



Pembrokeshire

The cutting edge of Britain

PART 4

A rural case study of how a plan for the future
can change the fortunes of a whole county

by Nick Tyrone

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About the author: Nick Tyrone is a journalist, author, researcher and Senior Policy Adviser at the Jobs Foundation. He has published several books, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as having written for most mainstream news outlets in the UK, most frequently and prominently in *The Spectator*. He was also the Executive Director of CentreForum, the liberal think tank most noted for publishing the Orange Book, as well as Director General of the Red Tape Initiative.

Foreword

The origins of the Jobs Foundation go back to a conversation in 2020, when the two of us talked about the crucial role that businesses play in giving people a step up in life, through jobs and training. We kept circling back to this subject, and in 2022, we realised that there was a need for a charity that distilled the best practice from companies who excel at getting people from disadvantaged backgrounds into work, so companies who wish to introduce dedicated schemes to do this, can do so without going through the process of trial and error. The Jobs Foundation was granted charitable status in 2023 and launched later that year.

When we first began working on the Jobs Foundation, very few people were aware of the crucial need for a charity that helps get people into work. Fast forward to 2024, and it is front and centre of the policy debate. But missing so far has been the crucial role of business to make this happen, by creating and providing jobs, which is why Nick Tyrone's report, which looks at the role that businesses play in their local communities, is so groundbreaking.

Pembrokeshire: The cutting edge of Britain, takes a look at the most southwest corner of Wales, a county that is a rural community while also being coastal, surrounded as it is on three sides by sea. It is a beautiful place with

a thriving tourism sector, containing within it one of the most important ports in Britain, and featuring a still vital agricultural sector. It is also a place filled with pockets of poverty, a place which is badly served by transportation infrastructure, with both trains and roads in and out of the county inadequate.

The report looks at the oil and gas sector through the lens of Valero, one of Pembrokeshire's biggest and most important employers; at the tourism sector via the seaside town of Saundersfoot; the agricultural sector, with interviews with representatives of two of the county's prevalent dairy farms being detailed. The report also looks at the village of Lawrenny, one that is being revitalised, bringing in new denizens and businesses alike. There is also a delve into Pembrokeshire College, a vital institution that trains the leaders of tomorrow in all the sectors covered in this report.

Our next paper will be the master report, one which will bring together the lessons learned from a cross-section of the country. This final document will cover what businesses are doing to alleviate poverty via best practice in terms of hiring, training and apprenticeships, what institutions are helping businesses along this journey (and what is missing from that equation), all demonstrating that business is a societal good, across Great Britain.

Lord Elliott of Mickle Fell
President of the Jobs Foundation

Georgiana Bristol
CEO of the Jobs Foundation



About Pembrokeshire

- A country that comprises the far southwestern tip of Wales, the eastern border being around 45 miles west of Swansea
- Population of the county as a whole: 123,400.¹
- Haverfordwest is the county seat. Its population is 12,000.²
- Pembrokeshire is a major centre for tourism, with around seven million visits in 2019, bringing in £590 million in revenue for the area, supporting almost 10,000 full time jobs. Although these figures were subsequently hit by Covid, there is hope in the county of returning to and perhaps bettering those figures in 2024.³
- Pembrokeshire has a large number of entrepreneurs, with 14% of the workforce self-employed, up against 8.5% across the whole of Wales.⁴
- Pembrokeshire Council is the largest employer in the county, with 6,100 staff, although this is at least partly due to the preponderance of SMEs.⁵
- Average salary for someone working in Pembrokeshire is £31,694,⁶ which is lower than the Great Britain average of £34,900.
- Nonetheless, Pembrokeshire has a huge level of child poverty. Nearly a quarter of kids in the country are growing up in deprivation, as opposed to around 15% across the whole of Great Britain.⁷
- Employment in the county over all sits at 73.6%, slightly under the national average.⁸
- Pembrokeshire County Council has 60 representatives: 11 Conservatives, 10 Labour, 2 Plaid Cymru, 2 Lib Dems – and 35 independents (18 are “not affiliated” to any political grouping, while 17 sit together as the “Independent Group”).⁹
- Although the county used to sit geographically evenly across two Westminster constituencies – Preseli Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire – after the redrawing of the constituencies for the 2024 general election, most of the county is now in the seat of Mid and South Pembrokeshire, which returned Labour with a majority of 1,878.

1. 2021 ONS census, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/W06000009/> (Accessed 06/06/24)

2. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/W06000009/> (Accessed 06/06/24)

3. <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/cscorporatestrategy202328/cspembsincontext#:~:text=In%202019%20the%20Pembrokeshire%20tourism,jobs%20and%20101%2C341%20bed%20spaces.> (Accessed 06/06/24)

4. Ibid

5. <https://newsroom.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/about/about-us#:~:text=The%20Council%20is%20the%20biggest,%3A%20Working%20together%2C%20improving%20lives.> (Accessed 06/06/24)

6. <https://totalpopulation.co.uk/authority/pembrokeshire> (Accessed 06/06/24)

7. <https://www.tenby-today.co.uk/news/nearly-a-quarter-of-pembrokeshire-children-living-in-poverty-674886> (Accessed 06/06/24)

8. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/W06000009/#inactivity> (Accessed 06/06/24)

9. <https://mgenglish.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=PARTY&VW=LIST&PIC=0&LLL=0> (Accessed 06/06/24)



