

Community of Gwehelog Fawr

REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

COMMUNITY OF GWEHELOG FAWR

Response to the Draft Proposals

1. Communication Channels

- The working group should be aware that the main channel of communication through the community is via the R61 Llanccayo Road. It is not the case that *‘the main channel of communication through the community is via the B4598 and Usk Road’*.
- R61 Llanccayo Road is the principal east / west link through the community and is the route which connects the Gwehelog and Trostre wards to the Llanccayo and Kemeys Commander wards. This is the route which locals use and it is **incorrect** to state that *“electors from within the community are required to travel through the adjoining Usk community in order to reach either side”*.
- R61 Llanccayo Road is a Class 3 road which has recently been resurfaced by the Council’s Highways division in acknowledgment of its status as a strategic route. It is **not** a *“narrow single track lane”* as referred to in the Recommendations.
- We ask you to reconsider this statement and to acknowledge that Llanccayo Road does provide a main channel of communication linking the wards within Gwehelog Fawr community

2. Community Links

- The current western boundary of Gwehelog Fawr is the River Usk. This natural boundary incorporates Kemeys Commander and Llanccayo within the community. The proposal to move the boundary to the edge of Llanccayo and Trostre Wood and to annex the Llanccayo and Kemeys Commander wards from Gwehelog Fawr and include them in the Llanarth community does not appear to be a logical decision because:
 - i) The new boundary is ill defined and does not follow a natural boundary, e.g. a watercourse or road.
 - ii) The communication link between the wards of Gwehelog, Trostre, Llanccayo and Kemeys Commander is well served via a Class 3 road whereas the road link between Kemeys Commander and Bettws Newydd in the Llanarth community is

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via the Unclassified C31.2 Thornbury Road.

iii) Kemeys Commander and Llancao and are both closer to Gwehelog and Trostre than they are to Llanarth and as a result have strong community and church links with each other which they do not have with Llanarth village.

- In consideration of the above we ask you to reconsider the recommendation to disband Gwehelog Fawr and to retain the Gwehelog, Kemeys Commander, Trostre and Llancao wards within a Gwehelog Fawr community.

3. Gwehelog Fawr Boundaries

- Bettws Newydd, currently within Llanarth C.C. is severed from Llanarth village by route R64, the old Raglan – Abergavenny road whereas it is well connected and has direct road links from both west and east directions with Gwehelog Fawr community from Thornbury Road and Berthlwydd Road respectively. Gwehelog councillors consider that Bettws Newydd is closer to and has more affinity with Gwehelog Fawr C.C. than with Llanarth C.C. and would welcome the attachment of Bettws Newydd to Gwehelog Fawr C.C.
- The current boundary between Gwehelog Fawr C.C. and Raglan C.C runs along the centre of route C33.2 which has the effect of severing households within Gwehelog village from the community. Gwehelog councillors consider that the Gwehelog Fawr boundary should be adjusted in order to include these properties.
- In consideration of the above we ask you to consider extending the northern boundary of Gwehelog Fawr to include the Clytha Ward of Llanarth C.C. which incorporates Bettws Newydd. Also that the western boundary of Gwehelog Fawr is extended to include properties fronting routes C33.2 and C215.15.

4. Cultural Links

- The churches at Trostre and Kemeys Commander are both served by the rector of Bettws Newydd Church which provides a cultural link to the parish.
- Gwehelog Fawr C.C. makes annual donations to Bettws, Trostre and Kemeys Commander churches.
- Gwehelog Fawr C.C. has strong links with the Gwehelog Village Hall committee and shares a joint website which has recently been awarded a grant of £500 to further

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develop the site. The development of the website is a clear example of the way in which the community council is developing a local identity with other bodies in the rural area, an identity which would be entirely lost were GFCC to be subsumed into 'greater Raglan'.

- Gwehelog Fawr C.C. has recently revised its Standing Orders to allow the public to actively participate in Community Council meetings in an effort to encourage the village to engage and feel part of the community. The review proposals will extinguish that concept.
- Gwehelog Fawr C.C. has also recently undertaken a project to widen community involvement, which could well serve as a model to be emulated by other community councils in Monmouthshire and Wales. A community council working party is currently due to report back to the main council on a number of unique initiatives.
- Gwehelog Fawr C.C. is a strong and active council which works tirelessly to support its community.
- In consideration of the above we ask you to reconsider the recommendation to disband Gwehelog Fawr and to retain the Gwehelog, Kemeys Commander, Trostre and Llanccayo wards within a Gwehelog Fawr community.

5. Raglan

- The proposal to attach Gwehelog to Raglan is not a natural link because Gwehelog is a rural community whereas Raglan is predominantly a suburban community. Raglan C.C. undertakes responsibility for the provision of dog waste bins, allotments, park seating and war memorial maintenance and also makes hefty donations to the Raglan Music Festival and Raglan Twinning Association. As a result its current precept is £17,425 whereas Gwehelog Fawr C.C., which has no infrastructure to maintain, has a precept of £3,800.
- The consequence of Gwehelog being attached to Raglan would be that its precept would increase from £13.81/household to £16.27/household, i.e. an increase of 18%.
$$[\text{£}16.66 \times (1070 + 220 + 146) + (\text{£}13.81 \times 223)] / 1659 = \text{£}16.27$$

Gwehelog Fawr C.C. has no plans to increase its current precept and therefore it is unlikely that Gwehelog residents will benefit from the increase in its precept as a

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result of a merger with Raglan.

- Furthermore, because under the proposed arrangement Raglan will have four councillors whereas Llandenny, Kingcoed and Gwehelog wards will only have one councillor each; in the event of a vote to allocate resources etc. the Raglan councillors will always be able to outvote the other three wards and therefore there is a concern that Raglan affairs will take precedence over the issues of the rural wards.
- In consideration of the above we ask you to reconsider the recommendation to disband Gwehelog Fawr and to retain the Gwehelog, Kemeys Commander, Trostre and Llancayo wards within a Gwehelog Fawr community.

Conclusion

1. Gwehelog Fawr councillors consider that whereas some minor adjustments to Community Council boundaries may be beneficial in order for example to ensure that villages are not severed by community boundaries, it does not think that the review provides any fundamental improvement on the existing arrangement.
2. The proposals will cause major disruption to many Councils and it is difficult to understand what benefits the review will provide. The fact that under the proposals the number of Community Councils will only reduce from 33 to 31 and the number of wards from 119 to 118 seems to demonstrate this. The only notable reduction as a result of the review is that the number of elected Community Councillors will reduce from 356 to 287.
3. Although MCC has a responsibility to review electoral arrangements, the draft proposals appear to be making changes for the sake of making changes. Nowhere does the draft document explain where any advantage would be gained by the change to current representational arrangements.
4. Gwehelog Fawr is a distinctive, ancient community of great historical importance and members of the community value that heritage. Members of the community are currently researching the area's local history – but could well feel disinclined to do so if the community becomes greater Raglan... and subsequent generations will have no "Gwehelog Fawr" as a starting point.
5. There is no apparent financial saving as a result of this review, because councillors offer their

