

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 16 April 2025 7.30 p.m.

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 apologies. Cllr Hughes declared an interest in item 2 and left the meeting, rejoining for item 3.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 18 March 2025 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) were discussed.

The Chair requested an update on item 7(c) in these minutes regarding a disputed invoice for snow clearance at the cemetery. The Clerk explained that he had conveyed the Council's position to the funeral director and their contractor and they agreed to review their costings and seek a contribution from the family that had paid for the funeral. The contractor had agreed to remove the profit element from the invoice but was determined to recover full costs and insisted the work had required three employees and £50 of salt. The funeral director agreed to contact the Clerk once the difference between the Council's agreed contribution of £100 plus VAT and the revised cost net of any contributions was known but had not done so by the date of the meeting. Councillors noted the position remained unresolved and no payment was required at this stage.

Cllr Tipping confirmed that the streetlights at the junction of the A66 / A67 had been repaired.

It was **resolved to accept the circulated minutes as a true record.** Proposed by Cllr Carlisle seconded by Cllr Tipping.

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

Cllr Hughes provided an update on the affordable housing presentation that he had attended in March. It was very interesting and he had not appreciated the extent of Durham Community Action's role as a rural housing enabler previously. Their surveys had highlighted a clear shortage of affordable housing partly caused by the increasing presence of second homes such as holiday lets and residents choosing not to downsize. He believed these were significant factors in Bowes, but Bowes was not mentioned. Accordingly, he proposed running a local survey. The Clerk stated that he had been sent a profile for Bowes following DCA's survey so a separate survey might be unnecessary. He agreed to forward the profile to Cllr Hughes for consideration in advance of discussion at the next meeting.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £6,500.00 2025/26 Precept

£91.50 Headstone Fee – Allison

£41.96 Bank Interest

(b) Expenses since last meeting £543.00 Clerk salary Q4

£510.00 Cemetery wall repair - Gibson

£135.60 HMRC PAYE Q4

(c) It was **resolved to approve the following payments – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded:**

- £81.69 CDALC Membership 25/26.

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the March 2025 meeting, except for the cemetery wall repair, which had been completed since that meeting. The value of the invoice agreed with the order approved at the December 2024 meeting and the Chair confirmed that following inspection by Cllr White the work had been completed and the invoice payable upon receipt should be paid.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 31 March 2025 (month 12)

The Clerk presented Appendix B showing receipts and payments to year-end compared with the annual budget. The Clerk explained that although the Council underspent by 3% in 2024/25 and achieved a surplus of £1,069 this was due to deferred expenditure. The underlying position is unchanged with £38,000 of reserves anticipated after allowing for deferred expenditure. It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

(f) Bank reconciliation at 31 March 2025

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 31 March 2025 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£39,160.80** was held. The Chair agreed the bank reconciliation to the cash book and bank statements and signed all the documents to evidence this year-end control. It was **resolved to accept the bank reconciliation – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

5 Planning

There have been no planning applications within the parish council boundaries since the March 2025 meeting.

6 Correspondence

(a) Durham County Council sent confirmation that the 2025 Bowes Parish Council election is uncontested and a notice to that effect has been displayed on the website and noticeboard. The Chair agreed to canvass interest from suitable candidates to be co-opted on to the Council before the Annual General Meeting in May.

(b) PKF Littlejohn (the Council's new external auditors) have sent the Clerk a link to their website containing copies of the 2024/25 AGAR, 2025 Practitioner's Guide and auditor guidance. As the Council's 2024/25 receipts and payments were below £25,000 the Council are eligible to apply for an exemption from external audit. It was **resolved to apply for exemption from a limited assurance review when the 2024/25 AGAR was completed – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.**

(c) National Highways informed the Council of A66 barrier repairs causing lane closures, speed restrictions and speed cameras starting 7 April and lasting 7 months. The Clerk has added a news article to the Council's website to inform residents. Councillors noted the extent of time residents were likely to experience traffic disruption.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

(a) Approval was requested for a headstone memorial. The design was considered and it was **resolved to approve the headstone application – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Redfern seconded.**

(b) Cllr Hughes confirmed that green waste from the 2024 grounds maintenance at the cemetery has been burned and the wall repaired. Cllr White stated that new damage has been spotted and a quotation requested from the contractor who had repaired the cemetery wall. Cllr Carlisle said that he would ask a second contractor to send the clerk an estimate as the cemetery wall was requiring repairs more frequently and the Council needed to be sure it was getting value for money from its usual contractor.

