

Present: Councillor Barrie Pierpoint (Chairman), Councillor Patricia Marson (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Emma Cresswell, Anton Dani, Neil Drayton, Anne Dorrian, Paul Gleeson, Mike Gilbert, Andy Iazard, Lina Savickiene and Stephen Woodliffe

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Dale Broughton.

Officers –
Assistant Director - Culture and Leisure, Operations Manager, Strategic Finance Manager and Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tabled for Councillors Joythi Arayambath, Alison Austin, and Sandeep Ghosh.

2 MINUTES

With the agreement of the committee, the Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting.

3 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

No updates tabled.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest tabled.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions

6 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

A member of the public addressed the meeting and referenced the ongoing issues of Fly Tipping around the town and included the following:

They tabled their thanks to the Councils Fly Tipping team on its ongoing efforts in clearing the volume of tips, but questioned what penalties were in place for those who were caught fly tipping, stating that whilst they had reported incidents they were unsure if any action was taken. Further concern was noted that having tried to contact the Council's Environmental Team to give notification of a further dump of rubbish, there had been no response from the team which they felt was concerning. Questioning the action taken when a culprit was identified, they suggested that those identified be made to join and assist the fly tipping team and clear up their rubbish.

The Leader of the Council (a member of responded and apologised for the lack of feedback by the Environmental Team and gave assurance that contact would be made with the member of the public following the meeting to address the issue. Further confirmation was provided that the Council did follow up on all prosecutions through to the Magistrate Court, where to date the Leader felt no cases had been lost by the Council. The Leader stressed that the Council took Fly Tipping very seriously having recently increased the fine for the crime to a maximum under new legislation of £1000 per incident with an early payment reduction available. Furthermore educational packs had been produced by the Portfolio Holder in a number of languages to assist residents new to the area and consideration was also being given to the use of CCTV Cameras in know areas of continual incidents of fly tipping.

The Chairman thanks the member of the public for this comments.

7 PROPOSED BTAC BUDGET 2024/25 AND FORECAST TO 2028/29

The Strategic Finance Manager supported by the Head of Finance presented the report advising that the Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC) was asked to make a recommendation to Cabinet and Council on the precept and Band D Council Tax levy for properties in the BTAC area for the 2024/25 financial year. This report details the current position and the proposed levy for the Council to approve for 2024/25.

Members were reminded of the context in which this budget has been set. It was at a time of continuing change and significant financial challenge for local government. Those included the ongoing reductions in grant support from the government, the impact of Welfare reform, changes to the mechanism upon which central government support is allocated, and the proposed future moves to full localisation of the business rates regime.

BTAC members have in recent years increased the Council Tax and precept to help make the town a better place, and initiatives have been progressed to fund public conveniences, central park spend, footway lights and open spaces, events and town centre operatives.

The proposed budget included an inflationary increase this year, which included an unallocated sum to enable members to support further measures to improve the town.

The level of Council Tax was a key factor for the Committee when considering its future aspirations.

The impact on Council Taxpayers of the proposed 1.24% increase would be that BTAC's Band D annual charge would go up by £0.99p, or 2 pence per week. The impact for all bands is shown in the table below, almost 70% of BTAC households are in bands A and B, meaning that their weekly increase, before taking Council Tax Support into account, would be approximately 1 penny in each case.

Questioning and commenting followed which included:

Responding to questions the Strategic Finance Manager advised that:-

- There had been an over spend for footway lighting for 23/24 due to ongoing prices rises in power supplies, hence the significant increase within the budget. The Council might wish to look at reducing efficiencies in that area by looking at an 'invest to save' option for LED lighting, with only a third of the current footway lighting being LED lighting, the remaining two thirds being standard lighting. Members and the Chairman supported such an investigation.

- BTAC no longer funded a CCTV Operative following its' initial decision to support an operative for a year. No additional support had been taken forward.
- The Section 151 Officer recommended that a minimum of £70k be kept in the reserves, the additional £48k identified was on top of the £70k.
- The governed basic amount of increase was 1.24%, with the BTAC element being 3% or £5 whichever was the greater. Should the BTAC levy increase the Council levy would decrease. Members were advised that The RBA took into account the total of the council tax precepts plus Boston Town Area Committee, the table below demonstrated that the annual increase was within the 3% threshold when considering the RBA.

