

Quarterly comment & features from the Ruthin & District Civic Association

An Aldi by Christmas 2020?



And light industrial units thereafter?

They say that apart from the names your children, nothing says more about you than your choice of supermarket. Is that true? In Ruthin, we have little choice and that's perhaps why 60 per cent of us still do our grocery shopping out of town. And that's also perhaps why the prospect of an Aldi coming to Ruthin has been so widely welcomed.

But why on earth would Aldi wish to build a supermarket in Ruthin, with almost exactly the same square footage as its new Denbigh store? Ruthin's population is half that of Denbigh. And it appears that the rumour that Denbigh's is not trading well is true—as confirmed at by Aldi's development director at the pre-planning consultation meeting in May. He commented that "Denbigh isn't one of our better performing stores".

The answer lies less in Aldi's appeal to 'discount shoppers' but to the 'middle classes'. Aldi firmly believes that it will do better in Ruthin than Denbigh, simply because Ruthin is seen as a wealthier town. Somewhere recently in Aldi's 30 year UK history, it went all upmarket. It's said 'middle class' shoppers are lured in by cheaper wine and gin. But Aldi's range of own-brand food is winning awards and it's now highly regarded. It's therefore not just about selling cheap products to people who prefer not to pay Tesco prices.

Interestingly, Aldi believes that the Ruthin store will take at least 20,000 visits out of its Denbigh premises. Also interestingly, Aldi believes that Tesco Ruthin is over-trading

and as evidence they point to the full car park much of the time. Aldi feels that Tesco is ripe for a little competition. Aldi's view is the town can sustain three supermarkets. We had three in 2006 but, post-Tesco, 18 months later, one folded.

Any Downsides?

To date, it's been nearly four years in the planning. The only potential fly in the Aldi ointment seems to concern the industrial units planned next to the grocer. If ever these go to retail, our historic town centre will be further compromised.

Under Aldi's proposals, the units to the site's north are currently earmarked for industrial use. We've run out on Lôn Parcwr. We desperately need more and it would seem that the only way of getting them is to unlock the development potential of the site by building the infrastructure associated with the supermarket—access, internal roads and a sub-station. Lôn Parcwr owes its existence to the foresight of the former Glyndŵr district council and WDA in completing the infrastructure and even building starter units. In more austere times, the days of public sector largess have now gone.

But we also know that Lôn Parcwr has attracted retail onto an estate designed for industry. There's less on the industrial estate than previously but some remains. It could happen near Aldi.

And, let's face it, the Aldi development

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In need of a Friend

It's the only surviving piece of industrial archaeology associated with the railway in Ruthin and it needs a friend.

We refer to the crane on land owned by the Craft Centre. It's in a sad state and isn't looking at all well. At the very least, it requires, deserves even, a paint-up.

But its ownership seems rather complicated.

For one thing, in spite of it lodging on land owned by the Craft Centre, the crane does not belong to them.



As we understand it, in purely **legal** terms, the crane technically belongs to the "heirs of the National Coal Board", which may not be at all straightforward, and may not necessarily be today's Coal Authority. **Legally**, we're told, it's technically classed as "abandoned".

This means, should any organisation or, indeed, individual begin any sort of work or restoration, then at and from that point, they would assume liability as the new deferred owners for the structural repair costs, ongoing maintenance plus all other associated costs.

This, then, is the heart of the problem.

We also understand that the issue has a long history of investigation and there has been at least one feasibility study. Needless to say, in light of the significant costs indicated at that time, no one has thus far been willing or financially able to

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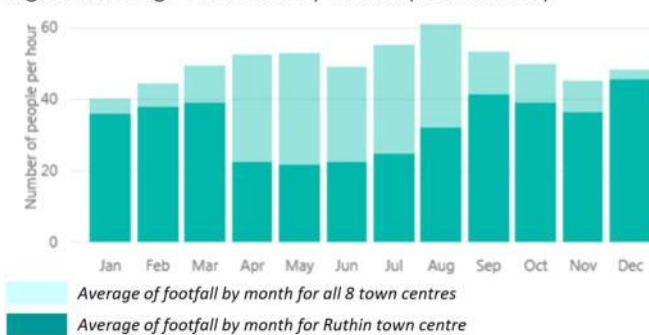
Some Interesting Facts

Did you know that Ruthin's town centre footfall actually dips over the summer?

This was one of a number of revealing facts and figures in the Denbighshire Town Centre Health Check 2018 document available on the Denbighshire County Council website.

The average monthly footfall figures for April, May, June and July 2016 and 2017 for Ruthin were near enough half those for September to March. The document calls the "huge decrease in footfall during the summer" a weakness. One way to find out whether this drop in footfall is the case is to add to the solitary footfall counter which we currently have in Ruthin town centre. Perhaps this is something the town council could and should consider and even fund.

Figure: Average of footfall by month (2016 & 2017)

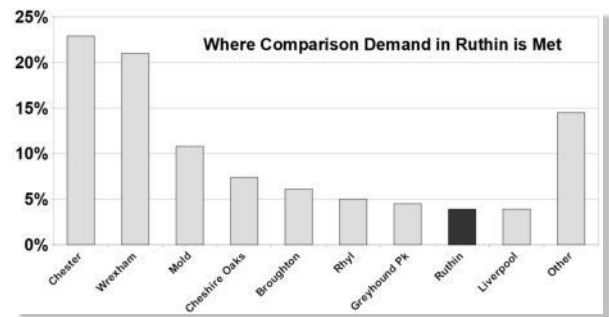


On more solid ground, it was reported that Ruthin was one of the most prosperous towns in the county. Indeed, we'd argue that Ruthin was THE most successful and prosperous. This is supported by the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation, where Ruthin consistently does well. No doubt one reason for that is the higher than usual proportion of jobs in public administration.

The Index also suggests that welfare benefits are low in Ruthin and that the crime rate is also similarly low—the spring spate of spring burglaries notwithstanding.

Affluence was perhaps one significant reason why Ruthin was able to support more local businesses, including retail, for its population size & catchment. They reflect the nature of Ruthin. The report suggests that 66 per cent of retail outlets were in independent hands.

It also likely accounts for the fact that Tesco Ruthin's turnover is reported on a par with Sainsbury's Rhyl—yet, Sainsbury's was almost one-and-a-half times Tesco's size and its catchment significantly bigger (although



there is more choice on the coast).

