

Tircoed Village Trust

June 2023 Newsletter

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to read the Tircoed Village June 2023 newsletter! The last newsletter issued was just over a year ago, and a lot has happened since, which we will update you on. There is a wealth of information in previous editions of this newsletter, and you can find them by visiting tircoed.org/news. We ask all residents to take a little time to read this, and previous newsletters, in addition to all the information on the tircoed.org website. A lot of effort is put into these communications with the aim of preventing misinformation and already-answered questions being repeatedly posted on social media where we do not have the resources to respond.

If you are aware of anyone who may wish to receive a paper copy of this newsletter, please advise them that paper copies will be made available in the village shop, and a copy posted at the village hall. An audio version is also available by visiting tircoed.org/news.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss a particular issue or idea, please contact the trustees via the tircoed.org website. Thank you!

Village Events

The Trust has continued to organise several events within the village. Last August, we held another successful Summer Fete. This was very well attended, and we provided a variety of entertainment for both young and old. Visitors enjoyed fun activities, tasty food, and live music, and we received a lot of positive feedback from residents who all thoroughly enjoyed the day.

The Trust received messages from some residents concerned that rentcharge money is used to fund events. This has been addressed before and, once again, we would like to make it clear rentcharge money does not fund events; it is used for the maintenance of several areas in, and around, the village including the village hall and village square.

A community police open day was held in the village to encourage residents to discuss any concerns they may have about village life, especially regarding anti-social behaviour. We would like to thank those who made the effort to voice their concerns. Sadly, it was very poorly attended, and plans to repeat this on a regular basis were dropped.

In late November, we held our first Winter Market. Whilst the unfavourable weather did deter some stall holders from visiting, many did attend, and were pleased with the turnout from the community. We would like to hold this kind of event again and hopefully see it grow bigger.

The Christmas Fayre took place again in December. It was lovely to see so many people enjoying the festivities including the brass band, refreshments and, of course, meeting Father Christmas! Unfortunately, there was no community choir this year due to lack of interest, so we would love to hear from anyone who would like to organise a choir this year. We asked all visitors to bring suitable items of food for our local food bank and were incredibly pleased to be able to provide much needed help for the local community! We received lots of positive feedback from those who attended and thank those who supported the event.

We put a call out for help from the community last November to help tidy up the village square, and received only one response, so the event was cancelled. We will ask the community again in future to support other initiatives regarding improving our lovely village but need your help to make them happen. Please keep an eye out for these requests!

Future Events

This year's Summer Fete is planned for Saturday, 26th August on bank holiday weekend. Trustees have already started planning it and hope it will be bigger and better than ever! We always invite local small businesses with fantastic products to hold a stall at our events and we would love you to come along and support them! If you would like to participate as a stall holder, or know anyone who does, please contact us via the website.

We are asking everyone attending the Summer Fete to support our local food bank again by bringing suitable food items for us to donate, or alternatively, to consider purchasing an item from the village shop to add to our collection. We want to make a difference to those in need of help in our local area.

All our events, especially the Summer Fete and Christmas Fayre, require a huge amount of time to plan, organise and run with a great deal of work conducted behind the scenes to ensure everything runs smoothly. There are currently five trustees who live in the village and give up time to do this, and as one may appreciate, we are all volunteers who have jobs, families, and other commitments. A trustee is not required to organise events and doing so is above the duties of the role. This is why we ask for help from the community to ensure these events continue to be successful.

Whilst we are extremely grateful to those residents who have reached out and assisted with events in the past, we often receive an extremely poor response when asking for help. For this year's Summer Fete, for example, we need help with supervision of bouncy castles and cleaning up of the area the day after. If we are unable to recruit volunteers for village events, we will have to consider whether they can continue to take place. If you think you can spare some time and help with the Summer Fete, please contact the Trust via the website.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Trustees have become increasingly aware of anti-social behaviour in the village square, particularly at night. This is not acceptable within our village or, indeed, anywhere.

The Trust has been in regular contact with local police regarding anti-social behaviour reported in the village and have continually requested an increased proactive police presence in addition to the police open day described above. Our local police have also made door-to-door enquiries and surveyed the community to learn as much information on the issue as possible.

The police continue to ask residents to report all incidents of anti-social behaviour to them so they may prioritise response and patrols within the area. Please remember Tircoed Trust and our management company, CLC Chartered Surveyors, do NOT have responsibility for dealing with anti-social behaviour as this is always a police matter.

In addition to the actions taken above, the village hall CCTV has recently been upgraded to offer much improved image quality, especially at night. It also offers the feature for local police to view activity remotely and this facility has been offered to them. Additional security and safety lighting has also been installed at the front of the village hall.

It is believed instances of anti-social behaviour have abated in recent months and we hope this continues to be the case. However, in addition to the improvements outlined above, the Trust is considering various other options to further address this issue, including the possibility of barriers to prevent cars using the area at night.

There have also been instances where vehicles have been left in the village square for periods of time by village residents for reasons other than using the local facilities or shop. In several cases, these vehicles have been found to have no road tax and / or MOT which raises the question of having appropriate insurance to be on the road. Please be reminded that no vehicle should be stored in this area at any time. Any vehicle found to be left in the area will be considered abandoned and reported to the police.

Village Square and Play Equipment

Several improvements have been made within the village square in the last year. In addition to necessary maintenance and repairs, the play equipment in the square and field has been upgraded and improved. New football nets and basketball hoops have been installed and have been enjoyed by many children and families. Unfortunately, the basketball equipment has since been vandalised and this has repeatedly happened over the years. The Trust is now considering whether it is viable to continually replace.

The additional village hall security and safety lighting referred to earlier has also allowed the village square to celebrate or commemorate national events and holidays by lighting up the hall in distinct colours. If you have a suggestion on how we may mark an occasion in future, please get in touch via the website.

