

# THE RADYR AND MORGANSTOWN ASSOCIATION

(A Civic Society affiliated to the Civic Trust for Wales)

## GENERAL MEETING

Old Church Rooms on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 7.30pm

**Present:** Cyril Williams (Chairman), David Silver (Vice Chairman), Nick Hawkins (Secretary), Bob Roberts (Treasurer), David Cargill, Allan Cook, Wyn Phillips, Sue Thomas, Cllrs Mike Diment, Judith Marsh, Rod McKerlich, Chris St Leger, David Suthers and 24 members.

**Apologies:** Terry & Betty Fitzgerald, Caroline Noall

### A Talk by Kevin Brennan MP

Mr Brennan spoke about his role as an MP and the changing role of Parliament. He said it was always a pleasure to come to Radyr, to the Old Church Rooms, a place where he had attended many gatherings in the past.

He was elected in June 2001 when Tony Blair was Prime minister, just before '9/11'. Security at the Houses of Parliament was lax, but that all changed at 9/11 - as had many other aspects of parliamentary life.

He spoke of the importance of parliamentary buildings. When the old Houses of Parliament burnt down in 1834 (only saving Westminster Hall) the architect Charles Barry was appointed to build what we see today: a Victorian state of the art building. It may now be in poor shape, vermin infested and in need of substantial repair, but it still reflects the UK Constitution - the separation of Monarchy and the Commons. It would take some years to refurbish the present building and some say it should be turned into a museum with Parliament moving elsewhere. He would not like that. He felt that the present building conveys history and prestige. Whilst it is true that it is the people and not the building that are important, he was proud and honoured to work within such a building and would wish to stay.

Regarding parliamentary life, he contrasted the opinion of the famous MP Jennie Lee who, when asked a question in the 1950s about dealing with her constituent's questions, answered "she didn't do that" with the current situation. Now MPs receive 1000s of communications every month via every conceivable method. In some ways it is now too easy to contact an MP and the role of the local MP has fundamentally changed. He advised that, if someone really wants to have a considered reply, they must write as an individual. Having 500 identical letters for a specific campaign is impressive but simply invites an automatic response.

On a personal level he saw himself as someone who is there to help his constituents, to campaign for them, make things happen, be a social entrepreneur, even an amateur psychiatrist. He did, though, note that sometimes the most pressing problems come from the most apologetic people. Sorting the wheat from the chaff is essential.

In 2005 he became an Assistant Government Whip and had a role in maintaining Labour Party discipline. In 2013 MPs have become much more independent of their whips - witness the recent voting regarding Syria. This was important - governments do need to be called to account. And governments need to be able to exercise power. He was impressed that a Select Committee could now command a businessman like Rupert Murdoch to attend a meeting under power of law. Parliament needs to have power over the media.

In summary, he said that MPs need to have a strong constituency link, to be able to identify the boundaries between their various roles, not to be unduly influenced by big finance and respect that they must always be open to challenge. He accepted that the parliamentary system was not perfect

but he was always minded of the Winston Churchill quote, “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried”.

In questions, Mr Brennan was asked further about the whipping system; he did not think it could be abandoned altogether as there is a need for a government to keep discipline over its manifesto, but it could be loosened. Regarding the number of Welsh MPs, he thought there was an argument for the number to be reduced to achieve evenness of constituency sizes, but this did need to be based on the true number of constituents; in his experience many people end up not being registered. In some ways he mourned the passing of charismatic powerful leaders - Thatcher, Blair - but in other ways they were not always a good idea - they can easily become infected by misplaced over-confidence. He was fairly relaxed over the influence of Trade Unions. He did not think they bought influence; it is important that organisations involved in the working environment have their say. It is essential that governmental decisions are based on what is really happening - he was concerned that many MPs have no experience of life outside politics. Regarding being in opposition, he said it could be ‘good fun’ but, basically, MPs wanted the ability to change things - in reality, ‘opposition stinks’. And finally, regarding the number of County Councils, he accepted that there were probably too many but warned against the huge expense that would be incurred in reorganisation.

At the conclusion of the talk, the Chairman thanked Mr Brennan for his very interesting and insightful talk and presented him with a bottle of whisky.

## **Cardiff Local Development Plan - an update**

The topic was led by Cllr Rod McKerlich. He conveyed his thanks to Kevin Brennan MP and Mark Drakeford AM for trying to ‘talk some sense’ into the process. He noted that the number of dwellings in the R&M Community had increased significantly over the previous 30 years but nothing had been done to improve the transport infrastructure. Traffic bottlenecks were now common at peak periods, and the same situation was true for St Fagans, Llandaff etc. The proposal was now to put over 5000 dwellings to the south of Radyr, with more at Creigiau and beyond without any guarantees that additional roads or railway links would be in place before they are built. He accepted that Cardiff had to have an LDP without which anybody could propose to build anywhere but he questioned whether it was correct for the Welsh Government to insist that Cardiff must plan for an additional 41,000 dwellings in the plan period (up to 2026) without taking account of the wider regional context. There was asymmetry between Council and Government planning.

In discussion, it was noted that other neighbouring Councils had concluded their LDPs so there was little opportunity to start regional planning now. Also that, in Victorian times, railways would be built first and houses afterwards - and there was not even a requirement now for the developers of the land to fund the provision of the necessary infrastructure. One disturbing fact about the current proposal was that houses were being planned for the west of Cardiff whereas all the new jobs were being created in the east.

Cllr McKerlich said that more detail about the LDP was arriving daily and the full picture, and the impact on R&M, was still difficult to assess properly. A public meeting at the Comprehensive School was being organised for 7<sup>th</sup> October to give an opportunity for all residents to hear the full details, and to have their say. Details, including maps, would also be available to view at Radyr Library at a Community Council exhibition on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> September. He did, though, warn that totally opposing the plans in the LDP would almost certainly be counterproductive; if the LDP failed we could end up with far worse.

## **Minutes of the previous General Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

The minutes were approved. All matters arising were on the agenda.

## Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that he had now finalised the finances for the May Festival. Tenovus had received a cheque for £4000 (including a top up from RMA funds of £19.32); they had also received £120 in cheques paid directly to them plus other monies from events they had run themselves. The Association had made a net surplus of £562 but had already spent £820 in purchasing additional material for the marquees and a new BBQ. Nevertheless, the Association still had a healthy retained balance of £6284. There were no questions

## Christmas Tree lighting Ceremony on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2013

The Secretary reported that planning had now started in earnest for the ceremony which would follow the pattern of previous years - lighting of the three main trees at the Granny Park, Lychgate Gardens and Windsor Park followed by a Fete in Station Road (with the arrival of Santa). LATCH, the chosen Charity for the year, were still seeking a celebrity to switch on the lights. It would be useful to have more stalls in Station Road, particularly from local organisations. This was an opportunity for organisations to promote themselves, make a bit of money and join in the fun.

## Festival 2014

David Cargill reported that the first planning meeting would be held on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> September; a key item to decide was the overall Theme. He noted that most of the Arts content had already been defined, thanks to Allan Cook, and that it looked like the local schools would be even more involved based on meetings he had with them recently together with Cllr Sue McKerlich.

## General R&M Matters

The following matters were raised:

**Special Website Meeting.** The Association was organising a meeting in the OCR on 4<sup>th</sup> November to assist local organisations make the most of the facilities in the R&M website, and generally to improve communications within the Community. It was recognised that existing methods - the website, Radyr Chain, etc - did not reach everyone, notably the newer estates, so work was being done on implementing 'Social Media' (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). All this would be featured in the meeting. Invitations would be sent out soon, but anyone was welcome to attend.

**Hanging Baskets.** The Association had taken the decision to assume responsibility from Cardiff Council for looking after the baskets in Station Road. The watering system had been overhauled and the baskets refilled at a cost of just over £200. The baskets would be taken down before Christmas and would be remounted in late spring 2014.

## Any Other Business

**Library Exhibitions.** It was noted that a new round of Saturday morning exhibitions was being planned for local organisations in Radyr Library. Organisations wishing to be involved should get in touch with either the Library or David Cargill.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at 7.30pm in the Old Church Rooms when the speaker will be Martin Chamberlain of Forest Farm.