

BEWDLEY TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

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 2018 although this is currently under review.
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 15th May 2015 when Cllr Mrs Calne Edginton-White was elected as Mayor and Cllr Philip Edmundson as Deputy Mayor.
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 Finance Committee meets approximately six times a year, their meetings being concentrated in the autumn and New Year in order to finalise the budget and precept.
7. The Staffing Committee meets on average three times a year to deal with matters relating to the employment of the Council’s staff
8. The Better Bewdley Advisory Committee meets every other month. This has a wide remit to consider issues often of a one-off nature that can improve the character and community of the town. Its role is to advise the Council and consists of Councillors plus up to seven non-councillors who bring and add their local knowledge to the discussions.
9. The attendance record for the year to date of the Town Councillors is set out in the table at the end of this report.
10. 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 to visit other areas of the community and has recently held meetings at St George’s Hall and St Anne’s CE Primary School.
11. 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.

12. 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

13. 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 Festival in December.
14. 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.
15. The Mayor's chosen charities for the year were two local organisations – Bloodwise and Midlands Air Ambulance.
16. 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

17. Nick Farress is the Town Clerk who has just completed one years' service and has overall responsibility for the day to day operation of the Council.
18. Ellie Hooper is the Mayor's PA who is now in her fourth year of office. Her local knowledge and good contacts are an essential part of supporting whoever is the Mayor.
19. Barbara Byng is the Assistant Town Clerk and acts as the committee clerk to the Council's Planning and Better Bewdley Advisory Committees.
20. David Moore is the Treasurer who has carried out that role for eleven years.
21. Alan Banks is the Council's caretaker and looks after the Load Street public conveniences.
22. All five posts are part time only but, holidays and sickness absence apart it does enable the office to be open for most of each working day . The payroll function for the Council is carried out by the District Council.
23. The Council has a number of volunteers including an Events Co-ordinator, Chief Town Marshal and a small team of Community Volunteers (Flood Defence).

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. Nick Ashby has recently stood down from the post of Assistant Lengthsman in order to concentrate on his work as a well-known local artist.

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 2015/16 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.
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 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. This was a new arrangement in 2015 which provided a new, brighter scheme for the town.
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 2016, this will be held on the Saturday night and will be part of the celebrations for the Carnival's 50th anniversary and Queen's 90th Birthday.

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. During the last twelve months, 134 applications have been considered by the Committee.
39. All Planning Committee meetings of the Town Council are open to the public and generally take place (subject to occasional changes) at 6.00pm prior to each Council meeting. 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 the Planning and Finance Committees are available for public viewing prior to the meeting date on the notice boards situated outside the Library, outside the Mayor's Parlour and inside the covered entrance to the Guildhall. The minutes can be viewed afterwards at the Library or on the Guildhall notice board. More conveniently perhaps for those with internet access, both the agendas and minutes 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 brand new website is now live which 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. Inspector Edd Williams is in charge of local policing throughout the Wyre Forest area, assisted by Sergeant Jan Shore based at Stourport, who leads the Bewdley & Rural Safer Neighbourhood Team which comprises Police Constable Steve Thomas and three Community Support Officers.

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. Thanks to a number of key volunteers led by local resident Sarah Lange, it also has raised flower beds that are looked after by local people. Sarah 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.

Better Bewdley Advisory Committee

45. This Committee's overall remit is to bring forward proposals which will bring benefit to the town and which may not otherwise be considered by the Council within its existing structure. Its membership includes up to seven non-councillors who can lend their own expertise to the subjects covered. To date the Committee has been working on the Neighbourhood Plan, a review of the Christmas lights provision, road safety issues, the town guide book and provision of events and markets. From May 2016, this Committee will be replaced by the new Community Development Committee.

Neighbourhood Plan

46. The Council have started working on Bewdley's Neighbourhood Plan. This area covered by the Plan will coincide with the boundaries of the Town Council. 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 conformity with the District Council's own planning policies and national planning policy. The first public consultation took place in March 2016 and there will be further opportunities for the community to develop ideas and objectives for what should or should not be built, how open spaces should be enhanced and overall amenities improved. 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

47. 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.

48. The Town Council have recently taken over responsibility for the Load Street public conveniences and continue to work with the District Council on issues such as events and markets, litter patrols and public parks.

Finances

49. 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 who pays £1,621.88 in Council Tax, just £26.61 is spent by the Town Council.
50. The Finance 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 nearly £18,000.
51. For the year 2016/17, the Town Council has agreed to make £14,500 available for grants to local organisations in anticipation of greater demand as support from other agencies is often subject to reductions. 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.
52. Overall when it came to considering the budget for the forthcoming year 2016/17, the Committee and Council decided to increase its part of the Council Tax by 3.5%. The table below shows how the average Band D charge has increased during the last seven 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

53. 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.
54. 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 2016 the reserves totalled around £90,000. The Council remains debt free.

55. Although subject to final audit and year-end adjustments income for the year has exceeded expenditure and hence the reserves have been increased. 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.

BEWDLEY TOWN COUNCIL – FINANCIAL POSITION

		2014/15	2015/16
Income			
	Precept	87491	89522
	Churchyards Grant exWFDC	1400	700
	Lengthsman Scheme	2895	2895
	Shortfall Funding	9663	10004
	Localism Fund (WFDC)	3555	0
	Interest Received	176	203
	Economic Regeneration (WFDC)	0	5000
	Load Street Toilets (WFDC)	0	6700
	Neighbourhood Plan Grant	0	6500
	Memorial Seats	0	650
	New Noticeboard (WFDC)	0	1270
	Christmas Lights replacement (WFDC)	0	1300
	Lottery Grant- Neighbourhood Plan	0	5906
	Total Income	105180	130650
Expenditure			
	Salaries	39700	41935
	Operating Costs	10566	10589
	Town Maintenance	13360	13709
	Council Costs	6594	7197
	Election Costs	4388	0
	Grant Aid Donations	17880	21940
	Town Events	5924	11241
	Millennium Green Maintenance	450	525
	Capital Expenditure	3618	1494
	Together Project	252	782
	Neighbourhood Plan	0	7310
	Load St Toilets	0	1352
	Shaw Hedge Rd Play Equipment grant	0	2000
	Total Expenditure	102732	120074
	Net Surplus	2448	10576

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Councillors' Attendance Record Schedule 2015/16

COUNCILLOR	FULL COUNCIL	PLANNING	FINANCE	STAFFING	BETTER BEWDLEY
Alton M	7/11	n/a	n/a	1/1	0/3
Beeson J	10/11	10/11	5/5	n/a	3/9
Candlin Mrs L	11/11	11/11	4/5	2/2	8/9
Clee S	9/11	n/a	n/a	2/2	n/a
Coleman Mrs A	11/11	n/a	n/a	2/2	n/a
Coleman R	11/11	n/a	n/a	2/2	n/a
Davies Mrs E	4/11*	n/a	n/a	2/2	n/a
Edginton-White Mrs C	11/11	n/a	5/5	n/a	9/9
Edmundson P	10/11	n/a	1/5	n/a	5/9
Fishwick Miss M	11/11	11/11	n/a	n/a	n/a
Killingworth D	11/11	11/11	4/5	n/a	6/9
Mace Miss A	10/11	10/11	n/a	2/2	9/9
Yarranton G	11/11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Illness

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