**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ON THE 8TH MAY 2018 AT THE NEW HALL, STATION ROAD, BAWTRY AT 7.00PM**

Present: D Kirkham (Town Mayor)

 A. Harrison (Clerk to the Council)

15 members of the public including councillors

1. To Receive Apologies.

 No relevant apologies received

1. Approval of the 2017 Annual Town Meeting Minutes.

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

1. Town Mayor’s Annual Report for the Year.

The report covers the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

People

Councillor Rebecca Dickenson resigned from the Council in November, being replaced by Paul Muxlow in January.

One of our part-time handymen, David Shaw, retired in July. His hours were taken by another member of the team.

Finance and the Precept

The precept is the element of Council Tax that is payable to Parish and Town Councils, to fund those Councils’ services. Historically in Bawtry this has been one of the lowest in DMBC, with the Council relying upon car park revenues to fund its spending. That revenue was increased over the years by repeated extensions to car park charging hours. The present Town Council believes this policy was fundamentally misguided; it has made us financially dependent upon a process that aggravates residents and deters visitors. It has damaged Bawtry’s prosperity. We believe the precept should be of a size to fund the routine expenditure of the Town Council, such as staffing, maintenance, rates, utilities, insurances and recurrent grants – but it presently falls far short of that, not even covering our staffing costs. We made a start last year with a small increase of 10%, and a much bigger one this year of 34% - but it has been at such a low base that this means an average “Band D” Council Tax payer will only pay an extra £6 per year. A balance between the precept and routine expenditure will take many years to achieve.

Grants

The Town Council made grants to third parties of about £37,000 during the year, the major one being BARS (see below.) A sum of £3,400 was also awarded to the Bawtry Heritage Group to cover the cost of an interpretive panel/map in the Market Place, as the focus of a planned heritage trail in the town.

Improving Bawtry

Few residents will disagree with the notion that Bawtry needs improving – it has become very tired. There are enduring concerns about maintenance standards, litter, dog fouling, unsafe pavements, failing businesses and empty shops, the high number of licensed premises in the town, traffic congestion and speeding, the volume of Heavy Goods Vehicles going through the town, parking charges and nuisance parking, pedestrian safety,– etc etc etc.. A recent heavy disappointment has been about the impending loss of our only bank. The Town Council has no control over many of these issues, although we do try to influence those who do – such as DMBC. The Town Council is well aware that everything it spends is from Bawtry residents. What should be our priorities? We rely upon information from the public – but it’s hard to get, and often only forthcoming if we do something they don’t like.

Neighbourhood Plan

We have worked hard to try to ensure that we do what Bawtry want us to do. A major element of this has been the creation of our Neighbourhood Plan, which has progressed and is currently the subject of formal consultation. Hopefully it will be adopted and become part of DMBC’s Local Plan before the end of this year. It addresses all of the issues listed above and should inform both DMBC and BTC policy and therefore may act as a blueprint for managing Bawtry’s future. We are satisfied that it does faithfully reflect the views which were received – but sadly only around 5% of Bawtry’s residents have contributed to its content.

Community Forum and its replacement

We also tried a Community Forum in the town, where the Town Council offered up its current policies and thinking to local residents, community groups and businesses, inviting comment and challenge. This did generate some very enthusiastic engagement – but from only a handful of people. We therefore decided not to pursue this any further, but to have a go at regular liaison and consultation meetings between BTC, Bawtry Residents Group and Bawtry Retail Association instead. This initiative will unfold later this year. Linked to that, a Bawtry Town Council Facebook page has been created.

Market Hill

Not withstanding the difficulty of gauging residents’ preferences, we were confident that repairs to the Market Hill pavement should be facilitated if at all possible. The difficulty of this was the impossibility of identifying who owns it, and who is therefore legally responsible for its maintenance. With no answer to this question being available, the result was no-one repaired it and it became unsafe. We therefore decided to step in, at some risk of future liability, to repair it, at a cost of almost £7,000. That work simply made it safe for pedestrians. It remains unsightly, but we have hopes of a major improvement in the future as part of an overall refurbishment of the whole of Market Hill. Work is ongoing to cost this, with a view to identifying options. Hopefully this planning and decision making may be completed in time for implementation in May 2021 when our Contract with Excel Parking Services expires and we regain control of the area.

