

## Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

Sir

At Monday's meeting of Llanhennock Community Council we received the draft proposals for The Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements.

It was noted that pages 48 and 181 of the draft states that the Community of Llanhennock submitted no representations. We are at a loss to understand how this statement can be made because we sent the email appended below in response to the initial consultation. As you can see, the email was sent on 3rd October 2012.

Please could you explain why our representation has not been acknowledged or printed in the draft proposal?

We shall be making a further representation in respect of the draft proposal, but in the meantime I would like to point out that my brief perusal of comments received and representations made by rural community councils throughout the area show an overriding desire to maintain the status quo. In other words - 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'

Please could you respond to this email to show that you have received it.

Yours faithfully

Ieuan Williams  
(Chairman Llanhennock Community Council)

-----Original Message-----

From:

To: elections <elections@monmouthshire.gov.uk>

Sent: Wed, 3 Oct 2012 14:13

Subject: Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements

Sir

In my capacity as Chairman of Llanhennock Community Council I am responding to the Monmouthshire County Council consultation document 'Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements.'

Whilst it is noted that Llanhennock Community Council has councillor:elector ratios at the lower end of the county scale we, as a Council, consider that this is fully justified due to the rural nature of our three wards. The geography and topography of the area combined with the dispersed nature of housing requires representatives who have an intimate knowledge of the community and its infrastructure. This knowledge cannot be imparted effectively by representatives covering a much wider area when important local issues are being considered such as planning, road repairs and improvements and crime matters.

Since each of our councillors are part of a close community who know each other so well, we are able to respond rapidly and effectively to any matter of local concern.

Our costs are minimal because we consider our roles as a privilege and pride ourselves in our community and so much of our work is done at no expense whatsoever, something which is not done for much larger urban areas.

Monmouthshire is a largely rural county and our job is to retain the appeal and sustainability of the rural community. This would not be achievable if we covered a much wider area or had a much larger councillor:elector ratio.

Hence, we would request that the status quo is retained.

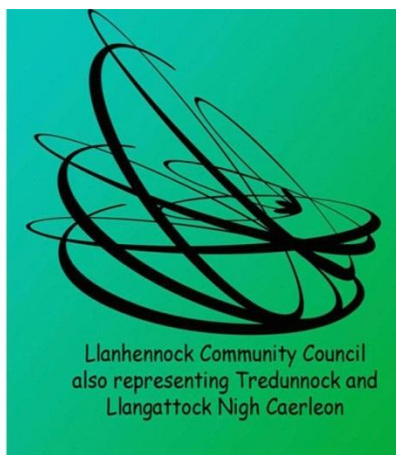
Yours faithfully

Ieuan Williams  
(Chairman Llanhennock Community Council)

## Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

### Llanhennock:

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Cllr. Alan Davies: 01633 422331  
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### Tredunnoch:

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### Llangattock Nigh Caerleon:

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### **Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements**

Llanhennock Community Council first responded to the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements consultation document in October 2013. It was felt that additional submission was unnecessary as we would be reiterating our initial stance against any proposed rearrangement in councillor numbers or amalgamation of community councils.

It was therefore of some concern that the latest tome, Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements Draft Proposals extending to over 200 pages, states that our Council did not submit any representation to the March 2013 initial proposals consultation, thus implying a certain amount of apathy on our behalf.

This is far from the case.

Our Community Council is opposed to any such rearrangement and it is noted in Appendix E of the Draft Proposals that the vast majority of rural community councils are of the same opinion. The Council's Working Group proposal is the amalgamation of Llangybi Community Council with Llanhennock Community Council. It is for this reason that I, acting as Chairman of our Council attended a joint meeting with Llangybi CC to discuss the proposals. It was agreed by all Councillors that the proposals were inappropriate and would not achieve any worthwhile or positive outcome for the two Community Councils or the County Council.

Llanhennock CC comprises three wards with eight Councillors with an average 52 electors per Councillor which is approximately one-third of the 'ideal ratio' of 150 per Councillor. Whilst this may be appropriate in more densely populated areas, judging by responses in the Draft Proposals it is clearly not the case in rural areas.

Our area comprises two small villages, Llanhennock and Tredunnoch, with the remainder being dispersed houses and farms. As Councillors we represent the whole community

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and take responsibility for the wider rural area. This we undertake at no cost to the taxpayer, so it is difficult to understand how there can be any cost savings from the proposed rationalisation.

Our members are a diverse group of men and women from a wide range of backgrounds with assorted skills covering most issues we encounter in our roles on the Community Council. These combine to produce a good working relationship and knowledge base to the benefit of our community. Members' vocations include:

- Farmers with a wide and intimate knowledge of rural matters throughout the three wards;
- Retired police officer;
- Council highways engineer;
- Probation officer;
- Retired housewife with many years of Council involvement; and
- Planning consultant.

