



Usk Town Council Annual Report 2022-2023



INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR
Cllr Meirion Howells May 2022 to May 2023

“Firstly, I have to start by saying what a great honour it has been to serve as the Mayor of Usk. The year has passed extremely quickly, and Sarah and I have enjoyed attending many community events. In May, we had our Local Elections where we saw three new councillors elected - Kay Peacock, Steve O’Brien and Dave Harrison, all of whom have been a welcome addition to the Town Council. Although the Town Council has been reduced from 12 to 7 councillors, the support I have received from my fellow councillors and our amazing staff has been invaluable. My grateful thanks to the outgoing Mayor Cllr Glenn Roderick and a special thank you to our retiring councillors - Christine Wilkinson, Alec Leathwood, Tony Watkins, Roger Galletley, Heather Graz and Steve Williams; between them they have served our town with over 100 years of service. The election also saw two new County Councillors for the Llanbadoc & Usk Ward elected - Cllr Tony Kear and myself.

We are currently working with MCC and Llanbadoc CC to move forward our vision for the Usk and Woodside Improvement Plan. We have also secured £50,000 Welsh Government funding for the design work for Twyn Square and Bridge St and look forward to sharing these with you when they are complete.

Together with MCC, Maryport St South Car Park has been resurfaced, complete with sustainable drainage system to lower our impact on flooding and a low energy lighting system installed, that dims to 20% brightness unless activated, thus lowering our light pollution on surrounding wildlife and planted flowers and shrubs in the sustainable rain garden.

Our thanks to the Panto Players for purchasing a new defibrillator in Burrium Gate furthering our existing defib cover for residents, bringing our total defibs in Usk to eight. We have also installed a new Digital Information Board near the Co-op, which was secured through Welsh Government funding and has proved to be a great asset for promoting events and for business advertising.

We continue to support the ‘Save The River Usk’ campaign and also the ‘Together For The Climate’ group to ensure our town becomes more sustainable. Unfortunately, the Jubilee Outdoor Market in the old recycling centre was not as successful as we had hoped as the operator found it difficult to make the market viable. However, we are looking at some exciting ideas to re-develop this area.

One of the many benefits of being the Mayor and Mayoress of Usk is that it allows us to fundraise for charities of our choice. My wife and I chose Parkinson’s Monmouthshire, MIND Monmouthshire, St David’s Hospice Care and Alzheimer’s Groups (Sing for the Brain Monmouth, Sing for the Brain Abergavenny, Music and Memories Raglan and Dancetime4All, Bridges Centre). These charities were chosen by my wife and I because they are very close to our hearts and feel that they touch the lives of so many of us living here in Usk. Through residents and businesses, we have fundraised £10,560 and we are grateful for your generosity.

With the pandemic almost behind us, we were allowed to have unrestricted events. I am immensely grateful to everyone that has contributed to organising these events and I must extend a special

thank you to my wife, Sarah, and my children Freddie, Katie & Dilwyn for all the support they have given me. I would also like to extend my thanks to my mother for occasionally standing in as my Consort and Tracey, Diane, Lyn & Richard who have always been there to offer a helping hand when needed. A special thank you must also go out to the Worsley and Harrison families who have stepped in to help whenever needed!

The year has certainly been a busy one! The start of summer was marked by our late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, which we celebrated with a wonderful Lantern Parade and Community Picnic with live music in The Owain Glyndwr Park. We enjoyed beautiful weather for the Usk Civic Service at The Priory Church of St Mary, with a wonderful reception afterwards here at the Sessions' House. I also had the pleasure of attending numerous events in my mayoral capacity including the Athletic Club Annual Duck Race, the Usk Primary School Summer Fayre the Chordis Caerllion Youth Orchestra Summer concert and the opening of the District Nurses Clinic Room in the Roger Edwards Building.

September 8th saw the sad passing of Her Majesty the Queen. At the Sessions House, we had a ceremony to lower the Union Jack. A few days later, I attended the Proclamation of King Charles III at County Hall. In this same month I also visited Dora Sales MBE to wish her a Happy 100th Birthday, judged at the Usk Agricultural Show, opened the new Baby and Toddler group run by the Priory Church of St Mary and presented specially commissioned pens in memory of Cllr Jill Jerimiah to year 3 students at Usk Primary School who had gained their pen license. I was also a guest of the Usk Rotary at their opening of the Alfred Russel Wallace Arboretum in Usk.

In October, I attended the Crickhowell 'Save The River Usk' walk. We had the Blaenavon Male Voice Choir give us an amazing fundraising concert at the Priory Church of St Mary with guest singers Deb Hancock and Chris Moreton. I had tea with Cllr Maxine Mitchell, Mayor of Caldicot, along with Caldicot residents and school children and also attended the Usk Rotary Musical Concert fundraiser for the Mayor's Appeal in the Memorial Hall.

In November, I had the pleasure of taking some chocolates and flowers to Mrs. Winnie James on her 104th Birthday. I attended the Dedication of the Garden of Remembrance and laid a wreath at the War Memorial at the Remembrance Service at the Priory Church of St Mary. Ian Williams and Michael Barnett gave us a superb Flanders & Swann fundraising concert at the British Legion. I was invited to the Abergavenny Mayoral Civic Service and Reception in St Mary's Abergavenny. Kelly and her team requested that I cut the ribbon to open our new Usk restaurant 'The Alfred Russel Wallace'. The Usk Christmas Panto returned with 'Cinderella's Fellas'. As many of you may know, in previous pantomimes, I have been cast as the Town Mayor, however, apparently this year this role was seen as to be too grand for me and I was demoted to Town Crier!

