**Chairmans Report 2023 to 2024**

This year has been a sad one for the Community Council with the loss of our Vice Chair, Carolyn Ovenden. Carolyn had supported this council as Chair for many years before deciding to step back and take the role of Vice Chair. I was very fortunate to gain from Carolyn’s wisdom and experience as Chair and will be ever grateful for her support. Carolyn was a very special person and added sound questioning, vigour, and humour to our meetings. I thank Councillor Sidwell for taking on the role of vice Chairman after Carolyn’s passing.

I also thank James Anderson, who stepped down as Councillor during the year, for his sound work supporting Pwllmeyric and the Community Council generally during his years of service.

This year has proved to be a difficult one in terms of our interface and challenging of Monmouthshire County Council (MCC). We are all aware of the challenging times and that cutbacks must be made but with rising Council Tax, we believe the community should still be provided with a level of service one should reasonably expect.

Communication appears to be a significant matter with MCC shutting down established communication routes due to the interpretation of Data Protection Laws without putting in place alternatives. If only life were so simple!

This has in particularly made it difficult for us to be aware of Planning and Enforcement issues with no feedback from MCC on any matters reported by a member of the public or us. We continue to challenge MCC on these matters.

We have also been pressing MCC on longer term issues such as the flooding under the motorway bridge in Mathern and the rebuilding of the pedestrian bridge crossing Mounton Brook by the lakes.

On the former we are pressing for an agreed emergency plan with MCC in the absence of MCC enforcing or maintaining road clearing standards. On the latter we are seeking a shorter-term solution in the absence of capital funding.

We have been successful in getting the sluice gates renewed on the outfall of Mounton Brook at St Pierre Pill. The 20MPH speed limit is now in place in Mathern. Dropped kerbs have also been constructed to the Stepaside road junction in Mathern.

Our finances remain is good order and have been passed by Wales Audit as such.

This year we have been continually recruiting for replacement Councillors for both Mounton and Pwllmeyric but disappointingly with no success to date. This leaves us with five Councillors in lieu of seven. Our aim has been to attract Councillors from all demographics within our community to ensure we cover all parties’ views and opinions. We are mindful that some in the community see us as ‘more mature’ individuals who just interfere with progress, particularly when it involves the emotive matter of planning. We pride ourselves in challenging this view whilst protecting the unique values and qualities of the village. It is for this reason we have tried to enlist proactive support from the Community.

This current year sees us engaging further on the development of the Replacement Local Development Plan. We actively fought against the initial plan to accommodate a high growth strategy with a large number of housings in the County with it all being focused in the Severnside area, particularly in Chepstow and Caldicot. This has now been changed to low growth plan (as supported by Welsh Government) but does present risks to our villages and their unique environments. We will continue to study the plan and hopefully hold an open session in Mathern to inform residents on proposals and the process of approval.

It would be remiss of me to not thank Jane Kelley our Clerk for her help, support and guidance to all Councillors during the past year, particularly myself. Jane’s professional and proactive support is really appreciated by all and she is a great ambassador for our Council.

I would like to thank County Councillor Louise Brown for all her hard work looking after to interests of the community at County Council level. We have worked collaboratively with Councillor Brown, who has worked tirelessly hard to pursue matters with us and has been a tremendous support throughout.

All within the Community have enjoyed the respectful way in which the war memorial has been lovingly presented and cared for and I must thank Chris and Carol Wheeler for their continued hard work and dedication to this valuable and respected memorial.

I thank my fellow Councillors for supporting me over the past year, support that is essential and hugely valuable. I look forward to 2024-25 and working with my fellow Councillors, ensuring we protect, support and enhance our community as best we can.

Yours

***David***

David Harris MBE FRICE, FICE, (Ret)FCIOB

Chair of Mathern Community Council