

BEETHAM PARISH ASSEMBLY

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Assembly held on Thursday 16th March 2017 at the Heron Theatre, Beetham.

Present were Parish Councillors Brian Meakin (in the chair), Bob Pickup and Ian Stewart, District Cllr Pete McSweeney, Parish Clerk John Scargill and thirty five members of the public. Also representatives from BT (3) and B4RN (3).

1. Opening of the Parish Assembly and welcome – Cllr Brian Meakin opened proceedings by welcoming those present and describing the changed format of this meeting (from those held in recent years) – namely presentations by BT and B4RN on high-speed broadband in the area.

2. Apologies for absence – Parish Councillors Pru Jupe, Margaret Knowles and Steve Yates.

3. The minutes of the Annual Assembly, held on 17th March 2016 (previously circulated), were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

4. Review of the Parish Council's year 2016/17 (Cllr Brian Meakin) – New ground rent agreements for tenants of the Parish Council's garage sites at Slackhead were now fully operative but no progress had been made with smartening up the Dixies site at Sandside due to unresolved ownership questions. The inspector's decision re the Hale Marble Quarry footpaths had found in the landowner's favour, with ROW status being denied. It had been agreed to install four more information panels in the parish to supplement the existing two, and to purchase defibrillator equipment as soon as a suitable location could for it could be found. An original metal finger post at Slackhead was to be renovated with help from Landscape Trust. The new crematorium at Beetham Hall was now fully functional. Plans for continued limited use of Sandside Quarry for a valuable recycling activity and eventual sympathetic decommissioning of the site were welcomed. Parish Council representatives were to meet Cumbria's new Police and Crime Commissioner for informal discussion. It had been noted that volunteers were urgently needed to supplement the police in their efforts to reduce cross-border crime. Additionally, members of the public were urged to notify Parish Council members of anything which adversely affected the parish as a desirable place to live.

5. Presentation by BT – set out their progress to date in making superfast broadband via fibre-optic cable available within the county. Availability was now in excess of 80% properties, although take-up of this facility was slow. Fibre cable had been laid in parallel to existing copper cable to local cabinets in most population areas; a user who chose to switch from copper to fibre would find a dramatic improvement in data transmission speeds. In most cases it would be possible to use the existing copper cable over the relatively short distance between cabinet and property without adversely affecting these speeds, although fibre cabling was likely to replace it in the long term. Up to 1km from the cabinet, the user could expect superfast broadband (>24 Mbps) and up to 2km some >8Mbps. If the property distance from the cabinet resulted in unsatisfactory broadband speeds, then fibre cable from cabinet to property would be used from the outset.

6. Presentation by B4RN – was set up in 2010 as an organisation of volunteers to bring broadband via fibre optic cable into any property that wanted it, in particular those mainly rural properties that were outside the scope of the BT service in the relatively short term. There had been good take-up of this service which now covered +/- 2,500 properties over 65 parishes between the Ribble and Kendal. Current cost of installation was £150 plus £1 per month per property. B4RN was slowly becoming self-financing and now had 24 full-time paid employees.

7. Question time – a wide variety of good questions from an interested audience produced knowledgeable and helpful answers from the presenters over a full half-hour period..

8. Conclusion and closure – there being no further questions the Chairman thanked all present and closed the meeting at 9.15pm.

The meeting was followed by refreshments and informal conversation between all present.