

BENTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday, 3 June 2014

Present: Cllrs Bridgeman, Cowling, Marshall, Stannard, Townson & Vendy, DCllr Brockbank, also the Clerk and 15 parishioners

Apologies: Cllrs Adams, Hey, Pritchard & Swales, DCllr Barrington, Mr Frankland (NYCC Library Services), Mrs Gillibrand (Meals On Wheels), Mr Huddleston (Ewecross Historical Soc), Mr Bullock (Pet Rescue), Mrs Mouncey (Goodenber Play Area), Mrs Elwood (Bentham News), Mrs Porter (Sunbeams), Ms Miller (Community Bonfire) & Mr Wheildon (Bentham AFC)

1. Notice convening the meeting was read by the Chairman

2. Minutes of the 2013 Meeting
Minutes of the above meeting were presented, agreed and signed

3. Mayor's Report

Councillor Marshall commented that the last 12 months had flown by and the Council had been very active. Two new Cllrs, Vendy and Stannard, had been co-opted following the resignations of Cllrs Procter and Brown.

During the year the Council had met with the new Civil Parking Enforcement team to understand how they would operate in Bentham, and the subsequent appearance of a traffic warden had kept everyone on their toes. It had also had an informative meeting with the Community Rail Partnership, and a useful one with representatives from the local Care Homes and the Police looking at how they might better integrate into the community. It had also tried to act as a catalyst, pressuring Craven to keep HGV parking on Lairgill, working to get the Station approach repaired and contributing to the insurance payments of both Friends of Bentham Library and Bentham Common Land Charity to keep the organisations going

The Council had reformed its committee structure to try and streamline its operation. It had also introduced new Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, the rules by which it operates, and updated the Town Hall fire policy. He continued that the Drop-In sessions prior to the Council meetings had been mixed, with fewer takers towards the end of the year and their format would be reviewed. Following the end of the LEADER Parish Caretaker Scheme the Council had kept on the role and continued to maintain areas around the town and prune tree beside the highway. It had also worked with Highways to solve problems with parking by the Farrier, Harley Bank and Crow Trees. The introduction of vehicle activated signs on Springfield and Robin Lane had been shown to reduce speeding. Looking at other projects, the Neighbourhood Plan for Bentham had started with the collection of data from residents on a questionnaire brought to the Council by Cllr Burton. The Bentham Calendar had sold out for the first time, and the funds had gone to the Youth Café, a worthy charity aimed at keeping Bentham youngsters off the streets. Thanks to the clerk and sponsorship from local businesses the Forest of Bowland Bentham leaflet had been updated to keep the town represented in other places. The Council had also awarded grants to 9 local organisations including the Community Bonfire and the Carnival to enable local volunteers to keep events going. Cllr Marshall commented that Bentham had a myriad of volunteer organisations, with reports being invited from 54 different groups showing the diversity within the town.

In conclusion he thanked the Council for its work over the last year, and particularly Cllr Burton who had been Vice Chair for the four years of his Chairmanship. He also thanked Ruth and Mick Green for their continued care of the Town Hall and Jo Burton, the clerk, for her assistance and support.

4. Financial / Precept Details

Draft copies of the Reconciliation of Receipts and Payments for 2013/14 (unaudited) were circulated. The clerk emphasised the fact that the accounts had not yet been fully audited and were therefore subject to change.

The end of year figures indicated a credit of £60,188.88, some £6500 higher than the previous year due to receipt of the Council Tax Mitigation Grant from Government which the Council had taken whilst keeping the precept at £100,000 in case of capping in future. The figures for both income and expenditure were artificially inflated by nearly £7000 due to the closure of the Tourist Information and Low Bentham Playing Field accounts when, after closure of the Bentham HSBC, the Council moved banks. Actual income was £32,686.48 (ex Precept) in 2013 and £43,522.51 in 2014, some £3800 different in real terms, due to the receipt of the CT grant, increased income from the cemetery and calendar sales being offset by reduced income from the Town Hall and the end of the Parish Caretaker scheme, plus the deposit of £1200 from the Christmas Lights committee in 2012/13. Expenditure, ignoring account transfers, totalled some £130,000, £1375 higher than the previous year. Council spending was £126,606.49, of which £47855 was loan repayments which will continue until 2017. Spending in the cemetery was reduced following completion of the drainage project, but increased in the form of grants to outside organisations and in payments for Christmas Lights from funds held and from calendar sales to the Youth Café. The Council had also installed 2 temporary vehicle activated signs in conjunction with NYCC Highways, paid for from reserves.

With prudent spending plans in the coming year the Council had managed to maintain the precept at £100000 for the sixth year. It had also chosen to take the reduced CT grant. Grants totalling £4730 (excluding Tourist Information)

were awarded to 9 local organisations, a higher figure than previous years. Projects to be tackled in the coming year included stripping and re-varnishing the Ballroom floor and trying to progress the purchase of Low Bentham School Playing Field.

There were no questions from the floor.

4. Library

Mr Frankland reported that the partnership with Friends of Bentham Library (FOBL) was going from strength to strength, and the group now had a Facebook page to promote library events. Business levels remained healthy, and Bentham had been named runner up in the NYCC Library of the Year award. During the year several taster sessions had been held to introduce people to the computer facilities. The Book Group continued to be well attended and author Jo Baker had attended a meeting in March. Sunbeams had donated some of their fundraising to purchase a collection of books to support parents and carers with children on the Autistic spectrum. One hundred children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge in 2013, of which 85 completed the challenge and received a certificate in a special school assembly. The Premier League Reading Stars, a scheme put together by the National Literacy Trust using football to encourage children struggling with literacy to enjoy reading, had met in the library every Thursday.

5. Reports from Local Organisations

Reports were received from:

Adventurers, Age Concern, Aid in Sickness,
 Bentham Agricultural Society, Bentham AFC, Bentham Bees, Bentham Beagles, Bentham Common Land Charity,
 Bentham Environmentally Sustainable Town, Bentham Film Group, Bentham First Responders, Bentham Juniors FC,
 Bentham Line Dancers, Bentham Netball Club, Bentham News, Bentham Youth Café, Blooming Bentham
 Carnival, Churches Together & Christian Aid, Citizens Advice Bureau, Collingwood & Longstaffe Charity,
 Community Bonfire, Community Link Bonfire,
 Ewecross Historical Society,
 Footpaths Group, Friends of Bentham Library, Friends of Bentham Station,
 Goodenber Play Area,
 High Bentham WI,
 LASRUG, Looking Well / Pioneer Projects, Low Bentham Badminton Club, Low Bentham WI
 Meals on Wheels, Mencap,
 Nursing Benevolent Fund,
 Playing Field Association, Pet Rescue,
 Settle & District Blind Persons Association, Springboard, Springfield Bowling Club, Sunbeams,
 Theatre Group, Toddle In, Tourist Information, Tuesday Craft Club,
 Victoria Institute,
 Welcome-In

There were no reports from:

Cancer Support Group, Indoor Bowls, Homing Society, Women's Social Services and NSPCC & We Are Bentham

6. A.O.B.

Due to the late date of the meeting, following the election, the precept grants had already been distributed.

Cllr Townson addressed the meeting by saying that Bentham had many characters and traditions and he felt it should be noted when a tradition ceased as had happened that month with Wendy Dowbiggin's retirement as local reported for the Craven Herald, Westmorland Gazette and Lancaster Guardian after many years in the role. He felt that the town owed Wendy a big thank you for keeping its events in the public eye.

Miss Dowbiggin thanked him and the meeting for the kind words. She said she was sad to give up but that it was time to retire. She had enjoyed her time reporting but said that it had become increasingly difficult to get information about what was happening in the town. She thanked the clerk for access to the Council minutes to ensure that Council business had been reported correctly.

She then went on to thank the out going Council for their hard work over the last four years and to wish the new Councillors luck for the coming four.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.