



Abergavenny and District Civic Society

Preserving the best, improving the rest

A great place to live, work and visit

Dear members

The theme this year (2012 -2013) was '**Abergavenny – past, present and future.**' The Society has continued to actively work on an increasing number of projects along with the Local Authority, Town Council and other agencies. As always we need more members to be active in the society, to join an interest group that enthuses you... don't be shy, it's good fun and we are making progress to ensure that Abergavenny remains a bustling, vibrant town.

Frank Olding started our programme describing Abergavenny in Medieval times. A fascinating and informative talk which of course led on to the state of play today and how the town came to lose what could have been some historical gems in the 'slum clearance' programme. The demolition of the livestock market abattoir buildings earlier this year marked the loss of more historical buildings.

In November we moved camp to the Senior Citizen's Hall for a very successful afternoon event – 'Jam, spam and do-nuts – Abergavenny in the forties'. This was a sell out and our members and guests got through a mountain of sandwiches served by members dressed as Lyons' Tea House nippies! The fashion of the day was modelled by stunning volunteers from Vintage Vision. All were in good voice singing along with Vera Lynn to conclude the afternoon.



Our December social meeting was entertaining and informative with Don Balkwill testing our knowledge of 20 items from his store of 'Grandma's gadgets' fuelled by drinks from the bar and some nibbles. January saw snow, and a lot of it. Our Sunday lunch at St Michael's Centre provided by Jems Catering was in doubt due to the weather and snow. In the event people who expected to be away ended up unable to travel so filled the places of those who couldn't get out at all!! Despite some initial anxiety about whether to cancel the event, a total of 50 brave stalwarts were served a delicious meal, enjoyed a quiz, completed a questionnaire on Castle Meadows and generally had a great time.

At a packed February meeting Nick Ramsay AM, Fiona Beavan from Abergavenny Business Club (ABC) and Will McClean, (Strategic Partnership and Engagement Lead, MCC) discussed the hot topic of 'Regenerating town centres'. Mr Ramsay had chaired the WA Enterprise and Business Committee looking at 'Regeneration of town centres', the report being published in January 2012. This was complemented by the March meeting with speakers talking about what makes Abergavenny special, what events contribute to the town's distinctive character and bring visitors in to the town eg Food Festival, cycling, recently achieved 'Walkers are Welcome' status, MCC's Tourism Team vision for the town. Rachel Rogers from Abergavenny Museum spoke passionately about her desire to see the museum better known and used by people, hosting more events during the year.

In May we welcomed children from Class 3 of Our Lady and St Michael's to our meeting. Facilitated by one of our members Anthea Fairey, pupils had been working on a project called

"Mayfly in the classroom", an initiative funded by the Wild Trout organisation and also through the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF) REACH project. Pupils presented their findings and hosted a display of their art work to parents and society members and a prize was donated by the Art Shop for the most original art work. Simon Evans, Deputy Director of WUF brought a sample of water from the R Gavenny to show the invertebrate life and spoke with passion about the need to protect our rivers and river life. He was enthusiastic about the Society's long term vision for a 'green corridor' along the R Gavenny, to make this beautiful little river more accessible to visitors and residents alike and maybe one day even see the return of salmon leaping as would have been the case in the 19th century. This project will be led by Kim Waters and Anthea Fairey so watch this space for further news....

Our final, and completely packed, meeting of this year's programme in June was held in the Angel and is covered in more detail in the section on 'Regeneration'.

The Angel Hotel, one of our affiliated members, has offered to accommodate the Society for forthcoming year's programme. This will allow us to offer a fixed meeting slot of the 2nd Monday in the month, something that was difficult to achieve at St Michael's Centre. The rear door to the ballroom will be unlocked for easy access from the car park.

Please let us have any ideas for future meetings and feedback from meetings is always welcomed. Now for some news from the various interest groups. Sue Konieczny

EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY – Dick Cole

As anticipated in last year's Newsletter, during the winter months about ten volunteers spent chilly, but enjoyable, hours surveying the Monmouth Road and Mardy areas to record their most interesting and characteristic features. Both areas proved to have more interest than might have been expected, and a number of questions about their history have yet to be answered. For example, who laid out the old roads at Mardy that have taken 150 years to develop, and why? Does anyone remember the POW camp on the site of Poplars Close? We presented our results at a meeting on 15 April but have yet to go public in the areas themselves.

This will be an early task in the next phase of the survey, no longer guided by the Civic Trust for Wales. We are working on a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund that will enable us to cover the rest of the town and Llanfoist over three years and do much more in the way of gathering information from local residents. We would like more Society members to get involved so get in touch and join in the fun!

This work is already increasing our expertise and helping us to respond to planning applications. We will also soon have to express our views on the County Council's Conservation Area Appraisal that proposes changes in the Area's boundaries.

