

Keeping Welshpool Tidy - A Paper for Consideration

I am grateful for the “in principle” approval given to my suggestion that we invite people to consider whether they might be “Litter and Tidiness Champions” for their particular patch of our town. The idea came from

- (a) 16 years of doing a regular litter-pick myself (I’ve been doing this as a Keep Wales Tidy volunteer since the preparation for the Queen’s visit in 2010);
- (b) Hearing of an initiative elsewhere along these lines that has met with a good measure of success;
- (c) Conversations with local residents and the Powys County Council operative who does an excellent job emptying bins in the town (and beyond); and
- (d) The simple fact that I want to see our town tidy and safe and also wildlife-friendly!

There are a few of us still doing regular litter picks, and from time to time we have set up (as we did in Spring Clean Cymru Fortnight) litter-pick events. Schools, churches and even McDonalds have organised litter picks, and in the past we have had initiatives like Groundforce. I intend to continue to liaise with James Thompson of PCC, Jodie Griffiths of Keep Wales Tidy, local schools and others to do litter pick events - these are important; but my proposal now is different. It aims to set up a network of people whose main role is simply to notice and report on tidiness issues on their patch. Some of them may well be folk who come to litter picks and do a bit themselves in between times, but others may not be. This, though, is about spotting areas where there may be problems or accumulations of litter so they can be tackled by the appropriate authorities. What then happens may vary from James Thompson getting together a team of volunteers to clear a patch, to Martin from PCC (or our Ops Team if it’s our patch) getting to know about an overflowing bin - or maybe a vandalised one - that needs attention. My intention is to set up a system that helps direct existing council staff to areas of urgent need, rather than being about volunteers doing work that “should be done by Powys”.

Most people do dispose of litter sensibly, and our existing litter bins around the town are well-used. Those who don’t use bins to dispose of their litter are the exception - but are of course committing a public nuisance. (Having said that, I accept that another annoying source of litter is the stuff that blows out of kerbside recycling bins. Why is the night before bin collection so often windy?! I wish we weren’t using such comparatively flimsy containers for kerbside recycling. Other councils may use sturdier wheely bins for recyclables - but these are not appropriate for the vehicles used by Powys). Anyway, while our Council Tax manages to pay for bin collections from homes, for the provision of on-street bins and for their emptying, it doesn’t pay for people to tidy up after thoughtless people have dropped litter, much as we might wish it did. I suspect that for it to do so we’d be faced with a larger increase in Council Tax than the 4.9% we’ve already been saddled with.

My proposal is that we test the water regarding Litter & Tidiness Champions, perhaps by first focusing on one particular area of the town, and reviewing how that works before, I hope, being able to roll the project out further. I'm very much open to suggestions about how it might be best to proceed, and how we train and prepare volunteers to carry out this role. Alongside this, I would also like to get a "Love Our Town - Keep Welshpool Tidy" (or similar) poster out and about, and in as many shop windows, notice boards, pubs and cafes etc, as possible, and propose that we might invite children in our schools to submit designs, in a competition for which I would be glad to source the prizes. While there may be budgetary implications if the whole thing takes off, I don't see that there need be any cost to the Council at this stage, other than maybe printing the posters.

Litter is an annoyance, and it spoils the look of our town. It's harmful to wildlife, and where it isn't cleared it can attract vermin. On the whole, Welshpool is a sight better in this regard than some places I've been, but I'd like it to be better still. So my hope is that this scheme can enable volunteers and statutory services to work together to greater effect, can increase awareness and encourage support from the wider public, and will make a real difference to how our town feels and looks. I commend it for your support.

Bill Rowell