**Report for Abermule (with Llandyssil) Community Council Meeting on 6th April.**

**From: Cllr. Wynne Jones – Elected Member for Powys CC for Dolforwyn Ward.**

1. **Update on Abermule Business Park.**

Site surveys are currently taking place by the County Council with regard to the proposed development of the site, whilst at the same time the legal process that will result in the transfer of the site from WG to Powys CC is underway. Unfortunately WG move very slowly on these matters and this legal process is expected to take months rather than weeks.

As previously mentioned the initial proposals is for a phased development of starter type units along with a County Council presence on the site and up to 24 commercial units of varying sizes. At present the exact use of part of the site by Powys CC has not been decided but as previously outlined to you, we have a need to rationalise our HTR sites and also to vacate the Kirkhamsfield site on Pool Road Newtown which could attract a high price for retail development. At present the preferred option for the Council use of the far end of the Abermule site is for a process plant for recycled materials. We have an urgent need for a site to do this process which will result in significant ongoing savings for the Council and its taxpayers. Being a new process, it will provide new jobs and will fit with the remit for the site laid down by WG in the transfer of the site(employment related). However no decision has been made and will not be made until surveys are favourable and then application for planning permission sought.

Based on the Councils decision to reduce to one Household Waste Recycling Site ( from current 2) rumour has now started to abound in Abermule are that both Newtown and Welshpool HWRS will close to be replaced by a single site in Abermule. I can confirm that this is not true, Abermule site will NOT become host to a Household Waste Recycling Collection site for North Powys.

1. **Powys County Council property rationalisation proposals for North Powys.**

The County Council own a significant amount of property in Powys and although we have been for some time disposing of property assets it is now time to take this agenda to another level, and aggressive property rationalisation programme has started in North Powys, and this will see many changes happening in Newtown and Welshpool. The Council also has the need to co-locate with the Powys Health Board where possible as the two organisations are working towards integration. Some of the changes that are in the pipeline will be surprising (and probably hit the headlines in CT!!) and I will be able to explain the rational in detail at that time. But with some initial outlay in the area, the Council has the opportunity to co-locate lots of staff and several services onto one site, thus making several high value sites in both Newtown and Welshpool available.

1. **Council Tax and PCC budget matters.**

Since your last meeting the Full Council has met (March 9th) and agreed a Council Tax I increase for 2016/17 of 4.25%. This equates to a rise of £48 per annum on a Band D property (Wales average increase £47). The increase in the Counties that shared the lowest WG funding settlement with Powys, are Ceredigion + £54, Monmouth + £57. On Council Tax on a Band D property in Powys the total figure is £1,335, Wales average £1,374, Ceredigion £1,354, Monmouth £1,406, Gwynedd £1,484. The lowest Council Tax in Wales is Cardiff £1,270 ( Band D property) but despite having no cut in funding have still gone up by £46 this year.

With regards to the Councils budget for year 15/16 ( year just ended) it is looking like that we will achieve a small surplus at year end, and this considering some of the things that have hit us in year ( eg. Having to bring Dom Care back in house in South of County at additional cost of £750k), this will be a pleasing outcome. In addition to this, on March 9th, I took a proposal to County Council to change the Minimum Revenue Provision from 4% tapered to 2% straight line on our supported borrowing. Council agreed this proposal and this will provide us with an additional £3m of revenue which will add to the small ‘real’ surplus that we will achieve at year end.

This will mean that since 2012, the Council will have achieved savings of £55m, with another £30m planned for 2016/19. If all goes well by 2019 savings will be £85m in total and the Council will still have all services still running, although with some service delivery adjustments and changes to providers and to deliver methods.

1. **Proposal to raise age for starting school**

Members will remember that this proposal was contained within the budget proposals to achieve an annual saving of around £1.5million. The public consultation on this proposal has been completed and it showed that 80% of respondents were against this proposal. From analysis by far the biggest majority were from parents of young children who will be affected by the change. This will go before Cabinet on 12th April when implementation of the proposal is expected to be agreed.

1. **Removal of Community recycling sites.**

Cabinet will consider a proposal at the meeting on 12th April, to remove the Community Recycling sites across Powys. Some green waste bins ( where provided) may be retained but other recycling bins will be removed. There is no such sites in either the Abermule, Llandyssil or Bettws Communities now, so the Dolforwyn ward in unaffected by this proposal. Recyclates collected at these sites have always experienced a high level of contamination and since the introduction of weekly collections of recyclates there is no real need for these anymore and the saving from removing them is in excess of £300k per annum. These Community sites have always experienced a high level of ‘fly tipping’ also which is an ongoing problem for them.

1. **Schools Transformation Agenda**

There is a good deal of ‘heat’ at present in mid and south of Powys on this issue. Currently three primary schools ( Llanbister, Dolau and Nantmel) are in the consultation process with a view to closure . The proposal is for children from Llanbister and Dolau to transfer to Crossgates Primary School and children from Nantmel to transfer to nearby Rhayader Primary School. All these schools have less than 50 children and two of them just over 30.

On top of that there is also four High Schools in the same process, as the Council proposes to build a new High School at Brecon ( and close Gwernyfed & Brecon High) and to close Builth HS and Llandrindod HS being replaced by one High School for the Mid Powys area. In total those opposed to the above are exercising my email box 30/40 times per day, every day.

A similar process is underway in Welshpool where it is proposed to close all current primary schools there, and build two new schools, one for education in the medium of English and one for education through medium of Welsh. Thankfully the population of Welshpool, including its Councillors are fully supportive of these proposals, so this is proceeding quickly and smoothly.

1. **Powys CC Cabinet changes.**

Cllrs will have read of the resignation from the Cabinet of Cllr. Mayor who was the Portfolio Holder for Property & Housing. Cllr.Mayor is a Governor at Llanfyllin HS where it has been discovered they have used nearly half a million of funds from their delegated budget to subsidise transport for children from England to come to Llanfyllin High School. This practice was stopped by regulation in 2011 and it turns out that Llanfyllin HS and continued to flout the regulations and continued to do this. Cllr. Mayor’s position on the Cabinet therefore became untenable and he duly took the honourable action of resigning. His place on Cabinet will not be filled and the Council Cabinet will reduce from 10 to 9, with responsibilities re-allocated to other Cabinet Members.

1. **Money to spend in ward**

Its always good when as a County Councillor you can bring good news. I have found that within Powys CC specific reserves, there is £26,500 being held from Planning Gains that can and should be spent in Abermule. £20k of that has to be spent on the school, so Terry and staff are currently considering proposals to put to the Governing Body. The remaining £6,500 is to be spent on play provision in Abermule only and I are asking you as the Community Council to decide on what this should be spent on.

1. **And finally, some potential further good news….**

The Council has been undertaking surveys on our primary schools, with a view to making sure we have enough capacity in the few areas where we are seeing a growth in pupil numbers and also to make sure other schools are indeed fit for purpose. Out of this work Abermule School has been identified as a school in need of remodelling due to a low condition survey. Providing that the business case can support the proposal the school may be allocated some funding under 21st Schools funding programme for remodelling work. Its early days yet but fingers crossed !!.