audit – listing the main features and facilities
- The Rhos in the Bigger Picture – considering global and local issues
- Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths and Opportunities
- The Vision for 2016 – an idealised view of the future
- Skills and Resources Audit – illustrating the variety of local skills
- Translating Ideas into Action – using the information to plan projects
- Pledge Wall – identifying main issues considered to be important.

The Rhos, Its People & Its Sense Of Place

The Rhos is described as a ‘very special place’ which has an ‘island feel.’ It has a rich history and fascinating built heritage too. It is peaceful and attractive and the environment is beautiful. Trees are considered very important, especially the distinctive tunnel on the approach to the village. It is very ‘close and tranquil – a safe haven’. Local people are warm and friendly and local ‘characters’ are valued.

The Rhos in the Bigger Picture

Local people are fully aware of global and local sustainability issues and show concern for a wide variety that might affect their community in the future.

The cost of waste, the use of unnecessary energy, the effect of increasing road use and use of chemicals, were highlighted. Concerns include the effects of poor quality food and diet, especially on health, the development of children and their education.

This emphasised the importance of making the most of local opportunities such as organic farming and food processing, which could also reduce food miles, waste and packaging.

The 21st Century Vision

During the Community Visioning exercise, participants were asked to envisage their ideal community in ten years time. They emphasised the need to preserve the existing small scale rural environment, the peaceful nature of the area and to make the most of what is available locally especially food and other local produce.

There was a desire to build on existing social strengths, such as the strong community spirit, the ability to organise enjoyable events and the good interaction between age groups. The development of a Community Centre, where a range of activities for all ages could take place, was seen as desirable. A recreation area for young people was also a priority.

A chance to maximise the benefits of the natural strengths of the area – the beautiful environment and the rich history and heritage was also regarded as important.

Favourite local areas, such as Picton Ferry, should remain unspoilt and features such as the oak lined riverbanks should be maintained. This might need some form of management plan, rather than just hoping for the best. Local rights of way should be looked after and their usage by locals and visitors encouraged for health and enjoyment. This should be assisted by effective interpretation.

From a business and health perspective, the potential for exploring organic farming and food production opportunities was identified. A farm shop ‘to sell local produce to the local community’ was seen as a possible opportunity. It was felt that The Rhos Garden Centre site should remain as a commercial outlet.

The importance of preserving the scale of the area was emphasised and any future housing development should respect this context and reflect the vernacular style.

A c t i o n P l a n P r o p o s a l s

Issues raised in the workshops have been grouped into broad themes and, where appropriate, related to specific sites to highlight objectives and recommendations.

A Community Facilities, Activities & Communication

Commentary:

The Rhos has a strong tradition of trust, friendship and organising great community events, including a Horticultural Show, Fun Day and Christmas Party. This community spirit has fostered a sense of belonging – an aspect of its ‘Sense of Place.’

However, this has developed without the assistance of a formal meeting place although it is felt that there is a real need for a community focus or ‘heart.’ Meetings currently take place in private homes. The Church Hall is used occasionally. Other larger events, including operas and concerts, are organised in other venues in the area.

The need for a community facility was originally expressed in the 1992 Action Plan. SPARC assisted the community to explore the possibility of renovating the Church Hall, with the aim of developing more activities and providing wider community usage. However, the church authorities were unable to support this expansion.

Since then, the Rhos and District Community Association has organised events to raise funds for a community meeting place, including the purchase of a marquee. This has been successful but the small group needs support and re-energising, if community spirit is not to become exhausted.

Existing local activities include WI, Church, Community Council and recreational pursuits such as walking, gym, cycling and gardening.

When asked what activities they would like to participate in, local people added keep fit classes, Pilates, luncheon club, gardening club, ‘meeting each other,’ festivals,

events, whist drives and bingo. Also, 'rounders matches and fancy dress should be revived'. The need for a pub and the associated social activities was also expressed on a number of occasions.

Today, the development of a Community Hall, an all purpose facility, is seen as a key to the future development of the community, as a means of engaging all age groups and regenerating community spirit. It would give the village a 'heart.' During the youth visioning exercise, provision of a Youth Club was mentioned.

There is a real determination to develop a successful project. Some funds exist and there is a willing group of volunteers to form a nucleus. They have challenged other local people to get involved and 'Keep the Community together'.

On the communication front there is interest in starting a community newsletter and or website. This would be an effective means of circulating information and gathering support for community projects. It could also promote activities that might interest the community, such as events at Picton Castle and 'community walks' and picnics. There was a strong feeling that the community should have free access to Picton Castle grounds.