Traffic concerns

We are also confident that easing of the many problems associated with traffic in the town is high on most residents’ priority. The concerns are mostly about traffic volume, and speed. As a Town Council we have no powers in traffic management and are entirely dependent upon trying to persuade other parties – DMBC, the Highways Authority, and the Police – to act. We have been very active in trying to do that, usually with the help of one of our DMBC Ward Counsellors, Rachael Blake. Some very modest success has occurred but progress is very slow. We have not been able to persuade DMBC Highways or the Police about the need to reduce speed limits or to more effectively enforce existing ones.

The major expansion of Harworth, new sand and gravel extraction in North Nottinghamshire, and the planned expansion of the airport all pose substantial risks for us, with increases in the volume of traffic including Heavy Goods Vehicles. We have used all the opportunities available to make representations about these concerns – for instance, in planning applications – and lately there have been some signs that DMBC may be beginning to listen and to take our concerns seriously, reflected in their support for our representations.

BARS and the new pavilion

Historically the Town Council has been a strong supporter of BARS in their provision for the community, especially sports for young people. We have continued in that support, and at the start of the year we agreed a further capital contribution of £29,600 towards the completion of the new pavilion.

Relocation of the War Memorial

A major project over the past year, which is now nearing completion, has been planning the relocation of the War Memorial. Presently located on the side of Bawtry Road just to the south of the town, it is not safely accessible to the public. It is intended to refurbish and move it to the pawned area of the Bawtry Community Library site. As a Listed Monument that is potentially quite fragile we have to use a specialist contractor, and the cost is high – about £20,000 although we hope DMBC might make some contribution to that.

Welcome to Bawtry signs

The “Welcome to Bawtry” signs fabricated last year were installed on all the routes into the town. It is hoped to recoup some of the costs by selling sponsorship plaques below the signs to local businesses.

Market Hill taxi rank

Thankfully, after being mired in bureaucratic and legal problems, we are close to achieving the creation of a taxi rank on Market Hill. The significance of this is that such a facility should result in late night drinkers exiting the town in a more orderly and timely manner at the end of their carousing.

Events

A new Events planning working group has been created, with representation from residents and retailers.

The Town Council supported the majority of the events traditionally held in the town – the BARS Sports and Gala Day, the Car Pageant, the Christmas lights switch on, and Carols around the Tree. At the Christmas lights switch on, we were unable to hire the traditional carousel we have used the last two years, and were disappointed to have a big wheel instead. It turned out, however, that this was actually more popular, probably because small children could ride it safely. It cost us £2,800 to hire, £2,255 of which was recouped from riders. £400 of this was donated to DRI Children’s’ Ward.

Unfortunately the Town Council was not able to support the Grove and Rufford Hunt holding their Boxing Day Meet in the town, because of the conviction of three of their members for fox hunting. Now that these convictions have been successfully appealed, the Council have informed the Hunt they may return to Bawtry this year.

An additional event held was the “Illuminate” festival, celebrating the Pilgrim Fathers sailing to America. It is envisaged these annual celebrations will culminate in 2020, the 400th anniversary of the voyage.

It is not intended as a complete account of the Town Council’s activity, but rather a precis of the most significant issues, decisions and events. A detailed newsletter is published in Bawtry Today each month, and the Council’s meetings minutes are available on our website [www.bawtrytowncouncil.co.uk](http://www.bawtrytowncouncil.co.uk)

1. Issues Raised by Residents of the Parish.

Discussed better communication with residents and the methods of engaging with the public. Discussed additional minutes by working groups and efforts to date in terms of community engagement, community forum liaison, Facebook etc

Toilet sticker scheme noted and lack of by businesses taking part in the scheme and displaying stickers. BRA representative advised he would circulate the stickers amongst members if further copies could be forwarded to him

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.25pm

Signed…………………………………….

Dated………………………………………