



Abergavenny and District Civic Society

Preserving the best, improving the rest

A great place to live, work and visit

Dear members

Once again we enjoyed a varied and interesting programme throughout the year 2017 - 2018 which enticed members of the public to come and join us. For the first meeting a packed hall listened intently to Patrick Hannay's provocative presentation on 'Architecture: the State of the Nation' followed in October by Richard Suggett, Senior Investigator of Historic Buildings at the Royal Commission, who enlightened us about medieval wall paintings, illustrated with examples of work by the Royal Commission – we had a member of the public travel from Bristol for this! Will McClean, MCC's Chief Officer of Children and Young People, brought us up to speed with the county's 21st Century Schools Programme and assured us that Abergavenny's new secondary school would be built by the early 2020s. Elspeth Lewis, Head Teacher of King Henry School, was on hand to answer questions and commented on the current dilapidated state of KHS, joking that she had a "bucket, fan and heater" to cope with different weather conditions. The eventual aim of the new school is to open the doors to the whole community, to have all professional support services, known as an "all agencies hub" on site, to offer facilities to the wider community after hours, as well as in school holidays, and to help address the challenges faced by socially disadvantaged and vulnerable families in Abergavenny.

Unfortunately our December meeting was cancelled due to heavy snowfall. In February Professor George Nash, internationally renowned archaeologist, made a return visit to explain what finds had been unearthed beneath the former cattle market before the construction of Morrisons. From the start of 2018 we discovered more about the geomorphology of the Beacons National Park with geologist

Alan Bowring and then learned from CEO Aine Morris about the aspirations and challenges facing the Food Festival in its 20th year. We also discovered from Rachael Rogers, MCC Manager of the Museums Service, what thorny issues and opportunities lay in store for the County's museum service as well as the exciting plans to develop the Castle's activities programme with the construction of an Events Pavilion. Lastly we were entertained by the very talented Bettina Reeves, theatre designer and costume lecturer. She talked about bringing the awe inspiring and enormous art installations to life to be hung in the Market Hall for all to gaze upon. She also brought along a number of creatures she and her team created, as well as an outstanding banner celebrating the Suffragettes.

Bettina receiving a Civic Society award



Grateful thanks go to all our speakers who give so generously of their time to provide us with such a fantastic programme and thanks to Kath and Clive Bransom for providing tea and coffee at meetings.

New members are welcome and encouraged to get actively involved. To continue to thrive, our Society wants and needs people with new ideas to keep Abergavenny a bustling and vibrant town. The executive committee always welcomes suggestions, fresh ideas and new members to stop us from getting stale. There is also an opportunity for someone to stand as Vice Chair to learn the ropes before stepping up as Chair for 2019 -2020. Want to get involved? Please get in touch at abercivsoc@gmail.com or phone for a chat with our Chair, Stan Pochron (01873 854180) or Vice Chair Dick Cole (01291 673617). If a project inspires you let us know and get stuck in. Don't be shy, it can be great fun and you will learn a lot on the way!

And to the social side Kath Bransom

Unfortunately heavy snowfall took the 'magic' out of our sociable December meeting when magician Gerry Walker was snowed in preventing us from a chance to be entertained, socialise and partake of festive nibbles, washed down with the now traditional non-alcoholic punch.

The King's Arms in Nevill Street once more provided members with the traditional January lunch to chase away the winter blues. This year fewer members came but those who did enjoyed a delicious meal in excellent company. Our grateful thanks go to the staff who ensured that all went smoothly. We aim to patronise local businesses so if you have a suggested venue for a future gathering please get in touch and let us know. If members would prefer a different type of arrangement for our New Year get together, such as cheese and wine, informal buffet, lunch or evening meal, please let us know and we will do our best to arrange it.

Communications – Judith Vicary

This year's steady rise in membership is probably as a result of the excellent, varied and dynamic programme and the Executive Committee's dedication to promoting the Civic Society through word of mouth to friends and guest visitors to our meetings. Our newsletter in the One Stop Shop has also helped!

Local people are drawn in by the high standard of talks and the revelations about our geography, infrastructure, local government and history. Friends, who come regularly, always remark, "Well, that was something really eye opening," or "Well, I never knew anything about that." In fact the Methodist Church Hall is becoming in danger of being too small a venue. What a pleasant dilemma!

