



Abergavenny and District Civic Society

Preserving the best, improving the rest

A great place to live, work and visit

Dear members

The theme last year was 'Getting to know your town' and the Society has been actively working on a number of projects in collaboration with the Local Authorities and other appropriate bodies. However, to secure successful outcomes, we need more members to get involved with projects that they find interesting– ***Your Society (and town) needs YOU!***

Our monthly meetings have been interesting, varied and occasionally controversial but always well received. In September 2011 we discussed the entries to the Good, Bad and Ugly photographic competition and considered realistic projects that could be undertaken. Since the competition, graffiti and despoiled signs have been cleaned, rusty posts removed alongside the Fairfield car park, the Information boards are being refurbished, the newly decorated Nat West bank looks splendid and 'Abergavenny is NOT an Ashtray' posters are printed ready for the launch later this year of a joint campaign with Keep Abergavenny Tidy, and Keep Wales Tidy, supported by the Town Council and the Bryn y Cwm Area Committee.

Our programme journey gave us an insight into the Food Festival with Kim Waters, Sir Trefor Morris told us things we didn't know about St Mary's and the Tithe Barn and Ryan Beech, Principal of Anthemion Auctions, Cardiff, concluded 2011 by hosting an antiques evening. In 2012 Eryl and David Sheers gave a presentation on 'Resistance – from book to film'; we were given a chance to debate 'Local Crime, Community Sentence' with a Magistrate and Probation Officer, actively participating in a case study; David Jenkins, Chair of the Aneurin Bevan Health Board talked about the difficulties of running a busy hospital like Nevill Hall and future plans, we celebrated Abergavenny's 'green spaces', much photographed for our competition, and wound up with an illuminating presentation by Stefan Horowskyj of an architect's view of working on listed buildings in our town. Grateful thanks to all our speakers for giving so generously of their time.

2012 – 2013 Programme: Abergavenny – past, present and future.

On 17 September, Paul Matthews CEO of MCC and Kellie Beirne, Chief Officer for Culture and Regeneration will bring us up-to-date on progress made with plans for regenerating Abergavenny since addressing the Society in April 2011. Having been invited to have an open dialogue with Kellie we are looking forward to hearing more about MCC's new policy of engagement 'Your County, Your Way'.

- **15 October** – AGM (with bar and nibbles) followed by Frank Olding – Medieval Abergavenny
- **Sat 10 November 3 – 5pm in OAP Hall** 'Jam, spam and do-nuts – Abergavenny in the Forties'
- **10 December** – Grandma's Gadgets – Don Balkwill, who writes a weekly column about artefacts from yesteryear, will bring a selection to baffle and amuse us, with a quiz to test our knowledge!
- **January** - Annual lunch – venue, date and speaker to be decided
- **February** – **Nick Ramsay AM** to discuss the WG paper on 'Regenerating Town Centres' hopefully with a panel of invited business owners and traders from Abergavenny
- **March** – **What's on offer in Abergavenny** – a variety of events and activities
- **April** – **'Exploring Abergavenny's character** – exhibition and feedback on the project with Civic Trust of Wales

The remainder of the annual programme and dates in 2013 are yet to be finalised.

Progress report from sub-groups

Latest news from the Design sub-group

Sub-group members met with Civic Trust of Wales to launch the project to develop a methodology for looking at and recording the character of 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. More below from Dick Cole

EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY

When Abergavenny Civic Society was revitalised it was apparent that it needed a much better understanding of the distinctive character of the town against which planning proposals can be measured. MCC had commissioned an appraisal of the central Conservation Area, yet to be published, but the character of the rest of the town, Mardy and Llanfoist is unrecorded and perhaps under-appreciated.

Fortunately, Civic Trust for Wales successfully obtained a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a project to test whether community groups could conduct 'urban characterisation' studies similar to those prepared by Cadw experts at Aberdare, Denbigh and elsewhere. Abergavenny Civic Society is pioneering a methodology that will be used at three other towns.

Suburban housing estates, byelaw terraces and the leafy residences of the better-off have features that give them individuality – the age and scale of the buildings, their arrangement and architectural details, materials used, trees and green spaces, walls and fences, focal points, outward views, and much more. Recording these characteristics, street-by-street is not only useful for assessing proposals for change, suggesting features to be protected or echoed in sympathetic new development; the involvement of local residents as surveyors and informants opens eyes to what is good and bad about our surroundings and encourages civic pride and engagement. Explaining the differences between one part of the town and another also means studying old maps and other records; the scope for ongoing research is extensive. Opportunities for environmental improvement can also be pinpointed.