Nick Tyrone



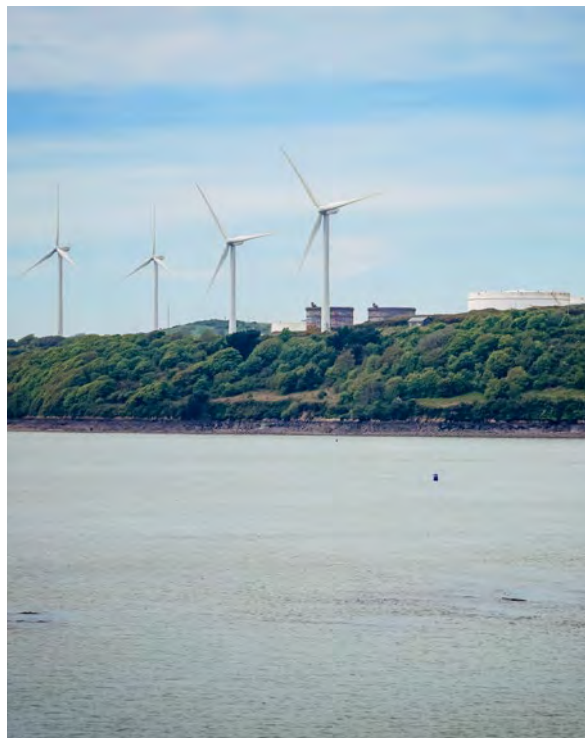
Valero and the refinery



Pembroke Refinery opened in 1964, one of several oil and gas refineries to be built on the Milford Haven Waterway during the 1960s and 1970s. The Labour MP at the time, a political maverick named Desmond Donnelly, described the development of the oil and gas sector as “the rebirth of Pembrokeshire”, something that was expected to create huge numbers of jobs in a region that badly needed them.

I headed there on a cold day in late winter to find a place that was immediately impressive. The site of the refinery is huge, taking up a large chunk of the peninsula directly across from Milford Haven port. While the economics of the Pembroke refinery are interesting, the role it plays in training and hiring local people is even more intriguing.

“The Refinery supports hundreds of highly-skilled, well-paid jobs in Pembrokeshire and across South



“The Refinery supports hundreds of highly-skilled, well-paid jobs in Pembrokeshire and across South West Wales. In particular, we significantly invest in the next generation of workers, with opportunities through world-class apprenticeship and student bursary schemes.”

The local economy also has a number of highly skilled SMEs that are a vital to local industry, with a symbiosis between larger companies like Valero engaged with supply-chain firms that employ hundreds and sometimes thousands of people.

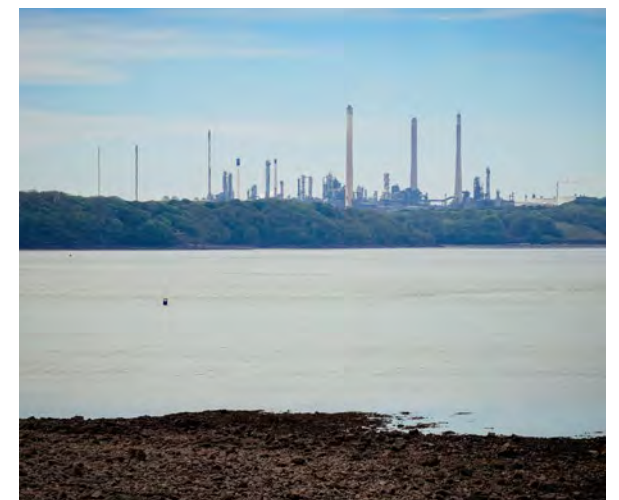
West Wales,” said Will James, Valero’s Manager of Public and Government Affairs. “In particular, we significantly invest in the next generation of workers, with opportunities through world-class apprenticeship and student bursary schemes.”

The training programmes for refinery recruits are remarkable. They cut across all parts of the business, from the most technical positions to the purely backroom and operational jobs. They involve some time on site at the refinery, combined with a huge amount of training at the nearby Pembrokeshire college.

“Every year a new cohort of apprentices are recruited from the local, Pembrokeshire community,” Will continued, emphasising the local focus of the refinery. “Balancing their studies at Pembrokeshire College in Haverfordwest alongside working on site, these apprentices gain incredibly valuable skills in operations, maintenance, instrumentation and electrical engineering that will last a lifetime. The student bursary scheme sees undergraduates from top UK universities earn as they learn during summer holidays and get a full year of employment, with the specialisation in chemical and mechanical engineering.

The energy industry in Pembrokeshire has changed markedly in the last sixty years and promises to transform even more in the future. Yet the skills to be found amongst the refinery’s employees and trainees are those that will still be needed in the decades ahead: in-depth industrial expertise across engineering, electronics, chemistry, mechanics, operations and maintenance. With their understanding of the local community, the refinery offers opportunities for both school leavers and those in their mid-career looking to upskill, giving them a chance to earn good wages without having to move away from the area.

The local economy also has a number of highly skilled SMEs that are a vital to local industry, with a symbiosis between larger companies like Valero engaged with supply-chain firms that employ a large chunk of the Pembrokeshire population. As we look to a future where we increasingly balance emissions reductions, energy security and meaningful jobs across the economy, that emphasis on the connections between large employers like Valero, SMEs close by and the larger, wider community shouldn’t be minimised in terms of importance.





Pembrokeshire College

On the outskirts of Haverfordwest, just off the Merlin's Bridge roundabout, sits Pembrokeshire College. Although it was only established in 1990, it's difficult to imagine the region without it now. It provides secondary and post-secondary education to students between the ages of 16 and 19, while also offering invaluable Further Education courses to older students. On top of all that, there are the apprenticeships the college provides and facilitates. Larger companies like Valero see the college as an important partner, their main provider of quality training.

I was taken around the campus by William Bateman, the Curriculum Area Manager for Mechanical and Marine Engineering, and Arwyn Williams, Head of Faculty for Engineering, Computing and Higher Education.

The college is larger in size and scope than I had imagined prior to my visit. "We've had a lot of work done recently. We've spent around £14 million on the infrastructure here," Will said. Yet for all the money that the college has put into developing itself, as in many other parts of the

country, the external infrastructure in their area lets them down.

