

Town & Around O Gwmpas y Dre

Spring 2025



NEWS, COMMENT & FEATURES FROM THE RUTHIN & DISTRICT CIVIC ASSOCIATION SINCE 2003

60 Year Vision

It's good news-bad news as regards the Levelling Up public realm work on St Peter's Square

In the heart of our town, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment: one that beckons us to reflect on the past while casting our gaze towards the horizon. The tale of St Peter's Square is one of both triumph and challenge, a recent narrative woven through the fabric of over 60 years.



Let us first celebrate the good news. After decades of enduring the infamous roundabout, a circular remnant of early 1960s urban planning, we are on the cusp of transformation. Dating back 60 years, this hated patch of grass, a symbol of an era that prioritised the car over the pedestrian, is finally set to be retired. In a time when larger towns succumbed to the tyranny of traffic, Ruthin stood resilient,

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opting for a roundabout rather than the demolition of its heart.

Yet, as we look back, we recognise that this decision has not served us well. The roundabout, with its unforgiving sea of tarmac, has stifled the vibrancy of our town centre, offering little regard for the pedestrian experience. Motorists look right but rarely glance left. As such, the roundabout does not promote pedestrian

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A Fiver a Week? That's a Local Lifesaver

Local businesses are struggling. We've oft said that it's up to no one but each of us to support them. We cannot rely on others. Here's an innovative way of bring this to everyone's attention. Could it have relevance to Ruthin?

The Totally Locally campaign, which began in the north of England around 2010, has since expanded into a multi-award-winning initiative aimed at boosting independent businesses and revitalising town centres.

At the heart of the campaign is a simple yet powerful message: if every adult spent just [an additional] £5 a week at local independent shops, the positive impact on the local economy would be significant. Organisers argue that even a small shift in consumer habits can generate millions in additional revenue for communities.

The campaign provides towns with a free 'Town Kit' offering marketing materials, strategies, and templates to help local volunteers, councils, and

A grass-roots movement encouraging shoppers to support their local high streets is gathering pace across the UK.

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From the Chair

While on my usual wanderings around our town recently, I have been left with a genuine sense of positivity, and I'm sure I'm not alone in this sentiment.

New businesses are opening, one is expanding, and several shop fronts are looking well cared for and maintained.

The upper part of Clwyd Street is a prime example, with Nest coffee shop consistently busy and providing a fresh look to the street. Ffansi Ffrogs has opened a second store, while nearby,



Empty former Candy Shack

Serenity Studio has launched, offering clients a lovely and welcoming experience.

Further down Clwyd Street, Lovingly Made with Threads has returned, sporting a fantastic new look. The former Clogau store has now become home to Williams Estates, and what an excellent refurbishment job has been carried out—well done to them!

Well Street has welcomed two excellent additions to its retail offering: the new antiques shop on the corner of Well Street and Record Street, and NuBee Fashions. Again, a big well done to all these businesses. We wish them every success for the future.

However, there has to be a 'but'. Several Committee members have been stopped by people about some of the problems we see. We discussed this in January. Our town is still blighted by empty premises that detract from the appearance of the streets in which they are located. The former Candy Shack shop at the bottom of Clwyd Street, which I have mentioned previously, is a real eyesore and has been for several years now. The former launderette on Well Street appears abandoned.

Ongoing building work in many premises continues to mar our town, particularly on St. Peter's Square. In my view, this is off-putting to visitors and is entirely unfair to businesses trading



next to or near these sites. While I appreciate that such work can take time, we've been waiting years, not months. We're about to witness the complete restoration of the interior of St. Peter's Church in a fraction of the time it has taken for some of these town centre premises to be restored.

I truly believe it's time we addressed these issues in order to reclaim our lovely town. I will be writing to Denbighshire County Council to explore ways to compel landlords and builders to tackle these matters. I will provide an update with any response received in due course.

Anne Roberts MBE
Chair of the Civic Association

In the Wake of Defeat



We must also temper our expectations regarding Castle Street.

Members and readers will recall that, alongside the Friends of Nantclwyd y Dre and The Castle Hotel & Spa, we advocated for the inclusion of this street in the public realm work. During previous consultations, we are grateful that members also championed this cause.

Denbighshire has committed to

addressing Market Street, but this is contingent upon securing funding. In our view, Castle Street holds greater significance than the treatment of Market Street. While upper Market Street will need to be converted to one-way to balance Well Street, it is Castle Street that requires remodelling to enhance pedestrian safety and highlight the heritage streetscape.

Navigating Castle Street can be

challenging for pedestrians. The footway widths are often inadequate and, at times, completely non-existent. We pressed for a better pedestrian environment

However, there is one major hurdle. The UK government has imposed a moratorium on the concept of 'shared space', where road users intermingle. They say this may lead to confusion for drivers which, arguably, is the point, as it encourages drivers to slow down. Nevertheless, pending evaluation, 'shared space' is on hold.

As it stands, Castle Street can at best anticipate resurfacing and the maintenance of existing footways.

We are, however, advocating for a speed table outside Nantclwyd y Dre so that, at the very least:

- Pedestrians, particularly those with wheelchairs and buggies, can safely swap sides flush with the pavements when the footway narrows or disappears;
- Traffic speeds are reduced; and
- The large numbers leaving Nantclwyd y Dre after events will benefit from decreased traffic speeds, a significant concern for the Friends.

We would still like to see an environmental weight limit implemented, but it appears that this initiative has also lost momentum.

Time to Bid a (Fond?) ‘Adieu’



All shuttered up and no future to show. Below, recent vandalism

by Peter Daniels

Generations have attended Rhos Street. It's likely that even if you did not, you will know of friends or neighbours who did.

It's understandable that the community has affection for the Rhos Street School building. Though neither in a conservation area nor individually listed, it's still a fine looking structure that blends well with its environment.

But is it now time to bid farewell to this once proud building?