In May four members attended a Civic Trust for Wales conference on Characterisation at Shrewsbury. As well as learning from others, Tony Konieczny and Dick Cole presented lessons from Abergavenny's own experience, starting with an attention-grabbing sketch in the style of Pete and Dud (if you can remember them).

We are grateful to the Trust, and Anna Leron in particular, for helping us start this pioneering work, which has resulted in a Trust manual that will help others across Wales.

PLANNING – Dick Cole

The outcome of the Public Hearing into the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan will not be known for some months, but the Inspector's request for more housing land has not led the Council to put forward more edge of town sites at Abergavenny. However, it may suggest that the controversial Deri Farm site at Mardy is likely to be approved.

We have become more confident with our observations on planning applications, with an advisory group of up to 8 members. We have commented on more than a dozen applications including the outline proposal for more housing at the Coopers site at Llanfoist (supported and approved by MCC), a leisure use on the Mill Street industrial site (objected but approved), renovations at 46 Cross Street (supported and approved), the McCarthy and Stone retirement flats (supported in principle, favoured three-storey, approved), an extension of Baileys DIY on Brecon Road (improved access sought, unsuccessfully) and housing at Red Barn, Brecon Road (objected, yet to be determined). Our comments are often on matters of detail (eg housing at the Westgate site and retirement homes at The Knoll) and may sometimes be subjective where architectural style is concerned, though we try to take a balanced view.

3 members attended a Council training session on planning procedures held at Monmouth, to which we were invited following a request made after a meeting of the county's civic societies.

The Society expressed concern to MCC that their performance in determining applications within eight weeks was, by a considerable margin, the worst in Wales. A full explanatory reply was received, though it was not entirely convincing, and we were invited to contribute to the development of their Development Control Customer Charter. We have responded and a constructive relationship is our main objective.

Welsh Government is expected shortly to issue a White Paper on planning, which may need a Society response.

Smart town – Anna Petts

As part of the CS Smart Town Initiative, we have been looking at parts of the town that are crying out for improvement and some TLC.

One such area is the narrow strip of land that borders the Fairfield car park at the lower end of Park Avenue. At present, this border contains a few elderly trees and little else except compacted rubble, various desperate weeds and of course litter.

The aim is to level-up the ground surface, install a selection of colourful raised beds for planting, with the possible addition of some simple sculptural features alluding to Abergavenny's traditional fairground - part of the town's heritage. We hope to include some new trees as well.

With MCC's budget facing yet more cuts, the intention is to use recycled materials wherever possible, and community labour and input. Discussions have already taken place with various organisations. And it will all take time. But we are hopeful. Anna Petts

The much needed care of the 'Green spaces' originally identified by the Society has now been absorbed into the work of the Abergavenny Area Community Orchards and Gardens group capably led by Geoff Davies and Laurie Jones.

Abergavenny Tourism Update – Ruth Coulthard

As tourism is one of Abergavenny's main industries, the Society has been involved in improving the welcome to tourists and facilitating discussion on how we can do more.

Following the Good, Bad and Ugly campaign, we have been talking with the County and Town Councils about the various areas that we feel need to be renewed in the town and have been successful at getting a facelift for a number of areas of town. You will hopefully have seen the new town centre notice-boards with the distinctive headers which we promoted. These boards, with a new map, should help highlight the town's key attractions to locals and visitors. The Society has also been offered the board outside Burtons to advertise community activities.

Working with MCC we have looked at signage in town and recommended areas we can work on together, especially the information and route from the railway station to the town centre.

Another big project will be the development of a new tourism action plan, and implementation of this, working with the National Park Authority, County Council, Bryn y Cwm Forum, Food Festival, Business Club, Tourism Association and Abergavenny Walkers are Welcome. The plan is due to be produced in October and delivered over the winter months.

Abergavenny Regeneration – Tony Konieczny

Members of the Society have worked closely with other town organisations and the County Council to develop strategies for the regeneration of our town.

The Society commissioned a conservation report on the Victorian abattoir buildings as MCC's Conservation Appraisal had not been released. Cadw considered the report and surveyed the site but disappointingly came to the conclusion that the buildings did not merit listing as they were of insufficient heritage significance. Shortly afterwards the buildings were demolished.

MCC initiated the Whole Place Plan process with a well attended meeting at St Michael's Centre and four workstreams were subsequently identified. The Society was a major contributor to all of the workstreams through the work of the members who attended the sessions from which the final plan emerged.

The Chair and Vice Chair also attended a seminar organised by Action for Market Towns (AMT) on building a Town Team. This was very informative and Chris Wade CEO of AMT agreed to address this year's final meeting in The Angel to discuss the concept of a Town Team for Abergavenny. Cllr Phil Hobson spoke for MCC and Emma Goode and Janis Davies from Abergavenny Business Club (ABC) gave the perspective of the towns' traders. As Chris Wade pointed out, from the turnout and passion in the room, there is no shortage of ideas and enthusiasm to ensure that our lovely market town remains buoyant and becomes even more vibrant – it just needs ordering and a Town Team and manager, independent of the County and Town Councils may be just the right vehicle to achieve this.