"Every morning, several buses turn up from around the county, bringing students in," Arwyn told me. Like in Hartlepool, the college has had to become a transport provider on top of everything else it does, in order to fulfil their remit to the desired level. Where possible, the college tries to cover these costs – as well

It's in the provision of these apprenticeships where Pembrokeshire college really shines, particularly when it comes to training people in skills like welding which are vital to nearby companies.



Will Bateman and Arwyn Williams

"Most of our provision is in engineering, construction and health. That's where the jobs are for the students after they graduate."



as giving the students real world commercial experience – by running portions of what they do as a business. For instance, the salons, there to train hairdressing students, are run as commercial enterprises.

The college has 13,000 students in total. That's 2,000 full time (mostly people aged 16 to 19), around 5,000 students in part-time studies (and the part-timers can be all sorts of ages, but tend to be people changing careers). Then the college has around 6,000 people doing apprenticeships – almost half of those studying at any given time. It's in the provision of these apprenticeships where Pembrokeshire college really shines, particularly when it comes to training people in skills like welding which are vital to nearby companies, such as Valero. Students study at the college on some days, and then work on site for their employers the rest of the week, allowing them to use their training in a real-world environment.

Given the levels of poverty in this part of Wales, the college and the employers who use it to train their employees of the future are doing a huge amount to create jobs, as well as to take people out of poverty via employment. Just as in Hartlepool, this is the one route out of generations of unemployment and deprivation for thousands of people, through the link between institutions like Pembrokeshire College and employers like Valero.

“Most of our provision is in engineering, construction and health,” William told me. “That’s where the jobs are for the students after they graduate.”

My tour of the college built up to the big moment at the end, when Arwyn showed me a large drawing outlining the planned future of not only the college, but in some ways, Pembrokeshire as a whole. It details how the expansion of wind energy creation will be put into overdrive in Cardigan Bay and the Celtic Sea.

“The artist drew this live, in the meeting we were having on it all,” Arwyn said with pride. The plans are big – a power cable between Wales and Ireland, the installation of hundreds of new wind turbines and the creation of the infrastructure needed to store huge amounts of energy. Most of this will be created by the private companies - but many of their employees will be trained at Pembrokeshire college.



Pembrokeshire overview

Although Celts have lived in the area known as Pembrokeshire, the part of Wales that juts out in the south-west, forming the far corner of Cardigan Bay, it got its current identity shortly after the Battle of Hastings and the arrival of the Normans. Henry VII was born in Pembroke Castle in 1457. The area was notable in the English Civil War as heavily supporting the Roundheads vs the rest of Wales being almost entirely Cavalier. In World War II, many areas around Milford Haven became militarily important.

These stand out in the history of a county mostly known as a peaceful idyll; a part of Britain removed from the rest of it. As such, apart from its economy being based on shipping and agriculture, as well as oil and gas because of the refinery, tourism has played a large part in its history, as well as being important in the present. Surrounded by the sea on three sides, the county is undoubtably beautiful.

There are no motorways in Pembrokeshire – the M4 terminates at the Port Abraham Services in Carmarthenshire (which has a Costa but charges for parking, something to note if you're ever stopping there for a quick loo break). This feeds into the soul of the place, an almost mystical, unspoiled land out of time (which is a big reason why it is popular with tourists). Yet it is also a large drawback in many respects – the county is particularly badly served by the train system, even compared to the rest of Wales which is very badly connected by rail as compared to anywhere in England. To get to Haverfordwest from London on the train, you have to change at Salisbury, then change again at Newport – then change again at Carmarthen. The journey takes between seven and eight and half hours in total, and you have to hope you don't miss your connections along the way, some of which are terribly infrequent. Haverfordwest is 244 miles from London – for a reasonable comparison, Newcastle Upon Tyne is 290 miles away from the

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capital, yet you can get there in about three hours via rail from London, without having to change and with a service every half an hour, all day long.

Despite the influx of visitors in the spring and summer months, Pembrokeshire is also reasonably poor compared to a lot of the rest of the country. It has one of the highest child poverty rates in Wales, a nation which contains a lot of child poverty all round. 36.2% of kids were living in poverty in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire in 2020/21¹⁰, versus 27% UK wide¹¹. The reality behind the beauty and remote wonder of the place is harsh at times.

Yet there is a huge amount to be hopeful about in this corner of Wales. The connections between agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and shipping are encouraging – the building blocks for a great future in Pembrokeshire are clearly there. The challenges cannot be dismissed, however.



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10. <https://www.pavs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Addressing-Poverty-Research-Report.pdf> (Accessed 15/04/24)

11. https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Local-child-poverty-indicators-report-2022_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 15/04/24)



Case study: Poyerston Farm

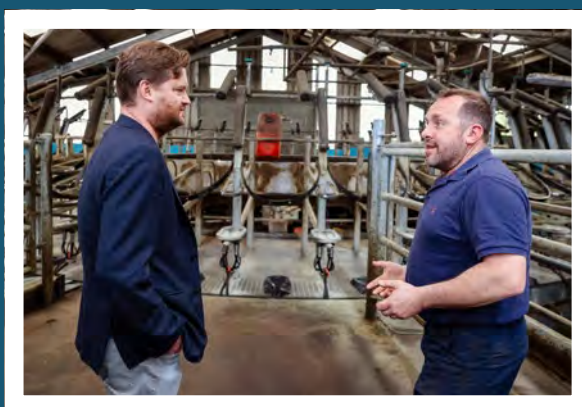
Poyerston farm is a 650-acre dairy farm that sits about ten miles east of Pembroke Dock. It milks around 350 cows at any given time, with “autumn calving” employed, where the next generation of cattle is born September through November. The farm is owned by Roger Lewis.

