

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate
Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad Rhandiroedd | Allotments Inquiry
Ymateb gan : Cyngor Tref y Drenewydd a Llanllwchaearn
Evidence from : Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council

28th February 2019

National Assembly For Wales Sustainability Committee Allotment Provision in Wales: Review of consultation July 2010

Response from Newtown & Llanllwchaiarn Town Council

About Newtown

Nestling on the banks of the River Severn in the heart of Mid Wales, Newtown lies in the old county of Montgomeryshire, which is now part of Powys. With a population of about 13,000, it is a pretty market town with a rich industrial heritage, surrounded by beautiful countryside.

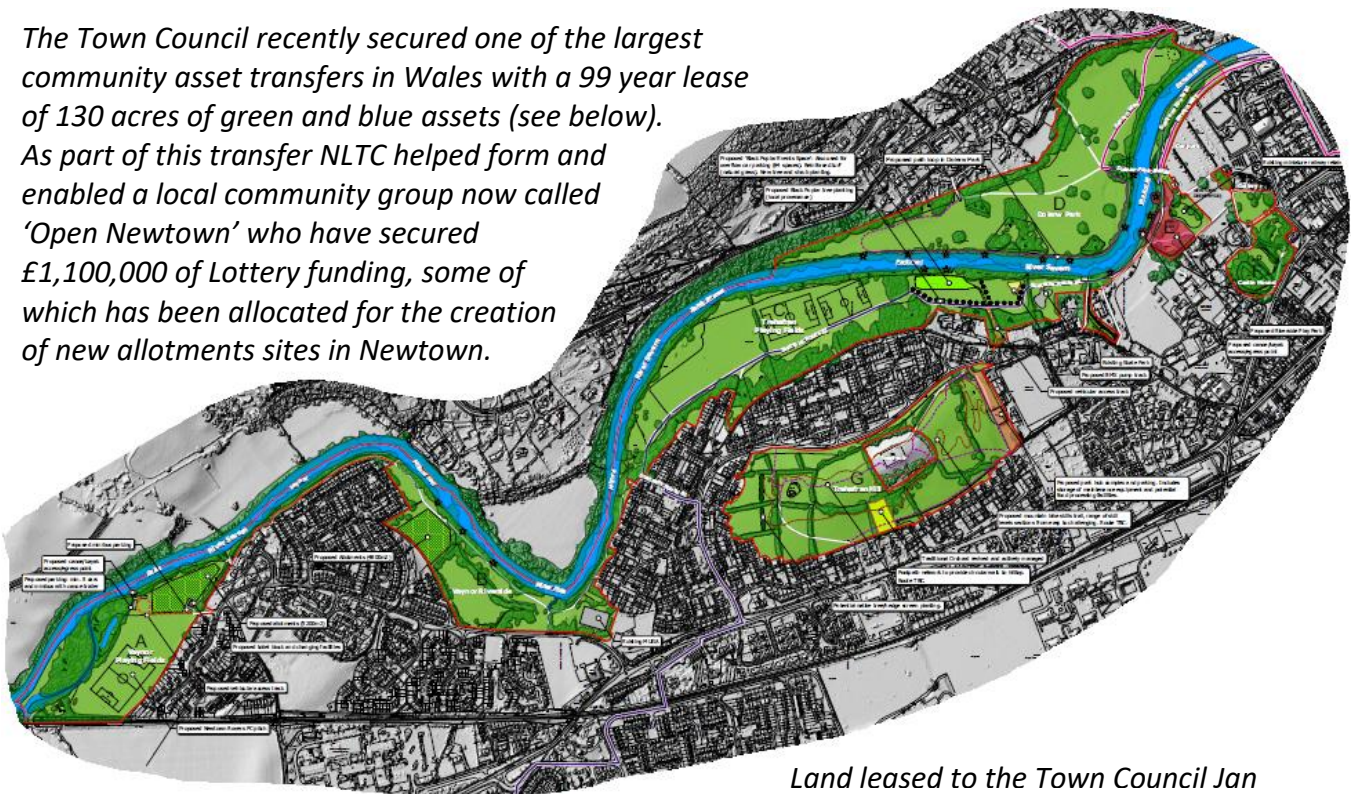
- *Founded as a market town at the end of the 13th century (1279), with a market in operation since Medieval times. Today's location for Newtown replaced its original, latterly suppressed, fledgling town on the ridge west of Dolforwyn Castle following the Mortimer siege (1277).*
- *Newtown grew strongly with the expansion of the woollen industry in the early 19th century.*
- *It was an international hub for the flannel industry. The old Flannel Exchange survives to this day as an entertainment venue.*
- *Social reformer and industrial pioneer Robert Owen was born in Newtown in 1771 and left to seek his fortune ten years later. He returned to the town shortly before his death on November 17th 1858. Owen's ideas have had worldwide influence and became the cornerstone of the international co-operative movement. There is a museum dedicated to Owen's memory in the town centre.*
- *Newtown is also famous for the birth of the mail order retail business which local entrepreneur Pryce Jones started in the mid nineteenth century by dispatching goods*

to Britain and Europe from Newtown. His Royal Welsh Warehouse still dominates the townscape. Amongst his customers were Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale. It is believed that the parcel post in Britain was started as a result of a suggestion made by Pryce Jones to the Postmaster General.

