



Abergavenny and District Civic Society

Preserving the best, improving the rest

A great place to live, work and visit

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Newsletter - September 2025

Dear friends

I hope that you have enjoyed the programme of meetings organised for this year in the welcoming Methodist church hall as much as we have. What a variety of topics brought to us by our very generous speakers. Starting with 'Placemaking for Abergavenny' with Chris Jones and Owen Davies, we then wandered through Abergavenny's award-winning Laurie Jones Community Orchard with Simon Bilsborough which was followed by RHS Chelsea Gold Medal winner Sarah Price giving us an insight into the future of sustainable town planting. Later we learned from retired Paediatrician Tom Williams about the history of Nevill Hall hospital and plans to give the gardens and grounds a new lease of life. Carrying on the 'green theme' we received an update on the Gavenny Project from Kate Stinchcombe and Jane Clarke as part of MCC's Green Infrastructure Plan.

We were unable to hear from Sarah Dickins due to her appointment as Chief Communications Adviser to Eluned Morgan, first Minister of Wales. However, at short notice Hannah Rigley, Senior Consultant at Miller Research gave an interesting and thought-provoking presentation on the B Corps model, a way of working to benefit employees, communities and the planet, and she explained how it has worked for this local company. Will Davies, Cadw Inspector, told us about his wide-ranging work opening our eyes to all manner of challenges, some quite unexpected, that he faces daily. Our programme finished with a visit from Hannah Evans, Director of Strategy, Planning and Partnerships for Aneurin Bevan University Heath Board, and her colleague Hannah Capel. They gave us a glimpse into what the future may hold for our much-loved Nevill Hall Hospital. At this stage they could only give us a wish list without much detail, but they reassured us that Welsh Government were keen for new services to be offered from Nevill Hall alongside the new cancer treatment centre.

Over the course of the year, we enjoyed some meals together, often at the local Golf Club but also on one occasion at the Kings Arms. Ian Cooper led Uskulele in entertaining members with a variety of music to suit the festive occasion and all tastes, and members seemed to have a thoroughly enjoyable time singing along whilst Civic Society chair Tony, bashed his bongos and shook his maracas to keep the group in time.

Chairman's Report – Tony Konieczny

We have enjoyed another successful year with some very interesting topics covered by our guest speakers. Over the year we have upgraded some of our audio-visual equipment to ensure our growing membership can see and hear the presentations at our meetings. We have been able to do this thanks to the continuing support of those who have a 100 Club ticket which provides the income for our projects.

The Executive Committee, after much discussion, agreed that our website needed an overhaul to be easier to navigate, hopefully the new website will be active in September 2025. I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Executive Committee for their support and encouragement over the past year. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure we have an interesting programme, a social event calendar, close cooperation with public realm initiatives and ideas for our own projects to improve the town.

We are continuing to support the Plas Gunter Mansion project and have donated £5000 to them towards the purchase of the land at the rear of the mansion. Hopefully, the purchase will be completed by the time this newsletter goes to press. We look forward to hearing more about this amazing project at this pivotal stage. Gunter Mansion Trust should know in September if they have been awarded The National Heritage grant to complete the project.

We have always supported Abergavenny in Bloom, and this year we took on an ambitious project to restore



and replant the bus stop beds at the side of Tesco. Civic Society funding was matched by the Town Council and Abergavenny Rotary to provide a working total of £1500. Abergavenny Garden Centre was approached to provide



plant plugs to be given to volunteers in the community to nurture until they would be ready for planting out.

We wanted this scheme to be intergenerational and invitations to participate were sent to local schools, community groups and care homes, the latter showing no interest on this occasion. However, the response from the schools was overwhelmingly positive, and along with some Society members, U3A and the tiny tots from Abergavenny Nursery the project was started. Clearing the plots was very hard work as the soil was very poor and compacted. The Town Team kindly rotavated the plots which were then top dressed with organic mulch to enrich the soil and discourage weeds! Over a couple of weeks at the end of June, beginning of July, the volunteers brought their plants and dug them into the beds.



Civic Society members showed great commitment and resilience in assisting with the daily watering by hand that was required during the heatwave. Watering is now being resolved with some assistance from the Town Team.

