



Monmouth Town Council



Annual Report 2007/08

Monmouth Town Council – Shaping Our Future

In December 2004 the Council adopted a plan that would take it up to the elections in 2008.

At the time it was considered a brave step and it was certainly a first for the Town Council which, in truth, needed to improve the way it worked and how effective it should be for the town.

The plan called 'Shaping Our Future' was a way of changing that view of the Council and of uniting the Town Councillors around a set of positive proposals that would improve the town we all love.

In implementing these proposals the Council believes it has indeed moved on and is seen as a well organised, united Council which adds its weight to projects that will improve Monmouth and encourages the volunteers in many organisations who will make sure that the improvements continue.

There have been year on year improvements to the look and feel of the town through the funding of the new planting scheme, Christmas lights and other small and medium scale environmental projects. Also, there has been support for the new town maps and real partnership progress in the success of the project to improve cycling and walking in and around town.

Monmouth Town Council continues to be the largest supporter of the Festival and the Carnival and is a major funder of the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Attik.

There has also been a pledge for substantial funds to ensure the successful renovation of the Shire Hall.

There were major contributions to the work of many voluntary groups in Town through the Community Grants scheme and recognising that work with the successful introduction of the Mayors Civic Awards.

The Council has made a major contribution to the future of the town by supporting and leading many projects including the current debate about making our streets more unique to Monmouth and safer through the idea of 'Shared Space'.

One of the aims of the 'Shaping the Future' document was to be "a Town Council that people can be proud of". In our view we may not have arrived at that destination but we are moving in the right direction. We hope you agree with us!

What did the Council do in 2007/2008?

Community Affairs Committee by Chairman Councillor Mrs. A Dewhurst

The third year of this committee has seen much activity. We hope that we have been much more effective in letting people know of the ups and downs, through press releases after each meeting and the help of Sunshine Radio.

£8,000 of Community Grants was allocated to local voluntary groups, in two tranches. During a very enjoyable evening in the Community Room each of the eighteen groups gave brief, but mutually fascinating presentations of how their grant had, or would be used.

The Mayor's Civic Awards were presented at a cheerful evening at Bridges. Local business sponsorship meant that the six Award winners received a £50 cheque as well as a specially-designed plate, given by the Town Council.

Attik, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Festival/Carnival continue to be the three main organizations which we support financially and all three gave presentations at a Full Council Meeting. Attik's junior evenings have become so popular that they are full to capacity despite opening on an extra night each week. The CAB has been able to install a new telephone advice system which gives enquirers direct access to a much wider range of skilled advisors, while retaining their personal help. The Committee's commitment to the Festival and the Carnival, in both money and time, has been appreciated and productive. Dreadful weather in the run-up failed to stop people's enthusiasm to prepare and the Carnival, once again, including its King, Queen and Attendants, processed in sudden, bright sunshine.

The Christmas candlelit event was successful, but its organisation relied on very few Councillors and the Town Clerk. All the local people who were as generous and involved as ever, were properly thanked on local radio.

Other positive matters have been the moving presentation that the Comprehensive pupils gave after their working expedition to Nairobi which the Committee has energetically supported. Timely publicity we were able to provide for the Connect2 lottery vote helped towards victory and a £250,000 grant for the walking and cycling route to link Monmouth's communities.

Another small grant was allocated to support a Shop mobility scheme, now a possible site has, at last been found.

The Committee has tried hard to liaise with Monnow Vale by contributing to its Users' Group and seeking information from the Manager. The sensitive second phase of the facility's reorganisation is under way. Better communication between the town and Monnow Vale is vital.

After much research we decided to revert to supporting the Summer Play scheme hoping that the 2008 scheme will reach more young people.

Where as we were fully consulted about the possible withdrawal of Sunday duty pharmacies, by the LHB, our thorough response was completely ignored. A trial withdrawal is now underway, meaning Abergavenny provides Monmouth with its nearest pharmacy. We have been urging the public's response is put on record and acted on.

