**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ON THE 9TH MAY 2017 AT THE NEW HALL, STATION ROAD, BAWTRY AT 7.00PM**

Present: D Kirkham (Town Mayor)

A. Harrison (Clerk to the Council)

12 members of the public including councillors

1. To Receive Apologies.

No apologies received

1. Approval of the 2015 Annual Town Meeting Minutes.

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

1. Matters Arising from the Minutes.

None although previous matters raised by the public in 2016 were noted.

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

This report covers the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

People

Gilbert Budgen and George Scott were elected to the Council in June, bringing us up to full complement.

Angela Harrison was appointed to the position of Clerk to the Council just before the start of the year, and she has proved to be an excellent recruit. Our thanks are due to her, and also to our handymen Paul Vallow, David Shaw and Les Carby who continue to help us keep the town looking decent.

Commitment to Openness

Although we have been obliged to hold some Council business “In Camera”, because of legal, contractual or individual confidentiality, we have been determined to conduct our proceedings as openly as possible. This has built upon last year’s decision to abolish all the Council’s sub-committees, where historically it would appear some important decisions were made without the scrutiny of all Councillors. We have therefore established a number of themed working groups, with formal terms of reference set by the full Council, where smaller numbers of Councillors “do the donkey work” in researching and considering options available. No decisions that will bind the Council are made in these groups; their proposals are put to full Council for consideration and decision. Currently, these working groups comprise ones looking at car parking provision, relocation of the war memorial, the future development of Market Hill (including repair to the pavement and re-introducing a market to Bawtry), and events. In this context, mention should also be made of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

In this spirit of openness, the Lease agreed between the Council and BARS, to facilitate the construction of the new pavilion on the Council-owned Memorial Sports Ground, was made public by being posted on the new website. We would like to be able to do the same with the Contract made between the Council and Excel Parking Services some years ago, but unfortunately Excel are not agreeable to do this.

A decision was also made to create a Community Forum, to try to make the Town Council more representative of, and responsive to, its electorate. The Forum was to consist of the Town Council, individual residents and any existing community groups or associations that wished to participate. The intention was, by explaining the rules that govern our activities, how we spend your money, and what our existing policies and priorities are, to give the public the information they need to question the Council, to challenge it, and hold it to account. The first meeting of the Forum took place on 3rd April 2017 and members of the public judged it to be a success. It is intended these meetings will be held on a quarterly basis.

Finance

In March the Council resolved to make modest increases to cemetery and allotment fees, with the latter not coming into effect until 2018.

It was also decided to increase the precept, by 10% to £27,061. This was the first such increase in 14 years, during which the buying power of the precept reduced by more than 30%. The effect of the increase is that Council Tax payers who own the average (Band D) property will have to pay an additional £1.65 per year. The decision emanated from the Council’s view that it had become over reliant upon car park revenues.

Improving Bawtry

The Council is concerned to try to improve the town – to make it look smarter, to make it more prosperous, to improve safety for pedestrians and to improve its facilities. This ambition is reflected in the routine business of the Council, and in the Working Groups which have been created.

We have improved grass cutting standards in the cemetery, and provided new fencing to the allotments. We are working with DMBC (who are responsible for highways verges) for them to improve their standards. We are increasing the number of litter and dog waste bins, and we hope to improve floral displays. Following extensive public consultation, we have had fabricated new “Welcome to Bawtry” signs, which are awaiting installation by DMBC.

Traffic congestion, speed and nuisance parking are major issues for the town. As a Town Council, we have very little power in these areas – we have to look to DMBC for significant change. Historically, the Council’s relationship with DMBC has not been very productive. We have now embarked on a number of substantial and constructive discussions with them about these subjects, ably assisted by one of our Ward Councillors, Rachael Blake. Her role was instrumental in the progress made to make Station Road safer for school children, and to the extension of yellow lines on Tickhill Road. We are pressing DMBC on making a “traffic plan” for Bawtry, to ease congestion, reduce speed, and make the town safer for pedestrians. We are also exploring with them the possibility of “residents only” parking in some streets.

A major problem is the sorry state of the Market Hill pavement. Research and legal advice has been unable to establish ownership of this footpath. Whose responsibility it is to maintain it – to make it safe – cannot therefore be established. We have therefore decided to adopt a pragmatic approach, of sharing costs, to try to get it repaired. DMBC initially rejected this proposal, but their position appears as if it may change.

The new pavilion erected on the Memorial Sports Ground will be a great asset for the town; work commenced in November. This facility, striven for by BARS’ Matthew Brearley over many years, has been financially supported by the Council, and facilitated by our leasing the site to them. Currently, the Council is considering a request from BARS for further funds to enable the building to be completed.

The Council is of the view that its historical policy of increasing the Market Hill car park charging hours and fees has damaged the prosperity of the town, and has sought ways to reverse these changes. We have, however, been unable to do so, because of the terms of the Contract with Excel Parking Services made in 2007 and renewed in 2011 for 10 years. A three month trial, of free parking on Sundays and Bank Holidays, was made at the start of 2017 but the original charging regime was reverted to at the end of the trial because of Excel’s intransigence. We have had to recognise the possibility that no positive change may be achieved until the Excel contract expires in 2021. Even so, the Council’s Working Group has been trying to identify the potential of new parking facilities, to provide additional spaces and to make us less reliant upon Excel.

We were obliged to close the Gainsborough Road toilets because of repeated vandalism and defacement. This decision, however, was made on the basis of premises in the town – the hotel, bars, restaurants etc. – displaying notices that the public were welcome to use their toilet facilities.

No new licences to serve alcohol were granted during the year. This may have been, in part, as a result of the Cumulative Impact Policy now applied to licensing in Bawtry. This policy makes it harder for new licence applications to be successful and was adopted in 2015 by DMBC, the Licensing Authority, at our request, reflecting our view that the number of licensed premises in Bawtry should not become any greater.

It was decided to try to provide a taxi rank on Market Hill, for use late on weekend nights, to get revellers away from Bawtry after closing time. This process has proved to be more complicated than envisaged but is nearing completion.

Crime levels in Bawtry have remained relatively modest, but last year saw reports of increase and the Council has attempted to understand these. Unfortunately we have had little success to date in establishing any meaningful dialogue with South Yorkshire Police; these efforts will be renewed.

The Council continues to support events in the town, and decided to try to work more closely in the future with other organisations planning and delivering events – hence the creation of the new Working Group. Events highlights were the BARS Sports and Gala Day in June, the Christmas lights “switch on” in November (with the Council funding the carousel) lead by the Bawtry Retail Association, followed by the Carols around the Tree event on Christmas Eve, organised by Bawtry Churches Together.

At the end of the year, the Council agreed to become lead partner in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to secure monies to celebrate Bawtry’s history, one element of this plan being to create a Town Trail. The attempt to put together a persuasive bid continues. Work has also continued to relocate the War Memorial, to make it more accessible. Quotations are being obtained to move it to the Community Library site.

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan continued, to the point that Steering Group members are now drafting the Plan in preparation for the formal examination and consultation processes later in 2017.

It is hoped that all these efforts to improve the town will be continued, and that the many discussions we have held with DMBC will begin to bear more fruit.

The report to be placed in the Bawtry Today publication

1. Issues Raised by Residents of the Parish.

* Gainsborough road toilets including the Eps obligations and costs incurred by the Council. Noted that the EPS Contract governed their obligations.
* Toilet stickers/scheme and lack of retailers currently advertising this.
* Increase of car parking fees to enable resurfacing in 2011. EPS Contract noted to govern this not unilateral decisions by the Council.
* Problems with the yellow lines at Tickhill Road. Parking study to consider.
* Improved cemetery maintenance noted but recent spacing to be reviewed.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.30pm

Signed…………………………………….

Dated………………………………………