“It’s a family farm. We’ve been here for 31 years,” Roger said. “My mum and dad purchased it in 1993, just as I was about to go to university. My father had his own farm about five miles from here at the time but wanted a bigger farm and so we bought this place. It’s been a steady expansion since then, always investing in infrastructure to get it to where it is now.”

Spring should be the most productive season for a farm like Poyerston, but it’s been tough with the bad weather this year. Roger sells all his milk to a nearby co-operative, something which I discovered is a common arrangement now throughout the Pembrokeshire dairy industry.

“We’re very much focused on trying to produce milk from homegrown feed. But obviously, there are some things we can’t get in this country, proteins being the classic one. Soya is the best quality protein we can feed to the cows and most of it is imported. But we use it as sparingly as possible. We locally source as much as we can.”

“It was one of those moments that have changed the business. Reduced the time it took to milk the cows, but also provided a better environment for the cows as well. They are so much calmer, they each have their own space. It has improved production immensely.”



The farm installed a new automated milking parlour in 2018. Roger was emphatic about the positive influence of this innovation.

“It was one of those moments that has changed the business. Reduced the time it took to milk the cows, but also provided a better environment for the cows as well. They are so much calmer; they each have their own space. It has improved production immensely. In the first twelve months, we noticed such an upturn in production. Part of it is just the cows having to stand around less of the time.”

Roger employs two farm hands at present, but that’s mostly to give him time to spend on expanding the business in various ways - the milking parlour can be run by one person.

“I’ve got two great guys with me now. We’ve got a settled workforce, which is a far cry from how it’s been in the past when it’s been quite a challenge not just to find good people, but to find people.”

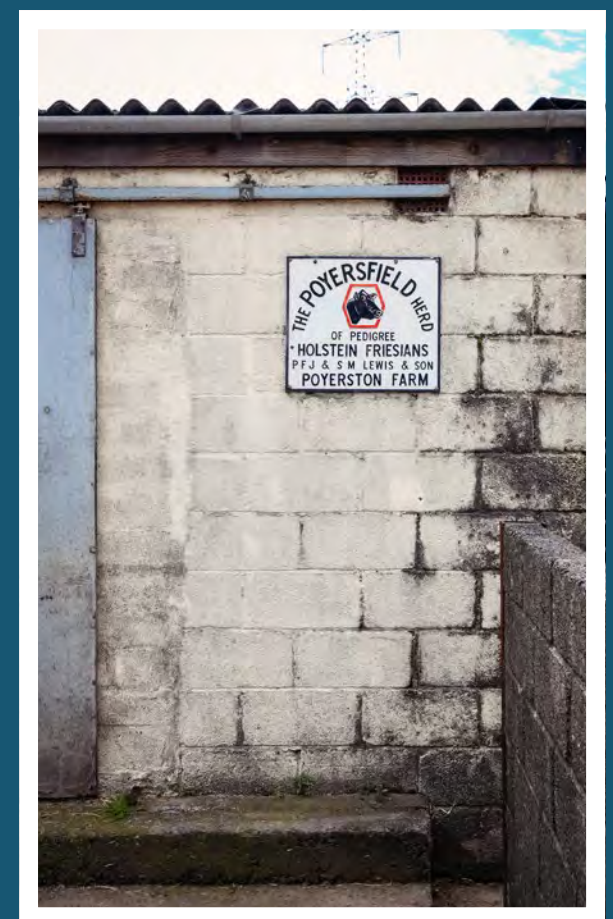
Roger has two daughters, both of whom are finishing school soon. They are looking to go away for post-secondary education, one to university, one to agricultural college. Roger hopes one or both will return to the farm eventually to keep it going – but the agricultural sector in Wales faces huge challenges and Roger was straight up with me about them.

“We’ve built up a good business, but it’s hard work. Profit is a dirty word in most industries but in farming, it’s a really dirty word. That unfortunately goes against us when we’re trying to attract people into the industry, particularly the next generation. Ultimately, food producers are vital to the future of Wales and the UK as a whole.”

“Farms often get tagged with this “unsustainable” tag and its completely unfair. Nature is our friend; it’s part of our business. If we abuse it, we’re not successful, so why would we do that?”

On February 28, 2024, thousands of farmers protested in Cardiff outside of the Senedd, objecting to the Welsh government’s new subsidy plans. Under the proposals, farms in Wales would need to dedicate at least 10% of their land for trees and 10% for wildlife habitat. For some farms, this will be easy and in fact, they already apply; for many others, who need to farm their land intensively, this is next to impossible. As a result of the protests, the Welsh government have shelved the plans until 2026. However, this just means the question of farm subsidies in Wales has been kicked into the long grass. On May 14th, the week after I interviewed Roger, there was another protest by farmers in Cardiff.

“Farms often get tagged with this “unsustainable” tag and its completely unfair. Nature is our friend; it’s part of our business. If we abuse it, we’re not successful, so why would we do that? The reality is, over the last ten years the sector has seen massive efficiency breakthroughs. We’re sourcing less stuff from around the world and getting it locally. We’re reducing our carbon footprint all the time. I don’t feel that food producers get enough credit for that.”





Pembroke Dock and the Port of Milford Haven

On the banks of the River Cleddau, just before the waterway spills into Milford Haven, sits Pembroke Dock, both the dock itself and the “new town” that was built around it with the same name, both beginning life in 1814. Boats were constructed there in the 19th and 20th century, but the space now acts as a commercial port, both for goods coming in and out, and a commercial, public ferry service to Rosslare, Ireland.



“We are a trust port. What that means is that we have no shareholders; we own ourselves. While we can compete for government funding, we receive no funding from government as a matter of course. The fact that we have no shareholders means we can reinvest our surplus into the business, into our people, into our community.”



