

BENTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Precept Meeting held on Monday 11 January 2010, at 7.30 pm in the Town Hall

Present Cllrs Adams, Barnes, Barrington, Burton, Heigh, Taylor, Wills & Yaman
Also, the Clerk Mrs Burton and 4 parishioners

182. Apologies Cllrs Hurtley & Marshall

183. Declarations of Interest

All interests were declared in item 187, grant applications. Cllr Barrington is a committee member for LASRUG and the Victoria Institute. Cllr Adams is a committee member of the Community Bonfire, the Theatre Group and the Youth Theatre Group. Cllr Wills is a committee member of the Community Bonfire. Cllr Yaman is a committee member of the Playing Fields Association, Bentham Youth Cafe and High Bentham WI, and declared a personal interest in the Victoria Institute. Councillors representing the Council on various organisations do not have to declare an interest.

184. Comments & Concerns - none

185. Projected Assessment 2010/11

The clerk circulated copies of the projected assessment for the year 2010/11. She explained that the predictions for the current year were based on actual income / expenditure to the end of December 2009, i.e. 3/4 year adjusted to the full year either by the addition of known costs or by converting from 3/4 to 4/4. The predicted overspend / under spend for the current year was then calculated as the difference between budgeted and actual expenditure plus or minus any differences from budgeted income.

The Council as a whole was considerably under budget this year to date.

Open Spaces: The under spend in this area was due to the fact that Craven had closed the public toilets thus saving the Council the budgeted salary to open and close them. Grass cutting had also been under budget as fewer cuts had been made than expected and the poor summer meant that the proposed work to the public seats around the town was still unfinished. The new grass cutting contract for 2010, following a change of contractor, was slightly cheaper. Also agreement with NYCC to take on the Low Bentham School Playing Field for the children in Low Bentham meant a further £1100 was required, which could be covered from the completion of the payments to Thwaites.

Market: Expenditure was under budget as no rent had been paid due to the lack of a lease. Income was slightly under budget as another stall had been lost. It was hoped that the lease problem could be resolved in 2010, but Craven was still showing no inclination to do this. The final legal costs could still not be estimated.

Admin: Stationery and postage were both under budget. This was mainly due to the bulk buying of stamps prior to the price increase which had fallen into last years expenditure. Telephone costs were over budget due to a call out charge levied by BT, and the website was also over budget as updates were now paid for following the resignation of Cllr Stannard. Consideration should be given, upon advice from YLCA, to direct debit payments for telephone lines which were previously deemed unlawful for parish councils.

There was considerable discussion regarding the clerk's hours and status. Following an increase in workload it was agreed that the hours should increase to 65 per month with a regular presence in the Town Hall and that in view of this the clerk should be come employed rather than self employed. Due to the increase in National Insurance payments that this will create it was agreed that the budget for the clerk should be increased to £11500

RESOLVED: That the clerk's hours be increased to 65 / month and that, in view of the change in requirements, the clerk should become employed as of 1 April 2010.

Street Lighting: The under spend in this area was due to the unexpected continuation of the fixed rate contract for the unmetered supply. Maintenance had also been below budget, but the Council was reminded that this was expected due to the three year cycle of work, with 2010/11 being the 'third year' where costs would be higher.

Cemetery: Again costs are difficult to predict as they are associated with burials / memorials, although as income had been higher than expected again an increased income figure had been included. The new grass-cutting contract showed a slight reduction in maintenance costs.

Town Hall: Income was running in line with budget this year, although an increase in bookings in the post Christmas period suggested that income should actually exceed budget by the end of the year. This was attributed to the marketing leaflet produced and a small budget for this purpose was suggested for the coming year. The maintenance budget under spend was due to the fact that the project to patch the rendering on the building had turned out to be a much bigger and therefore more expensive job than expected. It had been agreed that the budget for this should be added to the 2010/11 maintenance budget and the project be completed in the coming year. The predicted under spend on gas was not expected to materialise following the prolonged cold spell in December / January, particularly as the coming quarter is always the most expensive. Increases of up to 5% were proposed in

the budget for all the services. Following consideration of the budget surplus for the current year it was agreed to finance the rendering project out of this, and therefore reduce the ongoing maintenance budget for the coming year. Grants to the value of £4950 had been made in 2009/10 as the Playgroup had failed to get off the ground. Loan repayments of approximately £48500 will continue in 2010/11 as the old loan will be restructured to take account of reduced interest rates when the Community Centre purchase goes through.

186.Special Projects

186.1. Parish Caretaker

Following receipt of the grant for the Parish Caretaker the Council needed to find £2000 in match funding. The ongoing cost of bench maintenance would move to the Parish Caretaker and the saving on opening and closing the toilets could also cover this.

RESOLVED That the cost of the Parish Caretaker be added to the Open Spaces budget, and be funded from the parish seats and the saving made from Craven's closure of the public toilets.

186.2. Tourist Information

At the 2009 Precept meeting it had been suggested that the Tourist Information should become fully part of the Council's accounts. This idea was discussed in some detail but it was agreed that the TIP was better placed to attract other funding as an independent organisation, and that with a fixed grant from the Council it would have to live within its means

RESOLVED That the Tourist Information remain a separate organisation and continue to receive a precept grant.

186.3. Others, if any – none

187.Grants

The grant request from the Community Bonfire was discussed, particularly the cost of the Lantern Procession when the children are charged to take part. It was explained that this payment was made from the gate surplus. It was proposed and seconded that the payment remain at £250, an amendment to increase the payment to £300 was proposed. As Cllr Adams had declared an interest the members present elected Cllr Yaman as chair for this particular discussion and vote. The vote was counted as 3 for the amendment and 4 for the original proposal, with the proposal being passed.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £250 be awarded to the Community Bonfire

With the Council agreeing to buy the Community Centre and partially refurbish the building for youth work in the town, the Youth Café request for a grant caused some lively discussion. Cllr Burton indicated that although not required he would not take part in the discussion or any vote on the subject. The Council recognised that the Youth Café require to pay staff regardless of where they are situated and that the new building will take time to complete. A payment of £500 was proposed and seconded. An amendment of £250 was also proposed and seconded. A vote on the amendment was defeated 2:3 and the vote on the proposal was passed 4:2

RESOLVED: that a grant of £500 be awarded to Bentham Youth Café

The lack of colour in the lights was mentioned, but a proposal to reduce the payment to the Christmas Lights was not seconded. It was proposed that the payment remain at £500 and this was seconded and passed with 6 votes to 1.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £500 be awarded to the Christmas Lights.

It was proposed and seconded that the grant to High Bentham WI remain at £100, but an amendment that it should be increased to £125 and was also proposed. The amendment was passed 4:2.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £125 be awarded to High Bentham WI.

Goodenber Play Area is in need considerable funds to replace some of the equipment. It was proposed that the Council grant be increased to £750, but, in view of the Wesley Way development and the envisaged increase use of the area, an amendment was tabled that a grant of £1000 should be made. This was agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: that a grant of £1000 be awarded to the Goodenber Play Area.

There was discussion regarding the level of grant funding and donations received by the Victoria Institute in the last year. A grant of £400 was proposed and seconded. An amendment to increase this amount could find no second. The proposal was passed 4:1 in the ensuing vote.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £400 be awarded to the Victoria Institute

The Low Bentham Badminton Club had a difficult 2009/10 with the closure of SJS and the need to find new premises. The Council recognised that the members, including the youngsters, had worked very hard to raise funds to cover the increased fees and felt that this should be recognised. A grant of £250 was proposed and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £250 be awarded to the Low Bentham Badminton Club

Grant funding from Craven to the Tourist Information in 2009/10 had been cut back to £800, which had meant that reserves had reduced considerably during the year. The Craven grant has been confirmed for 2010/11, but at the same level and therefore to continue operating at the current level an increase will be required from the Council. The TIP continues to look at ways of increasing income and potential grants from other sources, but these are limited. Visitor numbers rose by a further 6% in 2009/10 and the TIP does offer a good service thanks to the volunteers. A grant of £1000 which would cover some of the Craven shortfall plus the Council's previous grant of £600 was proposed and seconded, and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: that a grant of £1000 be awarded to the Tourist Information Point

Considering the Craven Citizens Advice Bureau request the Council discussed the good work of the organisation and the size of the organisation and its income. It was proposed that no grant was given. However other members felt that the work of the organisation locally should be taken into account and proposed a grant of £100. A vote on the amendment and the proposal was 3:5 with the original proposal being carried

RESOLVED: that no grant be made to Craven Citizens Advice Bureau

Similarly Council recognised the worthwhile work of Relate. However it was argued that the benefit to the town as a whole was limited and the organisation had considerable income from other sources. It was proposed that no grant be made, and agreed unanimously

RESOLVED: that no grant be made to Relate

Fifteen applications were received for 2010/11, and the following grants were approved:

Playing Fields Association	1000
Goodenber Road Play Area	1000
Tourist Information	1000
Bowling Club	500
Christmas Lights	500
Bentham Youth Cafe	500
Victoria Institute	400
Badminton Club	250
Community Bonfire	250
LASRUG	200
Youth Theatre Group	150
High Bentham WI	125
Theatre Group	100
Craven CAB	0
Relate	0
	5975

As before grants of £500 or more will be paid in 2 instalments and the Bonfire grant will be paid in October. The Tourist Information grant will be paid in full in April, as it is only open for the summer months. It was agreed that organisations receiving precept grants should be present at the Annual Parish Meeting to give a report, and that failure to attend may affect the way that the Council considers further applications

RESOLVED: that grants of £5975 be awarded to local groups and associations.

RESOLVED: that organisations receiving grants should attend the Annual Parish Meeting.

188.Precept 2010/11

The agreed grants expenditure was above that discussion in the projected assessment. The Council agreed to reduce the proposed contingency (to cover the unknown legal expenses of the Cleveland Square lease) accordingly giving a predicted expenditure of £115,560 for the coming year. This gave a precept of £100,000, which is the same as 2009/10

RESOLVED: that a precept of £100,000 be set

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.05pm