



Abergavenny and District Civic Society

Preserving the best, improving the rest

A great place to live, work and visit

www.abercivsoc.com

Newsletter - September 2026

Dear friends

This last year we enjoyed another programme of interesting and thought-provoking presentations although there were also some disappointments when two meetings were unable to go ahead due to a lack of decision-making progress by the Welsh Government. Our first meeting co-hosted by MCC's Green Infrastructure Team and held in St Michael's Centre was about Otters in our local rivers with expert Lee Jenkins. After the AGM Dani Farrington gave an insight into the process of painting large scale murals and this was followed by Nick Miller telling us about sustainable farming at Pen-y-worlod Farm where award winning pasture fed lamb is raised.



Bringing the year to an end, the amazingly talented Maryna Korolova gave us a glimpse of Ukrainian Christmas traditions, ably helped by her children. The hall was packed to capacity and we all enjoyed the fantastic Ukrainian carols, including the well known Carol of the Bells and her playing of the hauntingly beautiful piano piece Melodia by Myroslav Skoryk, often regarded as a spiritual musical symbol for modern Ukraine. Traditional Ukrainian food and drink was also provided for us to taste. That evening we raised over £500 to help send items to Ukraine and purchase much needed medical equipment.

In February 2026, Jim Quinn told us about the Growing Space project at Mardy Park. His ready smile and enthusiasm for his horticultural work with volunteers with learning difficulties made it easy to see why this project is such a success. Next, we were given an update on the Plas Gunter Mansion conservation project and heard about the good news of the lottery funding being awarded. Patrick Hannay, editor of Touchstone Magazine, gave a thought-provoking presentation about the many hurdles facing developers wishing to build housing stock nowadays. Unfortunately, the speakers from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board were unable to give us any up-date on the future of Nevill Hall hospital but will do so this coming year and likewise Nigel Leaworthy from MCC Grounds Team was not in a position to provide information on proposed development at Linda Vista Gardens, again this has been postponed to the coming year. We were fortunate that Sandra Rosser, Principal Officer of the Town Council and Rob Howells, Horologist stepped into the breach for our May meeting and told us about the project to modernise and restore the iconic Town hall clock and chimes.

Chairman's Report – Tony Konieczny

It has been another successful year for our Society. We gained recognition from Wales in Bloom for our Tesco Bus Stop Beds' project and a small group of volunteers from our membership continue to maintain the beds. We owe a debt of gratitude to the assistance we have been given from Abergavenny Garden Centre. Gavin and his team applied a second dressing of mulch to the beds in the spring, and plants to fill the many gaps in the second bed were generously donated by Growing Space at Mardy Park and Mary Barkham. The MCC Community Infrastructure team will install a much-needed low fence to deter cyclists from riding through the beds and, hopefully, prevent the dog fouling that has become a real nuisance.

We have invested in some new audio-visual equipment for the Society donating the older equipment to Benthg rather than sending it for recycling. The new equipment is totally compatible with current

computers and has the capacity for video playback with sound, as some of our guest speakers include video excerpts in their presentations.

Our new website is proving to be very popular and we will endeavour, with the help of The Media Agency, to keep it up to date with regular news items and details of our meetings.

Many members of the Executive Committee have been in role for several years now. I am concerned that the future of the Society is likely to be in question very soon as it was back in 2009 and the running of the Society going forward is rapidly becoming an issue. We need new members who can give a small amount of time to help and without your support the Society will no longer be able to function. The current executive committee can support anyone who wishes to come onboard so nobody will be left to flounder. We have achieved so much in the last 16 years and made a significant contribution to the continuing development of our lovely town. It would be a great shame to lose the opportunity, as a respected Society, to meaningfully engage with shaping the decisions that affect our natural and built environment.