In the autumn, an amendment to the 2022 housing planning application for the site was lodged by the potential developer. The Civic Association responded (again) objecting to the demolition of the building. We weren't alone. In total, there have been around 200 who similarly objected.

But the Civic Association also needs to concede that the hope of the building's refurbishment and retention is now unlikely in the extreme. Keeping it may simply be unrealistic. No developer has come forward with a plan to reuse the building or even its façade. The site only becomes useful to developers if cleared.

This is the dilemma the community faces. Do we hang on in the vain hope

that it might be rescued? Or admit it never will be and that it will suffer a slow deterioration and lingering death that will blight the locality for years to come.

This is something with which the Town Council has wrestled

and it concluded, with an appropriate degree of sadness, that it was now time to bid farewell to the site. The Town Council did not object to the altered application.

One positive, of course, is that there have been certain amendments to the planning application. A major change is that it will see so-called affordable rather than market housing. Given the shortage of such stock in Ruthin, this must be cautiously welcomed.



The building is still owned by the County Council. Were it to be in private hands, the owners could easily apply to demolish it. That process does not require planning permission and is nowhere near as onerous. In other words, without listed building

status, if in private hands, it could be gone in weeks. Or it could've been torn down years ago and there was little the community could do.

The Civic Association's views remain that every effort should be made to

Rhos Street: a Planning history

Rhos Street and Pen Barras closed at Easter 2018. Denbighshire marketed the now redundant site. Towards the end of 2019, there was interest from Ruthin School in establishing a music department but distractions at that time resulted in this being dropped.

An application for housing on a demolished site was lodged in July 2022. It garnered over 170 responses from the public and groups such as the Civic Association. Virtually all objected.

The planning application was modified in October 2023. The response at that time was mute. A further amendment was lodged in May 2024. There were only about 10 additional public responses.



The latest application amendment was in December 2024. Changed by then was an emphasis on affordable rather than market housing, a better amenity space at the front of the development and the retention of more of the front wall. This still garnered over 20 additional public responses.

The proposal has probably seen more public responses since the initial plans in 1989 to build houses between Corwen & Wrexham Roads

In 2016, Arnold Hughes wrote for T & A on the history of Rhos Street. Here's a summary

In the early nineteenth century, the rise of non-conformism in Ruthin and Wales prompted the demand for non-denominational education in non-Anglican primary schools, known as 'British schools'.

Rhos Street School, founded in 1840 initially operated in the Anglican Chapel of Ease before moving to its own iron building in 1845, funded by Anglican George Johnson.

A stone building in the Elizabethan revival style was constructed in 1848, initially serving boys, with girls admitted that year and children from

the nearby Ruthin Workhouse in 1849. Its was designed by Richard Cash (as was the rival Anglican Borthyn). The school saw significant growth, with pupil numbers increasing from 193 at its inception to 289 by 1895.

By the 1930s, it became a local authority Mixed Council School, with 132 pupils, and had 169 students by 2013 when it was designated a County Primary School.

In 1984, the establishment on site of Ysgol Pen Barras, a successful Welsh language primary school, was prompted by demand, leading to increased enrolment from 58 to 248 by 2011.

Both schools boomed, creating pressure for new facilities for both Schools as they prepared to relocate with established reputations.

retain at least the frontage (and that the whole of Rhos Street should be incorporated into the town's conservation area, thanks to the unity of the local stone in the cottages, school and chapel). It does seem unintuitive for us even to entertain something else but, on this occasion, perhaps we need to adopt an air of pragmatism.

It would nevertheless be nice to think our County Councillors would reflect the thoughts of the Civic Association and the public (as appears likely), that:

- Efforts should continue to try to save the façade;
- If not, the resultant housing might should blend better into the local area. Plans suggest otherwise; and
- Allied to this, that the stone from the current building could somehow be reused within the development.

Green Light for Park is Breath of Fresh Air

Peter Daniels offers a Cae Ddol Levelling Update

Denbighshire County and Ruthin Town Councils are spearheading an ambitious project to revitalise Cae Ddol Park, thanks to significant funding from the UK Government's Levelling Up initiative.

The focus is on a greater use of Cae

Ddol and in making it easier to get around for walkers and cyclists. The proposed enhancements for Cae Ddol include a new 480-metre active travel route to facilitate easier walking and cycling, the replacement of the central bridge over the river, and the introduction of a new pump track designed for wheeled sports. Additionally, plans to replace the previous children's playground are already complete.

Within the broader £1m Cae Ddol project, that specifically for Parc Clwyd will see the community 'Incredible Edible' initiative re-established, which aims to promote healthy eating and sustainable food practices through upgraded community planters and educational events. Other plans include new outdoor exercise equipment, seating, bike racks, at least one canopy, and so-called 'way finding' signage. The goal is to create a

well-connected, multi-functional green space that fosters health, sustainability, and 'community cohesion' (i.e. bringing the community together).

Community feedback had been largely supportive of the proposed improvements (especially the pump track), although concerns were raised regarding future maintenance and potential antisocial behaviour. Many consultees expressed a desire for more natural spaces and facilities that cater to a diverse range of users, including families and older residents. Suggestions included the need for additional seating, adventure play areas, and better access to the river.

While the plans have been met with enthusiasm, some residents have voiced concerns about the potential for increased noise and activity in the park, particularly with the introduction of a promised pump track. Suggestions for zoning different activities to maintain as peaceful an environment as possible have been proposed, alongside calls for improved facilities such as free lavatories and a café to encourage more visitors.

As the project moves forward, both councils are committed to ensuring that the enhancements not only improve the park's recreational offerings but also focusing on protecting its nature and the environment.



Could Speed Limit Rise Pave the Way for Auto Ascendancy?

Most local authorities are still working through their respective consultations about whether and which stretches of road should revert from 20 to 30 mph. This in the light of revised Welsh Government guidance.

Denbighshire has yet to publish its full decisions. But Wrexham has. It is returning some 50 roads to 30 mph. If this is an indicator of likely developments nearer to home then we should be worried.

