

Cyngor Tref Caerfyrddin Carmarthen Town Council



CARMARTHEN TOWN COUNCIL – PRESS RELEASE/NEWS ITEM

Carmarthen Velodrome Redevelopment

On 24th October 2017 one of the most historic local events for many years took place in Carmarthen. The re-opening of the town's Victorian Cycling Track was the culmination of several year's planning by a project team led by Carmarthen Town Council.

The original velodrome was opened on Easter Monday in 1900 and became a mecca for cycling competitions in West Wales during the early part of the twentieth century, with cycling races attracting thousands of spectators and professional competitors from all over the United Kingdom.



Dechrau'r ras/Start of race
tua/circa 1905



During more recent times the cycling track had become less well used due to the need for renovation, and during the summer of 2017 contractors moved in to complete the construction phase of the redevelopment. Thanks to grants provided by Carmarthen Town Council, Carmarthenshire County Council and Sport Wales Carmarthen Town Council was able to proceed with the project in the knowledge that the likely redevelopment costs of approximately £600,000 would be met.

The Clerk of Carmarthen Town Council Alun Harries, who has worked on many different local, regional, national and international projects during his career said: “This has without question been one of the most unique and challenging projects I’ve ever been involved with. The Velodrome is located in Carmarthen Park, one of the key attractions in the middle of the town, which is a conservation area, and it also a listed building. The rugby pitch – located in the middle of the cycling track – is the home of Carmarthen Quins RFC who play in the Premiership of the Welsh Rugby Union – and we therefore had to plan to undertake the construction phase of the project during the close season – which of course is the summer and the time when most people visit the attractions and events that take place at our Park”.

“There have been very many different challenges and issues to take into account. To successfully overcome these we formed a project team consisting of experts from the cycling world including Welsh Cycling, officers with experience of sport projects with other organisations such as Carmarthenshire County Council and one particular expert from the world of conservation and listed buildings construction – Carl Morgan, a local specialist conservation surveyor, whose professionalism and knowledge was essential to the success of the project. We were very lucky to have such knowledgeable people on the team – it made the challenge of pulling the project together less difficult than it otherwise could have been.”

“A number of different synthetic and concrete sample surfaces were trialled by cyclists in 2016 to ensure the best and most appropriate possible cycling surface was identified. We looked at options from all over the world including France, Italy and China. Obviously the Velodrome is of considerable historical significance and we needed to retain the uniqueness and purpose of the Velodrome within the setting of Carmarthen Park whilst at the same time providing a modern facility capable of attracting high level national and international cyclists to compete there.”

In addition to the challenges of providing a suitable surface to ride on, the project involved creating a safety fence around the perimeter of the track and a new safety or ‘blue zone’ around the entire inside of the track. Without these two additional safety features it would not have been possible to bring the Velodrome up to the standards required from British Cycling.

Councillor Alun Lenny, Mayor of Carmarthen and also a member of the Project Team added: ‘We all wanted the Velodrome to be restored to its former glory as soon as possible but we also had to be mindful that a lot of public money was being invested in this project and we therefore had to be very careful that the work carried out to all 232 concrete bays ensured that we maximise the lifespan of the new Velodrome for generations to come. In the longer term this would reduce the maintenance and management costs and maximise the lifespan of the track’.



The initial work involved carrying out laser surveys of the original concrete bays to establish if there was any movement of them during different and extreme weather conditions over a 12 month period. The original bays were put in place well over a hundred years ago and over the last 100 years or so some of these bays and surrounding brickwork have continued to deteriorate due to age, weathering and general wear and tear etc and have had to be repaired or replaced. The drains underneath the grassed area also needed to be surveyed to

establish whether they had the capability to continue to drain away all the surface water. Again these had been in place for very many years and engineers needed to be certain that the risk of future problems was minimised as this would obviously affect the surface and the quality of the ride for cyclists. It was therefore imperative that every element of the construction work and design of the new cycling surface took account of these issues – not just to ensure the redeveloped Velodrome was of the highest possible standard that will allow national and possibly international events to take place there – but also to ensure that the public was getting the best possible value from the money being spent on it.

The appointed contractors – local firm GD Harries & Sons Ltd – started the construction work on 15th May 2017 and the favoured option of replacing the old concrete with brand new concrete was selected, thereby providing a bespoke concreted and specialised cycling surface.

The construction work encroached into the rugby season and special arrangements were made to allow Carmarthen Quins RFC home league matches to take place as planned during September whilst Carmarthen Park remained open to the general public throughout this period.

The existing floodlights – designed to cater for rugby at the Park –also needed to be upgraded to ensure the safety of cyclists using the track during the darker winter evenings.



The redeveloped Velodrome was re-opened during a public ceremony on Tuesday evening 24th October and was attended by hundreds of people.

Professional elite cyclists Scott Davies and Amy Roberts, both of whom were junior members of Towy Riders the local Carmarthen based cycling club, helped Carmarthen Mayor Councillor Alun Lenny officially open the facility. Other local dignitaries in attendance included Councillor Emlyn Dole, Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council, Cllr Irfon Jones, Chairman of Carmarthenshire County Council, Jonathan Roberts from Sport Wales, Anne Adams-King,

CEO of Welsh Cycling. Despite the wet weather Towy Riders were able to cycle on the track for the first time and several antique bikes including 150 year old penny farthing built in Carmarthen were also on display.



The Mayor of Carmarthen Councillor Alun Lenny said: "It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here this evening to this historic occasion. The redevelopment of this facility, first used over a hundred years ago has been a challenging but really interesting project and my thanks go to all who have worked so hard to make this happen. It would not have been possible without the financial support of Carmarthen Town Council, Carmarthenshire County Council and Sport Wales. Thanks to all who have made this such a success. We now look forward to the next chapter in the story of Carmarthen Velodrome and good luck to all of the riders and cycling clubs who will be using this facility, including the young people from Towy Riders who are eagerly anticipating their first ride on the new surface this evening".

Nick Smith, Chairman of Welsh Cycling said: "This is a very proud moment for cycling in Wales and we in Welsh Cycling are thrilled to have played a part in securing the facility and also worked very closely with all those local people who have made this happen. There is no doubt that cycling in Wales has a very bright future and this great facility will ensure that cyclists of all abilities continue to thrive".



Brian Davies, Director of Elite Sport at Sport Wales commented:

"Cycling is one of the most successful sports in Wales both in terms of community participation and performance, which is why we were so keen to invest in such a key facility. The work that has been done here will ensure the sustainability of a venue that will deliver positive outcomes both regionally and nationally. The collaboration and investment from different partners has been pivotal to making all this happen. We're grateful to all the local people who have brought drive and energy to make the project a reality. The first cyclists to take to the track will be young riders from the local club under the watchful eye of local elite athletes. I think that says everything about what can be achieved here."

Alun J Harries - Clerk, Carmarthen Town Council
30th October 2017