

# Llanfihangel Rhydithon Community Council

Serving the community of Dolau Radnorshire

Minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Llanfihangel Rhydithon Community Council which was held on **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021** started at 8pm after the annual meeting.

Present- Cllrs R S Lyon (Chair), R Thomas, E Newman, D Lewis, R Shelton, C Watkins, R Watkins, County Cllr H Lewis. Also present 8 members of the public.

Social distancing and track and trace were carried out.

1.Apologies for absence; None

2.Declarations of interest; None

3.To approve minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021

These were read and all agreed to be a true account. This was proposed by Cllr R Shelton and seconded by Cllr D Lewis.

4.Matters arising from the above minutes; None

5.Corrospondence;

- Email received from New Radnor Community Council asking for members views on the possibility into making The Radnor Forest area into a dark sky community. This was read by the chair and all councillors supported the dark skies idea. It was noted that it may help local tourism, however it was also noted that street lighting is not present in Dolau.
- Email received from DRA regarding the funding they have received to build a play area in the Dolau area. All in full support of a new play are. C Cllr H Lewis gave some names of companies that PCC have used in the recent past for play equipment.
- Discuss the recent tree felling by Western Power in the community.  
Cllr E Newman queried whether a Cllr R. Watkins should leave the room as she felt he may have a declaration of interest but there was no support for this view. Cllr R Watkins addressed the meeting with regards to the issue and he explained that tree felling had been undertaken by Western Power. He explained that he had agreed for a small meeting to be held at his farm to permit a Western Power representative to meet concerned local residents. However. due to concerns over possible increased numbers attending and the need to conform with COVID regulations, the meeting had to be cancelled. A member of the public was invited to address the meeting with their concerns as detailed in APPENDIX A. After much discussion with public members the Council Members expressed sympathy with the concerns raised and thought there might be breaches environmental legislation by Western Power subcontractors. The Council agreed that a letter should be sent to Lesley Griffith AM to highlight the concerns over this issue. It was noted the issue of tree felling by Western Power must be tackled between the public and the company.
- Email received from The Dolau School Action Group asking all members to respond to the School closure consultation. This was read and all agreed to respond and act.

6.Highways;

- Update regarding the recent white line painting in Dolau.  
A copy of a email between Cllr E Newman and Jo Lacey was shown to the meeting. On the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018 C Cllr H Lewis met with Jo Lacey to discuss the white lines in Dolau. After recent re surfacing works the Council found it hard to believe that the white lines were

painted the same as they were before when they clearly should have been made correct. In fact the original double white lines around the Church bend had been removed and replaced with hatched lines. C Cllr H Lewis did not see anything being done about this issue now but agreed to follow up.

#### 7.Reports from representatives;

- Cllr E Newman- DRA  
Reported that the new floor in the hall was finished, the hall was open to user groups and was open for the election.

#### 8.Community Council Finances;

- Bank Balances – current account £3.263.09
- Recent transactions –  
Paid out – One Voice Wales subs - £38  
Paid in – precept £1,234
- Consider and approve the last year's accounts - The Clerk presented a draft copy of the Accounts for the 2020/21 Financial Year. It was noted the draft copy did not fully account payments in respect of Audit fees for the year. Subject to an amendment to include of these payments the Accounts as presented were approved.

#### 9.Llanfihangel Rhydithon School;

- Update regarding proposed School closure.  
Cllr D Lewis gave a detailed report into all that had been going on in the fight to keep the school open. He reported the tractor run had been a huge success. James Evans MS had visited the school and Fay Jones MP was due to visit, both fully support keeping the school open. Cllr D Lewis also stated how poor PCC have been on setting agendas for meetings with Dolau School. Cllr D Lewis asked C Cllr H Lewis if he supported keeping the school open, C Cllr H Lewis responded that he fully supported the school and would do all he could to help fight to keep it open. It was felt the financial argument as presented by Powys CC was full of inaccuracies and open to challenge. C Cllr H Lewis also congratulated the school for the excellent use of their budget management. Cllr D Lewis thanked C Cllr H Lewis for his attendance. Any decision would be examined by a scrutineering committee.

#### 10. Any Other Business (At Chairman's Discretion)

- Clerk laptop- can be repaired for forty-nine pounds, all agreed to get it fixed.
- A copy of the scrutineering list at PCC was read.

