

Ilston Community Council Annual Report 2022/2023

Forward

The Local Government (Wales) Act 2021 Statutory Guidance imposes a duty on all community and town councils to produce an annual report.

This will be the second such report for Ilston Community Council and we again want to take this opportunity to increase our contact with residents, and encourage them to engage in local democracy.

Our question is 'What do you want from your Community Council'?

The statutory guidance also imposes responsibilities on councillors as individuals. These include continual professional development and a requirement to integrate other legislation within our plans and activities, eg Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

We are of course the lower tier of local government in Wales, but are the eyes and ears on the ground so to speak. Where possible, we deal with matters ourselves. If not, we raise issues to Swansea City Council (known as the Principal Authority). We do this via the appropriate council officers or through our Ward Councillor (Pennard) Lynda James with whom we have established a healthy working relationship.

It is important to stress that community councils help as a pressure group to bring matters to the attention of the Principal Authority, and get things done. With the exception of the Clerk, all members are volunteers who give their time, and professional knowledge for the benefit of the community.

A review of local councils has been carried out by the Local Government Boundary's Commission. There are some common-sense reasons for the change. On the flip side there are distinct disadvantages to the proposals. Namely the absorption of a reduced Ilston Community Council in to the Pennard ward. This will mean the current area of Ilston Community Council will be represented on the enlarged Pennard Community Council by just two members. We will have little or no voice, and importantly it will become even more difficult, if not impossible to deal with Swansea City Council or utility providers. Of recent years this community council has punched well above its weight, with notable successes through perseverance.

Additionally, the Community Council precept will rise to the Pennard level. This is currently just under £100 per household, while Ilston is just £19.00.

Details of the proposals are contained in the attached boundary commission report. This is open for consultation for the next 8 weeks. We urge you to make any representations you see fit. The Report has been published electronically and can be viewed at [website](#).

This will undoubtedly make a difference. It is up to you to judge whether it is worthwhile keeping Ilston as a separate Community Council

I am standing down as Chair of Ilston Community Council at the AGM in May this year. It has been a privilege to hold the post. However, it's time for a new leader to be appointed to keep the work of the council fresh and dynamic. I will put myself forward for the role of vice chair to assist the and support the incoming chair with continuity of change.

Your Councillors

Dale Ponting (Chair), Penmaen

Roy Church (Vice Chair), Parkmill West

Ian Brown, Parkmill West

Sue Mobbs, Parkmill East

Helen James, Ilston/Lunnon

Nick Huffer, Ilston/Lunnon

Nigel Hollett, Penmaen

Cody Bates, Penmaen

Benjamin Beynon, Nicholaston

Steve Pleydell, Penmaen

We currently have one vacancy for a councillor.

Since my last report we have said goodbye and thank you to Charlotte Toft our previous Clerk. Charlotte has left to pursue her own business interests, and we wish her well and thank her for the excellent support she provided.

We have been exceptionally lucky in appointing Mr Paul Sizer as our new clerk to the council. Besides being a professional accountant, Paul is also currently Clerk to Reynoldston Community Council. This means we are able to make efficiency savings in areas such as training and time. The Clerk is the main conduit for correspondence, and can be contacted by email at,

clerk.ilstoncommunitycouncil@gmail.com

Paul is qualified as a clerk at the appropriate level required by a council of our size. However, he has obtained a bursary and is currently working through the higher level qualification (CiLCA) increasing his professional expertise in the role.

As a Community Council we have moved to holding meetings every two months. This is partly a cost saving measure, and also enables us to share the clerk with Reynoldston Community Council.

Councillor profiles can be found on our website

<https://ilstoncommunitycouncil.com/>

CURRENT WORK GROUPS REPRESENTING ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COUNCIL

We have some long-standing work groups and a number of new ones as follow:

Planning Cllr Nigel Hollett and Cllr Ian Brown

Finance Mr Sizer (Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer), and Cllr Dale Ponting.

Training Cllr Helen James (lead) Cllrs Cody Bates and Dale Ponting.

Traffic Cllr Cody Bates (lead) Cllr Roy Church, and Cllr Sue Mobbs.

Environment Cllrs Sue Mobbs, Ian Brown and Benjamin Beynon.

Communications Cllr Steve Pleydell.

Community Council Forum Cllr Helen James

Swansea Area Committee Cllr Dale Ponting

Chair of Gower Community Council Forum, Cllr Dale Ponting

The main objectives of the community council, and progress towards them are as follow;

The above working groups continue to operate. The objectives for each group are amended as necessary and action plans re formulated.

Often, these are time critical and driven by the statutory guidance, and direction from the Senedd in Cardiff.

The training record for councillors is available for inspection on the web site.

