

# Monmouth Town Council



## Annual Report 2008/09



## **Forward by Councillor Terry Christopher.**

After the local elections in May 2008 a new Town Council came in to being.

Within this council there were six new members and despite two of these members leaving the council the remaining members quickly adopted the positive and forward thinking attitude that had been previously introduced. The objectives and aims of the council were to enhance and protect not only the built environment but also fostering improved working relationships within the community.

I would like to congratulate all members on their commitment and hard work for their communities over the past year.

During this time I have visited many clubs and groups within the town. These organisations offer a diverse choice of activities and interests for the people of Monmouth. In the main these clubs and groups are administered and organised by volunteers, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding work that is undertaken by everyone who freely gives their time and energy for the benefit of others.

Some of the highlights of my year as the Mayor were the Community Grants presentation evening, the visit to HMS Monmouth which was docked in Cardiff Bay and I also had the honour of laying a wreath on behalf of the people of Monmouth at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day.

There were also two deeply sad occasions during the year, the death of Rifleman Jamie Gunn, who was killed whilst serving his country in Afghanistan. Also the sad death of one of our Mace Bearers Mr. Graham Powell. Graham served for 40 continuous loyal years as one of the towns' Mace Bearers.

During the past year I supported 3 local worthy causes, they were; Monmouth MS Support Group, Monmouth Tea Dance Group and Monmouth Town/Waitrose Junior Soccer Academy. Over the past 12 months several fund raising events were held, and I would like to thank not only the friends who helped on these occasions, but also the people of Monmouth for their generosity. In particular I would like to express special thanks to Mr. Cedric Gibbons who once again staged the Mayor's Showcase Spectacular.

These events raised a total of £3431.70p.

In the coming years the Town Council will face many challenges, but having said that, I am confident that the members and staff of the council will meet these challenges with their usual enthusiasm.

## **What did the Council do in 2008/2009?**

Community Affairs Committee by Chairman Councillor Mrs A Dewhurst

The Community Affairs Committee has had a busy and pro-active year. Whether the news is positive or not, we have tried to maintain good communications despite both Sunshine Radio and The Free Press moving their bases out of Monmouth.

We are indebted to all the jobseekers who responded to our request for firsthand experience of the consequences of the closure of Monmouth's Job centre and who still are. This evidence is forming the basis of our work to re-establish a one day a week local office. It backs the petition that the Committee took to the National Assembly; the letters to Job centre Wales and UK and will be shown to the Minister for Work and Pensions in Westminster, who has ultimate responsibility. The One Stop Shop and all political parties are supporting us. Meanwhile we are following up the generous and imaginative ideas of local people, as the unemployment rate inevitably rises.

Good publicity meant that we had more applicants than ever to the Community Grants scheme. £8,500 was awarded. This budget has been increased for next year. We were extremely pleased to host an evening when all the successful voluntary groups could make brief but fascinating presentations and network with each other.

Both summer Carnival and Christmas Candlelight procession were well received and largely depended, as always, on volunteers offering their time, skills and equipment. Monmouth Band plays a crucial part in both these landmarks of the year and we are very grateful.

The Committee oversees the Town Council's funding of C.A.B., the Attik and the Festival. All of these organisations have had challenging but very successful years. Attik continues to thrive, even with three of our members on its steering committee! It provides a safe, caring place for young people with a wide range of interests, problems and talents.

We have tried to support the evolving Summer Play Activities organised by Monmouthshire County Council, while keeping an eye on costs.

A Shopmobility scheme for Monmouth is becoming more of a probability, with the hard work of the 50+ group. This committee is helping to fund their investigations towards a result.

Communication with Monnow Vale is becoming more meaningful. We play a full part in the active Users Focus Group. Action initiated by People First, backed by the Committee and led by the Mayor has resulted in reconsidering plans to re-locate many users of Monnow Vale's Day Services and special needs facilities to Abergavenny.

However, despite last year's work by the committee, the so-called trial to close Monmouth's Sunday duty pharmacy rota, has been made permanent. We are relieved that Boots has come to the rescue, for the moment, by opening each Sunday, including their dispensing service. The Local Health Board (LHB) report seems to find this irrelevant and would have discontinued the service anyway. The LHB has promised to spend the £5000 saved, in Monmouth.

The Committee has worked well as a team, incorporating three very energetic new members. Again, it has benefitted hugely from the organisational skills of the Town Clerk and her assistant.

## Environmental Affairs Committee by Chairman Councillor Mrs A Were

The Environmental Affairs Committee has, as usual, been busy again this year.

We have continued to award maintenance contracts for the Christmas lights and the floral decorations which, together, form a major part of our budget. Regarding the floral decorations, we have persevered with the Henry V planting scheme and intend to continue to build on this over the coming year, adding a little more colour to the planters, particularly in the town centre area.

The Christmas lights have been improved with the addition of the icicles at the bottom end of town. It has become clear that the star lights across the street have passed their best so they will no longer form part of the Christmas decorations. A working group has been set up to look at alternatives and a budget set aside to purchase new decorations.

The Committee has funded or match-funded several new benches, litter bins and dog bins in all areas of the town including Wyesham and the Millennium field. We have also installed bicycle racks near the bus station.

We have continued to support the 'Overlooking the Wye' project and are major contributors to the scheme to renovate the old quay near the Rowing Club.

We have worked with the Civic Society to match-fund the second tranche of Blue Plaques which have now been installed on various buildings of interest around the town, including the Rolls Hall. A guide book has also been produced to support the scheme.

Over the year the committee has become concerned about the lack of provision of allotments for Monmouth and has raised the issue with the County Council, which has now commissioned Cllr Liz Hackett-Pain to look at the problem and report back later this year.

Finally, now that the proposed Welcome Centre has been put on the back burner, we have set up a working party to look at ways to improve and enhance the old cattle market area, including the road to the allotments and the Millennium field. We are looking at the possibility of providing a bandstand and picnic tables on the grassy area which had originally been earmarked for the Welcome Centre.

All in all it has again been a successful year for the Environmental Affairs Committee and the coming year promises to be equally so, with plenty of projects to be taken forward and new ones to be begun.

## Planning Committee by Chairman Councillor R Bond

As usual many types of planning applications were received, and on the vast majority of occasions Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) accepted the Monmouth Town Councils' (MTC) recommendations. There have been a number of successful outcomes in enforcement as a result of the committee's vigilance where companies and private individuals flout planning regulations, for instance on change of use matters or non compliance with planning conditions and listed buildings regulations.

Current issues still include the proposed Croft -y -Bwla housing development on the land adjacent to the Rockfield Estate which is at this moment the subject of an appeal. There are still major concerns regarding access and also the existing flooding problems created by the current site developer's lack of provision against water run-off and the concerns regarding ground water. These are the kind of issues that Monmouth Town Council has always emphasized the need for caution when considering these sorts of developments.

We are also keeping a very watchful eye on the two developments on the Old Hospital site currently refused by MCC contrary to our recommendation, and the Dixton Road Clinic where our preferred entrance to the site is from the Dixton Road side rather than the proposed access through The Burgage, which is impossibly narrow and would clash with school pedestrian traffic.

Further concerns relate to traffic flow and drainage, in particular around the Haberdashers school development off Hadnock Road and Lidl's store on the site of the old County Garage, which will continue to be closely observed.

A planning committee working group looked at the input that Monmouth Town Council would like to have in the production of the Local Development Plan where it impacts on Monmouth. It will serve as a useful consultation document for the committee. Here are some of the headings used and for brevity it includes only some aspects under each section.

- **Sustainability**  
Improve standards of housing insulation  
Town centre regeneration
- **Environmental**  
Tree planting and maintenance programme to improve the town's appearance  
Avoid development on flood plains and other areas prone to flooding
- **Housing**  
A balance between the types of housing needed  
Additional housing generated by infill and redevelopments
- **Industry and Employment**  
Increase local employment of all kinds

- **Tourism**  
Encouragement of a year long event programme extensively and well publicised  
Improved marketing of historic features and connections
  
- **Shopping**  
Total rejection of out of town retail outlets  
Improved car and coach parking facilities
  
- **Waste Management**  
Programme for minimum use of packaging  
Use of biodegradable products  
More emphasis on recycling

This is not a comprehensive list and the full summary can be made available.

Once again, we have been grateful for the assistance of the staff in the Planning Dept at County Hall who have been quite helpful on individual issues. We appreciate any guidance and the training that we have received. I would also like to thank our small but dedicated committee for their commitment and the Town Clerk for her help, in what is a very important area of Monmouth Town Councils' responsibilities.

## Finance & Policy Committee by Chairman Councillor R Hayward

The main function of the Finance and Policy Committee is to supervise the expenditure of the Council and the other committees and to audit and authorise the general administration of the Council. It is also responsible for recommending updates to existing policies and procedures and to formulate future policy according to the wishes of the Full Council.

A budget and precept for 2009/2010 was recommended and accepted by the full Council. Despite monetary pressures from the funding of the Shire Hall project the Council were able to limit the increase to 3%. It has been the Council's policy for some time to keep the precept at a low level and provide real value for money.

Work has commenced on the Shire Hall and the Town Council has a representative on the project board. There has been a dispute over the positioning of scaffold and the work has been delayed by up to fifteen weeks. The problem should be resolved in June 2009 but there will inevitably be an overrun in costs. The Town Council is aware that they may have a part to play in providing extra funding once the full extent is known. A draw down schedule has been agreed with MCC on the funds promised by Monmouth Town Council and the first payment has been made. A recent tour of the works enabled Councillors to appraise the extent of the work and to appreciate how much improvement there will be to this historic Monmouth building.

The alternative meeting room within Market Hall has not been a huge success with very limited space for councillors and members of the public and press. It has recently been agreed that Full Council meetings will take place in the Priory to allow greater access for the public.

A working group was set up by the committee to look at all aspects of CCTV within the town. Many hours were spent by the group and opinions and information were obtained from all levels of the police force, MCC, the other participating towns, CCTV suppliers, Monmouth Chamber of Trade and Commerce, shopkeepers, and members of the public. A very full and well considered report was accepted by Full Council and it was agreed that the present system provided by MCC did not offer good value for money and was not really wanted by any of the stakeholders. In line with the report the group has been reformed to examine in detail the CCTV requirements to see if anything has changed which would alter the view of the Town Council and which would justify rejoining the MCC partnership next year.

Pay and conditions for staff have been modified in line with One Voice Wales guidelines. Staff appraisals were carried out satisfactorily.

The regalia has been revalued for insurance purposes and the maces are being examined by a conservator who will give us advice on the best way of preserving and maintaining these historic pieces. The mace bearer uniforms and the mayor's robe have been cleaned and refurbished.

Despite standing orders being reviewed for persistent non attendance by members this has remained a problem with a small number of Councillors. Standing orders require Councillors to explain before Full Council their reasons for failing to attend or offer apologies for not attending three consecutive meetings. The legal requirement however, is that Councillors must attend only one meeting every six months. In one case the six month rule was invoked and a new councillor sought.

In 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government launched its 'Making the Connections' initiative which put the citizen at the centre of Local Government and encourages Unitary Authorities to work closer with Town and Community Councils in order to provide more efficient and more focused services. This seems to have stalled within MCC despite still being on their agenda. In order to try and breathe some life into this initiative the committee has recently formed a working group to look at opportunities to extend the provision of services by Monmouth Town Council.