

BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

EDITION 1 • AUTUMN 2023

Welcome to the first edition of the new Blaenavon Town Council newsletter! This is the first newsletter that the Town Council has issued in nearly 20 years so you might be wondering why we've decided to start it up again.

We've listened to the feedback we received from residents who have expressed a desire for greater awareness of what is going on in the local community and a better understanding of the Town Council's work. While we do our best to keep people updated through our Facebook page, we recognise that not everyone uses social media, and even those who do might easily miss important information.

Through this newsletter, we aim to provide you with insights into how your council works, how it spends public money and how you can get involved. This newsletter is part of our effort to improve the democratic life of our town, we genuinely hope you find it informative and beneficial.

This is also about political engagement. Blaenavon Town Council firmly believes in fostering a healthy democracy where residents actively participate in the democratic process and strive to make positive changes in our community. By the next council elections in 2027, we hope to encourage candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds to put themselves forward for election, giving voters a choice at the ballot box. It is only right that you can boot your local councillors out of office if you think they are not delivering!

But to achieve this political engagement, YOU need to be kept in the loop. The Town Council should never feel like some exclusive club because it's YOUR council and exists to serve you!

With special thanks to Mr Alan Parry and Mr Walter Waygood for the kind permission to include their photography in this newsletter.



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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

I was deeply honoured to have been appointed Mayor of Blaenavon in May 2023. During recent months, it has been a delight to represent our town at various events, where I have witnessed the remarkable efforts of volunteers and community groups. There's always something going on in Blaenavon, which is a true testament to the dedication of the people and organisations that work tirelessly to make it all happen.



Among the many memorable moments during my term, I had the pleasure of participating in local celebrations for the King's Coronation. Additionally, I had the privilege of presenting prizes for the Coronation Poetry Competition at Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School; attending the Blaenavon Blues AFC Presentation at Blaenavon RFC; and paying my respects by laying a wreath at the cenotaph on Armed Forces Day. I also had the honour of opening the Mic Morris 10k race and delivering a speech at the outstanding 'Family of Blaenafon' photography exhibition by Walter Waygood at the Workmen's Hall. Furthermore, I attended the Blaenavon and District Horticultural Show and joined in the celebrations at the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company's 40th-Anniversary Gala.

In addition to these ceremonial duties, I have been actively engaged in council business, chairing council meetings, participating in working groups, and liaising with our team of hard-working councillors and officers. Together, we are unwavering in our commitment to deliver the best for Blaenavon and its residents.

In the spirit of collaboration, I have engaged with the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Partnership, Gwent Police, Bron Afon Community Housing, the Over 50s Forum, and various other organisations to understand ongoing initiatives and raise residents' concerns. I have chaired the Healthy Blaenavon Strategic Partnership Board and have actively participated in a series of Town Council litter picks, joined by fellow councillors, officers, and dedicated local volunteers. We extend a warm invitation to anyone interested in joining us for the next one!

Looking ahead, Blaenavon Town Council has an exciting calendar of events for the remainder of the year, including a range of Christmas festivities to conclude the year on a happy note.

Throughout my term, I am committed to serving Blaenavon to the best of my abilities, with a determination to repay the trust placed in me. Representing this special town is a genuine privilege, and I am eager to continue working alongside all of you to make Blaenavon an even better place to live, work, and invest.

Best wishes
Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews
Mayor of Blaenavon



WHAT IS A TOWN COUNCIL?

We are aware that not everyone knows what a Town Council is, or what it does. Well, town and community councils provide the first and most local tier of local government. Their members are closest to the communities they represent. They act as a bridge between the community and higher levels of government, advocating for the specific needs and priorities of the town or community they represent.

Blaenavon Town Council is not to be confused with Torfaen County Borough Council. It is a separate legal entity. Torfaen County Borough Council is a 'principal authority' and covers Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran, as well as the surrounding villages. It delivers most services and has a much broader range of responsibilities, including education, social services, highways, planning and development, waste management, economic development, and major infrastructure projects. It deals with matters that affect the entire borough and is responsible for coordinating and providing major public services.