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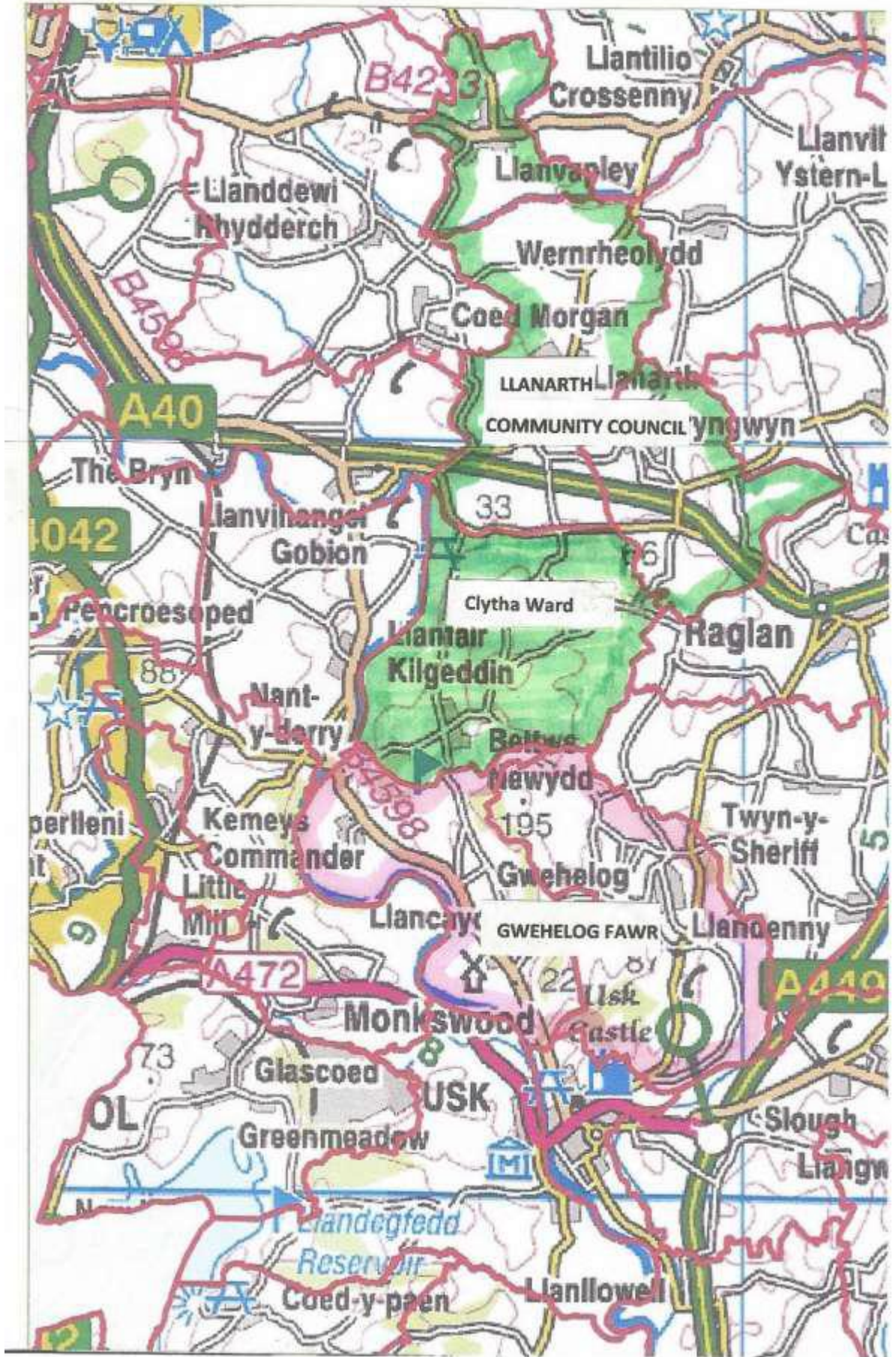
services free, and the reduction in the number of councillors per ward seems to be a very retrograde step which:

- (i) is in direct opposition to the Government philosophy to promote localism and public participation in local affairs.
- (ii) reduces the local geographical and historical knowledge possessed by councillors which is available to the community.
- (iii) reduces the expertise possessed by councillors which is available to the community.

For example. Gwehelog Fawr community councillors embrace knowledge of local farming, building and architecture, highway maintenance, prison liaison, community care and communication skills, all which are employed from time to time when dealing with community issues. The reduction from 4 councillors to 1 councillor in the case of Gwehelog ward will severely impact the level of experience and expertise which will be afforded to community issues if the recommendations are adhered to.

6. In consideration of the above we ask you to reconsider the recommendation to disband Gwehelog Fawr and to retain the wards of Gwehelog, Kemeys Commander and Llancayo within a Gwehelog Fawr community council together with the addition of Clytha ward in order to incorporate Bettws Newydd (as shown on attached map).

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DAVID T C DAVIES MP
Member for Monmouth

Please Reply To:
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Date: 6th February 2014
Our Ref: M(1)/lp
Your Ref:

Mr J Pearson
Local Democracy Manager
Electoral Registration
Monmouthshire County Council
The Rhadyr
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Dear John

Re: Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements

I have been contacted by Gwehelog Fawr Community Council following publication of draft proposals for the above review being conducted by Monmouthshire County Council.

I'm concerned to hear the future of this small but effective community council has been cast in doubt by a recommendation to disband Gwehelog Fawr.

I have read the community council's response to the review, a copy of which is attached for ease of reference, and I think some power arguments have been put forward.

In particular, I would fully accept that Gwehelog Fawr is very rural whilst Raglan is quite clearly a village.

I understand members of Gwehelog Fawr Community Council recently attended a public consultation meeting where they were well received. I do hope the council's representations will be given full consideration when formulating the final proposals and I would be grateful if you could notify me of the outcome.

Yours sincerely

David T C Davies MP

Cc: Gwehelog Fawr Community Council

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