A pilot study of Chapel Road showed that within its half mile length three or four quite different 'character areas' could be described, ranging from the village-like mid 19th century housing near Brecon Road to the low-density homes on the edge of the National Park. A public meeting that attracted an audience of about sixty and recruited nearly twenty volunteers. Since the first survey in July we have been reviewing and simplifying the methodology. It is hoped to complete the survey of the Monmouth Road and Mardy in the next few months we will be holding another training session in October.

Civic Trust's involvement will end next year but we expect to continue until all of the town and its neighbouring built-up areas are covered. A consultative exhibition is planned for the Spring. The County Council is assisting the study and the Society hopes that official design guidance will be another outcome. Anyone interested, whether a member of the Society or not, in contributing to this project should contact Tony Konieczny (01873 858912).

Planning sub-group news

McCarthy & Stone: planning proposal for retirement homes on the old Milsteel site:

All Society members on email had a chance to comment on this before we assembled a substantial response to MCC which supported the development in principle, favouring three storeys, at least at the front of the site, but indicating that overdevelopment of the site was leading to some of our other criticisms such as limited parking, the proposed front elevation

and proximity to the bus station. Noise problems for residents were among a number of other matters commented upon.

We also supported the reversion of Claremont Hall (Monmouth Road/Station Road) to a single dwelling, and objected to revised proposals for a modern dwelling in Fosterville Crescent.

The Chairman arranged a meeting with three other similar societies in Monmouthshire at which it was agreed to support, via the Civic Trust for Wales, statutory consultation on planning matters, and also to seek better interaction with the Monmouthshire Planning Department, especially when there are differences of opinion. The suggestion of further future joint meetings was supported.

For the submissions made to MCC on planning applications we are indebted to Tony Konieczny, Dick Cole and David Sheers for their assistance and expert advice.

Smart Town sub-group news

Good Bad and Ugly Photographic Competition – our successful competition is now on display at Nevill Hall in the Outpatients Department and continues to attract much interest and discussion. Following the competition, we have had a number of 'successes' in helping improve those areas identified as bad and ugly. Nat West Bank has now had a facelift, MCC is taking enforcement action against the scaffolded shop on Cross Street and the Fairfield Car Park green space has been tidied up. We're still hoping to progress other projects in conjunction with other groups too.

Town Centre notice boards – the Society has recently coordinated all the groups in town, including the Town and County Councils, to improve signage. All the blue notice boards are being refurbished and we are working with the Council to produce a new and improved town map. We want to work with all the groups to make sure these are kept up to date and the information is relevant and interesting to both visitors and residents.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee

A metal silhouette featuring Abergavenny's town and landscape was commissioned by the Society and designed by local artist Jane Turner for 4 refurbished Information Boards.



Regeneration sub-group

A meeting was held last December between Cllrs John Prosser and Bob Greenland and a range of Society members from various backgrounds, to discuss the declining fortunes of Abergavenny and the surrounding area. A list of wealth creating businesses that had been lost from Abergavenny was provided and the councillors were asked what plans there were to regenerate the area. The livestock market was raised during the discussion and Cllr Greenland said that if the Society got a feasibility study done on retaining this market, (the council had never undertaken such a study), it would be considered. He did say however that it would not just be a matter of persuading him at this late stage but the whole cabinet would need to be convinced of the feasibility.

A report was commissioned, published and presented to Councillors and Council officers with an invitation to discuss the report with the Society. With the elections coming we were told that this topic was not for discussion. A reply from Mr Greenslade dated 28 March 2012 gave the Council's opinion that the report was fatally flawed and they did not believe that anything could be gained by meeting to discuss it. We are still trying to engage with the Council over this and spoke about the report at the recent very well attended public meeting organised by KALM (Keep Abergvaenny's Livestock Market).

One of our members, Andy Taurins, wrote an article for the Institute of Welsh Affairs called 'Retaining the link between farming and food'. It appeared in the Welsh agenda summer edition 2012 – issue 47.

Earlier this week we finally received the report prepared following Councillor Prosser's invitation to the community last winter to describe their vision of the town's future ('blue sky thinking'), an exercise to which the Society contributed. We shall be considering this to explore ways of moving it forward.

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.

Two significant purchases have been made during the year: a projector for power point presentations to be made to the Council and other interested parties and an improved sound system with 2 microphones so questions from the floor at meetings can be clearly heard by all.'

Two stalls raised a total of £313. Grateful thanks to all those who provided goods and turned out to man the stalls – it was good fun and with enough helpers not too onerous.

Membership

Individual Membership has grown over the last year and is now standing at 92. At year end in March 2011, membership stood at 65 with some 25 people having joined after the EGM in 2010 to launch the 'new' Society. Because a significant number joined and paid in the latter part of that 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 1 September to 31 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.

Also, at present we have 9 affiliated members and give grateful thanks to the following for their support and where appropriate expert advice:

Angel Hotel, Homes of Elegance, Judd Brothers, the Hardwick, RED Builders, Chamber of Trade (now Abergavenny Business Club), Dovers and co, Taurins Taylor Associates, Catherine Roberts and Steven Harris (Architecture and Energy)

Please get your subscriptions for 2012 – 2013, either by cash or cheque, to our Treasurer **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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River Gavenny project

A meeting was held in August to explore the interest amongst local groups to be involved in supporting the Wye and Usk Foundation's plan to encourage salmon to spawn in the Gavenny. At this well attended meeting there was agreement that we should support the work of WUF.

During Tidy Wales Week (17 to 23 September) Abergavenny Brownies will be involved in a litter pick of Swan Meadow using equipment donated by Gateway dental practise and the press will be invited so we hope this will bring the Gavenny to the attention of local people.

Green spaces project

Collaborative effort with MCC, Abergavenny Town Council, Abergavenny Climate Action and Keep Abergavenny Tidy to smarten up communal green areas eg outside Tesco, in Brewery Yard car park, by the Drill Hall and the little Regents St Memorial Garden. After initial meetings with MCC and other interested town groups, remedial work has taken place in Brewery Yard and the Tesco raised beds. The Memorial Garden, Regent Street is the next project to be considered and there will be an on site meeting on 26 September from 5.30 -7.00pm. Please come along if you are interested in getting involved in this or any of the green spaces projects.

It is also hoped to open up the area by the Gavenny in Swan Meadow allowing this to be better accessed and enjoyed. Collaborative work between The Castle Meadows group, the Gavenny Meadows group and the Society's Gavenny Project will, upon completion, provide a significant "Green Corridor" in the middle of the town.

Social events

Members thoroughly enjoyed a delicious post Christmas lunch provided by Sugarloaf Catering in Trinity Church Hall. Gareth Williams regaled members with anecdotes of his life in the world of banking and how things have changed. He told some hilarious stories, including of his time working in a very small branch in St David's. One day, the Bank Inspectors arrived unexpectedly. The reaction of the townsfolk to these besuited gents was such that 2 ladies from the next door shop strode in with pitchforks to ward off the strangers!

A summer tea party had to be postponed due to the weather – we look forward to it next year.

News

Tidy Wales Week 17-23 September 2012

Make a difference this year - If you are interested in becoming a volunteer litter warden for your local area contact Will Beer of Keep Abergavenny Tidy enquiries@keepabergavennytidy.co.uk for free litter picking equipment or phone Tom Ward Jackson on 029 2072 6988

'Abergavenny is not an ashtray!' campaign launch day on Tues 18 Sept 10 - 3pm with the Civic Society, Keep Abergavenny Tidy, Public Health Board, Keep Wales Tidy, MCC, Gwent Neighbourhood police in the Town Centre (Red Square)

Abergavenny Area Community Orchards and Gardens - a scythe training day on Saturday 22nd September at the orchard field starting at 10am and finishing at 3pm. Training will be given by a trainer from "Caring for God's Little Acre", CFGA. The Scythes are Austrian Scythes which are considerably lighter than British scythes.

If you are interested in acquiring a new skill which can be applied to open spaces in Abergavenny in order to create flowering meadowland please contact Laurie Jones 01873 851299. The training is Free.

Green spaces

An on-site workshop (weather dependent) at the Memorial Garden, Regent St from 5.30 - 7pm on Weds 26 Sept from 5.30 - 7.00pm

Wales World Trade Fair 2012 - Sunday 7 October, Abergavenny Market Hall 10 - 5pm

There will be about 50 stalls including some performance and a variety of entertainment.

This year the Fair is expanding into the brewery yard with a performance stage, stalls and food. Entrance is free!

ABERGAVENNY CLIMATE ACTION - Environment & Community Fayre

Sunday 14 October from 10 - 4.00 pm

Come and support the Civic Society as we take part in the second annual Environment and Community Fayre. The event includes all the environmental and community groups who are joining together to celebrate Abergavenny groups' many skills and talents.

The day will give groups like ours an opportunity to showcase their skills, creativity and activities and provide an opportunity to find out about other groups. There will also be dancing, knitting, singing and weaving groups as well as local energy and conservation groups plus live entertainment and a range of cakes and bakes on offer.