Civic Society meetings are regularly promoted on the Digiboard outside Boots, and several articles, relating to speakers, have been submitted (not always with success), to the Chronicle. Ian, our Treasurer, has cleverly managed to get a regular spot in the monthly Focus magazine, advertising our meetings. This is free, too. I will try to get some of my future articles published in Focus. The Society's annual programme and other information are displayed on the notice board outside the former Burton's building.

Planning updates – Dick Cole

The Morrisons' store has been built and opened since our last report. This triggered several weeks of correspondence in the Abergavenny Chronicle, mostly hostile to the appearance of the building and concerned about the consequent traffic delays. The Society expressed unease about the County Council being able to be both promoter of the project and planning authority.

Planning applications for residential developments at Newbridge House and the former Magistrates Court/Police Station (McCarthy and Stone) on Tudor Street, and the Henstaff site on Brecon Road, all the subject of critical comments or objections by the Society, have yet to be determined, though revised proposals by McCarthy and Stone have been recommended by planning officers for approval.

Other applications on which we have made observations include a pilot hydrogen car refuelling station at the bus station car park (objected but suggested alternative siting; approved), final plans for Deri Farm housing (now under construction), backland development at Gwent Road, Mardy (undetermined), an office building at Nantgavenny Lane (approved), a flat-roofed modern house in Belmont Road (undetermined), the proposed pedestrian/cyclist bridge over the Usk (supported; undetermined), and proposed housing on Hereford Road at Llantilio Pertholey (objected; undetermined). We await more details of controversial housing proposals on Pentre Road, but are likely to object to these.

The County Council has reviewed the effectiveness of its Local Development Plan and concluded that while most policies remain sound there is a need to revise it, extending it from 2021 to 2033. Slow progress on some allocated housing sites means that the county already has a shortage of land available for housing, as measured by Welsh Government methodology, and the removal of Severn crossing tolls is expected to add to the pressure. We await the opportunity to comment on new strategy options but at present take the view that only modest housing growth in the Abergavenny area will be necessary. Other issues that concern us include the increasingly dormitory role of the town as the amount of housing increases while mostly low-paid jobs are created, and the shortfall in the provision of affordable housing (accessible to those who cannot afford market housing, usually as rented social housing).

Through the Town Team's Enhancing the Environment group we have played a part in the design of the public realm improvement works in Frogmore Street and Lion Street, and this will continue in the coming year with completion from Monk Street to the war memorial expected by June 2019. We believe that the removal of most traffic from Frogmore Street and much of Lion Street will considerably enhance the appearance and trading prospects at a difficult time for town centres.

Exploring Abergavenny – Dick Cole

We exhibited the results of our survey of the character of the town and its suburbs at the Gunter Mansion before Christmas 2017. About 150 people viewed the displays, which are also available on our website, and many commented favourably. We did not learn a lot from the consultation but visitors became more aware of the importance we attach to the town's varied character.



Fifty copies of an omnibus collection of the 36 character area reports were printed, about a dozen of which were distributed to interested organisations such as Abergavenny Town Council, MCC's planning department, the National Library of Wales, Cadw, Abergavenny Museum and Library. The remainder were made available to Society members on an 'at cost' basis of £20 each. Demand was such that a further fifty were ordered and many of these have been sold. If you wish to buy a copy (it would make an excellent Christmas present) please contact us at abercivsoc@gmail.com. Some copies will be available at meetings.

Our 'Take a Look at Abergavenny' paperback, which draws on the character survey, should be available for purchase in the autumn – published in association with the Local History Society. These will be priced as more of a stocking filler for Christmas.

A Design Statement – Dick Cole

Debates about the architecture of buildings such as the McCarthy and Stone proposal, Morrisons, and housing estates, together with a thought-provoking talk to the Society by Patrick Hannay, prompted our executive committee to feel the need for our own design guidance to be available to developers. We noted that, apart from Local Development Plan policies, the County Council, somewhat unusually, offers no such guidance. We recognise that some aspects of design lead to subjective judgements and that buildings can succeed because they break the 'rules'. We also recognise that some people will always prefer architecture that echoes past styles such as 'Georgian', while others welcome well-mannered modern styles. Success is usually about sensitively integrating the new with the old, and buildings with the spaces in which they are situated.

We are well-advanced at preparing a design statement that will not be a detailed guide such as those available from many central and local government bodies and accessible on the internet, but which provides the Society's local perspective on design matters.