There is concern about lack of Broad Band connection in the area.

Proposals:

- Encourage everyone in The Rhos to join the Community Association and add their support to making things happen at a local level.
- Organise a Community Activities survey to determine different needs.
- Put new effort into developing a sustainable community facility – a 'heart' for the village which would have some outdoor space for young people too.
- To ensure that a future community facility is affordable and realistic
- Explore different options, taking a fresh look at all sites to find out whether there is any land available for a new facility.
- Research funding sources related to the different options mentioned.
- Research sustainable building options – energy efficiency, waste recycling etc
- Explore options for linkages to other projects that might build capacity in a funding application eg local food produce, crafts and health care provision.
- Invite people with various skills to get involved – a variety were indicated in the skills audit, there will be many others. Some people may be happy to help complete funding applications, write letters or to enthuse others.
- Start a community newsletter to involve as many people as possible in 'Keeping the Community Together.'
- Obtain update on Broad Band provision.

B Youth Facilities

Commentary:

Young people really value The Rhos, they enjoy ‘the woods to explore’ and the ‘nice places to walk.’ They feel that it is a ‘close community’ where ‘everybody knows each other’ and they regard it as ‘one of the nicest places in Pembrokeshire.’

However, they would like to participate in more activities within the community. They are keen to contribute to its social fabric, are concerned about other age groups and understand that they need to help make things happen rather than expect others to do it for them. They have offered to organise sponsored activities to help towards the costs of running a Youth Club which they are particularly keen to establish.

The need is for ‘somewhere we can get together,’ and ‘something everyone will enjoy.’ A majority of participants in the Youth Visioning exercise indicated that a Youth Club was their priority project. Strengths to aid the Youth Club project include young people with a will to make it work, supported by parents who have agreed to get involved in running it.

They identified a range of activities that could take place in a multi purpose centre. These included Brownies, Scouts, disco club, craft club, church club and circus club. Trips to shows and other attractions and ‘days out’ were also mentioned.

Outdoor activities were also discussed, including ‘a ball games area,’ and ramping area for skateboards, rugby was also mentioned. A multi use games area would be ideal. A safe recreation space for younger children is also seen as desirable.

Young people are concerned about the lack of a bus shelter for the school bus users.

Proposals:

- It is vital that young people are involved in planning a community facility and outdoor recreation area.
- Hold a meeting to discuss establishing a Youth Club – is there a temporary meeting place available?
- Look at possibility of organising ‘days out’ – maybe potential youth club helpers would help with transport etc?
- Organise survey to research support for a Bus Shelter.

C Environment, Enhancement & Energy

Commentary:

Residents of all ages value the local environment, especially Picton Castle and Slebech Park, bats, birds, the estuary, footpaths and the National Park status. They regard trees and the 'tree tunnel' that leads into the village as an important part of area's identity – its unique 'Sense of Place'. Young people also refer to the importance of the woodland areas, the wildlife and the 'good countryside.'

All are keen to 'protect the environment for future generations.' Litter, pollution from oil refineries and effluence in the river, car noise and fumes are regarded as potential threats. There is also concern about the condition of favourite places such as Picton Ferry where residents would like a bench.

There is a concern about conservation of trees, especially the oaks that line the river bank. A tree planting programme would ensure any that die are replaced and the all important local identity would be conserved.

Existing measures to care for the environment include recycling and composting, but residents are keen to see a local recycling point and 'orange bag' refuse collection. More people would recycle if it was convenient to do so. Local efforts also include bird counts; objections to road widening and pop concerts; prohibition of overnight parking and litter picking.

Location and surveying of local public rights of way and using them to keep them open is regarded as important. The link between a managed environment and economic benefit is recognised and sustainable environmental tourism is possible.

There is an interest in making the most of the local environment without compromising its quiet qualities. One proposal is to create a 'traffic free circuit', making use wherever possible of existing paths and bridleways to construct a multi use route. Surfacing would have to be suitable for hooves as well as bicycle tyres and a users' code would have to be agreed.

There are possible linkages to other projects include healthy living benefits and tourism opportunities, including the national Sustrans trail.

The local environment offers other recreation options according to young people – these include raft and boat races, bike races paint balling and bird watching.

There is interest in alternative energy sources but a feeling that any method should not compromise the local environment. Information should be easily available to all and the use of wind energy and solar panels encouraged through alternative energy grants. There was some interest in finding out more about community owned wind turbines similar to those operated in Mid Wales.

Proposals:

- Form local Environment Group. Ask PLANED and other agencies for help.
- To seek advice from Picton and Slebech estates with regards to the environment, energy and enhancement aspects of the community.
- Work with local landowners to plan simple enhancements e.g. providing benches at locations such as Picton Ferry
- Continue consultation with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) – on any conservation issues.
- Work with local landowners, the County Council’s rights of way officers and PCNPA to survey public paths and ensure they are signposted and way marked.
- Ask Environment Group to look at potential for a traffic free circuit around the village using existing paths, bridleways and green lanes. Need to survey paths and assess gradients, surface requirements etc If progressing the proposal - obtain professional help with designing and funding the multi purpose route – consult National Park Authority, Sustrans and Greenways Officer .
- Look at options for linking with healthy living projects – calorie burning etc and any other outdoor activities.
- Make alternative energy information and grant details available
- Ask the Eco Centre for details about community energy projects



Picton Ferry is a favourite beauty spot

D History & Heritage

The history and built heritage of The Rhos is important to local people – they are proud of it and would like to make more of it.

The activities of the Knights of St John and the Civil War siege at Picton Castle provides more history in one small areas than some cities can boast.

The built heritage includes Picton Castle, the Tower opposite Rose Castle. Slebech Park, Millin Chapel, South Dairy Chapel, Rhos cottages, lime kilns, wells, several vicarages and the two old churches at Slebech. Conservation of these buildings and others are considered important. They all help to give a special quality to the area, as does the river, Rudder tree and ‘The Rhos cottages.’

The importance of people was also highlighted – particular ‘characters,’ who have a story to tell and memories to relate in the oral tradition. Some remember their relatives telling them about the ferry which ran between The Rhos and Landshipping – when the ferryman had to be called up to make the journey.

The changing face of agriculture can be witnessed in the now redundant buildings at Picton Home Farm that were once busy with teams of men setting out to plough the surrounding land and other tasks. There are many stories to be related and people willing to tell them.

History featured in the area’s first Action Plan and a local group were assisted to produce a village leaflet. Now there is enthusiasm for a new opportunity - to produce ‘a village book to record history of the area and its people.’ A local author is willing to help compile the book on a community led basis.

Further interpretation boards and a guided tour, maybe in the form of a heritage trail, have also been suggested. In addition to helping the local community to enjoy the area’s history, visitors would also be interested.

These proposals are also another way of raising revenue and making the most of what is already in the local area. There is a potential retail outlet at Picton Castle which has a gallery and café that some locals feel should be better supported.

Proposals:

- Organise a meeting and form a History Group to discuss the feasibility of producing a book and involve the local author. Promote the project and request photos and other memorabilia. Assess potential cost of the book and how it should be funded. Involve people who have indicated that they have skills that might help – such as bidding for funds. Word processing or scanning skills might be useful too. Keep the wider community informed and involved in the book’s progress.
- Organise a launch and exhibition of all the old photographs and memorabilia.
- Discuss ideas for interpretation boards and consult with the National Park Authority – there may be some interpretation help available.
- Ensure all paths can be put in good order before designing a local trail.

- Organise story telling and singing event – maybe an evening of local entertainment. This might help raise funds too.
- Consult with sustainable tourism agencies for best practice and funding possibilities to assist the development of an integrated project which encourages visitors to explore the history of The Rhos whilst benefiting the local economy.

E Employment, Business & Tourism

Commentary:

The main employment in the area is farming, tourism related businesses, the Garden Centre and the local estates – Slebech and Picton Castle. Most local people are employed outside the community.

There is strong support for organic farming and diversification and an interest in exploring options for a farm shop to sell the produce. This is partly in recognition of local strengths including a specific interest in organic farming and partly in reaction to the perceived threats of large scale modern farming systems and of losing ‘true countryside.’

Impact on health of poor quality food that travels many miles in excessive packaging and the waste this sort of system involves, is a concern. Workshop participants referred to the decline in old style ‘door to door tradesmen’ and regretted the lack of local farm shops and services.

Perceived strengths include a number of small local farms suited to organic farming and a strong local interest in diversification, such as growing soft fruit. One idea is to investigate a local ‘co-operative’ of organic farms, run on sustainable principles and linking in to the Tir Gorfal scheme, which promotes environmental conservation.

