

Llanfair Community Council Response to the “LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH OF THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN DRAFT PROPOSALS REPORT (September 2023)”

Llanfair Community Council (LCC), following consultation with our Community and with neighbouring Town and Community Councils (TCC), makes their response as laid out below.

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBC) has proposed that our rural Community be absorbed into the neighbouring town of Cowbridge and be represented by the Town Council thereof.

LCC strongly believes that their electors would continue to be better represented by a rural Community Council and to that end proposes that LCC becomes part of the Community Council Cluster focussed on communities to the South and South-West of Cowbridge.

Llanfair Community

Llanfair Community consists of the communities of St Hilary, St Mary Church with the Herberts and Llandough. These rural villages to the South of Cowbridge, each centred around their Church, are currently represented by a Community Council consisting of 8 elected Councillors and a part-time clerk.

LCC Initial Response to the Review

With the Council’s area being made up of four small communities, the Members felt that they are best placed to consider and understand the requirements of the smaller communities. Llanfair Primary School is in the heart of the Community Council’s area and an important part of it and the Community Council has an excellent relationship with the school and would wish to protect it. This relationship has been strengthened through the years with many of the Councillors, past and present, proudly serving and continuing to serve as Governors at the school. The Members would ask that the rural and historic nature of this beautiful part of the Vale of Glamorgan is protected and enhanced now and for future generations which, the Members believe, they are best placed to serve.

LCC Updated Response following the Vale of Glamorgan’s initial response

Llanfair Community Council's first preference would be to remain as Llanfair Community Council with the two wards of Llanfair and St Hilary. Whilst the Vale of Glamorgan Council

has suggested a potential for amalgamation with Cowbridge Town Council, the Members would have concerns that the specific needs of the very rural communities of LCC could be lost within the priorities of a Town Council. Ultimately, if any decision was made to progress an alignment or amalgamation, the Members would wish to press for assurance that the wards of Llanfair and St Hilary would continue to be individually recognised ensuring they retain the focus and support necessary for these unique communities.

Importance of rural representation

At the recent Vale of Glamorgan Community Liaison meeting, Councillor Haines (Vale of Glamorgan St Athan Ward) emphasised the role of rural community councils and councillors in being very pro-active when dealing with their electors and their community. He commented that these Community Councils delivered their (albeit) limited services on very low Council Tax precepts, with Councillors being unpaid volunteers. Llanfair Community Councillors are fully in agreement with this sentiment and are very much part of their communities with Councillors knowing all of their electors and residents by name.

In addition, at the same meeting PCSO Stephen Davies emphasised the marked difference between the nature of crimes. Whilst the headline may be the same – burglary, anti-social behaviour, traffic offences – the specific rural issues such as criminal damage caused by trespass and illegal hunting (known as lamping) require a closer interaction between the Police and local communities with the Community Council being the first point of contact. This close relationship is a part of the current rural crime initiative to combat theft and trespass.

Compliance with Vale of Glamorgan CBC Council Size Policy

Llanfair Community Council accepts that the current number of Councillors is unsustainable particularly given the Independent Remuneration Panel's Draft Report for 2023/2024 which proposed introducing a mandatory payment of £156 for each Councillor and either a fixed payment of £52 for printing costs or reimbursement on production of receipts. Whilst the implementation of this proposal has been delayed, undoubtedly this or a similar scheme will be introduced in the future. In addition, the costs to TCCs of increasing skills of volunteer Councillors and employed officials will continue to increase.

As part of a rural Community Council Cluster, the proposed reduction of Councillors from eight in total (5 for Llanfair ward and 3 for St Hilary ward) to three (2 representing Llanfair and 1 for St Hilary) is in line with the Council Size Policy which states "In rural communities, which are communities with no dense area of population, there should generally be a ratio of 150 electors per councillor." Whilst this reduction in number of Councillors will increase the workload per Councillor and may lead to gaps in specific local representation in times of sickness, holiday or other personal commitments, it is accepted as the way forward.

