

BEWDLEY TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

The Town Council

1. Bewdley Town Council was created in 1974 following the reorganisation of local government in England & Wales before which it had been a Borough within Worcestershire. It now forms part of Wyre Forest District which is one of six Districts within Worcestershire.
2. Bewdley Town Council has 13 Town Councillors all of whom are elected for a term of four years and whose names and contact details appear at the foot of this report. For voting purposes, Bewdley is divided into three Wards which are Bewdley West (4 Councillors) and Bewdley East (4 Councillors) on the west side of the river and Wribbenhall (5 Councillors) on the east side.
3. The last Town Council Elections took place on 22nd May 2014 with the next due in May 2019 following a change in electoral arrangements at district level.
4. The Town Council year begins officially with the Annual Meeting of the Town Council. This is also known as "Mayor-Making" when the Town Councillors elect a Mayor, a Deputy Mayor, the Town Council's Committees and Advisory Groups, and representatives to outside bodies. This took place on 13th May 2016 when Cllr John Beeson was elected as Mayor and Cllr Philip Edmundson as Deputy Mayor for a second term.
5. The Town Council and Planning Committee meet once a month. They generally do so on the first Monday of each month unless that happens to be a Bank Holiday in which case they take place a day later.
6. The Policy and Resources Committee meets bi-monthly and considers matters in relation to general Council policy, budgeting and staffing matters.
7. The Community Development Committee meets bi-monthly. This has a wide remit to consider issues such as the Neighbourhood Plan, events and markets, public toilets, Christmas lights and road safety issues.
8. The attendance record for the year to date of the Town Councillors is set out in the table at the end of this report.
9. The Town Council holds its formal meetings in the Guildhall which is owned by the District Council but made available as and when required for Town Council purposes. However, the Council is keen secure premises of its own as the Council is outgrowing its single rented office in the Guildhall.
10. The Town Council is actively involved with a number of organisations in Bewdley on which it has representatives including Bewdley Civic Society, Community Transport Wyre Forest, Bewdley Development Trust, Bewdley Medical Practice Patients' Advisory Group and Millennium Green Planning Group.
11. In addition, the Council has representatives on the following organisations: Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils Executive (CALC), Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau, Wyre Forest Community Emergency Planning Forum and Wyre Forest Parish Forum.

Civic Matters & Mayoralty

12. The Mayor and (if appointed) the Mayoress or Consort in the company of two or more of their ceremonial officers (Macebearers and Town Constable) attend the following events during the course of the year when they may be accompanied by Town Councillors: St. George's Day Parade in April, Annual Meeting of the Town Council (Mayor-Making) in May, Mayor's Sunday, Bewdley Festival Service in October, Remembrance Day Services in November and the Christmas Lights switch on in December.
13. The Mayor undertook a large and varied number of engagements during the year being invited by many local organisations to their functions plus representing Bewdley at functions across Worcestershire.
14. The Mayor's chosen charity for the year was the Wyre Forest Citizen's Advice Bureau.
15. The Deputy Mayor also undertook civic duties in the Mayor's absence as and when required to ensure Bewdley was well represented at local events.

Council Staff

16. Nick Farress is the Town Clerk and has overall responsibility for the day to day operation of the Council.
17. Ellie Hooper is the Mayor's PA and Council Administrator who is now in her fifth year of office. Her local knowledge and good contacts are an essential part of supporting whoever is the Mayor.
18. Barbara Byng is the Assistant Town Clerk and acts as the committee clerk to the Council's Planning and Community Development Committees, as well as working on the Neighbourhood Plan.
19. David Moore is the Treasurer who has carried out that role for twelve years.
20. Alan Banks is the Council's caretaker and looks after the Load Street public conveniences.
21. Kyle Daisley is the Council's Community Engagement and Events Officer working on events, markets and other community focussed projects.
22. Five posts are part time only with the Town Clerk role being full time. The payroll function for the Council is carried out by the District Council.
23. The Council has a number of volunteers including a Town Marshal and a small team of Community Volunteers (Flood Defences).

Town Amenities & Maintenance

24. Richard Jones is the Town's Lengthsman who also runs his own gardening and landscaping business to assist in that role. Petr Kratky is his Assistant.
25. The role of the Lengthsman is to carry out a wide range of minor works within the Bewdley boundaries but mainly in the town centre on behalf of the County Council as Highway Authority which provides a budget of £2895. In 2016/17 the whole of this amount has been utilised. The

Council has also engaged the Probation Service to use its Community Payback teams to carry out work in clearing weeds and vegetation along Severnside North and South and in Millennium Green.

26. The Town Council pays for the servicing of the Town Clock on St. Anne's Church Tower.
27. The Town Council owns nine bus shelters. All these bus shelters have been provided from funds of Worcestershire County Council but are maintained and kept in repair by the Town Council.
28. The Town Council at present owns and maintains some 41 seats and benches situated in the town, some of which with plaques have been donated in memory of people for whom Bewdley was a special place.
29. The Town Council owns and maintains seven lifebelts on Severnside North, Severnside South and along Beales Corner which are checked on a regular basis. Again it is pleasing that there have been no losses during the year on account of anti-social activities.
30. The Town Council owns and maintains nine street poles in Load Street which are used for Christmas lights, bunting for the Carnival and for the town's hanging baskets.
31. The Town Council manages the events notice board on Beale's Corner and all voluntary, not for profit organisations in the town are able to advertise events taking place in Bewdley, subject to liaising with the Town Clerk's office as to a suitable slot in the diary being available. Due to high demand, it is necessary to limit advertising to a period of one week per event to run from Monday to Sunday. Any adverts must also comply with the requirement that they are not too wordy as to cause a distraction for motorists.
32. The Town Council has continued to set aside money to pay the District Council for the running costs and maintenance of the Wyre Hill Play Area adjacent to St Anne's School.
33. The condition of Bewdley's rural footpaths is monitored by a voluntary Parish Footpath Officer, Mrs Ann-Marie Faloon.
34. The condition of Bewdley's trees is monitored by the two voluntary Tree Wardens, Mr Cliff Willmot and Mr Gren Jones, appointed by the Town Council who comment on planning applications for work to be done on trees in the Town. They are primarily concerned with trees that are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order and all trees within the town centre Conservation Area. Where any tree is to be removed for a genuine reason they usually recommend a replacement is planted to maintain and enhance the overall amenity of the town.
35. The Town Council owns a number of flower tubs and planters located around the town. They are planted up for the summer and winter seasons by the District Council. The District Council also provide the Town Council with the hanging baskets affixed to the street poles in Load Street plus the "tree-basket" display at Beales Corner. It is pleasing to report that there has been negligible vandalism to the plants despite their vulnerability especially late at night.

36. The Town Council provides the Christmas Lights which are switched on for a period of about six weeks from late November into the New Year. It pays a company called Gala Lights to provide the display including installation, removal and storage. The Council also puts on the annual switch on event.
37. The Town Council arranges and pays for the fireworks display which is centred on the Rowing Club and forms part of the Carnival entertainment in June. In 2017, this will again be held on the Saturday night as this worked well last year.

Town Planning

38. Through its Planning Committee which meets each month, the Town Council maintains an active role in planning matters. All planning applications in Bewdley and within the Ribbesford Parish are referred by the District Council to the Town Council Planning Committee for its views as a consultee. It should be noted that the District Council makes the final decision in each case.
39. All Planning Committee meetings of the Town Council are open to the public and generally take place (subject to occasional changes) at 5.30pm prior to each Council meeting. However, it is likely to be on a different evening from May 2017 due to the number of applications it needs to consider, along with planning policy issues and consultations. Anyone wishing to speak either for or against a planning application may do so subject to standing orders and in consultation with the Town Clerk.