But relative wealth appears to be a double-edged sword. Whereas nearly 40 per cent of us do our convenience (grocery) shopping in town, we can only assume that our higher-than-average incomes drive us to Chester, Wrexham, Mold, Broughton or Cheshire Oaks for comparison goods (clothing, furniture, white goods, etc.). Ruthin, apparently, only meets just four per cent of comparison demand itself. It seems more of us shop for comparison goods in Rhyl than Ruthin.

With retail challenges ever present—the prospect of up to 30 per cent expenditure online by 2030—Ruthin needs to support and retain its independent shops, restaurants and cafés, its remaining bank, its tourist offer (Craft Centre, Old Gaol, Nantclwyd y Dre). It should consider the the Square in some way. Outside most people's gift it may be but Ruthin needs to retain its seat of local government as an important employer of status.

Are 'Friends' Electric?

In January, electric car sales soared by 26 per cent.

Ruthin is now considering charging points. What will the coming revolution mean for us?

By 2040, it's likely the UK government will have banned the internal combustion engine. By 2030, the government expects 70 per cent of our cars will be electric. It's optimistic but it's only 11 years away.

Moreover, by 2022, pundits expect capital price parity between conventional and electric cars and it is after this date—three years hence—that we can expect the start of an avalanche in electric vehicle sales. The rate of conversion should quickly ramp up each year to 2030, then steady.

Looking ahead to this new reality, the Town Council wants five charging spaces for public use, behind the Old Courthouse.

It's said that for every filling station forecourt pump we shall need eight charging points. In fact, that may be pessimistic. Whereas it takes three to six minutes to fill a car with liquid gold, the

minimum time for a rapid top-up electric charge is 20 minutes. What this means is that drivers will no longer stop to fuel up, as they do now. Instead, they will charge when they visit a destination. We will need a different mindset—hence the idea of why in-town charging is attractive.

This results in several challenges. Fast charging for 20 minutes needs a power supply of 450kw, which is not cheap to install.

We know that Ruthin's economy depends on visitors. Range is no problem for a petrol or diesel car. But, we're far from much of our natural catchment. Electric motorists are not just going to want to top-up, they're going to have to. Waiting for a 20-minute fast charge at the Courthouse or a converted petrol station will not always be reasonable.

There may, for example, be queues at the end of a Saturday or Sunday as visitors try to top up cars for the return leg? Will this simply put some visitors off?

It means charging when motorists have time on their hands, at supermarkets such as the Co-op, at visitor attractions such as the Craft Centre, at hotels such as Wetherspoon's, at events, and so on.

Instead of service stations, we will want charging points at Tesco, so that we can charge while we shop. And what about a visit to Moel Famau or Loggerheads? Although on (or near) a strategic route, how easy will it be to add capacity at these significant destinations? Will a car park full of charging points be a blot on the AONB landscape and how do we deal with planning applications for huge numbers of them? How does the energy network supply all this juice to all these destinations... and, more to the point, can it? We can expect an additional requirement of 35 per cent electricity.

There are also generating capacity problems in an area like Ruthin. There is no nearby generated electricity. Our wind turbines are some miles away at the top of the hill, in the wrong place for cars, even if they could cope with demand. Clocaenog's could fast charge six cars in a gale but probably not even one if the wind dropped to 20mph.

For those of us who live here, overnight slow charging is the best way of improving range. Five hours will typically get you 200 miles. This, of course, assumes that you have off-road parking. What about communal parking, flats and terraced houses?

At the time of writing, the nearest charging points to Ruthin are currently at Rhug and Green Lane, Corwen; and at Trefnant village hall.

area has the feel of an edge of town retail park linked to an anchor store, surely something inappropriate in a compact historic town centre of independent traders.

One crumb of comfort is that Aldi has secured a covenant preventing further food retail on the site. Another is that Aldi believes non-food bricks-and-mortar retail is dead, undoubtedly true of larger retailers. But what of smaller ones?

The County Council also wishes to see more local employment land. Aldi says that for over 20 years, planners have earmarked the whole field (including the proposed Aldi) for light industrial use. We would simply ask that the initial planning guarantees about employment land remain and that the Council does not allow retail to creep in by stealth.

Town traders, meanwhile, seem either neutral or mute on the subject of a pending Aldi. Aldi's non-food "specialbuys" will probably threaten B & M more than town centre comparison shops.

Meanwhile, of course, there's little town centre grocery shopping left to be imperilled & the great 2005 debate about Tesco versus the town no longer applies, as changes have already occurred.

Store Design

Aldi's familiar wedge shaped grey- and silver-clad structures are more purposeful than pretty (though they have improved over the years). They are a product of their time, although the proposal looks much fresher than the 2006 Tesco design.

It may not win awards but the shape and design of Aldi would certainly not be too discordant with the extension to the adjacent agricultural mart or the new Glasdir schools. And it lies next door to proposed industrial units and an existing industrial area at Lôn Cae Bricks. Aldi doesn't therefore need to be of significant architectural merit.

Greenfield versus Brownfield

We're told that Aldi has looked for land elsewhere in Ruthin. The most obvious was opposite Glasdir housing at the Glasdir estate roundabout off the recently named Ffordd Glasdir. That land already has the beginnings of an access bell off the roundabout but it is unlikely in the extreme that the County Council would grant permission in what is a flood risk area.

Other than the proposed site near Lôn Cae Bricks, it's difficult to see where Aldi could go. There are no brownfield sites of a suitable size available and if the desire is to unlock light industrial land anything nearer to town will have an impact on residential areas.

Social Media Watch

A quiet quarter on the social media front, till under the debate about Aldi there emerged in full view the toxic and dehumanising world that is social media, with renewed and bitter criticism of the town council and its priorities. Attacks of this nature can be draining, not least because town councillors give their time and effort for free.

Ruthin believes itself to be a tourist town, yet it is effectively closed on Sundays. Sunday shop opening was given a minor airing on social media, with one trader who used to but no longer opened on that day asking whether there could be merit in a number all opening together. Sort of safety in numbers or even the possibility of mutual trading support. There was no real consensus as to whether to open on a Sunday but there were words of warning from small family firms that they might need to close on Monday as a result—when else can shopkeepers have time off if not on a Sunday (or Monday)?

As he helped launch Ruthin's coach-friendly status, John Pocket, the director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport tweeted enthusiastically he was delighted to be in Ruthin—again.

When Facebook brings people together, this is when social media



works at its best. Too often, Facebook is a destructive medium that simply niggles. It was therefore refreshing, this spring, to see that we were urged on social media to save our plastic bottle tops in aid of a disabled girl in Llangollen. It improved upon what occasionally was bickering or vigilante-style action aimed at some poor individual who probably didn't deserve it.

There's still an over-reliance on Facebook as regards what we might call mini-consultations or asking for general views. You can see the appeal but we continue to say that this assumes everyone is either online or prepared to use the medium. Some will not, out of principle. "Hitler would have loved social media. It's the most powerful marketing tool an extremist could ever hope for. At its worst, social media allows evil to prey on troubled minds and lost souls". So said Disney CEO Bob Iger. We've asked before and can we do so again—don't dismiss those who eschew Facebook.

Squaring the Circle

With the Old Courthouse project well under way, all eyes are now focused on St Peter's Square. Consultations show that there is a clear appetite to make this better and to rebalance cars and pedestrians.

Indicative plans demonstrate the direction of travel is a good one. But it seems that there will be room for more not fewer parked cars. Wasn't the idea to clear the square of vehicles?

The rectangle between The Cabin Coffee Shop, Post Office and Wetherspoon's is only about 700 sq yds.

Ridding this most important asset of cars is surely the higher aim. While maintaining access for deliveries, can't we manage with permitted access-only for a space only one third smaller than the size of the proposed Aldi? This is a once in a generation opportunity and we need as much ambition as possible.



The Civic Association has long called for the removal of the roundabout; and there should be a higher priority for pedestrians.

Rather than specific channels for vehicles that will have no roundabout to slow them down, however, we still believe that a Caernarfon square or Chester railway station model of truly shared space would be preferable at and over the area where the roundabout now is.

One-way streets will also likely speed up traffic and run counter to pedestrian friendliness.

Developments at Ruthin School



Artist's impression of the promised new teaching block

Rarely does Ruthin get to see behind the façade of its prestigious public school nor does it fully understand the contribution the school makes to the town. Ruthin School may offer its site and lavatories free for the annual carnival; its older students may volunteer within the community; a number join St Peter's Church choir but in the eyes of the town the school is always somewhat aloof and there can even be a suspicion about it.

In April, Civic Association members & guests were treated to a rare behind-the-scenes look at the school.

As one of the area's major employers, the school's contribution to the local economy is considerable. There's the local supply chain, of course. It directly employs 52 academic and 100 non-academic staff and its new £5.5m dining hall and café added over 20 locals to the school's payroll. A seemingly trivial example of its economic power is that Tesco takes account of term times when allocating evening staff. When the school is open, Tesco can expect 40 to 50 visits from older boarders at or around Ruthin School's 7.30p.m. finish and Tesco needs to tool up as a result. Go back 20 years and pupils were only allowed out on Sunday afternoons. How things change.

Of course, education at Ruthin School is in another world. It specialises in catering for small class sizes. It will hold a class of one in an A level subject if that's the only demand. This contributes to the school's sixth form success. It currently is the 12th best performing UK school at A level.

A levels have been a key to the school's growth in popularity and its financial stability. 10 years ago and many locals felt that the school was on the brink of financial collapse. Unlike many of its peers, Ruthin School has no huge foundation or endowment. Few local families could afford the day let alone boarding fees and the scope for growth locally was limited. In any case, many locals enjoyed scholarships and contributed little financially.

The sometimes outspoken new principal, Toby Belfield, reversed that position. His six-year plan was simple. Increase the

number of boarders and the associated revenue ensured the school's sustainability. He put time and effort into attracting boarders from overseas, whose parents had high aspirations for their children to access top universities, especially to read science subjects and mathematics.

Many boarders are therefore A level sixth formers and many are from Asia. They have allowed the school to grow and this directly benefits local children. Our guide, vice-principal Ian Welsby, said that Ruthin School was now one of the most economically viable public schools in the UK.

Some 80 per cent of sixth formers are from China or far eastern countries whose second language is a variation of Chinese. 30 years ago, Latin was considered the school's second language but no longer. Interestingly, though, the school still teaches Latin, alongside an unusual A level in Classical Civilisation useful, apparently, to those who wish to read law at university.

To accommodate a five-fold increase in boarders, the school investment has been over a number of phases. It built its Trevor House on site. It purchased the Anchor in town and converted that into additional boarding accommodation, now known as Goodman House. It purchased and converted the two houses on the former farm site on Mold Road as additional boarding accommodation. And, as an expediency, it has added so-called "bunker bins" of additional compact yet quirky bolted together boxes to provide pop-up en-suite accommodation not dissimilar in size to university hall accommodation.

And then there's been the investment in the new dining hall, completed in December 2018. Its east-facing glass wall alone cost £1m and contributes to the building requiring little winter heating. A 0.5m canopy added in retrospect is enough, apparently, to mitigate summer heat from the rising sun.

The dining hall aims to ensure five-star hotel service. It's open seven days a

Facts & Figures

- New boarding accommodation includes 30 rooms available at Goodman; 40 at Trevor; 30 at Kenyon East & West; and 20 "bunker bins"
- Increase in boarders from less than 50 10 years ago to 240 today, with capacity for 250
- Cost of purchasing Anchor was £300,000 plus over £1m conversion costs. Cost of Trevor halls £2.5m
- Café opening times 8.40a.m. to 9.30 p.m. Closed during formal mealtimes
- School's annual turnover £9m
- Boarding fee per annum £37,000 (said to represent value for money compared with other public schools)
- After unpacking, the school needs to store 600 suitcases
- Cost of 40L soup machine £1,500
- Ranked 12th in UK for A levels and 3rd for mathematics at A level

week and caters each mealtime for up to 450 each mealtime. Such is the choice that it is impossible to sample all the meals on offer even were you to eat every lunchtime and evening during the academic year. Virtually all its food is cooked or baked in-house unusually in an electric-only kitchen.

The next phase will see the demolition next month of the tired and in some places sagging 1961 modular dining hall with its five classrooms beneath, to be replaced, eventually, by a new T-shaped academic block of 30 classrooms, four laboratories, a large library and teachers' workrooms. The 23 year old science block will be refurbished and get a new pitched roof. The current temporary classrooms and labs at the rear will then all go. Although ugly, they are actually excellent modern teaching spaces.

This phase will be the most challenging project yet as previously the school has been able to build on the periphery of its site. The new phase will be smack in the middle of its teaching space, causing some disruption and additional safety requirements for students and staff.



Our host, Vice-principal Ian Welsby

Spring Developments at Glasdir

Positive Start for new houses at Galsdir

Taylor Wimpey's Glasdir sales office opened on March 22nd. By its third weekend, it had sold seven of its 49 proposed houses on the new build area of Glasdir. Hurrah!

This was at a far speedier rate than when the development first started, in 2007. And the sales assistant should know: she had previously sold houses on the site, till the 2012 flood put paid to everything.

Having smashed up the 2012-laid concrete slab foundations, Taylor Wimpey had started afresh on site. This time, they constructed a "raft" for each house foundation several feet above ground level, much higher than previously. This was to offer "extra protection for our customers", given the scale of the 2012 flood.

This is a technique for building on bad ground but is obviously more expensive.

To do this, they have piled into the ground to the appropriate depth, a process akin to hammering a nail into a wall to create tension. The piles were then tied together with concrete ground beams and the void in-filled with concrete.

At the March 2019 sales launch, three-bed semis were competitively priced from £170,000 and three-bed detached from £190,000. Four bedroom homes weighed in at £250,000.

A small number of almost finished but previously abandoned houses of the 2012 phase were also included in Taylor Wimpey's 2019 brochure.

For example, there was a solitary four-bed

"Carmel", at £215,000, marked as the "last one remaining"; and the two four-bed "Trefnants" at £245,000 each, shown as the "last few remaining".

Sales Brochure

We're sure that prospective buyers will overlook a number of oddities within Taylor Wimpey's glossy publicity.

For example, there's talk of Ruthin "conveniently located on the A494, which takes you straight to Chester or Colwyn Bay". And, prospectives from Colwyn Bay are urged to "follow the A56 towards Chester".

Under five minutes by car are Rhos Street, Borthyn and Ruthin schools but also "Glasdir County Primary School".

There's no mention of Ysgol Brynhyfryd (but St Brigid's is shown).

The brochure mentions just three eateries, On the Hill, the Star Bistro (no longer serving food) and, curiously, the Valentine Inn (we think in Llanddulas).

We're sure—we hope—that there is no similar lack of attention to detail in the actual homes themselves.



Other Housing

This spring saw a very unusual housing market

As we approach the end of the spring peak house selling season, there's a certain amount of frustration within the local housing market.

At the beginning of March 2019, in town, there were only 33 properties for sale and, by mid-April, this dropped to just 26. In recent years, you'd expect to see up to four times that number available.

In mid-April, the number of sold properties in town stood at 23, some on the market only for a short period. This, of course, reflects the paucity of supply. Those sold were not simply at the cheaper end of the market as hitherto; some of the mid-priced, larger houses were also selling.

If you include Ruthin's villages—as far, for example, as Llandrym, Llanrhaeadr, Llanarmon and Brynegrwyys—then

you had a choice of about 100 for sale.

If you needed confirmation of the current market, just peer into any of the estate agents' windows and you will see either a lack of stock or houses advertised as far afield as Cerrigydrudion, Corwen and Denbigh.

The frustration we see reflects a lack of choice and, for buyers, the need to make compromises.

If you are after a bungalow, for example, in mid-April there were five on the market in town, four of which were under offer, one of which sold within a week. If you include town and district, things were very different. Of the 28 on the market, eight were under offer (and half of these in town).

Who knows whether the lack of supply is down to the so-called "Brexit handbrake" as conventional wisdom might suggest. Brexit doesn't seem to be putting people off purchasing, though.

Another reason might be a pending crash in the housing market. The Financial Times, for example, is currently speculating that such a downturn is "imminent".

The FT is, of course, notoriously London-centric but the infamous late 1980s/early 1990s crash that resulted in the negative equity phenomenon spread from there like a contagion, affecting the market for a generation... only then to succumb to the 2008 crash.



The image shows the piled raft with ground beams for a double garage associated with a "Manford", with one of the two unfinished 2012 "Trefnants" behind

Plastic Hedging

What's all the fuss about the plastic hedge surrounding the waste bins at Ysgol Brynhyfryd? It's received mixed reviews, writes **Kathy Daniels**.

There are those who are trying to encourage Ruthin's residents to become plastic-free. Why not, then, screen the bins naturally?

Plastic-free Ruthin is about moving away from single-use plastics. Even that isn't universally popular especially among some large and small retailers whose business model includes the sale of bottled drinks (for example).

The hedge, on the other hand, could

hardly be called "single use". Whether it will last that long without looking shabby remains to be seen but it's a rather pragmatic solution to tidying up an unsightly corner of Ruthin, one that immediately used to catch your eye.

The bin store fencing upon which the base trellis is fixed is hinged and the remainder of the store is built on asphaltic concrete. In such circumstances as these, the planting a "proper" hedge would seem to be difficult.

There are those who say that the hedge



reduces visibility for drivers. I doubt that it does. If it results in motorists taking that little bit of extra care, that's no bad thing. It is, after all, on a school site and even after school hours you might reasonably assume there'd be children visiting the leisure centre.

There is one notable aspect, though, and that's the trellis itself is actually wood, not plastic!

What is more concerning is the loss of our hedges & hedgerows, whether in fields or around town. With their removal goes valuable habitats. Not far away, there's even a recently grubbed-up natural indigenous hedge relatively close to the plastic interloper.

Can you actually have too many cafés?

With the latest developments, some have said so. In a very prominent position in town, there has appeared the new Cabin Coffee Shop in what was once the infamous "purple shop" at the corner of St Peter's Square and Clwyd Street. Do we

actually need another café in town? Don't we have enough of them already?

Perhaps we do but, for those who think there are too many, it's worth noting that in recent times Ruthin has seen many more of them. It depends upon how you count them but we currently have eight within walking distance of the Square, including Café R. This includes Leonardo's which, in March, morphed into a similarly small eight-cover café along the size of the Cabin Coffee Shop.

At its zenith 10 years ago, we supported 14 cafés, including the Watergate Tea Rooms, Slop Nain, Annie's, Nelson's, Lovell's, Doodles, the Castle Park Café, the Bridge Café and Espresso (the former long-standing

Coffee Mill).

Over 10 years, by our calculations, even accounting for the closure of Miss B's last month, I'd say this means the number of cafés has reduced by at least one-third—even almost a half—and, in terms of available seating, there are considerably, significantly fewer covers.

What we have seen over those 10 years is a change of emphasis. In that decade, Ruthin has caught up with the coffee culture and the evidence for this is the arrival of Costa in 2013 and Chatwin's, recently extended. Others have followed the trend for better coffee.

It's perhaps surprising that we don't have more cafés. But, then again, Wetherspoon's also acts as a kind of café and that will undoubtedly have an impact on others. Meanwhile, the Coffee Cabin has had some encouraging reviews. It's too small to require a lavatory but it does offer something unique: it advertises that it stays open till 7p.m. Tuesday to Thursday inclusive; 8p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays; and 6p.m. on Sundays.

