

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 10 December 2024

Present

Cllr Carlisle, Cllr Hughes, Cllr Redfern, Cllr White, Cllr Tipping, Mr Ross Woodley (Clerk and RFO)

1. Apologies and declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda and no apologies.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 12th November 2024 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) discussed. Cllr Carlisle remarked that the minutes described a former councillor by his first name rather than surname and the Clerk agreed to correct. It was **resolved to accept the circulated minutes as a true record subject to the agreed amendment. Proposed by Cllr Redfern, seconded by Cllr Hughes.**

3. Matters arising (unless dealt with later in the agenda)

The Clerk confirmed that all matters arising from the November meeting were considered as a separate agenda item below.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £523.50 Burial fees for unreserved plot (non-resident)

£216.00 Allotment Rents 1/11/24 to 31/10/25

£43.50 Bank Interest

(b) Expenses since last meeting £364.68 New Clerk training and handover

£135.00 AR Toward final 2024/25 grass-cutting invoice

£78.76 Smiths Signs for playground and cemetery

£10.00 CDALC for clerk training event.

(c) Payments to approve at the meeting– **Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded:**

- £904.80 C Gibson footpath grant-funded repairs.

- £400.00 P&EJ Simpson cemetery grounds maintenance.

- £6.95 C Tipping refund for noticeboard key cutting.

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the November 2024 meeting. No urgent payments have arisen separately.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 30 November 2024 (month 8)

The Clerk presented Appendix B for receipts and payments to date compared with the annual and profiled budget, confirming that the forecast outturn at month eight of the 2024/25 financial year was close to budget, for which a small use of reserves had been planned.

Members confirmed that they were comfortable with the report and had no questions.

(f) Bank reconciliation at 30 November 2024.

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 30 November 2024 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£41,146.34** was held.

(g) 2025/26 Budget and Precept Demand

The Clerk presented Appendix D, which showed the draft 2025/26 budget and the precept to be requested from Durham County Council and implications for council tax bills. The report includes the 2024/25 forecast outturn and closing reserves and proposes a balanced budget to maintain reserves at this level throughout 2025/26. It also shows the impact of two alternative precepts. The Council were asked to approve the budget and precept or suggest amendments before the budget is finalised in January 2025. Cllr Carlisle said that he agreed the proposed

option of a balanced budget with a council tax increase of 2.23% was preferable to the two alternatives based on prior experience of council tax freezes and above inflation increases. He noted that benchmarking suggested the Council's council tax was relatively low, but thought the proposed budget and reserves were sufficient to avoid an above-average increase for 2025/26. All agreed that the budget forecasts, assumptions, level of reserves, growth and savings were reasonable, and it **was resolved to:**

- **approve the 2025/26 Budget without amendment;**
- **approve the 2025/26 precept of £6,500 and the resulting council tax Band D of £34.76 (2.23% increase); and**
- **approve a general reserve of £6,000 and an earmarked reserve for a future cemetery extension of £32,000. Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Redfern seconded.**

5 Planning

One item to report within the parish boundaries. Cllr Hughes explained that a resident had applied to install a heat pump at Dotheboys Hall, which is a listing building. He regarded this as appropriate in terms of improving the energy efficiency of a large, old building and central government policy. The Council noted the application and had no comments.

6 Correspondence

(a) CDALC informed the Council that the Government will fund on a first come first served basis 50% of the cost of defibrillators located on an external wall in an area of a village that is accessible 24 hours per day. The Clerk said that the Council may wish to consider applying for such an asset, noting that if they do the 2025/26 budget at item 4 (g) would require amendment. However, Cllr Carlisle confirmed that a defibrillator was already operational at the village hall and accordingly any application for grant funding was unlikely to be successful.

(b) A local charity (WAG & Company North East Friendship Dogs) are seeking referrals from any residents suffering from loneliness and isolation who would benefit from a weekly visit from a volunteer with a pet dog. They have a local team in Eggleston and would welcome donations to help them expand their operations throughout the region. Councillors were not aware of any residents that would benefit from this service and re-iterated the policy agreed at the November meeting not to make any grants or donations in the remainder of 2024/25.

(c) Durham County Council have informed the Council that a new telegraph pole is to be installed in Back Lane, Bowes by a broadband provider (GoFibre). This does not need planning consent and is part of an initiative to improve the reliability of rural broadband. Councillors were aware of this project and supportive of initiatives to improve rural broadband; and

(d) As discussed at the meeting on 12 November Durham Community Action have e-mailed the Clerk about a survey they are running into affordable housing in rural parts of the County. The results had been expected by the end of November 2024 and the charity wanted to attend a future meeting to explain the results and how the Council could help. The Clerk confirmed that the survey results were now expected in January 2025 and would be shared with the Council. Cllr Hughes declared that he had met a County Councillor and suggested possible sites in Bowes, but these were not owned by the Council, so the Council had limited leverage. Following the sale of land in 2023/2024, the Council did not own any unused land and DCA may be unaware of this. The Clerk agreed to clarify this with DCA and present the survey results to the next meeting.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

(a) The Council discussed the impact of the ground maintenance work completed at the cemetery involving tree pruning, cutting, and clearing over-growth from elderberry bushes and spraying saplings. Cllr Carlisle stated that he had inspected the work and thought it had achieved its objectives and represented good value for money. He agreed to arrange the burning of the green waste when wind conditions were conducive.

(b) The Clerk updated the Council on his discussions with the footpath contractor about stone wall repairs. He had received a quotation of £510, but excluding VAT it was below the £500 threshold for seeking quotations in financial regulations. Cllr White explained that the wall was in a worse state than expected and needed urgent repair to delay a more expensive rebuild that would be necessary in the long-term. **It was resolved that the Clerk should place an order with the footpath contractor for urgent repairs to the cemetery wall. Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

8 Allotments

The Clerk updated the Council on progress collecting 2024/25 allotment rents. 100% was collected by the end of November 2024, which was a significant improvement on previous years. Two reminders had been necessary. Cllr Carlisle welcomed this and noted that there were some non-urgent repairs to the allotment boundary wall that had been carried over from 2023/2024 when a contractor had completed some cement work at the allotments. It had been agreed that the contractor would carry out this work as it would cost significantly less than £500 and he had inspected the work required when performing the 2023/2024 work. The Clerk agreed to look for any correspondence relating to this agreement and inform Cllr Carlisle who would then approach the contractor to discuss the timing of the work.

9 Play Park

Cllr Redfern circulated a post-completion inspection sheet for the playground and noted that the only issue remained a washer missing on the multi-play equipment. Cllr Tipping said that the cheapest solution might be to fill the fixing with resin, but he would inspect and research the cost of replacement parts. The work was not urgent, so he would report back to the next meeting.

10 Footpaths

Councillors considered the work undertaken on the footpaths and requests from landowners for further repairs. All agreed that the contractor had completed the work as ordered and funded by Durham County Council and following payment of the outstanding invoice the Clerk should seek reimbursement from Durham County Council. However, the Parish Council did not have any obligation to maintain footpaths and if the landowners needed assistance they needed to approach the highways authority. Cllr Hughes said that the Council could liaise with Durham County Council where the issue was on a public right of way, but councillors should not give any commitment to repair footpath infrastructure.

It was resolved that the Clerk would submit a claim to Durham County Council in respect of the repairs that they had agreed to fund in 2024/25, but no other footpath works should be ordered until 2025/26 and a further funding agreement from DCC. Proposed by Cllr Hughes and seconded by Cllr White.

11 Bank Mandate

The Clerk explained that he had taken the signed bank mandate forms into Nat West and Barclays branches in Darlington two weeks ago and had chased progress earlier today. Nat West needed to verify the identity of the former clerk who initiated the mandate change form and Barclays needed the Chair and Vice Chair to sign another form describing the new signing rules for the John Bousfield charity, agreed at the November 2024 Charity meeting. Accordingly, whilst it was frustrating that another month had passed without the requisite amendments being made the changes were expected soon.

12 AOB

Cllr Carlisle said that he had one item of other business relating to a request from the Bowes Heritage Group to update the Bowes Historical Walks leaflet. As a member of the group, Cllr

Hughes declared an interest and did not take part in the discussion. All agreed that an update funded by the Heritage Group would be welcome, but if funding was requested from the Council that would need consideration at a future meeting. Cllr Carlisle agreed to relay this message back to the Heritage Group.

13 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 21 January 2025 at 7.30 pm at Bowes Hutchinson's School. The remaining meetings prior to the elections and Annual Parish Meeting in May would provisionally be on:

- Tuesday 18 February;
- Tuesday 18 March; and
- Tuesday 15 April.

14 To consider extending the grass-cutting contract for two years.

The Clerk commented that the current grass-cutting contract is informal (an e-mail exchange with the former clerk) and is due to expire on 31 March 2025, although an option was provided for in this informal contract to extend it on the same terms until 31 March 2027. Providing the Council are satisfied with the quality of work, the Clerk proposes to implement this option by preparing a formal contract and signing on behalf of the Council. Quotations will then be sought in 2027 for a new three-year (extendable to five) contract. All agreed that they were satisfied with the value for money of the existing contract and thus had no reason not to exercise the option to extend. **It was resolved that the Clerk should prepare and sign a formal contract to extend the existing contract to 31 March 2027 on the same terms.**

Proposed by Cllr Redfern and seconded by Cllr Tipping.

Meeting closed at 20.40. In accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) the impact of resolutions on crime and disorder in the parish was considered but no significant impact was identified.