

BOSTON TOWN AREA COMMITTEE (BTAC)

20 September 2022

This is the reconvened meeting adjourned from 8.9.22.

Present: Councillor Paul Goodale (Chairman), Councillor Stephen Woodliffe (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Katie Chalmers, Anton Dani, Anne Dorrian, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Brian Rush and Yvonne Stevens

Officers –

Assistant Director - Culture and Leisure, Democratic Services Officer, Interim Strategic Finance Manager, BTAC Small Grants Administrator and Democratic Service Officer.

76 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled for Councillor Alan Bell. Apologies were also tabled by Portfolio Holder Councillor Tracey Abbott.

77 MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 10 August 2022.

78 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Assistant Director – Culture and Leisure (*and Lead Officer for the Committee*) advised that due to the short time line with the re scheduled meeting, the report on the Central Park Play Area Member Working group was not available. However, a final report would be tabled at the next scheduled meeting in November, the working Group had met would come to the November meeting. The group had met and quotes for the work were being sourced

A question was raised seeking an update report on Christmas Lights.

The Chairman confirmed that there would be no update through BTAC as it had no further involvement in respect of Christmas Lights.

BTAC had historically contributed £5000 per annum to the Christmas In Boston organisation to assist with their provision of the annual Christmas Lights display. However, Christmas in Boston had submitted a letter declining the contribution for this year.

BTAC thereafter were asked by the Council to contribute the £5000 which had been declined, towards a tendering process for a provision of Christmas Lights for this year. BTAC had agreed the request.

The results of the tendering process would be taken through a scrutiny committee with any funds being the responsibility of the Council and not BTAC.

79 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

80 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been tabled within the deadline for the opening of this meeting on the 8th September 2022

81 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

None

82 BTAC FINANCIAL REPORT

The Finance Manager presented the report as tabled advising that current projections indicated a surplus for the year of £2,838 with the year's expenditure forecasted to be £730,026.

The main projected variances in the year were noted as follows:

The projected full year expenditure is forecasted to be £730,026; with a projected surplus of £2,838 which would transfer to reserves at year end.

The balance of the "other projects" budget was forecast at £51,514

There was an underspend within the BTAC Operatives Supplies and Services budget of £3,170, whereas Employee Overtime budget had overspent £837

The remaining £505 was made of small variances across all other areas

Referencing the BTAC reserve, members were advised that the opening balance as at 1 April 2022 was £302,530 (comprising £70,000 as the minimum to be held to allow for contingencies - as approved in the budget setting report - plus £51,514 for projects as listed in Appendix 1. The forecasted total closing balance on BTAC's reserve is £169,320, at 31 March 2023. After taking account of the S151 Officer's recommendation of a minimum reserve of £70,000, the Funds available (not allocated) were £169,320 projected for the year end.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

With concern noted at the level of projected funds, clarification was provided that whilst the Funds available (not allocated) were projected to be £169,320 they had not taken into account all of the projects already outlined and others still pending, including a refurbishment of the play area within Central Park and the replacement of the Pirate Ship on Woodville Road, both of which would be expensive. The Chairman also advised that a BID for funding from the Arts Council was being considered which, if successful would require a level of match funding. BTAC had further agreed the extension to the locking of the Central Park Gates which would be a further charge to the projected funds. The Lead Officer confirmed that there would be quarterly reporting of the funds which would change moving forward as projects were agreed and taken forward.

Referencing the recent arson attack on the Pirate Ship within the Woodville Road play area, a member questioned if the item had insurance which would assist in mitigating the replacement costs. The Lead Officer confirmed it was being looked into, the Council clearly had insurance but the threshold level was unknown. The Portfolio Holder added that he had tasked the relevant officers to address and establish the insurance position and, in response to a request that any claim back from the insurance be credited to BTAC as it would be they financing the replacement, he advised had noted the request. There was full support of the committee for replacement of the equipment as soon as possible and the Lead Officer advised that costs and options would come back to the next meeting. Reassurance was also offered that the Police were taking the incident very seriously and that CCTV had been scrutinising their data in depth.

Concern was raised at the potential loss of revenue through Council Tax due to the likelihood of the forecasted increases in the cost of living, with high increases in fuel and the knock on effects to everything else. Whilst Council Tax was a legal requirement, the public's priorities moving forward were unknown with many potentially not be able to pay their Council Tax. The Portfolio Holder agreed that the future could not be predicted but did state that during the pandemic the domestic collection rate for the last quarter of the last year had actually been 94% as against 94.23% the previous year. The Finance Manager agreed that the figure could only be a projected figure during unprecedented times as it would be difficult to try to project the future of the economy not suggest how households would dispense their income.

Members noted the report.

83 CENTRAL PARK SECURITY MEASURES UPDATE

This report was tabled at the meeting held on the 8th September 2022 prior to the meeting being officially adjourned in line with the announcement of the death of Queen Elizabeth. The Chairman was made aware of the urgency of the report to allow renewal of the contract for locking the park gates and agreed he was of the opinion that the item did need to be determined. All members in attendance agreed that the report needed to be determined.