Ward	Existing Arrangements				Proposed Arrangements				
	Electors	Community Councillors	Electors per Councillor	Electors per Councillor Variance (Rural)	Electors	Community Councillors	Electors per Councillor	Electors per Councillor Variance (Mixed)	Electors per Councillor Variance (Rural)
Llanfair	311	5	62	-59%	321	2	160	-40%	7%
St Hilary	183	3	61	-59%	195	1	195	-27%	30%

Consultation

In preparing this response, LCC held an Extraordinary Council Meeting on October 3rd to explain the LDBC process and draft proposals to residents, and for Councillors to explain and discuss the potential solutions with them. Members of the 2 Ward communities were notified ahead of the meeting. This raised awareness of the proposals and several electors attended the meeting and participated on the day. One area of discussion was the variation in TCC precept levied by LCC and Cowbridge (Ancient Borough) with Llanblethian Town Council (CLTC). In 2023/24 the precept for LCC electors in a Band D property is £15.05, in CLTC the precept is £87.97. Whilst everyone present recognised the additional responsibilities, in terms of buildings, land and employees, of CLTC they could see no additional benefits Llanfair residents would gain from being part of CLTC. Also, with the cost of living crisis continuing to impact our communities, an increase to this level without the same delivery of services will be very poorly received. The 3 villages represented by LCC do not have any public transport links, play parks or many of the rest of the provisions which the town of Cowbridge benefits from.

Following that meeting, Councillors and Clerk met with Councillors from Llanmaes Community Council and Llandow Community Council and their clerks. This meeting discussed the proposals as they would affect the 3 Councils and possible ways ahead. Finally, LCC representatives met with the Councillors plus the Town Clerk from CLTC.

Proposed Names

In respect of LCC's preferred outcome, it is assumed the LDBC and Welsh Language Commissioner would suggest a name that includes the current Council names in some combination, and the ward names would not be affected.

Although LCC does not wish to become part of a new Cowbridge with Llanblethian and Llanfair Council, Councillors feel that were this to happen there should be recognition of the constituent parts of the community within the formal name of the Council. LCC recognises that there needs to be some form of identity for the residents, within the new Town Council. LCC understands that CLTC is proposing that, contrary to the draft proposals, both Llanblethian and Llanfair is dropped from the new Town Council name. It is a concern that by proposing this, it could indicate the attitude and importance that might be given to the Llanfair and St Hilary wards in the future and this would back-up the 'cluster option' as LCC's preferred option.

Principal council electoral ward arrangements

LCC recognise that this is not an area of the proposal that we are being asked to respond to. However, as part of the deliberations leading to our declared desire to be part of a rural Community Council Cluster, we also discussed our representation at Principal Council level. Currently we are represented by the three Cowbridge ward Vale Councillors but do not feel that they have had a focus on rural matters since their election; this is reflected by their very limited attendance at LCC meetings. The LDBC proposal is that the new Llanmaes and Llandow Community be part of an expanded VOG Llandow electoral ward whose Councillor already represents a number of rural communities (Llangan, Llandow and Colwinston). LCC would ask that their area is included in this new ward.

Consequential Issues not covered by the report.

The LDBC report makes no reference to the impact the proposals (specifically for Community Councils rather than Town Councils) will have on the employment of clerks. The Vale of Glamorgan Council has indicated (verbally) that as most clerks are shared there would be a negligible impact. This is insensitive and does not consider that these very clerks who are involved in the process to discuss and prepare a response to the proposal, may eventually see them being made redundant.

The reduction in eventual number of Community Councils will, on the face of it, reduce the number of clerks. This could mean that the new council, formed by a combination of 2 or more small CCs all employing 1 part-time clerk, will only require 1 clerk. However, for a clerk and/or RFO of the new Councils, the workload will increase, requiring more contractual hours and could even lead to a requirement for a full-time clerk for each of the enlarged councils. This may have implications about place of work, employment rights, etc.

Signed:

Date: