

Introduction

Welcome to the second Tircoed Village Trust newsletter of 2021! We had hoped to update you earlier in the year; however, the Trust has been extremely busy with ongoing developments in the village, many of which are outlined below. If you have not read the newsletter issued in January this year, you can do so by visiting the News page on the Trust website at tircoed.org/news.

If you are aware of anyone who may wish to receive a paper copy of this information, please advise them that paper copies are available in the village shop and may also be delivered within the village upon request. An audio version of this update is also available on the Trust website.

We hope this newsletter gives you an insight into much of the work that has been carried out by the trustees this year. If you have any queries or would like to discuss anything in more detail, as always, we encourage you to contact us directly via the Trust website. Thank you!

Maintenance

There has been a great deal of maintenance within and around the village in 2021, both seen and unseen.

The Trust received competitive tenders for the annual maintenance of the communal areas it is responsible for. A professional company was appointed to undertake grass cutting, pond maintenance and manage tree surgery where required. This work is ongoing.

Earlier this year, a map of Trust ownership of all areas within the village was made available on the Trust website. This should be your first port of call when making any enquiry regarding village upkeep or area ownership. The map may be found by visiting tircoed.org/map.

If you have a question or concern about any tree within the village (or anything else regarding Trust matters), you should first check the map of ownership, review the information provided in the FAQ section of the Trust website, and January newsletter first. It is very likely your question is already answered.

Village Square

A great deal of maintenance and improvement work has been undertaken in the village square including drainage, block paving, lighting, play equipment and communal facilities. The damaged basketball hoops at the rear of the village hall were replaced and repaired, however within 24 hours one of the hoops was damaged again, and within 4 weeks was snapped off completely. The Trust cannot justify continually spending money on facilities that are deliberately damaged so this situation will be reviewed again in future.

All play equipment receives regular mandatory safety inspections to ensure it is in good order and improvements to this area are being considered. If you have any suggestions regarding enhancing this area, please get in touch with the Trust via the website.

Village Hall

The hall has received all statutory inspection and maintenance required including emergency lighting, fire alarm and fire equipment, security system, CCTV, electrics, etc. The solar panels on the roof have been maintained resulting in an increase in efficiency to offset energy costs.

The village hall was closed for most of the time throughout the pandemic, however the Trust received approval from the council to continue with limited operations during lockdown for specific activities that supported those in need during the difficult time. We were made aware of a complaint to the council from a resident who incorrectly reported the hall was being used illegally. We can assure residents all Covid regulations have always been adhered to by the Trust and we would encourage anyone with a concern or query to contact trustees directly.

Currently, the hall hosts martial arts, exercise classes, tutoring, coffee mornings, toddler groups and more, and will soon offer ladies self-defence classes. Small businesses will be charged a nominal fee to cover running costs and there is no charge to those offering free services or events for the benefit of our community. If you wish to make use of the hall, please get in touch via the Trust website.

Village Adoption

There has been some progress by the developers with regards to bringing up to standard those areas the council will adopt - primarily the roads, pavements, and street furniture. The Trust has been actively involved with exerting pressure on this process over the years but are only able to influence the pace of this between the developers and council.

For example, the Trust had to adopt the pond for Swansea Council to progress with adoption of the village, as Welsh Water would not take ownership from the housing developers. It is an additional area of responsibility trustees never originally planned to own but have had to do so to move us forward with council adoption.

We encourage any member of the community to additionally voice any frustration toward the parties involved in this process!

Village Pond

As described above, the Trust has undertaken ownership of the pond in recent years, and this was originally never in scope. Throughout this year there has been much activity within the area.

It has been noted there has been some concern in recent months regarding the management of the pond. We have a programme of activity to improve the area for all wildlife in accordance with the professional recommendations and law we must abide with. Early this year, the Trust commissioned a well-established and respected environmental professional to examine the pond and recommend what is required, and when, to ensure it promotes wildlife and causes no harm to the habitat. Our newly appointed contractor has worked on the improvements throughout the year in accordance with the recommendations and there is still much to be done.

We are limited in what we can and cannot do (and when) to the pond due to legislation regarding the protection of wildlife that may be unseen by most. The area may be home to the Great Crested Newt, a protected species, meaning there are additional restrictions in the area until confirmed or otherwise.