Communication with residents

40. The agendas for the Town Council plus all Committees are available for public viewing prior to the meeting date on the notice boards situated outside the Town Clerk's office. The minutes of Council and Planning Committees can be viewed afterwards on the same noticeboard. Both the agendas, papers and minutes of all Committees can be viewed online at www.bewdleytowncouncil.org
41. The Council's website contains information, news, links and updates on all Bewdley related matters. The website also includes an interactive planning tracker – www.bewdleytowncouncil.org. The Council also has an active Facebook page – search "Bewdley Town Council".
42. The Bridge magazine continues to devote one page each month to "Town Council News" which is written by the Town Clerk and includes main items of interest from the Council meetings and additional information that may be relevant.

Policing Matters

43. The Town Council maintains regular contact with West Mercia Police at various levels including the Police & Crime Commissioner, the North Worcestershire Superintendent and the local Safer Neighbourhood Team. The Town Council has a Police Liaison Group which leads on policing matters. The Bewdley & Rural Safer Neighbourhood Team comprises Police Constable Steve Thomas and three Community Support Officers. The Council is also represented via the Clerk on Team Wyre Forest, a partnership of the police, Safer Wyre Forest (WFDC) and Town Councils.

Millennium Green

44. The Council holds this land situated adjacent to the Shaw Hedge Road Community Centre in Wribbenhall on trust for the community. It represents a welcome green space for residents to sit quietly on the bench seats provided or to walk through. The Council is currently running a campaign to recruit new volunteers to look after the Green. In recent years new fruit trees have been planted to encourage the local community to see the benefits of small scale food production. The Council continues to arrange for the Probation Service's Community Payback team to carry out grass cutting, cutting back of bushes and vegetation and clearance of litter.

Neighbourhood Plan

45. The Council continue to work on Bewdley's Neighbourhood Plan. Throughout the country with encouragement from the Government, more town and parish councils have embarked on this process, the purpose of which is to give a stronger voice to local residents on planning issues and land use. The Neighbourhood Plan does need to be in general conformity with the District Council's own planning policies and national planning policy. The first public consultation took place in March 2016, with the draft objectives and policies consultation held on the 18th March 2017. There will be further opportunities when the draft Plan is published for the community to comment. Ultimately it will be the subject of a referendum for Bewdley residents to either accept or reject. You can find information about the Plan at www.beinbewdley.org.

Localism

46. The Town Council remains supportive of the localism agenda as a principle namely that functions carried out by the County and District Councils should wherever practicable be passed down to Town/Parish Councils.
47. The Town Council have taken over responsibility for the Load Street public conveniences and will shortly be taking over the green space next to the new Load Street car park. The Council are keen to investigate other areas where it can enhance services where this is appropriate and in line with the Council's aims and objectives.

Finances

48. The bulk of the Town Council's income continues to come from the precept. This is the sum of money which the Town Council raises from householders in Bewdley. It forms part of the overall Council Tax levied by the County Council, West Mercia Police Authority and the Fire & Rescue Service which is collected on their behalf by Wyre Forest District Council. For an average Band D householder just £35.70 is spent by the Town Council each year.
49. The Policy and Resources Committee considers applications for grants from a number of local community based organisations. The payment of any grant is subject to certain terms and conditions but a number of local groups operating within and benefiting the community were last year able to benefit to the extent of £12,500.

50. For the year 2017/18, the Town Council has agreed to make £12,500 available for grants to local organisations. Voluntary and community organisations who would be interested in applying for a grant should make contact with the Town Clerk who can advise of the relevant terms and conditions which have been laid down as to eligibility, or view these at www.bewdleytowncouncil.org. It also has a Small Grants Fund which organisations can apply to for promoting community events in the town.
51. Overall when it came to considering the budget for the forthcoming year 2017/18, the Committee and Council decided to increase its part of the Council Tax by 34.2%. This increase will be used to fulfil the Council's corporate aim of securing its own premises over the short to medium term. The table below shows how the average Band D charge has increased during the last eight years though it remains a very small percentage of the overall total Council Tax bill.