<https://ilstoncommunitycouncil.com/notices/>

The Council website has been completely rebuilt and updated by and Councillor Steve Pleydell. Since May 2023 we have held multi location meetings in compliance with Wales Senedd requirements. This means that members of the public may either attend council meetings in person, or online by zoom. As a cost saving measure our secure IT links are hosted by Tourism Swansea Bay

In the last year we have held two 'meet your councillor' sessions, one in the Gower Inn, and the other in The Heritage Centre. Both were well attended. They were effective on two levels.

The first being the opportunity for councillors to hear firsthand what members of the community want, and secondly for the councillors to explain their role in the process of local government.

Councillors continue to attend a range of training courses appropriate to their roles, as mandated by the Senedd. We continue to integrate other strategic objectives in our plans as required by the Senedd

An example of this is the Wellness of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

We continue to explore ways to make this a better environment for young people not just those who live here, but for individuals to work in, or visit the area. There are three current members of the council with school age children. They are well placed to represent the needs of young families, and have networks with schools and other groups.

We have actively addressed important community infrastructure including transport. An example of this is the Nicholaston to Mumbles Community Bus. This venture is a joint enterprise between Pennard (the lead), and Ilston Community Council. The driving force behind the project has been Cllr Lynda

James. There is a huge amount of negotiation and, ongoing fundraising ongoing to make this happen. Cllr Sue Mobbs is our representative on the Community Bus Committee.

Contrary to popular belief planning is a relatively small part of our brief. Planning matters are decided by the Principal Authority

We continue attempts to engage with planners to ensure there is viable and sustainable housing. We try to balance the needs of a thriving resident community and those who own second homes in the area. This is a sensitive issue. Swansea Council Planning Officers decide on all but the larger strategic projects. Communities and Councils such as ours find the system challenging. We like to welcome everyone into our community; but we also understand communities need not only houses, but also residents to keep them alive. Without them, year-round businesses, schools, churches, community halls and bus services, etc cannot survive.

People have a vested interest in their villages, their neighbours and the local environment. As a community council, we hope a healthy balance can be maintained.

We continue to support and value community assets (not necessarily owned by the community council) including Penmaen and Nicholaston Village Hall, The Barham Centre in Parkmill, as well as churches and other places of worship. To this end we will be supporting St Johns Church Penmaen, by holding future community events there.

Cllr Lynda James has provided a bench in the garden of Penmaen and Nicholaston Village Hall. Everyone is welcome to use it, either to admire the views across Oxwich Bay, or maybe quiet contemplation with a flask of tea, also Cllr Lynda James replaced the bench in Parkmill which was damaged beyond repair after a motor accident.

The above in many ways links to another piece of Senedd legislation, namely the Environment (Wales) Act.

We are mindful that a sustainable and healthy environment is a cornerstone for developing a better place for future generations. We previously tasked The Environment Working Group with identifying not only what is going wrong eg destruction of habitat by unnecessary mowing, use of herbicides, high levels of traffic pollution etc but also identifying good practice and green opportunities. This includes more efficient use of public transport, for which the aforementioned community bus is an excellent starting point.

The group have produced a comprehensive biodiversity report as a base line assessment. They are now working on the diversity action plan. We are engaging a range of stakeholders from The National Trust, The City Council, and countryside access groups.

Cllr Ian Brown of the Environment Working Group has produced a draft flood plan for Parkmill, and Ilston. Flooding of houses is a real and present danger in these areas and several hundred sandbags have been provided by The Principle Authority. The Community Council hold stockpiles at Gower Heritage Centre, and The Guide Centre in Parkmill. Councillors recently distributed sandbags to the homes of residents in Ilston. Sandbags are free and available for collection by residents. If physically unable to collect themselves, we will arrange delivery.

Councillor Mobbs has identified an illegal waste water outfall into Killywilly Stream near the Gower Inn. It is possible this comes from the Pennard Housing Estate. As a result Welsh Water, and Natural Resources Wales are investigating the source, as well as discharges from the waste treatment and pumping station at the top of Sandy Lane. The effluent flows down the stream, into Pennard Pill to Three Cliffs, during periods of high rainfall. We have obtained a commitment from the above organisations to resolve these matters.

Cllr Mobbs is also in regular contact with highways to keep the junction of Sandy Lane and the A4118 clear of gravel and debris washed down the hill in heavy rain, and attempting to have the situation remedied at source.

ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

The community council continues to monitor Japanese knotweed in Ilston and Three Cliffs Valleys. As a result, the Principal Authority are coordinating treatment over two years. We are now in year two of the process.

Concerns remain about speeding traffic, and frequent unacceptable congestion on the A 4118 especially through the village of Parkmill, and more generally along the entire 2-mile length of road between Kilrough Manor and Nicholaston. Last year we identified several collision hotspots. Understanding the principal authority have many competing demands the community council took the following actions.

Erected a speed monitoring sign at the bottom of Penmaen Hill eastbound. This has seen some benefit in slowing vehicles to 30mph. A second speed monitor device has now been installed near the junction of Sandy Lane to inform westbound traffic. The devices also record traffic flow and speed data which we shared with the highways department.

