

Cymuned: What makes a community?

Welsh community group Cymuned describes its work and how it is supporting the people of Rhostyllen in their resistance to a housing development on National Trust land at Erddig.

Carrie Harper



The value of community

What makes a community? What ingredients come together to form the bond that makes a strong, sustainable and positive environment in which we all can thrive? We all want an environment in which we feel safe, secure and have a genuine connection with those around us. In the modern era of commercialism and globalisation this type of living environment is becoming increasingly rare. Many people have never even experienced such a place.

Communities are built through a shared experience, the various aspects of our daily lives that are intrinsically linked with the people around us. It is our shared identity, our culture, heritage and language that bind people together to form strong communities. This is a delicate balance, but one which can accommodate both inward and outward natural migration and still thrive. As long as the links are in place, it can grow, develop and happily adapt to the changes that inevitably come over time.

Imagine being part of such a community. It is surely something we would all strive for. A safe and familiar place for us to live and bring up our children, something to be proud of and to protect.

How community is being lost

But what happens if the essential links of identity and culture are broken? What if the balance within your community suddenly changes, and you experience a mass influx of people who do not speak your language, do not share your identity and have a significant financial advantage over you? Your community begins to break up; it cannot integrate so many new people all at once.

Before you know it, you are a minority in your own community; you have very little say about what happens. Imagine how you would feel at becoming a minority culture, your way of life being changed beyond all recognition. The community in which you were brought up is being replaced, you are being replaced. Now imagine this happening across your entire country.

What is Cymuned?

Cymuned, meaning 'community' in English, is a communities pressure group born in the heartlands of the Fro Cymraeg (Welsh-speaking Wales). The group, based in Gwynedd, began in 2001. Its aim was to give a voice to Welsh-speaking communities being threatened by an ever-increasing number of holiday homes and a lack of local housing. With the use of the language currently down to 20% on a national level, these communities are still facing a massive threat to their very existence.

Non-Welsh-speakers with a financial advantage over local people are moving into these areas in increasing numbers. Almost all (over 90%) refuse to learn the language, and due to their significant numbers, the linguistic balance within the community very often shifts to English, thus threatening the very existence of Welsh as a living community language. In other areas across the country, Welsh identity is also under threat, especially in non-Welsh-speaking communities.

Wreccsam also was once part of the Fro Cymraeg. It was a Welsh-speaking area not so very long ago. Due to the influx of so many English speakers over the years, the language is no longer in use in everyday life in many of the villages in which it used to thrive. The sense of

Welsh identity, however, is very much still alive, although it is under increasing threat because of the amount of speculative development taking place across the area. Local people are being priced out of the housing market and many people feel that the sense of community that once used to exist in the area is fast disappearing. The local council in Wreccsam seems hell bent on city status, and at the same time it ignores the needs of the very people it is supposed to represent. This has led to an increasing number of people in the area wanting to do something practical to safeguard the future of their communities. Cymuned offers local people a voice, and a way to challenge the decisions that are being made - decisions that are bringing our communities in Wales to their knees.

Housing that locals can afford

Cymuned is not against natural migration. It is of benefit to communities to welcome in those from different backgrounds and cultures. Neither are we against development, but what we want to see is development that benefits local people.

What is happening across Wales at the moment is an unusual level of life-style-motivated migration. The very dynamics of our communities are being changed so dramatically and at such a pace that it is impossible to integrate the numbers of people moving to our towns and villages. What we are campaigning for is equality; we want to protect our identity, language and culture. We want to be able to afford to live in the communities in which we have lived for generations. If local people continue to be forced out of their own communities on the scale which is happening now, our very identity as Welsh people will disappear.

We are calling on councils across Wales to adopt a policy of no new build except for local need. There are enough properties in the current housing market to supply the wants of those wishing to move to our towns and villages. What we need now is

Hafod Quarry update

Pauline Smout



Rhostyllen campaigner against the housing development on Erddig

balance, a chance for our communities to recover from some of the dramatic changes that have taken place.

How you can get involved

You can help us protect areas in Wreccsam from speculative development. We are currently campaigning with local people against plans by the National Trust to build 223 houses opposite the Welsh village of Rhostyllen. As is the norm, local people will not be able to afford the houses. Rhostyllen is one of the places that we have been describing here. It is still a close knit community, a place where people know each other, and it has a strong sense of shared identity. You can sign the petition against the development at www.rhostyllen.com.