December saw the return of the Christmas Market in Twyn Square. Unfortunately, we were informed that the Cairngorm Reindeers are no longer travelling so far away from home, so as an alternative, there was a Festival of Carols at the Priory Church of St Mary followed by a Lantern Parade to the Sessions House. I attended the Usk Brass Band Christmas Concert, gave a reading at the St Mary's Nine Lessons and Carol Service and I was a guest at the Usk School Christmas Dinner with all the children.

A quiet January, however, the band '400 What!' gave us a fundraising concert at the New Court Inn. In February, I met the Mayor of Chepstow, Cllr Margaret Griffiths, at their 'Vision for Chepstow' event. I was invited by the Young Farmers' Club to my first visit to the International Conference Centre to watch the talented YFCs perform in their Showcase Concert and prior to St David's Day the Usk Hub requested that the 'Mayor's Maestros' perform some Welsh songs at their St David's Day event.

March brought St David's Day and I was asked to give a Welsh reading at St Mary's on the 1st of March. The Singing Club, together with soloist Emilie Parry-Williams and the Chepstow Chatelaines, gave a wonderful fundraising Afternoon Tea Concert in a packed Memorial Hall. My wife, Sarah, the Mayoress, organised a sell-out 'Mayor's Spring Fling' Concert with the very talented Tim Southern. Also in March, I had the pleasure of attending the Music for Youth Showcase Concert at Monmouth Comprehensive School to listen to the vast range of young musical talent in our County.

In April, my daughter, Katie organised a family 'Bingo Bango' fundraising evening at the Memorial Hall, insisting that I was the bingo caller. Parkinson's Monmouthshire, one of my chosen Mayor's Appeal charities, invited me to their 10 Anniversary Afternoon Party. Sarah and I also attend our first Iftar Muslim shared meal at County Hall. Everyone was in full voice for the return of the Usk Cymanfa Ganu in the Sessions House, proceeds were shared with the Mayor's Appeal, Ukraine Appeal and the Turkey & Syria Earthquake Appeal. My relentless fundraising daughter suggested we organise a family 'May Day Pyjama Walk' which was well supported by many Usk families. As the Mayor and Mayoress, we walked in our Chains of Office in Dragon & Cow Onesies! Proceeds were shared with the Mayor's Appeal and The Leukaemia and Lymphoma Society.

Although May has been my final month as the Mayor of Usk, it has been a busy one. I was given the difficult task of judging the handmade crowns at Usk Primary School and at Usk Nursery. I attended a Royal Picnic and Singing Concert at Little Explorers Nursery; planted an oak tree to commemorate the King's Coronation in the Alfred Russel Wallace Arboretum and opened the very successful Bridge Street Coronation Street Party. At our Usk Town Council Presentation Evening my wife and I presented our well-deserved Community Awards to Barry & Ann Morse, Angela Jones and Sue Cowburn and was delighted to hand over cheques to our Mayor's Appeal charities totalling an amazing £10,560. We are so grateful to the businesses, groups and residents that have supported our events.

Amongst all this I have also attended nine HM Prison Officer Graduation Ceremonies in the Sessions House, Courtroom, seeing new officers complete their training and starting their careers in the Prison Service.

My wife and I have thoroughly enjoyed the past 12 months and offer our incoming Mayor Cllr Steve O'Brien our best wishes for the year ahead.

Best wishes
Meirion & Sarah

Cllr Meirion Howells
Mayor of Usk



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The Mayor of Usk Cllr Meirion Howells has had a very busy year and attended all the Civic duties below:

1. Graduation of Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
2. 1/5/23 May Day Pyjama Walk from the Sessions House along the river and through the town raising £203 shared between The Mayors Appeal and Leukaemia and Lymphoma Society.
3. 23/4/23 Cymanfa Ganu at The Sessions House raised £340.50. £113.50 each to Ukraine Appeal, Turkey & Syria Earthquake Appeal & Usk Mayor's Appeal.
4. 14/4/23 Iftar Muslim meal at County Hall attended by Muslims from many countries, County Councillors and Mayoress Sarah Howells
5. 12/4/23 Parkinson's Monmouthshire Group 10th Anniversary Tea Party - The Bridges Centre, Monmouth with my Consort Iris Howells
6. 8/4/23 Bingo Bango at the Memorial Hall organised by Katie Howells as fundraiser for Usk Mayor's Appeal raising £743.
7. 6/4/23 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
8. 27/3/23 Gwent Music Showcase Concert held at Monmouth Comprehensive School.

9. 25/3/23 Mayor's Spring Fling Tim Southern Auction Raffle organised by the Katie Howells and the Mayoress Sarah Howells; the evening raised £2,842
10. 5/3/23 St David's Day Afternoon Tea Concert in the Memorial Hall organised by The Usk Singing Club with guest soprano Emilie Parry-Williams fundraising £793.95
11. 1/3/23 St David's Day Service - Welsh reading at Priory Church of St Mary
12. 27/2/23 Usk Hub St David's Day Celebration. Mayor's Maestros singers gave a special one-off performance.
13. 25/2/23 Gwent Young Farmer's Club Showcase Concert held at the International Convention Centre Wales
14. 4/2/23 'Vision for Chepstow' visit to Chepstow Community Centre to view proposal to redesign the town.
15. 3/2/23 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
16. 20/1/23 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
17. 18/1/23 400 What! Music event at New Court Hotel. The evening raised £121 for appeal
18. 22/12/22 Guest as Mayor and School Governor to the Usk Primary School Christmas Lunch.
19. 18/12/22 Priory Church of St Mary Nine Lessons & Carols Service.
20. 17/12/22 Usk Brass Band Christmas Concert at the Memorial Hall, Usk.
21. 4/12/22 Festival of Carols at Priory Church of St Mary's and Lantern Parade from the Church to the Sessions House.
22. 2/12/22 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
23. 25/11/22 Officially opened the Alfred Russel Wallace Restaurant on Bridge St
24. 20/11/22 Abergavenny Mayoral Civic Service at St Mary's Abergavenny and buffet in the vestry.