Monitoring the results of having our Job Centre removed is very depressing. We continue to remind the Abergavenny office of the serious transport difficulties Monmouth people face, on their compulsory visits.

Our efforts to work in partnership with County Councillors to help improve play facilities in Wyesham have been rejected, this year. However, a notice board for the community has been fixed at last, with the co-operation of the central shop. Keeping Wyesham properly linked and informed, is already bearing fruit.

Planning Committee by Chairman Councillor R Bond

In the last 12 months many types of planning applications were received. On the majority of occasions our recommendations were endorsed by MCC. However one notable exception was the Croft y Bwla application, to which the committee recommended refusal, Access to the site, which has still to be decided, will now at least not pass through existing residential areas. Flooding problems created by the current site developers lack of provision against run off, will still have to be dealt with and this provision is something that Monmouth Town Council has always stressed when considering these types of development.

Monmouth Town Council Planning Committee has also produced a Consultancy Document which it intends to use when reaching decisions on individual planning applications. These are listed under various headings which include:-

SUSTAINABILITY: looking into the impact of Global Warming, and the aim to achieve a zero carbon town.

THE ENVIRONMENT: for instance, avoidance of development on flood plains, and tree planting schemes.

WASTE MANAGEMENT is also an obvious concern with more recycling to be encouraged, as is the need for biodegradable containers for takeaway and general use.

DESIGN: New building in the town conservation area should be sympathetic with its traditional styles.

HOUSING: should be a balance between different types including a good percentage of affordable accommodation.

INDUSTRY AND EMPLOYMENT: Encouragement must be given to the development of local businesses both new and existing, some of which would assist with **TOURISM** benefits to the town.

SHOPPING: a rejection of out of town developments and encouragement to small local shops through perhaps campaigning for a reduction in local business tax.

Other considerations are the conservation of historic and natural assets, in both of which, Monmouth is very rich. Recreation and leisure affects local residents and visitors as well, and are priorities, along with other community facilities with more emphasis on the needs of young people.

The committee continues to keep a watching brief on developments in archaeologically sensitive areas.

In general the staff at the Local Authority's Planning Department have been very helpful and we thank them for the guidance that has been received. Thanks are also due to former Councillor Tim Buckland for his excellent chairmanship and practical advice, and to the committee for its interest and input during the last year.

Environmental Affairs Committee by Mrs. Vivien Mitchell

The Environmental Affairs Committee, in its care for the physical environment, worked extremely hard during the year, achieved notable successes and made progress on numerous projects.

Much effort was concentrated on the streetscape. The committee purchased a new set of lights for the tree and, following on the investment made the previous year, the Christmas lights were extremely good. We continued the policy of upgrading street furniture in Heritage style; a number of such litter bins were installed, there will shortly be three new benches installed near bus stops, and there have been negotiations with the County Council for replacement of more street lanterns in Heritage style. The committee is grateful that Monmouth School was persuaded to replace the fence along the Redbrook Road to match the black hooped style in that area. In a development that would have a major impact on the town centre, and in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government and the County Council, the committee part funded an initial proposal by Hamilton-Baillie Associates for the redesign of Agincourt Square and Monnow Street based on the principles of Shared Space - the aim being to improve traffic flow along the street, improve safety, and improve the environment for the pedestrian.

The path through Chippenham Field is now lit and the lights in Drybridge Park will once again be operational very soon, and a path along what has become a 'desire line' in the park from Watery Lane is soon to be laid. A new litter picking machine was part funded to help with the ever present litter problem, and work with the schools in their litter education programmes was undertaken.

There was a radical approach taken to the planting scheme and a competition was organised for ideas that were sustainable, required minimal maintenance, had year round interest, were appropriate for the area, and had a 'theme'. The winning theme was Henry V – what a marketing tool! This work has of course, had to be completed within a budget; planting on the theme was started in December and will be finalised in this coming year. Being sustainable means it will take another year to mature, but it will improve as time goes by and the ongoing costs will reduce dramatically.

Three major projects were supported that will make a huge impact on the town:-

- Refurbishment of the Shire Hall, a £4 million project, which has received Heritage Lottery funding
- The 'Overlooking the Wye' project which has also received Heritage Lottery Funding to develop historic sites along the Wye including Monmouth Quay
- Monmouth Links, which was successful in the Sustrans' Connect 2 bid and received £250,000 towards the seven proposed walkways and cycle way in and around Monmouth

The committee is delighted with the Blue Plaques produced with the assistance of the Civic Society; they make an important contribution to the tone of the town; it is anticipated that funding will continue for more plaques in the coming year.

There was an extensive submission made to the Regeneration Officer at County Hall for various developments that were wished for Monmouth. Among these was a request that the A40 be put in a tunnel to eradicate this notorious accident black spot and once again unite Monmouth with the river, and with Wyesham. The regeneration report is expected in July.

On a personal note, I feel we came a long way during the year in developing our “vision for Monmouth”. I trust that the County Council will take note of our hopes and dreams, and work with the Town Council to achieve their realisation.

Finance and Policy Committee by Chairman Councillor Robert Hayward

The main purpose of the Finance and Policy committee is to supervise the expenditure of the Council and other committees and to authorise and audit 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 was recommended and accepted by the Full Council. This Council was once again able to maintain the precept at the lowest level for any of the towns in Monmouthshire.

The restoration of the Shire hall has been an important preoccupation for the Committee. Not only has it negotiated the provision for a substantial contribution from the Town Council but also it has recommended the guarantee of the contribution promised by the Shire Hall Stewards to Full Council. This made the character of the bid stronger and the committee is extremely pleased that confirmation has been received in June that the bid has been successful.

The restoration of the Shire Hall has meant the relocation of the meetings of the Council and the committees to the Market Hall, together with the office of the Town Clerk. The Finance and Policy Committee has been responsible for the move arrangements and the storage of some of the artefacts from within the Shire Hall.

Standing orders have been modified to include measures for non-attendance of members at committee meetings, a complaints procedure has been developed and a policy on unacceptable behaviour has been adopted. Staff appraisals have been carried out satisfactorily and training has been arranged for the new position of Deputy Mace Bearer.

The committee has been negotiating with Monmouthshire County Council over the possibility of re-entering the CCTV scheme but as yet is not satisfied that the current arrangements offer a reasonable return for the people of Monmouth. Similarly the committee has been in discussions with the Police about the funding of an extra PCSO but have failed to obtain the necessary assurances that this will result in better policing or value for money for the Town.

Work continues with Monmouthshire County Council on the ‘Making the Connections’ initiative however it is disappointing that such slow progress has been made throughout the year.

Conclusion by the Mayor Councillor Terry Christopher.

2007/2008 was the last year of the previous Town Council and I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the members for their effort and hard work over the past four years.

During the past year 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.

There were many memorable events and functions that I attended and among these some of the highlights included the occasion in March when HMS Monmouth exercised its freedom by parading through Monnow Street. Another event was the Civic Awards evening where people were recognised for voluntary work within the community. There are so many people who work tirelessly for the benefit of others in Monmouth and it was a privilege to make the awards to them. Once again I had the honour of representing the people of the town at the wreath laying ceremony on Remembrance Sunday in memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

The charities that I supported last year were St Mary's Church Spire Appeal, Overmonnow Special Needs Unit and the Shire Hall Stewards. I am grateful to the people of Monmouth for their generosity which helped to raise the sum of over £4300.00 for these worthy causes. A number of events were held and in particular the Mayor's Showcase Spectacular which was hosted by HMSG and which was produced by Mr. Cedric Gibbons and his team once again. I am also grateful to the many businesses within the town for supporting various fund raising events.

In May 2008 a new Town Council was formed and of the sixteen members there were six new Councillors elected. It is likely that the new Town Council will have to face many challenges in the coming year and I am confident that the members have the skill, ability, enthusiasm and will to face the tasks that lie ahead.