

Usk Town Council

The Sessions House, Maryport Street Usk NP15 1AD



Mr. J Pearson
Electoral Registration
Monmouthshire County Council,
The Rhadyr,
Usk,
NP15 1GA

30th January 2014

Dear Mr. Pearson

Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements **Draft Proposals**

Usk Town Council

Response to the Draft proposals contained in the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements.

I should begin by thanking you for inviting us to the consultation meeting on 14th January in County Hall. My colleague and I found the meeting extremely helpful. We have since had the opportunity to discuss the draft proposals with full council and wish to raise the following points.

Whilst we are pleased to note that there are no major proposals to change the Usk boundaries in respect of the town Council ward, we would not object to the inclusion of some of the isolated properties bordering the current boundary being included in the Usk ward as discussed at our meeting on the 14th.

Our one single concern about the proposals relates to the proposed reduction in the number of councillors from 12 to 7.



Mrs. Tracey Huxley Town Clerk
Ms Jenny Mee - Sessions House Manager/Responsible Finance Officer
Tel: 01291 673011 E-mail:-clerk.usk@btconnect.com

Usk is the smallest of the five towns in Monmouthshire, and therefore the demands placed on us are far greater than those of the majority of Community Councils. In addition to the normal range of responsibilities, Usk has purchased the Sessions House from the County Council. It is the most significant Victorian building in the town and because of its design; the cost of running maintenance is extremely high. We work hard to manage the building on a self financing basis so as not to burden council tax payers wherever possible. We achieve this by leasing some of the office accommodation on a commercial basis, hiring rooms and facilities and even organizing weddings in order to raise income. All of this takes a great deal of organizing. We employ a total of three part time staff and in addition rely on all councillors giving up their time to help.

The town hosts a number of significant events throughout the year all of which help the local economy. We have a Gardens Open weekend which attracts thousands of visitors from around the country and this year welcomed a coach load of Canadian visitors. Usk in Bloom competitions which see us representing Wales, in the Britain in Bloom competition. We have summer and winter festivals which also attract hundreds of people and this year's winter festival with Santa and the reindeers was the most successful ever with police estimates of around 3,500 people just wanting to see the reindeers. We also provide Christmas lights throughout the town.

Whilst these events are organized by local volunteers they do rely on Council support. The reindeer parade is of course run solely by the Council.

The council currently has 22 sub committees which all meet on a regular basis and the town has a total of 59 local voluntary organizations the majority of which the council has dealings with. Indeed, there is a standing agenda item at all our meetings to receive reports from members serving on other organizations. We currently operate with 12 elected members, 25% of whom are still in employment. Even now it can be difficult ensuring that meetings are quorate. If we were to be reduced to just 7 elected members the services and support that we currently offer would be drastically reduced.

Given the current financial constraints on the County Council, we are offering to take responsibility for providing some of the services currently provided by MCC, but which are likely to be cut or phased out without town/community council support. Yet it appears that you want to reduce the number of councillors whilst expecting us to provide these additional services.

In conclusion, whilst we recognize the importance of councillor/elector ratios, the concept of over representation is irrelevant in respect of Town and Community Councils because we are all volunteers and therefore attendance at meetings have no cost implications.

Given the above, I trust you will revisit these matters and allow us to retain a council of 12 members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alec Leathwood', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Alec Leathwood
Mayor of Usk