Vidette Swales, Tom Sawyer and Anna Malloy

Pembroke Dock is run by the Milford Haven Port Authority, which sits across the water on the north banks of the Cleddau estuary. I met with the CEO of the dock, Tom Sawyer, alongside Anna Malloy, the port’s Comms and Marketing Director, and Vidette Swales, the HR Director, on a glorious spring day.

“We are a trust port,” Tom said. “What that means is that we have no shareholders; we own ourselves. While we can compete for government funding, we receive no money from government as a matter of course. The fact that we have no shareholders means we can reinvest our surplus into the business, into our people, into our community.”



Tom sees the activity of the greater Milford Haven Port (which includes Pembroke Dock) built around three campaigns:

01. The moving of the large ships in and out of the port. This provides 65-70% of the organisation’s revenue. This is the port’s primary function, at least for the time being.
02. On the north side of the water way, in Milford Haven, sits a marina. There, a transformation is underway, becoming a greater and greater attraction to visitors each year. A hotel, a score of restaurants, shops and other businesses are dotted around the waterfront.
03. The growth and development of Pembroke Dock, both the port and the town around it. The main project is to turn this into a green energy hub, mostly powered by the big wind farms in the Celtic Sea, and plans for this are well underway already.

“This is a multi-generational business,” Tom told me. “Our remit is to hand it on to the next generation in better shape than we inherited it.”

Of course, the first of those three campaigns remains, for now, the most crucial.

“At its core, our purpose is to safely and effectively operate the western energy gateway to the United Kingdom.”

The job of moving large ships, mostly containing bulk liquids which are hydrocarbon based, is a big one. But Tom sees the vision of the port, particularly looking to the future, being broader than that.

“We have if you like two supporting campaigns: one is around our people, making sure they are capable, supported and motivated. Every business will tell you that people are their most important function, but I think it’s clear to us that they genuinely are. We have highly skilled individuals, working in difficult conditions on board the ships, side by side with people who are overseeing a critical piece of national infrastructure, both in terms of our energy security and the vulnerability of the United Kingdom.”

The other supporting campaign is based around bolstering the community of Pembroke Dock, the town itself. It is the poorest area of Pembrokeshire, with 61.1% of households being labelled by the 2021 census as socio-economically deprived.¹² However, in the 2011 census, the town had 67% of its citizens living in deprivation, so it is at least heading in the right direction.¹³ The port is at the heart of bringing the community out of poverty, both through the community funding it undertakes, but more importantly than that, via hiring and training local individuals.

Wanting to work at the port is a huge aspiration for many young people in the surrounding area. Pembroke Dock employs around 200 people (with the greater Milford Haven port, including Pembroke Dock, having around 700 employees).

“Port jobs are great jobs. Typically, 40% higher paid than the average across the UK, never mind the local area,” Tom said. “A young lady just got a maternity cover job, and she told me recently that when she went home and told her parents that



she’d got the role, they welled up. She said it was the proudest moment of her life.”

The marina at Milford Haven deserves another mention here - over 70 businesses rest on the waterfront. They range from the locally owned and operated, like Dilly’s Chocolates and The Fish Plaice, to large corporate entities such as Tesco and Boots, to public and culture amenities, such as the library and a theatre. It is impressive what the port has managed to do with relatively little resource; it is punching above its weight.

“There is a huge amount of expectation placed upon us. Yet we are a relatively small organisation. You know, when we are looking to win a freeport bid, there are only five or six people involved in that, beginning to end. It’s an absolute joy to do all that, but you can feel like you have a huge responsibility to bear.”

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Case study: Ted Sangster and Saundersfoot

Although the development of Milford Haven port is a huge step in Pembrokeshire’s ever expanding tourism sector, it is far from the traditional heart of tourism in the county. St David’s has long been a huge attraction; numerous portions of the coastline are a draw in and of themselves as well. But a lot of the tourism trade in the county has been focused and will continue to be centred on the area around Tenby and Saundersfoot, both picturesque towns on the south coast.

Saundersfoot is also, like Pembroke Dock, a trust port. I spoke to Ted Sangster, who used to be the Chief Executive of the Milford Haven Port Authority, but now lives in Saundersfoot and is involved with the port there as Vice Chancellor, about tourism in the area. I mentioned staying in the St Bride’s hotel in Saundersfoot on one of my visits to Pembrokeshire.

“Until last week that hotel was owned by one of my fellow chancellors of the port, Andrew Evans,” Ted told me. “It was announced last week that he has sold it to Milford Haven Port Authority.”

This was interesting news in many respects – one being that the port is looking to expand beyond its immediate area into tourism and hospitality throughout Pembrokeshire. Another is that, as tourism expands in the county, hotels run by individuals or partnerships may be bought up by larger enterprises. Ted was CEO of the Port Authority when they started to branch out into tourism, as opposed to just being a commercial port. He’s looking to bring the same lessons from that experience to Saundersfoot.

“We’ve put in place a series of sequential developments with the aim of turning around the harbour from a carpark with views of the sea, to being a harbour at the heart of our local community.”

¹² <https://www.westerntelegraph.co.uk/news/23104595.figures-show-pembrokeshires-least-deprived-areas/> (Accessed 16/05/24)

¹³ Ibid



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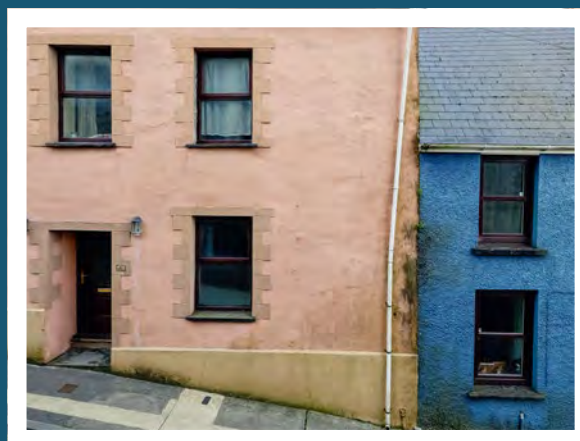
There have been an impressive group of developments in Saundersfoot over the last few years, with many more to come. The aim is to bolster the local economy and increase the tourism trade, all while retaining the character that makes places like Saundersfoot so pleasant to visit in the first place. Yet like the agricultural sector, tourism is affected by seasonality. One part of the year must fund the rest. Ted thinks this can be overcome in Saundersfoot, however.

