



*Abergavenny and District Civic Society
Preserving the best, improving the rest
A great place to live, work and visit*

Dear members

This year (2013 – 14) has brought some very positive results, action instigated by the Society working collaboratively on an increasing number of projects with the Local Authority, Town Council, Abergavenny Business Club and other agencies. Civic Trust for Wales wrote about us as an example of a Society that had been successfully rejuvenated – here is the link to read about it

http://civictrustwales.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/rebuilding-a-civic-society_abergavenny.pdf

Members enjoyed a packed programme, varying from the arts and local artists through green matters of local flora and fauna and the Gavenny Project via the Night Sky with a planetarium in the Angel ballroom to considering the case for developing a Business Improvement District (BID). In June we had an enjoyable trip to Cirencester to round off the year's programme.

More members, especially younger members, playing an active role in the society are always needed to ensure that Abergavenny remains a bustling, vibrant, relevant town for generations to come. Anyone is welcome to join an interest group that enthuses you... don't be shy, it can be good fun and you will learn a lot on the way!

Understanding Abergavenny – Dick Cole

The survey stage of our Exploring Abergavenny project with the Civic Trust for Wales ended before the end of 2013, with about a third of the town covered. Report-writing has since been almost completed, but our energies have been given to considering how to complete the task and to share it with residents.

It has taken many months of discussion, form-filling and preparing costs, but we are now nearly ready to make an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Civic Trust and the County Council's Museum Service will be supporting partners in an ambitious £60,000 three-year project that we have called 'Understanding Abergavenny' as it will probe more deeply into the development of the town, drawing on local knowledge, memories and perceptions. If we are successful we will have a part-time Project Officer to help us run the project, which will still depend heavily on keen volunteers, and ensure that it has lasting value via a website and digital archiving with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

We recognise that we may not be successful with our grant application, but we are determined to at least complete the survey and reporting, even if it takes a few years. We would love to hear from more people interested in the growth of the town, its architecture, and gathering information from the community, and prepared to volunteer some time to the project.



On Saturday, 12 July, we were pleased to entertain a group of Newtown Civic Society members, also doing their own characterisation survey, with a descriptive tour of parts of the town. The Mayor of Abergavenny Cllr Martin Hickman and his Consort very kindly welcomed the party with light refreshments in the Mayor's Parlour.

Members may recall that several years ago the County Council commissioned an Appraisal of the Conservation Area. We have a copy of the outcome, which has been agreed for consultation by the Council, but their staffing shortages have prevented any action on this. An updated report, which includes the consultants' summary characterisation of the central Conservation Area and suggests some changes to

its boundary, is now likely to be consulted upon before the end of the year, and we have offered to help the process without prejudicing our own views.

Planning – Dick Cole

Early in 2014 the County Council adopted its Local Development Plan for the county, as amended by the Inspector following the Public Hearing in 2013. Apart from the Deri Farm housing site at Mardy put forward by the Council, no other proposal for peripheral development of the town was agreed. As the LDP only covers the period to 2021, the Council soon has to start planning beyond that, and Abergavenny may face some difficult choices regarding future growth. The Society will need to engage closely with this process.

Often assisted by our characterisation work, we have commented to the planning authority on about ten planning applications during the past year, with mixed results. They include:

- an objection to the layout of the Premier Inn and Brewers Fayre proposal at Llanfoist: Dick Cole addressed the Planning Committee but it was approved without alteration;
- an objection to the design of a Costa coffee shop at Llanfoist: decision deferred to allow submission of improved design; none yet made public;
- observations on layout of David Wilson Homes development at Llanfoist: no changes resulted;
- welcomed housing infilling on Merthyr Road but concerned about parking provision: approved;
- welcomed proposals for 43/43a Frogmore Street (formerly Farm Foods): undetermined, with issues arising from shopping frontage policy;
- observed favourably on modern design of house proposed in Union Road East: approved;
- welcomed proposals for 51 Frogmore Street (formerly Britannia Inn), especially amended plans for front elevation: undetermined;
- commented adversely on details of an infilling proposal on Stanhope Street: undetermined.

We have had constructive meetings with officers of both the development control (re their Customer Charter) and conservation teams of MCC. We believe these have improved our credibility with the authority and our understanding of their processes, though constraints on their time and scope to negotiate seem likely to limit practical improvements. An example is the publicity given to significant planning applications, where they already do more than the legal requirement yet many in the community are unaware of changes threatened. Despite following Government guidance, their refusals on design grounds are often not supported at appeals. The Council's slow decision-making on planning applications, about which we expressed concern in 2013, has much improved.

More encouraging was a Welsh Government consultation that suggested that the forthcoming Planning Bill would require many applicants to conduct pre-application community consultations. In the spirit of that we have recently approached developers of Deri Farm and The Hill for pre-application meetings. The Society made other detailed responses to Welsh Government on this planning consultation and on proposals for a Heritage Bill.

Smart Town

The society has been given the use of a Notice board outside Burtons – any requests for posters or suitable information to be added should be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com



The society helped buy a new Plaque in Bailey Park commemorating the planting of 25 trees by the Civic Society for the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the addition of 3 more

trees, planted by Friends of Bailey Park for the more recent Diamond Jubilee as the old plaque was past its sell by date!



The smart town sub-group is keen to continue its involvement with Abergavenny in Bloom. The Society applauds the effort for flowers to be more 'bee friendly' and wholeheartedly supports MCC having sown wildflowers on roundabouts and various strips of land



We hope that such colour or possibly some new trees may be seen at some point in the future on the narrow strip of land that borders the Fairfield car park at the lower end of Park Avenue and continue to work towards this but know that it will all take time. Tony Konieczny, our Chairman, has been instrumental in getting trailer loads of muck to the Abergavenny Area Community Orchards and Gardens group capably led by Jeff Davies and Laurie Jones.

Abergavenny Tourism - Ruth Coulthard

The Civic Society has been playing a key role in developing a new tourism plan with a difference for Abergavenny. For the first time, an alliance has been created between businesses, local authorities, community groups and residents to identify the priorities for enhancing Abergavenny's tourism offer and promoting it to the wider world.

Included in the top ten actions are proposals to work together to develop joint promotions and mini marketing campaigns for the town, bring together event organisers to increase the benefit that events bring to town centre businesses and increase the amount of information available to potential visitors.

Alongside this, St Mary's Priory is developing new tools to explain the special features of the church, Abergavenny Local History Society has launched a QR (Quick Response barcode) trail and Monmouthshire County Council are developing new proposals to enhance information and interpretation on food and drink. You may have heard too about the Ambassador programme that was run where nearly 100 people in the county signed up to learn more about their local area and the unique aspects we can be proud of. These are all great initiatives which will add to the town's already strong offer.

We are currently working on production of short films with some overhead shots, to showcase the uniqueness of Abergavenny which can be used by businesses and other agencies to help promote the town to the wider world. We are also working to develop a long term relationship with local ambassadors to create an even warmer welcome to visitors in town.

Exciting times and really positive for all involved in the Civic Society to help support these initiatives which underpin our vital tourism economy! You will have an opportunity to hear all about the latest developments next year in our April meeting (for the whole programme see page 8).

Abergavenny Regeneration Report – Tony Konieczny

The last year has seen some significant progress in the regeneration programme for Abergavenny and the Bryn y Cwm area. Our Society has been instrumental in pulling together partners to make what were once aspirations into real actions.