It is inconceivable that such a broad range of experiences could be brought to administration of Community Council matters if operating on a significant reduction in Councillor numbers and over a much wider area.

Since the members are spread throughout the three wards there is close contact with all the electorate and as a consequence any local issues are noticed and actioned at an early stage. This cannot be the case when Councillor numbers are significantly reduced, particularly in such a wide rural area.

It is considered that any amalgamation would result in a shift of focus to the detriment of our community. There is currently a good relationship with the electorate within our community due to the close contact and ability to action issues promptly. The proposed changes are likely to result in the electorate becoming disenfranchised, which is the complete opposite of the national politicians' desire for localism and community involvement in their own affairs.

It is of particular note that the County Council wishes to devolve some of their responsibilities to Community Councils with associated budgetary accountability. It seems quite evident that amalgamation of Community Councils will result in a focus on certain areas within the proposed larger community to the detriment of more remote and less populated areas within the boundaries. An example would be Gatlas Lane which suffered years of neglect and heavy traffic accessing the Water Treatment Works (WTW) as a short cut. Without close local attention and knowledge this would have been neglected even further to the point of being unpassable to cars. Lobbying by our Community Council has resulted in a resurfaced lane and discontinued use by HGVs and large vehicles accessing the WTW.

As a council we give our time for free and see our roles as a privilege. We are enthusiastic and attendance at meetings averages 90%, allowing a good representation of opinions from across the area. Any vacancies are filled immediately without recourse to election expenses. Reduction in councillor numbers will inevitably result in elections

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due to the desire of the Councillors to be involved in our community. This will have attendant electoral costs which we have not experienced for many years.

In conclusion, there is no perceptible advantage to the proposed amalgamation of Community Councils and reduction in numbers of Community Councillors. It is quite likely that costs will increase due to electoral issues. The changes will be to the detriment of the community as a whole. It has to be asked – what is the purpose of a Community Council if it cannot effectively service its electorate and community area?

# Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

**Andrew Wilkinson**

I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to the Consultation process and have the following observations :-

O Entirely appropriate for the Community Council structure to be reviewed from time to time and, in principle some rationalisation is sensible.

O I would be interested to have a better understanding of the underpinning rationale and no doubt the public meeting will address this for wider benefit. The formula based on number of residents is understandable but needs to be considered alongside local and sometimes potentially conflicting interests

O In determining the number of Councillors involved within a Council particularly important to have a full understanding of the extent to which responsibilities may be further devolved from the County Council.

O There is some risk in that asking fewer people to do more will prove counter productive in terms of the flow of volunteers particularly in circumstances where achieving some balance in the age and experience profile of Councillors is currently a challenge. I accept that filling spaces is sometimes a challenge

O The proposed changes place additional reliance on a reduced number to attend regularly and, if these proposals are implemented then guidance around expected attendance ( if not already in existence) should be provided. Whilst removing a Councillor should be a last resort equally efficient and democratic functioning of individual Councils is of real importance

O A better understanding across the wider public of the role of Community Councils ie what they can do and what they cannot do would be useful This is especially important if further powers are to be devolved from County Council.

O The ability of Councils and particularly individual Councillors to access confidential and impartial advice (apart from the Clerk to the Council) could usefully be reviewed alongside re-organisation .There is a wider training issue but in realistic terms there is a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be asked to do more albeit the corollary is of course the inevitability of the County Council doing less going forward.

Hope the observations are of some use.

Andrew Wilkinson

# Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

**Peter Harkness**

Good morning

I have reviewed the proposed arrangements for the above, and have three concerns:

- The underlying rationale for the proposals to merge and reduce the number of elected representatives
- The logic for merging the CCs concerned (apart from applying a formula to arrive at the desired number of Councillors)
- The increased workload that is likely to be involved in dealing with issues across a bigger and less well known area allied to likely additional responsibilities which will be devolved to Community Councils

On the face of it my view is that any re-organisation should take place once the implications of the last of these is known.

I'm unable to make the consultation meeting and would be grateful if you would ensure that these concerns are raised.

Many thanks

Patrick Harkness

# Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

## Llangybi Fawr Community Council submissions on the Review

Llangybi Fawr Community Council has the following general observations on the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements:

1. We question whether this is a good time to be proposing substantial reductions in the number of community and town councillors when the policy seems to be to devolve responsibilities down on to communities and towns. There is also the further uncertainty brought about by the anticipated reorganisation of primary councils as proposed in the Williams review. It begs the question as to why and for what purpose these proposals are being made now. It seems to be bringing about a great deal of upheaval and confusion without any serious gain. There certainly appears to be no financial benefit accruing.
2. An aim of the review was to remove existing inconsistencies in the level of representation within the county, but in the event, the review has introduced or maintained a number of inconsistencies. We will refer to this further below.
3. The reductions proposed in the review fall predominantly on rural areas. In practice, in these communities, there is more ground to cover, and extra councillors are needed, not fewer.

We turn now to comments relating specifically to the proposals for Llangybi Fawr and Llanhennock:

1. The review proposes a huge cut in representation for the residents of our two communities, down from 17 councillors to 8. No other community is subjected to such a large cut. This loss of nine councillors will lead to a huge loss of experience, expertise and local knowledge. Moreover, there is no synergy between Llangybi Fawr and Llanhennock. The two communities seem to be pushed together merely because they are adjacent. The reference in the review to the road links between the two communities centring on Cwrt Bleddyn is at best dubious and at worst not true.
2. Llangybi Fawr has approximately 750 electors. The review includes proposals for the survival of five community councils with smaller electorates - significantly smaller in several examples. Because of this, we in Llangybi Fawr cannot understand why it is considered necessary to combine us with another community. We note that in those communities smaller than Llangybi, the review panel seem comfortable to propose some extremely low electorate/councillor ratios, for example, 27/1 (Mathern), 89/2 (Grosmont), 267/5 (Skenfrith). All these ratios are far lower than those existing currently in the wards of Llangybi Fawr.
3. The proposed new council for Llangybi/Llanhennock has 5 single member wards (out of 6). No other proposed council has as many or as high a proportion of single member wards. It changes the balance of the council. It also means that there is a significant risk of areas not being represented at council meetings because of illness, holidays, &c. It puts a greater load on individual councillors, as well as more pressure because of the sole representation. The larger area covered could well give rise to more issues coming up at meetings, resulting in longer and difficult meetings. Overall, the job of a community councillor, which is purely voluntary and unpaid, will become more onerous and less attractive, with the consequence that local people will be less attracted to the task and not put themselves forward as future councillors. This will result in less democracy and accountability rather than the more hoped for.

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4. The review states that there are no developments in the community. This is not correct because there is a proposal in the draft LDP for 10 new dwellings in Llangybi. In addition there are current planning applications for an additional two dwellings as well as a restoration and extension of a currently unoccupied property in the village. These developments will push the population of Llangybi ward over 500, which, based on proposals elsewhere in rural areas, merits at least 4 councillors, and we would argue justifies retaining the current 5 seats.
  
5. In conclusion, we would point out that the current arrangements are working very well as far as Llangybi Fawr is concerned so it begs the question why it is considered necessary to change them. We fail to see how the new proposals would make the system in any way better than we have at present. In fact, we believe the new proposals will bring many disadvantages, be less accountable, less efficient, and therefore less accountable.

Graham Rogers  
Chairman Llangybi Fawr Community Council



# **Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council**

## **Further Evidence for Working Group on Reorganisation from Llangybi CC**

Llangybi Fawr Community Council has three wards – Llangybi with 5 councillors, Llandegfedd with 2, and Coed-y-Paen with 2. We strongly oppose the proposal to reduce our representation from 5:2:2 to 3:1:1 and amalgamate us with Llanhennock Community Council. We are a very active – and proactive – council, involving ourselves with numerous issues concerning our local area.

In addition to all our work within our wards, we work with several other groups within the locality. One or more of our members represent us at the following groups, attending meetings and reporting back to council:

Monmouthshire Rural Forum 6-weekly meetings  
One Voice Wales Regular local meetings and Annual Conference  
Prison Council Liaison Group Quarterly meetings, also cascade abscond reports  
Coed-y-Paen Residents Assoc Bi-monthly meetings, also regular liaison  
Area Health Issues Ad hoc meetings  
Llangybi Village Hall Regular meetings  
Parochial Church Council Regular meetings

Recently, we negotiated the purchase of a plot of land, arranging a loan from the Public Works Loan Board. Having canvassed local opinion, we have organised allotments, setting up an Allotment Association, drafting a memorandum of agreement to set out responsibilities between the Council and Association. We have also negotiated the purchase of two redundant telephone kiosks from BT, one of which is now successfully functioning as a village library in Coed-y-Paen, the other of which we have refurbished with a view to creating another village library in Llandegfedd.

We are in the process of developing two Community Led Plans, one for Llangybi and Llandegfedd, the other for Coed-y-Paen. Each has involved organising open meetings, forming steering groups, manning public consultation sessions, developing questionnaires, and distributing and collecting the latter. We are currently awaiting the analysis of the results by adventa before drafting the two Community Led Plans.

We are also currently in the process of purchasing a defibrillator for Llangybi, with the intention of purchasing a further two for the other villages. We will arrange training sessions for local residents as and when the defibrillators are installed. We believe we will be the first community council in Monmouthshire to install a defibrillator.

We are responsible for the maintenance of several facilities in our area. Primarily we have a grassed play area in Llangybi (for which we have purchased play equipment) and which we arrange to be mown at regular intervals. We are also responsible for the upkeep of two further grassed areas in the centre of Llangybi and an ancient Cadw Scheduled sacred well (St Cybi's well) which Council restored with the aid of grants. We have purchased a number of notice-boards, benches and litter bins distributed around our three villages. We also have several dog-waste bins and purchase appropriate bags for free use by dog owners. We provide financial support to the four churches in our area as well as the Residents Association in Coed-y-Paen.

Llangybi and Coed-y-Paen have their own websites, and as well as having information on councillors, we provide regular updates on our activities. We also provide articles on our activities for a 'Steps' a quarterly church Newsletter. One of our members has

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prepared an information leaflet primarily for newcomers in Llangybi, but of use for all residents, with information on local facilities, transport, &c.

We have a large number of public footpaths in our area and one of our councillors is a trained footpath assessor. We also organise teams of volunteer litter-pickers to keep our roads tidy.

We take our responsibilities regarding planning matters very seriously, carefully considering all applications in our area. We respond to all applications, attending and addressing Planning Committee Meetings on numerous occasions where appropriate. On several occasions we have attended planning appeals, putting forward our views. We were instrumental in obtaining an Article 4 Order on a local area of woodland to protect it from unsuitable development. We have actively participated in the Local Development Plan process, presenting our case at Monmouthshire Council sessions and also several sessions before the Welsh Government Inspector. We, together with Llanbadoc Community Council and Coed-y-Paen Residents' Association, have maintained close contact with Welsh Water over their development of facilities at Llandegfedd Reservoir.

All this is in addition to the regular contact we maintain with our residents to be aware of any issues that concern them. Llangybi Fawr is a large rural area, and requires the current level of representation to provide an adequate level of cover to keep in touch with residents. It would be impossible for us to maintain our current level of activity and keep abreast of local issues with the proposed reduction of councillors from 9 to 5. We would also lose a great deal of knowledge and expertise. Our current councillors include a consultant paediatrician, a farmer, a manager of a higher education establishment, a former JP, as well as a retired educationalist and retired civil servant. This gives residents greater scope for addressing their concerns to the most appropriate and best qualified person. We also have an acceptable gender mix of 6 male and 3 female councillors – a gender mix which wards reduced to a single representative could lose completely.

We also strongly oppose the proposed amalgamation of Llangybi Fawr with Llanhennock. We have no affinity with Llanhennock and there is no synergy between the two. We in Llangybi tend to look towards Usk and the rest of Monmouthshire, whereas Llanhennock looks more towards its neighbours Caerleon, Ponthir and Newport. The proposal to reduce the representation from 17 councillors to 8 is a massive cut and will hit the local community hard. To create a new council with 5 single member wards would seriously put at risk the representation that the wards now enjoy. Any absences of councillors for holiday or illness would leave large wards unrepresented at meetings.

Graham Rogers, Chairman Llangybi Fawr Community

# Llangybi & Llanhennock Community Council

## COED-Y-PAEN RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Sirs

I am writing on behalf of the Coed-y- Paen Residents Association which represents the views of residents in our village. We discussed the proposals in the above Review at our recent AGM. Everyone was concerned about the impact they would have in our ward of Coed-y- Paen.

Our ward covers a large area and we consider it justifiable for the ward to be represented by two councillors. At present we have one male and one female councillor, and consider that the gender balance offers residents options when raising issues. Also, our two councillors have different perspectives and offer us different skills, knowledge and experience.

With two councillors, we are virtually guaranteed representation at community council meetings, whereas, should we have only a single member, there will inevitably be occasions, because of holidays, illness etc. when our representative will not be available, and our voice would not be heard.

We are also very concerned about the proposal that Llangybi and Llanhennock Community Councils should be merged. We do not know what issues concern Llanhennock, but are sure that they will differ from those that concern us.

We in Coed-y-Paen very much look towards Usk, for local shopping and leisure interests as do the residents of the other two wards in our area. In fact everyone in Coed-y-Paen is extremely irritated that our postal address is Pontypool and not Usk. We suspect that residents in Llanhennock look much towards Caerleon and Newport. Consequently because of this difference in focus we are not convinced that the two community councils would work well together.

It seems to us that this review offers very little financial benefit to the County Council and does nothing to improve communication and efficiency within the community.

So in conclusion, we would urge the review team to reconsider their decision to reduce our representation to a single councillor. We would also urge the team not to amalgamate Llangybi Fawr and Llanhennock community councils.