Planning - Dick Cole

Last year's Newsletter summarised the representations that we had made on the county's **Replacement Local Development Plan**. In response to thousands of other representations, the Council made no substantial changes to the plan and in early 2025 sent it and a vast number of accompanying documents for examination by independent Inspectors. Every representation will be considered, but the Inspectors main concern is not whether the plan is the best possible but whether it meets tests of 'soundness', notably that it can be acceptably delivered. In response to an opportunity to supply the Inspectors with supplementary statements, the Society has submitted a detailed criticism of the inadequate provision for pedestrian, cyclist and mobility scooter bridging of the railway to reach the town from the proposed East Abergavenny development, to which we objected for this reason. Delayed by an administrative oversight, the online hearings will start in September and the Inspectors' conclusions are likely to be announced in mid-2027. The Inspectors are already listing searching questions to be answered – such as whether Abergavenny's Green Wedge is really needed to prevent development that could be prevented by other policies.

The Council's Conservative group, which voted against the submitted plan, has already anticipated that next May's elections will result in a new administration. This could take advantage of a recent Supreme Court decision on Wrexham's LDP and decide not to adopt the Inspectors' conclusions, but to restart the RLDP process. This could mean ten years without an up-to-date plan and no policies for more affordable housing or higher environmental building standards.

As if that is not enough, we will be consulted on a preferred strategy for a regional **Strategic Development Plan** in 2028. This plan will pre-determine new large housing sites for the next RLDP and will therefore need close attention.

The **Town Centre Placemaking Plan** was adopted by the Town and County Councils in December 2025. We welcomed it as a valuable and comprehensive framework for progressing regeneration, if ambitious in



terms of capital expenditure for 'the coming years'. In effect it contains a broadly prioritised long list of minor and major actions to draw upon as opportunities arise. Community involvement was high and the councils are committed to some 'quick wins'. All projects require further study and detailing. Some key highway projects will depend on the agreement of the Welsh Government. £350,000 has been allocated this year for a 'changing places' public toilets etc building in the Castle Street car park. The Placemaking Partnership Group has had early involvement in the design of both this building and that on the vacant Frogmore Street site to be used for retailing and social housing.

Planning applications:

We have not felt the need to comment on any major planning applications during the past year, though we are keen to see proposals for the 'Richards site' on Frogmore Street, cleared after the fire in November 2024. We have accepted in principle several proposals for new detached houses in the Conservation Area, but all with reservations about the details, notably one in Avenue Road.



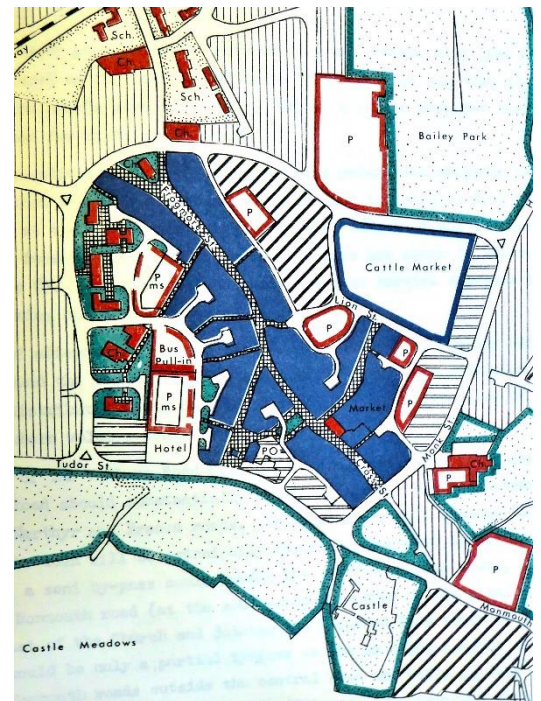
We objected to squeezing a house into North Street and we had some highway and detailed concerns about an otherwise acceptable proposal to convert a pair of properties on Brecon Road to 'transitional accommodation'. Illuminated signs on an Italian restaurant on Frogmore Street, acceptable to us, were considered unacceptable by MCC's heritage officer on Conservation Area policy grounds but approved by the planning committee. We hope to suggest less rigid policy terms for illumination this winter. MCC approvals during the year have included 12 business units on Nantgavenny Lane and assisted living accommodation at the former office block on the Brecon Road roundabout (trees to be retained).

