



Abergavenny and District Civic Society
Preserving the best, improving the rest
A great place to live, work and visit

Dear members

In 2009 the Society appeared to be on the brink of being wound up but as our Chairman said in his annual report at the April AGM: "A few people felt that in the 21st Century there was still a role for a Civic Society because the community continues to be interested in making Abergavenny a 'better place to live in'."

We hope that you like the new logo and statement. After much discussion we felt that the view of the Town Hall with the mountains was immediately recognisable as our lovely market town – a symbol of our 'Civic Pride' in Abergavenny

There will of course be changes as the revitalised Society evolves and is more actively involved with the Town and County Council and other voluntary groups. We are thankful for the experience and wisdom that is being passed on to us by loyal and long standing members and hope that you approve of the direction in which we are moving and will continue to support us in any way you can.

We hope to continue recruiting new but also younger members as any group needs an injection of new blood and ideas and the youngsters of today will be the custodians and guardians of the Abergavenny of the future.

Last year's programme

We had an interesting variety of speakers starting with Matthew Griffiths from Civic Trust Wales looking at Abergavenny's sense of place. Our programme journey took in 7Corners and the next generation, tourism – the lifeblood of Abergavenny, policing and safety issues with Chief Constable Carmel Napier; conservation with Simon Robertshaw followed by Frank Olding's talk in the King's Arms about the 'Pubs of Abergavenny' concluded the programme. Our AGM was a little different, starting with a social half hour with nibbles and a drink before Kellie Beirne, MCC's Chief Officer for Culture and Regeneration gave us her suggestions of the way forward for the town and invited us to keep an open dialogue with her.

This year's theme is '**Getting to know Abergavenny**'. We have meetings arranged up until December and can give you the dates of those in the New Year to put in your diary although final details of speakers and topics have not yet been confirmed.

- **26 September** - Results and discussion on the 'Good, Bad and Ugly' photographic competition – creating an action plan with future projects
- **10 October** - Abergavenny Food Festival: Kim Waters
- **7 November** – Things you didn't know about St Mary's and the Tithe Barn: Sir Trefor Morris
- **5 December** –Antiques Evening: Host Ryan Beech [Anthemion Auctions in Cardiff]

- Annual lunch - January date to be arranged

Dates of the meetings for next year

27 February

26 March

23 April

21 May

18 June

16 July

Progress report from sub-groups

Latest news from the Design sub-group

Following meetings with Civic Trust Wales and CADW earlier this year, Abergavenny was chosen as one of 3 Welsh towns to be part of a proposed project to develop a methodology of urban characterisation for towns in Wales. Urban characterisation aims to identify the historic and physical character of settlements that is fundamental to local distinctiveness and pride of place.

Civic Trust Wales has put forward a bid, supported by us and CADW, to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Hopefully the bid results will be announced by early October, followed by the appointment of a Civic Trust project officer and a meeting to agree a local action plan. An open brainstorming meeting will be held before Christmas with fieldwork starting in early spring. Members' ideas, suggestions and some volunteer work will form a vital part of this project which in turn will inform an urban design guide for Abergavenny.

Planning sub-group news

The Morrisons' application to develop the Cattle Market site presented a significant opportunity for the society to inform the authority of our reaction to the scheme. Members debated the scheme and our reasoned concerns about the design were forwarded to the Planning Committee. The society also made a well received informative presentation to the Town Council again outlining our concerns on the design. Morrisons' response to what was now a consensus of opinion from all of the major town groups was very disappointing. A second report was sent highlighting the shortcomings of the design in respect of the published Design and Access statement. It remains a deep concern that the elected members of the Planning Committee and the Chief Planning Officer chose to brush aside our reasoned concerns and those of the other town groups and the application was granted.

We have also been quietly working behind the scenes with MCC and Simon Robertshaw, to get something done about the burnt out building in Cross Street. MCC have now started the legal process and placed an enforcement order on the building.

The presentations made to MCC over both of these issues required a great deal of work and we are indebted to Stefan Horowskyj, Dick Cole and David Sheers for their assistance and expert advice.

Smart Town sub-group news

This has been a busy year for the Smart Town sub group. Our main activity has been the highly successful Good Bad and Ugly Photographic Competition. We had over 200 entries in all age ranges and the support from businesses in town was overwhelming. This proved just how much of an appetite there is to take action to improve Abergavenny whilst celebrating its many special features. We were lucky to secure a shop window in the centre of town and, along with the recent articles in the Abergavenny Chronicle, this has sparked much interest. At our next meeting we will be discussing how we can take this forward and plan a number of projects that will make a real difference in improving many areas of Abergavenny. Please do come along and have your say.

We have also been working with Monmouthshire County Council and local societies getting involved with making the town centre more welcoming for visitors and have been involved in the local tourism and signage strategies that are being created. By engaging positively in this, we are starting to get our voice heard and suggestions incorporated. We will keep you up to date with developments.

Finance

The Finances of the Society are in good shape. The extra members who have joined the Society since its re-launch in Sept 2010 have boosted the subscription base. This has enabled the Committee to run the society without it having to look over its shoulders as to the smaller items of expenditure.

