

TRELLECH UNITED - UPDATE



Debby Blakebrough

Your Independent County Councillor serving the communities of Catbrook/Broadstone – Llandogo - Llanishen – The Narth – Penallt – Trellech – Whitebrook

Together We've Made a Difference

My main achievement has been to bring people together to solve problems and fulfil aspirations, creating the links between our Communities and the Council to ensure ideas and concerns are heard and acknowledged.

I am always happy to take up problems on behalf of residents and have done so with individual cases. However, co-ordinated meetings between residents and the decision makers have made the difference. Penallt burial ground is an example of how shared local knowledge during a meeting with Monmouthshire Officers influenced the final outcome. It was concluded that the proposed site was not suitable and local knowledge saved a further council spend on consultancy fees.

Local knowledge – priceless!

This newsletter gives many more success stories as a result of working together.

However, not all battles have been won. National Resource Wales (NRW) announced that they were putting up barriers to the entrance of the woods. During a meeting held in The Narth Hall our concerns convinced them to give us a temporary reprieve of one year before they erected the barriers. Many residents gallantly continued the campaign but on this occasion there was no victory.

We win some - we lose some - but we never give up trying.

If I'm honest being a County Councillor can be very frustrating. Policy and politics can be stubborn obstacles to getting things done. But our collaborative small efforts have made a significant difference and together we are making steady progress. Patience, tenacity and your support drives me on.

When I was elected you asked me to focus on the following priorities:

- Better broadband connection
- Improved road conditions
- Increased road safety
- Protect rural services

Better Broadband Connection

Our broadband connection and speed has improved but still could be better.

In 2012 I met with Ann Beynon, the then Director of BT in Wales, to discuss the Superfast Cymru programme of bringing high speed broadband to rural areas such as ours. I was keen to ensure that Monmouthshire and therefore Trellech United should benefit from the £57 million Welsh Government scheme as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the Welsh Government put Monmouthshire at the back of the line and we were the last authority in Wales to be included in the scheme. It was vital to campaign and ensure we were not forgotten.

I have worked closely with BT and the MCC Enterprise Team to ensure that all our BT cabinets have been upgraded as part of the scheme. With the support of knowledgeable and proactive Trellech United residents we have improved internet connection with faster broadband. However a significant number of properties did not benefit from the Superfast Cymru programme. It was vital that we in the Trellech United area were involved in the UK funded AB internet project and benefit from the mast in Pen-y-Garn. My work continues with AB internet to increase the connectivity in our area and negotiate free connection to some of our Village Halls.

Trellech United BT Cabinet Update

Cabinet	Cabinet Position	Progress Made
Cabinet 1	Narth	Work completed 14/07/16 now connected and live
Cabinet 2	Llanishen	Work completed 09/05/16 now connected and live
Cabinet 3	Whitebrook	Have had wayleave issues and now scheduled for delivery at the end of March 2017
Cabinet 4	Trellech	Work completed 04/07/16 now connected and live
Cabinet 5	Catbrook	Work completed 06/07/16 now connected and live
Cabinet 6	Catbrook	Work completed 20/07/16 now connected and live
Cabinet 20	Penallt, Lone Lane	Wayleave and land ownership issues. Actively liaising with landowner, BT, power company and local authority to try and get a resolution.

BT are also building some additional fibre to the premises (FTTP) in the following post code areas. NP16 6NA, NP25 4QA, NP25 4PP, NP25 4PJ, NP25 4JP, NP25 4BU, NP16 6QZ and NP16 6QY

The long journey of securing superfast broadband to every property in the Trellech United area is an uphill struggle but significant progress has been made. We have achieved improved broadband connection and speed but it still could be better and there is more work to do.

I will continue to support campaigns at local, national and UK levels in challenging poor rural internet service and secure Trellech United's inclusion on future digital programmes. Mobile phone signal is also an area of focus for improvement in our area.

Improved Roads

The local authority highway budget is reduced every year and without constant reminding there is always a risk that our rural roads are forgotten and not prioritised for repair.

As a result of regularly inviting MCC highway officers out to see the poor condition of our roads I successfully had miles of our road infrastructure added to the local authority road resurfacing schedule. A significant number of our roads have experienced a facelift with newly laid tarmac. Although pot holes continue to be an issue, the repair rate has improved and many sections have had hot patch treatment. Despite our success I continue to be aware of roads that are still in poor condition and deteriorating. The battle continues to ensure, despite eroding highway budgets, that Trellech United remains on schedule for maintenance and repairs.

Over the past few years lives have been disrupted by landslides cutting off road access. It is essential that funding is ring-fenced for emergency work and preventative land stabilisation programmes.



Bringing residents, Community Council, Monmouthshire Council Officers and Gwent Police together to solve the problem of speeding on our roads.

Safer roads

With the support of local residents through petitions and campaigns we have managed to introduce road calming measures in some of our villages.

Llandogo and Llanishen have speed reduction monitoring and enforcement in place. The resident driven 'Make Trellech Safe' campaign resulted in a collaborative approach to a road calming programme supported by Gwent Police, Local Authority highways and a successful Welsh Government bid for funding. Work is scheduled to begin by the end of March this year. Penallt and The Narth are included on the work programme.