Year	Precept £	Band D Charge £	Increase %
2010/11	80,399	21.52	0.00
2011/12	80,184	21.52	0.00
2012/13	81,302	21.52	0.00
2013/14	78,826	23.59	2.07
2014/15	87,491	25.71	2.12
2015/16	89,522	25.71	0.00
2016/17	94,864	26.61	3.50
2017/18	128,377	35.70	34.20

52. Like ordinary savers, the Town Council has found it difficult to get a realistic level of interest on its reserves of money. The Council has placed some of its reserves on deposit. The Council does not invest money where there is any risk of loss of capital. The position is kept constantly under review.
53. Over a period of many years the Council has been able to build up a reasonable level of reserves. They comprise reserves that are earmarked for certain items or projects for which money had been saved and general reserves that are there to act as a cushion against unexpected events and contingencies. As at 31st March 2017 the reserves totalled around £90,000 and the Council was debt free. Having a healthy reserve balance is important given the overall uncertainty about public expenditure, and this continues to be the case. Certain items may be required to be funded by the Town Council in the future under the localism agenda which at present are funded from other public bodies and agencies.
54. In the future, the Town Council are seeking premises to house their offices, but also make the Council more accessible to the public and potentially provide meeting spaces and office accommodation to community groups who may be in need of such facilities. This will of course be dependent on the eventual property choice.

BEWDLEY TOWN COUNCIL – FINANCIAL POSITION

Annual Town Meeting Figures					
		<u>2015/16</u>	<u>2016/17</u>		
Income					
	Precept	89522	94865		
	Christmas Lights- donation from Cllr Yarranton	0	1300		
	Christmas Market- Lottery grant	0	4500		
	Churchyards Grant exWFDC	700	0		
	Community Engagement Officer (WFDC)	0	3500		
	Community Flood Volunteer Scheme	0	200		
	Donation towards defibrillator	0	475		
	Lengthsman Scheme	2311	3479		
	Shortfall Funding	10004	9296		
	Localism Fund (WFDC)	0	1900		
	Interest Received	250	245		
	Economic Regeneration (WFDC)	5000	0		
	Harvest Fayre Co-ordination	0	215		
	Load Street Toilets (WFDC)	6700	3450		
	Neighbourhood Plan Grant	6500	2500		
	Memorial Seats	650	500		
	Museum Cleaning	0	715		
	New Noticeboard (WFDC)	1270	0		
	Christmas Lights replacement (WFDC)	1300	1770		
	Queen's 90th Birthday donation	0	200		
	Together Project Income	0	1851		
	Lottery Grant- Neighbourhood Plan	5906	0		
	Total Income	130113	130961		
Expenditure					
	Salaries	41935	46189		
	Operating Costs	10265	10245		
	Town Maintenance	13559	13940		
	Council Costs	6457	6960		
	Election Costs		6539		
	Grant Aid Donations	20740	11942		
	Town Events	11441	18383		
	Millennium Green Maintenance	525	682		
	Capital Expenditure	1494	743		
	Small Grants Fund	0	400		
	Together Project	757	0		
	Neighbourhood Plan	7684	5854		
	Load St Toilets	1352	7392		
	Shaw Hedge Rd Play Equipment grant	2000	0		
	Total Expenditure	118209	129269		
	Net Surplus	11904	1692		

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Councillors' Attendance Record Schedule 2016/17

COUNCILLOR	FULL COUNCIL	PLANNING	P&R	COMMUNITY
Alton M	0/7	n/a	n/a	n/a
Beeson J	11/11	n/a	n/a	5/6
Byng J	1/1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Candlin Mrs L	11/11	10/10	5/6	5/6
Clee S	10/11	n/a	6/6	n/a
Coleman Mrs A	11/11	n/a	6/6	n/a
Coleman R	11/11	3/3	n/a	n/a
Davies Mrs E	5/11*	n/a	2/6*	n/a
Edginton-White Mrs C	11/11	10/10	6/6	5/6
Edmundson P	11/11	n/a	5/6	n/a
Fishwick Miss M	11/11	10/10	n/a	6/6
Harrison P	1/1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Killingworth D	11/11	10/10	6/6	5/6
Mace Miss A	8/8	n/a	1/1	n/a
Yarranton G	11/11	5/6	n/a	n/a

*illness/bereavement

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