

ANNUAL REPORT

MAY 2020 - MAY 2021



Councillor Bob Owen

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ELECTORAL WARD: Risca West

PARTY: Independent

PROFILE: Ward Member for Risca West

COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Council
Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny Committee
Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

SUBCOMMITTEES/WORKING PARTIES/PANELS

Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal – Crumlin Arm Working Group
Risca Town Centre Management Group
Car Parks Task & Finish Group until 15th December 2020

OUTSIDE BODIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

ATTENDANCE

To view my attendance record, please follow the link below:-

<https://democracy.caerphilly.gov.uk/mgUserAttendanceSummary.aspx?LLL=0>

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Armed Forces Covenant (seminar)

2021 Census (Seminar)

Mass Vaccination Programme (seminar)

Homelessness (seminar)

Tips (seminar)

WARD ACTIVITY

In my role as a Councillor I have continued to represent my community to the best of my ability over the past 12 months in, what continues to be, a difficult period.

As ever, I would like to start by offering my sincere thanks to our officers, in particular those that I have had the pleasure of meeting or communicating with during the undertaking of my duties. In such a big organisation it is easy to underestimate the work that goes on, of those in the background, or front facing in our communities out in the field delivering services. To all our officers, thank you one and all.

I am truly thankful to the Risca COV19 volunteer group for their unstinting work during this pandemic, now an established charity (RCV UK). Thanks also to the Moriah Chapel pastors for their efforts to establish a charity for the funding to keep Risca Park public toilets open. I would further like to thank the community and everything that entails, from the Police, to the Town Council, support groups, networks and residents, we all have our part to play.

We still find ourselves in unprecedented times with the pandemic and the effects of it still very much with us. It has impacted on our personal lives, in particular on our most vulnerable and not to underestimate the effects it has had on the economy. If you have been unduly affected, I extend my heartfelt wishes to you; to all, please continue to follow WG guidelines which are in place to protect you. As we move slowly out of it, we should see our local economy starting to recover and we will all have a part to play in its regeneration, in particular I urge you to support our local small businesses.

With local government resources as ever stretched, in the circumstances the council budget was not as hard hitting inasmuch as cuts to front line services were avoided, however we were not all in agreement with respect to the latest annual council tax setting.

With respect to the ward and our community I am as always driven and guided by you, our aspirations (I believe) are aligned and I am pro-active, in putting forward our position to offer this council the strategic information it requires, for the benefit of both Risca and the borough as a whole.

Community Projects Update

With respect to our local identity, it is now four years since I brought the 'Risca' Cuckoo re-siting project forward yet it still remains an aspiration, moving forward I will continue to drive this forward, to deliver this project. As stated previously with respect to our (Risca's) Tesco S106 monies - committed for demolition projects I think we are at least 'owed' what is now

becoming a long drawn out aspiration and I will say it again, let's hope we can finally see the Cuckoo fly up (to Risca) this year.

The 'Terry Howell Memorial' garden was progressing but stopped due to the pandemic, I am hopeful of movement on this through the summer, again with council assistance to remove waste FOC, and reliance on some local businesses for funding, as well as voluntary work. As I said last year, there are many facets to this project including the building of a boundary wall to the back, fencing and gates plus putting together a 'garden' design which will involve your input.

Crescent Road coal dram - moving inasmuch as the dram is now at the fabrication facility for overhaul and repairs but once again the pandemic restrictions has slowed this project down. With the lifting of restrictions, I will be re-engaging with officers with respect to the proposed siting and bureaucratic aspects.

Regeneration

Last year's arrival of William Hare Ltd into Pontymister continues to boost the local economy, the family driven fabrication company is keen to employ local, including apprenticeships for our youngsters. The WG has recognised their potential with a grant to aid their expansion but this is subject to planning and adherence to noise regulations to ensure our residents are not disturbed by their operations.

The old Suflex site is 'planning ready' but still remains dormant. Initially held up as a result of the (2008) banking crisis and later, the uncertainty of Brexit we now have the pandemic to consider, I am now pushing on this.

Rolling Mill Car Park - after much debate around this issue involving pressure from a number of our local councillors, we finally have agreement to re-open a section of the car park. This is tremendous news for Pontymister, an off-road parking offer that will ease local-street parking congestion, this is in the pipeline.

As ever, I have concerns with respect to regeneration / planning in other areas (in particular Ty-Darran, Bird's (private) site, Brooklands etc), As a local strategist I am not convinced that CCBC has the right strategy for Risca. We require a commercial / residential mix (including sheltered accommodation) to ensure the needs of the community are met going forward, and it will be critical as to how this is planned to take ensure the full effects of traffic growth and parking are given the correct level of due diligence. In consultation with all local councillors I am hopeful that the master plan for the Blackwood-Newbridge-Risca corridor will enhance thinking in these areas, but as ever I will continue to work with officers to push local views and needs. My ideas and plans around social well-being e.g. respite beds (to aid the NHS, Royal Gwent hospital) and high dependency care could benefit the whole of Greater Gwent.

Working with my co-councillors it has been excellent to see the re-vitalisation of the Channel View Community Centre, initially destined for closure the council has invested in works to improve it which we feel we can expand upon to give it a new lease of life, more on that as things develop.

In the Community

I was very honoured to receive an honorary membership of Risca Male Choir during the past year, I know my late father (himself once a long time member) would have approved. I was also similarly honoured to be asked and to become the President of Risca Senior Citizens Association which I have duly accepted.

As in all parts of the borough we have our social issues, but I do think that we are special, caring people in a special and caring community, and you are the proof of that and I thank you for continuing to invest in me as a councillor - I will always do my utmost best for you.

Let's hope we can climb out of this pandemic and get back to some level of normality soon.