

ARTHOG

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COMMUNITY
COUNCIL

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4th November 2019

Rt Hon Liz Saville-Roberts MP
Angorfa Heol Meurig
Dolgellau
LL40 1LN

Dear Liz,

In response to your email asking to be informed of the outcome of the meeting hosted by the Arthog Community Council on the 29th October, chaired by Sturt Eves. This was for residents only. There was no Press and no representation from Gwynedd Council. The Community Council are grateful to Graham Hogg and Eluned Morgan AM, who kindly paid for and arranged delivery of the Notice of the Meeting. **The Village Hall was full!**

It may be that a second meeting will now be held in the not too distant future so others can attend who were not able to do so on the night. The village Hall, due to Health and Safety restrictions, can only accommodate 100 people at one time.



Firstly, please do not let this letter get lost amongst B for Brexit and E for Election. This situation, to the residents of Fairbourne, Friog and Arthog takes precedence over what may happen re Brexit, or indeed who wins the election.

The main, and most important outcome of the meeting was that it highlighted the deep anxiety, persistent worry, and unhappiness that is felt by many residents in the Community. One lady who attended the meeting told of her anxiety morning noon and night. The feeling of utter hopelessness, not knowing from one day to the next if this was the day, "she would be told to leave her home of many years". Her despair was felt by all and actually moved some people to tears. No amount of counselling is going to alleviate that fear. This toll on the residents of Fairbourne is cruel, unprecedented, and unacceptable in the 5th richest country in the world, a member of the G7 and G20, a member of the UNEP, etc. Help is needed here.

One written statement from Gwynedd Council to remove this fear and anxiety would be to truthfully set out a programme for the future. By that I mean: to state categorically that unless there is a breach in the wall or a very unlikely tsunami, and to honour the statement made by the NRW that they would continue to maintain the sea wall until 2054, that no attempt will be made to forcibly, or in other ways, to remove residents from their homes. It is understood that come 2045 Gwynedd Council **may** already be taking steps to be able to offer some residents the chance to relocate. It is appreciated that it will be impossible for the whole community to be relocated in one action, come 2054. And we also need to remember that this is dependent on data figures regards rising sea levels being accurate. Currently, much of it seems to be supposition! By making this statement it will offer residents the opportunity to fully evaluate their options. For instance, do they try and sell? 2054, as of next year, will be 34 years hence which to some people is a lifetime. It would allow residents to evaluate whether to continue spending on improving property rather than just maintaining property. It would give residents back the "choice" to make their own decisions.

Residents feel that Gwynedd Council is looking for any excuse to start moving people out and to start the process of decommissioning. It is feared that as soon as a home floods, be it from the sea or from flood water run-off, Gwynedd Council will start that process. Currently the news is full of communities throughout England and Wales that are suffering from flooding. However, there is no mention of decommissioning regards these areas, and these are areas that are prone to flooding annually. FAIRBOURNE HAS NOT FLOODED, not even in 2014 during the great storm. Barmouth, Aberystwyth and many other areas DID flood.

What also came out of the meeting was the fact, repeated and repeated, that the state of the ditches in Fairbourne is due to inappropriate maintenance over a number of years. As a result of a meeting held in Aberystwyth where James Morris and Lowri Norrington Davies, (Welsh Assembly), Stuart Eves, Theresa Eves, Mike Thrussell and Angela Thomas, (Arthog Community Council) also Lisa Goodier and Huw Williams (Gwynedd Council) were present, and the ditches were discussed in length, and as a consequence a programme of de-silting by the NRW commenced shortly afterwards. This is much appreciated and hopefully will

continue. It is also appreciated that over the past 7/8 years the NRW has spent approximately 8 million pounds on the defense of Fairbourne. However, the old sea wall now has a purpose made breach in it turning the old football field into marsh land and bringing the possibility of flooding closer to the village. Also, the recent project at Friog Corner will no doubt help protect the corner against a 2014 type storm, but the design made by Royal Haskoning "did not consider the risk of seepage occurring through the embankment". (Review of Revetment Design at Friog Corner, Geotechnical Peer Review prepared by Black & Veatch for NRW 12 July 2019"). The result of than non-consideration is that on a high tide saltwater is now seeping into the Caravan Park and is having to be pumped out into the freshwater ditch system. This is of major concern to the residents as it puts the ditch system under increased pressure.