By contrast, Blaenavon Town Council, as a town or community council, is much smaller, with more limited powers and financial resources. Nevertheless, it is a voice for the local community and can deliver projects, events and initiatives that contribute to local wellbeing, as well as providing funding and support to organisations and community groups. Increasingly, the Welsh Government is keen for town councils to grow and become more ambitious and take on what are known as 'place-based services' by transferring community assets and services from the principal authority.

YOUR TOWN COUNCILLORS

Blaenavon Town Council has twelve members. The current members of the council are:



Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews (Mayor)

nathan.matthews@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Annalisa Beavan (Deputy Mayor)

annalisa.beavan@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Liam Cowles

liam.cowles@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Lewis Evans

lewis.evans@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Marc Harris

marc.harris@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Prof. John Hunt

john.hunt@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Georgina James

georgina.james@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Alan Jones

alan.jones@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Sandra Keen

sandra.keen@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Ian Parfitt

ian.parfitt@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Tom Porter

tom.porter@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



Cllr Mike Wheeler

mike.wheeler@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk

The councillors are your representatives, and you can contact them on the details above.



WHAT DOES A TOWN COUNCILLOR DO?

Councillors are here to ensure that you have a voice in how our town is run and that your needs and concerns are heard. Councillors make decisions on setting and spending the council's budget and input into the planning process and on other matters that affect the community.

But it's not just about decision-making. Our councillors also work hard to improve our town's well-being and promote community involvement. They put together community events, lend support to local organisations, and talk to other local authorities and government bodies on behalf of Blaenavon residents.

Town councillors are unsalaried, only receiving a small allowance to cover the costs of their duties. Many of our town councillors have full-time jobs and work or volunteer in the community in addition to their role as councillors. They are public servants who are dedicated to making Blaenavon a better place.

THE COUNCIL OFFICERS

Blaenavon Town Council also employs three diligent officers to help keep things running smoothly. We have a Chief Officer who performs the dual roles of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer; an Assistant Chief Officer; and a Community Wellbeing Development Officer. Without their expertise and hard work, it would be impossible to maintain the level of services that the council currently offers.

Kevin Warren	Chief Officer	kevin.warren@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk
Kerry Jones	Assistant Chief Officer	kerry.jones@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk
Sophie Johnson	Community Wellbeing Development Officer	sophie.johnson@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk

BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL APPROACHES GOLDEN JUBILEE

Did you know Blaenavon Town Council was established in 1974? That means that in 2024 we will be marking its 50th anniversary. We aim to share information, stories, and memories about what the council has achieved during its half-century existence. Old photos, documents or newspaper cuttings relating to the council's past will help us tell our story. If you have anything to share, we would love to hear from you. Either drop in at our Council Offices in High Street or email the Chief Officer at kevin.warren@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk.



KEEPING BLAENAVON TIDY!

Blaenavon Town Councillors and officers, alongside local volunteers, have rolled up their sleeves to keep Blaenavon tidy through a series of litter picks. The council has targeted several areas of Blaenavon. In recent months, litter picks have taken place at Broad Street, Garn-yr-Erw, Elgam Green, Hillside Avenue, Llanfoist Crescent, Bowen Close, Ael-Y-Bryn, Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate, Upper Coed Cae, Giles Road and the surrounding areas. Through these collective efforts, over 100 sacks of rubbish have been collected.

Whilst it has been a great effort by all involved, it is always disappointing to see how much litter has been dumped around Blaenavon. By taking pride in our town, and disposing of waste correctly, we will all benefit from a cleaner and more pleasant environment. Blaenavon Town Council will continue to run these litter picking sessions. Keep an eye out on our Facebook page or noticeboards for dates and times if you wish to join us. All equipment is provided!



COMMUNITY GROUPS SUPPORTED THROUGH GRANT FUNDING

In 2022/23, £67,186 has been donated to fifteen local community groups through the Community Brew Participatory Budget project administered by Blaenavon Town Council and funded in partnership with Torfaen County Borough Council, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Bron Afon Housing Association. This included grants to Forge Side RFC Community Garden to create a community event space; Bethlehem Chapel for initiatives to help combat loneliness and isolation within the community; Blaenavon Blues AFC to help improve the ground for community use; and to the Garnsychan Partnership to support the community via the Pantry Community Shop and Kitchen.

As of September 2023, the Blaenavon Town Council has also provided **£9,610 in grants and sponsorship** as part of its Small Grants Scheme in 2023.

Community organisations wishing to obtain funding of up to £250 are invited to contact the Chief Officer to the Council for details of eligibility and how to apply.

Email kevin.warren@blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk



BLAENAVON CELEBRATES THE KING'S CORONATION

In May, Blaenavon Town Council worked in partnership with Forgeside RFC and Blaenavon World Heritage Centre to put on a range of celebrations to mark the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. On 4 May, the Mayor raised the Coronation Flag at Blaenavon Cenotaph, alongside the volunteers of the Royal British Legion, and a weekend of celebrations followed.

On 7 May a 'Coronation Big Lunch' was held at Forgeside RFC, featuring live music, entertainment for all ages, and a jubilant atmosphere. The event also marked the first anniversary of the Forgeside Community Garden, highlighting the collective efforts of Forgeside RFC and local volunteers. The celebrations continued on 8 May with the Blaenavon Coronation Fair at Blaenavon World Heritage Centre where residents could escape the bad weather, listen to brilliant performances by Blaenavon Male Voice Choir, take part in an array of coronation-themed craft activities and shop at a range of well-stocked craft stalls provided by GW Crafters.

Blaenavon Town Council also supplied free street decoration packs for residents to hold local street parties. A children's poetry competition was held at Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School and Blaenavon Town Councillors were delighted to attend a special assembly to present each winner with an annual magazine subscription for their fantastic poems, a certificate, and a water bottle. Shops and businesses around Blaenavon were also tastefully decorated for the coronation and Blaenavon Town Council was pleased to award Green Gables Grazing the prize for best-dressed shop window.



BLAENAVON COUNTRY & WESTERN FAYRE

Despite some challenging weather conditions, the Blaenavon Country and Western Fayre on 12 August at Broad Street Car Park turned out to be a successful event. The event, which was organised by Blaenavon Town Council, drew a good crowd, offering live music, children's activities, and a variety of food and drinks. Attendees even got into the spirit of the Wild West with some fantastic, themed costumes, making it a memorable day for those who braved the elements.



BRONWEN LEWIS DELIGHTS AUDIENCES AT BLAENAVON WORKMEN'S HALL

Welsh singer-songwriter Bronwen Lewis graced the stage at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall on 8 September in an event hosted by the Blaenavon Town Council. With her unique blend of Country, Pop, Folk, and Blues, Bronwen's performance resonated with the 200-strong audience. Her warm and versatile style left a lasting impression, making it a highly popular event among attendees.



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY PARADE 2023

The annual Remembrance Day Parade will take place on Sunday 12 November 2023 from Broad Street Car Park. The parade will muster at 10:30am and at 10:45am will proceed through the town centre to reach the Cenotaph at Church Road in time for the service at 11am.

Blaenavon Town Council and other organisations will lay wreaths in memory of the Blaenavon people who served and laid down their lives in service of their country.



BLAENAVON CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

Don't miss out on Blaenavon Town Council's Christmas Market at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall on Saturday 18 November. Held in association with GW Crafters, you can peruse a selection of stalls to get your Christmas shopping started early.

Then, join us in Market Street Car Park on the evening of Friday 24 November 2023, as Blaenavon Town Council hosts this year's Christmas light switch on event. There will be live music to set the festive mood, a variety of stalls, and children's entertainment, including Santa's Grotto and a Gaming Van! It promises to be a great start to Blaenavon's Christmas celebrations.

Keep an eye out for posters and social media adverts closer to the time for more details.

BLAENAVON BEFRIENDING FILM CLUB

Organised by the Blaenavon Town Council and Torfaen Community Connectors, the Blaenavon Befriending Film Club is a fantastic opportunity for residents to enjoy a free screening of a movie while also socialising with others in the community. With free refreshments provided, it's a great way to spend a Friday morning. The initiative aims to tackle loneliness and social isolation, particularly amongst older residents in the community. By offering a friendly and welcoming environment where people can come together and enjoy a shared interest, the club makes a positive difference in people's lives.

The monthly screening schedule includes a wide range of popular movies, ensuring that there is something for everyone to enjoy. Whether you're a fan of classic films, action-packed blockbusters, or comedies, there is sure to be something on the schedule that will appeal to you. Simply head to the Blaenavon Workmen's Hall on the last Friday of the month at 10:30am. The event is free to attend, and refreshments are provided. To find out more, contact Torfaen Community Connectors on **01495 742397** or Blaenavon Town Council on **01495 790643**.



STAY ACTIVE AND HEALTHY WITH THE OVER 60S EXERCISE GROUP!

Are you over 60 and looking for a fun and free way to stay active and healthy? Look no further than the Blaenavon Town Council Over 60s Exercise Group! Held every Wednesday 11am to 12 noon at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall and Friday from 11am to 12 noon at the Constitutional Club in James Street, these exercise groups are a fantastic opportunity to get moving and improve your fitness in a friendly and supportive environment. Held in conjunction with Torfaen Sports Development, the exercise groups are led by qualified instructors who will guide you through a range of exercises suitable for all fitness levels.

Exercise is vital for maintaining good health and wellbeing, particularly as we age. By participating in regular exercise, you can improve your strength, flexibility, balance, and coordination, which can help to reduce the risk of falls and other health problems. The sessions are designed with older adults in mind, ensuring that the exercises are safe and appropriate for all fitness levels. Whether you're a seasoned fitness enthusiast or new to exercise, you will find something to suit you at these groups.

The exercise groups are free to attend! Simply turn up and start exercising! If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Blaenavon Town Council on **01495 790643**.



Regular Activities Supported by Blaenavon Town Council and its Partners:

Activity	Location	Time
Stori Arts and Crafts Group	Blaenavon Medical Practice <i>In partnership with Stori</i>	Mondays 1pm - 2:30pm
Mums & Daughters Fitness	Blaenavon Active Living Centre <i>In partnership with Street Games & Torfaen Sports Development</i>	Wednesdays 5pm - 6pm (Term Time)
Over 60s Exercise Class	Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, Blaenavon Constitutional Club <i>In partnership with Torfaen Sports Development</i>	Wednesdays 11am - 12 noon Fridays 11am - 12 noon
Family Club Sports & Fitness	Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, Blaenavon Constitutional Club <i>In partnership with Torfaen Sports Development</i>	Fridays 5pm (Term Time)
Blaenavon Befriending Film Club	Blaenavon Workmen's Hall <i>In partnership with Torfaen Community Connectors</i>	Last Friday of the Month 10:30am



BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL SUPPORTS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HOLIDAY FUN

