

BENTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday, 29 April 2015

Present: Cllrs Adams, Bridgeman, Cowling, Marshall, Stannard, Swales & Townson, DCllr Barrington, also the Clerk and 14 parishioners

Apologies: Cllrs Faichney, Pritchard & Vendy, DCllr Brockbank, Mr Frankland (NYCC Library Services), Mrs cadbury (Citizens Advice), Mrs Gillibrand (Meals On Wheels), Ms Halsall (First Responders), Mr Huddleston (Ewecross Historical Soc), Mr Johnson (Longstaffe Educational Foundation), Ms Miller (Community Bonfire), Mrs Whitfield (Springboard) & Mr Wheildon (Bentham AFC)

1. Notice convening the meeting was read by the Chairman
2. Minutes of the 2014 Meeting
Minutes of the above meeting were presented, agreed and signed
3. Mayor's Report
Councillor Stannard started by saying that the new Council had contained 5 new members who, despite the steep learning curve, had got to grips with the projects and local issues over the last 11 months, although he did note that there was now a vacancy for a Councillor in High Bentham and encouraged the residents present to consider standing. Changes in the law meant that Council meetings could now be recorded and the Council had taken to doing so to ensure it had an accurate record of the main meetings. A considerable sum had been spent on the Town Hall in 2014/15, ten years since the refurbishment, replacing the curtains and re-varnishing the floor in the Ballroom and restocking the crockery and cutlery for large events. Heating improvements had been made in the Community Youth Building to try and reduce the condensation issues in the building. As NYCC had announced in June that it was ceasing to maintain 'amenity' areas and would only cut grass required for safety reasons the Council had agreed to take this on to keep the parish looking good. 20% of the Neighbourhood Planning Questionnaire forms had been returned which had given an interesting take on the views of residents – in general people like living in the town and appreciate the facilities available. The Council was in the process of registering as a Neighbourhood Plan area in order to take the process forward. In August Craven had announced a consultation to introduce parking charges on Grasmere Drive car park. Armed with the NPQ comments and the results of a survey of business owners the Council led a concerted campaign, along with We Are Bentham, CCllr Ireton and half the town, and the plans were dropped in December. The time allowed for parking on the street had been discussed in detail, with various opinions being expressed, and the associated Road Traffic Orders would be reassessed in the autumn once the effects of the school move had been understood. Dealings with NYCC Highways continued to deliver mixed results and some projects or problems like the potholes on the Station Approach, white lines in Low Bentham and a 20mph zone through Main Street were taking time to resolve. The Council's attempt to set up a Green Dog Walkers Scheme had been met with general apathy from residents and had been shelved. Successes had been achieved with the Partial Night Lighting Consultation from NYCC where amendments to those light being switched off after midnight had been made following representation from the Council, and in the Local Development Plan consultation where the general consensus had been that new development should be sprinkled around the parish rather than centred on 2 or 3 large sites. Like many parishes, Bentham had objected strongly to the closure of the Skipton custody suite and also to the potential changes in the Library provision. The former battle had been lost and the latter would be reported on in July. The WW1 Centenary had been remembered in 2014, with the Council purchasing the Bentham Boys – a depiction of all those Benthamers who died. A national scheme to commemorate the VC winners around the country was also set up and Bentham was the only town in Craven with a VC winner born here – Charles Robertson, and a stone will be unveiled in 2018 on the centenary of his award. A duplicate stone for Theodore Bailey Hardy VC, headmaster of Bentham Grammar School, will also be installed at the same time. The new school finally opened in February and is an excellent facility thanks to NYCC and CCllr Ireton who had pushed the project from its inception. The Council was pursuing improved signage and street lighting to try and negate the perceived road safety problems. The long awaited purchase of the school playing field had moved a step closer with resolution of the maintenance vehicle access issue, but Craven had decided that change of use, from school playing field to playing field was required and this was being pursued, in the hope that the facility might be owned by the next Annual Parish Meeting!
4. Financial / Precept Details
Draft copies of the Reconciliation of Receipts and Payments for 2014/15 (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 £62313.70, some £2125 higher than the previous year despite a reduced Council Tax Mitigation grant from Government - showing prudent financial management by the Council. In order to receive the Council Tax mitigation grant for 2014/15 the Council had to set a Band D tax identical to the previous year – due to the increase in properties paying Council Tax this raised £101366, which made up for some of the reduction in CTM grant. Actual income was £25,730.38 (ex Precept & grant) in 2014, some £2000 lower than the real income for 2013, due mainly to a reduction in calendar sales and no outside grant funding for work around the parish. Expenditure totalled almost £130,000, which is in line with the previous year. Actual Council spending was £128,599.91, of which £47855 was loan repayments which will continue until 2017. Spending on Open Spaces (maintenance around the parish) and in the Cemetery was reduced, but more was spent in the Town Hall – with new curtains and the re-varnishing of the floor in the Ballroom, and the clerks hours were increased