The project was entered into the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' category for Wales in Bloom and was judged during the Abergavenny in Bloom visit.

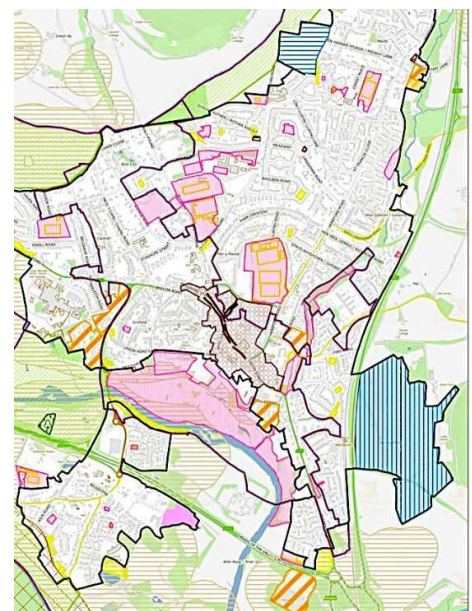
In other areas of development, the Society has been deeply involved in the recent Placemaking Plan and we are grateful to Dick Cole for his representation on the steering committee.

Members, I thank you all for your continuing enthusiastic support for the Society and on behalf of you all I would like to thank the Executive Committee members for keeping us on track and their hard work.

Planning – Dick Cole

Replacement Local Development Plan 2018–2033

Our last two annual newsletters described the lengthy process of contributing to the preparation of this county-wide plan. The planned number of additional homes had reduced from nearly 8,400 in 2020 (ca 900 at Abergavenny/Llanfoist) to about 6,000 (600 at Abergavenny/Llanfoist) in late 2022. Our main concern was that there would be insufficient extra jobs in the county to avoid unsustainable commuting, and we would have preferred a compromise figure nearer to 5,250. However, the Welsh Government broadly accepted the County Council's figures, despite, similarly to the Society, having asked for about 4,700 in 2021.



In late 2024 the Council consulted on its Deposit Plan – the plan to be submitted for independent Examination. The figures were based on those that had been endorsed by the Welsh Government in 2023 but there was much more detail in the plan. The Society questioned a 5% addition for flexibility but



otherwise decided not to object to the housing numbers. Reasons for this were doubts whether the planned homes would all be built by 2033, our support for half the homes on new sites being affordable, mainly social housing for rent, the commitment to net zero housing, and Abergavenny's rail service for commuting.

We decided to object to the development proposals, including 500 homes, east of the A465 and the railway because we needed more assurance that there would be easy means for pedestrians, cyclists and the disabled to cross these barriers to reach the rest of the town. The development is

otherwise acceptable in principle, but we have yet to see detailed proposals for crossing the road and railway.

We also objected to a proposal for 100 houses at Penlanlas on Old Hereford Road especially insofar as these would conflict with the otherwise welcome provision of a Green Wedge between the built-up area and the National Park. The very limited local provision for business growth was also a matter of concern, possibly reduced by the more recent availability the 'turkey factory' site of about 30 acres at Hardwick. However, there was much else in the plan that was a welcome improvement on the present plan. The County Council is expected to respond to all representations (2023 and 2024) before the end of 2025 and the Society will need to consider how to react when the Plan and representations are considered in 2026 by an independent Inspector.

Abergavenny Town Centre Placemaking Plan

The consultants started work on this plan in the autumn of 2024. We sought public involvement from the beginning and an open workshop held by the Society was one of the first consultative events. Shortly after this we submitted a statement of our initial position on the plan both to inform the consultants and as a document to refer to later in the process. Apart from a list of nearly thirty projects for consideration, the statement emphasised the need for a realistic plan that would strengthen a multi-functional town centre and inspire a shared commitment to its future. Following a series of steering committee meetings and stakeholder workshops, the consultants' proposals were made available for comment in April 2025.

The Society's response was welcoming and broadly supportive, especially as most of the projects in our initial statement appeared somewhere in the proposals. We hoped that the final plan would be more of an Action Plan, focused more on manageable early works and tasks (such as dealing with problems faced by the less able), rather than on expensive public realm projects. We noted that several projects depended on Welsh Government policy for the A40 trunk road, yet to be considered. We thought that more emphasis should be placed on the improvement and better use of property (eg the post office/Royal Mail building) and strengthening the appeal of the town's built heritage.



The subsequent Report of Consultation – over 200 pages – detailed hundreds of largely positive reactions to all the proposals, a result that has made prioritisation difficult. The total estimated cost is about £13 million, which is unlikely to be met within 10-15 years, so some projects may need to be listed but not scheduled. The proposals will be finalised in the autumn.

Other Matters

Partly because the Local Development Plan is still being revised there have again been few planning applications needing Civic Society comment during the year. A proposal to remodel the petrol filling station and shop on Brecon Road was considered overdevelopment of the site, but we welcomed proposals by the Pugh group to take over 7-9 Mill Street and by United Joinery to redevelop old buildings on their site off

Baker Street. We have objected to the proposed loss of trees as part of a change of use proposal for an office block on the Cantref roundabout. We supported the retention of the illuminated lettering of 'Il Gusto' on Frogmore Street, calling for more clarity of policy for this type of advertising. MCC officers recommended refusal but the planning committee did not agree. Most recently we have objected to a proposal to squeeze a small house into a corner site in North Street.



In January we were greatly saddened by the loss by fire of listed and other buildings in Frogmore Street. We await the opportunity to comment on redevelopment proposals for a sizeable site of about 2,500m². The completion of two long awaited projects, the new King Henry VIII school and the accessibility-compliant footbridge at the railway station, is welcomed.

The Society has objected to Welsh Government proposals to allow some forms of affordable housing to be built without the need for planning permission. No substantial evidence of the need for these changes has been supplied, and we fear an extension of this provision to urgently needed market housing. On the other hand, we have conditionally agreed that housing sites allocated in an approved development plan should not be able to be challenged in principle at the planning application stage.

Membership - Sue Konieczny, Membership Secretary

This year our membership grew to 111 and it was a pleasure to welcome some newcomers. It is however, with great sadness that I share news of the passing of long-time member Carol McCombie. As a keen gardener, she was a passionate supporter of Abergavenny in Bloom, planting and maintaining the floral displays at the Railway Station. Her husband Steve and she were very active members working for the good of the town that they loved. When Steve died Carol continued supporting the Society and enjoyed the friendship of many members. She will be missed by many friends and acquaintances.



As always, we are hugely grateful for all the support given to us by our business members. Our small and large businesses make such a contribution to keeping the town vibrant and viable and we encourage everyone to use local businesses and the market whenever possible.

The Angel Hotel, Celtic Computer Systems, Emmeline's Tearoom, Jaybee Soft Furnishing, Judd Brothers, The Kings Arms, Owen Davies Consulting and the Wool Croft.

We are hugely grateful to Judd Brothers for allowing us to use their water to keep alive the young plants that went into the Tesco beds – that was literally a life saver for the plants that, prior to planting out, had been lovingly cared for by nursery and school children as well as U3A members.

Please email abercivsoc@gmail.com if any business or member wishes to lapse their membership for whatever reason and I will change our records so you will not receive unwanted emails.

Subscriptions are due from September. Please bring cash or cheques to a meeting in an envelope with your name on it, or send them either to me at 125 Park Crescent, Abergavenny, NP7 5TN or to our Treasurer, Ian Vicary at 17 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7. Alternatively, please set up a standing order or pay by bank transfer into our bank account (giving your name as reference):

NatWest account

sort code 51-61-02

account number 01523430

Under 65 - £10

Over 65 - £8

Student - £1

Financial Report – Ian Vicary, Treasurer

This year our income from membership subs, 100 Club and other miscellaneous items amount to £3030 compared with £3000 last year. Estimated ordinary outgoings amount to £2030 compared with £2735 last year. Thus, an estimated surplus on ordinary activities of £1485.

There were two exceptional items this year. £5000 towards the cost of the purchase of the land behind Plas Gunter as reported last year, and £3420 to The Media Agency for a revamp of the Society's website. These will see our closing funds reduce from £18,000 to nearer £10,700. This is still a very healthy figure and more than adequate to meet our ongoing running costs for several years.