“We want to develop ourselves into an all-year round, all-weather tourist attraction,” Ted said. “We’ve built a replica of the type of vessel that used to sail out of the harbour. Close by to that, we have a museum dedicated to the maritime history of the town. There are also now large spaces for events that we’re developing.”

Tourism is worth around £600 million to the Pembrokeshire economy.¹⁴ It’s an indelible part of what the county does well. But part of the future of the place revolves around the people who live there – and those who choose to move to Pembrokeshire from elsewhere in the country.



Ted Sangster



Adrian Lort-Phillips and the village of Lawrenny

Lawrenny is a small village on a peninsula in the estuary of the river Cleddau, close to where the Black Mixen Pool forms, a place which is the meeting of the Cresswell and the Carew rivers. If that sounds like a mythical space where Vikings or ancient Normans might have congregated, you’re not wrong – Pembroke castle, which has stood since the 11th century, is a mere 20 minutes by car away. If you get the view over the estuary on a clear day, just past the old church of St Caradoc, as I was lucky enough to, it is breathtaking. It feels like the word “bucolic” rendered as an image by AI.

I met Adrian Lort-Phillips, whose family has owned a large amount of the land in and around Lawrenny for centuries, in the village. It was

thankfully on a beautiful day, made more notable by it being the first truly fine weather of the year to that point.

“My father took over the village from his father in the 1970s. He was inheriting a place my grandfather had never really wanted, him having been a professional soldier. It was just something that was in the family. When my dad took it over, you had maybe 30 or 40 people still here. It was a place that felt like it had lost its purpose.”

His father set about restoring large portions of the town to make it a more liveable space. “A community like this didn’t register on any regional development plan,” Adrian said. “So, he had to do it himself.”

“The number of businesses that are here is extraordinary,” Adrian said. “You have people in the village, doing what they love, and then they in turn become part of the dynamic of why the place works.”



Adrian Lort-Phillips

¹⁴ <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/cscorporatestrategy202328/cspembsincontext#:~:text=In%202019%20the%20Pembrokeshire%20tourism,jobs%20and%20101%2C341%20bed%20spaces>. (Accessed 29.06.24)

Adrian is carrying on the work of his father, overseeing the development of a host of new houses and workspaces in the village, building over parts of it that had become derelict, include the old family farm. A festival was mere weeks ahead of happening when I was there – The Big Retreat, which is like a music, well-being and intellectual gathering, all rolled into one. Adrian was expecting around 3,000 visitors in total over the course of the festival's run.

There are around 140 inhabitants in Lawrenny now, between three to four times the size of the place when Adrian's father took it over.

"The number of businesses that are here is extraordinary," Adrian said. "You have people in the village, doing what they love, and then they in turn become part of the dynamic of why the place works."

Of the dozen or so businesses currently operating in the village, there are software game developers, designer businesses, landscaping services, tree surgeons, bakers and solicitors. How the village finds new residents and businesses is largely through word of mouth. I asked Adrian what the ultimate plans are for Lawrenny.

"What we are aiming for is double the population at least, which means doubling the number of houses. We'd like a centrepiece, a centre square, which we don't have now, bringing it all together."

When I ask him if he plans to stay in Lawrenny for the rest of his life, he unhesitatingly says "yes." He wants his kids to go away for a while – but ultimately come back to Lawrenny to have their kids too. As I have found again and again in my travels, attachment to a place runs deep.

What I found in Lawrenny was a fascinating approach to rural life. While it's still about attachment to the land and a love of open space and beautiful views, it is also about expansion, growth and accepting the 21st century. If we want to create a Britain in which everyone has a place that works for them – and indeed, has a job to go to if they need and want one – we need to think about how places like rural Wales rediscover or at least redefine their purpose in a way that works both socially and economically.

"When I was a kid, we learned about and celebrating people like Isambard Kingdom Brunel, you know, people who built things. We don't have that culture anymore."

Adrian feels like the current government in Wales is not helpful to this mission.

"The issue we have in Wales is a government and civil service that is heavily grounded in the southeast of Wales and the industrial past of Wales. What that means is, the way they absorb information is wrong. They don't step outside of their area to find out. Places like this are so critical because they have a place to play in the future of Wales. I am worried about how rural and coastal economies are overlooked and misunderstood."

Adrian then added this: "I don't even know where to start with Britain as a whole because it's such a shitshow."

After a laugh, he complemented the Jobs Foundation's project while also making a point about the importance of business and entrepreneurship.

"The way you're travelling around doing what you're doing, you'll see things for what they are. And of course, you'll see poverty and what causes it, but we can also say without doubt we'd be in a lot worse a situation if it wasn't for the energy of people doing shit because they enjoy doing shit."

We closed on Adrian lamenting how he feels – and I happen to agree with him on this – that we've got away from a culture that celebrates the "doers" in society. Those who build things, start new businesses, who ultimately are the job creators.

"When I was a kid, we learned about and celebrating people like Isambard Kingdom Brunel, you know, people who built things. We don't have that culture anymore."



Case study: Owen and his automated dairy farm



Just down the road from Lawrenny sits a dairy farm run by Adrian's brother, Owen, up on Rose Hill. It's small as dairy farms in Pembrokeshire go – 135 head of cattle – but significant in that it confirmed for me the direction this portion of the agricultural industry across the UK is going in, which is as automated as technology allows. Even Poyerton farm has a small group of hands who aid Roger in the collection of milk – Owen runs his farm almost entirely by himself.