Trustees are not able to prevent, or relocate, wildlife adopting our pond (nor would we wish to) but have no ownership of any that do; ducks, for example, may settle anywhere they feel worthy of home. During the dry weather earlier this year, the Trust was made aware the community took action to have the pond filled with water. Much as we appreciate this may have been considered the right thing to do at the time, Natural Resources Wales became aware and were extremely unhappy about the situation and the danger it posed to the seen, and unseen, wildlife, and habitat. They spoke with the Trust and advised they were in consultation about potential prosecution. This also caused issues with the supply and quality of drinking water within the village for some time afterwards. Once again, we stress the importance of contacting the Trust first if you have any issues or concerns regarding areas in the village.

Life-saving equipment is inspected frequently, and the pond perimeter is also checked regularly to maintain integrity. Some repair work has already been undertaken with more improvements planned.

The Trust has arranged for our appointed environmental consultant to visit the pond one weekend in September, for an open day, so anyone in the village interested in the pond and associated wildlife may find out more about the recommendations and plan and ask any questions they wish. Please keep an eye out for the date and more details soon.

Radio Tircoed

Radio Tircoed is a not-for-profit station run by volunteers and covers its operating costs from fundraising, grants, and advertising. The radio station has enjoyed good listenership this year and proved a lifeline to the community during the uncertain and isolated times throughout the pandemic and lockdown periods. Since August 2020, Radio Tircoed has largely been under new management, and an agreement was put in place with the new Trust team at the end of last year. As a result, all energy consumed is paid for, and the station has also commenced making payments against an amount previously loaned to support it.

The station and its volunteers will again be supporting the upcoming summer fete to help make it another success. If you, or someone you know, wishes to volunteer and support the community by getting involved, please get in touch with the radio station.

Finances and Rentcharge

The trustees have worked with our management company, CLC Chartered Surveyors, to ensure the absolute best value for money for all services and mandatory costs associated with the management and upkeep of the village. The Trust annually submits financial information to Companies House for public inspection after being prepared by professional accountants and independent professional third-party auditing. As a registered charity, a report is also submitted to the Charity Commission. This information may be viewed by any member of the public using the details provided on the Trust website.

In 2020, rentcharge demands were issued late due to a delay in information required by CLC relating to the five-year index-linked increase. Trustees understood that issuing rentcharge demands for 2021 in April may have exerted undue pressure on those struggling to meet their financial obligations due to the pandemic, with income potentially affected by lockdown and furlough. Considering this, rentcharge demands will be issued in September with a plan to revert to earlier in the year, as before, in 2022. If you haven't already, please confirm your Gift Aid status when you receive your letter from CLC as this makes a huge difference to the income for our village!

Members of the community have contacted the Trust on numerous occasions, stating how unfair it is that whilst most of us pay the rentcharge on time, others simply refuse to pay and withhold funds. The Trust acknowledges this frustration and agrees the situation cannot continue. After recent consultation with the Trust legal team, tougher measures will be enacted on those who choose not to pay, including additional charges, debt recovery and legal action. Trustees implore anyone who has rentcharge debt to contact CLC as soon as possible to prevent these additional measures. The Trust has enhanced the information and transparency available to the community regarding why and how this money is spent, and payment options have been available for those requiring support for some time.

Our management company, CLC Chartered Surveyors, are piloting an improved customer contact system to manage all enquiries from within the village and expect this to allow their service to be improved further. You will also see more reference to Deed of Variation in future and this will be something communicated in more detail within the next year.

Village Events

Trustees organised a council-approved and Covid-safe family egg hunt over Easter weekend, and it was met with great success. Many families within the village enjoyed cracking the clues to receive a treat for all their hard work. The Trust was also pleased to be able to spread goodwill and make a wonderful donation to a local food bank following the festivities!

Following a two-year absence, trustees are very happy to announce the Tircoed Village Fete will be back for 2021. Previous summer fetes have been immensely enjoyed and this year's event will include live music, hot food, fun family games, and activities for children. All arrangements, licensing, entertainment, authorisation and health and safety work has been completed and trustees ask for your help on the day - please keep an eye out on the Community Facebook page.

The fete, or any other social event, is not funded by rentcharge income. Trustees have already planned an autumn (Halloween) and Christmas activity, subject to pandemic restrictions at the time.

Trustees and Community Support

A new trustee team was formed toward the end of 2020, and it is hoped the community will have seen many improvements in this time. Trustees put a call out for support early this year and are happy to confirm the team is growing with additional help at hand. More information on this will be provided in future.

We would like to thank everyone in our village for supporting each other, and the community spirit, during the difficult times throughout the pandemic. The trustees have volunteered to serve our community and will always appreciate any help offered. If you have any suggestions to make our village a better place to live, please get in touch with the Trust, as we always welcome enquiries and suggestions!