

BENTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday, 25 April 2006.

Present: Cllrs Adams, DeLaHaye, Faichney, Heigh, Hey, Hurlley (Chairman), Marshall, Reynolds, Stannard & Wills, also the Clerk and 16 parishioners

Apologies: DCllr Camacho

Notice convening the meeting was read by the Chairman

1. Minutes of the 2005 Meeting

Minutes of the above meeting were presented. Cllr Wills proposed their acceptance and Cllr Marshall seconded

2. Mayor's Report

Cllr Hurlley began his report with the re-opening of the Town Hall in April 2005. Refurbishment has cost £400K, but Bentham now has a building suitable for use in the 21st Century. He thanked the Council for their work during and after the project, particularly Cllrs Wills, Adams and Marshall without whose efforts would have seen the costs far higher.

New licensing rules came into force in November which affects use of the Town Hall for events proceeding after midnight. These rules insist that door staff are employed pushing up the cost of events, however at a ratio of 1 doorman per 100 guests these costs may not prove too onerous.

The culvert in Low Bentham that had collapsed in early 2005 was repaired by NYCC during the summer at a reported cost of £250K. As NYCC had accepted liability thankfully Bentham residents did not have to directly foot the bill and flooding should not be a problem in the future.

The Indoor Market and the Farmers Market which had restarted in the Town Hall following the refurbishment are doing well. The Clerk has done a lot of work to encourage traders to attend, and it is now up to the public to support them and buy local where possible. The Tourist Information Point has also moved into the front office. Affordable housing is in great need in the area and Cllr Hurlley told the meeting that nine houses are being built on Wesley Close. New business premises are also being built in Low Bentham, which will hopefully bring more jobs to the area.

The Town Council is also encouraging Craven District Council to build a new car park down Station Road, to help ease congestion on the Main Street. It will also be available to rail users. The Council is keen to see more trains run on the Bentham line.

To improve communications between the Council and Bentham the Clerk is now working out of the Town Hall two mornings a week. This is proving very popular with parishioners being able to look at planning applications, book the Town Hall or raise issues face to face.

Cllr Hurlley finished by saying that there will be a new Council after the elections on 4 May, but that he was confident that the new Councillors would continue to make every effort to make Bentham a better place to live and work. Finally he thanked the Town Councillors and the Clerk for their support in his year of office, and the members of the public who have attended meetings.

3. Financial / Precept Details

Copies of the Reconciliation of Receipts and Payments for 2005/6 were circulated, and indicated a credit of £12379.23. The Clerk explained once again it was not possible to make comparisons with previous years as the completion of payments for the refurbishment project has distorted the picture, with expenditure being considerably greater than income.

Once again the burial account had made a small profit, helped in part by the change in accounting for grass cutting such that non-cemetery cutting was no longer charged to the burial account.

The market account set up in 2005 had been used purely for market promotion, with expenditure being made on advertising and leaflet drops in Bentham News. The successful Taxi Voucher Scheme had come to an end with the financial year and the surplus had been returned to NYCC. Two loan repayments have been made to PWLB and the excess of £20K returned within the penalty free period.

The completion of the refurbishment led to the Town Hall being re-valued for insurance purposes and premiums rose by 50%. Service charges have all increased and a contract cleaning company have been hired on a fortnightly basis. The Council has also taken on a larger grass-cutting schedule. All of which has increased outgoings.

Income from the Town Hall is now back to pre-refurbishment levels, with the Indoor and Farmers markets helping to replace income from those organisations that chose not to return to the building. Hire charges were left at 2005 levels to encourage greater use, and the new Council will be looking at actively marketing the building to increase income.

Details of the 2006/7 Precept were outlined, and approval of 12 grant applications from local organisations indicated a grant budget of £4,650. These included grants to 2 new organisations, and increased payments to both the Victoria Institute and Bentham Community Bonfire.

When questions were invited from the floor an explanation of the large income and expenditure figures was requested. The Clerk said that income was made up, in the main, of the annual precept and nearly £70K reclaimed VAT from the previous year, plus a much smaller income from the Town Hall and Market. Expenditure included £190K payments for the refurbishment project plus £70K loan and excess payments to the PWLB, the rest was due to the running of the Council.

4. Library

Changes to staffing at Bentham Library have been made following the death of Pauline Hill and the retirement of Diane Chant

John Frankland is now the Community & Information Assistant in charge and Liz Farmer has joined the Bentham Team, with Liz Charton as the Community & Information Officer providing the link between the Bentham branch and the rest of the area team.

The Chatterbooks club for 8/9 year olds has contributed to an increase in junior books. Bentham Primary School visits the library weekly and the Reading Group is well attended. The public network computers are well used. The reservation system was computerised in the last year resulting in over 50% of reserved books reaching the customer within a week countrywide. The Home Library Information Service, which provides housebound people with a delivery of books etc through volunteers, is being used more.

5. Reports from Local Organisations

Reports were received from:

Abbeyfield, Age Concern, Aid in Sickness,
Bentham Agricultural Society, Bentham AFC, Bentham Juniors Football Club, B. Community Transport, B. Cricket Club, B. Development Trust, B. News, B. Traders Association, Bowling Club,
Cancer Support Group, Churches Together, Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Bonfire, Community Centre, Craven Juniors AFC,
Ewecross Historical Society,
Footpath Group,
Goodenber Play Area,
High Bentham Playgroup, High Bentham WI, Homing Society,
Justice & Peace,
LASRUG, Looking Well,
Meals on Wheels, Mencap,
Nursing Benevolent Fund,
Pet Rescue, Playing Field Association,
Sedbergh Junior School, Springboard,
Theatre Group, Tourist Information, Toy Library, Tuesday Morning Club,
Victoria Institute,
Women's Social Services and NSPCC.

There were no reports from:

Blind Persons Association, Brownies & Guides, Christian Aid, Friends of LBCP School, Indoor Bowls & Low Bentham WI.

6. A.O.B.

Ms W Dowbiggin thanked the Mayor, Council and Clerk for all their work for Bentham in the past year. She said that it was recognised that they had done a good job, and that the refurbishment of the Town Hall was much appreciated.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.