Of Wrexham's decision, the campaign group "20's Plenty for Us" said, 'Is that really a difficult decision? Saving children from death and injury or appeasing a few motorists'.

Meanwhile, the uncertainty over the whole debate has resulted in an alarming increase in traffic speeds. Those on Rhos Street and Mold Road are, frankly, shocking. Here are substandard width footways. It's a road where pupils regularly walk (including increased numbers this academic year seven days a week for Ruthin School).

Meanwhile, alongside this, last month the Welsh Government told us that over the summer on 20 and 30 mph roads there was a drop in crashes, and fewer deaths & serious injuries compared to the previous year.

Casualties were their lowest for the quarter since records began...

Boosting Local Economies through Investment in Pedestrian Infrastructure

As urban environments become increasingly car-dominated, the concept of the 'Pedestrian Pound' has emerged as an initiative aimed at revitalising local economies. This innovative approach focuses on investing in pedestrian infrastructure, with research indicating that such investments can yield significant economic returns for towns.

Studies suggest that for every £1 spent on improvements, such as safer crossings, better footpaths, and traffic speed reductions, local economies could see a return of £2 to £3. This impressive return on investment arises from various factors, including reduced accident costs, lower healthcare expenses and crucially increased retail activity.

Enhanced pedestrian environments lead to higher footfall in town centres, which supports businesses and sales.

Moreover, the benefits extend beyond mere financial gains. Improved pedestrian infrastructure contributes to healthier communities by encouraging physical activity, which can lead to lower healthcare costs over time. Additionally, towns that prioritise walking often experience reduced air pollution and noise levels, creating a more pleasant environment for residents and visitors.

The Pedestrian Pound initiative also aims to address social inequalities by ensuring that improvements in the



pedestrian environment benefit all community members, particularly those who rely on walking as their primary mode of transport.

While the potential benefits are clear, successful implementation will require strong public support and transparent governance to ensure that funds are effectively managed and spent. By focusing on pedestrian-friendly initiatives, towns can create safer, healthier, and more vibrant communities, ultimately leading to a revitalised local economy and a more sustainable urban future.

■ Details of 'The Pedestrian Pound' Third Edition (November 2024) at tinyurl.com/walk-pound

Will Café Leave a Bad Taste?

Is Moel Famau Set for Exciting Enhancements with New Visitor Hub?

Access to Moel Famau, the most popular site within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape, is set to change significantly with the proposed development of a new 'Nordic' style visitor hub, funded by Levelling Up. Situated at the upper Bwlch Pen Barras car park, this hub is intended to include refreshment facilities and lavatories, alongside enhancements to local cycling routes.

Proponents of the project argue that it aims to manage the increasing visitor numbers, which now exceed 300,000 annually, by establishing a permanent staff presence on site. They suggest that this will alleviate visitor pressures and provide essential information, thereby improving the experience for those exploring the park. For the first time, public lavatories will be available at this access point.

However, the proposed visitor hub has sparked significant controversy among local residents, with many expressing strong opposition to the development. Critics highlight concerns about potential environmental

degradation, increased litter, and the risk of antisocial behaviour. They argue that the hub will disrupt the unspoilt landscape of the National Landscape and question the necessity of a café to replace the existing hut. There are fears that the development will attract even more visitors, exacerbating congestion on already narrow roads and increasing pollution levels, which are already a pressing issue.

Sceptics also raise doubts about the café's sustainability and profitability, suggesting that public funds would be better allocated to supporting local businesses and promoting sustainable transport options (even though the latter have been tried). There is a palpable desire among many residents to preserve Moel Famau's natural character and ensure that any developments align with community values and priorities.

The ongoing debate has resulted in calls for alternative locations that would minimise the impact on the landscape, although the proposed site is deemed convenient for those accessing Moel Famau. While the new visitor hub is intended to serve as a management base for rangers and volunteer rangers (helping to

mitigate issues such as littering and sheep attacks) there are concerns that it may inadvertently attract more visitors rather than simply guiding them.

That said, it's widely held that irrespective of the status of the National Landscape (or National Park) Moel Famau will continue as a significant honeypot

Most controversially is the design of the building. It aims to blend with the local landscape but critics question whether the building's design complements the area's natural beauty.



60 Year Vision

From page 1

safety.

As we navigate this journey, we must acknowledge the voices that have risen in defence of the roundabout's demise. Since the inception of the Town Council's Masterplan in 2010, a chorus of opinions has emerged advocating for the removal of the roundabout. Time and again, consultations have echoed the desire for a more pedestrian-friendly environment, one that prioritises the community over the car.

However, we must now confront the sobering reality: the bad news. Beyond the roundabout's impending departure, the aspirations of the Masterplan remain elusive.

The vision for a revitalised Square still appears overshadowed by the persistent dominance of vehicles. As traffic flows at one-way speed from Well Street through the Square to Clwyd Street, the pedestrian experience is left wanting, with little to slow the relentless flow of traffic. The crossing from The Old Courthouse to the Peers Memorial lacks the priority it deserves, leaving pedestrians to navigate a landscape still marred by the presence of vehicles, parked or otherwise.

Indeed, the Square has become a patchwork of parking spaces, with the recent expansion during the pandemic



only compounding the issue.

The Civic Association supports the Town Council's initiative to increase central parking on the Square. This could have liberated the pavement of parking on the Myddelton side, inviting our local hospitality businesses to flourish with outdoor seating.

Instead, the sight of parked vans and cars obscures the charm of our streetscape, detracting from the very essence of what makes Ruthin special.

As we ponder the future, we must also consider the concerns of our local businesses, who rightly worry about footfall and parking. Yet, we must strive for balance. The current scheme, which paradoxically increases parking, risks perpetuating a car-dominated environment. With new parking opportunities awaiting on Well Street, the loss of some parking on the Myddelton side may therefore prove inconsequential in the grand scheme of rejuvenation.

We empathise with the struggles of our current business owners but we must also remember the legacy of the past 60 years. Only a handful of current establishments have endured since the roundabout: HSBC, the Castle Hotel, and the Post Office.

The landscape of commerce is ever-changing, and while we cherish our Post Office, we must remain open to the possibilities that it may relocate. Who knows what will happen in five let alone

60 years. If we had a WHSmith, it would likely already be within, as part of the Post Office's declared aim to increase footfall.

Thus, we implore the County Council to adopt a vision not for the next few but which stretches across the next 60 years, just as it did 60 years ago with the roundabout.

For it is in this long-term perspective that we shall find the courage to embrace change, to create a St Peter's Square that reflects the needs of our community, and to ensure that future generations can thrive in a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment.

The legacy we build today will shape the town we leave behind tomorrow and in 60 years.

■ Pedestrian Pound, p4

Looking Back to 1997

We need to be mindful of the concerns of shopkeepers. But let us also not forget more recent history.

Traders on Well Street feared for their businesses during the 12-weeks'-worth of work during the 1997 environmental improvements. Their concerns were spearheaded by Ruthin News' Simon Roberts.

Ruthin News, however, stayed in business for a further 11 years and closed in May 2008, thanks largely to changes to newspaper, magazine and tobacco sales.

A Front Too Far: time to rein in brash shop displays



In November, Williams Estates made the significant move, relocating from its previous offices at the junction of Well Street and Record Street to the top of Well Street, now proudly boasting the coveted LL15 1AA postcode. This new home, the former Clogau store, has been a gaping hole in the town's landscape since January 2024.

As we pen this piece, it appears that neither planning permission for painting, a change of use from A1 to A2, nor listed building consent has been granted—at least, there's no sign of it on Denbighshire's planning system. This leaves Williams Estates in a bit of

a quandary, taking a leap into the unknown.

However, credit where it's due: Williams Estates has done a commendable job both inside and out. The more so as Williams sits directly across from the prominent Old Courthouse, adding to the area's charm.

We can't help but wonder if Williams has felt frustrated by a sluggish Denbighshire system. Denbighshire acknowledges problems on its website.

But on a very much brighter note, there's some good news on the planning front. After a period of carrying vacancies, we hear that two planning enforcement officers will soon be appointed, which should help alleviate some of the pressure on the lone conservation officer. While a backlog will continue, we urge swift action in our conservation area to address the rather 'colourful' and, dare we say, inappropriate frontages that have crept in over recent years.

If new establishments like Williams Estates, the butcher on Well Street, the adjacent masseuse, Nest, and the exemplary Leonardo's and Naturally Ethical can get it right from the outset,

why do we continue to tolerate the brash and the brazen?

The longer these unsightly features are allowed to remain, the more challenging it becomes to rectify the situation.

■ Recognising the challenges in terms of planning enforcement, in December 2024, the County Council considered a revised Planning Compliance Policy. This generally lengthen the permitted response time for lower priority cases, while improving that for those with higher priorities. Of note was the single sentence on p15, which reads 'The Council may also close investigations when evidence of a harmful breach is not forthcoming'.



A Stitch in Time for Democracy & Current Events



by Kath Daniels

The Craft Centre is currently showcasing an intriguing exhibition titled 'Stitching a Voice' by local artist Bethan M. Hughes. This display is particularly poignant, as it features a quilt named 'Together, Apart', created during the coronavirus pandemic. It comprises 2,737 one-inch quilts, each representing a household in Ruthin during lockdown, capturing the essence of isolation and community spirit.

Bethan's work is a vibrant tapestry of red, black, and grey, with the red symbolising her deep connection to Wales and its emotional landscape. The main exhibit, set against a striking red wall, embodies the collective voice of democracy, with 6,721 individual quilts

reflecting the majority that supported the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales in 1997. The black and white fabrics represent the 'yes' and 'no' votes from that pivotal referendum.

Her quilts are not merely decorative; they are powerful political statements. Themes of language, community and social justice resonate throughout, urging us to consider the importance of standing up for their beliefs and nurturing pride in our heritage. The quilts serve as a reminder of the fragility of democracy, much like the delicate stitches that hold them together.

Bethan's colours are influenced by the those used in the traditional Welsh quilts. Her artistic process features dense machine stitching to create different textures and surfaces. Each piece is a reflection of her commitment to Wales, intertwining personal and collective narratives. The edges of her quilts often remain unfinished, symbolising the ongoing story of Wales and the challenges it faces.

In a time when our voices are more crucial than ever, Bethan Hughes' exhibition invites us to reflect on our shared experiences, particularly during the pandemic. It's a celebration of resilience, community, and the power of art to unite us, even when we are apart.

■ **Stitching a Voice**, till March 30th, 2025 at the Craft Centre

Bridging Craft Collaborations

In an exciting development for the arts in Wales, two spaces at Ruthin Craft Centre are being transformed to enable Ruthin to become part of the CELF Contemporary Art Gallery. This ambitious project aims show a broader range of artistic expressions.

This newly reimagined space will serve as a vital platform for displaying works from the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and the National Library in Aberystwyth. By facilitating this collaboration, the CELF Gallery will become an integral part of a network of nine venues across Wales, each contributing to the rich tapestry of the country's cultural landscape.

The original designers of the 2009 Craft Centre, Sergison Bates, are once again lending their expertise to this innovative venture. Their involvement promises to bring a fresh perspective to the gallery's design, ensuring that it not only meets the highest standards of exhibition but also reflects the dynamic nature of contemporary art.

As the CELF Contemporary Art Gallery embarks on this exciting journey, it is poised to become a beacon of creativity and innovation, inviting art lovers and curious minds alike to explore the vibrant world of contemporary art in Wales. Keep an eye on this space: it opens on April 5th, 2025.

From Grand Ambition to Empty Shell

It shaped our lives for over 20 years, reports local government aficionado Peter Daniels

Forty-one years ago, the historic county of Denbighshire was wiped off the map, replaced by the new administrative behemoth that was Clwyd. For Ruthin, this meant the loss of its cherished status as a county town—an indignity not easily forgotten by locals.

Now, in a twist of fate, the most potent symbol of Clwyd's reign, County Hall, Mold, has finally fallen silent. February saw the last remaining staff vacate the building, marking the end of an institution that once oversaw the affairs of a population of over 400,000.

Mold's selection as the administrative centre for the 1974 newly formed Clwyd County Council (merging Denbighshire and Flintshire) owed much to the foresight of historic Flintshire's then Chief Executive, Haydn Rees. Well before the merger, Flintshire was feeling the squeeze for office space. The solution? The purchase of the Llwynegryn estate to the north east of Mold.

In 1967, Flintshire proudly unveiled its modern seven-storey HQ at Raikes Lane, a newly transformed dual carriageway to reflect the boldness of the era. But this was more than just a civic upgrade. Rees, ever the strategist, had one eye on local government reorganisation, with mergers on the horizon.

Sure enough, when Clwyd came into being in 1974, Mold's Shire Hall (as it was then known) became the only logical choice to house the newly combined administration and staff.

For speed and affordability, the

original front block—later dubbed 'Phase 1'—was swiftly followed by extensions as Clwyd's needs were identified. Prefabrication was the order of the day. Whispers persisted that the modular structure was originally destined for somewhere far warmer, possibly Africa or the Middle East, before being diverted to Mold. The truth of this claim remains uncertain, but such stories were not uncommon in 20th-century British local government.

Between 1974 & 1996, Shire Hall became Clwyd's beating heart. Reading the Free Press during those years, you'll recall major decisions that shaped our daily lives: the A55 and A483 dual carriageways were designed there (there was money, back then). Clwyd's sheer size and influence gave it a prominence in Wales that successors struggle to match.

The Free Press did not always see eye to eye with Clwyd. In the early 1970s, the paper even reflected Ruthin's deep frustration over its loss of status, all thanks to Shire Hall.

When Clwyd was broken up in 1996, new Flintshire took over the building. As a clean break, they renamed it County Hall. Even then, new Denbighshire had a stake: it housed Denbighshire staff pending a transfer to Caledfryn and Trem Clwyd, both now closed.

But time was not kind to the once-futuristic headquarters. The structure became increasingly costly to maintain, and by the late 2010s, the cracks (literal and figurative) were showing.

By 2018, key departments were already being



relocated, including to the former 1992 Alyn & Deeside District Council offices at Ewloe (after lessee Unilever had vacated). Meanwhile, other services moved to Alltami depot. In 2020, Phase 4 was demolished.

Now, the final curtain has fallen. County Hall stands empty, a relic of an era that reshaped local government—and, in many ways, our identity in Ruthin.

As the last lights go out, perhaps it's time to reflect. Whether you saw Clwyd as progress or an unwanted takeover, there is no denying its impact. And now, the last great monument to that time stands silent, waiting for whatever comes next. Which, if you believe Flintshire's local development plan, will be housing. The estate is expected to realise up to £6m when sold. Contrast that with the 1967 Phase 1 building costs of £839,000.



Shire Hall (now County Hall) phase 1, Mold

A Rosy Future...

... for Rose Cottage, writes Liz Williams

Rose Cottage, a privately-owned grade



II Cadw-listed building, is a medieval cruck-framed hall-house and is currently up for sale.

It is a remarkable survivor of medieval buildings of relatively low status and was probably was a Welsh labourer's cottage. There are very few of its kind left standing.

It is also one of the very few thatched properties left in this area and is built on a high rubble stone plinth. The thatched roof had been covered by corrugated iron sheeting and the roof had to be completely renewed. Timber wall framing with wattle & daub panels exist for the complete length of the surviving building and it is very well preserved.

Although the timbers have not been dendrochronologically dated, a comparative property in Radnorshire is dated to 1550. It has a brick chimney that

is 17th century and is a fine example of the tradition between open hearth (with a hole in the roof) and a full fireplace.

In 1947, Ernest and Letty Harrison bought Rose Cottage from the Mainwaring estate for £100. Their son Roderick inherited Rose Cottage and lived there till 1996. He was a well-known local character.

By then, the cottage was in a neglected condition, so a considerable restoration was undertaken: the windows were replaced, the roof renewed and kitchen added.

During the restoration, a section of floral painted plaster was discovered and thus was in charcoal, grey and red ochre. So Rose Cottage was restored to its former glory.

Whoever buys this delightful property will truly own a piece of history.

■ Rose Cottage is a detached bungalow reduced in December 18th, 2024 to £200,000

A Buffer Too Far: The Balancing Act of North East Wales' National Park Boundaries

We were fortunate to have Keith Davies of NRW address our December 2024 AGM on the subject of the proposed National Park and, especially, its boundary.

The debate over the new National Park in North East Wales centres on how best to protect and manage the region's distinctive landscape, and it involved two main strands of discussion regarding the park's boundary. That boundary at one time included part of the Ruthin Castle protected gardens (but no more).

Initial Proposal: extending the boundary as a buffer

Proponents of an extended boundary argued that by enlarging the park's limits beyond the existing Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB, sometimes referred to as a National Landscape), a protective 'buffer' zone could be established around the core landscape.

This buffer was intended to shield the higher-quality areas within the AONB from the impacts of external development pressures. Part of the rationale was that the extended boundary would encompass areas that did not, on their own, meet the high environmental quality standards of the core AONB.

In essence, the extension was seen as a means to provide extra protection against potentially incompatible uses or developments that might otherwise encroach on the core protected area.

The Subsequent Decision: reverting to the Original AONB Footprint

During consultations, critics of the extended boundary raised several concerns. They argued that broadening the park's area would impose additional planning restrictions on a larger region,

potentially complicating local development and management.

