

Beeston Regis Parish –

Annual Parish Meeting 10th. May, 2023.

This meeting is a statutory requirement on all Parishes, and is not, as such, a Council meeting; it is in effect a Parishioners meeting.

Having endured the rigours of the Coronavirus pandemic with its various lockdowns The Parish Council, has now returned to our in person monthly meetings and have hopefully now consigned both Covid, and Zoom to the past.

I begin by saying farewell, and thank you, to two of our longest-standing members, Derek Thompson and Margaret Roffe, both of whom have retired from the Council. Between them they have clocked up something like 45 years of service and have been very valued members; we will certainly miss them.

By virtue of the election last week, both vacancies created have been filled and I am pleased to welcome both Neal Wylde and Pete Thorogate, who I am sure will prove fine additions to our Council. Therefore, we are once again fully up to our designated complement of 11 Councillors, and all elected, no less, and we therefore securely maintain our General Power of Competence.

As always, I must say a few words of thanks to my fellow Councillors for their efforts throughout the past year, all of whom contribute valuable input to the Council. And of course, our Clerk, Peter Bullimore, who has, as always, ensured the Council operates within its obligations and that matters are dealt with appropriately. Although the Quality Council scheme has never fully benefitted us to the extent it perhaps was intended, we can proudly say that we still hold that Quality status.

I will touch on a few of the financial matters concerning your Council.

As a Parish Council, we are funded principally on a precept basis, collected within your Council Tax. The 2022/23 precept was £12,500, and I am pleased to report that we have, after some sterling budgetary work by Peter and Roy, maintained the precept at that level for the 23/24 year.

You will be aware that around 98% of your Council Tax goes to the County and District Councils and the Police Authority, and that £12,500 for Beeston Regis represents something like 50p per week per household. That level of precept is the same as it was when I first came to sit in this chair twelve years ago, and Beeston Regis is placed well below the average precept on the NNDC list. Of course, faced with continually rising costs, the other authorities I just mentioned continue to increase their precepts, often to the maximum allowed within Government guidelines.

One of our most significant costs is for street lighting. Last year I suggested that our costs were likely to increase significantly when our then current contract expired in April 2023. On compiling our budget we decided to double the figure projected for electricity. We were totally shocked when nPower, our supplier, offered us a new contract at approximately four and a half times the level of the previous one. This would have involved us having to dip into our reserves to the tune of around £2500

for this years supply, and probably to increase our precept for future years by that amount.

After much to-ing and fro-ing and countless hours on the telephone, we were able, at the eleventh hour, to seize upon an opportunity to sign with Scottish and Southern Energy who had, only that week, entered the unmetered supply market, at just under half the nPower offer, which was within a little of what we had budgeted for. We signed up for two years amid huge sighs of relief.

We do also receive a few grants from Norfolk County Council, the major one being for Safety Cuts relating to grass verges. Those grants usually cover our total costs in respect of not only the verges involved, but all of the grass areas in the Parish and I think Stuart from Secret Gardens does a sterling job in keeping the Parish looking neat and tidy.

In addition, we are awarded a small sum for road sign cleaning, which Stuart kindly takes care of as well.

New for this year was a contract to maintain the surface areas of our most significant public footpaths. Will Peverill, our maintenance man, has done a sterling job, walking the paths on a scheduled basis and keeping them passable. That contract, which actually covers more than Will's costs to us has just been renewed for another year. We have five dog bins within the Parish which are emptied at our expense— and I always like to note that there are a further nine dog bins in the Parish both provided, and emptied, by the holiday park.

And there is now clothes bank in Briton Lane, which I am pleased to say seems to be quite well used.

A couple more points to note regarding Finance....

We take responsibility in house for bus shelter cleaning – not sure if I should perhaps refer to it as the Beeston book depository? - and maintenance and siting of the Vehicle Activated Speed Sign for which I must specifically thank Councillor Nick Wright.

The defibrillator situated at the bottom of Britons Lane has been monitored weekly by Councillor Ralph Smith and as far as I am aware has fortunately not been required over the last year.

We will as usual circulate full accounts for the year just ended, which will be published in the next issue of Beeston Regis News. Peter will be completing them shortly and I can report that we succeeded in operating within our set budget for 2022/23.

Sitting here last year I was able to tell you about our upcoming Queen's Jubilee events, which developed into a totally enjoyable concert at Beeston Hall School, a classic car show on the Church Field and topped off with the beacon lighting in the Churchyard. All these events were extremely well attended – I was particularly amazed at the number of Parishioners that came to see the beacon lit, ending the evening with a rousing "God Save the Queen". All those events were primarily organized by our Vice Chairman, Roy Beckley, who in a short while I shall be trying to convince to continue in the role for another year!

Of course, we have now had the Coronation of our new King this last weekend. The Council deliberated over organising something but ultimately decided that there was plenty going on elsewhere and decided against. We were intending to perhaps light the beacon again, but insurance issues conspired to defeat us on that endeavour.

There have been a number of planning applications over the past year, and members have studied these and the Council, as a consultee has responded where appropriate. Last year I mentioned the renovation and conversion of Beeston Hall Barns....well, it still hasn't been determined.

Probably the most significant to appear recently is the application by the County Council to construct a new and improved Recycling Centre, opposite, and slightly further East than the existing one. It is a massive and very detailed application and the Parish Council has grave concerns on several aspects, not least the traffic arrangements (as always – thinking about Britons Lane!), and the fact of moving it across the road places it in our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We have, as always, submitted a comprehensive response.

I would also note at this point that we will soon have a couple of “gateways” installed on Britons Lane, to be situated just north of the quarry entrance. These are to be directed at northbound traffic in the hope of encouraging drivers to slow down and drive carefully through the narrow section. I am pleased to report that the cost of these is to be borne partly by Norfolk County Council under their Parish Partnership scheme and our contribution is to be covered by our County Councillor, Judy Oliver, from her small budget.

We will now move on to a couple of brief reports from Roy regarding the two Beeston Regis charities, and I shall finish by saying your Parish Council is here to assist in any way it can, and if there are any issues or queries, both Peter and I are available.

Michael Knowles,
Chairman,
Beeston Regis Parish Council.

10th. May 2022.