



## ***Abergavenny and District Civic Society***

*Preserving the best, improving the rest*

*A great place to live, work and visit*

[www.abercivsoc.com](http://www.abercivsoc.com)

August 2021

Dear friends,

What a time we've all had with the pandemic forcing us to modify our behaviour and stop doing the many things that brought us pleasure and satisfied our various physical, emotional and intellectual needs.

Perhaps during this time, we have learned to be a bit kinder to each other, found community alive and kicking as we each tried to muddle through and help one another in our neighbourhoods. For many living on their own and those needing to self-isolate, it has been a particularly difficult time and our thanks go to the many and various Abergavenny companies and organisations that ensured meals were delivered and food parcels provided for those especially in need, including our amazing NHS staff at Nevill Hall. I know that a good number of our members were involved in donating, collecting and delivering toiletries, clothes and other goodies to the hospital for the staff.

### **Keeping in Touch - meetings**

As per our previous newsletter and, with members' support, we continued with the 100 Club draw but dropped subscription fees. After a trial committee meeting via Zoom where we held the first draw of the year in September, we had 3 virtual meetings with a speaker with the draw happening at those meetings over the screen. Nobody opted for the occasional quiz although this was offered. However, many thanks go to Judith, our communications Secretary, for regularly keeping in touch with members during this unprecedented time and to Ian and Judith for hosting our Zoom meetings.

### **Zoom (verb) - definitions:**

- 1 To move or travel quickly
- 2 To rise sharply
- 3 To enlarge or decrease the size of part of an electronic image on a screen
- 4 To cause (a camera lens) to move in or out

Of course, we all now know that it also means to learn, visit, attend meetings and keep in touch with friends and family electronically over a screen!! We have also learned the etiquette of using this form of communication, realising that if we are NOT muted then everyone can hear our asides, whoops!

We were held spellbound as our very own Daniel Morden, storyteller extraordinaire, wove his magic in the run up to Christmas. We all agreed that it had been an excellent, enjoyable evening of escapism despite the lack of our usual non-alcoholic punch. In March, David Morgan, Development Manager Wales of Glandŵr Cymru (The Canal & River Trust in Wales), gave us information about the Canal and River Trust's new health and wellbeing campaign and the many opportunities that it brings for our very own canal. At this meeting, we were also pleased to welcome Justine Wheatley, Chief Executive, and Melissa Appleton, Creative Director at Peak Art in the Black Mountains, who told us about "Hinterlands," a project led by Peak and Canal & River Trust, supported by the Arts Council of Wales, inviting artists and communities to explore the Monmouthshire & Brecon canal as a space for creativity, biodiversity & wellbeing. It was a well-attended meeting with lots of ideas about how to get out and about and enjoy nature when we were able to. Our final meeting was a guide to how the town council works and a little bit about what being Mayor of Abergavenny entailed from Civic Society member and town councillor Tony Konieczny. Many of us were surprised to learn what were statutory duties and what were not and gladdened to learn of council support in helping our lovely town to look its best and attract residents, and indeed visitors, out into the streets when permitted.

## What Next? Dick Cole, Vice chair

Inevitably the Society's activities have been much constrained since March 2020. The executive committee has functioned at a low level by email and Zoom and we have tried to keep in touch with our members through email and some Zoom events. The 100 Club has been kept going for the benefit of our income, while membership fees have been suspended, and of course for the benefit of our prize-winners. We have also continued to observe on the few planning applications that needed a Society comment – fortunately none very controversial. But now the town is looking good and coming to life again and so should the Society.

We are committed to hold an AGM this autumn and it would be good if that could be part of an event that launches a year of new projects and interesting talks. While such gatherings are now allowed, we must consider whether our members are yet ready to come together in a public hall. **Suggestions for topics or speakers help us to put together a programme that will interest you.** The committee is not getting any younger and we expect to lose a few either now or in the foreseeable future (only as members of the committee of course!). The present team achieved a lot in the 2010s but the Society could soon be in a position much like that over ten years ago when Alan Michie, the Konieczny's and others revived it – see below for Tony's message and offer to talk.



**Your Society NEEDS YOU!**



### **A message from Tony Konieczny, former Society Chair and Vice chair.**

My how time flies! Just over ten years ago, the Civic Society was on the verge of winding up. The membership had dwindled and there was little enthusiasm to replenish the officers and the committee. The Society needed a reboot! It subsequently became pro-active and project based. The membership started to grow, and the programme of speakers brought fresh insight and attracted larger audiences.