25. 18/11/22 Flanders & Swann Concert organised and starring Ian Williams and accompanied by Michael Barnett at the British Legion Usk
26. 18/11/22 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
27. 13/11/22 Attended the Remembrance Service at the Priory Church of St Mary and laid a Wreath at the War Memorial.
28. 4/11/22 Dedication of the Garden of Remembrance Service – Priory Church of St Mary.
29. 3/11/22 104th Birthday of Winnie James, presented flowers and chocolates.
30. 29/10/22 Usk Rotary Club Musical Concert at the Memorial Hall, Usk. Fundraiser for the Mayor's Appeal.
31. 20/10/22 Tea with Mayor of Caldicot, Cllr Maxine Mitchell at the Caldicot Community Centre with local residents, Councillors and children from the Welsh and English Schools.
32. 14/10/22 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
33. 1/10/22 Save The River Usk Walk in Crickhowell attended by a large group of supporters and Wild Swimmer Angela Jones.
34. 30/9/22 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
35. 24/9/22 Usk Rotary Arboretum attended the official opening along with MP David Davies
36. 23/9/22 Presentation of 'Jill Jeremiah Pens Awards' to Year 3 students at Usk Primary School.
37. 21/9/22 opening of St Mary's Church Baby & Toddler group. Memorial Hall
38. 16/9/22 Attended the 100th Birthday Celebration of Dora Sales MBE, New Market St, Usk
39. 11/9/22 King Charles III Proclamation at County Hall, Usk
40. 10/9/22 Attended Usk Agricultural Show to judge the 'Best Small Trade Stand' at the Show.
41. 8/9/22 Ceremony of lowering the Union Jack Flag for the death of the Queen at The Sessions House.

42. 13/7/22 Attended the Gardens Open Cheque Presentation Evening at the Sessions House.
43. 13/7/22 Invited to attend the official opening of the District Nurses Clinic Room at Roger Edwards Building on Maryport St, Usk
44. 2/7/22 Guest at one of the many concerts held at the Usk Choral Festival.
45. 2/7/22 Chordis Caerllion Orchestra Leavers & Summer Concert in Ponthir Village Hall with the Mayoress, Sarah Howells
46. 2/7/22 Invited to open the Usk School Summer Fair on the school grounds.
47. 1/7/22 Announced the winner of the Usk Annual Duck Race Winner held at the grounds of Usk Cricket Club.
48. 20/6/22 Fly the Flag for the Armed Forces at County Hall with Consort Mrs Iris Howells, The High Sheriff of Gwent, County Councillors and Staff.
49. 17/6/22 HMP Officer Graduation of New Officers into the Prison Service. Held in the Sessions House Courtroom attend by Prison Staff, Governors and Relatives of New Officers.
50. 12/6/22 The Usk Mayor's Civic Service at the Priory Church of St Mary and reception at the Sessions House.
51. 10/6/22 Save The River Usk Walk in Usk attended by residents, supporters and Wild Swimmer Angela Jones
52. 3/6/22 The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Community Picnic with Live Music on the Owain Glyndwr Park, Usk
53. 2/6/22 Queen's Platinum Jubilee Lantern Parade and Beacon Lighting Ceremony. Walking from Twyn Square to the Owain Glyndwr Park where the Scouts lit a Beacon as part National Beacons.
54. 27/5/22 Visited Usk Primary School to hand out Souvenir Bookmarks to Commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee to the students.
55. 27/5/22 Visited Usk Pre-School Nursery to hand out Souvenir Bookmarks to Commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee to the children.
56. 9/5/22 Appointed Usk Mayor by Usk Town Council at The Sessions House

Usk Mayor's Appeal

During his term in Office Cllr Howells raised with a number of fundraising events raised an amazing £10 560 which he divided between the following charities

- St David's Hospice
- Parkinson's UK
- Alzheimer's Society
- MIND

An introduction to the Report

Welcome to the second Annual Report from Usk Town Council. The report sets out to inform Usk residents of the many roles, responsibilities and activities undertaken by the Council during the period from May 2022 – March 2023.

As Town Clerk I work alongside Diane Richards, the Responsible Finance Officer (who is responsible for all financial records of the Council and the careful administration of its finances) and it is my role to advise and support the Council, within the law.

Following a reduction from 12 councillors to 7 there has been a huge increase in the workload of councillors and staff. My thanks go to Diane Richards the Responsible Finance Officer and Sessions House Manager without whose support and excellent bookkeeping

I hope you will find the report informative. Usk Town Council welcomes any feedback.

Tracey Huxley Clerk to the Council

THE COUNCIL

Usk Town Council (UTC) serves a population of just over 3000. It is currently made up of 7 elected members who represent the interest of the community and strive to improve the quality of life for the people of Usk.

Usk Town Council is led by the Mayor who, together with the Deputy Mayor, is elected by fellow members of UTC. This takes place at the Annual Meeting in May each year.

UTC meets on the second Monday of the month for a couple of hours (with the exception of August when there's no meeting). There are also sub- committees within the council which meet periodically. All meetings are open to the public.

There is the opportunity for Councillors to undertake a small amount of training (usually, 2/3 hours training in an evening) provided by One Voice Wales; this enables councillors to develop their skills and knowledge on local government matters and to keep up to date with changes. The role of a Usk Town Councillor is a voluntary position.

Usk Town Councillors



**Deputy Mayor
Alison Ivin**

Maryport House
49 Maryport Street,
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Cllr Steve O'Brien

Independent
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Cllr Dave Harrison

Independent
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Cllr Glen Roderick

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Cllr Kay Peacock

Independent
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Councillor Meirion Howells

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The Town Council has several committees of which the main ones are:

- ❖ **Finance Committee** - responsible for the running of UTC budget
- ❖ **Planning Committee** - although the UTC is unable to grant permission, it acts as a consultee and comments on all planning applications to Monmouthshire County Council
- ❖ **Sessions House Management Committee** - taking on the running and maintenance of the Sessions House building
- ❖ **Tourism & Events Committee** - responsible for organising community activities and events.
- ❖ **Usk Masterplan Committee** – working, and in discussion, with Monmouthshire County Council on the future of Usk and on how services can best be improved.

The Town Council's main responsibilities are.

- Street cleaning
- Providing and maintaining the Usk Park Toilets
- The provision of, and paying for, the dog waste bins to be emptied
- Providing the Christmas lights and Christmas Event
- Supporting local events and festivals
- Organising free events in the town
- Providing grants to local groups
- Maintenance of the Sessions House
- Planning advice to MCC

Apart from the above, UTC supports the community with the following.

- Noticeboards
- Church grass cutting
- Factory Lane Allotments
- Defibrillators
- Usk Action Litter Group
- Remembrance Day Service
- Commonwealth Day Service
- Usk in Bloom
- Usk Open Gardens
- Fundraising for Charities

County Council Representation

The Llanbadoc and Usk Ward is represented by two County Councillors



Councillor Meirion Howells
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County Councillor Tony Kear
c/o Democratic Services
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The Sessions House – Home to Usk Town Council



The Sessions House was opened in 1877, having taken 20 years to complete. Built as the Quarter Sessions Court for the whole of Monmouthshire it is, in true Victorian style, perfectly symmetrical even to the use of a false door to ensure that symmetry.

Sadly, the building fell into disrepair and in 1998 Usk Town Council bought it for use, not only as Council offices, but as a community resource. The purchase was supported by the whole town with organisations and individuals raising funds, and successful applications to the Heritage Lottery and CADW raised grants of £90,000 towards the restoration. The restoration continues to date.

Today, the Sessions House continues as a home for Usk Town Council and is a prestigious base for local businesses and organisations. It provides meeting rooms, conference facilities, a concert venue and a stylish setting for parties and anniversaries. The building is now licenced for Weddings and Civil Partnerships, offering unique surroundings for those special occasions. The building plays an important role in the life of Usk.

A report provided by Cllr Steve O'Brien Chair of Usk Sessions House Management Committee,

Sessions House

Finally, after what seemed lifetime, Lockdown Restrictions in Wales were finally lifted in May 2022.

It would be very remiss not to spare a thought for all those who lost loved ones and to offer a huge thank you, to all the selfless people who worked and looked after us all, throughout this unprecedented period of our history.

The Sessions House opened its door once again and life started to take on some normality.

We welcomed our new Mayor Councillor Meirion Howells and Deputy Mayor Alison Ivin and fellow Councillors. Instead of the online meetings, we were at last able to meet in person, although at times, I wish I still had a mute button!

Our tenants started to return to their offices and the hustle and bustle of life resumed.

The Sessions House is beginning to show her age and in order to keep her beauty, we began a series of restoration works. We repaired all of the ground floor windows and replaced two windows in the Court Room, which look fabulous and help to keep out the wonderful Welsh weather. We upgraded our electricity, lighting and safety certificates to ensure our compliancy.

The Sessions House Roof is in much need of some attention, we were fortunate enough to obtain a match grant from CADW. Work commences in May and weather permitting we anticipate first stage completion by the end of July.

Throughout the year the Sessions House has hosted many events, all of which are fully supported by the community.

June saw the whole country celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee. The Town was festooned in bunting, and we had a wonderful time on the Owain Glyndwr Field from the lighting of the Beacon to the Community Picnic on the actual day. It felt like to whole town attended. It was joyous. Sadly, on September the 8th our much-loved Monarch Queen Elizabeth II passed away. The flags were lowered, all events were cancelled, a book of remembrance was opened, the Country entered a period of National Mourning. The Town Council on behalf of the residents of Usk sent a letter of condolence to His Majesty The King and in turn we received a thank you from Buckingham Palace.

In celebration of the 200th birthday of Usks' famous son Alfred Russell Wallace, the acclaimed theatre group "Theatr na nOg" gave a wonderful performance in the Sessions House Court Room, entitled "You Should Ask Wallace." The performance was shown in the afternoon to the children of the town and repeated for the adults in the evening.

In January the Sessions House hosted a Choral evening and towards the end of Mayor Howells term in office a Cymanfa Ganu in April, what a glorious end to the year. It's amazing how a Victorian Court House lends itself so perfectly to music. It was just perfect.

Weddings

The Sessions House is licensed for weddings and has hosted a number of weddings throughout the year. Special thanks to Diane Richards and Caretaker Lyn Wadley who manage couples wedding day to the highest standard.

COUNCIL SPENDING

Usk Town Council's Spending and Finance Precept for 2022-23 is £145.656

UTC's spending is controlled by a budgeting and monitoring process under the supervision of the Responsible Finance Officer, Mrs Diane Richards.

UTC aims to provide services, manage facilities, and meet the town's priorities. It monitors expenditures whilst endeavouring to obtain value for money.

The work of UTC is funded mainly through the precept which is collected via Monmouthshire County Council.

Background

(Setting the budget)

The council is required to set its annual budget by the end of the year (Dec) so that it can be approved by Full Council at its January meeting. Our precept request must be submitted before the end of January, which allows time for the County to set its own budget in readiness for the new financial year (April). When setting our 2020/21 budget we were unaware of the Covid Pandemic and its effect on our activities. Therefore, our budget predictions for the year were somewhat wide of the mark.

Finance Report for the period April 2022 to March 2023

by Diane Richards Responsible Finance Officer

The annual budget was set and approved by Full Council at the December meeting. The precept remained the same as the previous 4 years.

There was quite a marked overspend on the building and maintenance aspect of the budget this was due to the fact we had an opportunity to have all the ground floor windows at the Sessions House repaired. We were also able to replace 2 windows in the courtroom which has stopped the water ingress which has made a big difference to this extraordinary room.

The Clerk and Chair of Finance managed to secure some funding towards the celebration for the King's coronation, so we were able to keep within budget and enjoy a very special day.

The £50,000 contribution to the resurfacing of the Maryport Street South car park has now been paid.

In 2022/23 Financial Support is provided for the following.

Usk in Bloom	8,000
Road cleansing	28,285
Christmas Lights	9,036
Grass Cutting	4,000
Dog waste Removal	1,542
Allotment Maintenance	1,000

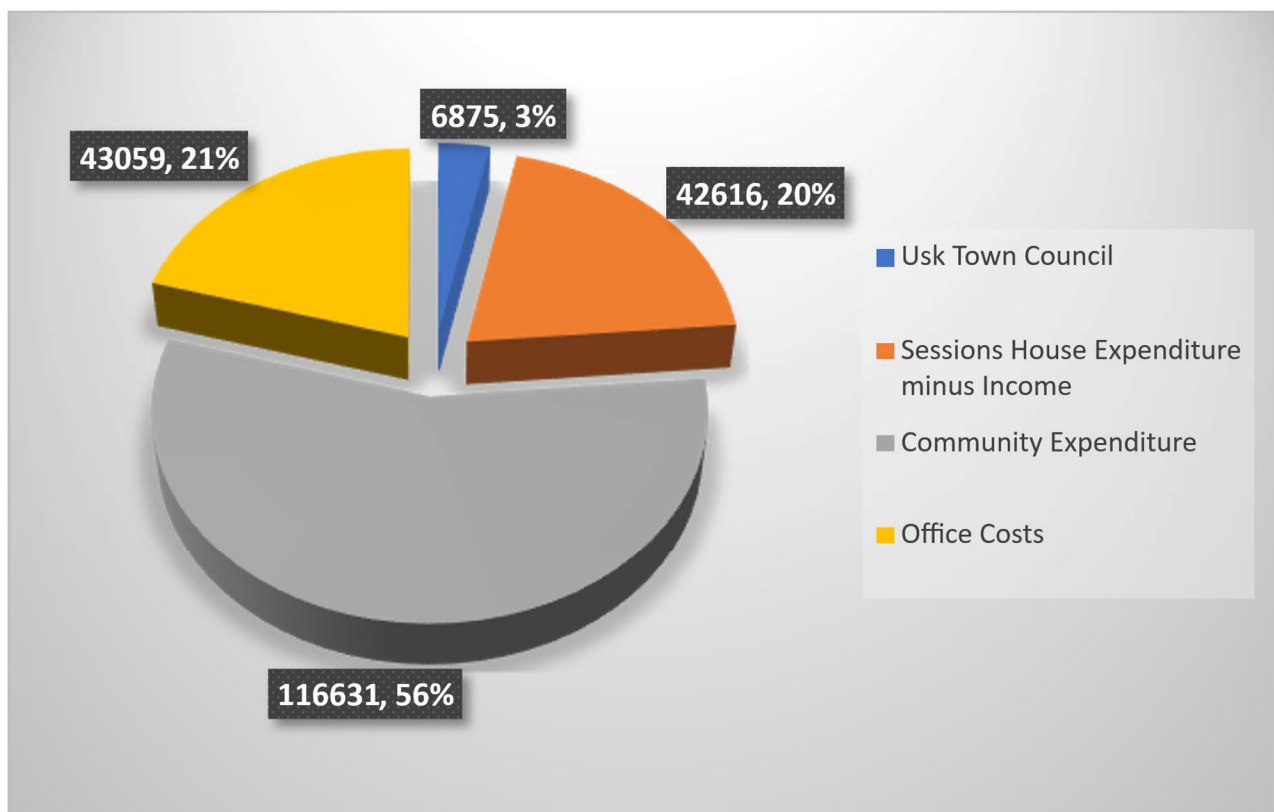
Grant Funding	2,000
Donations via S137	1,200
Summer/Christmas Events	9,518
Hub Newspapers	328
Community Project + de-fibs pad replacements	1,722

General Fund Opening Balance	102,242
Income for the year	178,465
Expenditure for the year	234,014
Closing Balance	96,693

Financial Position on 31st March 2023.

VAT outstanding	5,519
Current A/C	8,911
Reserve A/C	93,796
Cash in Hand	19
MBS A/C	5,018
	£113,261

Local councils are advised to retain the equivalent of 6 months running costs, we meet these guidelines. The accompanying Pie chart shows a simple breakdown of expenditure.



In conclusion

I would like to thank all the councillors for their help in maintaining a healthy financial position with special thanks to Chair of Finance Cllr Steve O'Brien, and to the Town Clerk Mrs Tracey Huxley for her tremendous support through the last year.

Councillor Allowances

Councillor Name	Payment as a contribution to costs and expenses (max £150 per member)	Responsibility Payment (up to £500 to a maximum of 5 members)	Chair/Mayor's & Deputy Chair / Mayors Allowance	Financial Loss Allowance	Travel & Subsistence expenses	Care Allowance (up to a maximum of £403 per member per month)	Other	U
Cllr M Howells	Nil	Nil	900	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cllr A Ivin	150	Nil	500.	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cllr S O'Brien	150	Nil	1500	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cllr G Roderick	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cllr D Harrison	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	900,00
Cllr K Peacock	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	300	Nil	2900	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	900.00

THE REPORT

Activities undertaken by Usk Town Council (UTC) during the year May 2022-April 2023.

Park Toilets

The Usk Park Toilet remain a great asset to the children's park and all ongoing costs are met by Usk Town Council.

Allotments

There are currently sixty-two allotments situated in Factory Lane, Usk. Although the land is owned by MCC, Usk Town Council manages the site. The current fee is £20 per five perch per annum.

The Usk Post Office

UTC considers the Post Office an essential service and continues to work with MCC by offering support financially to ensure its opening. It is currently open Mondays and Thursdays 9-5pm and Saturdays 9-12.30pm.

Street Cleaning

MCC is not obliged to provide a road sweeper. UTC considers keeping Usk clean and tidy an essential service. As a result, UTC adopted this service and now totally funds our road sweeper, Robert.

UTC has provided new and additional litter bins in the town and have funded two extra "dog poo" bins on the grounds of the Athletic Club.

Safer Roads

As you are all probably aware, Wales will be one of the first countries in the world and the first nation in the UK to introduce legislation to have a 20mph speed limit on roads where cars mix with pedestrians and cyclists.

The Senedd passed The Restricted Roads Order legislation in early 2022. This means that speed limits on most restricted road will reduce from 30mph to 20mph from Autumn 2023.

Closure of the Usk Waste & Household Recycling Centre

Following on from MCC Cabinet decision to close the recycling centre in 2020. UTC submitted a plan to keep the former recycling centre as an asset for the town to use as a site for local markets and events.

This proposal was accepted by MCC and with the aid of a grant from WG Transforming Welsh Towns, Usk hosted outdoor markets on the first Wednesday, last Saturday and second Sunday of the month. However, the hosting of the markets proved not to be financially viable, and UTC is

now looking to work alongside MCC to see how best this area can be utilised as a community asset.

Natural Resource Wales Discharge of Sewage into the River Usk

This has been of great concern to Usk Town Council and residents.

Angela Jones has worked tremendously hard raising awareness of this problem.

A "Save the River Usk" group has been formed to support Angela with her campaign.

The purpose of the group is

- To stop pollution in the River Usk.
- To give a non- political voice for Nature and the River Usk.
- To report issues to Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Welsh Government (WG), Monmouthshire County Council (MCC),

The Save the Rive Usk Group has organised a number of marches/protests to highlight the seriousness of this problem Walk.

Welsh Water is investing more than £10m in Usk over the next three years to improve the town's water treatment works and upgrade a combined storm overflow (CSO).

<https://www.david-davies.org.uk/news/welsh-waters-ps10m-usk-investment-aims-curb-sewage-discharges>

Digital Information Board

Usk was awarded a grant from Welsh Government and the digital information board is now up and running. It provides information about places of interest, local businesses, accommodation, events, services, local new and current information.

SMART TOWN

Usk lends itself to being the ideal candidate for becoming a fully functioning SMART town. The benefits to the town itself are immense and as a pilot town we could lay down the foundation for other towns and rural communities to follow suite in this ever-changing world of digitisation and urbanisation.

There are plans to set up Usk as a SMART Town.

Memorial Hall Car park

The long-awaited resurfacing of the car park has taken place along with the installation of solar lighting. The rain garden was kindly planted up by the Usk Environment Group. This has been a huge improvement not only to the to the community halls located in the car park but residents and visitors. UTC passes on their thanks to Mon CC for their help and guidance with the refurbishment

Events and Tourism

June saw the whole country celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee. The Town was festooned in bunting, and we had a wonderful time on the Owain Glyndwr field, from the lighting of the Beacon to the Community Picnic on the actual day. It felt like to whole town attended. It was joyous.

Huge thanks to Lottery Funding and to everyone who made this fantastic event possible.





Sadly, on September the 8th our much-loved Monarch Queen Elizabeth II passed away.

The flags were lowered, all events were cancelled, a book of remembrance was opened, the Country entered a period of National Mourning.

The Town Council on behalf of the residents of Usk sent a letter of condolence to His Majesty The King and in turn we received a thank you from Buckingham Palace.

December saw the return of the Usk Christmas Markets and Festival, unfortunately the company that brought the reindeer for Santa made the decision that they would not be making the long journey from Scotland to Wales, we therefore had to look a replacement.

After the markets, we had a wonderful Carol Sing A Long in St. Marys' Church followed by a Lantern Parade. The Children of Usk were encouraged and helped to make lanterns, lit by battery operated candles.

Together with the Henllys Pipe Band, we all processed from the Church along to the Sessions House, where the Grand Finale Light Show ended our festivities.

In celebration of the 200th birthday in January 2023 of Usks' famous son Alfred Russell Wallace, the acclaimed theatre group "Theatr na nOg" gave a wonderful performance in the Sessions House Court Room, entitled "You Should Ask Wallace."

The performance was shown in the afternoon to the children of the town and repeated for the adults in the evening.

A huge thank you to the Chairman and Committee Members of Usk Civic Society for their unstinting hard work in bringing this event together.

Weatherman Walking

Usk allotments welcomed "Weatherman Walking" Derek Brockway as he made his way through Usk calling in at Usk School, Twyn Square and Usk Castle. The programme was aired in May and showed Usk and its surrounding area in all its splendour.

King's Street Party Coronation

UTC organised a Coronation Street Party to celebrate our new Monarch King Charles III.

Nerves were teetering on the edge as we frantically scanned the weather forecasts. The outlook did not look good!

The Coronation Day itself, saw rainfall of Biblical proportions in London and we held our breaths and said quite a few prayers.

But we needn't have worried - the weather gods, looked favourably upon us and the sun shone brilliantly.

What an amazing day!

Bridge Street looked its finest, decked in flags and bunting. The street was closed, allowing the businesses to spill onto the streets in a very European style.

A constant throng of visitors arrived continually throughout the day. Picnic baskets were opened and the odd bottle or two popped and the fun filled family festival began in earnest.

For those that didn't bring food or drinks, the choice was worldwide, Greek, Indian Caribbean and of course British Street food was available to buy.

Entertainment extended throughout the day, with a host of local singing talents and bands, there were jugglers and fire eaters, fancy dress parades, crown making, face painting, nail makeovers and secret agents on secret missions.

At 6 o'clock St Mary's opened her doors and celebrated the Coronation with a feast of modern and traditional music.

The party on Bridge Street continued late into the evening with the local businesses all providing their own entertainment and music.

What a wonderful community spirited day.

God Save The King!

New Defibrillator

A huge thank you to Usk Panto Players for all their efforts in raising money for the purchase and installation of Usk's newest defibrillator.

The defibrillator is now in place near to the entrance of Burrium Gate.



Further thanks also go to the community minded householder at number 5, who are meeting the running costs for this life saving equipment.

The council's website www.usktown.org continues to provide useful information about the council and the community.

In addition, the council has its own Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/usk.town/>

Community Awards

This year's Usk Town Community Awards-went to the following people for their hard work and contribution and commitment to the Usk community

- ❖ Susan Cowburn
- ❖ Angela Jones
- ❖ Barry & Ann Morse



Usk Master Plan

Usk Town Council, with Llanbadoc Community Council and Monmouthshire County Council (MCC), are proceeding with the Usk & Woodside Improvement Plan first compiled by the consultancy firm



ARUP in 2019 with the revision now suggested. The revised Plan has suggestions for Twyn Square to become a more pedestrian friendly area and MCC Highways Design Team are looking at ways to make Bridge Street safer for pedestrians and so encourage a more vibrant shopping area for local businesses. Welsh Government joint funding of £50,000 has been secured for this initial placemaking design work. Once this is complete, there

will be a public consultation to gather local views on how to proceed. We are fortunate to have a resident who has experience in this field and has voluntarily been helping the steering group. Twyn Square is a relatively straightforward placemaking design matter where we hope the designers will be able to provide us with a few options. However, in Bridge Street, as we are all aware, the issue is the sheer volume of traffic on the A472, and we hope that the design team will



identify gains that will improve this road for pedestrians whilst still allowing traffic a free flow. Parallel to this design work, we continue to investigate options that will either encourage through traffic to use alternative routes or re-route traffic in a different manner. The ARUP Improvement Plan can be viewed on this link <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/usk-town-improvement-project/>

You will have noticed also that Maryport St South Car Park (Memorial Hall) has now been completely resurfaced and upgraded, with a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) to reduce flood risk during periods of heavy rain. Rainwater falling on this surface flows into underground storage containers where the water slowly soaks into the water table. A new solar powered streetlighting system has also been installed. On standby, these lights dim to 20% power until activated by passive infrared (PIR) sensors to give 100% output. These lights will help reduce light pollution in this area whilst also maintaining safe visibility for pedestrians at night.



Moving with the times we have been fortunate through MCC to secure Welsh Government funding for Electric Vehicle (EV) Chargers in our car parks. There are 8 in the Maryport Street South Car Park and another 4 are being installed in the Maryport Street North Car Park (Co-op). This is an essential part of providing a network of EV Chargers ahead of the UK Government's commitment to ban new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

You may have seen the news that Wales, from September 2023, is to become the first UK country to change the default speed in built up areas from 30mph to 20 mph. The Welsh Government has

recognised that reducing the speed limit in areas where people and vehicles mix will save NHS resources through lower fatalities and injuries, along with the effects on the families of victims. In Usk, of course, we have had a 20-mph limit on Bridge Street since 2017 and we are pleased to notify you that, ahead of the Wales September change, 20 mph will be implemented throughout the town - we hope, around springtime.

The Usk & Woodside Improvement Plan Steering Group are meeting regularly and are already seeing some gains with the above achievements. We will continue to proceed with the plan which will help secure a thriving future for Usk residents and businesses.

Usk Town Council's ongoing work & partnership with other local organisations

Usk and Graben Neudorf Twinning Association

Annual Report 2023 provided by Diane Richards Chair Usk Twinning Association.

April 2022 saw us still under some covid restrictions with both Graben Neudorf and Usk Twinners nervous of travelling. The new secretary of the Graben group, Melanie Beims has been keeping us up to date with their news.

It wasn't until early in 2023 that we received the good news that 8 members of the Graben group were looking to come over in September 2023 for a weekend to attend the Usk Show. We eagerly set up the AGM and a business meeting for 16th March.

At the AGM Dorothy Brunt and Kathryn Clarke are to remain in post as Secretary and Treasurer and I was voted in as Chair so as I write this report plans are being made for accommodation, receptions, and the Show visit.

The subject of a return visit next year will be discussed at future meetings, it seems we can start to make new plans and twinning future may look a little different but hopefully a little brighter too. The Burgermeister and his fiancé have also accepted the council's invitation to the Usk's new Mayor's inauguration to be held in early June.

Usk in Bloom

Annual Report 2023 kindly provided by Mr David Williams, Chair of Usk in Bloom

Usk in Bloom is a community-led project that works to enhance the appearance of the town of Usk. The project is run by a dedicated team of volunteers who work to create a vibrant and attractive environment for residents and visitors alike.

Each year, Usk in Bloom produces an annual report that summarizes the progress made in the previous year and outlines the plans for the upcoming year. This report includes information on activities undertaken, successes achieved, and challenges faced.

Winning 'best large village in Wales' an incredible achievement and is a testament to the hard work and dedication of Usk in Bloom volunteers and the wider local community. The gold medal is a symbol of the village's success and recognition for the commitment and effort that went into achieving this accolade. It is a source of pride for the village and reminder of the importance of working together to achieve great things.

We continue to maintain the projects and garden lifecycles started by the group, for example the Girl Guide Garden, along with maintaining other areas that have been left to us to produce an annual display, such as the children's park garden.