To ensure that road safety issues are prioritised and addressed I'm a member of the Monmouthshire Strategic Road Safety Task and Finish Group, working with GoSafe, Gwent Police and the Local Council.

Protecting rural services



Celebrating Our Community Spirit

I feel so fortunate to live in an area which has such a strong sense of community spirit.

Residents have a true commitment to ensuring that village life remains both vital and vibrant. Many give of their time and energy to provide services that the Council are no longer delivering in our rural communities.

We have so many events and successful social enterprises that bring people together

and demonstrate entrepreneurial talent and flair - Trellech Teas, Art in Penallt, The Big Weekend, Great Narth Run, Whitebrook Wind-Up, Wye Valley Festival and crucially the regular activities organised through our 7 Village Halls which are at the heart of our communities.

As your representative I continue to challenge the Council and Welsh Government where their policies have a negative impact on our rural communities.

Such as their decisions to:

- Reduce public transport
- Increase post 16 school transport charges
- Limit access to leisure, education and social care services

I ensured that our Villages were able to benefit from the Community Led Plan scheme and access the opportunities and support offered by Monmouthshire's Rural Development programmes and funding.

Supporting our Village Halls – business rates – a mean tax

Village Halls are the heart of rural communities offering social, educational and leisure services.

These are facilities that the local authority can no longer provide due to reducing budgets.

The existence of vibrant Village Halls prevents social isolation and contributes to the Wellbeing agenda. These village community centres are managed and run by volunteers, so for Monmouthshire County Council to demand they pay business rates does not seem fair.

With the support of our Village Halls' Committee Members and the Trellech United Community Council (TUCC), I am insisting that MCC revisit their decision to charge business rates.

As registered charities they currently attract 80% mandatory relief in business rates. Other authorities gift Village Halls 100% relief but this isn't Monmouthshire's policy.

Representing you at County level

I've been an active member on these committees to ensure that our communities are better represented at county level; asking questions, challenging and influencing decisions that affect the way we live our lives here in Trellech United.

Committee	Some of the issues raised on your behalf
Strong Communities Select Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the green waste and refuse collection changes and charges • Challenge the £90k public money spend on grey refuse bags • Challenge and monitor budget cuts to the highway department which risk reduced rural road maintenance and repairs • Raise concerns over street lighting • Challenge school transport policy that discriminates against children in rural communities.
Children and Young People Select Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and challenge school budget cuts. • Scrutinise Additional Learning Needs policy. • Monitor reduced youth work provision
Planning Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a balance is struck between meeting a need for housing, in particular affordable housing and maintaining the integrity of an area of outstanding natural beauty. • Support residents through the planning, policy and legislation system to ensure consistency and transparency on decision making.
Vice Chair of Monmouthshire's Domestic Abuse Board (VAWDASV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the need to raise awareness of domestic abuse particularly in rural areas and to promote healthy relationships
Chair of Democratic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local democracy, public governance and genuine community engagement, giving local residents the power to influence council decisions.
Monmouthshire's Strategic Transport Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the needs of Monmouthshire residents are included in the All Wales Transport Strategy of improved integrated public transport system and metro service.
Monmouthshire's Road Safety task and finish group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic approach to safer rural roads and reduced speed through our villages
Other groups and forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) • LA Governor – Monmouth Comprehensive • Rural Forum • Monmouthshire Central Area Committee

Our Local Schools

As a Councillor I have seen the fantastic job teachers do for our children and we are very lucky to have some of the best schools for our children to attend in Monmouthshire, be that Trellech, Llandogo or Monmouth Comprehensive.

As a governor of Monmouth Comprehensive School and a member of the Young People and Children's Committee I have seen the struggle that schools have to ensure high standards are maintained. Yet, whilst both the Welsh Government and our local authority claim that education is their priority they have systematically reduced school budgets and at the same time increased staff workload, responsibilities and expectations.

As your County Councillor I will continue to campaign for a better deal for our schools and above all our children.



To promote local democracy I have been involved with the Welsh Government Women in Public Life and Diversity in Democracy projects. Last year I was also invited on a Welsh Government volunteer programme to Uganda. I worked with women and children as part of the Coalition Against Poverty team. I learnt the true power and value of community spirit. With very little people achieved so much by coming together and helping each other. This is the spirit I experience in the communities of Trellech United.

Generous response to the Syria Appeal

I was overwhelmed by the kindness of the Trellech United residents when I made a local appeal for warm blankets, clothes, tents and sleeping bags.

The response was so generous I needed to hire a van to transport the donated items to a collection point for distribution to Calais. After seeing the news about the Syrian refugee crises, everyone just wanted to do their bit.

Useful Contacts:

Trellech United Community Council
Website: www.trellechunited.org.uk

Monmouthshire County Council
Main switchboard: **01633 644644**
Website: www.monmouthshire.gov.uk

Debby Blakebrough your Independent County Councillor

Thank you and keep in touch

I would like to thank the residents of Trellech United. I could not achieve as much without your knowledge and support. By working together we have been successful and made a positive difference. Things have improved but I still continue to strive to make things even better.

Putting People before Politics for you, with you

Please keep in touch and let me know if you have any other priorities which you need me to focus on or ideas to further improve our lives here in Trellech United.