Relative Basic Amount Calculation	2023/24		2024/25		Movement	
	Precept (£)	Band D (£)	Precept (£)	Band D (£)	£	%
BTAC	763,636.00	79.38	768,772.00	80.37	0.99	1.25
BBC	4,235,036.00	208.89	4,387,059.00	216.09	7.20	3.45
Total – RBA	4,998,672.00	246.56	5,155,831.00	253.96	7.40	3.00
Tax Base	No of Properties		No of Properties			
BTAC	9,619		9,566		-53.00	-0.55
BBC	20,274		20,302		28.00	0.14

- In response to a question querying the premiums in respect of re banding, due to a decrease in the tax base, members were advised that the query would be passed to the Revenues and Benefits team to source a full breakdown as to why the base had moved.
- Third party payments had increased due to increases in maintenance costs – bulk staffing costs year on year?

Overall members approved the need for the increase as proposed, acknowledging the reasons for the increase and further agreed the request for the ‘invest to save’ review in respect of Footway Lighting. An additional request agreed the need for a report at the subsequent meeting identifying the costs of BTAC Assets.

RESOLVED:

That BTAC recommends to Cabinet and Council the level of its Special Expense precept for 2023/24 at £768,772 and the Council Tax charge of £80.37 at Band D.

8 BTAC ASSETS

The Portfolio Holder presented the report advising it was tabled following the annual tour of assets and sought to gain committee’s priority areas for improvements based on the costs provided within the table. The report further included an itemised list of all BTAC owned public spaces together with site location maps for each ward. Any improvements agreed by the committee would be subject to contract procurement rules and orders will be placed with appropriate providers as soon as practicable.

Significant committee deliberation and questioning followed included:

Members agreed that the tour of assets had highlighted how good the provision of play and open space area was within the town, with the exception of Ingelow Avenue which they recognised was the poorest ward within the town and agreed it had been neglected

and needed to be considered as a priority moving forward. Congratulations were tabled to Councillor Marson for her generosity in both implementing and providing continued support of the football provision on the Ingelow Avenue play area, which provided a football facility for both disabled and able bodied children. Referencing the wish list of improvements, it was agreed that in respect of Ingelow Avenue, the larger items would require time to allow funds to be sourced for the improvements, but, the smaller items could be taken forward once costings had been secured and agreed by the committee. It was agreed that the initial marking up of the pitch and provision of a storage facility would reassure the users of the site of BTAC's commitment to improve the facility. A member noted that previous funding in 2018 had been made available for Fenside but had not been fought for, and one of the ward members for the ward advised they had held negotiations with the Council previously but noted at that time the Council had been looking to sell off the site for development.

Referencing the site maps, attention was drawn to West ward, with the ward member stated that there was only one area of open space identified on its site and that was really just a strip of grass next to a layby and did not constitute a play area due to the dangers of its proximity to a highway. Developers had put in a small play area on one of the developments and, with an additional substantial development expected within the ward, members were urged to agree that developers needed to provide a larger provision of play area within their development sites. The ward was a privileged area but children still needed areas to play in.

Confirming that there was no money set aside or within the budget for the larger items, the Strategic Finance Manager advised that some of the smaller items could be provided within the budget.

Questioning potential finance streams a number of options were discussed. In response to a query about sourcing funding from the Levelling Up Fund, the Leader of the Council advised members that unfortunately with Government funding, a strict criteria was often imposed for the spend and recently such funding had been town centre focused for rejuvenation purposes and as such the Council was constricted in what it used the funding for. A further funding stream mentioned was the Windfarm Offshore organisation and the Lead Officer for the committee advised that officers would be in talks with the company. Further advice was provided that funding was now possible through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, following its initial refusal to allow BTAC to apply in its role akin to a Parish Council. The decision to refuse BTAC due it having been classed as a committee of the Council, has been rescinded and applications were available up to £25k.

Referencing the number of other amenity areas within the ward maps, a member questioned the actual use of them as amenity areas, when a number of them were very small sites, some overgrown and used for siting litter bins. The member suggested that a more creative use of them be considered with suggestions working with partner groups like Boston in Bloom and also encouraging residents to take ownership of sites in their locality, would improve the small sites which would enhance the town.

A member questioned the possibility of providing toilet facilities at the play sites with a suggestion that maybe a refreshment provider on the site could take responsibility for the facility, but was advised that the logistics of mobile toilets was a big issue. The Chairman advised that historically businesses within the town centre had an agreement with the Council to provide their facilities free to the public and maybe a similar process to speak with shops local to the play areas could be considered.

Noting the frequency of comments within the report for a number of sites to improve the BTAC signage currently in place, members questioned the timescale of implementing such changes. A further member questioned signage into the town on the arterial routes and also the lack of signage within the town. In response the Operations Manager confirmed that once costings were to hand, the implementation would not take long. In respect of the arterial road signs confirmation was provided that it was a Lincolnshire County Council provision and nothing to do with BTAC or the Council. Signage was available within the town directing residents and visitors to key landmarks. Concern was tabled at the lack of knowledge of BTAC by its' residents and that needed to be addressed ahead of any new signage being produced. A suggestion was made that a communications exercise be undertaken to provide a strong communications strategy beforehand, to ensure BTAC residents were fully aware and what it stood for and how it supported the residents within the respective wards.

