

Episode 207 – Bailey Hill and Anti Vaping: School and Community Engagement with Mold Town Council

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Welcome the Exchange Podcast. I'm Beth Smith and part the Good Practice Exchange team here at Audit Wales. As part of our current series on community and town councils in Wales, today I'm in Mold and more specifically at Bailey Hill, which a Norman Castle site at the top of the town, which has recently been redeveloped.

Today we're discussing the benefits of youth engagement and the importance of ensuring younger generations have a voice in shaping their communities. We're also discussing the council's work to preserve and celebrate Mold's rich community heritage.

Okay, good morning. So I'm chatting to George and Ciara today. So good morning both. Tell us a little bit about the project.

George (Youth Council)

This vaping project has been something we have been deeply passionate about and we have been trying to work on for a very long time, ever since we first learned of the issues that have been occurring with vaping, not just in our school, but in Mold as a wider like community.

Ciara (Youth Council)

Yeah, it's obviously a major problem amongst young people, especially we found. So the youth council and has sought to collaborate with the school council and we've discussed how it's affected the environment but also people's wellbeing.

For example, last year our school completed SHRN survey, which evaluates each individual's like mental and physical health and stuff. And we found that like quite a significant amount of students have been vaping and it has increased. But then we've also found um that there's been issues like drain blockage, which has amounted to like £6,000 worth of damage.

So with these problems, we've sort of collaborated together, both councils, the school and Mold, to try and find a solution.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

It sounds like a really positive movement. So you talk about the, you know, the wellbeing, environmental issues. Were they the real sparks then behind wanting to set this project up?

Ciara (Youth Council)

Yeah, definitely. Especially in a high school setting and with this evaluation that we did, just gave like the hard evidence of the effect and knowing that we had to make a movement for like the community as a whole.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

So how did it come out? How did you actually start? You know, how did, how did you set things up?

George (Youth Council)

Okay. Well, as I said, we learned eventually just look through like word of mouth and also just like about going around school that there were a lot of people who were vaping, which is obviously, you know, not a very good thing. And we also unfortunately received 6,000 pounds worth of damage to our school drains because of vapes, like being put down the toilets, for example.

So that was obviously another big issue, and so that's about when we went to the Mold Town Council and we discussed the problem with them and they suggested that we apply for a grant, which we did, and they ended up giving us £200. Yeah, £200. Yeah, as Ciara mentioned, to spend on a campaign to reduce vaping and we ended up using that money to buy display boards which we could use for the vaping project and also any other future projects which we may have planned.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

That's great. And what's been the sort of feedback initially, you know, from, you know, people in school and people in the community? Have you received any feedback from the project?

Ciara (Youth Council)

Quite a wide range, actually, because not only did we do these display boards, when we basically with the display boards, we presented them in like things like option evening and parents evening so that parents and families could also see.

That was quite positive because it was displayed in our school library, which is a very like popular, like social sort of place. But then we followed up this year.

We, as a school council, we presented assemblies and to all younger students and sixth form, and just discussing the issues of vaping, and some of the lesser known facts, like, for example, the contents in a vape. And we were getting feedback from all over the school, from students, but from staff as well, saying how they learned things and how that was useful. So it was really helpful to see that we were actually making the difference and getting the feedback and the effects of um our hard work.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

That's great. And what are your plans then for the future? Have you thought about how you might take this forward?

Ciara (Youth Council)

Well, weather dependent next week, we are opening a stall on Mold Market to also and present to the community alongside all the other work we've done because It's important that we are reaching out to as many communities as possible since we've covered the school community, and parents and families, but we can reach out into the citizens of the town as well just to keep it nice and generalised.

George (Youth Council)

We also hope that later, after this project is done, we can move on to other hopefully beneficial projects, such as our next one, which we're thinking is going to be about equality and equity. And we hope that we can also work with the Moll Town Council for that as well, so we can continue to just make a difference, which is obviously very important and something we are deeply passionate about.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

It is, it's great. And how is the relationship between yourselves and the town council then? It sounds like it's a really positive one.

Ciara (Youth Council)

Yes, they meet us, I think it's around four times year to have the meetings as a sort of ad hoc collaboration. um So yeah, we work very closely with them, especially with this vaping project. This is really like displayed that and how we can rely on them and vice versa.

George (Youth Council)

Yeah, our relationship with the Moll Town Council is something we're very proud of. And we, as said, we hope we can continue to work with them for our future projects as well.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

So George, Ciara, thank you so much for your time today. It's been really, really great chatting to you and hearing about all the great work you're doing.

Good morning. So we're here in Mould today and I'm chatting to Deputy Mayor Pete Dando and Councillor Chris Bithell. Good morning both. Good morning. and Can I ask you just to tell us a little bit about your roles and just introduce yourselves to those listening?