In partnership with Abergavenny Town Council, the Business Club and the MCC Market Hall Management team, we commissioned a baseline survey of our town. This was completed in June and gives us a comprehensive audit of the town centre business offer, the parking capacity and usage, footfall analysis and indication of our tourism potential. The shopping survey revealed many comments about our town both appreciative and critical. There is much to digest in the comprehensive report and it will be extremely useful for us to understand the impact on the town if and when the new Morrison's store starts trading. Mike King, Senior Consultant for Town Alive will be presenting the report and its implications at a public meeting on 2 September in St Michael's Centre, Abergavenny at 7.00pm.

Members of the committee have also been working closely with the Business Improvement District (BID) team to progress this ambitious project for the retail and service sector in the town. MOSAIC, the consultants, who are charged with bringing this to a vote for the business community have been given the go ahead to complete the project after successful completion of the first phase.

You may remember our meeting last October when we debated the legacy of our highly successful Food Festival. Many members gave us their thoughts and opinions after the meeting and we were able to contribute to the design of another consultation which was being undertaken by Adventa to look at improving the branding of both Abergavenny and Monmouthshire as Food destinations.

The Civic Society continues to be represented on the Town Team and much progress has been made. However, there are many strands to pull together and we are awaiting further news of the development of the BID so that we can rationalise the aims and objectives and avoid duplication.

There is no doubt that Civic Society is well regarded by the partners it continues to work alongside. As public finances dwindle we will need to find partners who can offer to match fund projects that will continue to make Abergavenny a vibrant and prosperous community. Although the Civic Society will always be a financial minnow we can, by carefully choosing the projects to support, continue to be a key stakeholder in the development of the town.

Gavenny Project report – Simon Bilsborough

The River Gavenny gives Abergavenny its name. The source is found in springs at Blaenawey, high on the north side of the Sugar Loaf, which flows through Bettws and joins with a second tributary which rises in Blaengavenny Wood, it then flows south for about 4 miles, passing through Abergavenny (adjacent to Swan Meadows) to its confluence with the River Usk. In comparison with the Usk, a large river which flows to the south of the town, the Gavenny is much smaller and much less visible. The Gavenny is marked by a road sign for vehicles approaching Abergavenny from the south, travelling over a small town bridge before entering the town, but apart from this the river is largely un-noticed and has become hidden within Abergavenny.

Our vision for the River Gavenny is to make it a more central part of the town's rich natural environment, providing greater visibility to, and opportunities for, residents and visitors to enjoy walking alongside the river; to enhance the water quality and overall health of the river, and support its rich wildlife; and to remove blockages within the river to enable it once more to support spawning salmon.



We will achieve this through more active management of the River Gavenny, from its source to its meeting the Usk; through undertaking specific projects aimed for example at removing impediments to salmon; through engaging with the community including schools and showing school children the wonder of the wildlife to be found in a healthy river; and through

working with landowners and others to help enhance the river.

Through this work we hope that the River Gavenny becomes more central to the ongoing economic, social and environmental regeneration of Abergavenny, and that by making it more accessible and sustaining its health and quality over the long term, it will be a resource that is sustainably managed to contribute to the wellbeing of everyone.



We are hoping that work on constructing a fish pass at the Mill street weir will be completed by the end of September. Management of encroaching riverside trees has also been undertaken in Swan Meadow along with the installation of small log dams which will improve the quality of the habitat and encourage greater diversity. If you are interested in being involved in this project please contact us at abercivsoc@gmail.com or speak to Tony on 01873 858912

War Memorial to the 3rd Battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment, Frogmore Street.

Written by Michael Prys-Williams, May 2014.

I have been involved with our Memorial since 2001 when I was a Town Councillor and brought its condition to the attention of the Town Council. Since that time, I have been involved with both the Town Council and Monmouthshire County Council.

I obtained quotations for cleaning from specialist conservation contractors and obtained £1600 from Town Council and MCC and the work was completed in 2005. As an individual and Society member, I arranged the finance through Abergavenny Civic Society at that time.

