**Chair's Report Abermule with Llandyssil Community Council**

**May 2014 - 15**

It has been my considerable privilege to take the Chair of Abermule with Llandyssil Community Council. I owe a debt of gratitude to former Chairs, Cllrs. Jane Rees and Gwyneth Jones, for their support and advice and to Cllr. Rufus Fairweather for his diligence as Deputy Chair and his enthusiastic liaison work with our excellent school. I have been delighted to attend a number of events at community centres, churches and the School, several of them connected with remembrance of World War 11. The effort, imagination and team work that goes into all of these typifies our community. It would be remiss not to mention the hugely successful and visually stunning Festival of Christmas Trees at St Tyssil's or the School Christmas play and young entrepreneurs event which I left penniless. I have taken the opportunity to get to know more of the local communities and businesses and endeavour to ensure all interests are represented in our widely spread area.

As Chair I determined to continue the task of working towards an ever more visible and transparent Council. This is essential if we are to fairly represent our community in these rapidly changing times moving into the uncharted waters of Welsh Local Government Reform and challenging times for public finances to which we must all respond. There has been steady progress but plenty remains to do. There are good communication routes via the newsletters and community noticeboards but we need to make better use of our website ensuring it is up to date and useful.

Community members are very welcome at council meetings. The meeting with the Rights of Way Officer, for example, attracted a number of people and some close questioning. It is evident how important the footpaths and bridleways are for local people and tourists alike and we will continue to press for improvements and circular routes whilst recognising the enormity of the task for Officers with 14 000 kms of Rights of Way in Powys.

**De-fibrillators:** Cllr Rees’ Chair’s campaign resulted in fantastic fundraising efforts and, with grant support from the British Heart Foundation, both Llandyssil and Abermule will shortly have easily accessible de-fibrillators. There will also be training for First Responders and the benefits of this are perhaps even greater than the equipment itself in the community.

**Dolforwyn Woods:**  another superb fundraising effort enabled the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust to purchase this 30Ha woodland site as a reserve for the enjoyment of all in perpetuity. This is a wonderful community resource and it quickly became evident how much the Woods were valued. The Community Council was pleased to be able to donate and I made this my Chair's Campaign.

**A Small Grants Programme** has been instigated to assist with purchase of equipment, a special event or a new venture to benefit greater numbers. This is a pilot year and we will monitor the response and administration.

**The Burial Ground** (Llanmerewig) is now being appropriately landscaped and will be regularly managed. A grant enabled the installation of a fine oak gate in keeping with the rural location.

**Responses to Consultations:** Welsh Government consultations increase in number. Where there could be an impact for our community we seek to make our views known and a number of cllrs have given generously of their time to get to grips with these documents and formulate responses. We have commented on the highly controversial Planning Bill Wales and the, probably equally controversial, White Paper on Reforming Local Government. These will have far reaching consequences for planning and local democracy if enacted as they stand. We have also responded to two consultations on transport and highways issues and, in some detail, to the initial Draft Local Development Plan. A further Draft Deposit LDP will be issued for consultation in early June. Responding is an important task meriting careful consideration as the LDP will be the defining document against which all planning decisions are made for the next 10 years.

The Community Council is, of course, a statutory consultee for planning applications within or immediately adjacent to our area. There have been fewer applications recently but the duty is taken seriously and plans and accompanying documentation considered carefully. Some applications are highly contentious locally and we endeavour to consider and respond on relevant material planning issues that can be taken into account by the Planning Officer.

**Windfarms and transmission infrastructure** are a continuing major issue for Montgomeryshire with many more applications remaining to be decided. We received a very clear mandate from the community to oppose windfarms and continue to make strong representations. The analysis of the community survey was presented at both the Conjoined Public Inquiry and the Garreg Lywd inquiry and Cllr Rees spoke compellingly at the CPI cumulative session.

The CPI decision is still awaited and may be balanced on the outcome of the elections but, as the Inspector stated, he went away in no doubt as to the overwhelming local objections to the impact on their county and the economy. He fulsomely congratulated the public on the standard and rigour of their arguments. I was present at many of the sessions and can attest that whatever the outcome Montgomeryshire people could not have done more and ultimately it will be a political decision alone.

As a Council we do not operate in isolation. Cllrs regularly attend events and meetings and network with other bodies. This year has seen many developments which we have followed closely:

**Devolution of Services** and **Clustering of Town / Community Councils** occasioned principally by the budget settlements for Powys County Council and the need for significant cuts to services. This is a continuously evolving picture with opportunities emerging around possible economies in costs whilst maintaining best levels of service delivery and around co-operative working with councils with similar concerns to develop initiatives and have a stronger voice.

As part of informing ourselves to best respond a Community Survey was conducted with forms going to households in April. The response was good and following detailed assessment a report will be provided to the community. A number of Welsh communities have now prepared and are implementing Local Plans. This has not been progressed here as I would have hoped but we have a useful first step emerging towards a possible future Plan.

We assisted Welshpool Town Council with the Mid Wales Health Services survey for the Welsh Minister and also the Canals and Rivers Trust with their activity survey towards a major Heritage Lottery bid for the Montgomery Canal. Many helpful responses were received to both. On health, the council is supporting the establishment of an Urgent Care Centre in Newtown and Cllrs Jones, Brewin and Cooper continue to represent us at the Montgomeryshire Practice Forum.

This leads me to one group of people I would like to single out for especial thanks (no individual names but they know who they are!): the tireless band who chivvy the recalcitrant and forgetful; edit; print and distribute the newsletters. These informative bulletins are community glue and, even as only a small -time distributor, I know they are much appreciated. Additionally, it has been through the good auspices of these volunteers that we have been able to circulate surveys.

My gratitude to our dedicated group of Cllrs who use unobtrusively use their skills and time to improve community life in so many thoughtful ways. The community would be much the poorer without them. Our Clerk and contractors ensure the Council and services run smoothly and efficiently and I must particularly thank County Cllr Wynne Jones who is not officially required to attend our meetings but invariably does so providing insightful information as well as acting very promptly on the multifarious issues we report regarding our highways and by-ways.

*Jill Kibble May 2015*