Legal and administrative challenges were also cited, with the conclusion that the existing legal framework and established conservation policies were already well aligned with the current AONB boundaries. Furthermore, many stakeholders eventually agreed that the original AONB footprint sufficiently captured the landscape's most important features.

In their view, the extended boundary was unnecessary, as its potential downsides—such as increased administrative complexity and undue constraints on local land use—would outweigh the marginal gains in protection. In the end, though, these buffer areas were not of sufficient quality.

Specific Considerations in the Boundary Delineation

In the Ruthin area, the initial proposal extended the boundary to include part of the area around Ruthin Castle, possibly to create a more expansive protective zone around key historical and landscape features. However, further review and consultation revealed that this area, being more urban-focused rather than natural, did not significantly contribute to the park's conservation objectives. Consequently, it was excluded from the final boundary.

By contrast, an area around Pwllglas was retained in the proposed revised boundary. This decision suggests that, unlike the area near Ruthin Castle, Pwllglas was assessed as possessing environmental or landscape qualities that merited protection. Its inclusion helped maintain a more coherent and valuable natural landscape, thus reinforcing the overall conservation aims of the National Park.

While the initial idea of extending the boundary was partly justified as a means of protecting areas of lower inherent environmental quality from external pressures, subsequent analysis and debate led to the decision to revert to the original AONB limits. This change was driven by a combination of legal, administrative,

and practical considerations, alongside concerns that a larger boundary might impose excessive planning restrictions without significantly enhancing conservation outcomes.

The final boundary reflected a deliberate focus on safeguarding areas that truly contribute to the park's natural and ecological integrity.

All this debate did cause one member to question why consult on the boundary in the first place!

The general debate...what we think...

Rural North East Wales is a gem of landscapes, heritage, and community. Supporters of national park status argue it would safeguard these assets, curb inappropriate development, attract conservation funding, and boost sustainable tourism. It's also a point of local pride, reinforcing the region's unique character.

However, concerns remain. Some fear tighter planning restrictions could stifle rural livelihoods. Others worry about increased visitor numbers, adding pressure to already busy 'honeypots'. Yet, these honeypots draw crowds regardless, and national park status could bring better management—improved footpaths, visitor centres, and off-peak promotion.

Ultimately, on balance, while challenges exist, the potential to protect and enhance North East Wales outweighs the risks. A national park wouldn't eliminate visitor pressure but could help manage it, securing our honeypots for generations to come.

As ever, we feel it is an opportunity missed that Ruthin isn't even partly within the proposed boundary. But congratulations to Pwllglas for making the cut.

Fiver a Week

From p1

business groups coordinate shop-local initiatives. Events such as 'Fiver Fest' and 'The Magic Tenner' are key highlights, encouraging shoppers to take advantage of special offers from independent traders while reinforcing the importance of local spending.

This, then, supports the whole community. Money stays locally.

Totally Locally has been widely embraced in towns such as Hebden Bridge, Dinnington, Ripon, Wymondham, and parts of London. It's

currently used in 165 locations in the UK.

Despite its successes, not every town has taken up the initiative. Ruthin is one such.

The campaign does rely heavily on volunteers, meaning its impact depends on local leadership and enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, Totally Locally continues to grow, with its accessible and practical approach providing a valuable tool for communities looking to strengthen their local economies.

■ For our leaders, businesses and anyone interested, further details and resources are available at totallylocally.org.

The Arithmetic

As at the 2021 census, there were 4,351 adults within the town's boundary.

If each one spent an additional £5 per week in our family owned businesses, this would equate to over £1.1mil within the local economy.

You could probably double the population if you consider the villages within Ruthin's catchment. An additional £5 per adult per week could thus realise nearly £2.3m.

A Blessing Not in Disguise: St Peter's Church to Rebuild and Renew

St Peter's Church has temporarily relocated as it begins a £1.6 million transformation project under Levelling Up. This includes £400,000 from church reserves.

The church closed in January prior to work starting on February 3rd, 2025.

The church, which dates back 700 years, will be re-ordered to include a kitchen, lavatories, meeting spaces, a balcony, level access, and underfloor heating. This will create a more flexible environment for both worship and community use.

The adjacent cloisters will also be

renovated, to provide three en-suite rooms for pilgrims, including one that is accessible. The church's chancel will be raised, the high altar lowered, and most pews replaced with more comfortable & movable seating.

Donations from the public of around £100 will secure one of the existing pews. The decoratively embossed Cornwallis-West pew will be relocated to Ruthin Castle Hotel & Spa.

Before work commenced, specialists ensured that the church organ was protected and its pipes fully sealed.

During the renovations, services are

held at SS Mwrog & Mary Church, Llanfwrog at 9am, and Ysgol Borthyn at 4pm.

Warden of Ruthin Revd Luke Bristowe reassured the community that the church remains active, encouraging attendance at the two temporary locations.

Meanwhile, the Youth Café and Drop-In Fridays have relocated to the Ambulance Hall on Prior Street.

Contractors Grosvenor Construction is expected to complete the work in nine or so months, aiming for a grand reopening by Christmas 2025.



Creative Archives Consultation

As plans for the North East Wales Archives building project advance, Archive Service Manager Craig Berry tells us more—and how we can give our views

The project, called 'Creative Archives', has been made possible by a development grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, alongside financial commitments from both Denbighshire and Flintshire councils. The funding will support the initial phase of the project, enabling detailed architectural designs, and business and activity planning ahead of a second-round funding application in 2026.

Ruthin Gaol and Hawarden's The Old Rectory have hosted the archives in the region for many years but can no longer meet the expectations and requirements of stakeholders or provide sufficient or suitable spaces to house the growing collections. The proposed new Archive Centre will be a purpose-built, net carbon-zero building, on land adjacent to Theatr Clwyd in Mold. The new site will protect the collections for future generations and allow

for the service to deliver activities designed to attract a wider and more diverse audience.