We continue to review signage, road markings, and surface damage such as potholes which are reported to the Highways Department.

Due to financial cuts within The Principle Authority, and the Senedd focus on the Wales wide 20mph speed limit in all built up areas, it has been difficult to have anything more than essential works carried out on the local roads for most of the last 12 months. We are all acutely aware of the deterioration in road surfaces, which are reported on a regular basis.

A comprehensive 32 page report making a number of recommendations concerning signage and speed restrictions on the A4118 from Kilvrough to Nicholaston based on residents' personal knowledge of the road was submitted to the Highways Department in March 2023. A response was only received in March of this year, after enquiries on our behalf by the local MP, and The Senedd Member for Gower. It is clear that Highways have been otherwise focused, and finance is the overriding problem. However, it is our intention to continue to push for appropriate measures (not necessarily 20mph

speed limits) to reduce the risks to all. While aware of the financial and other pressures the highway department is under; there are challenges in communicating local knowledge to them. Some of this knowledge significantly contradicts data used by Highways. Communication challenges with this department of the council may ultimately have to be adjudicated by the Local Government Ombudsman.

This work and other matters relating to road safety on the A4118 are carried out by members of the Traffic Work Group.

The Principal Authority has difficulty with recruitment and retention of suitably qualified senior highways staff. Highways do not hold their own budget. This creates challenges for all concerned.

The Community Council continues to make donations to causes benefiting the community, such as The Air Ambulance, and the community bus.

Penmaen Nicholaston and Perriswood were particularly affected by disruptions to water supply. As a result of community council pressure Welsh Water carried out costly works in the summer of 2023, renewing water mains in the affected areas. That work is now complete, and water supply is much improved.

There have been ongoing concerns about illegal overnight parking of motor homes and rough camping as well as the use of off-road motor cycles on Cefn Bryn in summer months. The community council is in dialogue with police and the principal authority. Vehicle prohibition and police warning signs have been placed at two main access points to Cefn Bryn resulting in a marked decrease of unlawful traffic and camping in the vicinity. This however remains a work in progress, and is an issue across Gower and other areas of the country.

It is not helpful that there is only one sergeant, one constable and one police community support officer allocated to Gower. The constable is based in Townhill Police Station. Resourcing appears to be a common theme across all services.

The community council also input into other cross Gower groups that look at rural access plans, road closures due to Events such as the Iron Man triathlon and other pan Gower issues.

We have worked with the National Trust who installed a berm on the land used for indiscriminate parking at the west end of The Dingle (Penmaen loop road). They have re grassed the area and intend to plant trees.

Day to day councillors deal with the principal authority and other public bodies to make them aware of community concerns, for example the diminishing road surface at Lunnon Hill, overhanging and dangerous trees, damaged public footpaths and access gates.

The long running concern about the state of the carpark surface at Tor View unfortunately rumbles on. The principal authority state they do not own all the area, although it appears they originally surfaced it.

An offer by the community council to assist with cost was rejected.

Casual littering is an issue on the coast paths and access to beaches. The community council have installed public signage urging visitors to take their rubbish home and had refuse bins relocated where they are most effective. Councillor Helen James of Ilston has had a number of notable successes tracking down fly tippers, and these matters have been reported to Swansea Cleansing Department who have taken appropriate action with individuals.

The path through the woods in Parkmill from Shepherds to Gower Inn was completed by Access to Countryside last year and this happened after we had engaged with them, making the path wider and safer for locals, Schools and tourists. The project is ongoing as we are trying to get the steps either end replaced to make it completely safe.

PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

The world is going through a turbulent period with many uncertainties. Councillors are mindful, local authority resources will be put under further pressure.

We are starting our planning and budget cycle ensuring the objectives for the coming year are realistic, achievable and prioritised in order of positive impact on the community.

The Traffic Working Group will remain a priority with the aim of increasing road safety, and improving the environment for all residents' businesses and visitors. The overwhelming concern of local residents from all consultation is road safety on the A4118. We will do everything possible to get the relevant authorities to address the issues, such as improving signage, appropriate speed limits and tackling the anti-social driving of those drivers who use the road as a racetrack.

Our environment is under pressure from all sides. As a community council we will do our best to retain the environment at the core of everything we do.

We will continue to evolve our communication with the community and listen to what you say.

BUDGET

Given financial pressures on households this year any decision by this council to increase the precept would have to be justified by significant planned and properly costed requirements as part of the planning cycle.

The Community Council will undoubtedly need to look at other forms of funding including grants, lottery funding and where appropriate, sponsorship. The council came in under budget in 2023/2024 leaving a surplus.

The audited accounts for the last financial year can be accessed via the following link.

<https://ilstoncommunitycouncil.com/notices/>

Whatever the year ahead throws at us the members of Ilston Community Council are committed to playing our part in making the area a great place to live visit and do business.

Dale Ponting

Chairman Ilston Community Council.

(May 2024)