With prudent spending plans in the coming year the Council had managed to maintain the precept level for the seventh year. It had also chosen to take the reduced CTM grant available from government, giving an income of £106150 for 2015/16 before the Town Hall and Cemetery incomes were added – approximately £1000 lower than last year. Precept Grants totalling £5085 were awarded to 13 local organisations, a higher figure than previous years. Projects for the coming year within the budget included the continuation of amenity grass cutting which NYCC had ceased to perform to keep Bentham looking attractive, the provision of a document store so that the Council archives could remain in Bentham and the replacement of the Noticeboard on the front of the Town Hall. A question was asked about the level of the precept once the loans were repaid. The clerk replied that this was a decision that the Council would need to consider shortly, whether the money released should be used to reduce the precept or spent on other projects around the parish.

4. Library

Mr Frankland reported that during the year 430 customers had borrowed 14,688 items and there were 20,430 visits to Bentham Library. Tea and Teach taster sessions had been held by Barclays Bank Digital Eagles to introduce people to new technology. Events at the library to commemorate the First World War were well attended, including the Bentham Remembers Exhibition. 92 children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge in 2014, and the Premier League Reading Stars scheme with Bentham Primary School was a huge success. The partnership with Friends of Bentham Library (FoBL) continued to work well. In October, the North Yorkshire High Sherriff visited Bentham with Linda Brockbank, Chair of FoBL and said that the library was ‘charming’. A report on the Public Library Consultation was due to go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th June and the Executive Committee on 7th July for a decision about the future of the Library.

5. Reports from Local Organisations

Reports were received from:

Adventurers, Aid in Sickness,
Bentham Bees, Bentham Beagles, Bentham Environmentally Sustainable Town, Bentham Film Group, Bentham First Responders, Bentham Juniors FC, Bentham Line Dancers, Bentham News, Bentham Tuesday Club, Bentham Youth Café, Blooming Bentham,
Carnival, Churches Together & Christian Aid, Citizens Advice Bureau, Collingwood & Longstaffe Charity, Community Bonfire, Community Link Cafe,
Ewecross Historical Society,
Footpaths Group, Friends of Bentham Library, Friends of Bentham Station,
Goodenber Play Area,
High Bentham WI,
LASRUG, Longstaffe Educational Foundation, Looking Well / Pioneer Projects, Low Bentham Badminton Club, Low Bentham WI
Meals on Wheels, Nursing Benevolent Fund,
Playing Field Association, Pet Rescue,
Springboard, Springfield Bowling Club, Sunbeams,
Theatre Group, Toddle In, Tourist Information, Tuesday Craft Club,
Victoria Institute,
Welcome-In, Women's Social Services and NSPCC & We Are Bentham / Christmas Lights

There were no reports from:

Age Concern, Bentham Agricultural Society, Bentham AFC, Bentham Common Land Charity, Cancer Support Group, Indoor Bowls, Homing Society & Mencap

6. A.O.B.

The precept grants were distributed to recipients.

Cllr Townson proposed a vote of thanks to DCllr Barrington who was standing down from Craven District Council after 8 years.

Ms Dowbiggin commented that it was a shame that no Bentham resident had replaced her as reporter to the papers following her retirement the previous year, saying that she felt Bentham had suffered for it – and encouraging anyone with an interest to consider stepping into the vacancy.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm.