

Llantwit Major Chamber of Trade and Commerce Townspeople meeting.

A meeting called by the Llantwit major Chamber of Trade was held at Llantwit Major Town Hall on Tuesday evening (15<sup>th</sup> April). Some 25 people attended, made up of traders, town councillors and members of the general public.

The meeting had been called to discuss the general downturn in trade in the town, the causes of it and the ideas that could be adopted to attempt to reverse the trend.

The Chamber President welcomed the attendees and set out the background behind the meeting. He said that in recent years several businesses had closed down in the town and had not been replaced, and now many traders were concerned that, although the longer term was looking hopeful with the planned arrival of the Defence Academy and the possible development of Llandow Newydd, it was the next few years that would be a struggle to survive. The arrival of the train service had been a two-edged sword for Llantwit Major, whilst it was in some ways an asset to the town, it also had the effect of taking shoppers out of the town to the nearby centres of Bridgend and Cardiff. What was required was a plan to retain Llantwit Major residents as shoppers in the town, and encourage other shoppers to come into the town. The Chamber had, in conjunction with Creative Rural Communities, recently initiated a cheque book scheme that would be circulated to tourist accommodations in South Wales, offering discounts and other benefits for shopping in Llantwit Major. It was also liaising with local traders who felt that their trade had particularly reduced recently to encourage them to apply for business rate reduction. He also highlighted the recent report by Martin Sewell that encouraged co-operation between local traders and the need to hold special events to attract shoppers.

The discussion was thrown open to the meeting. In a generally upbeat and encouraging discussion several ideas were put forward for the Chamber to pursue. These included having a trial period of late night shopping to encourage those residents who could not shop in normal trading hours, consulting with the town manager to attract some of the smaller national chains to set up in Llantwit Major, encouraging an influx of a greater variety of retail outlets particularly in the clothing and food lines and attempting to introduce specialist businesses into the town. The main emphasis was to introduce a variety of businesses that, along with those already established, would make shopping in Llantwit Major an all round experience. Councillor Dave Lane gave news on the Boverton Road Redevelopment plans, although it was noted regretfully that this did not include the old part of the town. One speaker informed the meeting that Llantwit Major had recently been mentioned in a Sunday Times report as one of the best places to live in the UK, yet no publicity had been given to this tremendous news. Another speaker referred back to the Sewell report and how it laid great emphasis on the need for the town to become a "department store", not only by recommending other businesses in the town to their own customers, but by forming informal groups of businesses that were able to provide services within a theme, for example wedding services. There were further comments from a recently arrived resident who found that people in the town were very friendly and the traders helpful and courteous.

The meeting closed with the president thanking everyone for their helpful input.