Cllr Pete Dando (Deputy Mayor, Mold Town Council)

Yep. Hi. So my name's Pete Dando. I've been on the Mould Town Council for four years now and with this year currently I'm Deputy Mayor.

Cllr Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

Hi, I'm Councillor Chris Bithell. I'm a town councillor and a county councillor. I've been on the county council for and over 30 years and I've been a town councillor for 56 years.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Wow.

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

I've had a little bit of experience.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Just a bit though.

So tell us then a little bit about the work that's been happening in Mold that you're involved with.

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

Well, I'm one of the representatives of the town council on the secondary school councils and where we meet children of secondary school age within the town.

And again, we have an engagement with them. It's important as far as we're concerned to hear the views and the opinions of young people and indeed to take those on board as far as we can as a council and indeed to share our concerns and issues with them as well to get their views and opinions of what we should be doing.

It's working well and it has worked well for a number of years.

Paul Dando (Mold Town Council)

So yes, as Councillor Bithell said, I too am on the Youth Council Committee. I visit the primary schools, so we look at visiting quarterly. There are four primary schools in Mould and it's just about giving the children a voice on what's important to them, what they want to talk about, what improvements they would like to see, any safety aspects.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

So yeah, it's giving them a voice, what they want to talk about and any projects moving forward from that. And how does that work in practice then? How do you sort of how do you get that engagement with the children and young people?

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

Well, we meet with them ah fairly regularly. Obviously, they've got they are full-time courses in their schools, but we go into the schools about two or three times a year and have a session with them. And again, you we ask them for any views or opinions or issues they want to raise with us so we can be prepared for that and similarly you know we give advance notice of issues we would like their opinions and views on as well. But it's important to have that voice of the young people because again you know people often say that they're the voice of the future or the population of the future but they're the population here and now. And they are an important part and again you know they have their views and they have their opinions and again they're well worthwhile listening to. You know sometimes they've got better ideas than many of the adults we deal with to be quite frank and as a former teacher you know I recognise that's the case and you know I've certainly had experience of that over many years.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Yeah. And is that the same then for you know children at a ah younger age then in primary schools? How does that kind of work in practice?

Paul Dando (Mold Town Council)

Yeah, it is slightly different. You see when you when you ask them what they want to talk about, what are their concerns, obviously that they are slightly different, but they're still as important. I mean, a lot of issues, there were some they raised about the park and outside schools. So that was a project we put forward. They designed posters. We got them printed on boards with all the school badges, put them outside the schools. to prevent parents parking outside schools, because that was a major issue with all four schools, and it's an issue with many of the schools around the country.

Other issues were like green areas around the town and what they can do to enhance that. So, yeah, it's on the same theme, but there are slightly different concerns with the age group.

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

I think similarly, again, with the secondary school pupils, they've been concerned about vaping and also about illicit tobacco. And again, they've raised the issue with us. And again, we've had discussions with them.

One of the discussion meetings we had involved the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales as well. And we also heard the attendance of the then Assembly Member for the area. She was at that particular meeting as well. And again, they're concerned about illegal vapes being sold. And they're also concerned about illicit tobacco under the counter, which is happening. And again, it's happening not just in Mould, but in other parts of the country as well. And it's been highlighted in the news recently. And again, last night, the um Home Secretary was announcing increase additional measures to deal with the problem.

So this is an issue which young people particularly are concerned about because they can see their fellow pupils getting involved in this and the result of that. One of the problems they had in the in one of the local schools was that the children were smoking using vapes and deposited them down the down the toilet, which is know something which happened years ago with cigarette ends, but with vapes, of course, it causes a bigger problem. And the school had major problems as a result with that, with drains being blocked and so on.

So you know they're acutely aware of the problems that exist surrounding vapes and illegal vapes and illicit tobacco, and they wanted something done. And it was good to be there to listen to that and it was good for them to be able to speak to us and to other people in authority, both at Assembly Member and Senedd level and also the Police and Crime Commissioner as well, because they have been involved as indeed as public protection in some of the raids that have taken place. on some of these particular shops within the town.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Yeah, as you say, that that involvement is really important, isn't it, in these kind of issues.

So what kind of what impact is that having, and what difference has it made you know to have that involvement with the children and young people?

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

Well, again, I think it's made the powers that be and more acutely aware of the problems. and you know that even young people are very concerned about this and that's something needs to be done and again they've highlighted the problem and again I think it has been addressed now or is being addressed hopefully at a national level you know. It just shows really how important it is to have those views and opinions from the people who this is affecting more than anybody and that the they are being taken note of and their views and opinions are been considered and taken on board by the powers that be.

Paul Dando (Mold Town Council)

Yeah, and it's about you know giving the children a voice, you know letting them be heard. They don't get that platform very often. So it's discussing the issues they have, what can we do about it, moving forward with projects.

And then it's promoting that through the Mold Town Council website, through the school social media, and people get to hear about it that way. And I think it's rewarding for the children as well. and It gives ah and a positive impact. So it's good in that respect as well.

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

We've helped them too in what they wanted to do themselves, their plans. For example, we've been able to finance the publication and printing of leaflets and so on, which they've been able to distribute. And again, very shortly, they're going to have a pop-up at Mold market on the market stall, again, to make the general public themselves more aware of the problems affecting young people and adults as well in relation to vaping and the problems that creates.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Yeah, I think, um I guess, you know, touching on what you said there, Pete, from their perspective, I guess it's feeling that value, doesn't Feeling that real sense of that they're part of the community as well, which is really great to hear. So look into the future then, what are your plans and going forward? Is there any other projects that you, it's kind of in the pipeline? How do you kind of see this relationship going forward?

Chris Bithell (Mold Town Council)

Well, one of the things that's become apparent too, you know is that many of the things that we do as a town council are not always understood and known by the public generally and by young people as well. And again, we've explained to them exactly what we do as a town council, what our role and responsibilities are. And informed them what we do on a general basis and they're very interested and keen

on that but again it's been quite transparent that they are not always aware of what the town council are putting on really for their benefit and the benefit of the town as a whole. So again we've been talking about communications and the website which we're actually updating currently as the town council and again informing the school and getting on their particular website as well what's available so that young people can get more engaged in those particular activities.

Many of which are fun activities really like music on the square or and the carnival and so on and so forth which young people are e involved in but also with other things like keeping Mold tidy we just had a big campaign recently where we've been going out picking up litter and young people are often involved in that schools and also and local youth groups like the scouts and guides and so on the brownies. Getting young people involved in those really and coming on board with the community and dealing with these particular aspects.

Paul Dando (Mold Town Council)

Yeah, and with regards to the Youth Committee, it's with myself involved in the primary.

Every year you see different faces and Councillor Bithell has said that those that have been involved in the primary are also now involved in the secondary. So they've got that interest in having a voice with regards to what they want to see in our town. And it's just moving through the years and them in the secondary now. And it's just good to see and speaking to different people every year. So it's fantastic.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Yeah, it's great. Thank you both. It's really, really positive to hear about all the work you're doing. So thank you. Appreciate your time today.

Hello I'm chatting to Jo Lane, who is the Town Clerk and Finance Officer for Mold Town Council. Hi, Jo.

So tell us a little bit about the project you've been working on.

Jo Lane (Town Clerk and Finance Officer, Mold Town Council)

So the Bailey Hill project actually started 25 years ago, the idea of it. So where we're situated now is the Bailey Hill Park. It's a scheduled ancient monument. It was the home of a Norman castle back in the day. And although the park was used by the people of the town, and was a recreational site, it became slightly neglected and overgrown and the infrastructure wasn't the best and really it wasn't the best asset it could be for Mold. So there was a huge consultation that took place and a few years later, because things do take time, it was decided that three organisations would come together and work towards improving the site for the town. So the park is owned by Flintshire County Council. They are the landowners. The building itself is owned by Flintshire but leased to Mold Town Council. So Mold Town Council have the running responsibility for it.

And then we had an extra arm, which was a local charity group, which formed specifically for the project, called Friends of Bailey Hill. And their remit with regards to

the project is to go above and beyond what Flintshire are able to do. So we say that they beautify the park, they do the planting, everything and ensuring that they're using heritage planting, which would have originally been on site in the 1100s and things like that. So it was a real partnership.

We were successful in attracting quite large amounts of funding, which meant that the pathways could be improved. An outdoor area space was developed and the Bailey Hill Cottage was transformed into the Bailey Hill Centre, so there was a community space for and people to meet and enjoy the park. So in the centre itself downstairs is available for community groups to use. We hire out, we provide a variety of different events in the park and upstairs is a self-contained two bedroom flat which is privately let out and the idea of it is the money that's raised through privately letting out the flat keeps the community side going, it kind of self-funds as much as possible.

During the redevelopment work, we had a few hiccups, nothing ever goes to plan. So where when the first kind of shovel was put into the ground to start, COVID happened.

So everybody went into lockdown. But just before that, and we actually discovered seven skeletons on the inner Bailey.

So we discovered seven skeletons. We were in lockdown, so nobody was coming out to do any working on site. So we had to safeguard the skeletons that were on site and not let people know they were on site. So that was quite interesting to work through.