Saved from the Bulldozers Fifty Years Ago

Collaboration with George Beale, author of a recent Chronicle article on Grofield, has prompted Dick Cole to write these recollections of plans for Abergavenny over fifty years ago. Dick was a town planner with the county council from 1969-93.

In January 1965 James Kegie, the renowned planning officer of the pre-1974 Monmouthshire County Council, published his draft Town Centre Map for Abergavenny. Typically ambitious of the early 60s, it proposed numerous radical changes to the town including:

- A ring road around the centre that would have carved through Grofield between Tudor Street and Brecon Road, linked Brecon Road and Park Road behind the Baptist Church, and widened Lower Castle Street to enable Monk Street to connect with a new road extending Castle Street north of the castle to Monmouth Road.
- Redevelopment of much of Grofield with multi-storey car parks, bus stops, service access to the rear of Frogmore Street and Nevill Street businesses, and landscaped public buildings.
- A fully pedestrianised centre from the Angel to the Baptist Church, together with Market Street.
- Extension of the cattle market west to King Street.
- Allocation of the northern side of Lower Cross Street, outside the ring road, for residential use with property clearance for amenity open space opposite.
- All property south of Castle Street cleared for open space.



By 1965 the optimism of the post-war economy had been dented by financial crises, and the viability of such ambitious plans was starting to be doubted. Public opinion was unimpressed by reconstruction that lacked the appeal of much that it replaced, and many in Abergavenny questioned the wisdom of Kegie's plan. In November 1965 a certain John Wilson made an eloquent and persuasive appeal in the Chronicle calling for strongly led community resistance to the plan and for the formation of a civic society. An Abergavenny Civic Committee composed of representatives of fifteen local organisations attacked the plan

for favouring the needs of traffic over those of Grofield's elderly residents, and the Civic Society itself was launched in 1967. Kegie, a guest at the occasion, stated that: 'If every citizen of Abergavenny belonged to this civic society there would be no problem of ugliness or bad planning. No-one – architect, trader or local authority – would dare to do anything that would detract from the town's appearance and welfare.' We still have to achieve that expectation. John Wilson was a leading Society member until 2010 and frequently attended our meetings until he died at the beginning of 2022, aged 92.

The Civic Committee prepared its own compromise response to the 1965 plan. The new road through Grofield should be rejected and the housing be unaffected, but the rest of the major road proposals were largely accepted. More modest car parks, bus stops and rear accesses behind Frogmore Street and Nevill Street should be reached by a one-way loop off Tudor Street using Baker Street and a new road close to the town wall. The extent of pedestrianisation should be similar to that which we have today. The Chamber of Trade also joined the opposition. Their emphasis was on seeking what is now the Castle Street car park, retaining shops on the north side of Lower Cross Street and rejecting expansion of the cattle market at the expense of businesses and homes. Only the Castle Street car park differed from the Civic Committee's proposals. Kegie met both organisations and press reports suggest that he was quite easily persuaded to withdraw several proposals despite his characteristic strong will. However, he would not back down on the destructive new road through Grofield.

Despite these concessions, a revised Town Centre Plan was not prepared. James Kegie would have been aware that the Wilson government was moving to modify UK planning and housing policy. The designation of Conservation Areas was allowed in 1967 and the 1969 Housing Act enabled the declaration of General Improvement Areas (GIAs) where home improvement grants and grants for environmental improvement shifted the balance in favour of conservation. Kegie's small department was greatly expanded in 1969 with new blood, including my own, that was keen to follow new directions.

In January 1970 the Borough Council announced its new 12-year housing clearance programme. The clearances of older parts of Abergavenny in the 1950s and 1960s, decayed though these were, divided opinion. Hindsight forgets the state of those areas, evident in photographic records, and there was no financial incentive for restoration. Space was needed for car parks and public buildings, and rehousing was easy in council housing north of the town. But moving on to demolish Grofield housing, together with other proposals in the 1965 plan, had clearly roused public opposition. The new clearance programme of over 100 homes selected only a few in Grofield and most of the programme was never acted upon. Grofield became a GIA (my colleague Mike McLoughlin worked closely with the Borough Council's Roger Howells on this) and clearance was confined mainly to the northern side of Lower Monk Street and Tiverton Place. Road improvements that required the clearance of properties in Commercial Street and Lower Castle Street were later to be dropped. The GIA plan finally dropped the 1965 road plan through Grofield in favour of a Merthyr Road/Commercial Street improvement. Even this became unnecessary when the A4143 link road replaced the railway in the next decade. Only the Park Road A40 section of the 1965 plan materialised, in 1976. An interesting feature of the GIA plan was a pedestrian area in Gabb Square, still envisaged in the 2025 Placemaking Plan. A car park in the Radstock Yard area did not materialise, but a large one in Castle Street did.

James Kegie retired in 1974 when local government was reorganised and most traces of the 1965 plan disappeared when the new Monmouth District Council produced a more modest plan that guided change until the new century. Abergavenny had narrowly escaped the fate of many other towns – but will those Grofield cottages last for many more decades...?

Lunching out and gardening matters – Judith Vicary

Our Civic Society lunches continue to be very popular with our members. Last October we enjoyed an excellent Italian meal at Il Gusto, where the helpful and efficient staff made it a pleasing experience. In February, allowing for Christmas overindulgence to be well and truly behind us, we enthusiastically returned to the Kings Arms as it is a great favourite with many of our regular diners, only to turn up on their doorstep yet again in May to enjoy a further delightful repast. We are in the throes of planning for our next culinary venture in October, which will be somewhere completely different. Watch this space.

As you are aware, a dedicated team of Civic Society members have thrown themselves into some challenging work in the Tesco beds over the past few months. This reminded me of Civic Society's earlier endeavours in the Sunken Garden in Bailey Park, going way back to 2019. After a complete overhaul of a very weedy area, some members remained as Friends of Bailey Park, working throughout the Covid years, being an important part of Abergavenny in Bloom, and three of them remain as volunteers to this day.

Holywell Volunteers Breathe New Life into Ancient Priory Well - May 2026

At the end of May, a dedicated team of Holywell resident volunteers decided it was time to uncover their neighbourhood's history once again. Here are some images and extracts from their Wales in Bloom submission in the category of Community Heritage Cleanup

"Nestled quietly on Holywell Road lies a remarkable piece of Abergavenny's heritage: the ancient Priory Well. For nearly a thousand years, since Benedictine monks first sourced their water here in 1087, this natural spring has stood as a silent witness to our town's unfolding history.

Over the centuries, it evolved from a vital monastic supply into a sacred medieval holy well. In more recent history, the well was beautifully restored by the Abergavenny Civic Society back



in 1988. However, over the decades, nature steadily tried to reclaim the site. By this spring, a dense wall of overgrown brambles, thick weeds, and encroaching mud had completely hidden the historic landmark from view.

The transformation is nothing short of extraordinary. The beautiful stone courtyard, the historic well pools, and the Civic Society's 1988 plaque have all been proudly brought back into the light. It is no longer a hidden, forgotten corner, but a beautifully preserved focal point the whole community can enjoy.



This project embodies the true spirit of the 'Abergavenny in Bloom - It's Your Neighbourhood' initiative. It is a shining example of how a passionate group of volunteers can make a massive, lasting impact in a remarkably short space of time. A massive thank you to this fantastic local team of volunteers - you have truly made Holywell bloom!"

Membership - Sue Konieczny, Membership Secretary

This year our total paid up membership increased very slightly to 112 with 7 business members to whom we are grateful for their continuing support:

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

Once again, Judd Brothers came up trumps allowing us to use their water to look after the plants in the Tesco beds, particularly new ones popped in to fill some spaces, donated by Mary Barkham and Jim Quinn from Growing Space, for which many thanks.