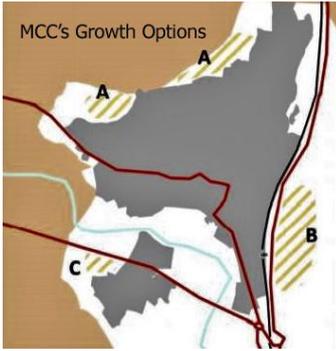
However, the Society needs to evolve to maintain its standing and ensure that the next ten years will be as successful. We must not fall into the trap of relying on faithful servants to step up year after year, if we want to see a sustainable and vibrant Civic Society going forward.

We now have over a hundred members, we regularly had 50-60 members and paying visitors at our meetings but the need to refresh our purpose and recruit new committee members to help steer the Society forward is an urgent priority. Some, but not all, of our long-standing committee members would like to resign after many years of service. We thank them for their generous contribution of time and effort in our success story. If the Society is going to continue, we need to encourage more members to become actively involved in shaping future activities and the direction of travel as well as the continuing administration. Don't be put off by imagining that getting involved will be a huge commitment of time and effort. The full committee meets monthly whilst the Society's programme of meetings is running but subgroups pursue the projects that are of interest to them. **If you would like to learn more and perhaps have an informal chat over a cup of coffee, get in touch!** Either email [abercivsoc@gmail.com](mailto:abercivsoc@gmail.com) or phone Tony on 01873 858912 or Dick on 01291 673617.

### **Replacing Monmouthshire's Development Plan – Dick Cole**

You may have noticed that MCC are consulting again on their Replacement Local Development Plan – our Vice Chair had a letter in the Chronicle about it. The council had to abandon much of the progress it had made when Covid-19 hit us in the Spring of 2020, but now they have caught up again and want comments on their Preferred Strategy by August 31st. Details are available at <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/plan-preparation/preferred-strategy/>. Despite everything that has been happening and the global uncertainties about the future, the council has not

felt the need to make significant changes to the strategy that they put forward early in 2020. Consequently, our response will be much the same.



A draft of the 2020 response was circulated to all members for comment last July, and no dissenting views were received. Our response in 2021 will be similar, though expressed in a somewhat different way – more clearly and up to date. The main elements are very briefly summarised below, and we do not plan to circulate another draft. It will probably be being worked on up to the last minute and **if anyone wants to see it and comment, please email Dick Cole at [dandlcole@aol.com](mailto:dandlcole@aol.com)** as he will appreciate your interest and send you the latest version.

As briefly as possible – forgive the simplification of complex stuff – the Civic Society's views are:

- We reject the proposal to plan for over 8,000 new homes in Monmouthshire 2018-33 (with about 1,900 at Abergavenny/Llanfoist), built at an average rate of over twice that of the last fifteen years. Over 3,600 would have to be on new sites, mostly greenfield (that's about 900 at Abergavenny/Llanfoist).
- We question the council's justification that this will bring more young people into the county to offset our ageing population and enable more affordable housing to be built (mainly as a percentage requirement of private housebuilding). Neither can be assured – the council cannot control the age of newcomers or be sure that housebuilders will agree that higher percentages are viable. There must be other ways of boosting the provision of affordable housing.
- And we especially doubt whether over 7,000 extra jobs can be achieved around the county so that the increased working population do not need to commute unsustainable long distances. Past experience suggests that all these jobs are unlikely to materialise.
- The council's numbers and strategy excessively conflict with, even undermine, the Welsh Government's national strategy of concentrating most of SE Wales's growth in Cardiff, Newport and the Valleys. The numbers also greatly exceed government projections and we do not accept the council's reasons for doing so.
- In summary we question the council's belief in this much growth and consider that the strategy is unnecessarily risky, requiring all the objectives to be achieved in order to succeed – during a Climate Emergency and other uncertainties about the future. We would have preferred a shorter-term plan pending greater clarity about future trends and regional needs.
- With scope already for 1,000 more homes at Abergavenny/Llanfoist under present policies, there is no urgent need for further large allocations of land, though more affordable or rented social housing might justify some extra sites.
- Our area needs more opportunities for employment, reducing the need for commuting to jobs elsewhere – even the train services are unlikely to improve greatly in the foreseeable future and the extent of future working-from-home is unknown.

Insufficient information is yet available to properly compare the council's options for the 900 homes that they say they need, but if that scale of growth proves to be needed our views at this stage are that:

- We continue to reject housing in the Green Wedge buffer between the existing development and the National Park boundary west of the town. We have also proposed a Green Wedge in the Gavenny valley.

- We are concerned by the prospect of continuing housing growth at Llanfoist, where years of expansion continue and access into Abergavenny is difficult.
- Expansion east of the railway and A465 may be the best long-term option, but there are many questions to be answered about its viability and integration with the rest of the town.
- We want to work with the county council, town and community councils and others to refine the choices and perhaps reach a consensus before the plan can only be altered by the independent Inspector who will examine the plan.