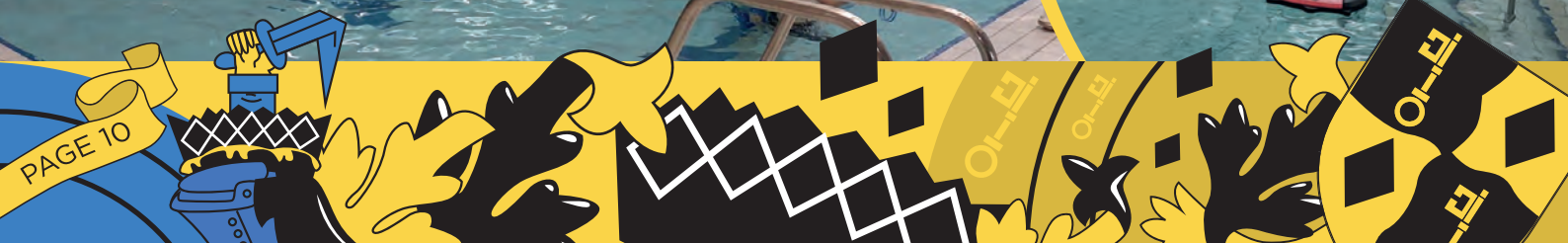
Blaenavon Town Council has been actively supporting youth activities this year. In partnership with Torfaen Play, the council has funded Play and Wellbeing Camps in Blaenavon during school holidays, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for children. These camps, catering for ages 5-11, promote positive wellbeing through activities that encourage social connection, physical activity, mindfulness, learning, and kindness. Children engage in games, arts and crafts, sports, and more, fostering skills, friendships, and self-confidence. Nutritious packed lunches are also provided.

In addition to the camps, the council has offered various activities during school breaks, including an Easter Digital Heritage Trail, Halloween pumpkin carving, Animals Interactive sessions, free cooking sessions with Cook Stars, and the Blaenavon Summer Music Project with Rec Rock. The council has also supported free paddleboarding sessions with Black Crow Paddleboarding and skateboarding sessions with Torfaen Sports Development, as well as Teen Gym Sessions for young people.



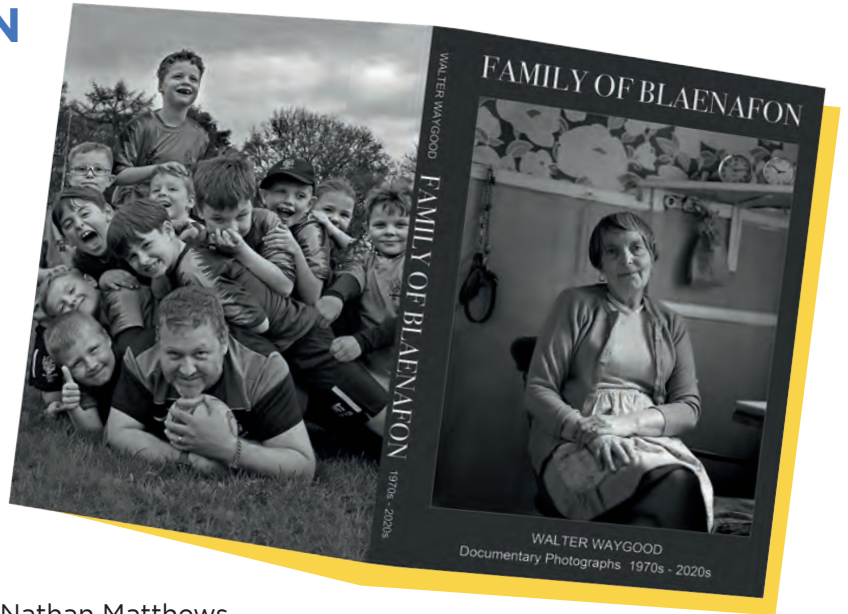
FREE COMMUNITY SWIMMING SESSIONS

Blaenavon has, unfortunately, been without a swimming pool since 2007. However, Blaenavon Town Council is determined to assist residents in accessing swimming facilities. Recently, scores of Blaenavon residents have attended a series of community swimming sessions at the Pontypool Active Living Centre. Blaenavon Town Council hired a bus to take residents to Pontypool free of charge, while Torfaen Leisure Trust provided free and private access to the swimming sessions for Blaenavon residents. These community swimming events have proven to be a resounding success, with attendees offering fantastic feedback. For many, it was a valuable opportunity to socialise with fellow community members while engaging in healthy exercise. Keep an eye out for future community activities and events.



FAMILY OF BLAENAFON IS CELEBRATED

Blaenavon Town Council was delighted to co-sponsor, along with the Forged Solutions Group, an exhibition and book by renowned south Wales photographer Walter Waygood. No stranger to Blaenavon, Walter had a photography studio in Blaenavon during the 1970s and took many photographs of Blaenavon and its residents during the 1970s and 1980s. He has turned his lens on Blaenavon once more and has taken a series of photographs depicting life in the town during the 2020s.



The exhibition was launched at a well-attended event at the Workmen's Hall in July 2023, attended by the Mayor Cllr Nathan Matthews alongside Nick Thomas-Symonds MP and Blaenavon Rugby Internationals Terry Cobner and John Perkins, who all gave speeches. The work was exhibited at the Workmen's Hall until October. An accompanying book entitled The Family of Blaenafon is also available to purchase from the Workmen's Hall and the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre.

Blaenavon Town Council also funded a series of photography workshops held by Walter with the Blaenavon World Heritage Youth Ambassadors at the Hwb Youth Club in Broad Street. Some of this excellent work also featured in the exhibition and book.



TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE GRANTS SUPPORT TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The former Market Tavern public house and the former butchers' shop at 24 Broad Street are the latest properties to receive funding from the Blaenavon Townscape Heritage Programme (THP). The Blaenavon THP, which has received over £1.2 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and is also supported by Torfaen Council, Blaenavon Town Council, Cadw and the private sector, provides grant funding for buildings within the Blaenavon Conservation Area that are in urgent need of comprehensive heritage-based restoration and refurbishment. The recent grant awards follow previous Blaenavon THP investment into the nearby Bethlehem Chapel, HM Stores and The Hwb. THP projects were identified as high priority in the original submission to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2018.

Cllr Nathan Matthews, Mayor of Blaenavon, said: "I am delighted to see work begin on these important and much-needed projects. The Market Tavern, in particular, has been an eyesore for many years..."





...This, along with the other projects, will enhance Broad Street, improve its appeal, and hopefully attract more business and vitality to our town.”

Torfaen County Borough Councillor Joanne Gauden, Executive Member for Economy, Skills and Regeneration, said: “This is great news for Blaenavon town centre. We know local residents have been keen to see the Market Tavern brought back to life for many years. Blaenavon is a conservation area and Broad Street is home to some beautiful original Victorian shopfronts. The renovation projects will use traditional materials in keeping with the town’s heritage and preserve as many of the original features as possible.”

EMPOWERING BLAENAVON FOR BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Blaenavon Town Council is spearheading the Healthy Blaenavon Strategic Partnership Board, a new initiative dedicated to enhancing the health and wellbeing of individuals and the broader Blaenavon community.

This collaborative effort brings together a crucial group of public sector stakeholders, including Blaenavon Town Council, Abersychan Comprehensive School, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (comprising Blaenavon Medical Practice, Primary Care and Community Locality Team, and Public Health Team), Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School, Bron Afon Community Housing, Gwent Police (Neighbourhood Policing Team), the Hwb Torfaen, Torfaen County Borough Council, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, and Ysgol Bryn Onnen.

The Partnership seeks to ensure that every member of our community feels involved and connected. With a commitment to feasible solutions, the Partnership will work towards empowering people to stay healthy within the community. We eagerly seek your input and value your thoughts!

We invite you to share your ideas and concerns with us. Encourage your friends and neighbours to discuss issues that impact them, such as loneliness, support, and safety in the local community. What interventions do you believe can genuinely improve lives?

Please provide us with your input, and together, we will identify pivotal, cross-cutting issues that our Partners can address collaboratively to enhance the quality of life for everyone. Don't hesitate to reach out to your Blaenavon Town Councillors to share any ideas or suggestions, and rest assured, your views will be taken into consideration.