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

Subscriptions remain unchanged and 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 6AW**. 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

Business - £20

Financial Report – Ian Vicary, Treasurer

The financial position of the Society continues on a sound footing and we ended the year with funds amounting to £11678, a 9% increase over the previous year. This was helped by increases in membership subscriptions, donations and by our 100 Club.

There was no major expenditure this year which allowed us to partially replenish the bank account after our big donation to the Gunter Mansion land purchase and the new web site design and set up.

We are always on the lookout for suitable projects to support financially and which sit within our objectives of making Abergavenny a great place to live, work and play so if you have any ideas or suggestions, do please let us know. Maybe a forgotten corner that needs a little TLC like our Tesco beds project.

These are my draft figures, unaudited and subject to change, although I am not aware of any reason to change them.

100 Club

Over the year 2025/26 we sold all 100 numbers again which was a splendid achievement. A big thank you to you all and especially those who bought multiple numbers. We paid out £850 to thirty lucky winners, ranging from £10 to £100. That gave supporters a thirty three percent chance of being a winner, whilst managing to bolster the Society's coffers by £1530 - again thank you.

This year we hope to repeat this with your help and continued support. Numbers are still just £24 each and you can have as many as you like. The ticket hotline is now open – just email ianvicary@outlook.com or abercivsoc@gmail.com to reserve your number or numbers and pay by bank transfer to our **NatWest account 01523430 sort code 51-61-02** 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 2027

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

14 September – Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) – More than just Bricks and Mortar with Rob Carey - Senior Engagement Officer

MHA is at the heart of the community, providing over 4,000 homes to more than 5,500 tenants. But it is about more than housing, as it delivers community development initiatives, ensuring tenant voices shape and improve service delivery. It creates stronger, more resilient communities where people can thrive, grow and prosper.

***5 October - AGM at 7PM followed by 'A Grand Landscape Masterplan'.**

All progressive health care projects now recognise the vital contribution of nature to well-being. Plans in detail have been developed through consultation for our unique Nevill Hall Hospital landscape and there is funding for 2026-27 to start making improvements. **Patrick Hannay and Tom Williams of Nevill Hall Nature Space CIO** will present those detailed plans seeking your support.

9 November – The Future of Nevill Hall hospital with Hannah Evans and Natalie North, ABUHB Executives

Hannah Evans and Natalie North are keen to give us an update following their first meeting with us, the subsequent consultation exercise and the Health Board's deliberations.

14 December – Members of Abergavenny Borough Band with Lana Tanguy

A chance to socialize over mince pies and mulled fruit punch with superb entertainment.

January 2027 – an opportunity to get together over lunch – date tbc

8 February – Linda Vista Gardens developments - Nigel Leaworthy and Mark Cleaver from the MCC Grounds Team will talk about the proposed developments at Linda Vista Gardens following the award of a grant of £100,000 from Welsh Government. Abergavenny Town Council provided essential additional funding at the bid application stage.

8 March - Overlooked No More: The Life and Work of Abergavenny-Born Author Ethel Lina White - Alex Csurko

Alex, whose PhD was on Ethel Lina White and is regarded as an on the authority on her life and work, will talk about this celebrated interwar author who dominated the suspense and thriller genre alongside Agatha Christie but then fell into obscurity. New information will be in his talk.

12 April – Why have Purple Plaques? – Nancy Cavill, Welsh Labour Group's senior policy officer at the Senedd will tell us something about the significance of Purple Plaques. Should we have some in Abergavenny as to-date we do not appear to?

10 May – Caring About Our Built Heritage – Molly Edwards, MCC's Principal Heritage Officer will describe the challenges she faces to look after the county's Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas'.

14 June – Forgotten parts of Abergavenny: The Workhouse quarter – Dr Joan Allen will shed light on this fascinating area of Abergavenny in collaboration with the Local History Society.