"Watch the robot," Owen said, pointing to a large unit that comes down the line in front of the cows at timed intervals. The farm used to be more varied in terms of its output, but it now focuses solely on producing milk.

"I did grow crops for sale. Barley, wheat. But times have changed a bit now. Crops simply weren't profitable. Skills were on the wane as people retired. Energy prices didn't help. So, I scrapped my grain drier a few years ago, and had a bit of a shift of focus."

"There was no Welsh organic brand when we first started the Calon Wen brand in the late 90s. There was a gap in the market."



"It's an endless cycle. If you've got young children, you'll appreciate it: you're either cleaning them up or cleaning up after them. Cows are the same, they're like fifty-hundred and fifty kilo children. They will wind you up for fun."

All the milk Owen's farm produces is used by a co-operative called Calon Wen, of which Owen is a director. Calon Wen sells all types of dairy products – milk, cheese, butter – both online and as wholesale from a depot outside Carmarthen. They have experimented with different things over the years, trying frozen goods as an example, but have settled into a steady group of products.

"There was no Welsh organic brand when we first started the Calon Wen brand in the late 90s. There was a gap in the market."

While the robots take up most of the work, dairy farming is still exhausting.

"It's an endless cycle. If you've got young children, you'll appreciate it: you're either cleaning them up or cleaning up after them. Cows are the same, they're like fifty-hundred and fifty kilo children. They will wind you up for fun."

The robots on the farm are impressive, however. An arm containing four milkers extends toward the cow's udders, lasers being used for them to latch perfectly. Once on, the process begins – and Owen can measure the amount of milk being extracted in real time.

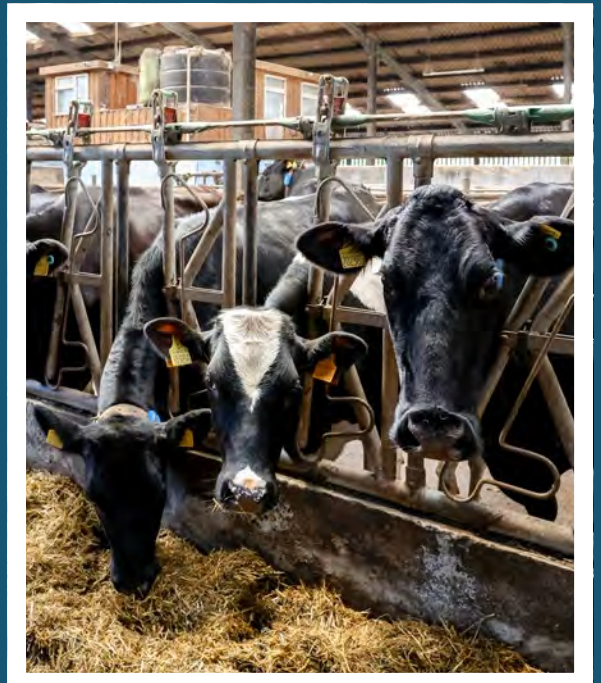
In terms of jobs, it isn't difficult to see that the future will contain fewer and fewer jobs in the agricultural sector. More things will become automated, not less, meaning the jobs will continue to thin out. How that affects rural communities needs to be addressed and considered in a more thorough manner than it is at present, both in Cardiff and Westminster.

For now, we can marvel at a one-man farm that manages to extract the milk from 135 cows each and every day.

"When I first got my robots, people around here told me, 'You can't milk cows with a bloody robot'. Turns out you can."



Owen Lort-Phillips





Sam Kurtz

On my way out to Pembrokeshire during one of my visits there, I stopped in Cardiff to speak to Samuel Kurtz, the Conservative member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire in the Senedd. He's a young man, who has only been an elected member of the Welsh Parliament since 2021. While Haverfordwest is not in his constituency, the oil refinery, Pembroke Dock, Lawrenny, and Poyerston Farm, all reside within its borders.

"Pembrokeshire is unique in that it's got heavy industry, rural coastal communities, agriculture dependent communities.... it's its own petri dish into how jobs, prosperity, routes out of poverty work, Sam told me when we sat together in the Senedd building, overlooking Cardiff Bay. I told Sam that I had interviewed a few dairy farmers in the county, but that those meetings had been difficult to pin down.

"It's been a very tough winter for farmers," Sam said. "I think their patience has been stretched in several ways."

Sam grew up on a farm in the county himself and is very close to all the issues affecting farmers in Pembrokeshire. "I'm a farmer's son as opposed to a farmer," he said early on in our discussion, and that felt like important context. Sam studied politics at the University of the West of England, Bristol, looking to become a journalist. But politics called to him. I asked him about the biggest problems facing Welsh farmers and particularly those in Pembrokeshire.

"Farmers feel under the cosh. There is potentially a lack of understanding amongst the general public as to the effort put into food production. The relationships between farmers, supply chains and supermarkets are under strain, particularly with milk being used as a loss leader by many large stores now."

"Leaving the EU meant that for the first time, Wales had to have its own agriculture policy. What we have now is called the Sustainable Farming Scheme. That's caused a lot of anguish. Reversing 40 years of policy to do something very different has caused a lot of anxiety amongst farmers who aren't happy with a lot of aspects of the new scheme."

This was further to what Roger at Poyerton Farm had told me – that agricultural policy in Wales is causing a lot of problems for rural communities across the country.

"Farmers feel under the cosh," Sam continued. "There is potentially a lack of understanding amongst the general public as to the effort put into food production. The relationships between farmers, supply chains and supermarkets are under strain, particularly with milk being used as a loss leader by many large stores now. The farmers are the ones who pay the price for that. Farmers also feel like the work that they do isn't acknowledged in Welsh government policy."

