

BAWDESWELL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 18TH MAY 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

WELCOME – Welcome all. Nice to see familiar faces (and a few new ones). Will make my usual comments at start: not a parish council meeting; I will try to keep some sense of order to proceedings, but really opportunity for you to say what you want when you want – heckle as you like, but just try to keep language down remembering we are in the church!

Which reminds me – usual H&S warnings: exits are the one you came in by and the back door through the vestry – toilet is also out there.

FORMAT – Just in case you are shy, thought I would kick off with few words about the work of the parish council over the last year, and where we hope to go from here. Reminder, shout if you disagree or want to make an alternative point of view!

Then, if we haven't descended into mayhem, I will give James a chance to tell you the latest about the new VH and its future. [Believe we might also have someone to chat to us about the exciting future of the School?] Finally, it is up to you – say your piece about anything going on, or not going on, in the village, what you want and what you don't – only by airing your views do we get a better perspective about what is important to the village.

PARISH COUNCIL - OK, let's start with the Parish Council. And first, in case you haven't met her, I should introduce our new parish clerk, Jo Boxall, who joined us last September. Jo is nearly 'local' in that she lives just down the road in Pettywell. She brings a wealth of useful experience as she is also the town clerk in Reepham and parish clerk at Corpusty. She has already put that experience to very good effect in Bawdeswell by better organising how the PC goes about its business and I, for one, feel that the council is on a much better and a more even keel!

As I hope you know, the PC also faced an election 2 weeks ago, along with central government and Breckland. However, regrettably, we didn't get enough candidates so all 5 volunteers (myself, William, James, Bill and Tony Smith were elected unopposed). Bit of double edged sword, as a fought election would have cost village money! John Mallen has since been coopted again to serve another year – thank you John. But we are still looking for one more councillor – ideally, such a person would be a female with a particular interest in the Two Fields Way/Paradise Road area of the village; but more importantly, we need someone with an interest in taking the village forward. Any takers – names to myself or Jo Boxall?

Regarding the last year, all important to most people is money! Well, we started the year with £8K, and ended it with £17.6K! That sounds horrendous to me, but when you dig deeper, it is not as bad as it sounds, in that it all surrounds the funding requirements for the new VH. As you will be aware, the PC (on behalf of the village) has given £50K to the new VH by taking out a mortgage loan – this, however, is a zero sum gain as far as the village is concerned in that the repayments of this loan is offset by the amount we used to give to the VH for maintenance – the VH Committee look after that now. However, to get the all-important Lottery grant, the PC also had to give approval in principle to a possible further grant of £72K which we had to make provision to repay starting in last year's precept – hence the significant hike in the precept last year, and our excessive balance of £17K at the end of the year!

As it turns out, thankfully, the new VH does not need any of the additional £72K; so in theory we could and should start to reduce the precept in future years.

However, the PC, with the help of the VH Committee, now have to grapple with the problem of improving the environment in which the new VH sits – none of us wants an glass castle in the middle of a swamp! While I personally do not believe we should saddle the village with further debt, I do believe that we should put a major

part of the end of year surplus towards the VH/Recreation Ground project.

Moreover, the other issue the PC has to get to grips with this year is putting the maintenance of village assets on a firmer footing. In the past we have relied totally on the goodwill of a few volunteers to look after the village green, Jubilee Garden and Adam's Pit etc. While saluting their efforts, and encouraging others to follow their example, we cannot afford to rely solely on their goodwill; so the PC is setting in place some professional maintenance effort to support to volunteers. This, of course, will cost money, which is catered for in this year's precept, but will also have an influence in any future precepts as well.

So, the underlying message is: we have some money to spare, but there is much to do and plenty of areas to spend it on; so, don't expect too much of a reduction in council tax in the future!

What else have we been up to this year – usual curate's egg!

We still have something of an anti-social behaviour problem in the village, and our 'crime' stats don't make pleasant reading compared to other villages around, but we have managed to contain it to some extent thanks to extra support from the Police and, perhaps surprisingly, to the efforts of the contractor building the new VH. We now have to review plans once the new VH is up and running, bearing in mind that light summer evenings is when we get most of our problems!

I suppose we could look on the bright side and say that we have managed to maintain the semblance of a reasonable bus service to Norwich and Fakenham, but it is nowhere near the level of service we need, and we have failed to attract any support within NCC staff for a bus service to Dereham. It still remains one of our priorities, however!

It was also a good/bad year for the so-called Dereham Road Trod. After a lot of traffic damage to the path over the winter, Highways

ruled that maintaining the Trod was not viable. However, given that many generous locals had donated money to the village's 25% share in the project, at least Highways were generous enough to give us the money back! The basis of the path is still there, and we continue to encourage Highways to maintain/improve the drainage on Dereham Road, but aside from the usual bi annual cuts, Highways will not tend the path. Doesn't stop volunteers though if there continues to be any interest in doing so?

Despite the new VH construction, and Breckland introducing more domestic recycling collections, the village did remarkably well on the recycling credit last year – a total of £897, which is now up for grabs. So, if you have small community projects in mind, and are desperate for some funding, drop a line to Jo; otherwise, my vote will be to use the money on the Recreation Ground.

Finally, let me mention the possible development of the so-called Two Fields Way site and, in that context, repeat what will be the PC approach to consultations with Breckland over its new development plan over the next year:

- First, and despite activities which suggest something is being considered, Breckland planners have assured us that there have been no discussions or planning applications for the Two Fields Way site. Until there is (and I suspect there will be) the PC cannot comment, albeit Breckland is and should be well aware of the local sensitivity over the issue.**
- What will be the PC view on any plan for the site – I don't know; it depends very much on the plan and every case will continue to be considered on its own merits. But, rest assured that the policy we take forward to Breckland on its new LDF – that Bawdeswell wishes to retain its settlement boundary and sees no scope for any major development without settlement of major infrastructure, schooling and local employment issues – will remain at the forefront of our minds.**