Other cafés close between 4 and 5.30p.m. These times were swiftly revised from a 10p.m. finish on weekdays. Few of our cafés traditionally open on Sundays.



Craft Centre Crane

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take on these responsibilities.

Everyone to whom the Civic Association has spoken agrees that the wider Ruthin community should do something, including placing a plaque at its foot to commemorate the railway yard.

This includes the Craft Centre which, itself, is in no financial position to help and certainly would not wish to assume

the crane's general liabilities. After all, looking after our industrial heritage is hardly core to the Craft Centre's very contemporary business.

The reality is that this requires significant funding that no one has previously found or indeed currently can find.

The crane can, of course, remain as it is, but it will deteriorate further. Once anything is undertaken that directly affects it, it alters its legal ownership. This is no different to structural regulations regarding abandoned or derelict buildings.

One wonders, therefore, if something were to happen and someone were to be injured as a result, just who currently would be liable.

In the years since the original 1982 Craft Centre, someone has placed a prop under the crane's boom... which indicates somebody has at least taken some responsibility. And it looks like it was placed on a plinth... so is it strictly abandoned?

The crane was manufactured by Richard Kitchin, Scotland Bank Iron Works, Warrington, 1820 to 1881

An Interesting Memorial

GWYNNE MORRIS considers a memorial at St. Peter's Church, Llanbedr DC and its connection with royalty and Ruthin

Churchyards hold the cherished remains of people from all walks of life, rich or poor, remembered by simple memorial tablets or in some cases in more elaborate stone crosses.

The photograph shows one such in St. Peter's Church, Llanbedr, in the form of a Celtic cross long forgotten by their family and covered in dense growth. While these crosses are associated with all Celts, their origin is in Gaelic Ireland and they were probably introduced to Scotland, Wales and parts of England by Irish Christian missionaries.

Llanbedr's is situated next to the wall of the drive to the vicarage. On the side facing the road is the inscription:

THERE ARE ALSO INTERNED IN THIS ENCLOSURE

**LADY MARY TAYLOUR
YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF THOMAS,**

**SECOND MARQUESS OF HEADFORT,
DIED 27 SEPTEMBER**

**1909, AND LADY OLIVIA
FITZPATRICK, WIFE**

**OF THE REV. FREDERICK
FITZPATRICK, AND**

**ELDEST DAUGHTER OF THE
MARQUESS OF
HEADFORT. DIED SEPT 4 1916,**

**THIS INSCRIPTION HAS BEEN ADDED
BY HER SURVIVING CHILDREN**

**"Blessed are the pure in heart for they
shall see God"**

This suggests that the memorial was first erected to another. Research shows that this person was a Frederick Fitzpatrick, who had died at Warren Hall, Broughton, in February 1898 at the age of 78. Engraved on the Eastern side of the Cross are the words:-

Rev. FREDERICK FITZPATRICK

died 5th feby 1898

This cross was erected to his memory

by his loving wife and children.

Blessed are they that do hunger

**and thirst after Righteousness for
they shall be fill**

The question which arose was—who were they and what was the connection with Llanbedr? The answers made interesting reading.

The Rev. Fredrick Fitzpatrick had for several years been the Rector of Cloane, Co Leitrim, Ireland. He married Lady Olivia Taylour, eldest daughter of the second Marques of Headfort. In her younger days, she was known as a 'flighty' character and is reported as having affairs with Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband. When this became known, she was banished from Court.

In later years, after the death of the Prince, and after her husband had left his parish at the 1870 disestablishment of the Irish Church, the Fitzpatricks returned to Britain.

Olivia then slotted back into the social world of the past. The 1891 Census shows that the family lived at Plas Draw in Llangynhafal. After the death of her husband in 1898, she took up residence at Bryn Edwin, now a Nursing Home, near Flint. Even in old age she was still friendly with Prince Edward when he became King Edward VII, as it was reported in 'The Welsh Coast Pioneer' on 16th December 1909. The account states that "the king, while staying with the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall, Chester, motored to Bryn Edwin, Flint Mountain, the residence of Lady Olivia Fitzpatrick, who is in her eighty sixth year, and was many years ago connected with the Court during Queen Victoria's reign. The king was accompanied by the Duchess of Westminster and Princess Henry of Pless".

The 1911 census showed that she still resided at Bryn Edwin. She was quoted as being a widow, head of household living with her two grand-daughters and grandson. In 1914, however, owing to



failing health, she moved to live with her daughter Mary ('Patsy') Cornwallis-West, wife of Col. William Cornwallis-West, at Ruthin Castle and where she died in 1916.

'Patsy' had a close connection with 'Bertie', Queen Victoria's eldest son, who eventually reigned as Edward VII—but that's quite another story altogether!



“Your Caring Sharing Co-op”*



*Co-op's 1970s catchphrase and strapline

Now that its £1m Ruthin store refurbishment is complete, many will welcome a securer future for the town's larger ethical trader—but trouble may still be ahead, with Aldi

For years, the blue “clover leaf” was a feature of the old Co-op at the junction of St Peter's Square and Well Street. It was in 1992 that this store vanished more abruptly than melting snow in May, with little notice, within days of Argyll Foods' Lo-cost supermarket opening off Station Road.

Soon after, the Co-op bought the Lo-cost name and stores and in turn gave Ruthin's the Co-op Pioneer name. Three brand changes later and we have today's return of the light blue Co-op.

The reason for the change? Quoted in Marketing Week, a Co-op spokeswoman said, “We are moving from being a distress retailer to a destination retailer and from little and often to more and often”.

Translated, this means that many saw the Co-op as a top-up shop, rather than how the Co-op now sees itself, as a store that offers a breadth of quality ranges and fresh foods to rival the Big Four. Mind

you, in the era of online food shopping, top-ups are ever more important.

How is this relevant to Ruthin's Co-op? The two-month, £1m makeover has not just created a better ambience within the



store, it has given an opportunity to re-evaluate & restock. It's a fact that, post-Tesco, the Ruthin Co-op had progressively de-ranged (down-ranged), which meant it stocked fewer and fewer lines. Managers created more and more unproductive space at the very front of the store which was basically empty of products. These were a direct response to falling numbers in the store.

There were those who wondered whether the Co-op would survive Tesco. What actually happened, post-Tesco, was that Somerfield blinked first and it closed—almost immediately before the Co-op bought that brand, too.

Although under the Co-op's 2019 investment the aisle spaces have increased, the amount of goods in display refrigerators and on

shelves have, too. The shelving is higher, for one thing.

The Ruthin store has benefited from extended ranges of fresh & healthy produce, so-called food-to-go, bakery items, wines and even new pizza ranges. But there are plenty of other additions, some quite esoteric, some taking advantage of an upsurge in veganism.

Gone, though, is the deli counter. You can hardly blame the Co-op for removing this when Tesco announced in January that it was pulling these from no fewer than 90 stores, including Ruthin's, including, in fact, from every store in North Wales. You don't get such luxury even at Marks & Spencer's and certainly not in Aldi. In spite of concerns about over-wrapped products, people's attitudes towards fresh items have waned as pre-wrapped foods have improved.

Given the Co-op's previous Ruthin trading position, stocking up is a bold step and it remains to be seen as to whether it can continue to offer such an expanded range of goods. It's early days but any casual

observation indicates that there are more people using the Co-op and more cars in its car park—again time-limited.

The formula has clearly worked elsewhere, of course, and, in April, the Co-op announced its annual pre-tax profits were up 27 per cent with revenue up 14 per cent.

What grabbed the headlines, however, was Tesco's figures of 29 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. In the media, Tesco was applauded yet the Co-op was sidelined. Does this illustrate our perception of the Co-op and why the Co-op wishes to change?

Over recent years, Co-op management has done much to address the gap in pricing between itself and its major competitors. But it will still need to do more to address so-called “insult pricing” for basic staples.

Take milk. At the time of writing, both the Co-op and Tesco sold two pints for 80p, yet the Co-op's price for a six-pint bottle at £2.20 was 70p more than Tesco's. One



Co-op's Ruthin Story

1992—Lo-cost built and opens on Station Road (and The Square immediately Co-op shuts)

1994—Co-op takes over Lo-cost

c.1996—Ruthin's re-branded as Co-op Pioneer

c. 1999—Co-op Pioneer re-brands as Co-op Rhuthun 2002—Co-op buys Alldays and eventually re-brands Borthyn Stores

2009—re-brands as The Co-operative Bwyd, with a lime green fascia and grocery labels

2016—Borthyn Stores and other similarly sized premises sold to McColl's Retail Group

March 2019—re-branded Station Road store as Co-op in blue & grey

assumes farmers get a fairer deal with the Co-op and, indeed, the Co-op's ethical trading position is a significant strength, of greater importance as such matters currently enjoy a higher profile.

But modern austerity often means a compromise between conscience and cost. Speaking on Radio 4 in bluntly non-academic terms, Birmingham City University's Steve McCabe said, "If you sell it cheap enough, people are not that bothered". The Co-op investment in Ruthin is nevertheless a welcome sign that an ethical trader sees a future here.

But food retail remains as it always has, a hard market, with rising costs and fierce competition from the march of the discounters.

The greatest threat could be Aldi in Ruthin.



Yet, at the Aldi consultation event, Aldi's development director said that Aldi Ruthin was unlikely to hit the Co-op hard, as the Co-op had very loyal supporters.

But the Co-op will need more than its pool of regulars if it's to justify its £1m investment.

Aldi might have an impact on that growth. The Co-op will no doubt have been aware of Aldi and that didn't alter its plans to create a far more attractive ambience within its Ruthin store.

Meanwhile, of particular relevance to the Ruthin district and its farmers, the Co-op continues to support Welsh lamb all year round, as recognised by NFU Cymru.

25th Anniversary of the Ruthin Festival

Many need no encouragement to support our annual festival week but, just in case others do, ROB PRICE writes

Ruthin Festival celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and we're excited to roll out another wide variety of events and activities during the week.

While the town will have an array of events on during June 22nd to 30th, it's nevertheless worth remembering why and how the first festival was held.

The first event occurred after a group of Ruthin residents had been over to our twinned town in Brittany—Briec and they were impressed by a similar event held on their main square, which resulted in the very first festival in Ruthin in 1994.

There was no festival in 1995 but from 1996 onwards it has been an annual event, organised by a small committee of volunteers. Many of the original members were still on the committee as recently as 2014 and many of the original organisers still take an active part on the day of the Top of Town celebration.

While some recognise the festival as only the Top Dre event, it is, after all, a whole week of activities, where we aim to cater for every taste and preference in music and the arts. This year includes music concerts, the carnival, a Shakespeare play at Nantclwyd y Dre, poetry sessions, craft workshops, film nights, a cheese and wine evening, a history talk and much more over the whole week.

Although many local people know that a committee of volunteers run the festival, not everyone is aware of this.

Indeed, the festival relies entirely on volunteers and the truth remains that one of the most popular events in Ruthin, namely the Top of Town event, enjoyed by so many, would not happen without them. Despite the efforts of a small group, we need more volunteers—the current cohort are pushed to breaking point at the end of the day when clearing the square of equipment, etc.

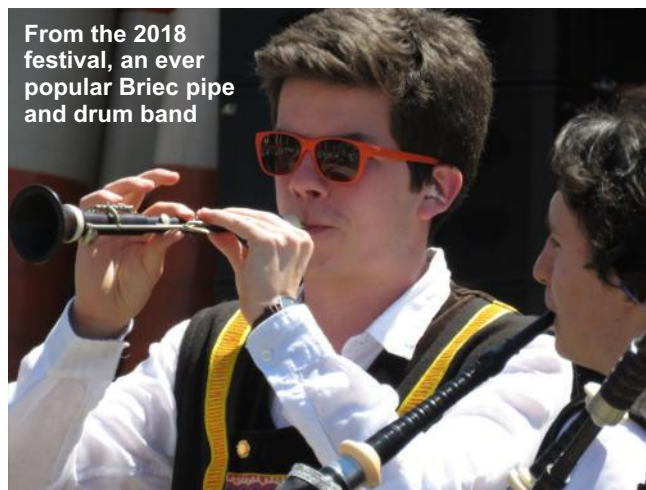
Therefore, if anyone is interested please e-mail gwylrhuthun-ruthinfestival@hotmail.co.uk.

We also rely largely on donations to run the festival, especially for Top of Town, which would not be able to continue without a donation while entering.

We are incredibly appreciative of all those who donate, although probably those who do not do so would be the first to complain if the event was not held.

After all, £5 per adult is not much to enter an event and have seven hours of continuous music, and anyone would struggle to find a like-for-like comparison.

From the 2018 festival, an ever popular Briec pipe and drum band



The festival committee is always open to suggestions and ideas but, above all, we would encourage people, if they believe the festival needs to be changed or improved, to join the festival committee.

Positive Economic Impact on Town

While the festival has a large community purpose, the economic impact of the Top Dre event on the town should be considered as well.