The Markets Manager presented the report (*compiled whilst in his previous role in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour*). Members were reminded of the initial stages of the implementation of locking the gates whereby on the 6th September 2021 BTAC Members agreed the committee would fund the closure of Central Park during the periods of darkness for an initial 1 year period. During that initial period the park had been locked between 2000 hours and 0530 each day with the reason for the park being locked overnight to try to reduce crime, nuisance and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Throughout the course of the year the opening times changes in line with the seasons. Over the first 14 days of locking the gates the private security company employed to conduct the service were supported by the Neighbourhood Police Team (NPT) who also offered support in educating locals and clearing the park before locking. Further support was also offered during the initial days by Boston Borough Council's ASB Officer and the Police Inspector of Lincolnshire Police with the park being closed within 20 minutes of their arrival with reported issues during that first two weeks.

Members noted the log within the time line of the locking to date and the comments of both the Police and the AS Officer each supportive of the continued locking of the gates.

Member comment agreed the success of the project and of the continued funding to take the service forward, but they did question the four differing opening times within the report and suggested that two sets of hours would be more practical across the year.

RESOLVED:

That BTAC having reviewed and commented on the report tabled, agreed to:

- Fund the continuation of locking the park for another 12 months at a cost of £16.500 + VAT
- Agree that the park gates be locked as follows:

0530 – 2200 until British Summer Time ends Sunday 30 October

0530 – 1800 until British Summer Time begins 26th March

**84 FUNDING PROPOSAL FOR BTAC EVENTS DURING THE 2023 - 24
FINANCIAL YEAR**

The Lead Officer presented the annual report on behalf of the Events Manager and advised that two options were available for consideration, or should members wish, an amalgamation of the two options.

Option One incorporated the larger scale events in addition to the existing community based events. That option aimed to keep all the free kids fun events, which people have enjoyed previously, it also added some of the larger events that have shown a large footfall and benefit the Town, including moving the Classic Car Show to the Central Park along with the Continental Market and a Vintage Festival instead of the 1940's event; the Beach in the Park with full programme: Party in the Park incorporating an International Food Festival using local businesses; the Proms at the Stump; an extended Halloween event at the Guildhall and Fydell House; Christmas Light switch on and accompanying events; and Santa Fun Run and Christmas Market.

Option one, would cost BTAC an additional £13,500 for the financial year and a breakdown of this programme is appended (Appendix A), (the annual baseline budget for events is £41,500).

Option Two focused on a more limited programme of events: Easter Bunny Hunt; 1940's event; Classic Car show and Continental Market; Celebrate Boston Day, incorporating an International Food Festival; Halloween in the Market Place; Christmas Light switch on; and Santa Fun Run and Christmas Market.

Option Two was proposed to be delivered within the annual baseline budget for events in 2023/24 of £41,500.

Members were updated on external funding and advised that Boston Big Local (BBL) had been a key supporter of events for Boston residents and its funding had enabled additional community based events in previous years. This funding would cease at the end of March 2023, although they had made provision to fund the construction of the Beach for 2023 but not the accompanying programme. Officers were currently exploring sponsorship opportunities in relation to the Beach.

Transported were also continuing to develop and work with Boston Borough Council to support events in the Town, this year they would once again deliver the Fire Garden on Bargate Green car park as part of the Christmas/Illuminate event, as seen in previous years with huge success. An Arts Council bid has been submitted in relation to this event and the Council expected a response in September 2022.

External event organisers were also keen to have a separate Fair in Central Park. From 2022 applications would be accepted to run one additional Fair, organised and managed by an external company with a fee paid to the Council for the hire of Central Park. This Fair will need to meet Safety Advisory Group expectations and applications will be dealt with via a tender/lease process.

To pursue larger events such as Party in the Park or Celebrate Boston it would be necessary to enter into discussions with the Arts Council about submitting a Project Grant bid. The bids would need to be submitted by December 2022 for a decision by February 2023.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Members overall agreed the need to continue the provision of free events and especially those for children and families, citing difficult economic times and the deprivation now within the town. The Beach event in particular was referenced in its benefits to the whole family, with supporting organisations attending alongside the children's activities and providing a wealth of information for parents across various services. The Skate Jam was also accorded praise for its resounding success and it was agreed it was good value for money and members' were further reassured at the continuity of the Fire Garden event at Christmas on Bargate Green which too had been highly praised. There was also recognition of the effect of all events on the local economy including car parking income and the financial benefits to local traders and catering businesses.

The Chairman advised that whilst all BTAC events provided would be free to all attendees, BTAC had been approached by an external event provider wanting to provide their own events for the town. Such events would be subject to an entry cost but there would be a charge to them for the use of whichever site. Responding to a question seeking further information on the event provider and concerns voiced about potential high entry costs to such private events, The Lead Officer advised that the company were called Showtime Events Group who had a credible background. They had amongst other events, provided Beer Festivals, Balloon Festivals along with Fiestas and Town Festivals within areas including Cheltenham and Northampton. They would be stand-alone events and negotiations between the parties would include the need to be mindful of what people could and would actually pay in Boston for entry to the events. The events would need to be affordable to residents. The Events Manager was moving forward with negotiations and a report on the outcomes would be tabled to committee.