If you have moved to our country, you have probably done so to enjoy our culture, our heritage and our communities. Help us to protect them for future generations to enjoy - don't let them become lifeless suburbs for commuters. Get in touch with us and help us to make a difference.

If you want to do something to help us protect Cymru, you can contact us by email: cymuned@cymuned.org, by post: Cymuned, 64 Stryd Fawr, Pwllheli, Gwynedd LL53 5RR or by telephone: **01758 612712**.

STOP PRESS

Denied a public meeting on the Erddig issue, Rhostyllen residents are utilising a little-known regulation contained in the Local Government Act 1972 to insist that WCBC should hold a referendum. The council must take the result of this vote into account in the planning process.

Landfilling continues at Hafod Quarry, Johnstown, despite several outstanding legal and planning issues:

Firstly, the Modification Order (to alter the outdated 1995 planning permission) is still with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) who have now requested a third Modification Order – outrageous that the original wasn't thrown out as inadequate and a new planning application ordered.

Secondly, the planning application to extract clay from the landfill area, i.e. enlarge the void, is still awaiting determination in Wrexham.

Thirdly, our appeal to Europe over desecration of the Special Area of Conservation for Europe is languishing in Brussels despite being put forward by the European Parliament.

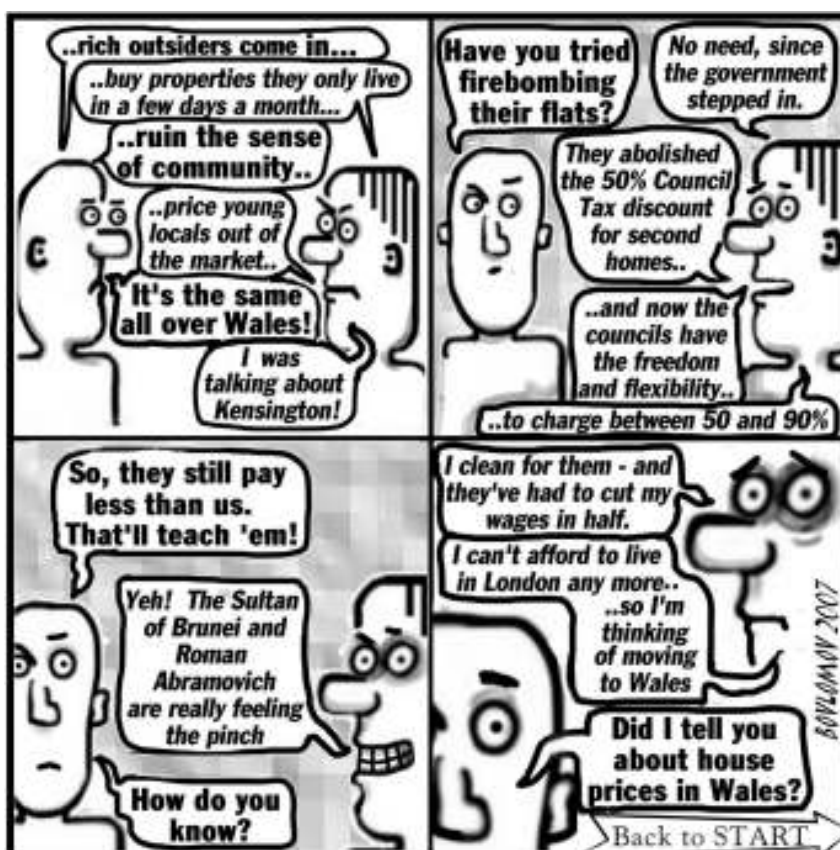


Lorries tipping at Hafod

Fourthly, Mersey Waste Holdings (MWH) are suing Wrexham County Borough Council for £5.6 million because they aren't allowed to work in the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Alice in Wonderland!! MWH knew all about the SSSI/SAC and many legal and planning problems associated with the site, after fighting through planning, a public inquiry and the High Court, all BEFORE they bought the site. How can they now plead ignorance?

Our legal team remains supportive and the protest at the landfill gate continues each morning, until all the above are resolved.

Residents continue to witness constant breaches of conditions – frag (foam lumps that look like boulders to drivers) and mud in the road, ghastly smells, litter over the boundary etc., but no prosecutions follow.



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