Creative Archives will give local communities greater access to collections and provide greater opportunities for staff to work closely with the public to celebrate their personal and communities' histories. The project includes an improved engagement and digital programme to extend access to the archives across the region and further afield, as well as providing modern spaces for research, digital conversion and displays. More people will be entertained, informed and be excited about the region's rich documentary heritage.

The project is now seeking views from stakeholders on what you want to see from the new building, the activities you would like to see delivered **and the type of service you want from the remaining archive presence at Ruthin Gaol.**

A drop-in public consultation event is scheduled for **Tuesday April 1st, 1-4pm at Ruthin Gaol**. Please do come along and contribute to the project. For those unable to attend, you can provide your comments via an online survey, available on NEWA's website at newa.wales



Archifau Gogledd Ddwyrain Cymru
North East Wales Archives

Ruthin Reborn

Times, they are changing,
At a pace that's not so slow,
Upset and uncertainty;
An anxious wait to know;
Anne understandably voices angst
At what's currently on show:
Windows that stare blankly
Leaving shoppers feeling low.
But, see it as a canvas,
Inviting what's soon to come
Exciting inspiration,
Compelling beating, as a drum.
Entrepreneurs of varied sort
Competing in the national sport:
Repurposing our High Street.

Ruthin's retail will be reborn
Bringing surprises yet to dawn.
Where hairdressers boomed, now on
the wane,
With just lurid barbers, a doubtful gain,
Baristas, like autumn fungi, found
Where luxury coffee and cake abound,
Awaiting the flood that's yet to rise
Of tourist visitors with curious eyes
To feast on that which, from the start,
Has been the Vale's true beating heart:
Architectural wonders, moels which
hem,
Ruthin's epicentre, Clwyd's cultural
gem.
The aim of folk from worlds afar
Still, sadly, find arrangements jar:
Costly parking chaos, a town unrefined,
Submerging the welcome of people kind
Repurposing our High Street.

© Robin Hill

Long-playing Legacy



by Jane Gerrard and Peter Daniels

Ruthin Craft Centre, our cornerstone of contemporary craft development in North Wales, is set to bid farewell to its long-serving Director, Philip Hughes MBE, who will retire this summer after an impressive 33½ years at the helm.

His tenure has been marked by a profound impact on the craft community, launching and nurturing countless careers in the applied arts.

In celebration of Hughes' remarkable contributions, the Craft Centre is currently hosting an exhibition titled 'Long Playing Record 33½', which showcases the work of various makers he has supported throughout his career.

Hughes' career has been both all-encompassing and far-reaching, influencing not just the exhibitions at Ruthin Craft Centre but also engaging in educational projects that benefit the wider community. He has created retail opportunities for emerging craft makers, identified and nurtured new talent, and facilitated artist residencies alongside diverse courtyard displays. His efforts have fostered collaborations with numerous organisations across Wales, the UK, and internationally, providing touring opportunities and mentoring support for many creative individuals in the craft and arts fields.

The exhibition features a selection of works in wood, jewellery, ceramics, and textiles, celebrating the creativity and innovation of those he has supported over the years. Hughes' legacy is further underscored by the thousands of conversations he has had with collectors and visitors, enriching the cultural fabric of the community.

As the Centre prepares for this significant transition, the impact of Hughes' leadership will undoubtedly be felt for years to come, leaving a lasting imprint on the world of crafts and the applied arts.

■ Tributes may be left at tinyurl.com/p-hughes

Seen in Passing...

Another business alongside Williams Estates' frontage (p6) to have been refurbished recently is Leonardo's café, Well Street. Leonardo's has always taken great care with its frontage and the winter refurbishment has seen a general paint-up and replacement windows with appropriate wooden casing.



Next door's Siop Nain café and card shop has also this winter benefited from a welcome paint-up, to include covering over some patches of bare plaster.

Towards the end of January 2025, Nantclwyd y Dre offered two open afternoons in The Lord's Garden for visitors to experience the varieties of snowdrops. This was a particularly pleasing addition to the heritage attraction's calendar, given that the place is not usually open between October-April.



At the time of writing, Plas Coch (Well Street) looks almost ready to reopen as 'The Dreamatorium'. This is a project that first came to our notice in 2022. Renovation of the front is particularly fine and owners Lavina Stamps are to be congratulated upon the restoration to date of this important heritage building. We trust that when complete and opened their investment will be able to re-energise lower Well Street.

As good as it is to see a shop opened in the former estate agents' Well Street premises, especially one of such



character and vibrancy, it's a shame that the surrounding footways seem invariably to be cluttered. The Civic Association has received several complaints. As we're all too aware, Ruthin isn't blessed with wide pavements.



The St Peter's Church noticeboard tells us that the church is closed for refurbishment (p8). The notice is surrounded by a collage of church-related photos that makes a truly colourful display, in both the literal and figurative uses of the word. Note the redundant pews to the right.



Capel y Rhos is undergoing refurbishment at present. This for years was the Royal Mail delivery centre. There's been an updated electrical connections, and external & internal work. The Denbighshire planning system suggests this will become some sort of café. This is an interesting development for a heritage building slightly out of the town centre but will allow us all to have a look around.

Quarter Millennium of Justice: Old Gaol Turns 250



This year marks the 250th anniversary of the Old Gaol in Ruthin, a historic building that has witnessed the evolution of justice and society in the

region.

Work on a new model prison is said to have begun in 1775, with a later Pentonville-style extension to the most modern standards of the time. It was a significant development in the local justice system, replacing earlier, less formal methods of detention.

Throughout its operational years, the Old Gaol became notorious for its harsh conditions. It housed a variety of inmates, from petty criminals to those accused of more serious offences. Executions were rare. The building's design included small, dark cells that offered little comfort, a stark reminder of the punitive approach to justice in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In 1916, the Old Gaol ceased to function as a prison, and its subsequent role has shifted over the years. It contributed to the war effort as a

munitions factory. It served as the headquarters of historic Denbighshire's Highways Department. The lending library was once on site. It still houses the county archive.