A question that arose again and again was, "Why has Gwynedd Council/NRW not carried out an analysis of the costings of decommissioning and relocation against the cost of continuing to maintain the sea wall"? This was in fact a question that was asked of Gwynedd Council through a Freedom of Information Request" and came back with NO answer. Gwynedd Council/NRW must compare these costs and make their findings public.

A major point of concern that was mentioned was that people continue to buy homes that come up for sale in Fairbourne without being fully informed. Although these people are aware of the potential flood risk of buying a home here, some as recent as 6 months ago, it would appear that during Solicitors searches **no mention** is being made of the fact that **decommissioning** is proposed at a date hence. One case in question, the purchasers have made a complaint to "Infotech" who supplied local government searches to their solicitor but did not mention decommissioning. Is this information out there? This is not an isolated case within Fairbourne.

The Community Council has now, at last, obtained several copies from Gwynedd Council of the Fairbourne Multi Agency Flood Evacuation Plan. It is marked up as **OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE**. Why? This is a document that should be supplied to each and every home in Fairbourne. It is very technically detailed, but having read it, it really does not put minds at rest other than knowing there is a plan in place. It does not tell you how residents will be rescued and to where specifically. On page 24, 2.2 Communicating with the Public, it says, "The more information the public have prior to an incident, the better prepared they are likely to be and the better able to respond to public warnings and advice during an emergency". "During an incident, all means of communication will need to be considered including use of social media and radio. Where safe and appropriate to do so more direct means could be utilized", "Door to door by suitably qualified and equipped responders". "Loud hailers, handheld or vehicle based if applicable". If the situation is that bad surely there will be no door to door access or road access. In 2014 everybody stayed calm, nobody was flooded, and life was not disrupted. Given that Gwynedd Council maintain they have an evacuation plan in place, why has the relevant document not already been sent to each home in Fairbourne, Arthog and Friog? Surely, the quicker the residents know the Councils intention re an emergency, the better!

The questions relating to where residents will be rehoused?, what kind of housing will be made available?, will families be split up?, who will bear the costs?, etc, will continue to be

raised. Realistically, residents now realise that they will not get an answer as it seems obvious that Gwynedd Council themselves have no solutions to any of these questions which have been repeatedly asked over the past 5-years or more.

The following has been asked for by a resident who attended the meeting. These questions have been previously voiced by the Community Council since the 2014 start date with, as yet, no solutions or answers given.

Quote: "What is needed is a "Social Impact Statement" from Gwynedd Council specifically for Fairbourne. It should address time frames, age groups, business, health needs, along with an associated action plan to mitigate the effects of the enforced dereliction of the Village." Quote ends.

Please, no more expensive glossy brochures from Gwynedd Council that provide no answers or solutions. Please use the money wisely and put it towards a positive future for Fairbourne and its residents.

It is obvious to Fairbourne residents that the village and its occupants are being used as a form of test case regards communities elsewhere throughout Wales, and probably the UK, that will, in future, be subjected to potential decommissioning due to rising sea levels. The lack of information, solutions, respect and concern that has been shown to Fairbourne residents since 2014 is blatantly obvious and lessons need to be learned by those that facilitated this situation at local government level. The fact remains though, that the solution to this sorry state will only be found at national government level and true responsibility needs to be realised by those in ultimate power. What's more, this is bigger than individual political factions. This will become a national issue that will dictate the very future and well being of Wales as a nation.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Thomas

Angela Thomas – Clerk

For and on behalf of Arthog Community Council

cc. Mark Drakeford – First Minister – Welsh Assembly

Eluned Morgan AM

Lesley Griffiths AM

Graham Hogg – Labour Party Candidate for Dwyfor Meirionnydd

Lord Elis-Thomas AM

James Morris – Welsh Assembly

Lowri Norrington-Davies – Welsh Assembly – could you please forward a copy to

James Morris – we do not have nor can we find an email address for him. Many thanks.

Catrin Wager – Gwynedd Council

Huw Williams – Gwynedd Council

Lisa Goodier – Gwynedd Council

Stuart Eves – Arthog Community Council