Many of the public houses rely on the festival every year to boost their income and, in the current climate of pub closures, it is important to keep the buildings they occupy in use and retain Ruthin's status as somewhere to go for a 'night out'.

The festival, of course, does not *directly* benefit many of the town's other businesses but surely with the profile of Ruthin raised locally and farther afield, and by encouraging people who rarely come into town to see what is actually in their town centre, these businesses hopefully benefit by future repeat visitors.

We hope that the festival is something that local people look forward to every year, bringing much needed trade to the town's businesses and promoting Ruthin farther afield.

More information on this year's festival programme is available at www.ruthinfestival.co.uk and the festival leaflets are being distributed locally along with the Clwyd Connection magazine.

Seen in Passing...



The Aldi pre-planning consultation documents stated that its new store would be off Lôn Gwernydd. Where was that, exactly? It turns out that this is actually Lôn Cae Brics. A search of Google Maps indicates that Google names it Lôn Gwernydd (so it must be true). A phone call to the Highways Department revealed that its definitive map also shows the name Lôn Gwernydd. Perhaps Brickfield(s) Lane is nothing more than a colloquialism but, if so, it's stuck.

Apparently, a Welsh exhibition board at the Aldi event referred to "Caernarfon Road" and we believe that this was cut & pasted from a Bangor consultation.

It's taken over 25 years of winter darkness for the footpath from Wynnstay Road to the Co-op to be illuminated... but, thankfully, as part of the Co-op's 2019 refurbishment, its managers have seen the light. They have installed a series of hooded lamps not only down the path but around the Co-op building. We say well done to the Co-op for improving safety over this much-walked section which after dark is now ablaze.

Access to Nantclwyd y Dre's the Lord's Garden may have increased from £2 to £3 per person but we still recommend it if you want to enjoy a quiet sunny afternoon amid sundry flowering plants and wild flowers.

Friday April 5th saw the delivery of tables and internal fittings. Then, "Small Plates" opened two weeks later, on April 18th, at the former Annie's premises, Upper Clwyd Street. Part of On the Hill, Small Plates specialises in tapas and other similar dishes. It's taken since July 2017, the date On the Hill completed the purchase, to convert it and get the new restaurant open.

Also open from April 2019, opposite Small Plates in formerly empty premises, is the promised Brontë boutique. What's interesting is that it carries on the almost-lost tradition of marketing up-market ladies' fashions, for which Ruthin had quite a reputation up to the early 2000s. Forget so-called "fast fashion", Brontë even has its own-label range (remember Lucinda's?). It joins Choo Choo and the long-established Gayla House.

On the other hand, we lost both Cwtch on St Peter's Square (in the former Montecito

premises) and the fashion shop at the corner of the Square and Clwyd Street (which from April 8th became the Coffee Cabin). Cwtch closed in April and its stock moved to Choo Choo.

Rupert's No.6 would have been a competitor of Small Plates but that wasn't to be. Also in April, then, at the Rupert's premises (former Siop Nain café), the Candy Shack moved from Clwyd Street. It now offers paint your own pottery and makes better use of the rear courtyard.

Over spring, 16-18 Clwyd Street was painted a fetching shade of light grey to replace its previously primrose colour. The previously black door and woodwork is now a darker grey colour. This building houses Siop Elfair and they have erected a new signboard over the shop.

We know that the building's empty and currently unused (pending a recent planning application) but someone has parked a reefer wagon trailer right outside and close to The Griffin, Llanbedr. This considerably detracts from the building's appeal within the conservation area.



Meanwhile, we understand that the owners of The Griffin, far from giving up in the light of insufficient community funds, has decided to bring the building back into use themselves.

It's been a year since we mentioned the state of the lodge at the entrance to Ysgol Brynhyfryd (see June 2018's Town and Around). Since then, the building has deteriorated further and remains little more than a noticeboard for the school, with adverts draped across the security fencing.



Mid-May and the Town Council's Tidy Town Team painted black the four contemporary benches on the Square and the two on Market Street opposite Wynnstay Road. True, these were not in

15 Years Ago

Denbighshire County Council's brand new headquarters, named County Hall, opened for business.

While retaining the early 20th century façade on Market Street and Wynnstay Road, everything behind was new and fit for purpose. The previous buildings had been sub-standard and the roof prone to leakage in bad weather.

Part of the "jumble of huts"



The Civic Association was relieved to see the end of the "jumble of huts which had disfigured the site for so long". This was a reference to the former Glyndŵr two-storey planning and technical services "temporary" accommodation and the single-storey timber-clad field huts used by Clwyd's social services and registrars.

The Civic Association nevertheless "reserved judgement" on the new building itself, stating it "could be worse". 15 years later and we're all quite used to this important asset.

good shape, with the metalwork showing signs of fading and rusting. The benches and pink matching tree protectors were installed as part of the 2013-2014 art trail. The unusual use of pink was not to everyone's taste.

Permanent work on the Park Road car park to thwart boy racers is now complete, resulting in the removal of the temporary concrete "Lego" blocks. The resultant footpath adds to the network of safer paths and cycleways linking residential Ruthin and the town.



May 7th and this police car seriously outstayed the prescribed time while parked by the Old Courthouse. Instead of receiving a parking ticket there appeared a notice "Scrap metal—free to collector", presumably under the North Wales Police scrapping of seized criminal cars initiative.

Ruthin & District Civic Association

Civic Appointment

We offer our congratulations to Civic Association Vice-chair Heather Williams upon her election last month as the town's deputy mayor. Heather has been with the Civic Association since its formation, has held the office of Chair and has been a town councillor since 2015. Most recently, she was instrumental in gaining coach friendly status for Ruthin.

June Event

Local resident and Sustrans area manager for North & Mid Wales Glyn Evans will give a talk to members and their guests about alternative transport related options on June 19th 2019. There's much happening in Wales (e.g. prospect of 20 mph zones) and locally. We'll confirm venue by email.

www.1919.cymru

Co-authors Ron Hughes and our Secretary have developed the centenary bus article that appeared in the March 2019 edition of Town & Around. C/o the County Council, there's now a booklet on the centenary of the bus service between Ruthin and Mold

available at the Library and County Hall (while stocks last) together with a well-received website, at www.1919.cymru. The brand new buses as used on the service have been re-liveried to celebrate 100 years of service.

Quayle Awards 2018

This year, we're granting not one, not two but three awards! This follows considerable deliberation on the part of both the Quayle Sub-committee and the Committee itself.

One award goes to Ruthin School for its new dining hall, as featured on page 4.

The other two are to the Education Authority and the individual schools, for the outstanding design of the two new primaries on land at Glasdir.