At this point in the proceedings the Chairman referred members to the wish list and requested a prioritisation of the items identified in order to allow officers to move forward.

Members concurred that quick wins on the smaller items could be taken forward in tandem with seeking funding for the larger items.

The prioritisation of the pitch marking out and storage facility on the Ingelow Avenue site be taken forward, which would hopefully reassure the residents of Fenside that BTAC was taking action, whilst ongoing resourcing of funding for the larger items was undertaken.

Further quick wins included providing dog bins and signage across all site.

A concern was tabled on the identification of potential hazardous surfacing within a play area which could be dangerous and officers confirmed they would look into it.

Members also recognised the need for improved signage and also a communications strategy to promote the work of BTAC. It was also noted that any new signage for the play areas would provide directional advice to the nearest toilet facility.

The Chairman concluded by thanking the committee for their detailed input and asked that Officers take forward the requests for costs on the items identified and return their findings to the committee to enable it to move forward.

9 GREEN FLAG AWARD

The Portfolio Holder presented the report and confirmed that at its meeting held on the 27th July 2024, BTAC considered a report in respect of the Green Flag Award. BTAC further agreed for such a report to come before its meeting scheduled for 8 February 2024, for consideration.

The Green Flag award scheme is a process of external accreditation intended to encourage the delivery of well managed public parks. The Green Flag Award® scheme describes itself as an award that: *'Recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world'*

The purpose & aims of a Green Flag are to ensure that everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live. To ensure that these spaces are appropriately managed and meet the needs of the communities that they serve. To establish standards of good management. To promote and share good practice amongst the green space sector. To recognise and reward the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers.

To achieve a Green Flag Award, BTAC would need to demonstrate that it has a clear plan of what it aims to achieve, why, and who it serves. The judges will expect to see a clear management strategy that both demonstrates that the Park is well maintained, and that there are plans for the future, showing continual improvement.

To apply for an award, an initial site description, contact details and publicity information would need to be supplied along with a management plan and purchase order. Finance considerations include a £350 registration fee, and costs associated with developing and implementing a 5 year management/investment plan, updated annually.

Whilst there is an administration fee of £350, to register for an Award, there is an expectation that BTAC would need to undertake additional work to meet the criteria and standards set by the Award. To undertake this work, there will be a requirement for Members, Officers and Partners to initially dedicate time to develop a management plan for the Park. There will be a further need to develop an annual action plan, which may require further financial resources.

Applications for a Green Flag Award need to be submitted by 31st January annually, with Award winners announced each July

The Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture (Lead Officer for the committee) stressed to members that should they agree to take the item forward, it would mean a large undertaking for members and officers and that a working group of 3 members would be required to facilitate the process to work towards developing a management plan.

Committee questioning and comment followed which included:

With overall agreement that Central Park was viewed by many as the crown jewel in the town centre, members acknowledged that should the town achieve the status it would provide a more structured view on maintaining park, whilst also providing the town with a key attraction. Confirmation was provided that Lincoln had seven such sites with Green Flag Status, but there were no others in the County.

A member noted that in 2007 many shrubs had been removed from Central Park and other areas of the town, due to them being used as areas to camp and also carry out personal functions. He further stated that it could be time to return those areas to being planted out once more. However, it would need the support of volunteers to maintain such areas which could only improve the town and support the status of the park.

The Chairman agreed that the Green Flag Award was a major project to undertake and that to try to achieve the prestigious award. He further suggested that the working group visit another organisation who had achieved the award to gain an insight into the issues and problems they experienced. It would add a point of research in structuring their management plan.

RESOLVED:

That Councillors Barrie Pierpoint, Paul Gleeson and Anton Dani volunteered to sit on the working group.

That the Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture and the Portfolio holder be charged to take the challenge forward.

10 WORK PROGRAMME - STANDING ITEM

The Chairman confirmed that an invitation had been issued to Mr Neil Kempster of Chestnut Homes to address the committee with a review and update on the developments within Chestnut Homes sites in the borough.

A further request sought conversations with LCC and the Borough to see what options were available to address the appearance of the town centre, with a view to sourcing grant funding to improve private dwellings.

Advice was provided that grants had been secured for shop owners to improve their appearance from Healing the High Street Partnership and that a future briefing would be scheduled, to provide members with further update information that would hopefully give them confidence in respect of the town centre moving forward.

The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm