

Chairs Annual Report

Cllr Jayne Garland – Chair

Draethen Waterloo Rudry Community Council (DWR CC)



Introduction

As one of the smallest Community Councils in our Borough we are known to be punching well above our weight. But we must remember, unlike our County Councillors, all our Community Cllrs do this without payment for their time and effort other than the potential of a small allowance and even that they choose to put straight back into the community. As Chair of this Community Council I am therefore very lucky to have a great team where we all work with one aim in mind which is to strive for a 'one Draethen Waterloo and Rudry community, fair for all - chwarae teg l bawb', in which economic dynamism and prosperity are combined with social justice, equality, honesty, dignity and respect, maintaining and improving our communities safety and environment. We are determined to secure, promote and deliver better services with great value for money to our community, its residents and visitors.

This year has been a year like no other and probably shown where those that can - do and those that won't - don't. In DWR CC we have certainly been in the 'Can Do' category. The global pandemic impacted upon everyone's life and where we as a Community Council had to adapt quickly. We suspended face to face meetings and moved to unfamiliar remote working like many others amongst us, learning new tools to keep ourselves and others informed. Notwithstanding this year we have worked harder than ever together with some great partners where DWR CC have led several operations that tackle antisocial behaviours such as deliberate grass fires, fly tipping and illegal off road vehicles. These programmes will continue and our partnerships with the Gwent Police, SW Fire and Rescue Services, Natural Resource Wales, Rudry Commoners Association, CCBC and other local Community groups will pull together even more positive outcomes for the benefit and wellbeing of our community. We have also delivered some great positive activities in health walks focussed on nature interests ranging from foraging, Fungi, nocturnal antics in exploring bats, moths and owls. Those events were really well attended and we had super feedback. We have more in our plan that have yet to be delivered. Nature rescued us over the pandemic giving us a space to feel safe and connected amongst nature and its fresh healing properties we helped our residents get out there safely and supported during a time of fear, uncertainty and loneliness.



Finding opportunities where others see obstacles.

This year we saw the creation of our new DWR CC logo and Website. I'm sure you will agree they look fresh and pleasing to the eye. I'm thrilled to announce that our new Facebook (FB) page has increased its following from having to set up a new page. This opportunity prompted us to create a forward planning 'communications committee' to explore how to improve and protect our 'comms' for the future and how to reach our residents getting our messages, information, activities and news out there. With an up to date Web page, a dynamic Facebook page and regular Newsletters we hope to keep our residents informed, inspired and connected.

Our Family Trees

DWR CC became a tree charter branch in 2017. Charter Branches are integral to embedding the Charters ten principles ensuring that the relationship between people, trees, their impacts and benefits are recognised in decision making across homes, communities and government. It sets out the principles where society can stand stronger together supporting our environment and highlighting how important a role trees play. DWR CC, through our community voice project, planted a small community orchard in the Parish Hall so we felt it was important to become a tree charter branch building on our great start. Since then we have been involved in The Big Climate Fightback and worked closely with partners to ensure we embed the ten principles into our everyday practice. Moving forward we're looking to undertaking a community tree survey with residents to learn what interesting, rare fruit and nut varieties we may have in our wards to record, protect and preserve them.



Community Health

A Parliamentary Review described the increasing demands that face our NHS and social care. This was never more evident than this year during the initial stages of the Pandemic. It exposed the inequality of resources for our ageing population and the general mental and physical wellbeing of those around us. The need for change is with us now, not just at some distant date. Without response and change we will fall short of meeting the needs of our communities.

DWR CC stepped up to that challenge and we set about making efforts to get our communities up and out into the fresh air whilst always mindful of the new social distancing rules that presented itself in many forms over the crisis. Mental and physical wellbeing throughout life helps individuals to realise their full potential – coping with the challenges that life throws at them, working productively, and contributing to their family life and communities. Well life certainly threw us a curve ball this year leaving many of our residents feeling alone, vulnerable and scared.

With my husband in the category of ‘vulnerable health condition’ I certainly empathised. With a donation from my Chairs allowance in April and another this November from Full Council we have been able to contribute to the BMMR Care Project to get urgent supplies and essential deliveries to those most vulnerable and most in need. I recall, whilst volunteering for the project, delivering a prescription only to bump into someone we would normally see once a month at lunch club but due to lockdowns she hadn’t been out for a while. I was pleased to learn she was well and keeping herself safe but like many she was scared of the unknown and feeling a little lonely. We chatted a while (as best you can through a mask) and I left my number if she just needed a chat. It’s that simple to keep those around us feeling connected.

Loneliness and isolation are some of the key social causes of poor health and wellbeing, which have been shown to have a marked impact on mental and physical health. Sadly, this year we have been unable to deliver our Intergenerational program with its focus on older generation isolation and loneliness. We set this up to bring younger people together with our less younger folks in our community. The program started where Rudry Primary School on one Wednesday a month, ‘cooked lunch day’, would invite a number of our less young residents to join them (thank you school chefs). The children and older residents would sit and enjoy lunch together and talk about how things have changed from one generation to the next. To support this program DWR CC funded iPads and recording equipment for the school with a view to capture some cultural history and compile video footage of interviews and stories to contribute to the students own school work. It was quite an eye opener for some of the students to learn that not everyone had an indoor bathroom and toilet back in the day! Sadly, this Intergenerational program has had to be put on hold until a time it’s safe for those very vulnerable groups of over 70’s to once again share their stories.

This small project may have been paused but we can still play a great part in supporting those within our close community. We may not be able to help everyone but every one of us can help someone and that has been our mantra.

With this in mind I used my Chairs Allowance to pull together ‘Operation Scarecrow’ a traffic calming Scarecrow Competition. I paid three local businesses to put together three great prizes offered up for grabs to winners of what turned out to be a great competition (I much prefer to invest in local businesses than go cap in hand for charitable prizes, especially in times like these). I also personally bought Rudry Primary school a huge hamper of arts and craft items for those classes taking part. Although justification for creating ‘Scarecrow Characters’ had a serious side, to tackle excessive speeds of drivers travelling through our lanes, it was also about delivering a light hearted safe activity to engage all of our community during times when little seemed fun or normal. A creative, fun filled distraction from the chaos unravelling around us. It truly captured the imagination of our talented villager’s and their scarecrows certainly slowed down traffic, even creating a tourist attraction having many visitors following the route of quirky new characters dotted about our villages. It also brought community together at a time when we all needed one another’s reassurance and support. Who knew our community could be so creative? May I take this opportunity to send out a huge thanks to Inspector Clifton of Gwent Police who diligently judged those quirky characters. It created such a stir it piqued the interest of National Press in the BBC and the Road Safety

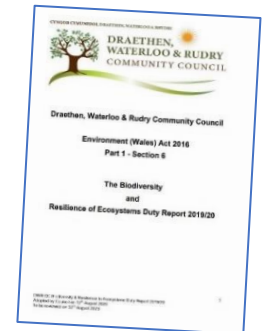


organisation RAC. The success soon took on a life of its own only to be replicated many times elsewhere throughout the borough. I can see this becoming a regular 'thing' in our calendar.

On the theme of road safety we have had confirmation from CCBC Highways that DWR CC can procure and install Chevrons at the notorious accident black spot at the S Bend in Rudry for the safety of road users. No more upside down vehicles going bump in the night. Lets hope these can be installed early in the new year.

Our Green and Pleasant Land

We need to be ambitious where we talk about how we decarbonise, if we look at some of the projection differences we need to make in terms of our Carbon levels in Wales it is a huge task but we have to start somewhere along that challenging route and we can all play our part. Our residents can't be expected to start this alone it needs leadership and commitment from us which is why we are making progress in looking to put in place those first steps so that it's easier for our residents to make those greener choices. We are exploring the possibility of installing Charging Points in our rural villages where it would normally not be practical for a resident to take that step alone.



DWR CC were pleased to be one of the first Community Councils to declare a Climate Emergency where we also published our comprehensive Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Report 2019/20 which sets out our commitment to contributing to preventing habitat and species loss and improving the environment where we live, not just for this generation but for all those to come.

Common Goals

We are fortunate enough to be surrounded by a rural setting of beautiful fields and woodlands. A significant part of our environment is Mynydd Rhydri which has a unique ecosystem of diverse habitats providing important economic, social and environmental 'value' to the rural area and is closely connected to our communities that surround and rely upon it. It contains a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). However, the landscape is under considerable threat at risk of becoming poor quality land primarily due to a high level of anti-social behavior, environmental neglect and damage and at great risk of abandonment.

Commoners can't charge the public for looking after the land therefore it requires a coalition of the willing, a partnership between the many users and stakeholders to look after it and ensure its protection. DWR CC have been working with our local Commoners to build a plan to enhance and protect it for future generations. DWR CC have been instrumental in bringing together groups to take forward a multi-functional approach of Sustainable Landscape Management. It's about making landscapes work harder for all the diverse users, improving resilience to climate change and based on the resources available to manage the landscape in a sustainable and practical way. You may have noticed the NHS tribute Firebreak on the side of Rudry Common during the summers very first lockdown. This was achieved by bringing together our Commoners, South Wales Fire and Rescue Services and CCBCs Warden to cut fire breaks in the bracken. We first undertook an ecology assessment, plotted the grid and then cut through the bracken, that fuels the fires, to create wide breaks should a fire happen limiting the potential devastation to habitat, wildlife and danger to life that is caused every time a fire is set. We are working with our partners to agree a program for cutting back bracken which will be delivered over the coming months. We are pleased to say a fire that was lit just after the first cut, although heart-breaking, could have been so much worse had we not started this program. Since then we have cut more firebreaks.

Speaking of cutting a path we also worked with CCBC to improve our Rights of Way. We have a great partnership, our main objective is to link up and improve routes to better connect people with nature using our registered and permissive paths. There has been considerable upgrades and some resurfacing to make them safer and wider so that horse, cyclist and pedestrian might pass one another safely plus it allows great social distancing in these unexpected times of keeping safe by staying apart.

Our litter picking equipment we purchased has seen little action this year other than with our Councillors undertaking their own small walks or PLAWKING as we coined the phrase 'Picking Litter and Walking'. Once we are permitted, we will get back to those valuable activities.

Still on the theme of nature we applied for a small grant from Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) to create a butterfly garden a 'Place for Nature'. Our intention after agreeing the space with CCBC was to engage community in installing and looking after the site but then came Covid-19. Instead Jake from KWT and I had to install it ourselves but were allowed to involve one family and here our residents 'the Ralleys' of Rudry stepped up to help us dig out and plant up. Twm Ralley has been provided with a huge bag of bird seed to top up the bird feeder over winter. The bug hotel should already have gained residents and the wildflowers climbing the trellis and shrubs chosen for their robustness should blossom in the spring.

Flower Power

We also saw the arrival of our three beautiful Flower Fountain displays this year. A triple layered vision of floral colour to adorn our three villages. We received some lovely compliments from visitors and residents alike. These will be regular displays each summer to cheer our villages. Now that the containers have been procured by us it will just mean replacing the floral displays and watering from here on in.

Healthy living

Our Defibrillator, placed outside Rudry Parish Hall, has had its battery changed and we are in the process of replacing its pads ready for action. We hope it won't be needed but it's there for you to use if it is. For a while we have been in a long process of getting permissions to move our vintage phone box in Draethen to a more appropriate and accessible place. We are nearly there! We now have permission from CCBC planning and we are about to consult with community on the precise final re location. The plan is to relocate it from its current, somewhat hidden, position to the Green where our Noticeboard and the mailbox are situated. Once agreement has been reached we plan to relocate it, refurbish it, and install a defibrillator for the community. Waterloo's Phone box is also getting a facelift. We are currently negotiating contracts to refurbish and install a defibrillator for this community too.

Draethen has a fantastic active community that carries out regular local events so we were more than happy to provide a super bench and picnic table for them to enjoy when they hold those community duck races and river clean ups

In Waterloo we saw the end of the bits and pieces of furniture on the green space at the roadside. We didn't have permission to place those items there originally and over time they had become unloved and unsafe so with the landowners agreement it was taken away for the safety and protection of our residents, ourselves and the landowners. However, we are now in discussions to create a great, safe space with the full permissions of the owners legitimately covered by us and any activities we do there are sure to be kept safe and maintained. We are all very excited about what will take its place. Watch this space.

Waterloo residents also contacted us to solve the constant confusion of Waterloo Place and Ty Newydd Road. Many a parcel was delayed or sent to the wrong house as there was no sign on the Ty Newydd side of the road. We quickly solved that by procuring a sign that was installed at the entrance of Ty Newydd Road. No more misplaced parcels or visitors we hope.

Since donating 30 lamppost event poppies the year-before-last we have displayed them throughout our villages leading up to Armistice Day. Each year we look to replace those damaged or lost to increase the display, this year was no exception. Our Cllrs also lay wreaths at informal services this year at St James Church Rudry Cenotaph, Machen Cenotaph and the main Cenotaph in the Twyn Caerphilly. We also chose to acknowledge the many animals lost in war by placing a purple poppy on each wreath. **We will remember them, all of them.**



Getting Noticed

This year after much delay we replaced our four dilapidated noticeboards for new solid oak boards. I have to admit they look so much better and our Notices now remain dry!! The whole point of a community notice board is to bring community together to provide access to information and encourage our local community to contribute to it. Please feel free to use them for your own local notices, they're there for you to use.

It's About Who's Around The Tree Not What's Under It

Normally this time of year the Draethen Community would hold a festive event 'turning on of the Christmas lights' (lights proudly funded by DWR CC) welcoming folk from further afield, sadly this year, although its gone ahead, it was limited to strictly Draethen residents to keep within Governments guidelines.

Instead of Santa's usual friendly visit he too has had to comply with public health guidelines and 'socially distance himself' but his sleigh was MOT'd and commenced its journey around our villages. This is no small thanks to Geraint, Emma and Sue of Basil & Rusty's Ice Cream, who are also residents of DWR who took on the Sleigh and all its duties from the recently disbanded Machen Rotary Club. DWR CC are thrilled to have donated to this great activity to ensure our children don't miss out on what has become a regular stop and highlight on Santa's route. Therefore, may I offer a huge thank you to Geraint and Geraint's mum Sue Richards and Emma Jones who have made this happen. The Lewis Richards Community Sleigh is in memory of Geraint's father, Lewis, formerly of Tir Jenkins Farm but a former key member and fund raiser of the Machen Rotary Club. It's also to recognise the memory of a local man, Ian Phillips, also affectionately known as 'Figgis', who sadly lost his battle to cancer some years ago. Ian selflessly supported Geraint's father when he too became ill with cancer, So, in memory of two very special local men I hope you gave generously to Santa when on his rounds. DWR CC have also made a charitable donation to McMillan Cancer Support because this year we have been unable to hold the coffee morning which usually raises valuable funds for this great cause funding McMillan nurses helping cancer patients and their families like Ian and Geraint's dad. Geraint, Sue and Emma plan to dedicate a proportion of their charitable donations collected to the BMMR Care Project supporting local people in these challenging times and the rest they will give to support other very local charities.



Christmas Decoration

As many of you know we don't have a single lamp post that can accommodate a Christmas Lighting Figurine, so each year we have to be creative. This year is no exception so I've sponsored a 'Christmas Decoration' competition which is not so much about lights but more about decoration. This is partly because of our de-carbonizing commitment. We didn't feel we needed to follow the 'Seen From Space - Home Alone' model. This way children could become involved and decorate the exterior of their homes and gardens together with their mums and dads. With evidence from the Scarecrow competition we knew we had some highly creative families in our community, so we were confident in seeing some excellent displays.



Peace, joy & kindness

For those of you lucky enough to be able to share a small break with family this Christmas – have a good one. However, many of us will again have to be apart from those we hold most dear. Never has it been more poignant



than this year that we appreciate who is around our tree than what is under it. For those of you working all or part of the holidays – I hope it's not too busy and that you get a rewarding break at some time. As a diverse community always there to support one another, because it's part of who we are, I ask that you look out for each other even more-so over this very different Covid-19 festive season and spare a thought and offer a hand of kindness to those who have lost so much this year.

I would also like to offer a huge thank you to all those who will be looking after us over the Christmas period, from the emergency services, our hospitals and our local authorities. This has been a year of truly recognising our key workers and never have we appreciated them more so than this year. I wish you all a joyful and peaceful Christmas with a genuine hope for a healthier, happier and more prosperous new year ahead. 'So Buy Local!' Please stay safe, be kind, care lots and may you find occasion to laugh heartily and give thanks for your lot. **Nadolig llawen.**

Cllr Jayne Garland - Chair - Draethen Waterloo & Rudry Community Council.