Open Doors 2019

The annual festival promises to offer some new properties for inspection, both in town and around. Please save the dates:
Ruthin Town: 7th/8th September; District: 14th/15.

Square Painting

Your last chance to own this Battersby original. There've been no takers at recent RADCA meetings, so it will go on eBay to coincide with the publication date of this edition. Navigate to eBay and search for "Veronica Battersby" to place your bid.



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It is available from Ruthin Library and on townandaround.org.uk

It is delivered free to Association members

We welcome articles, contributions, suggestions and letters, in Welsh or English

Please send them to the Secretary at cymru@clwyd.org or Coedlan, 25 Stryd y Brython, Ruthin, LL15 1JA

The deadline for the next edition is August 16th, 2019

Thanks are due to this quarter's contributors:

Peter Daniels, Kathy Daniels, Stan Davies, Gwynne Morris, Rob Price and Heather Williams; and with the help of Carolyn Brindle, Peter Cobbold, Mark Cleave, Jane Gerrard, Dorinda Kostravenglis and Andrew Torr

Views expressed by contributors are their own and neither necessarily reflect those of the Association nor those of their employer

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Join Ruthin & District Civic Association and help support our work and the production & distribution of Town & Around

Annual subscription rates are £10 (individual) or £15 (joint/family). If you are not sure if you are a paid up member, please check with the Treasurer.

The Association tries to help protect & enhance the outstanding market town of Ruthin and the areas nearby. Our main aims are to promote "civic pride" in the town and surrounding villages. We also aim to promote high standards in planning and encourage architectural excellence. We organise the annual Open Doors heritage weekends and the Quayle Awards.

(1) Name _____

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I/We enclose a cheque for £10 or £15 (delete as appropriate) payable to Ruthin & District Civic Association. Please forward to Robert Williams, Hon. Treasurer, Lenton House, Mold Road, Ruthin LL15 1SL (tel 704998 / ruthincivic@btinternet.com)

Ruthin is North East Wales' First Coach-friendly Town

Ruthin has recently been declared Denbighshire's first coach-friendly town and joins the few select places that have also achieved this status in Wales—Betws y Coed, Cardiff, Conwy & Llandudno.

So, how did this award come about? A couple of years ago, the Denbighshire County Council tourism marketing and events team invited representatives of Denbighshire town/city councils to go on a "learning journey" to Betws y Coed. While there, representatives had discussions with Conwy County Borough Council's destination manager about how Conwy County had achieved coach friendly status for no fewer than three towns.

Following this visit, Ruthin Town Council set up a working group, chaired by our Vice-chair and town councillor Heather Williams, to assess how Ruthin could meet the criteria needed to meet coach friendly status.

These criteria included clear signage for visiting coaches, adequate coach parking provision, facilities for groups and a website providing information for coach groups.

Ruthin town council added additional information to its website to give practical information and details of attractions and trails/tours for coach companies/group organisers. Further information can be



found at visitruthin.wales/about-ruthin.

John Pockett, Director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) Cymru, who presented the award to then deputy mayor, Gavin Harris, at Ruthin Craft Centre said Ruthin was punching well above its weight, as there were only five places in Wales which had Coach Friendly Status, with only 31 in the UK.

He added he was delighted to be in Ruthin to make the award to the town and remarked that there was so much to see in here, with lots of independent

shops and venues for refreshments. He commented on how he had enjoyed his visit to Ruthin, taking full advantage of staying overnight and then walking around the town, popping into a local caf  s and shops. He considered that the historic town of Ruthin was the jewel in the crown of North Wales.

Incidentally, John is obviously is an architectural fan, and commented that he often carried round a Pevsner guide with him! He also recognised how the Town Council was looking to the future in terms of developing its assets.

The CPT presented a framed certificate and the occasion was marked by a delicious cake appropriately decorated with a photograph design of coaches parked at the Ruthin Craft Centre's free parking area.

Councillor Peter Scott, Chairman of Denbighshire County Council, who was also present at the event, congratulated Ruthin Town Council for taking up the initiative to achieve the Coach Friendly status with the support of the County Council's tourism team.

Town Councillor Anne Roberts, also on the working party, said she hoped that the award for Ruthin would encourage other places in Denbighshire to work on achieving coach friendly status, in order to encourage even more visitors to the county.

Farewell to the Indoor Market

Loyal customer STAN DAVIES records the forthcoming sad event

Over the previous two editions of Town and Around, there's been some debate about whether we remain a market town.

One simple reason as to why Ruthin can be defined as such is its indoor market. Unless someone is willing to re-open it in the future, that will be a thing of the past on June 29th. After that, we'll have no (regular) market in town at all.

The current tenants, the Shaws, retire on that date, after nearly 15 years running the place. They lease it from the County Council and pay, we are told, at least   1,000 per month in rent for it, more if they are open on additional days.

Time was when there were a small number of stallholders to whom the lessees would sub-let space.

For various reasons—among them less trade and also illness—and the whole floor is now run by the tenants themselves.

Added to which, the number of customers is reducing. It seems that the client base tends to be older in nature,

with the inevitable decline in numbers as the years progress. There's no doubting that its customers remain very loyal—and I count myself among them, since the monthly followed by a weekly Thursday market and not forgetting the weekly Friday Country Market.

Also retiring is the last of the once-famous Friday WI/Country Market stallholders. Long-standing Jacky's Home Made Cakes & Bakes took up residence with the Shaws in 2014 when there was some debate about the Country Market's future.

The Friday Country Market used to take over the market hall once a week, bar in January, and used the site from 1981 or 1982 till in June 2014 it moved under the English Presbyterian church. This was because the Shaws wanted to operate the standard indoor market on Fridays but otherwise couldn't.

The Country Market closed that December. There was a reported rift but in truth patrons there were also declining. Long gone were those Friday morning queues to get in to the WI market, stretching down Market Street.

To increase business at today's market, the Shaws have on a number of occasions tried to persuade the County



Council to put up signage for it from the Old Station Yard roundabout. To do so would seem to favour one business over the many others who would not benefit. No permission was granted.

This, then, resulted in the positioning just off the roundabout of a white van on what is thought to be on an unadopted road, pointing up to the market. It's a vehicle and therefore doesn't need planning permission but it certainly seems against the spirit of planning legislation and it doesn't look attractive.

Rather sadly for those who regularly use the market, the van doesn't seem to have done the trick in drawing more footfall.

Seeing the market disappear will be a great shame. I shall miss it, its produce, baked items and the wonderful spring floral display of colourful plants up the side of Market Street.