We feel that the council is unlikely to markedly change its intentions unless new constraints on development emerge, elected members recognise the risks of proceeding in the face of public concerns, Welsh Government raise objections, or changes are required by an Inspector. We are in touch with other community groups around the county that share our concerns.

***Please don't leave it to us and other groups – individual representations help as well, so send them to: [planningpolicy@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@monmouthshire.gov.uk)***

### **Bloomin' Bailey Park! –Judith Vicary**



After completing the overhaul of the Sunken Garden two years ago, the 6-member Civic Society team joined the Friends of Bailey Park and decided to take on board the six main beds that had been very neglected, due in part to the aging and retirement of previous members of the Friends.



Initially, during the summer, a great deal of heavy digging, thinning out and replanting needed to be done before any structure could be brought to the whole area. Weeding was very demanding because the area was so neglected as the soil very heavy.

The team planned to buy and plant bulbs for the following spring. Work carried on until the end of October and included a massive clear up of leaves helped by MCC. Money for more bulbs in the Sunken Garden was provided by the Civic Society. Other funds were provided from the Friends of Bailey Park account, a Green Token award from Waitrose, spontaneous donations from grateful passers -by, friends, and a donation from Round Table.

Over the past year, stronger members of the team threw themselves into cutting down overgrown and dying trees, rotovating a long strip of land bordering the edge of the Park, laying down a membrane and bark and replanting shrubs and perennials to create an area of light and space. Planters of different sizes were made and filled, some of them being attached to the railings and filled with bedding plants, all grown from seed or plugs. Old town planters have been recycled and placed along the new border. A bench was made from recycled wood. Bird boxes, a hedgehog house, and a bee hotel have been provided to enhance opportunities for wildlife to visit the gardens. Wildflowers have been introduced into the small, wooded area.

During lockdown periods, we decided that no law was being broken, we were working outside, distancing, getting exercise, and carrying out essential work, the results of which were being enjoyed by the public. The work was also extremely therapeutic for the volunteers.

We often advertise in the Chronicle and online to try to swell the number of volunteers. Our improved site has drawn people to offer to help as they walk through, and word spreads so that recently we have welcomed a few more helpers. We have litter pickers, from the gardening group and Keep Abergavenny Tidy, keeping litter to a minimum. The Cubs regularly help with watering and are developing an awareness of the importance of wildlife. They also work towards the attainment of skills badges.

Visitor numbers to this part of the park have increased dramatically since the beginning of the Pandemic and some people have said that it has been a refuge from the anxieties and depression caused by being isolated for months at a time.

The plan for the future is to create a wildflower meadow, to continue with essential maintenance in the form of weeding and general tidying up at the end of seasons and improving the condition and drainage of the soil. We would encourage more volunteers to join us, including school children, and will continue to work with the Town and County. Our aim is to make this part of the park as welcoming and beautiful as possible, to encourage visitors and to give them pleasure and solace in difficult times.

We must also pay tribute to the beautiful planters by the Fairfield carpark which Society member Anna Petts maintains with just a little help from her friends.



### **Finances and 100 Club – Ian Vicary, Treasurer**

The finances of the Society remain on a solid footing thanks to your generosity and to the successful 100 Club. During this last year, our only income has been from the 100 Club and sales of Take a Look at Abergavenny. Expenses have been minimal apart from our donation to the cost of repainting the Bailey Park gates and the ongoing upkeep of the 'sunken garden' there.

We have agreed to continue with the 100 Club to continue to bring a bit of quarterly excitement into our lives and maintain contact with you whilst we are unable to meet up together in person. Numbers cost just £24 each for the year and can be paid by bank transfer, cheque or even cash with non or minimal contact. You can have as many numbers as you want.

Last year my wildest expectations were surpassed by 100 numbers being taken and I hope that you will do the same this year. If we fall far short of the 100, we may need to adjust the prize money accordingly but hopefully everyone will wish to continue supporting us in this way.

Please consider setting up a standing order or bank transfer your money, with a suitable reference like your name and 100 Club, (eg **Bill Winner 100 club**), to:

**Natwest account                      sort code 51-61-02                      account number 01523430**

Please let me know if you pay by bank transfer so I can check that your payment has been received.

Or you can send a cheque for the total amount to me or drop cash off in an envelope to **17 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW**. Please call me on **854929 for any more information or to request a standing order form or download one from our website** [www.abercivsoc.com](http://www.abercivsoc.com)

***It would help tremendously if your payment was in by the end of September so that everything is in place for the first draw in October.***