- The town's connection with the textile industry was revived in the 20th century when businesswoman Laura Ashley established her home furnishing and clothing company in the area. Newtown is now home to the Textile Museum, the Oriel Davies Gallery, entertainment venue Hafren, local sports facilities and an attractive town centre set against the backdrop of the beautiful Severn Valley.
- In addition to its many attractions, as the largest town in central Wales, Newtown provides the ideal base to explore the surrounding countryside. There are nature reserves, canal paths, the Severn Way and nearby Gregynog Hall and Gardens.

Newtown & Llanllwchaiarn Town Council (NLTC) are currently negotiating with Powys County Council (PCC) the transfer of the allotments service for the town and discussions are already taking place with a local community group called 'Open Newtown' to extend and enhance the allotment provision further.

The Town Council recently secured one of the largest community asset transfers in Wales with a 99 year lease of 130 acres of green and blue assets (see below). As part of this transfer NLTC helped form and enabled a local community group now called 'Open Newtown' who have secured £1,100,000 of Lottery funding, some of which has been allocated for the creation of new allotments sites in Newtown.



Land leased to the Town Council Jan

We believe that the current allotment provision in the town is managed by a local allotment association, on behalf of the county council on land owned by PCC. However, as identified in the review document of 2010, it is proving extremely difficult to obtain any firm figures or details of how many allotments there currently are, how many are occupied or how many are on a waiting list, or even if there is a list at all.

Town Council Response

The Welsh Governments' strategic approach

Having read through the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee Allotment Provision in Wales document dated July 2010, the general consensus is that all the recommendations made by the committee seem to be very fair and comprehensive. The fundamental problem appears to be that, in our experience at least; none of these recommendations have been implemented or, if they have been implemented, are actually working in practice.

We have been told that sufficient consultation and guidance documents have been produced in the last 9 years to support Welsh Government in identifying the actions and the steps necessary to support allotments and community growing in Wales.

Allotment Law is a minefield of extremely outdated terms and vocabulary rather like Planning Law. A review of Planning Law was undertaken in 2018 by Law Commission to consolidate and modernise, could something similar could be done for Allotment Law in Wales?

The approach taken by local authorities across Wales

As regards the allotment duty, where a town and/or community council exists alongside a principal authority, we need clarity on which body is to be seen as the allotment authority to meet the 'allotment duty' and who is the allotment provider to work with the allotment authority to ensure delivery.

In Powys if you are wish to apply for an allotment the local authorities website directs you one of the 10 existing sites under their control, all of which have no plots available (as of the 28th Feb 2019) or if your chosen allotment isn't shown it will direct you to the contact details of all the town and/or community councils of Powys. There is neither mapping of allotment provision nor any indication of how many are on a waiting list. No joined up advice or guidance for those with allotments or those wishing to get an allotment other than a link to Natural England's "Specific guide for allotments holders".

We are lead to believe that there is good practice found in some local authorities across Wales but if the Welsh Assembly wishes to really make a difference then funding should be made available (for either local authorities or town/community councils) to allow some continuity of service across Wales. This would also help with confusion over the size of allotments; the definitions of what an allotment is i.e. terms like allotment, garden allotment, field allotments are all common and allotment rent, law requires that not more than 25% of rent can be demanded in advance, is this still desirable in 2019?

How we can maximise the health, community and environmental benefits of allotments and community growing.

Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council believe that allotments are very much needed, not just for growing one's own food but for the wider benefits of health and wellbeing. Allotments should be made available of a similar standard with similar rents and similar provisions across the whole of Wales.

Allotments and the green spaces they secure, particularly close to urban centres can offer huge benefits to the public in Health & Wellbeing, Education and Recreation.

We are fundamentally asking **the wrong question** of the people of Wales, it should not be;

Would like to add your name onto the waiting list?

We should be asking;

If an allotment was made available to you, would you want one?

Only with the answer to this question can Newtown, Powys and indeed Wales truly understand the extent to which the public can help improve, maintain and benefit from the green spaces in Wales and help create a more circular economy around growing our own food to help reduce the dependence on imports. All this while creating greater community cohesion, reduction of social isolation, reduction of antisocial behaviour, food security and sustainability and improving green infrastructure and biodiversity.

End of response

Author – Lee Davies (Amenities Manager - Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council)