



Cymdeithas Brycheiniog a Chyfeillion yr Amgueddfa
Brecknock Society and Museum Friends
Registered Charity number 518041

Future positioning and operation of y Gaer, Brecon

Second Statement from the Brecknock Society and Museum Friends

This statement is a sequel to that distributed on July 22nd 2019.

The Executive Council of the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends (BS&MF) met for a special meeting on Monday July 29th in its capacity as the Society's Trustees and having received views from its members and the wider Breconshire community. The conclusions of this meeting were communicated in a letter sent to Powys County Council Leader, Cllr Rosemarie Harris and senior County Council officers on August 1st.

Our letter reported that the BS&MF Council can understand the very difficult position in which Powys County Council finds itself in terms of current and future revenue funding, and also the benefits that Powys CC and NPTC Group might perceive from the proposed partnership. However, the BS&MF Council is adamant that, as currently envisaged, it will impact disastrously on the benefits that existing partners expect from y Gaer and for which they have been waiting for so long.

Our letter continued "As a Society and charitable body, our 'aims and objects' focus on the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery. The benefits that will be provided to the community and to visitors through its renovated facilities have been central to the Society's commitment and fundraising, and to the future involvement of its members. With this as our basis we totally oppose the reallocation to NPTC of any parts of the Museum and Art Gallery." "The BS&MF Council is also very concerned about the effective functioning of y Gaer as a whole. The current proposal would destroy the very concept of y Gaer and its imaginative collaboration between Library, Museum and Art Gallery for which so many, both within and outside Powys CC, have laboured for so long. The Society together with other partners, stakeholders and the community has welcomed and been inspired by the 'three component' concept and has seen y Gaer as the model for a pattern that could well be followed elsewhere. We cannot accept that this vision can be allowed to fade".

In order to take matters forward we asked for a very early meeting of the existing y Gaer Stakeholders and Funders, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund. At this meeting Powys CC's perception of the benefits of the proposed link with NPTC for the community could be presented in detail, as well as evidence on NPTC's track record as a suitable partner in such an arrangement. We also supported the demands for a public meeting and requested

that all stakeholders in y Gaer should be invited to be present, perhaps to sit with Powys CC officers on the platform. We had already agreed with Powys CC officers that the two local funders (the Brecknock Art Trust and the BS&MF) would meet with them during August to discuss the developing situation.

Our letter continued “The outcome of these processes would be a new or restated Vision and a programme of implementation to which all existing partners could either commit or from which they could withdraw”.

“To elaborate on our Society’s concerns for the Museum and Art Gallery, the key issues are the reduction of exhibition space and the damage to a well-conceived plan of display and engagement. The designs for the Brycheiniog gallery and the Brecon gallery have been carefully worked out to complement each other and to provide resident and visitor alike with real insights into our lovely and historic area. The interpretative terminals (funded by the Garfield Weston Foundation following an application by the BS&MF) will provide the extra information that will encourage people to go out from y Gaer to explore this wonderful part of the world. Inserting into the Brecon Gallery some show-cases for part of the art collection, and the associated changes envisaged for part of the Brycheiniog gallery, would completely destroy the integrity of these displays.”

“The art collection, thanks in large measure to the work of the Brecknock Art Trust (supported by the Art Fund and the V & A Purchase Fund), is now of national significance and must be given the proper space that the permanent art gallery will afford. The Sir John Lloyd Gallery, specially fitted out with environmental and security controls, is suitable for the display of loan material from any museum or gallery in the world. Losing this facility will stop the creation of special exhibitions, in which items from the Museum’s own collections will be combined with loan items. These exhibitions will draw visitors into the area from across the UK and provide the boost to regeneration that, from the outset, has been envisaged for y Gaer. Last, but not least, the Victorian school room which will provide generations of school children with an introduction to their past and their culture must be retained.”

We concluded our letter by stating that the proposals and the secretive way in which they had been developed had caused a loss of trust between Powys CC and the BS&MF as well as the community. “We have been profoundly shocked by the discovery that you did not, at the outset, come to your local funding partners to discuss the revenue shortfall and to see if we could offer some solutions to the problem. The loss of trust is also having an impact on the goodwill felt towards y Gaer by the many people who have offered their services as volunteers and upon whom so much will depend. Volunteers have been seen as being integral to the success of y Gaer from the very moment that Powys CC began to develop the ‘Connecting Communities and Collections’ project in conjunction with our Society, the Heritage Lottery Fund (as it was then), the Breconshire community and other partners.”

The Brecknock Society & Museum Friends stands ready to do everything possible to redeem the situation that has arisen!

Brecknock Society & Museum Friends – August 6th 2019 www.brecknocksociety.co.uk