

Good evening.

I would like to introduce tonight's agenda item and take the report as read. I think it would be useful to consider how the national, county and local planning background can help with our discussion. I will give some examples of where other communities have or are planning to adopt assets.

Llanfair DC school was vacated in February this year (2020) and the Community Council has been considering the future of the school ever since the **new** school was announced a couple of years ago. The school site was listed as a candidate site in the local development plan consultation and we responded that we wanted to consider the future uses for the site, sitting in the Conservation Area, as a key part of the future and we were not in favour of its use for housing. Denbighshire County Council advised in February (2020) that the school was surplus to its requirements. It also advised that the school building and playground as well as the playing field could be considered separately if we want. The Community Council wishes to engage with the community as widely as we can to consider the potential use of the school.

Denbighshire County Council has advised us of the **Communities Assets Transfer** process which is the Welsh Government's process, and which is three-staged. Firstly, communities are asked to make an expression of interest, second a formal expression and thirdly a full proposal which would include a detailed business plan for whatever was being proposed. Previous examples show where communities have adopted buildings to develop a whole range of community facilities.

In Ebbw Vale in 2007, ProMo-Cymru approached the council to take on the major task of saving and restoring the historic building and turn it into a sustainable cultural centre of community activity and learning.

In Bethesda In September 2012, Gwynedd Council's Estates Department accepted a recommendation to transfer the freehold of Neuadd Ogwen, an arts and music centre, to the responsibility of Tabernacl Cyf.

Hay-on-Wye Cheese Market, a Grade II listed landmark building, required substantial investment and had been declared surplus to Powys County Council requirements. The Hay-on-Wye Community Enterprise CIC wished to be granted a lease at a nominal rent to allow the organisation to apply for a Community Asset Transfer grant under the Big Lottery Fund/Heritage Lottery Fund and restore the building into a community facility.

Another Community Asset Transfer in 2011 in Llan Ffestiniog transformed a former residential home for the elderly, owned by Gwynedd Council into a hotel that provides respite holidays for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers.

Connah's Quay Swimming Pool is a long-standing aquatics facility in Flintshire. It was built in the 1960s and has been valued by the local community ever since. In the face of pressures on Public Body budgets, Flintshire County Council invited the local community to take over the running of the facility as part of a Community Asset Transfer.

In Y Fron in Snowdonia the community group want to transform the local school into a community centre that includes a cafe, shop and an 18-bed bunkhouse. They have secured £1m in funding and the project is underway.

So, we are not the first to be presented with such an opportunity. The aim of tonight's agenda item is to have discussion to decide whether there is a wish to express an interest in the school, its playground and playing field and if so to agree the next steps to taking the matter forward.

From a **National** perspective, Planning Policy Wales Edition 10, December 2018 is the instrument to deliver the vision of the Wales we want, as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. There is a hierarchy of planning documents which translate high level aims into actions in communities and in recent years there has been emphasis on local decision making. The documents which relate to planning include the National Development Framework, the Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans which set out a vision for how places are expected to change in land-use terms to accommodate development needs.

Place Plans are non-statutory documents. They may be prepared at the initiation of the local community and are a powerful tool to promote collaborative action to improve well-being and placemaking. Our Neighbourhood Plan is an example.

Sustainable placemaking is an inclusive process, involving all of those with a professional or personal interest in the built and natural environment. It focuses on developing plans, making decisions and delivering developments which contribute to the creation and enhancement of sustainable places. Placemaking in development decisions happens at all levels and involves considerations at a global scale, including climate change, down to the very local level, such as considering the amenity needs and the context in relation to neighbouring properties and people.

Placemaking is described in Planning Policy Wales and is an essential aspect for us in determining what use we might see for the school and its grounds and it entails several facets including **Active & Social Places**, which include community facilities and recreational spaces as well as **distinctive & natural places** which recognise the historic environment, green infrastructure and biodiversity.

Community Facilities contribute to a sense of place which is important to the health, well-being and amenity of local communities, and their existence is often a key element in creating viable and sustainable places. Examples include schools, cultural facilities, health services, libraries, allotments and places of worship.

Turning to the **County** perspective Denbighshire County Council's Corporate Plan 2017 - 2022 is titled "Working together for the future of Denbighshire".

It is relevant to consider what Denbighshire County Council says about **Conservation areas** which it designates for their special architectural and historic interest. Conservation areas are places that should be preserved or enhanced as they contribute to the character and appearance of an area. There are 32 conservation areas in Denbighshire of which Llanfair DC is one. Substantial or total demolition of a building in a conservation area would need conservation area consent. This would only be granted if there was a valid redevelopment proposal included with the application. Most other works would not normally require conservation area consent. The result of any planning applications for sites in conservation areas would always consider the preservation or enhancement to the area's character and appearance.

Public space needs are addressed in Supplementary Planning Guidance Note, Recreational Public Open Space March 2017. Public open space such as sports facilities, parks and gardens or areas of amenity greenspace are recognised as being important to the quality of people's lives and to the achievement of sustainable communities. They contribute to the general well-being of the community in respect of providing for sport and recreation, encouraging physical activity and the

associated health benefits that come with this. These areas encourage enjoyment of the natural environment whilst contributing to biodiversity, the conservation of nature and landscape, air quality and the protection of groundwater. The importance of open spaces has become even more apparent during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Denbighshire public open space audit of March 2017 identified that for Llanfair DC the Community areas show deficiencies in all types of open space. It concluded that *“there is vast opportunity to improve the Open Space provision in these areas. An assessment of the demographics of the area would also help to determine what form of provision would be beneficial as well as consultation with the community of Llanfair DC and Graigfechan.”*

It is also relevant to consider Denbighshire’s **Housing needs** which are set out in the Housing Strategy. The Denbighshire Corporate Plan (2017-2022) identifies that it will support the development of 1000 more homes in Denbighshire. These will include 170 Council homes, 260 affordable homes provided by private developers and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Extra Care Housing and additional specialist housing to support people with disabilities and low-level support needs. The plan aims to support young people to access suitable homes they can afford and to bring 500 empty properties back into use.

Llanfair DC is playing its role in meeting the needs of the plan with the current 63-house Pure development and the 12-house development planned for Graigfechan. We are also actively trying to bring the Alms houses back into use.

Turning to **Local** needs assessment, our Neighbourhood Plan presents a vision for the community and identifies 30 specific proposals to meet needs. These have been developed through community consultation. All the ideas in the plan are linked back to Denbighshire’s key strategic themes of Environment, Health and Social Well-being, Economic & Culture and Community Resilience.

The Neuadd Eleanor survey, carried out in September 2018, was primarily concerned with residents’ views on the needs and uses of the village hall. The survey did identify broader needs in the 160 responses (44% of 365 surveys issued), with major areas for concern including the lack of safe closed-in communal playing area as well as a lack of opportunities for the community to meet such as at a café or shop. The survey also identified the potential for providing bunk-house type accommodation in the village to support tourism.

Discussions in the Community Council and the Neighbourhood Plan have identified potential uses for the school and include, in no order:

- Use of the school building (or a part of it) as a village shop. It has been suggested that the shop could be provided as an extension of the existing community owned shop in nearby Pwllglas.
- Use of the school building as a business incubator, like the Rhewl Technology Centre, where new start-up businesses can rent office space at an advantageous rate thereby stimulating the local economy.
- Creation of a Peace Garden in the school playing field taking advantage of the spectacular views from the grounds across the Vale. This would also meet the idea in the Neighbourhood plan for a respite area where people can meet and seek peace and quiet.

- Provision of a children’s play area; this would continue the use of the school grounds for the benefit of the children in the village. There is provision in the Neighbourhood plan for provision of play area on the nearby new housing development.
- Provision of an exercise trail on the school field.
- A cycling “pump track” to encourage development of riding skills.
- Provision of allotments or gardening-based activity.
- Combining several needs where the school could be used, possibly with the Alms houses, to provide holiday and tourist accommodation with potential for a shop and other community uses which could be Church based.
- Provision of affordable housing has also been suggested.

I would emphasize that we don’t need to make any decisions of detail tonight but rather to determine whether we want to express an interest in the school using the Communities Asset Transfer process.

DISCUSSION.....

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Llanfair DC Community Council should discuss and agree on the future use of the school and its grounds.

- i) Llanfair DC Community Council should **formally express an interest (pre-application)** in the former School, its playground and playing field to Denbighshire County Council following the Welsh Government’s framework for transfer of assets. These should be as two applications for i) the building and playground and ii) the playing field.
- ii) Llanfair DC Community Council should **continue to hold discussions** with relevant bodies with interests in the adjacent Alms houses to determine the best use of the former school building and its playground in line with the options set out in this report. This with a view to presenting a business case for their use.
- iii) That Llanfair DC Community Council should put in place measures to develop an application for the use of the **former school playing field**. Having expressed an interest in the site for the benefit of the community Llanfair DC Community Council should promote and support the Asset Transfer process for the playing field site. This would entail setting up a group with clear terms of reference for future use of the field in line with the needs identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. The group would report to the Community Council and would develop a plan to enable the second (expression of interest) and third stage (full application) of the Asset Transfer to take place.
- iv) Llanfair DC Community Council should **include the strategy** for the future development of the school and its playground in the Neighbourhood plan to advise policy and responses to any planning consultations.