Although I'm the town clerk now, I started as the Bailey Hill Project Officer for Mold Town Council, so it was my job on behalf of the Town Council to oversee this project, which is why I've got quite in-depth knowledge with regards to it.

The skeletons were removed from site, they've been taken off for further analysis and then the work was completed. Within that time we worked with over 60 volunteers, we had different volunteering roles, we were trying to get people more involved from the community.

We had research volunteers, research and everything Bailey Hill related. We had events volunteers, wildlife volunteers, and they are still working today, even though, you know, we're still, we're six years down the line.

The funding for the project has been spent. But we're continuing to work as a tripartite group. We meet quarterly. We talk about any issues relating to the size. We talk about how we can continue to encourage people to come and visit the size. We applied for additional funding to get the new play area built, which is at the top of the size.

It's gone from that really metal 1980s play area to a to a play area fitting for such a beautiful park: It's made out of wood it's in keeping with the size and we have a castle back so we have part of the climbing wall is a castle and there's been a variety

of different projects that have sprouted out from the main one. So we trialled and a men's sheds initiative in the park.

A group of men meet on a weekly basis, although it's called the Men's Sheds Project, which is an Australian initiative, we don't have a shed here. They literally work within the park and they and whittle and create in the medieval ditch. And that three-month project, which we had funding for, has now been going for three years. We're still kind of beg, borrowing and stealing funding to keep it going. It's won a local award for its mental health and wellbeing aspects, but it's also won a national award through the Green Flag um Keep Wales Tidy initiative for the best well-being initiative and it's just such a small project in a small park. But it's actually having a huge difference to people's lives and so much so that we've now applied for additional funding because we want to expand it so instead as well as a men's sheds we're looking for a women's woodland workshop so we can offer that opportunity to um everybody within the town who wish to get involved.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

That's great. It's really nice here. And you know you mentioned about the site itself. Obviously, we're here today and it is such a beautiful building. So it's a real credit you know to all the hard work that's gone into it.

And you talked a little bit there about some of the initiatives, you know the men's sheds projects, things like that. What difference do you feel like it's making to the community then and and to mould as a town?

Jo Lane (Mold Town Council)

I think it's celebrating the culture and the heritage of the town. We're very lucky in Mold that we have many historical stories to tell. It really does have and a really interesting background. And although we had this public space available and it's been here for many years, it became of a formal park in the nineteen twenties.

It got to a point where people were afraid to come here because it was overgrown, which attracted people you perhaps wouldn't want to visit on your nightly walk. So it has brought that community space and that community pride back into the town. I think that because because open spaces can mean and be different things to different people, that is what the Bailey Hill Park provides to the community. So it provides the heritage, it provides the history, it provides the leisure, it provides the health and wellbeing side of it.

We deliver tours for local schools and scout groups and brownies just celebrating what's on their doorstep. This is your history. This is your town. And I think through the project, it has managed to and strengthen that voice and get the message out there more with regards to this asset is available and is free too

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

And that's a huge thing, isn't it, for a lot of you know families and people these days, that it is a free asset. There's obviously lots already going on, but what's your plans for the future then? Have you got anything in the pipeline that's coming up?

Well, the plans for the future is to continue the good work that we're already doing. We want to be able to continue to offer and kind of our historic tours, and our events, we host an annual Easter event up here that sees thousands of people attend.

Previously we've done medieval events where we've done re-enactments here as well to bring the history of the site to life. What I would say we need to improve on and go forward with is our presence online.

We've been working on a website for the Bailey Hill for a number of years and we haven't quite got to the point where it's ready to be published. So this is what we're really working on at the moment. We need to get that and kind of sealed off and out there. So again, it helps to spread the word of this facility. The other thing that we have taken probably a bit too much time to do, within the partnership is that if you walk around the park there's many spaces where you can see there's something should be there I'm not quite sure what it should be but there should be something there and what should be there is interpretation panels. We haven't been able to do the interpretation panels in the timeline we expected because of the finds.

Because we found seven skeletons, they've been sent off and they've been analysed and further research is being done so we can understand who these people may have been, were they part of the castle, did they come afterwards and again anything archaeology related takes years, the reports take years, the findings take years.

So we didn't want to kind of throw up the interpretation panels to then have to renew them a couple of years later when we've got the info. So we're still waiting on that final report to come out so that as well as having our guided tours, people can do self-guided tours and see the information and experience the site for themselves.

Beth Smith (Audit Wales)

Oh, that's great. Now we'll look forward to seeing that as it develops. But thank you so much for your time today. And thank you for having us here. It's been a lovely morning. Thank you.

Jo Lane (Mold Town Council)

Thank you very much for coming. It's been a pleasure.

Rhian Jones (Audit Wales)

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