I made several enquiries regarding the settlement of the memorial to the West which I understand was caused by a collapsed drain. MCC investigated this at the time. I wrote to Alun Griffiths in 2006 who said that he had noticed the gradual incremental settlement of the Memorial and he agreed it needed to be halted sooner than later. He said that there were a number of patented methods of arresting settling. Mr Griffiths was unable to undertake the work, however, he enclosed a donation for £100 as his father was in the South Wales Borderers Regiment. He also said that he totally approved my aims to restore this Monument to first class condition.

For some years no organisation assumed responsibility although one penny was placed on the rates in 1921 when the Memorial was erected. I believe that this applied to all First World Memorials in the country. However, this appears to have been lost with the changes in authorities since that time.

After several delays, in 2008 MCC said that they had assumed responsibility and insured the Memorial. I am currently seeking confirmation of this arrangement, as I am sure that I will be asked to confirm that adequate insurance is in place when I apply for funding for the repair and cleaning. I will be looking for support from Town Council MCC and/or Civic Society for processing the finance.

Having been made aware of work being undertaken throughout the country by Civic Voice UK, I noticed work being carried out on Memorials whilst travelling recently through Kent and Sussex. As we approach the commemoration of the 1914-1918 War, Cllr Prosser suggested that we attend a conference at Bulth Wells to discuss the restoration of all Memorials in Wales. I obtained details from three organisations - Cadw, War Memorials Trust and the Heritage Lottery fund and shall obtain quotations to stabilise and renovate our Memorial and obtain match funding to cover the cost.

This Memorial is unique and is one of Gilbert Ledward's finest works. I feel we have a duty to maintain it for future generations so that we can continue to remember those who gave their lives in that War.

Visit to Cirencester, Capital of the Cotswolds on 21 June 2014

Clive & Kath Bransom

Midsummer's Day lived up to its name as, with the sun shining and a blue sky, we arrived in Cirencester. After a quick coffee break we headed into the Parish Church of St John the Baptist. Situated in the centre of the town, it is an impressive building which has undergone much alteration and extension over the centuries. Recent refurbishment included work on the massive South Porch, costing 3.5 million pounds. This was mainly funded by the community, a tribute to the wealth and generosity of the town. We were treated to a detailed tour of the church and its many interesting medieval features.

Then we had a chance to admire the wide main street where we were struck by the varied colour palette of the old buildings, which gave it a vibrant feel. It was encouraging to see the innovative use of some of the old buildings, such as 2 rows of independent craft shops leading to the indoor market.



Lunch followed in the Crown Inn, a solid repast (particularly for those who chose the risotto!) We were then taken around the town in 2 groups by Cirencester Civic Society members and spent a fascinating hour looking at the varied and impressive townhouses. A beautiful Georgian street lead up to the massive iron gates of the 3000 acre Bathurst Estate. The houses, now highly desirable, were originally built by the Earl of Bathurst for retired estate workers.

Our party reassembled for a generous tea, served and provided by Cirencester members. Over tea, representatives of the Town Team described its development and present status, emphasising the involvement of the youth of the town, including the revelation that the current Mayor is just 21 years old! A Youth Council promotes activities for young people such as an annual Music Festival.



We had no time to visit Cirencester Museum housing Roman and other interesting relics found in and around the town, including some magnificent mosaic flooring. If you're visiting Cirencester in the future, allow an hour or two for this.

All in all, we had a thoroughly enjoyable and fascinating day and would strongly encourage others to join us for our next outing in 2015.

Many thanks to Ruth who liaised with our Cotswold counterparts and made all the arrangements, to Sue and Tony who looked after us on the day and to Duncan and Tony who took the photos.

Finances and 100 Club – Ian Vicary

Whilst our finances remain robust there is an ever increasing demand on the Society to fund the special projects we want to be involved with, particularly as Government and Assembly funding cutbacks in recent months have practically stopped all forms of grants. With the Towns Alive project we shared the cost with the Town Council and Business Club. However, there will be projects in the future which we want to pursue for the betterment of the Town which we will have to fund ourselves. Your membership subscription pays for the day to day running costs such as meetings, guest speaker's costs, etc but there is only a small amount left over to fund any major activities.

From time to time we organise table top sales and raffles to raise more funds. Not all our members can take part in such events and for this reason it was decided to start up a **100 Club** which will allow everybody to participate and at the same time have a chance to win prizes - and at much better odds than the Lottery. We have had over forty expressions of interest so far and it will be starting in September with the first draw scheduled for our AGM in October, so if you have already put your name down then a big thank you. Some have even indicated that you want two or more tickets, so an even bigger thank you!! We still need another fifty of you to join so if you have not yet put your name down then now is the time to do so; and remember that this is open to all your friends and family as well. For business associate members it is also open to your colleagues and staff.

If you require more details or want to join please email, phone or write to me now, or contact any committee member. Thank you

Ian Vicary Treasurer ian@vicary1name.freemove.co.uk
01873 854929 17 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW

Membership – Mike Foden

Our membership has increased slightly from last year and now stands at 106. Our Affiliated membership also increased by four to 18 and we are very grateful for the support given to us by businesses to help further our ambitions for improvements in Abergavenny.

A list of supporters is as follows:

Abergavenny Business Club, Abergavenny Music, Abergavenny Markets Traders Assoc, The Angel Hotel, Broadleaf Books, Celtic Computers, Hardwick Restaurant, Homemakers Recycling, JayBee Soft Furnishings, Judd Bros, Kings Arms, Red Builders, C. Roberts & S. Harris Architecture and Energy, Robin Elt Shoes, Serendipity Hair Salon, Smiles Better, Taurin Taylor Associates and The Woolcroft.

Subscriptions for 2014 - 15 will be due from September so please get them, either by cash or cheque, to Membership Secretary, Mr M J Foden, 3 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW

Under 65 £10

Over 65 £8

Student £1

Affiliated membership £20

Programme of meetings to run up until June 2015

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

Each year we try to organise a programme of relevant and interesting meetings and social events for members usually on the second Monday of the month. Some flexibility is needed to accommodate issues/topics that arise.

2 September: joint public meeting at 7pm in St Michael's Centre, Pen y pound

Mike King, Senior Consultant of Towns Alive presents the report of the benchmarking survey and audit of Abergavenny Town Centre commissioned by the Town Council, Abergavenny Business Club, and the Civic Society

8 September: *NB Change of Venue- Brecon Room, Angel Hotel*****

Exploration of 500 million years of Earth History with Alan Bowring, Fforest Fawr Geopark Officer. A chance to learn about the global importance of our local rocks.

13 October: AGM followed by an audience with the Mayor, Cllr Hickman and Town Clerk Peter Johns who will talk about the future of our town and how we can work together. This will be followed by a wider discussion with members on the Society's future and its priorities. Your chance to influence events!

10 November: A Future for Historic Buildings

Edward Holland speaking with particular reference to the work of The Prince's Regeneration Trust. Plus a short update from Michael Prys-Williams on Abergavenny's war memorial

8 December:

Christmas Social with seasonal refreshments and enchanting tales from the renowned local story teller Daniel Morden

January lunch (date and venue tbc) - Repeat of our annual highly successful New Year Sunday lunch

9 February: Bee Friendly Abergavenny

Bees and their needs – a chance to hear from a range of experts on the importance of bees and what is being done to help bring them back and survive.

9 March: What lies beneath Abergavenny?

A unique chance to hear from archaeology expert Professor George Nash on recent findings underneath St Mary's Priory and the Cattle Market

13 April: Welcome to Abergavenny

An update from the Tourism Alliance on the latest developments to promote Abergavenny and create a warm welcome

11 May: Blaenavon World Heritage Site

The past, present and future of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site - a chance to hear about the international legacy of our local world heritage site, its current challenges and latest initiatives

June (date to be confirmed) – A further meeting or summer outing to be confirmed