8 Allotments

- (a) Cllr Carlisle declared that he would remind the allotment wall contractor again to send an invoice to the Clerk. The invoice would include unbilled work installing a bench in the play park from early 2024.
- (b) The Clerk stated that an application had been received to let a vacant half-sized allotment with sheds for 6 months starting 1 May 2025. The two people on the waiting list had declined. Cllr Carlisle commented that he was not in favour of short-term allotment lets. The Clerk said that his understanding was the applicant wanted the allotment long-term, but he had only offered six months because the allotment year started 1 November and before that the Council were due to review prices. It was **resolved to approve the allotment and sheds application at a price of £6 for the remaining six months of 2024/25 on condition the applicant confirmed intent to continue for a further year from 1 November – Cllr Tipping proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**
- (c) The Clerk sought clarification on what should happen to the two residents on the allotment waiting list as they had declined twice and allotment rules suggested they would be removed from the waiting list after the second refusal. Cllr Carlisle said that this only applied if there was someone else left on the waiting list. As there was not there was no value in removing them. Cllr White noted that an existing allotment holder was breaching rules by cultivating next to walls and rubbish was accumulating on a communal pile. Cllr Carlisle said that he had completed a mid-year inspection of the allotments and identified one plot that appeared in breach of rules. Cllr Hughes said that he would follow up the issues raised and report back so the Council could consider action at the next meeting. All agreed that as the Council still had one vacant half-plot (after the above allocation) and none of those on the waiting list were ready to take on allotments there was less incentive to take action on minor breaches, but the position should be monitored and reviewed before the new allotment year.

9 Play Park

- (a) Cllr Redfern had sent the latest playground inspection reports and confirmed that there were still only minor, non-urgent repairs as discussed at the December 2024 meeting. The play equipment contractor had agreed to address these before the next meeting. Cllr Hughes agreed to take over Cllr Redfern's role inspecting the play equipment each month from 1 May 2025. The Council noted their thanks to Cllr Redfern in performing this role diligently for many years.
- (b) Cllr Carlisle revealed that a resident had kindly dealt with the herbaceous border at the play park and asked the Clerk to write a letter of appreciation. He suggested canvassing the resident's interest in doing this work annually if the Council reimbursed the cost of plants and allowed advertising signage for his business. Cllr Hughes agreed to deal with the flower tubs if the cost of plants was reimbursed. It was **resolved to agree a budget of £50 for Cllr Hughes to buy flowers for the tubs and seek reimbursement upon production of receipts. – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Redfern seconded.**

10 Footpaths

Cllr White updated the Council on the proposed application to Durham County Council for 2025/26 P3 footpath grant funding. He had requested a quote from the contractor who completed the work in 2024/25 seeking more durable wood is used this time, as some of the repairs needed were repeats of work done only a few years previously.

This was likely to result in a higher cost and additional quotes may be required. DCC had not specified a deadline for the grant application but were aware of the proposed work.

11 Internal Audit

The Clerk confirmed that Butler and Gee were willing to undertake the 2024/25 internal audit in time for the AGAR to be approved at the June meeting for a fee of £100 plus VAT. **It was resolved to appoint Butler and Gee as internal auditors for 2024/25 and delegate authority to the Clerk to agree terms of engagement and an internal audit plan with Internal Audit.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

12 Bank and Investment Strategy

In view of the global turbulence in financial markets since the last meeting the Clerk explained that he had postponed previously agreed changes in bank and investment accounts due to take effect on 1 April 2025. It was resolved that **the Clerk would present a banking and investment strategy to the next meeting setting out up to date options.** Cllr Tipping proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

13 AOB

Cllr White said that he had obtained a bus timetable and was planning to put it in the bus shelter.

The Clerk explained that his six-month probation period ended on 31 March 2025 and asked if councillors wished him to leave the room whilst they discussed either moving him on to a substantive contract or terminating his employment. The Chair said that there was no need and providing the clerk wished to continue in the role he could do so with a revised contract removing the probation clause presented to the next meeting.

The Chair expressed thanks on behalf of the Council for the valued contribution of Cllr Redfern who was stepping down as councillor on 1 May. A presentation took place.

14 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting.

The Annual General Meeting would take place on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at Bowes Hutchinson's School at 7.00 and would start as required with the election of the Chair and Vice Chair for 2025/26. This meeting would also agree the timetable of meetings for 2025/26.

Meeting closed at 8.40 p.m. 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.