The scheme would need professional guidance and proper co-ordination. The potential for adding value to crops and bulk purchasing opportunities was also identified. Linkages to other projects, such as food or walking festivals are possible. The local producers would be encouraged to establish and supply the farm shop.

A ‘healthy living’ tourism theme was also apparent in opportunities identified for making better use of local paths and tracks for walking and cycling – as a means of promoting exercise and cutting down on road use. Visitors would be encouraged to spend time and money locally - on accommodation, activities, food and produce.

The desire to promote local enterprise and create ‘future employment for the young’ is regarded as a more sustainable way of living. A wider perspective expressed by a member of the community is that it is desirable to ‘harness attributions (Heritage and Environment) for employment and sensitive economic development.’

Another possible link is to the proposal for a Heritage Trail with interpretation. There is also a desire to support existing businesses and assets in the locality. It was suggested that local people should have free entry to the Picton Castle Restaurant.

Proposals:

- Explore marketing options for local produce and research suitable local site for Farm Shop – redundant buildings etc
- Organise local consultation to gauge interest in an ‘Organic Farm Project’. Request agricultural advice from agencies such as PLANED - work collaboratively and obtain specialist advice - agree preferred crops etc Design a business plan – consult appropriate agencies for guidance. Consult PCC food officer for best practice and advice.
- Explore development of a Food Group.
- Explore linkages with other projects – healthy living etc
- Work with local business and tourism agencies to ensure that local products are used wherever possible.

F Transport, Traffic & Highways

Commentary:

Over the years there has been a lot of concern about traffic speed through The Rhos and now noise and other pollution from traffic on the A40 are mentioned.

Following the first Action Plan, the community was assisted with a traffic calming scheme but there is still concern about speed through the village ‘children on bikes and playing might get run over.’ (Youth Visioning event).

The increasing busy-ness of the A40 causes problems during the summer season as it can be difficult to exit from The Rhos junction. There is also concern about the future development of the A40 – plans for widening it etc.

There is no local bus service which means that everyone has to use their car wherever they wish to go – not a very sustainable option. There is interest in a community bus service. This situation should be reviewed. There is a school bus service but no bus shelter. Young people are very keen that this issue should be addressed.

There is interest in encouraging people to use the roads less and use a proposed ‘traffic free circuit’ of local paths and lanes for local journeys (see earlier ‘Environment, Enhancement & Energy’ section)

Proposals:

- Organise a meeting with Pembrokeshire County Council regarding future plans for A40 in the vicinity of The Rhos.
- Look into ways to reduce speeding in the local vicinity
- Work with Environment Group to hold meeting to explore reaction to a village traffic free circuit proposal along paths and quiet lanes – important to prepare carefully – talk to landowners etc.
- Request meeting with Pembrokeshire Transport Co-ordinator to review potential for a bus service or feasibility of a Community Bus system.
- Proactively work with young people to establish a bus shelter.

G Housing & Services

Commentary:

A bleak question was posed by a participant in one of the community workshops, 'Where will our children live?' The same issue concerned young people where the need for 'more family houses for more children,' was identified.

Local people are keen to retain the character of their village and surroundings and do not want large scale housing development. However, they recognise that affordable housing (and employment) is needed if young people are to stand any chance of working and living in the area where they were born and brought up.

Concern about declining services was voiced – this included the lack of a bus service and potential for reduction in facilities at Withybush Hospital in Haverfordwest.

Proposals:

- Look at the joint unitary development plan to assess potential for small scale affordable development.
- Meet with the Rural Housing Enabler to enquire the demand for housing.
- Ask the County Council about possibility of mobile support services to address health issues and services for older residents.

I m p l e m e n t a t i o n / A c t i v i t y G r o u p s

In order that the Action Plan can be progressed effectively it is proposed to form special interest Working Groups within the local Forum - The Rhos & District Community Association. Also to work with the Community Council and County Council. The Groups would, in consultation with the relevant providers, for example the Highway Authority, concentrate on preparing more detailed action programmes giving priority and focus to those proposals which are capable of early implementation.

The Groups could be centred on:

- Community - facilities, activities and communications.
- Environment - including rights of way, energy & waste
- Heritage and History.
- Business, Employment & Tourism – taken forward through PLANED's Area Development Group.
- Transport, Traffic & Highways & Housing & Services.

It is important that the Groups:

- Work within the agreed Action Plan and report to the main Forum – The Rhos and District Community Association.
- Work with existing groups and organisations, including the Community Council and other local authorities.
- Meet on a regular basis.
- Keep the broader community informed of progress.