#### 11.Date of next meeting.

- To be agreed subject to business

## Resilience Tree Felling Western Power Points of Concern

### The Issue

Western Power seem to have changed their policy from one of prune and pollard every few years, which has minimal environmental impact and is a continuation of an ongoing maintenance programme to one of clear felling any tree/bush near the line. A contractor spoke of being able to clear trees ‘up to a mature tree’s length, or 100 foot either side of the lines.’

Whilst none of us are against reasonable maintenance to keep the lines clear, this leaves a trail of devastation behind, changing the face of the countryside forever, and having a massive impact on wildlife.

This policy is also being carried out at this moment, at peak bird nesting time, without the necessary environmental surveys and mitigation being carried out. Western Power provided the residents of this community, Dolau in Powys, with a copy of their ‘survey’ which was done from a desk and addresses none of their environmental responsibilities in law, identifies no at risk species despite bat colonies locally, and evidence of otter along the brook. Felling was only stopped when it was pointed out tree felling where there were nesting birds was unlawful. The felling stopped in this community, but just moved on elsewhere from what we understand.

On speaking to an ecologist – Dr Stephanie Harper of Ecology Associates – she expressed concern at the policy and was good enough to pay a fleeting visit to this community to see what was happening. She very quickly identified potential bat roosts in many trees near to where the felling had already taken place (those already felled it was, of course, impossible to inspect), and in others to be targeted, and failed to understand why such a wide swathe was needed, as well as why the brook bank had been totally cleared of all its undergrowth, shrubby vegetation etc, which posed no threat to overhead lines, and cleared all wildlife habitat.

She also expressed concern that if this level of felling was to continue across the countryside it would lead to tree-felling across the countryside on a scale greater than that caused by HS2 – and all with no oversight or impact assessments.

She felt that if this scale of work was being rolled out across all of Western Power’s region, which is huge, then a National Environmental Impact Assessment was the least that should have been done due to the scale of works. This work is being pushed through as maintenance, but in her opinion it goes far beyond this and is tantamount to redoing the construction phase of the lines and verges on illegal clearance if they have not done the necessary surveys and impact assessments.

This work has already been completed in South Wales and, according to a local resident who has seen it, has devastated the countryside there.

We estimate that for Western Power alone (and there are other power distribution companies who may or may not be doing the same) this policy covers a 55,300 square mile area across England and Wales and a conservative, back of the envelope sum, given the number of trees felled, or to be felled, in this area alone, will see the clearance of over 300,000 trees in Western Powers area alone, many of them mature trees, many decades if not over a hundred years old.

Clear felling of this sort across the country should have been assessed as a whole, not just at individual landowner or community level.

Western Power (WP) are taking the tack that it is between them and the individual landowners to settle what is done. Several landowners have been told they will be liable for costs should they stop WP taking down the trees they wish, and a power interruption occur in the future. This is enough of a threat to make most landowners acquiesce without asking further questions.

One or two locally have said a clear ‘No’ to Western Power though, despite this, and being offered considerable sums of money. One has asked for and says he has been promised a written note that he that he is not liable for power interruption should a mature tree he does not wish felled some way from the line come down. This would seem to imply that the threat being used against landowners is untrue.

Western Power have been asked about this. Their reply is awaited.

There is also the issue that although trees may reside on individual landowners land they also have amenity value for the whole community and can be seen as a community resource at various levels, their visual impact and enhancement of the local landscape being only part of this. There is often windbreak value to properties, and privacy value and of course there is both their part being played in helping to clean air of local pollution and produce oxygen, as well as carbon capture – a big issue given current climate instability.

Legally there seem to be various issues

1. Felling during nesting season without any of the necessary surveys being done of with attendance by and Ecological Clerk of Works who can identify nests and habitat and direct away accordingly.
2. A change to national policy (from pruning to clear felling) which has wide impact ecologically and to communities without any National Environmental Impact Assessment or consultation.
3. None of the necessary wildlife surveys for bats, otter holts and couches, dormice etc being carried out on the ground, by independent ecologists. Horseshoe bats have been seen locally as well as many other bat species, and signs of otter along the brook bank on occasion. Near to where the trees were felled Red Kites have nested in the last few years.
4. Visual impact assessments have not been carried out.
5. Western Power have a statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience under s6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. No mitigation measures or sign of this duty being carried out are to be seen, nor have landowners been informed of any.

We also, of course, have the issue of Climate Change and the governments stated aim of planting 143 million trees by 2035 in a bid to mitigate carbon emissions. The loss of over 300,000 mature trees within Western Power's area alone seems to fly in the face of this and be in direct contravention of Government Environmental Policy.