Responding to a question in respect of a zero budget for the possible provision of a Party in the Park event, the Chairman advised he had requested such a budget figure as at the current time it was not possible to get a cost figure. Grant funding would be sourced if possible which might require match funding in part, but the event would be a stand-alone occasion whether provided by BTAC or by an external provider. Again, the Events Manager was moving the possibility forward and reporting would come back to BTAC in due course with the outcomes.

Addressing a question which queried the differential in costs of £1500k in respect of the Christmas Events within Option One and Option Two, the Lead Officer advised he would assume it was due to the actual level of content of each event and if required, would ask the Events Manager to expand more on the various range of activities and entertainment within each option.

Following on from some confusion by members in respect of the position of Boston Big Local and some mis-understanding of their future support with funding, the Lead Officer confirmed that they had received £3million from the National Lottery over a three year period which had been depleted and there was no replacement for the lottery funding stream. Members were also reassured there was capacity within the events team to take whichever programme forward and deliver the events.

RESOLVED:

That BTAC agree Option One of the events report with the addition of all the missing events from Option 2 to be included therein.

85 BTAC SMALL GRANTS SCHEME AND BTAC EMPOWERING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES GRANT SCHEME

The Local Communities Development Officer and BTAC Grant Administrator presented the report in accordance with Round One of the financial year and confirmed the decision made by the Small Grants Working Group on the 11 August 2022.

Three applications had been received by the BTAC Small Grants Scheme and considered eligible for consideration: Boston Samaritans for £1000.00 for Volunteer Training; The Friendly Bench – Boston Committee for £500.00 to contribute towards the cost of equipment for activities at the site of the Friendly Bench and finally Carers First for £995.00 to contribute towards the cost of well-being packs and afternoon tea event for most in need carers in the BTAC area. The Small Grants Working group agreed all three applications.

One application was considered eligible for the BTAC Empowering Healthy Communities Grant Scheme. That was for Curo-Lincs for £1000.00 to contribute towards the cost of purchasing equipment for community gardens – The Old Rectory, Boston Stump and Black Sluice Lock Cottages and was agreed by the Small Grants Working Group.

Committee was advised that the Small Grants Scheme had £13,203 in remaining funds with the BTAC Empowering Healthy Communities Grant Scheme having £16.000 to carry through the next round.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Following a request for further information in respect of two of the applicants the Local Communities Development Officer and BTAC Grant Administrator advised as follows:

Curo-Links were a new established community interest company technically based in Holbeach who ran a farm which enabled people to pet animals and socialise with animals. Their wish for Boston was to work alongside Boston Stump and the Black Sluice to open up community gardens to encourage people to grow vegetables and flowers and to also look at helping people to re-train their skills. The sites identified being a garden behind the rectory at Boston Stump and also land around the Black Sluice Lock Safe.

The Friendly Bench was situated within the Staniland Ward on the Broadfield Lane Play Area between Mayfields and Ancaster Court. The Bench has hosted a number of events and the additional money would support additional crafting events.

Members thanked the Small Grants Working Group for their continued support of the application process and also voiced their recognition that new as well as existing applicants were now coming forward to share the funding available.

RESOLVED:

That BTAC endorse the recommendations of the Small Grants Working Group.

86 WORK PROGRAMME - STANDING ITEM

The Chairman advised that he was pleased to advise that Inspector Clarkson had accepted an invitation to the meeting scheduled for the 15th December. The Small Grants Scheme was scheduled but there would be no other business to enable Inspector Clarkson to have ample time to provide members with an overview of his intentions for Boston, within his new role and then take questions without the need to rush through for a busy agenda.

The Lead Officer confirmed that the Report on BTAC responsibilities and charges across the service areas would be provided at the next scheduled meeting on the 3rd November, along with the report on Central Park Play Area along with options for the replacement of the Pirate Ship on Woodville Road. The Round 2 Small Grants Scheme would also be tabled.

Requests for future reporting included:

An invitation to a new housing provider within the Borough who were providing affordable housing.

The Chairman noted he would take advice but clearly all members on BTAC who sat on the Planning Committee would be potentially compromised and the commercial relevance too would need to be addressed.

Referencing littering within the town a request was made for a report on the cleaning operatives.

The Chairman confirmed that such a report was scheduled through the next Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee. Similarly a request in respect of car park enforcement would too go through the same Scrutiny Committee.

Referencing the damage to the Pirate Ship, a request was tabled for an update on the Council's CCTV operation in its entirety to include lighting and coverage within the parks.

The Chairman agreed and a request would be made to the respective officer and the report would be tabled on the 15th December aligned to the Police attendance.

The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm