

Annual Town Meeting – 8 March 2018

Questions submitted by the Public in advance of the meeting and the Town Council's responses:

- 1. Bodmin junior parkrun is 6 months old this Sunday.... over our 26 events we have seen 229 different youngsters run/walk/ jog around the 2k course a total of 876 times covering a total distance of 1752 km. We are proud to have presented a total of 18 Half Marathon wristbands to athletes who have run at least 11 times and we have one dedicated youngster who received his Marathon wristband having completed 21 separate events.**

We have a fabulous team of 66 adult and junior volunteers and we are now training new Run Directors for our own event and a team of volunteers for a new junior parkrun setting up in Devonport.

Bodmin juniors would like to thank Bodmin Town Council for their support by allowing us to use BTC land at Hillside Park playing fields.

My question is to ask if BTC to commit to support us continue the success of this growing community event by facilitating the recruitment of Volunteer Dog Wardens. The dog fouling in this area is causing increasingly serious problems for both volunteers and participants. It is becoming almost impossible for us to put on the event each week.

If BTC cannot take this on then I ask that BTC staff clear their field for us prior to our event every Sunday morning.

Answer:

Dog fouling is a blight on our community and is detrimental to the enjoyment of our open spaces and the day-to-day walk to school, work or into town.

I am aware that Councillors have been making their own enquiries into the volunteer dog warden programme and they have asked that this matter is itemised on the Bodmin Town Council agenda for 22 March for discussion.

As there will be other implications to consider it may take some time to work through given policy implications and factoring this into the Council's existing work programme.

This is an extremely difficult area to enforce given the requirement to see the act of not picking up taking place and the offence can usually take place early in the morning or late in the evening when staff or volunteers might not be on duty.

Staff do not currently work Sundays so are not able to clear this site of hazards left by irresponsible dog owners – as event organisers the risk assessment process must cover any hazards with the implementation of control measures to mitigate those risks.

- 2. GAS MAIN WORKS. When will they end?! I note that the contractors have already been given an extension of time to carry out the works from their initial plan. Can BTC put any pressure on the contractors/service providers who are carrying out the gas main improvements or on Cornwall Council to not allow them any further extensions of time? The works seem to be dragging on, are very poorly manned, the traffic lights and barriers keep falling down and frankly the residents are getting fed up of the disruption.**

Answer:

I (Town Clerk) will be meeting with representatives of Wales & West on the 15th of March to discuss gas works in Bodmin and I have already e-mailed them, copying in Cornwall Council, to express serious concerns with the lack of visible progress on site which is leading to ongoing disruption to local residents.

The perception is that there is little concentrated activity taking place to bring about quick completion of works which is leading to ongoing disruption.

An update will be reported to Bodmin Town Council on 22 March.

- 3. OPEN SPACES PROTECTION. Does BTC believe that all of the open spaces owned and /or controlled by BTC should be protected from unwanted and/or unwarranted development? I ask this again, as I did last year, when I raised the Fields in Trust scheme. This was mentioned at the properties committee meeting in June last year and I have heard nothing since. I appreciate that staff time is precious which is why I offered to volunteer to complete the paperwork and as much as I could for the process. Fields in Trust have accessed over £3 Million to improve parks in their protection, they have access to funds, resources and discounts on play equipment. It makes economic sense to protect our open spaces via Fields in Trust.**

Answer:

Bodmin Town Council is keen to protect open spaces around the town and to look at ways of increasing financial assistance via other ways than the precept.

Bodmin Town Council has recently land transferred the Lower Midway Road play area from Cornwall Council to protect that site into the future for the benefit of the community and it has also acquired the play area on Beacon Heights (Northey Road) via Land Transfer from the developer.

The first step around Fields in Trust would be to work through the land registration process with land registry and that piece of work will need to be actioned prior to any Fields of Trust application process. The Town Council would want to consider the legal implications of the Fields in Trust process. Given the range of projects that the Town Council has planned, it will need to prioritise work and currently, Fields in Trust is not one of the higher priority pieces of work.

- 4. GRANITE SLABS FROM 'THE ROADWORKS'. What ideas has BTC received in relation to the reuse of the granite slabs recovered from the roadworks? Do BTC intend to do anything with the slabs? May I suggest our very own standing stone circle at Hillside Park perhaps, it would be a great feature for the many cyclists and walkers coming into town from the Camel Trail and I'm sure that if you speak nicely to the contractors from the Jail that they will assist with the works whilst they are digging the car park and repairing the leat.**

Answer:

The Town Council has incorporated some of the smaller pieces of granite into some flowerbeds in Priory Park and some can be used to form seating areas. The Parks Manager has considered a stone structure but there are issues to work through to mitigate risk given their weight at anything from 1.5 to 3 tonnes each and obvious H&S implications around fixing methods and ongoing maintenance. Sinking them into the ground is an option but would be dictated by the concept and how they would be set out.

Any thoughts of stacking them along the lines of a mini stone henge would increase the risk given fixing methods and topple risk.

There are some limitations at Hillside Park given the presence of an underground cable which has restrictions around what can be installed above its route and the ongoing discussions on the principle of a car park (subject to contract) with the owners of Bodmin Jail.

This standing stone concept will need to be considered by the Council through its Properties Committee.

- 5. DARK SKIES. I have noticed that the new college emits a considerable amount of light pollution. As BTC are aware Bodmin Moor has attained the internationally recognised 'Dark Skies' status. Will BTC make it a policy that any future development in the town takes this into consideration and ensures that lighting levels are controlled so as not to cause any further light pollution, especially at the northern end of town. Additionally will BTC endeavour to get Cornwall Council to include this as a requirement of new developments in the town?**

Answer:

The Town Council are only consultees in the planning process so ultimately any policy that BTC implements would be overruled by the final decision of the local planning authority.

However, Bodmin Town Council has and continues to make consultation responses based on mitigating light pollution given the dark skies designation. Bodmin is outside of the dark skies buffer zone (2 mile area around the core area of designation) so unlikely to trigger any proximity concerns with the dark skies designation.

However, Town Council consultation responses will continue to include representations on light pollution issues for larger developments as and when appropriate.

Aside from the International Dark Sky Landscape designation, there are other lighting considerations / controls already in place through the National Planning Policy Framework and Cornwall Council do implement policies to take into the dark sky designation both in the Cornwall wide Local Plan (policy 23) and the and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan which is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

For example, the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy 23 of the Cornwall-wide Local Plan seek to protect dark landscapes / areas of dark sky. Also the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, which is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, recognises the importance of the dark sky. In addition to the planning system, light pollution is also a potential statutory nuisance (in extreme cases).

- 6. BUDGET. Now that the town's budget has been set and the precept increased again will BTC publish the full budget (not just the headline figures) so that the townsfolk can see where you plan to spend our money and hence have the opportunity to discuss things with the councillors who represent them?**

Answer:

Yes – the Town Council will be publishing the budget on the Council's website together with other data – there is a section under the 'documents' tab from the Council's home page called 'Local Government Transparency Code' where information is being populated and then uploaded.

Bodmin Town Council will be publishing information on individual posts (jobs) and the salary grade and band for each post. The Council employs a number of part time staff so there will be some comparison information to take account of any pro rata adjustments.

In terms of the budget and the precept, Bodmin Town Council is not the highest precepting local (parish and town) council in Cornwall. As a number of local councils are taking on devolved assets and services from Cornwall Council they are increasing their precepts to fund those services for their communities.

Historically, and unlike some towns and parishes, Bodmin Town Council has owned and operated a number of services (such as parks and open spaces, public toilets, cemeteries, play areas and CCTV) for a number of years which accounts for Bodmin's precept being higher when compared with other towns. However, other towns and parishes are now having to make budgetary provision for these services to be retained by their communities which has seen their precepts increase.

To assist, the following table shows Bodmin in correlation with some of the other, larger towns in Cornwall:

Town and Parish Council's Precepts 2018/19

Town	Precept	Band D Tax Base	% increase
1. Falmouth	£1,762,397.85	6,947.40	2.56
2. Newquay	£1,680,811.00	7,799.95	0.00
3. Truro	£1,659,892.00	6,780.53	1.29
4. Penzance	£1,337,625.00	6,852.93	2.18
5. Bodmin	£1,283,850.00	4,290.95	2.37

The Band D figure is calculated by way of simple division of precept amount through the number of Band D properties – for Bodmin this

equates as follows: 1,283,850 divided by 4,290.95 = £299.20 per annum for a Band D charge (equates to around £5.75 per week).

As a comparison, Falmouth for example has the highest precept in the county at £1,762,397.85 but has a taxbase of 6,947.40 giving a Band charge of £253.68.

Bodmin does not have many Band D properties so the Band D comparison is a fairly weak tool and leads to a perception around Bodmin having the highest precept, when the reality is that of the larger, more proactive towns, Bodmin is ranked 5th.

Bands A, B and C are then calculated based on the Band D figure so are affected by the cascade nature which leads to Bodmin having the highest Band A to D figures i.e. if your Band D is high in comparison to others so will all of the other Bands (for example Band A is 6/9ths of Band D).

The Band Charge for Cornwall Council is £1,468.50 and for Devon and Cornwall Police is £188.28.

The full precept list for Cornwall is attached (document reference Appendix 6 Taxbase by Parish and Parish Precept and Band D Council Tax refers) for information.

6. BTC PROPERTY/ROOM HIRE. Can I have a detailed breakdown of the income from hirings for all BTC properties/rooms please? What has BTC done in order to increase revenue? How has BTC marketed its rooms/facilities/properties in order to maximise income? What are BTC's plans to increase revenue from its property portfolio?

The Council is looking at alternative ways of generating income and have agreed that a full review of its properties is required, where each operational and investment property is made to work for the Council and provide income to support its services, whilst minimising the financial burden on the people of Bodmin.

One of these ways is to look at implementing full repairing and insuring leases on its buildings to discharge that liability on to tenants.

In terms of the Shire House, the Council is aware that there is a large amount of work to be carried out such as a replacement heating system, flat roof repairs and refurbishment of some areas and as the building is listed it adds to the sensitivity and the level of potential disruption as and when work is carried out. The Council has not marketed its room hire facilities whilst it considered various options and

in light of discussions and to reduce burden of costs, a review of services will be carried out this financial year.

Due to the large level of financial commitment required to fund its property portfolio, the Council prior to May 2017 elections decided to let the incoming Council make the decision about the future of the Shire House. This Council are doing just that but are being realistic in terms of exploring options.

The Council has tasked its Officers with looking into the feasibility of relocating staff currently based in Shire House into Shire Hall with the view that the Shire House can then be used for a combination of longer-term rental options together with continuing community use of the Shire House Suite and the Dining Room, on a low cost hire basis with the costs of providing those facilities at low cost offset by rentals.

This is the starting point of a larger inward look at its services and this will need to harmonise with the Council's revised (new) strategic aims and objectives which will be considered at the March Full Council meeting.

7. NARISA HALL. Since its rebuild what percentage of time has Narisa Hall stood empty. What are BTC going to do with the building?

Narisa Hall has been empty since the former tenants handed the keys back to the Council in December 2016.

The building was kept vacant from January 2017 to September 2017 as alternative accommodation for the Bodmin Community Association (BCA) as part of the Section 25 Notice issued under the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 to achieve the sale of the Public Rooms to Merlin Cinema. The BCA declined the Council's offer of use of Narisa Hall.

- From 2013 Narisa Hall has been occupied 72% of the time by Bodmin Bandroom Ltd,
- 17% held for the BCA as alternative accommodation in line with S25 Notice – which ran until 8 September 2017.
- 11% unoccupied (October 2017 to present day).

Bodmin Town Council has now resolved to actively market the property, having obtained a range of quotations, to ensure best value. – permission to advertise was granted by the Council on 18 January 2018 and the commercial agent was agreed at the Properties Committee on 25 January 2018.

Change of use has not been ruled out and the Council, via its agents, would be open to offers.

Merlin Cinema are carrying out building works to the Public Rooms this year (2018) to bring a cinema to Bodmin.

8. COUNCILLOR TRAINING. What training do councillors receive in order to be competent in their role as representatives of the townsfolk, guardians of the public purse and committee chairs? As it is 10 months since the last elections have all of the councillors received adequate training to fulfil their roles?

Answer:

Training is an ongoing process like all Continual Professional Development (CPD) and is considered and arranged in line with any new areas of work.

Councillors have been on training which includes:

- Being a Good Councillor;
- Code of Conduct;
- Finance;
- Planning (including a specialist planning conference);
- Performance Management;
- Internal Audit;
- Strategic aims and objectives workshops (a series of)

Training currently being organised includes:

- Employer Responsibilities – SW Councils;
- Treasury Management - CIPFA;
- Risk Management – CIPFA
- Chairmanship Training