The amazing success of the Good, Bad and Ugly was in part due to the generous support of local businesses and the Town Council. The idea was enthusiastically received and both cash and kind donated. This allowed us to award cash prizes to the winners. A raffle of donated goods raised £775. Together with the unused balance from the Town Council grant we shall have a big enough pot to help put right some of the eyesores in the town so graphically illustrated by the photographs.

Membership

We have seen a large increase in our numbers. At year end in March 2011, membership stood at 65 with some 25 people having joined after the EGM in September 2010 to launch the 'new' Society. Because a significant number joined and paid in the latter part of the year, it was difficult to ask for further subscriptions in April this year for 2011-12. The Committee has therefore decided to change the Society's year to run from 1st September to 31st August with the AGM being moved now to October 2012. We are always looking to recruit new members so help spread the word and invite friends and family to join.

Two new membership categories have been created – student membership and affiliated membership for local businesses that wish to support the society's work. At present we have 9 affiliated members.

Apart from members who have already paid since April 2011, subscriptions are now due so please send your cheques to Mr M J Foden, 3 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW

Under 65 £10	Over 65 £8	Student £1	Affiliated membership £20
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Social events

On a lighter note, members enjoyed one coffee morning and two lunches during the past year. Finding a venue for the coffee morning last December proved challenging but we finally found a vacant slot at the Methodist Hall. Bearing in mind that many new members are at work, 36 members enjoyed a pre-Christmas Monday morning gathering and we managed to make a profit of £100 to go towards the Mayor's chosen charities.

On 23 January, 51 members and friends gathered at St. Michael's Centre for a delicious Sunday Lunch. Sugar Loaf Catering and their efficient staff took care of the food which everyone enjoyed. A cheque for £100 was presented to the Mayor, Councillor Mrs. Norma Watkins. The occasion was rounded off by our guest speaker Mr Robert Morgan who entertained us with reminiscences of his time in the police force.

In July, Alan and Anne Michie very kindly made their garden available for a Summer Lunch. The awnings and gazebo created a welcoming atmosphere and the weather was perfect. This time the Committee took charge of the catering and a superb meal was enjoyed by 52 members and friends. We were serenaded by flautist Mr William Day and no one was in a hurry to go home!!

These three events created a lot of work (and not a little worry) for the Committee and helpers Alison Johns and Sarah Jones who should be thanked and congratulated by us all.

A view of things past from Margaret and Brian Giles

We are particularly pleased that the Civic Society is to produce a Newsletter again. Going back through our files it seems the first one was produced in 1998 in response to a request from our members. Until that time all the Committee reports and planning applications were made orally which prolonged the meetings considerably so a newsletter enabled members to read them at their leisure. Also, members who were unable to attend some of the meetings were still kept up-to-date with what was going on.

The main topic at that time seems to have been the development of Pen-y-Fal Hospital site. Having been instrumental in having it listed prior to its closure in 1996, the new developments were under scrutiny and site meetings were held with the Area Health Trust, Councillors, Prospective Assembly candidates and our MP. The Chapel was an area of conflict which still hasn't been resolved and the hope of a small general store / post office remains that – a hope....

The Civic Society invested £100 commissioning plans for a “Town Wall Walkway”, a promenade linking the Castle with our hidden gem, Linda Vista Gardens for the Millennium. Seating and lighting were to be installed and panels designed by young people depicting “life in Abergavenny” over the last 1000 years were to have been incorporated. It was noted that local support was conspicuous by its absence. Finally our secretary came up with a splendid idea which was “do-able”

We were involved in the Economic Development Forum which later became ‘The Three Towns Initiative’. This was most interesting and brought together some very bright people with innovative ideas. (Who could forget Miffa, the Town Planner?) Some of the schemes were really inspirational and possible. I wonder what became of all the minutes of those meetings – are they still mouldering in some dusty corner in County Hall ?

Then there was the **Unitary Development Plan** and their 5,000 trees with owl boxes and bat roosts, safe cycling and walking routes, support for “local” shops and Post Offices and a cinema on the Ford site in Monk Street.

That year our members cleared the Gavenny of several supermarket trollies and bits of bikes and prams and replanted Priors Well after taking out about 20 buckets of sludge and silt and fought a losing battle with the vehicles demolishing the wall in front of it. We went on “visits” and had a Xmas Party at The Hill, we had a fund-raising coffee morning for the Mayor’s Charity – all great fun and it is so good to look back on but better still to look forward and think the Civic Society has the opportunity to be bigger and brighter and retain its place in Abergavenny.

NEWS

Keep Abergavenny Tidy wants volunteers to ‘adopt’ their local area - **FREE** litter picking equipment (litter-picker, bag hoop, hi-viz vest and gloves) available. Get in touch with Sue who will pass your details on to Cllr Sam Dodd or Will Beer as all volunteers need briefing

Abergavenny Youth Centre, Old Hereford Road NEEDS your empty straight 2 litre clear plastic bottles eg Fanta or Coke to build a plastic bottle greenhouse. Please drop them off at the Centre (01873 851554)

Abergavenny Community and Environment Fair, Sunday 9 October 11 to 3pm
Come along to the Market Hall on Sunday 9 October to support the inaugural Community and Environment Fair. This new event is being organised to raise awareness of all the many societies doing good work to improve and enhance our town and its environment. The Civic Society will be there answering questions about our work, showcasing the results of the photographic competition as well encouraging new members to join. If you can spare any time to help man our stand and offer some help it would be much appreciated.