Thanks to Denbighshire County Council, in the early 21st century it was repurposed as a museum. Indeed, Ruthin Gaol is the only purpose-built Pentonville style prison open to the public as an attraction. Today, it stands as a testament to Ruthin's rich history, offering visitors a glimpse into the past.

As we celebrate its 250th anniversary, the Old Gaol remains a symbol of resilience and transformation, reflecting the changing attitudes towards justice and rehabilitation in society. Its legacy continues to educate and inspire future generations about the importance of history in shaping our communities.

Five Years Ago

Can it really be 5 years since the coronavirus nightmare began? It all kicked off in March 2020

Town & Around featured nine consecutive 'Coronavirus Chronicles' to September 2022. We marked the impact of the virus on our town. We received significant positive feedback over the coverage, more than at any other time.

On March 17th, 2020, Ysgol Brynhyfryd became the first school in Wales to close. County Hall staff were sent home.

More and more business owners cut their hours, to look after children whose teaching was cut short. Signs appeared in shop doorways and windows.

We witnessed the disappearance from our shops of hand sanitisers, thermometers, liquid soap, antiseptic wipes... and lavatory paper. Most people began to follow Government advice ahead of the actual lockdown.

Then, on March 20th, pubs and cafés had their last gasp. 12 days before Denbighshire Leisure Ltd was vested, all leisure centres closed. Some restaurants converted to offering takeaway meals.



And 30 Years Ago...

... in May 1995, we cast our votes for councillors for the new Denbighshire County Council shadow unitary authority. 'Shadow', because it would be one year before full transition to the newcomer. The shadow authority had been due in 1994 but time ran out. Prior to May 1995, there had been a transitional committee.

The 49 Denbighshire councillors of the time comprised 20 Labour, 19 Independents, seven Plaid Cymru and three Liberal Democrats. Note the absence of Conservatives.

Of the two current councillors who commendably can trace their uninterrupted time to the shadow authority, one is Efenechtyd's Eryl Williams, himself a member of both predecessors Glyndŵr District and Clwyd County Councils.

March 22nd and Mothering Sunday was cancelled. There were no religious services, as the Warden Revd Stuart Davies turned to the web.

Monday March 23rd and the town was bare, with just 44 cars parked throughout. And in the evening we heard that the full lockdown became official. We could now only shop for essentials but infrequently. That meant food shops and pharmacies. All other businesses shut. Blinds stayed down or window displays were emptied. Though now superfluous, even more notices went up.

We were urged to 'Stay at home. Protect the NHS'.

We could travel to work only where there was no alternative. Otherwise, we had to work from home. We were required to wear face coverings and stand 6'6" from each other. With pubs closed, the latest grocery shortage was alcohol.

Children no longer played out. Gates were locked at out country park. Temperatures begin to soar, yet we could exercise once a day provided we

stayed near home.

Lay-offs and furlough began. The Glasdir site and sales centre closed.

Thursday March 26th and we noticed 30 cars parked in town, on street and in car parks. There were 15 cars at County Hall. Others worked from home.

Tesco introduced a queuing and entry/exit system, initially using borrowed barriers.

'Unprecedented' was the word on everyone's lips. We began to see window art and signs in shops and homes, all urging us all to stay safe. Did this love continue past Covid?

Many windows now sported rainbows in support for staff within the NHS.

Garden waste collections were suspended. Grass in public areas was left to grow. Schools became hubs for key workers' children and primaries remained open as such over the Easter school holidays. We could not take Easter breaks or holidays. We could not even visit the beach at Rhyl.

Changes at the Civic Association

At the December 2024 AGM, the officers and committee for the civic association year 2024/25 were confirmed. The officers are Anne Roberts (Chair), Heather Williams (Vice-chair), Peter Daniels (Secretary) and Robert Williams (Treasurer). The remainder of the Committee are Steve Beach, Kay Culhane, Kath Daniels, Menna Jones and Robert Price.

Since then, pressure of work has forced Robert Price to stand down for a period of six-months. Similar pressures result in a further change, to be confirmed at the March Committee, when Heather Williams officially takes on the role of Secretary. In a straight swap, it is anticipated that Peter Daniels will become the Vice-chair.

Closed for Renovation: but see you in 2026

As an organisation dedicated to the planning and delivery of Open Doors in Ruthin, it is with a heavy heart that we announce there will be no heritage festival this September.

The primary reason for this unfortunate decision is the anticipated commencement of public realm work on the Square.

While we understand that such projects can often face delays, we cannot risk planning an event that for September ultimately we may be unable to deliver.

Additionally, our esteemed co-ordinator, Fiona Gale, has decided to step down after her dedicated service over the past several years. With her involvement in other projects, it is entirely understandable that she wishes to pass the baton. Given that planning typically

Robert Price is a relative newcomer to the Committee but well known in town for his work with the Civic Association on the Craft Centre Crane; and on the refurbishment of the Peers Memorial and war memorial. We look forward to welcoming him and his ideas back later this year.

Peter Daniels, meanwhile, continues for now in his role as editor of Town and Around.



begins in February, we are unable to ensure the necessary resources to successfully execute the festival in 2025.

However, we assure you that we will return with renewed enthusiasm in September 2026.

In the meantime, if you know anyone who might be interested in taking on the co-ordination role, please contact our Secretary (ruthincivic@btinternet.com). We offer an honorarium for this vital work in bringing everything together.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Fiona for her invaluable contributions over the years.



Cymdeithas Ddinesig Rhuthun a'r Cylch
Ruthin and District Civic Association

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

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

The deadline for the next edition is May 16th, 2025

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

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Ruthin & District Civic Association

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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.

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(2) Name _____

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Forward this to the address below with either:

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- To pay by bank transfer or standing order, request that the Hon. Treasurer contacts you with details of how to do so.

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