

Minutes of the **MEETING** of **BISHOP AUCKLAND TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Wesley Room at the Four Clocks Centre, Bishop Auckland on **TUESDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2014** at 6.00 p.m.

**Present:** Councillor Fleming (Mayor), and Councillors Anderson, Brownson, Golightly, Lethbridge, Race, Wilson and S. Zair.

**Also Present:** Clive Auld (Bishop Auckland Town Team) and David Anderson (Town Clerk).

**TC.117/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Blackburn, A. Zair and L. Zair

**TC.118/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were submitted

**TC.119/13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No issues were raised under this item.

**TC.120/13 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2013**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes be approved as a correct.

There were no matters arising.

**TC.121/12 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

- a. Planning Committee, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013
- b. Human Resources Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014
- c. Finance Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014
- d. Events Committee 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes be approved and adopted.

There were no matters arising

**TC.122/13 REPORT OF TOWN MAYOR**

The Mayor reported on the events he had attended since the last Council meeting, including:-

10 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Recorded a Christmas message for Bishop FM,
13 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Greater Willington Town Council's Civic Carol Service
14 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Assisted with Christmas events in the Newgate Centre arranged by Bishop Auckland Town Team
15 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Spennymoor Town Council's Civic Carol Service
16 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Chilton Town Council's Civic Carol Service
19 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Sandringham Care Homes to open a lounge
20 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Mayor of Hartlepool Borough Council's Christmas Carol Service
22 <sup>nd</sup> December 2013	Held an Ecumenical Service at St Peter's Chapel, Auckland Castle

**RESOLVED:** That the information be noted.

**Signed:** .....  
**Town Mayor**

## **REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES AND TRAINING EVENTS**

### **TC.123/13 TOWN TEAM**

Clive Auld, Bishop Auckland Town Team, reported that the Christmas events arranged by the Town Team had been very successful. Various events had been held on 7<sup>th</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2013, which had all received positive feedback from the public and traders. There had also been very good feedback on the new Christmas lights.

Work was continuing to be done on the project to appeal against the level of business rates in the town centre. Mr Auld reported that a positive outcome was expected.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be noted.

### **TC.124/13 THE BIG LOCAL – GAUNLESS GATEWAY**

Councillor Brownson and Clive Auld reported on progress on the Big Local – Gaunless Gateway project. It was noted that public representatives had not come forward for the Tindale Crescent area and therefore that area was to be amalgamated with Woodhouse Close area for the purposes of the project.

Durham Rural Community Council had carried out a public consultation and would report their findings at a meeting to be held the following week.

The Chief Executive of The Big Local was to visit the group in March.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be noted.

## **REPORT OF TOWN CLERK**

### **TC.125/13 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15 – 2017/18**

#### **COUNCIL TAX 2014/15**

Consideration was given to the Town Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 – 2017/18 and in particular the proposed budget for 2014/15 financial year so that the Council Tax could be set.

It was noted that in addition to inflationary pressures the Council's funding was also vulnerable to the effects of the Localisation of Council Tax Support regime which had the unintended consequence of reducing the Town Council's Tax Base, thereby reducing the ability to raise revenue.

The Government had made a grant available, however this did not make up the entire shortfall. Durham County Council had informed local councils that the allocation would reduce year on year in line with the reduction of revenue grant paid by the Government to it. Grant forecasted up to 2017/18 was included in the MTFP.

In addition, it was noted that the Secretary of State's powers to impose a referendum on principal councils where increases in Council Tax were above a certain level, may be extended to local councils. This would limit the Council's ability to deliver additional services. An announcement had not yet been made, however indications were that if this regime was imposed on local councils it may only apply to those Parish/Town Council that levy a Council Tax above the level of the smallest district councils, i.e. around £160 - £170 (Band D). An announcement was not expected until mid February, however Durham County Council had requested notification of local councils precepts by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> January 2104.

**Signed:** .....  
**Town Mayor**

Bishop Auckland Town Council would not be affected if the referendum regime was extended as reported. However any announcement by the Secretary of State would be reported to Council and the Council Tax and precept would be revisited if necessary.

### **Budget proposals**

Members noted that the Finance Committee had considered the MTFP, incorporating budget proposals for 2014/15 at its meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The following amendments were proposed:-

- The allocation to Citizens Advice Bureaux be suspended as it was understood that following the reorganisation of CAB the donation was no longer necessary.
- The contract with Groundwork Trust to provide the Parks and Environment Team not be renewed for 2014/15 as it was considered that the Town Council no longer received value for money.
- That an allocation of £3,000 be made to cover the cost of production of a quarterly newsletter as it was important to advise the public of the activities of the Town Council. The publication of a quarterly newsletter was also a criterion for Quality Status, which emphasised its importance.
- An allocation of £5,000 was proposed to assist the staging of Velo 29, a town centre cycle race which would bring economic benefit to the town. Financial assistance of this event had previously been agreed in principle by the Council (Minute No FIN.36/13 and TC.81/13 refer)
- It was noted that an allocation of £5,000 had been included to help fund a Parish Plan. This would assist the Council in understanding the public's views on local services they would like the Town Council to deliver or improve.
- The allocation of £5,000 from reserves be deleted.

The resulting Council Tax would be £36.35 (Band D) which represented an increase of £7.75 or 27.12%.

Detailed consideration was given to the proposals made by the Finance Committee, with particular emphasis being given to the level of increase, in monetary and percentage terms, affordability and the likely affect on Council services going forward.

It was noted that a lengthy meeting of the Finance Committee had taken place which had considered budget options in great detail.

A motion was **Moved** by Councillor Anderson, **Seconded** by Councillor Golightly to agree the budget proposals made by the Finance Committee.

An **Amendment** was **Moved** by Councillor S Zair, **Seconded** by Councillor Race that:

The following Allocations be deleted from the proposed budget to reduce the Council Tax to £34.05, resulting in an increase of £5.46 (19.08%) (Band D):-

Events (Market) Budget	£5,000
Bishop Proms	£6,000
Music festival	£6,000

**Signed:** .....  
**Town Mayor**

On a vote being taken the amendment was **defeated**.

**N.B.** In accordance with Standing Order No. 1.s. Councillor S. Zair requested a recorded vote.

**Voting for the Amendment:** Councillors S Zair and Race

**Voting against the Amendment:** Councillors Anderson, Brownson, Fleming, Golightly, Lethbridge and Wilson.

On a vote being taken the original motion was **carried**

**N.B.** In accordance with Standing Order No. 1.s. Councillor S. Zair requested a recorded vote.

**Voting for the original Motion:** Councillors Anderson, Brownson, Fleming, Golightly, Lethbridge and Wilson

**Voting against the original Motion:** Councillors S Zair and Race

**RESOLVED:** That the budget proposals and Medium Term Financial Plan made by the Finance Committee, as detailed in the report, be approved and a precept of £142,284 be declared for 2014/15, which would result in a Council Tax of £36.35 (Band D).

#### **TC.126/13 PROVISIONAL MEETINGS DATES 2014/15**

Consideration was given to a calendar showing provisional dates of meetings for the 2014/15 municipal year.

**RESOLVED:** That the diary of meetings be approved.

#### **TC.127/13 CAR PARKING**

Following discussion of car parking issues at the previous Council meeting it was noted that information had been received from Adrian White, Head of Transport and Contract Services, Durham County Council with regard to the call for free parking after 3.00 p.m.

Mr White had advised that Durham County Council would need to look at this type of initiative across the County as a whole, which could result in a loss of income estimated to be in the region of £2,500 per day. This would be difficult to justify at a time when decisions were being taken to reduce budgets and/or services.

It was noted that Middlesbrough Borough Council had introduced a discounted parking scheme in the run up to Christmas, however it was difficult to fully evaluate the impact of these offers. Whilst their free parking trial has been reported as a success due to the council car parks being full, the reality of the situation was that motorists had simply moved from the privately run car parks to the council run car parks. There was no evidence of an increase in shoppers being generated by the initiative.

A similar scheme introduced by Darlington Borough Council had been funded by traders themselves which had been put together by the local BID (Business Improvement District) who were underwriting most of the costs. The possibility of such

**Signed:** .....  
**Town Mayor**

a scheme being introduced in Bishop Auckland could be explored with Town Team partners, possibly as part of shop local scheme.

Research suggested that the likelihood of finding a parking space being available was more important to motorists than being put off by a modest charge, e.g. 60p for 2 hours. Also free parking at certain times of the day did not necessarily increase the number of shoppers visiting a town centre. It merely resulted in people changing the time of day that they shop.

There had been concern that shoppers were going out of town rather than using the Town Centre. However Mr White reported that after an initial dip in car park revenue, it had now recovered to previous levels and was fairly static.

Given the reduction in Government support for local authorities and the difficult decisions members were having to make in relation to reducing budgets, the County Council would struggle to justify putting further pressure on their finances by giving up existing parking revenue.

However, Mr White emphasised that the County Council were keen to support local traders and town centres. They had recently reviewed yellow lines and other designated bays in order to create some free "limited waiting" spaces to help with trade. They continue to be committed to this approach, but in order to encourage and promote real economic growth we must look at a wide range of factors, not just parking.

Mr White, or a senior officer from his team, would be attending the Town Team meeting later that week to respond to car parking issues which had been raised as a priority.

Councillor S. Zair reported that the online petition had raised around 1,000 signatures and the issue was being pursued by Councillor L. Zair.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be noted.

#### **TC128/13 TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

The following would be invited to attend an appropriately timed meeting to update the Town Council on their activities:

- Auckland Castle Trust
- Ron Hogg, Police and Crime Commissioner
- Relevant senior officers of Durham County Council and County Councillors be invited to discuss:-
  - a. the decline of Bishop Auckland Town Centre
  - b. the possible adverse implications of the next stage of development of the Tindale Crescent out of town retail park
  - c. Durham County Council's plans for the economic regeneration of Bishop Auckland Town Centre.

**Signed:** .....  
**Town Mayor**