

BOSTON TOWN AREA COMMITTEE

13 February 2013

Present: Councillors Mike Gilbert(Chairman), Stephen Woodliffe (Vice-Chairman), Alison Austin, Mark Baker, Paul Gleeson, Paul Goodale, Yvonne Gunter, Paul Kenny, Paul Mould, Derek Richmond, Carol Taylor and Mary Wright

In attendance: Councillor Peter Bedford (for Minute 37)

Officers: Chief Executive, Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive, Partnerships and Sustainability Manager, Local Communities Development Officer and Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Guest: Mandy Exley, Community Development Officer, Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service (for Minute 38)

35 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Owens and Dr Gurdip Samra

37 FORMATION OF A TOWN COUNCIL

The Committee received a report by the Chief Executive, which outlined out the process for forming a town council, as requested by a Committee Member.

The Chief Executive reported that between 170-180 new town and parish councils had been created since the process was introduced and the present Government was keen to encourage more. Various issues were involved, but the initial requirement was to engage the interest of residents. Then the Council would undertake a Community Governance Review, the outcome of which was final with no right of appeal.

However, the current process was complicated and drawn out. The Department of Communities and Local Government was currently consulting on a simple system. New regulations would be introduced, probably in March 2013. It was expected that the local authority would still need to undertake a Community Governance Review and that 10% of residents in the area concerned would still need to sign a petition to request one. The main change was expected to be that the process would take six months instead of twelve. If BTAC decided to go ahead with this process, it would have to engage its own advisors, as the Chief Executive would be acting for the Borough Council in undertaking the review.

Members discussed various issues: the advantages and disadvantages of forming a town council; whether the public would want another layer of governance; whether a referendum could be held to assess the views of all members of the public, not just the 10% required to sign a petition; and what the implications would be for the Borough Council.

In response, the Chief Executive said the benefits would include increased self-determination. BTAC had special area expense powers and a precept; a town council would be similar, but would run its own services in its own way and employ its own contractors. It would have its own clerk and the head of the town council would have a civic role. It would make its own policy decisions; the Borough Council's power and influence would be diluted. The rates charged for the area would be for the new town council to set and would be governed by current governance constraints.

The disadvantages were that a Community Governance Review would involve a significant amount of work and there would be a cost. Also, it would be difficult to explain the issues involved to the public to enable people to make an informed decision on the matter. A referendum or an e-referendum could be held, but it would be hard to interest the public.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive advised the Committee that as the formation of a town council would make matters more complicated for the Borough Council, BTAC would have to voice very positive views for it to agree to go ahead. On the introduction of a town council, BTAC would cease to exist. The town council would start from scratch and could choose its powers; it would not automatically assume the same responsibilities.

Members' views varied. There was a view that the costs would be prohibitive, with extra rates to cover increased overheads when one layer of governance would do. Another view was that it might still be worth reviewing the possibility.

Speaking from personal experience, a Member described the role of town councillor as more effective and proactive than that of district councillor. A town council provided democracy at a more local level, which was the Government's aim. A town council could sell land, provide facilities and have open question time sessions for the public. In the 1974 reorganisation, the Boston town area would have been half the borough area, the likely reason a town council had not been formed, but the town should have its own town council now. Some areas had Placecheck and some did not; forming a town council would address this. In addition, Skirbeck should have its own parish council, as the area had different needs and the residents seemed in favour of it. However, it was not advisable to pursue the matter at present due to imminent changes in the process.

Another view was that forming a town council would give people in the town fair and equal democracy to those in rural areas of the borough, as they were disadvantaged at present. The recent issue of the Committee taking on the maintenance of Garfit's Lane playing field exemplified this. Following reorganisation in 2015, the parishes would have more seats, and, in effect, would set BTAC's budget, which was a concern, as decisions would be made by people who did not live in the town. If a referendum was held and town residents were asked whether they wanted to pay one charge or two they would vote for one. Self-determination was needed. BTAC was already paying for officers and accommodation. At the right time, a campaign would be undertaken for a parish council for Skirbeck and a town council for the town, to give people a voice.

However, another view was that areas with town councils seemed to be in district council areas, which were of significant size, with presumably greater ability to generate funds, and the Boston town area was still probably half the borough area.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive said he did not know whether a town of similar size to Boston had formed a town council; however, it was usually larger areas with discrete townships, such as East Lindsey. He then suggested that he report back to the Committee with the new regulations, adding that the Council could carry out a Community Governance Review that looked at all of the parish council structure. However, the outcomes would have to be considered; a recent review had looked at logical boundaries.

The Chairman referred to the limitations on BTAC compared with the Council and asked if the Committee's constitution could be amended so it had more parish council-like powers. The Chief Executive agreed to review it for a future meeting.

<p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the Chief Executive reports back to a future meeting of the Committee on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The new regulations for forming town councils in relation to the future of BTAC as an Area Committee or as a stand-alone town council; 2. BTAC's constitution and whether the Committee can assume more powers. 	<p>Richard Harbord</p>
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38 THE PLACECHECK PROJECT SINCE JANUARY 2012

The Local Communities Development Officer presented an update on the Placecheck Project by the Local Communities Development Officer, which had been requested by the Committee.

The report detailed outcomes achieved since the submission of the End of Project Report in January 2012. Since the beginning of the Placecheck over 30 projects had been developed, funded and completed, as detailed in an appendix to the report. The conclusions of the update were that communities were now able to identify local needs and take action in response to them; people had increased their skills and confidence so that they could continue to identify and respond to need in the future; and people had made a difference to their communities by prioritising needs and working together.

In response to a question, it was reported that there was £1,000 in reserve for the Boston Youth Council mural project because a basket ball hoop and back board were to be provided, but there had been issues with respect to the surfacing. As the project did not go ahead, the money had been ring-fenced in case there was a need for surfacing. The money was now amalgamated in one pot.

During Members' debate, officers were thanked for the way they had taken Placecheck forward as projects were successful in all areas where they had been established. There had been nothing in those areas beforehand; now committees had been set up and projects had continued. It was a credit to the officers' hard work.

It was remarked that Placecheck had certainly made a difference to the town centre and that residents were keen to get involved and were doing excellent work. However, it was described as unfortunate that there were some areas without Placecheck and officers were urged to work towards expanding it to develop new projects.

In response, it was reported that anyone in any street or area could set up a Placecheck project. They did not need a large pot of money; they just needed to work with service providers. Officers were keen to support people to get new projects established and had advised a great number of people about this. They had developed a basic toolkit, which could be offered out to people and officers could talk them through it. If there was an area Members knew might benefit from a Placecheck project, they should contact the officers.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that BTAC had also set aside £4,500 to support Placecheck and suggested a press release be issued to encourage people to apply for it.

In response to questions, it was reported that the Placecheck executive had its own terms of reference and met on an ad hoc basis regarding wider concerns. There had been a recent meeting regarding 'Big Local', which would help with community consultation and planning. Members of BTAC had been invited to meet with Ivan Annibal about Big Local on a date to be confirmed. The Big Local launch would be an all day event on 6th March, manned by volunteers, outside the community rooms, in the market place and in the main foyer of Asda. There was to be a series of public meetings as follows:

- 12th March 10 – 12 Fenside Community Centre
7 – 9 pm Boston College (to be confirmed)
- 14th March 10 – 12 Blenkin Memorial Hall
7 – 9 pm Pilgrim Lounge, York Street

<p>Action: Ask the Marketing and Communications Manager to issue a press release to encourage take-up of the ring-fenced BTAC Community Awards funding for new and existing Placecheck projects.</p>	<p>Maddy Eyre</p>
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39 BOSTON IN BLOOM CAMPAIGN 2013

The Partnerships and Sustainability Manager presented a report, requested by Committee Members, which provided an update on Boston in Bloom 2013.

Boston in Bloom was designed to enhance the image and reputation of the town, encourage more visitors and shoppers, and promote civic pride. The plans for 2013 would build on the success achieved in 2012 when, despite a late start, Boston had been awarded silver in the Large Towns category of the East Midlands region. A number of the Council's contributing partners had also received awards. The Committee was asked to consider offering support for Boston in Bloom 2013 to help enhance the town and foster public and business engagement in the campaign.

The report outlined the benefits associated with participation in the campaign, which provided a coherent framework for greening Boston with external independent

assessment. The project's steering group had identified a number of enhancements, which were set out in the report, including a facelift of Custom House Quay and enhanced planting displays. There were also ongoing projects such as bulb-planting, community orchards and growing spaces. An increasing number of organisations and commercial sponsors were supporting Boston in Bloom, such as Lincolnshire County Council, the Environment Agency, Asda, B&Q, Homebase and Bell Brothers. Substantial discounts and free plants had been received. Any support that BTAC might feel appropriate for the 2013 campaign would be welcomed.

During debate, Members voiced support for the Boston in Bloom campaign. There was a real need to enhance the town and, when areas were clean and well-kept, people did not abuse them. The public appreciated Boston in Bloom, it raised morale. BTAC should support it as much as possible and it should be properly endorsed. Preferably, the Committee should receive costings. It was suggested that efforts be made to involve the migrant community; the greater the number of people involved, the more ownership there would be and improvements would be sustained.

It was remarked that Boston's water ways could be improved and the Environment Agency should be approached about this. In response, it was reported that the Environment Agency had been asked to support the enhancement of Custom House Quay, though there would be other ways in which it could help.

A Member voiced concern that money was being spent purely on the parts of the town that were along the route of the Boston in Bloom judges and that other parts of the town were neglected. Areas that the Council used to look after were now unkempt, for example, the garden on the corner of Carlton Road and Sleaford Road, and the garden area in front of Fossitt and Thorne, which the Council maintained, but weeds had now replaced roses.

The portfolio holder reported that it was hoped to increase the scope of the areas included in Boston in Bloom each year, but it depended on funding. Also, work was ongoing with Fen Road to clean up the town, but this took time.

The Partnerships and Sustainability Manager reported that the Council was working closely with Boston Greenscapers and Thistles Nursery. Increased direct public involvement would be welcomed. Numbers were building up with people taking part in litter picks etc, but further involvement needed to be encouraged. However, with respect to the extent of the areas covered, the Council had limited capacity. Most of the work was done by volunteers, through community sponsorship and by the Council's parks section.

It was suggested thought be given to other ways to involve the public, for example, the B&Q discount could be used to encourage people to buy hanging baskets in this year's theme of purple and gold. Bulb planting was also endorsed, as bulbs flourished for years.

It was generally agreed that the approaches into town, such as along Spalding Road, were in a very bad state, giving a poor impression to people entering the town. It was suggested that officers approach the County Council about funding improvements to Boston's approaches and that Boston in Bloom be extended to these areas. Officers could also speak to local farmers. Network Rail had areas in a similar condition, though it was reported that Fen Road had contacted the company about tidying them up.

The portfolio holder then requested a contribution from BTAC of £2,000 to buy planters. Some Members felt there should be a report first, giving a costing for the planters and details of locations. However, it was proposed that the contribution be made at once, so that the planting could get underway.

RESOLVED: That a contribution of £2,000 be made from BTAC's reserves for planters for Boston in Bloom 2013.	Ian Farmer
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40 INGELOW AVENUE PLAYING FIELD

The Committee considered a report by the Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive, requested by Members of the Committee, on options for developing the Ingelow Avenue playing field site. It was confirmed that BTAC did not maintain this site.

The report detailed three options considered to be the best options for the public. The Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive advised the Committee that option 3 was the preferred option. The site was challenging, but had planning and development potential. However, design and flood risk factors were a barrier. The adjacent Julian's site had been the subject of a planning application that had been refused on flood risk grounds and a subsequent appeal had been withdrawn; therefore, there were unchallenged Environment Agency objections to development.

During debate, it was remarked that the planning application was some time ago and there could be resolutions to the flood risk issues; flood risk alone should not stand in the way. Residents had felt let down by the Council and planners when the application had been refused. The Council should be supportive of the developer and work with them to ensure the site was properly developed. The Environment Agency claimed the site was dangerous, yet there were existing houses there and the agency took no action. Perhaps agency officers should be invited to a Committee meeting to explain this or the Committee could ask them to improve facilities. The current condition of the site meant it was a wasted space for everyone.

It was generally agreed that option 3 appeared to be the only viable way to develop the site and should be investigated. However, it was remarked that perhaps there should not be development all the way around.

It was further suggested that the development should incorporate a resolution to the footpath that had been the source of significant problems for residents. It might not be possible to stop up the footpath, as the County Council and the Ramblers' Association would want it kept open; however, this could still be pursued. Other suggestions were to provide street lights in the area to act as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour and attach a Section 106 obligation to planning permission for security fencing. In response, it was reported that efforts should be made to try to resolve the problems, though it could not be guaranteed.

It was remarked that the site was a very large open space, larger than was needed and there was a shortage of affordable housing in the borough. The Council should work towards developing the site in partnership. The Julian site and the play area had been

problematic and had needed attention for years and development would resolve this. If the site was developed, residents would get a new play area and equipment.

RESOLVED: that it be recommended to Council that development of part of the Ingelow Avenue site be progressed, preferably in partnership with another organisation.	Phil Drury
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41 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

It was suggested that that County Council officers be invited to attend a future meeting to explain what their responsibilities were with respect to the approaches to the town and the town centre area, as more could be done to improve these areas (Minute 39 refers).

The ward Member felt that there should be a report on the Garfit's Lane site; it was an excellent resource that served a wide area that had a good deal of development, but few facilities. The Council had not realised the site's potential. It was preferable that BTAC now maintained the site; there was more chance of it being improved with the support of local Members. A business case should be drafted with details of the possibilities for the land. It was felt it should certainly generate more than £300 income per year. The building that housed the changing rooms and the play area were in a poor condition.

The matter of street sweeping in the town centre was raised. Although to be reported to the Environment and Performance Committee in March, it was a matter for town Members. Issues had to be raised, such as sweeping roads with a road sweeper when cars were parked down both sides of roads, as was the case with most town centre streets.

The following were agreed as future agenda items:

- Street sweeping in the town centre
- Garfit's Lane Site – future options
- Lincolnshire County Council – LCC officers to explain responsibilities

42 URGENT ITEM – REQUEST FOR PRE-APPLICATION COMMENTS

The Chairman explained that, after the agenda was published, a request had been received for feedback on a development proposal on a site located on land off Sir Isaac Newton Drive, Wyberton. A sketch layout had been provided, showing draft proposals for approximately 29 dwellings, of which 30% were required to be affordable, though the numbers could alter as the scheme developed. Open space was proposed to the A16 side of the site, together with acoustic bunding. The details had been e-mailed to Members and hard copies were circulated at the meeting. The proposal could be considered if the Committee wished to regard it as an urgent item.

The Chairman also advised the Committee that, contrary to previous advice, Members who were also Members of the Planning Committee were perfectly at liberty to take part and vote on this matter if they wished to do so, due to changes brought about by the Localism Act regarding predetermination. Guidance was quoted to the effect "*A dual-hatted Member can speak and vote on an issue at parish council level and still speak and vote at district level, so long as they keep an open mind...for transparency, it is advisable*

to make a statement at the meeting at which the decision on that issue is being made.”
Therefore, if the proposal went forward to the Planning Committee as an application, those Members could still fully participate in its consideration, but should declare their consideration of the proposal at BTAC.

RESOLVED: That the item be considered as a matter of urgency, by reason of special circumstances.

The Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive explained that the developer was seeking pre-application advice as part of community consultation, as required under the Localism Act. The matter was urgent as the local planning authority had advised the developer it would be helpful to demonstrate engagement with the local community. In this way, any issues would be highlighted and brought up during the developer’s pre-application discussions with the Planning Officers. The details of the development were not relevant to the Committee’s consideration; only the principle of development.

The ward Member listed several points she expected would be raised by local residents: the site was rumoured to be contaminated land; it was close to a school that was at capacity; there was a lot of traffic and parking issues on the road; and there was no footpath at the bottom section of Tytton Lane East. However, this was a good development site and it was inevitable that it would be developed.

Members commented that the development was expected. There was support for the proposal and no objections. It was remarked that there should be sufficient play space and that contributions for the local school would be expected, though the ward Member made it clear that it would not be possible to extend the school due to space restrictions.

The only query concerned the location of the drain, which appeared to be right through the middle of the site. However, it was reported that there was an open water course and the footpath was approximately where the drain was and Members recognised that the internal drainage board would deal with this.

RESOLVED: That, in response to consultation, the Committee is in favour of the development of the land off Sir Isaac Newton Drive, Wyberton going ahead.

Phil Drury

(The meeting finished at 8.20 p.m.)