Fairfield Improvement project – Tony Konieczny

It has been a long and winding road to finally get this project approved by all of the stakeholders. The good news is that work will commence on the improvements in September 2018. The defunct trolley park railings will be removed and a new stone planter put in place along with the installation of a couple of benches and granite setts to replace the concrete paving slabs.



MCC's efforts to make the grass verge a wildflower site have failed and as a result the strip adjacent to the car park has become neglected and unsightly. It now requires mowing and a major rethink is needed. Any suggestions for low maintenance improvements would be welcomed as would the offer of assistance to look after this adopted area.

Park Avenue/Fairfield car park planters – Anna Petts

The amazing thing about this project taken on by the Society a couple of years or so ago is that, regardless of a) all the nearby pollution from the busy A40, b) the battering the flowers get as they have no shelter from westerly winds and rain and c) the possibility of damage or theft, they have remained resolutely intact and resilient throughout!

Only occasionally have there been broken stems or crushed shoots, when a weary bystander has sat on the seating, but failed to remove a back-pack beforehand... and many, many people have sat there over the months, with great relief, as there is no other available seating in the car park.

Passers-by from the car park as well as the street often stop, when I am weeding or watering, to say how much they enjoy the oasis of colour. I usually mention the origins of the planters and on hearing this recently a lady took out a £5 pound note to give me for Civic Society funds.



As the soil in the planters is not very deep, and despite using water-retaining granules and mulching with composted bark for extra protection from this year's relentless sun, watering has been needed twice a day. Here I must give HUGE thanks to some members of the Constitutional Club, who have helped with the evening watering over a few exceptionally dry weeks.

The choice of flowers this summer has followed the red, white and blue theme of this year's Abergavenny in Bloom. Gradually, as summer passes, I add other plants such as the tall yellow daisies which make such a mark, chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies, to bulk out the beds as other plants fade. It is amazing what a splash of colour can do to lift the spirits and make small corners of our town feel special!

Gavenny Project - Tony Konieczny



The Gavenny project has been on the back burner for a year as Fen Turner, our NRW (National Resources Wales) project manager has moved on to higher things in the NRW structure. Congratulations to her and we wish her every success in her new post. NRW have recently appointed a new officer to take over her work on the Gavenny Project.

MCC are consulting on their proposed Green Infrastructure Plan as part of their response to the Well Being and Future Generations Act. I was able to attend a seminar and supply all the details of the Gavenny Project and look forward to seeing the project included in the finished plan. With these new initiatives there will be a significant opportunity for partnership working and some grant funding.

There will be a local consultation in September 2018 to publicise the project and widen the participation by inviting interested groups to engage with the project.

St Mary's Priory Flower Festival – Jay Shipley

Once again the Civic Society was invited to take part in the Flower Festival at St Mary's Priory June 28th - July 4th. This time the theme was 'celebrations' and we joined forces with Friends of Castle Meadows. It appears that 2018 is significant for anniversaries: Suffragettes, Royal Air Force, and Abergavenny Food Festival amongst them. We were allocated Sir Isaac Newton 375. Much head scratching ensued searching for an exhibit design! Everyone seems familiar with the image of gravity and a falling apple; then there was Newton's Cradle; he introduced milling coin edges whilst in charge of the Royal Mint; he built a telescope and he ventured the notion that light could be split into colours when shone through a prism. A clever polymath this Sir Isaac! Given that we had a window location, we opted for a rainbow effect/a 4 foot arch/ an apple and a meadow! Amazingly good fun once again. Thanks to Anna, Anthea, Benita, Sue, Tony, Kath and Clive.



Finances and 100 Club – Ian Vicary, Treasurer

Finances

The financial position of the Society continues to strengthen thanks to the record high membership and the success of the 100 Club. We have spent £2,167 on 100 copies of the 'Exploring Abergavenny' book and have already sold over half of these.

£100 was donated to the Abergavenny Arts Festival to help it get off the ground and by all reports this was very successful. The organisers hope it will become an annual event.

Discussions continue with the parties involved in the Fairfield Car Park improvements which were delayed by all the other improvement schemes taking place in the Town. Hopefully 2019 will see this project completed.

We continue to seek out other small projects that we can support financially that will improve our town.

100 Club

We sold ninety eight tickets to the 100 Club, the highest since it started. The target for 2018/19 is to sell all 100 tickets with your continued support. The profits will be spent on various small projects which we believe will help to make Abergavenny a better place to live, work and play. If you know of any such projects, or maybe have one of your own, please let us know.

So now is the time to get your cheque book out and send us your money; and remember, the more tickets you buy, the greater your chances of winning. At only £24 per ticket, that's less than 50 pence a week. Just contact me at ianvicary@outlook.com to buy your number(s) or of course you can set up a standing order, a facility also offered for payment of subscriptions. Contact either Mike, Membership Secretary, on **855263** or me on **854929** for more information and a standing order form or download one from our website www.abercivsoc.com

Membership - Mike Foden, Membership Secretary

Individual Membership has increased once again this year. 7 members left, including a couple who moved away from the area. We made up these losses when 18 new members joined over the course of the year. Some signed up after attending our monthly meetings and others came to see what we get up to, enjoyed the evening and were hooked. Currently we have 117 paid up members and 15 affiliated members.

We are hugely grateful for all the support given to us by the following businesses:-

The Angel Hotel, Celtic Computer Systems, Emmeline's Homebaking, The Hardwick Restaurant, Homemakers Recycling, Jaybee Soft Furnishings, Judd Brothers, The Kings Arms, Owen Davies Consulting, Red Builders Ltd, Catherine Roberts & Steven Harris (Architecture & Energy), Smiles Better Dentists, Taurin Taylor Associates and The Wool Croft.

Subscriptions for 2018 - 19 remain the same and are due on 1 September by cash or cheque to Membership Secretary, **Mike Foden, 3 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW**. Some members now pay by Standing Order or a Bank Draft which makes it easier for both parties. Forms are available from Mike on 855263 or Ian on 854929 or can be downloaded from www.abercivsoc.com

I should be grateful if any member deciding not to renew their membership would contact me at mikejudy@talktalk.net so that our records can be updated accordingly.

Under 65 - £10

Over 65 - £8

Student - £1

Programme of meetings to run up until June 2019

Venue – Methodist Church Hall, Castle Street, unless otherwise stated, starting at 7.30 pm

Once again we find ourselves with no shortage of topics to choose from for the coming year's programme of meetings. We hope you like it and, if you have suggestions for other topics, please let us know.

10 September - Town of Sanctuary (Harry Iles) & Abergavenny's 'Food Bank' (Peter Price)

City of Sanctuary UK supports a network of groups across the UK to welcome people seeking sanctuary. Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary is a part of this wider network, working to provide welcoming places of safety for all, offering sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. The Abergavenny Food Bank offers a tangible support to struggling individuals and families.

8 October - AGM followed by John Keegan, CEO of Monmouthshire Housing Association

John will speak about the work of MHA and the challenges it faces meeting future housing need in Abergavenny and Monmouthshire.

12 November - Black Mountains Project and farming futures - *speaker tbc*

Members of a local pioneering partnership will attend our meeting to talk about a new million pound project to restore and create a sustainable future for the Black Mountains. The partnership brings together key stakeholders in the area, including graziers from the Black Mountains Graziers Association and private land owners for the first time in the National Park

10 December -Jabolique

For our Christmas social we will be entertained by members of a select and dedicated group of musical and theatrical enthusiasts who will be giving us an Abergavenny focused performance. Nibbles and non-alcoholic punch will be on offer too.

January 2019 - an opportunity to get together and socialise over lunch – *date & event tbc*

11 February - Dr Ami Jones National Director of the Emergency Medical Retrieval and Transfer Service Cymru (EMRTS Cymru) will explain the workings and logistical challenges facing the Wales Air Ambulance service.

11 March - Patrick Hannay: Design Judgement and Visual Taste - are they one and the same? Patrick is the editor of Touchstone, the annual magazine for Architecture in Wales: In September 2017 his stimulating talk about whether building designs can be judged 'good' or 'bad' provoked the Society to consider whether it can issue its own guidance; this talk is likely to be more on the same theme.

8 April 2019 - Steven Harris, local architect: Towards Zero Carbon Building

The energy efficiency of even the latest housing estates in Britain falls well short of the standards required or achieved in some other countries; Steve has experience of building to high environmental standards and can discuss obstacles to progress in this country.

13 May 2019 - Revising the Local Development Plan

MCC has started updating the county's development plan, which will cover the years up to 2033; the process will be well under way by May and the Society will want to work closely with the planning authority. We will know by the spring what type of meeting will be of most interest to our members.

10 June - 'Green Infrastructure – what is it and how can we make more of it? – *tbc*

It is hoped that a newly appointed MCC officer will be able to come and let us know more about the green infrastructure.