

Opening Comments

The trustees always welcome enquiries from anyone in the village when contacted directly and have been working on the information contained in this page since September 2020 to increase understanding and transparency.

There has been increased dialogue with our appointed management company, CLC Chartered Surveyors, and Radio Tircoed in recent months to ensure all information is up to date. It was decided to publish this page when the best information could be made available, and reasons for this, should become apparent when this page is read fully.

A significant turnover of trustees has taken place in the last several months and a new chair of the Trust was appointed in late 2020. It should be appreciated there may be specific queries asking for a level of detail on previous decisions of expenditure that the current Trust membership cannot answer.

It should be clearly understood the creation of this statement has not cost the Trust anything financially, but it has cost a considerable amount of trustee time to produce and has had to be prioritised against other more urgent Trust work.

It is respectfully asked for the information on this page to be read and understood fully.

The Role of the Trust

This is an ideal opportunity to remind ourselves why there is a Trust and why most households in the village are required to pay a rentcharge. Our village was constructed with the aim of being different to most other developments, before, or since. The permission granted by the landowner for the construction of most houses within Tircoed was subject to communal areas and the village boundary being maintained independently of outside organisations.

The requirement of an annual rentcharge payment precedes the creation of the Trust and any currently serving trustees. A charitable-status Trust was eventually established to manage maintenance funded by the rentcharge monies collected for the areas it is responsible for.

Trustees are persons residing in the village who have volunteered to be appointed as directors of the Trust. Every trustee has volunteered to support our community and manage the Trust for no reward and are individuals, like most in the village, with occupations, family and many other commitments, but elect to donate as much free time as possible for the benefit of the community. No trustee is elected into position. Like other professional organisations, individuals who wish to undertake the responsibility have applications considered by incumbent directors, much as most would recognise in their own workplace.

The large number of physical, legal and financial tasks to complete rise each year, much of it outside the scope of a trustee and is the reason why a professional estate management company co-ordinate many activities on a day-to-day basis with a degree of autonomy. The trustees manage work through CLC and should be a point of escalation only if there is an issue not resolved by the management company for any reason.

The village has immensely enjoyed very successful community events such as the annual summer and Christmas fetes over many years and a wish for these to continue has strongly been expressed. The Trust has never been obliged to organise these events and they require a staggering amount of effort to ensure all licensing and safety requirements are met and far exceeds the role of any trustee. The Trust

proposes to continue organising and managing these events in future if sufficient support is received from the community.

It is with great sadness to state, over many years, trustees have had direct and indirect abuse, accusations and derogatory statements made which have had a huge impact on the mental health and wellbeing of trustees and their families. There are examples of individuals in our community who have caused harm by making defamatory public statements, insinuations and criticisms on social media based on guesses, assumptions or estimations that are wholly incorrect. This is usually accompanied without any attempt to contact the Trust for clarity. There are numerous instances of anger and disgust of 'them' and 'they' when referring to trustees, with completely unrealistic expectations of what can be expected of the Trust.

The trustees are not faceless persons gaining reward for serving the community; we are your neighbours, friends or family who are aiming to help - because nobody else has. Trustees, of course, encourage healthy dialogue and debate but ask the community to be respectful and considerate. Continued behaviour, as described above, is inexcusable and will not be tolerated in future.

Village Committee and Volunteers

It is with regret to say the current number of trustees is now half of what it was a year ago and there are now less people to undertake an ever-increasing amount of work. More recently, there has been a significant change in leadership, and the trustees are confident of greater transparency and dialogue in future.

The Trust is currently composed of three individuals who volunteer any free time available to serve our community. It should be noted, for a village comprising almost five hundred homes housing many professionals of differing expertise, no one has joined the Trust for over half a decade, with extremely limited interest to join. There is, however, a seemingly considerable amount of people who wish to engage in criticism of how things are run without stepping forward to actively help.

The role of a trustee comes with a huge amount of accountability and it is an extremely challenging role to undertake on a part-time voluntary basis. Trustees are acutely aware of their responsibilities and what must be undertaken. We ask anyone who feels they have time to contribute to a village committee to register their interest for a role on the Trust so their efforts can contribute to positive action as opposed to validating such activity already undertaken. The Trust always encourages dialogue with everyone in the community but there is simply no bandwidth to incorporate an additional layer in the process of decision making or prioritisation of work.

Trust Communication

A question has been raised regarding a general lack of response from the Trust. To all current trustee's knowledge, there is a high degree of confidence all messages sent directly to the Trust have been responded with in a timely manner for some time.

It would appear many queries regarding the village are made on social media and not to the Trust directly. It is often found numerous posts are made publicly with an assumption it will be received by a trustee. All communication directed to trustees should be via the channels described on the Trust website and not via any social media platform.

The Trust has maintained a website for many years containing a great deal of information and includes contact details for all organisations associated with the village. We ask anyone contacting the Trust to check the website information first as we receive many enquiries already answered.

In the first instance, enquiries regarding village maintenance issues should be directed to our appointed management company, CLC Chartered Surveyors, and then only escalated to the Trust if deemed necessary. CLC is investigating an improved contact management system which will allow them to handle village enquiries and track issues more efficiently.

Finances and Village Maintenance

The Trust is operated like many other businesses and organisations. It is managed by appointed directors and all accounts are made up annually by professional accountants. Accounts, including income, debt and expenditure is published annually on Companies House with the detail necessary to meet all legal obligations for disclosure. Because of our charitable status, the accounts are audited by an additional third-party professional organisation with information submitted to the Charity Commission. Annual returns are published every summer for accounts made up to September in the preceding year. There was a delay in the 2020 submission due to exceptional circumstances related to the pandemic.

It should be understood there is a level of accounting detail asked for which isn't permitted to be disclosed publicly and residents may not always obtain all information asked for. This is no different to any member of the community expecting the same from any organisation they donate to, work for, are a customer of, bank with, or hold shares for. The Trust has always provided as much information as required and will publish as much detail as possible in future. Going forward, the Trust will be working with our management company to provide a better understanding of expenditure for the previous accounting period.

The upkeep of the village including the village hall, square, play areas, village green, communal areas, pond, village perimeter and substantial number of trees is staggering, with an exceptional number of outgoing each year. Difficult decisions are made regularly about where money is, or isn't, spent from the limited funds available.

In addition to the above, many legal, insurance, administrative, financial and mandatory costs are required and must be funded from the rentcharge collected annually. Whilst some may argue costs are higher than expected in previous years returns, the current trustees can assure you these are now always reduced to an absolute minimum, and contracts for work undertaken in the village are tendered to ensure the best price available. In recent months, negotiations have, and continue, to take place to ensure maximum value from our key contractors operating within the village.

There is a considerable number of enquiries regarding trees each year. A good percentage of trees in and around the village are not the responsibility of the Trust. It is appreciated that trees constantly grow, but it should be understood the Trust cannot allocate all rentcharge collected for maintenance of trees it does have responsibility for. Trees are regularly inspected by third-party professional arborists, and any trees identified as requiring attention, are prioritised for work by professional tree surgeons with emergency or high-risk trees always taking precedence. There is strict governance regarding what work can be performed otherwise in order to protect smaller trees, wildlife and the habitat. Tree assessment and remedy is very expensive and a tree surgeon, for example, can cost several hundred pounds per day to address a small number of issues, which equates to the annual rentcharge of several houses within the village.

Some residents may feel that, as they contribute an amount annually, any tree they have issues with will be addressed as and when required - unfortunately - this is simply not possible. It should be noted any persons seen performing work in the village, such as those cutting grass, are sub-contractors (who are unlikely to be professional arborists) and won't be involved in the inspection and decision-making process. The procedure for highlighting concerns regarding trees is to our appointed management company and never to sub-contractors working in the area.

There have, for example, also been issues caused by surface water drainage in, and around, the village. The Trust has inherited ownership of this infrastructure and bears a huge cost of remedial works on such deficiencies even though it was not originally responsible for work undertaken during development of the village.

Radio Station

The radio station was founded in 2008, after a few trial broadcasts in previous years, with the aim of becoming self-sufficient and was launched with the support of lottery funding and local council grants. The radio station is run by volunteers and has an independent management team. Enquiries regarding any off-air periods may be addressed to them directly via the contact details provided on their website.

There are many benefits recognised by the community regarding the radio station. It is a unique, and rare, asset for any small village to boast, and is often referred to in addition to the village's other unique assets in estate agent listings. It provides a valued and depended-upon service for our local community and is immensely enjoyed throughout Swansea and around the world. Our annual Easter, summer and Christmas events would not have been possible without the voluntary staff of Radio Tircoed working hard to make them the success they are, with the station bringing considerable savings to the running of these events with no cost to the Trust.

The radio station raises funds to support itself through various means including advertising, fund-raising events, membership fees and sponsored broadcasts. Many years back, money was allocated to provide short-term support to the station with an agreement in place to return funds over time. The amount outstanding is due to be fully returned within the next three years under terms of a repayment plan.

The annual energy bill received by the Trust in previous years is for consumption of the village hall, radio station and all external street lighting operated by the Trust. The village hall requires heating throughout the year, regardless of usage, to prevent damage caused by frost or damp. An additional meter was installed in late 2020 to measure the energy used by the radio station so all power consumed may be paid back to the Trust going forward.

The station volunteers were extremely saddened to see comments made about them on social media in recent months. It has never been their intention to be a burden on the village or be considered a group of people only interested in using the station solely for their own gain.

Rentcharge

The annual rentcharge was set up decades before most living in the village became resident, including trustees. It is the lifeblood of what makes the village unique. Some argue this arrangement hugely contributes to what makes this village special and such an attractive place to live and is also reflected in the higher value of properties in a much sought-after location.

You should already be familiar with the previous information in this page to understand why there is a Trust, a rentcharge, and what the rentcharge is used for. To be blunt, less money is paid into the Trust than required, and needed, to maintain the areas it is responsible for. The rentcharge has been comparatively low for decades and, by comparison, new estates command annual payments in the region of two to three times more than what this year's rentcharge has just increased to - and very few estates have our considerable amount of trees to maintain. Our rentcharge increases can only slightly rise every few years in accordance with the lease on the land our properties are built on.

If you own a house in the village, you are responsible for paying the rentcharge (apart from a minority of houses built by the original developers in the Bron Afon area) and this should have been made absolutely crystal clear to you by any conveyancer used to purchase your property – if not – you need to have a strong conversation with them. All houses liable to pay rentcharge have a demand posted to the property, at least, annually. If you rent a property within the village and are unsure if you need to pay, you should refer to your tenancy agreement, and consult your landlord.

The amount of rentcharge owed to the Trust by residents of the village equates to just under **fifty thousand pounds**. This debt is increasing and is over seven times higher than the diminishing amount being returned from the radio station.

There is an increasing, and alarming, amount of rentcharge debt from residents in the village with some households habitually choosing not to pay. The Trust has always been fair regarding the collection of rentcharge or arrears and there is an option available for those who cannot pay the annual amount in full. There are numerous residents who complain about village maintenance who also believe they do not need to contribute to the scheme set up to directly fund the issue they publicly criticise the Trust of not addressing. It is regrettable to state several households have had legal proceedings against them in the past and all cases have been held in favour of the Trust.

The community has made it clear it is not satisfied with the standard of maintenance within the village. The choices made of what can, and cannot, be maintained within the village is of a direct consequence of this rentcharge shortfall. The considerable recent change in Trust membership and leadership will urgently address this situation and will be fair, but firm, with those who choose not to pay and contribute toward the village upkeep strongly called for.

Closing Remarks

The trustees sincerely hope the substantial amount of information provided in this page allay any concerns. A huge amount of great work has been achieved by many trustees, past and present, over the decades and, with your support, the current team are working harder than ever to improve trust, transparency and satisfaction in future.

We are sure there will still be some in the community who will wish to continue to guess, insinuate, criticise and purport facts without making any attempt to contact the Trust directly for clarity. The trustees ask the community to help draw a line with social misinformation and initiate direct dialogue with the Trust to understand any situation or issue fully, so we may move forward positively and make our community stronger.