The Trust applied to Mynydd Y Gwair Wind Farm Community Fund for a grant to improve the play facilities within the village. This was successful and we have been awarded money for refurbishment to existing play equipment and installation of new facilities. There is a programme of park improvements across Swansea and Tircoed is not in scope to benefit from this. Trustees, however, were successful in securing additional funds from Swansea Council with the help of our local councillor Victoria Holland. We are grateful to her for her assistance.

The Trust held two public consultations last year where all in the community were invited to visit the village hall and have their say on the proposed new play equipment. Children were also given the opportunity to provide preference on which types of equipment they would like to use and there was lots of enthusiasm on this!

Work has already started on refurbishment of the existing younger children's play area and new equipment will soon be installed near the existing wooden play area. Play equipment is expensive and it may not come as a surprise to learn that money does not go far when it comes to the cost of purchasing and installing new features. The type and location of all new equipment was chosen following the public consultations and the advice provided by professionals to ensure the best experience, accessibility, and variety for the money.

Village Hall

The village hall has benefited from several minor improvements including solar panel maintenance, improved lighting energy utilisation, and refurbishment and repair to the toilets and foyer. We have installed a cage for food bank donations at the entrance to the hall and encourage everyone to donate any suitable food items they can by leaving them there.

We have been active in encouraging a wide range of activities in the village hall to ensure it is used as much as possible to benefit our community. Sadly, some activities have ceased due to lack of local interest, but there is currently a varied programme and availability for more! If you have an idea about something you can bring to the hall for the community, please let us know!

Pond

We were obliged to confirm if our village pond was home to the Great Crested Newt as they have full legal protection under UK law making it an offence to damage or destroy their habitat (even if only a suspected presence). Our professional survey confirmed these are not present which will make improvement works planned for the area easier. There is a programme of improvements planned for the pond area over the next year with some already in place and more to be completed within the next month.

The pond area is regularly audited to ensure it remains safe. We have found, in between audits, some life-saving equipment is interfered with and items such as life-rings either go missing or are moved from their intended locations. If you spot anything in the area you have a concern about, please let the Trust know immediately, via the tircoed.org website.

Trees

As in previous years, all trees are examined regularly by a third-party professional arborist to determine any that may be unhealthy or dangerous, with work prioritised for any requiring attention. If you have an enquiry about any tree, please ensure it is managed by Tircoed Trust by visiting tircoed.org/map before contacting our appointed management company CLC Chartered Surveyors for advice.

The Trust has been given the responsibility to manage trees surrounding the village by Natural Resources Wales and, in addition to the regular professional inspections and surgery described above, we wish to proactively address some of the taller healthy trees which may be of concern in future. Even though we must bear the cost of work on these trees, we are unable to operate on them unless we apply for a licence to do so from NRW, to ensure it is the best course of action. We have formally authorised our professional arborist to consult with NRW on this and have applied for the licence to commence with work. As soon as we have confirmation to proceed, we will act as soon as possible.

Rentcharge Demands and Grants

Rentcharge demands have been issued to all properties liable for payment. If you have not received yours, or you have an issue regarding your account or payments, please contact our management company CLC Chartered Surveyors. Contact details for them can be found on the Trust website. If you are a landlord, or rent a house within the village, please ensure the property owner's correspondence address is provided to CLC.

CLC will shortly be providing an online facility for residents to view rentcharge balances and payments and be able to contact them more easily. Please keep an eye out for an invitation to create an online account in future.

The rentcharge demands, payments and accounts are administered, on behalf of CLC, by B-hive Property Solutions. The Trust has, as previously promised, and expected by the community, taken a tougher stance on residents who have habitually chosen not to pay rentcharge and have outstanding balances. CLC and B-hive have been helping the Trust on this with good results. We identified opportunities for improvement with the initial rentcharge demand sent to all residents this year and have fed this back to CLC for action.

In addition to securing a grant from the Mynydd Y Gwair Wind Farm Community Fund and Swansea Council to improve play facilities in the village as outlined above, we have also been successful in securing smaller grants to support our delivery of new sporting equipment and events within the village from both organisations. Loan repayments from Radio Tircoed continue to be paid with the station continuing to be financially independent of Tircoed Village Trust. The Trust has also successfully applied for Gift Aid from HMRC.

Deed of Variation

After a lot of challenging work, trustees are delighted to confirm a full and satisfactory solution has been developed for all homeowners in Tircoed in response to the issues presented by mortgage lenders in recent years. This solution is called a 'Deed of Variation' and has now been successfully implemented for many properties within the village.

Please be aware, a Deed of Variation is required to be signed off by numerous parties including multiple solicitor bodies, Tircoed Trust, and Llysdinam Trust. We have, on occasion, been contacted by some residents complaining about the time it takes for a Deed of Variation to be completed. Tircoed trustees typically sign and return this document within one or two days of receipt, but the rest of the process can take several months. If you wish to follow up on progress of completion, you should contact your legal professional involved in the process for an update. Please ensure any correspondence regarding Trust signoff specifically states which Trust is being referred to. Tircoed Trust has requested, via CLC, if other parts of the process can be completed quicker.

All property owners should consider if a Deed of Variation be sought in advance of selling or remortgaging any property within the village. Please contact CLC Chartered Surveyors for further information on how to start this process should you require it.

Community Support

We would like to thank everyone in our village for supporting each other over the last year and trustees very much appreciate any gratitude received from the community for our voluntary work. If you need to contact Tircoed Village Trust, you should always do so using the contact details provided on tircoed.org, and not via social media including the Tircoed Forest Village Community Page group on Facebook. If you have any suggestions to make our village a better place to live, please contact the Trust, as we always welcome enquiries and suggestions!