At the time of drafting this report, the Tesco flower bed project should have been completed. The total cost is £1500 of which £1000 has been received in grants from Abergavenny Town Council and Abergavenny Rotary Club. Therefore, our funds will be reduced by a further £500. I emphasise that these are all unaudited figures, final accounts will be presented at the AGM.

We continue to fund the upkeep and watering of the flower beds at the corner of the Fairfield car park, opposite Cibi Walk.

The three lunches were reasonably well subscribed. We are always on the lookout for new venues and your suggestions for restaurants that are easily accessible and provide good value are welcome.

100 Club – Ian Vicary

I am pleased to be able to report that this last year we sold all 100 numbers, a very big thank you for your support and generosity. Thirty prizes were paid out totalling £850, several to first time subscribers which is always gratifying.

I am hoping that for 2025 - 26 we can repeat this achievement so please dig deep and buy a number or two, or three..... If this continues maybe in the not-too-distant future, we could rename it the 200 Club!

You can see from reading the financial report the things we spend your 100 Club money on. All for the benefit of the town, none for the day to day running of the Society.

Numbers are £24 each and the more you have the greater chance of winning something. Your friends and family can buy numbers as well so please spread the word. Just email ianvicary@outlook.com or abercivsoc@gmail.com to reserve your number and pay by bank transfer to 51-61-02 account 01523430 quoting your name and 100 Club as the reference. Again, a big thank you for your support.

Programme of meetings to run up until June 2026

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

15 September at 7pm – Lee Jenkins – Otters in our local rivers.

Please note that this co-hosted first meeting is a week later than usual and starts at the earlier time of 7pm in St Michael's Centre where there is a car park.

Co-hosted by MCC's Green Infrastructure team and open to the public, we will learn much about this amazing semi aquatic mammal from expert Lee Jenkins, founder of the South Wales Otter Trust.

13 October - AGM at 7pm followed at 7.30 by a presentation on Public Art in Abergavenny.

Local resident Danielle Farrington who has painted the wonderful murals in Bailey Park will be in conversation with Tony Konieczny touching on the process of making this amazing large-scale art and considering further projects within Abergavenny.

10 November –Sustainable farming in Wales – Nick Miller from Pen-y-Worlod Farm

Sustainable farming in Wales and how Nick Miller and Sarah Dickins' experience has led to carbon positive regenerative farming at their organic hill farm producing award winning, pasture fed lamb.

8 December – Christmas Social with a hot drink and a festive nibble

Maryna Korolova, from Ukraine, fled Kyiv in 2022 with her husband, two young sons and two month old baby daughter. The local community in Abergavenny offered friendship and support to Maryna, Vadym and their family and they now run the very successful high street business **Squeezing**. With her amazing voice, Maryna will entertain us.

January 2026 – A chance to socialise over a meal – venue and date tbc

9 February – Growing Space, Mardy – Jim Quinn, Education and Vocational Officer

Jim has spent the last 5 years working at Mardy Park where volunteers with learning difficulties gain experience in all facets of horticulture culminating in the team harvest and take home. The gardens offer a safe space to meet and form friendships, improving emotional and mental wellbeing.

9 March – News of Plas Gunter Mansion– Owen Davies, Chair of Trustees

Owen will bring us up to date on this ambitious conservation project. The purchase of the land at the rear has been secured. The decision to fund the delivery of the project will be taken by the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee in late September. Fingers crossed!

13 April – 'Building future homes for Abergavenny - not as simple as you may think.'

Society member and editor of Touchstone magazine, Patrick Hannay sets out some of the complex layers of challenges facing designers of new homes, fit for the 21st Century, for those most in need.

11 May – Linda Vista Gardens developments

Nigel Leaworthy and Mark Cleaver from the MCC Grounds Team will give a presentation on the proposed developments at Linda Vista Gardens following the award of a grant of £100,000 from Welsh Government, match funded by Abergavenny Town Council.

8 June – Update on the Future of Nevill Hall Hospital – Hannah Evans, ABUHB Executive

Keen to take up an offer of giving us an update following the consultation exercise and the Health Board's deliberations, we are happy to welcome Hannah Evans once more to conclude our year of meetings.