We have also completed the first phase of an improvement to the town's main road route from the A449, adding raised beds planted with grasses and insect friendly plants. This project highlights the efforts made by Usk in Bloom to protect and conserve the local environment and its biodiversity. It is also a sign of the commitment to sustainable development and the importance of preserving the natural environment. The second phase will be completed this year (March/April 2023).

All this has been achieved despite a reduction in volunteers' numbers since the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside increased costs and reduced resources, but we have continued to provide the Town of Flowers with displays to a standard that Usk can be proud of.

Usk in Bloom marked its 30th anniversary in 2022, celebrating with a concert at St Marys church, supported by Pendyrus Male Voice choir, which was enjoyed by residents and supporters alike.

We have also worked with many local community groups throughout 2022/2023 on likeminded programmes, such as the WI on Save the River Usk campaign.

Remember the wicker fishes that WI members made last year as part of their "river" theme? They "floated" happily all summer in the WI flower bed next to the church gateway.

2023 is the year of the 'Beetle and Butterfly!', in Alfred Wallace's honour. Usk in Bloom's theme this year will be inspired by some of his discoveries – the many brightly coloured and exotic creatures that he collected from around the world, and which helped him arrive at his theory of evolution. So, look out for the bright colours of the Jewel Beetle and butterflies in the flowers display around Usk this summer - red, orange, gold and purple.

Like the bicycle theme a few years ago, craft-y residents will once again get the chance to use their imaginations and support this year's theme of beetles and butterflies. Usk in Bloom are hoping people will get involved and help create extra decorations around the town – in flower tubs, gardens and elsewhere – in the shape of exotic insects made from wicker or wire, or whatever they choose. Alfred Russell Wallace was a local hero – let's celebrate his work across the town!

Usk Civic Society

Usk Civic Society (UCS) aims to promote high standards of planning, architecture, and design, and to inform people about the history, geography and conservation of the natural and built environment in Usk and surrounding areas. UCS takes an active and positive interest in planning policies and proposed developments.

The following report is kindly provided by Barry Morse, Chair of Usk Civic Society

The Covid lockdown severely restricted the Society's activities for much of 2020, 2021 and the first half of 2022. It was all the more gratifying, therefore, that in November 2021 we achieved the first stage of a project, begun back in 2015, to bring Alfred Russel Wallace back to Twyn Square. This involved the installation of a bust of ARW, on a plinth of the rare Portland Roach stone, with the able and amusing assistance of the multitalented (and great ARW enthusiast) Bill Bailey to unveil it. Then, on 8 January 2023, the bicentenary of Wallace's death, the second stage was completed when we unveiled a bilingual interpretation board, on a second plinth of Portland Roach, in the Square. The day continued with a Wallace Walk around Usk and Llanbadoc, passing his birthplace at Kensington Cottage, followed by the planting of a memorial tree at Usk Rotary Club's Wallace Arboretum, a fascinating talk at Usk Sessions House by Dr Sandy Knapp of the Linnaean Society on Wallace's considerable contributions to botanical science, and finally two unforgettable performances of a one-man play, *You Should Ask Wallace*, by Ioan Hefin of Theatr na nÓg. It was a fitting conclusion to eight years of tireless fundraising (in all, some £16,000), negotiation and logistical planning by the Society and its loyal members, and we hope that the result, a permanent monument to one of Usk's greatest (and still too little-known) sons, fully justifies these wonderful efforts.

We are also delighted to report that our normal activities (the spring and autumn talks programme, and our other social events) have fully resumed in 2023

Usk Action Litter Group

Thanks to Tim and Jane Southern, and volunteers who independently litter pick around the town on the first Saturday morning of the month. Their contribution to keeping Usk tidy is invaluable.

Usk Open Gardens

Usk Open Gardens weekend takes place on the last weekend of June every year. This is a very popular and unique opportunity to visit local, private gardens in Usk which are open to visitors. The gardens are in walking distance of the free car parks and there is a regular mini-bus service around the town. All proceeds go to raise money for local charities. Thanks go to all involved.

Dog Fouling Action Group

Since 2015 MCC has had a Working Group comprised of a number of members of Town and Community Councils (T&CC's) including officers from the Waste and Resources/Environmental Health sections.

The primary focus of the Group is to raise awareness of the anti-social nature of dog fouling and help develop a social conscience that dog owners should 'pick up' under the brand **Give Dog Fouling the Red Card**.

There are currently twenty-two participating T&CCs of which UTC is one. There are typically two or three meetings of the Group every year which have proved an excellent opportunity for those attending to share ideas on how best to bring about change and reduce the number of fouling incidents.

It has helped target 'hot spot' areas, fund signage with consistent messaging highlighting the need for dog owners to 'pick up' and collaborative working on a couple of Action Days each year.

In April, members of Usk Town Council and MCC Environmental Officers took part in an Action Day in Usk to help raise awareness amongst dog owners.

MCC officers and members of UTC talked to dog owners, all of which apart from one, were carrying bags so that they could pick up their dogs' poo.

UTC has adopted the Pooper Snooper App to help tackle dog fouling in the town. The App maps all the dog poo and litter bins in the town, so it is easy to find out the location of each bin for people with a new dog or who are visitors to the area. It also provides a method of reporting dog fouling incidents, which can help identify hot spot areas where patrolling could be increased, or a bin provided. The more people that use the App, the greater its usefulness in tackling the problem.

The message that came across is that there is only a small minority of dog owners who do not pick up, although every dog owner is blamed. The vast majority of dog owners care for their community. UTC will continue to reinforce the message and remind residents of its importance.

Usk Town Council Staff

Town Clerk Mrs Tracey Huxley

Responsible Finance Officer/ Sessions House manager Mrs Diane Richards

Sessions House Caretaker Mrs Lyn Wadley

Town Constables Mr Robert Hamar & Mr Shaun Galletley

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