Members of the steering committee have been working closely with the ABC to develop a colour palette for the town. We have met with representatives from Dulux paints and hope to have some ideas and images to present later this year.

MCC have submitted a bid for £4million to the Wales Government 'Vibrant and Viable Places' Scheme. If they are successful the funding will help to realise both the formation of the Town Team and the ambitious redecoration of our town centre. We will know the outcome in September 2013 when the WG decides which bids to accept.

Finances – Mike Foden

The finances of the Society are in good shape as the overall membership, and subsequent income from subscriptions, has risen slightly over the past year.

This year we acquired two pieces of equipment with the purchase of two Pop-up Roller Banners to advertise the Civic Society at meetings and at fund raising events. Over the year we held three table top sales in the market hall which raised £527. We also held a successful coffee morning on St David's Day for 'Keep Wales Tidy' which raised a remarkable £128.

Grateful thanks must go to all those members and friends who donated goods for sale and to all who gave so freely of their time, helping set up and selling on fund raising days.

Membership – Mike Foden

Individual membership has increased slightly over last year with new members joining following their attendance at some of the Society's public meetings. Numbers stand at 98.

We have also had an increase in Affiliated membership, which now stands at 14, and are very grateful for all the support given by the following:

Abergavenny Business Club, Abergavenny Music, The Angel Hotel, Celtic Computers, Hardwick Restaurant, JayBee Soft Furnishings, Judd Bros, Abergavenny Market Traders Assoc., Red Builders, C Roberts & S Harris Architecture and Energy, Serendipity Hair Salon, Smiles Better, Taurin Taylor Associates and The Woolcroft.

Subscriptions for 2013 -14 will be due from September so please get them, either by cash or cheque, to 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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Programme of meetings to run up until June 2014

New venue - the Angel Hotel (ballroom) starting at 7.30 pm

Each year we try to organise a programme of relevant and interesting meetings and social events for members. Some flexibility is needed to accommodate issues/topics that will come up.

9 September: Heritage – maximising our historical and character defining assets/keeping our history alive with:

- David Llewellyn, Valleys Regional Park a successful regional model based on maximising the local heritage as an economic driver including developing local pride within the assets
- Rachael Rogers, Abergavenny Museum speaking on Monmouth-wide cultural initiative and the opportunities for Abergavenny

14 October: AGM at 7pm followed by meeting at 7.30pm

Abergavenny – food town & more. Looking at the use of local products and ingredients, how the 'food title' relates to the whole of Abergavenny throughout the year with:

- Nigel Burton, Chair of Abergavenny Food Festival and local chefs

11 November: Abergavenny's night sky

Planetarium experience and talk plus a minibus trip to Keeper's pond (weather permitting)

9 December or possibly Saturday afternoon – venue tbc

Mince pies and sherry/tea or coffee (possibly in Trinity church hall). A social event (variety of quizzes for teams) possibly finishing with some carols

January lunch (date to be confirmed) - Repeat of last year's successful Sunday lunch with Jems catering – St Michael's Centre

10 February: Arts and artists in Abergavenny

What inspires artists to live & work here? The Bethany chapel, a welcome addition to the town

10 March: Local Flora and fauna with a Speaker from **Gwent Wildlife Trust****14 April: River Gavenny 'green corridor' project** – Kim Waters and Anthea Fairey

A progress up-date on this project, working with partners to make the Gavenny properly accessible and ultimately see salmon once more spawning in this delightful little river

12 May: Town Team Abergavenny

News of how the formation of a town team is progressing – this idea came out of MCC's 'Whole Place' consultations and was endorsed at our final public meeting in June 2013 by Chris Wade, CEO of Action for Market Towns

June (date to be confirmed) – an outing to another town and Civic Society, possibly Cirencester

News Items

Wall2wall Jazz Festival - 31st August & 1st September

A great line up of gigs including two major free gigs and a young jazz musicians' workshop!

Tidy Wales Week 16 September 2013

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 or phone Tom Ward Jackson of Keep Wales Tidy on **029 2072 6988**

Environment & Community Fayre - Sunday 27 October

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

Please look out any good quality saleable items that are cluttering up your homes for this stall and consider helping out on the day – it is great fun!

Advent to Candlemass - A flower festival. St Mary's Church 21 - 26 November

Rather than merely providing some financial support for this event, some intrepid members of the society have decided to get involved and produce a flower arrangement. The title we have been given is 'Religious Changes - Ann Boleyn'. Please support us and the event!