It feels like there will be more farmers protests in Cardiff, like the one Roger told me about, in years to come. Sam agrees.

"Why won't the policy makers stand with the farmers? If you want a healthy economy in Wales, you need a healthy agricultural sector. If it dies, Wales will lose so many young people, and families as well, which means losing the young Welsh people of the future."

Pembrokeshire is facing the same problem that is affecting not only rural communities in Britain, but coastal communities even more so – an aging population which needs more and more social carers and burdens the NHS to a greater degree, but without young people to not only look after the elderly, but to do all the rest of the jobs that keep the country moving.

This is how everything connects – without a thriving agricultural sector, so many families leave the area. This causes a dearth of young people, which feeds into the college, and from there into employers like the Valero refinery who will struggle to find the staff they require - to Milford Haven and Pembroke Dock who need young people to work there and use the facilities, to the hotels of Saundersfoot where again, without young staff or families coming to stay, the whole thing dies in two directions at once. Without young people to do the jobs, everything becomes increasingly difficult.

My chat with Sam ended on a positive note. He is proud of his patch of Wales and certain that the problems outlined above can be overcome.

"If we're talking about food production, there are very few places that are as efficient as we are. We should be embracing new technologies. That's where the future is for agriculture in Wales."



Wales Millennium Centre

"If we're talking about food production, there are very few places that are as efficient as we are. We should be embracing new technologies. That's where the future is for agriculture in Wales."

What do businesses in Pembrokeshire want?

Different sectors have diverging wants and needs compared to others within Pembrokeshire. The agricultural sector feels particularly neglected by local, devolved and national governments, with anger about post-Brexit funding arrangements being either overly specific and limiting or simply not being available.

Yet the problems here are intertwined. They mostly come back to keeping young people in the area so that the economy can continue to grow. This will take foresight by the devolved government in Cardiff, as well as by businesses in the county. At present, the latter seems to be there with the former still catching up.

As is the case in so many parts of Britain, new transportation infrastructure is badly needed.

Train travel between Swansea or Port Talbot and the county is poorly provided and the car is king in Pembrokeshire as a result. Travelling to different parts of Pembrokeshire by rail is a nightmare – there are only a handful of services that run between Haverfordwest and St David’s each weekday, as an example. The road system should be reviewed as well, as parts of the county aren’t as well served as they could be.

A lot of sectors that fill a large role in the Pembrokeshire economy – agriculture and tourism are top of mind – are seasonally based. While what Saundersfoot is doing to make itself a year-round tourist destination is encouraging, it would be great if so much of the economy of the county wasn’t hurt every year by the inevitable changing of seasons.

Lessons on best hiring practice and bringing people out of poverty

One of the things Pembrokeshire does well is get a decent mix of SMEs and larger companies, varying the employment field to a favourable extent. That there are so many entrepreneurs there is to the county’s credit. While there are several large employers, such as Valero, who play a vital role, the SMEs are the beating heart of the place. And given the socio-economic make up of Pembrokeshire, they are vital for bringing people out of poverty by giving them a job.

The links between institutions, employers and employees are strong and highly functional in the county. The way that Valero and Pembrokeshire College interact to train up local people and get

them into skilled jobs is one great example of this. As has been detailed elsewhere across this report, the links between institutions and getting the balance right there, is crucial to maximising job creation.

But there is still a great deal of poverty in Pembrokeshire. While the plans to overcome the seasonality that affects almost all its prominent sectors are in the mix, there is still work to be done. Hopefully places like Lawrenny point to the future of Pembrokeshire – skilled people from other parts of Britain moving to the county in search of a quieter, more scenic life, bringing with them skills and entrepreneurial zeal.

Final thoughts

My principal memories of Pembrokeshire, weeks and months after going there, is of beautiful landscapes and coastline, set against the backdrop of a type of rural poverty that seems alien to those of us who have spent most of our lives in very urban environments. Despite this, Pembrokeshire has a great deal going for it. The county is a naturally beautiful place that should attract even more tourists than it does – in fact, the only thing probably

stopping that is the poor transportation infrastructure it has.

While several of the issues I discovered in Pembrokeshire were particular to either rural communities as a whole or Pembrokeshire specifically, many more of them are things that affect businesses across the UK. The next step in this process is how we solve those problems, nationwide.



Acknowledgements

These are the Pembrokeshire based organisations contacted for this report, without whom it would not have been possible

Calon Wen	Pembrokeshire County Council
Lawrenny Dairy Farm	Poyerston Farm
Lawrenny Estates	Saundersfoot Port
Milford Haven Port Authority	St Bride's Hotel
Pembroke Dock	The office of Samuel Kurtz
Pembrokeshire Agricultural Society	Valero
Pembrokeshire College	Visit Wales



The Jobs Foundation is a registered charity (1202928) which champions the role of business as a force for good, particularly the crucial role companies play giving people a step up in life by providing jobs and training opportunities.

We want to have a practical impact on the ground, by helping business leaders do even more for their local communities, by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and best practice on employing and training people from less privileged backgrounds.

In parallel, we want to have a policy impact by creating a business environment which allows companies to thrive. We hope our advocacy programme will bring about a real change in the way policy makers view business and the crucial social and economic value businesses contribute to society.

To achieve this, we are building a coalition of business leaders and entrepreneurs from across the country to join our Business Council, to act as the driving force and delivery engine for our ambitions.

“Pembrokeshire is a county of close-knit communities. It is a real privilege to live in a place with such an incredible history, and Pembroke Refinery is a huge part of that. Pembroke Refinery gave me the opportunity to better myself and gave me the platform to grow and succeed. The refinery continues to invest in new talent, by upskilling, training and ensuring that we diversify to meet the needs of the everchanging world. I am proud to be from Pembrokeshire, and proud to work at Pembroke Refinery”

Matthew Williams

Valero Apprentice

