

# **CYNGOR CYMUNED TAWE UCHAF COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **2025/2026**

#### **Introduction**

Welcome to the fourth annual report of Tawe Uchaf Community Council.  
The Council is required by Welsh Government legislation through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to prepare and publish an annual report. This report covers the financial year from April 2025 to March 2026

Stephen Davies – Chairman Tawe Uchaf Community Council

#### **The Council**

The Council has three electoral wards represented by 13 Councillors. Following Council elections in May 2022 the following councillors were elected or co-opted.

The Councillors in each ward are listed below.

#### **Coelbren Ward**

Stephen Davies (Chairman)

Arlene Jones

Gareth Hayton

Sandra Howard

Geoffrey Woods

#### **Penycae Ward**

Ann Watkins

Alun Thomas

Sandra Clayton

Marjorie Joplin

Vacancy

#### **Caehopkin Ward**

Susan Pyart (Vice Chair)

Huw Williams

Gail Hopkins-Williams

The Council employs a part-time Clerk.

Council Website: <http://www.taweuchafcommunitycouncil.co.uk>

Email – [taweuchaf@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:taweuchaf@yahoo.co.uk)

## **The Community**

The Community of Tawe Uchaf is located at the top of the Swansea Valley within the County of Powys. The Community includes the villages of Coelbren, Caehopkin, Ynyswen and Penycae and Penwyllt. Most residents reside in these villages. Part of the Community also sits within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. Tawe Uchaf is an area of outstanding natural beauty that includes major national tourist attractions, The National Show Caves of Wales, The Henrhyd Waterfall, The Craig y Nos Castle and Country Park and Wales Ape and Monkey Sanctuary. The above attractions together with agriculture provide employment. The Forest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark occupies the western half of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. Part of the Community lies within the Geopark. The villages of Ynyswen, Penycae, Craig y Nos and Penwyllt lie within the Geopark, Coelbren and Caehopkin lie just outside the Geopark boundary. To maintain the UNESCO status the objectives, activities and achievements are assessed every four years by validations from Geoparks from outside the UK. A recent revalidation recommended consideration to expanding the southern boundary. The Geopark does not have any responsibility for planning law. Craig y Nos Country Park is home to the Geopark information hub and learning laboratory. Possible suggestions for expansion might include Coelbren and land between the A4221/A4109 including the Gors Llwyn SSSI, also, the Swansea Valley, Caehopkin, Abercraf and communities to Ystradgynlais, the Neath Valley from Coelbren east to Pontneddfechan and south to Glynneath. Planning Solutions Consulting Ltd has been commissioned to assess the feasibility of expansion. Tawe Uchaf Community Council has a representative on the Geopark Management Group and participates in stakeholder discussions. If the preliminary report from the consultants, expected in February, recommends expansion, extensive public consultations will follow.

The south of the Community sits within the geological boundary of the South Wales Coalfield. Coal Mining had been a major employer during the 20th century. The dominance of the coal industry as an employer has now ended and new employment opportunities will be required. A Global Centre of Rail Excellence is being developed on the site of the former Onllwyn Washery and Nant Helen Opencast site. The Council has a representative on the GCRE liaison committee.

## **Council Objectives**

The Council's main objective is to represent its residents effectively. Local Councillors are the first point of contact where residents can raise their concerns. Local concerns, when raised are dealt with in several ways. The Council has a close working relationship with our local County Councillor, who attends Council meetings. In the first instance the Council will respond to matters raised. The close working relationship means local concerns can also be referred quickly to Powys County Council as and when required. The Ystradgynlais Police also attend Council meetings, as their resources allow, to provide local updates and receive any local

concerns requiring Police help and advice. The Council is open and transparent and is required, by legislation to publish all public notices on the Council website including agendas, minutes, finance reports, audit notices and opinion provided by Audit Wales. The Council website address is published in the introduction. The Council welcomes residents to observe Council meetings, either in person or over ZOOM from your home. To observe a Council meeting over ZOOM please contact the Clerk, who will send out a link to join. All notifications of meetings are published on the Council Facebook page.

### **Council Priorities**

The key priorities of Tawe Uchaf Community Council are listed below. To represent the residents of Tawe Uchaf working in partnership with our local County Councillor. Management of three children's playgrounds located at Penycae, Caehopkin and Cefnbyrle Road (Coelbren). Maintenance of local footpaths and the strip of land adjacent to Craig y Nos Castle. The effective management of Council Finances and Budget complying with Governance and Audit requirements set by Audit Wales

Improving communication with residents, using local social media groups. Regular updates on the Council Facebook page.

The Council priorities are developed in response to ratepayer concerns. Road safety is a major concern raised by the public, particularly, speeding traffic on the A4067 from Ynyswen to Craig y Nos. In addition, the road safety concerns on the A4221 in the Cefnbyrle Road area. The location of the junction with Cefnbyrle Road and the entrance/exit of the cycle path. Concerns of speeding in the Community are progressed regularly with the local Police, who attend Council meetings. The presence of a Road Traffic Officer will help support initiatives to reduce speed on our roads.

The purchase of a Speed Indicator Device (SID) by the Council, was made in response to resident concerns of speeding along the A4067 from Ynyswen to Craig y Nos and Cefnbyrle Road, Coelbren. The Council has received positive feedback from residents at Penycae on the effectiveness of the SID. The intention is to relocate the SID between Penycae, Craig y Nos and Cefnbyrle Road, Coelbren. However, the recently installed 20mph zones and the current Welsh Government review of the legislation has required the Council to review its intentions.

Fly Tipping, Maintaining the Footpath network and maintaining local bus services are also key priorities. The protection of local biodiversity is a priority required by legislation set by the Welsh Government. The Council produces a tri-ennial report under the legislation. The Council maintains a good working relationship with Powys County Council via our County Councillor, the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and the National Trust. Many of the issues above are monitored and problems resolved due to the close working relationship with our County Councillor. We are fortunate to have such a strong working relationship.

Fly tipping is a concern in the countryside. Reports of fly tipping can be reported to Powys County Council. Resources, when available, can be allocated to clear areas where fly tipping has occurred. However, fly tipping can lead to prosecution of perpetrators, if evidence is found at the site.

The annual maintenance of the local footpath network is a key priority. The Council strims the footpath network, three times a year from April to October. For clarification, the footpath network within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park boundary is the responsibility of the National Park Authority. The Council is anticipating the re-opening of rights of way over Mynydd y Drym and surrounding area. At the appropriate time, the Council will be invited to comment on possible improvements on the reopened footpaths. The comments will be part of a consultation issued by the Right of Way Officer at Powys County Council.

In addition, grounds maintenance is also undertaken at the three children's playgrounds. The playgrounds are mowed at regular intervals, from April to November. The Council has a Playground Inspection Team comprising of two Councillors and the Clerk. The team undertakes regular inspections of the three playgrounds, and a report is produced after each inspection. In addition, there is an annual inspection of the three playgrounds by RoSPA. RoSPA produces a report circulated to the Council.

In 2026 the Council has approved the roll out of Interpretive panels at strategic locations across the Community. The initial project will include the village of Coelbren. The intention is to create a panel highlighting the village's previous connections as a key junction in the railway industry. Work is commencing with a Company who will produce the interpretive panel.

**The Council recognises the seven well-being goals as set by the Welsh Government Act 2015. These are set out below.**

**A Prosperous Wales - Innovative, productive low carbon society, recognising the limits of the global environment and the use of resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change) and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through decent work**

### **A Prosperous Community**

The Council recognises the goals set by the Welsh Government for a prosperous Wales. Geographically Tawe Uchaf is a rural Community. A partnership approach is essential to achieve the requirements set out. The Council has a close working partnership with our local County Councillor. The partnership is a key component in a joined-up approach from local Council to principal authority at a time when Local Authority budgets across Wales are under severe pressures. A prosperous Community must have adequate public transport connections. Despite financial

pressures the partnership with the County Councillor has ensured bus services continue to be provided locally with links onward to Neath and Swansea. The bus services are a major link to access education services, health services and commerce. It should be noted the Council has limited control over bus timetables. The Council supports inward investment initiatives with the potential to provide sustainable local employment opportunities. The Global Centre of Rail Excellence is being developed on the site of the former Onllwyn Washery and Nant Helen Opencast site. The Council has a representative on the GCRE local liaison group. The Council is consulted by the Planning authority to comment on proposed development. For clarity, the Council can only provide comments. The final decision is taken by the local Planning authority. The Council has a representative on the following bodies associated with safeguarding the environment and efforts to maximise benefits to the communities. The bodies are Fforest Fawr Geopark Management Group, Coelbren Welfare Hall Committee and Governors of primary and secondary schools.

Tourism in the Community is a big attraction. Large numbers of visitors come each year. The Henrhyd Waterfall, National Showcaves, Craig y Nos Castle and Country Park and the Wales Ape and Monkey Sanctuary. Henrhyd Waterfall and its connection with major film projects is one popular attraction. Visitor Parking was an issue. Visitor numbers, visiting the falls, created parking problems in the village of Coelbren. The Council, County Councillor and local residents lobbied for a temporary overflow carpark at Coelbren. A temporary car park was established at Coelbren, by the National Trust, to mitigate parking issues created by visitor numbers. Local consultation and knowledge were a key contributor to the development of the new temporary car park at Coelbren, to accommodate visitor traffic. The temporary car park was constructed on National Trust land opposite the Smithy. However, due to highways intervention, highlighting highway visibility issues, the car park was closed, it will not reopen until vehicle splays are constructed. The responsibility for the work required rests with the National Trust as the landowners. The Council is trying to establish if progress is possible, however, it appears the National Trust has no budget to undertake the work. Parking restrictions have also been included on local roads to reduce on road parking; The Council continues to monitor the situation locally. Residents of Coelbren are consulted to receive their views and ideas. The Council will support green energy generation initiatives, The Council comments responsibly and consistently on planning consultations from Powys County Council and Brecon Beacons National Park. The Council provides financial support for village halls and local village groups to maintain social fabric; together with financial assistance to local voluntary organisations and sport clubs to support local activities.

**A Resilient Wales - A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.**

**A Resilient Community** - The Council continues to be, protective and caring of the rich biodiversity in the Community. One of the Community Councillor's is a member of The Brecknock Botany Recording Group and is able to help and advise the Council on biodiversity matters. Some rare plant species exists within the Community; To further protect the biodiversity of the area, the Council and County Councillor are maintaining a dialogue with Officers at Powys County Council, discussing the mowing of verges on the cycle path to protect and avoid the mowing of wildflowers. The Council is required to publish a report on Biodiversity in the Community. This report is required under Welsh Government legislation, (the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 Section 6). The report is reviewed and updated every three years. The report has been updated in 2025. A copy exists on the Council website. The Council applies its responsibility in considering the impact on local biodiversity when commenting on planning applications for developments in the Community. The end of coal production has had a negative impact for local employment in the Community. The Global Centre of Rail Excellence is in the early stages of development; The development will change the industrial landscape providing a change in employment opportunities in the coming years. Opportunities to improve the footpath network in the Community are under consideration. A project named Paths to Prosperity, will look at improving the rights of way network to create links to suspended rights of way across Mynydd y Drym. The project will compliment tourism strategies in the area including the Henrhyd Falls attraction and increase its benefits to the community. A resolution to car parking capacity near Henrhyd Waterfall is urgently required. Unfortunately, funding for the highway improvement required is not available.

**A Healthier Wales - A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.**

**A Healthier Community** - The closure of the local Health Centre at Coelbren created difficulties in accessing healthcare. The nearest healthcare facilities are located at Seven Sisters and Ystradgynlais. Maintaining local bus services is essential for access to healthcare services. The Council supports the work of our County Councillor in maintaining the bus services connecting Coelbren to Neath and Swansea. The Council promotes a healthy Community and provides local amenities to support this aim. The Council runs three children's play parks located at Cefnbyrle, Caehopkin and Penycae. The Council undertakes regular safety inspections of the playgrounds. The playgrounds are also subject to annual inspections by RoSPA. The Council acts on safety recommendations contained in the annual RoSPA report. There is an extensive Footpath network in the Community with walks to suit everyone. The Council actively maintains the local footpath networks, within Powys

to provide access for exercise and enjoyment for local walkers and visitors; Footpaths within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park are maintained by the park authority. The Council is involved in discussions with Powys County Council on reopening rights of way over the former Nant Helen Opencast mine. A lottery funded project entitled Paths to Prosperity, run by Powys County Council and The Ramblers will support this initiative. The Council works closely with the County Council Rights of Way staff if significant repair and maintenance is required. The national cycle route 43 runs through the Community and is well used and enjoyed by both walkers and cyclists: The Council has provided defibrillators in the villages of Coelbren, Caehopkin and Ynyswen. Local guardians undertake regular inspections of the defibrillator to ensure regular availability of the units; The Council provides replacement batteries and pads when required. The Council has contributed towards the cost of a defibrillator at Penycae and the Craig y Nos Country Park. The North and East of the Community falls within the boundary of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. The Park provides a wide range of activities, easily accessible, such as hill walking, pony trekking, Country parks and the National Showcaves of Wales. The Council has purchased a Speed Indicator Device to reduce speeding on the A4067; The speed indicator device will also be used on Cefnbyrle Road; to improve road safety across the Community; The implementation of the 20mph speed limits will require a review on the use of the SID.

**A more equal Wales - A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances)**

**A more equal Community** - Connectivity to the main commercial centres is essential to provide equality for residents in the Community. However, the closure of local banking services created a further level of difficulty for residents. The opening of a new banking hub at Ystradgynlais is welcome. Effective public transport is essential to access these services. The Council supports the County Councillor with efforts to provide and maintain local bus services to allow residents to access education, employment, commercial and health services, these services are all located outside the Community. Digital connectivity in the remote areas of the Community remains an issue. The roll out of provision by Openreach continues but may not reach all properties; The Council offers its residents the opportunity to observe Council meetings on-line via ZOOM or to attend in person. Regular Facebook messages advertise the opportunity. It provides an opportunity for residents to raise concerns. The Council maintains the local footpath network for access to local people to use and enjoy. The Council was originally consulted on Paths to Prosperity a lottery funded footpath project promoted by Powys County Council and the Ramblers. The project involves using teams of volunteers to clear and improve blocked rights of way. The Council has suggested discussions are held when the suspended rights of way over Mynydd Y Drym are reopened.

## **A Wales of Cohesive Communities - Attractive, safe, viable and well-connected**

**A Cohesive Community** - The Community has a natural beauty including many attractive, well known, tourist attractions. In the spring and summer, the Community welcomes visitors to the many beauty spots and National attractions. The National Showcaves, Henrhyd Waterfall and Craig y Nos Castle and Country Park and the Wales Ape and Monkey Sanctuary are all located in the Community. Tourism helps to sustain local businesses. Maintaining sustainable public transport links in the Community is essential. A Traws Cymru service T6 runs through the Community. The service links Swansea to Brecon. The availability of effective local public transport is critical to maintain cohesiveness in the Community and maintaining well connected links and access to services for residents of Coelbren and Caehopkin. Speeding traffic is a major concern across the Community. The purchase of a speed indicator device has contributed to reducing the speed of traffic through Penycae on the A4067 to improve public safety. Speeding along the A4221, Inter Valley Road is also a concern. The Council raises the issue of speeding with the local Police, who attend Council meetings. The Council is improving its local communication strategy as required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. All public notices relating to Council meetings are advertised on the Council Facebook page with a link to the Council website to view the documents. Minutes of the Council meetings are published on the Council website within seven days following the Council meeting. Public documents are also shared with local social media groups in the Community.

## **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and thriving Welsh Language - A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage, and Welsh Language and which encourages people to participate in the arts and sports and recreation.**

**A Vibrant Community** - The Council supports and encourages the use of the Welsh language and is protective of Welsh culture; The Council provides financial support to local village halls and local voluntary groups such as local OAP groups, village action groups and sport clubs. Local groups meet on a regular basis. Village Action Groups, in the Community play an important role in the culture and heritage of the villages, providing regular events and annual carnivals. Welsh Language education, at primary level, is provided at Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr at Cwmtwrch and a new Welsh stream at Ysgol y Cribarth at Abercraf. Both schools are outside of the Community. Local tourist attractions in the Community are also integral to maintaining the vibrancy and culture of the Community in a difficult economic environment. The Council has agreed to create a series of Interpretive Panels across the Community. The initial panel will be in Coelbren to highlight the history of the village and the railway industry. Discussions will continue for panel locations in future years.

**A Globally Responsible Wales - A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.**

The Council will strive, locally, to work in partnerships to improve the economic, social and environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Council supports many local groups with annual donations. Biodiversity and the protection of rare plants and areas of special scientific interest is another key element to protect the local environment. Within the Community there are many species of rare plants. The Council has a statutory requirement under Welsh Government legislation to publish a report on biodiversity. This report is known as a Section 6 report. The most recent report was published in December 2025. The report can be viewed on the Council website. The reports are submitted to Welsh Government. From 2026 onwards, the Council will also be required, under Welsh Government legislation, to produce a Biodiversity Action Plan. The Council also owns and maintains a parcel of land at opposite Craig y Nos Castle. The Council in partnership with Powys County Council cleared the area of land overgrown with brambles. The Council has undertaken improvement work on the land, planting trees and undertaking an on-going programme of ground maintenance of regular mowing.

Speeding traffic passing through our villages is a major concern. The Council maintains a regular dialogue with the Police at Ystradgynlais to register concerns on speeding traffic. The Council focus is on both the A4067 and A4221. It is hoped the Police will strengthen its ability to monitor speed and prosecute offenders.

**Finance** – The Council annual budget is approximately £40,000; The Council precept was £27,000. The Council prepares and approves a responsible and sustainable budget based on the following cost headings. Administration and office costs, payroll and insurance, website support, IT support, Annual Audit fees, GDPR Strimming and clearing Footpath's to maintain and provide clear access for users. Regular inspection of playgrounds including maintenance and mowing Donations to local village halls, local voluntary groups and sports clubs to maintain the social fabric and culture of the Community. The finance reports together with the Annual Return and Audit opinion are available to view on the Council website. See link below; <http://www.taweuchafcommunitycouncil.co.uk> The Council received a qualified audit report from Audit Wales for the 2024/25 financial year; The Council has appealed the decision. The key expenditure under the budget headings is.

General Administration	£16,000
IT and Office costs	£1000
Insurance	£1500
Councillor Training	£1000

Footpath Maintenance	£5000
Playgrounds and Land	£3500
Street Furniture	£3000
Donations	£6300
Speed Indicator Device	£3500
VC Equipment	£2000