

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 18 February 2025 7.30p.m.

Present

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

1. Apologies and declarations of interest

Cllr Tipping sent his apologies. There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 21st January 2025 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) were discussed. It was **resolved to accept the circulated minutes as a true record.** Proposed by Cllr Hughes seconded by Cllr Redfern.

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

The Clerk confirmed that the three highways' issues discussed at the last meeting were reported to Durham County Council and the direct debit to the website provider set up. Cllr Carlisle declared that the street lighting fault at the A66 / A67 junction (eastbound slip road) had not been repaired and since the last meeting there had been two accidents. The Clerk agreed to clarify if responsibility rested with DCC or Highways England and report accordingly. All other matters arising from the December meeting are considered as separate agenda items below.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £123.50 Brownless Cemetery Fees

£108.50 Blenkiron Cemetery Fees

£45.38 Bank Interest

(b) Expenses since last meeting £543.00 New clerk salary Q3

£252.00 Mazars 2023/24 limited assurance review

£152.80 PAYE deducted and payable to HMRC

£143.86 Hugo Fox Website Subscription

£69.12 Old Clerk back-pay Q1 and Q2 post pay award

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

- £85.00 SLCC Annual Subscription

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the January 2025 meeting, although the payroll figures were rounded when input to the HMRC Tool and the website subscription was covered as a separate agenda item. No urgent payments have arisen separately.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 31 January 2025 (month 10)

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 ten of the 2024/25 financial year remains close to budget with a 2% favourable variance at month ten, due to expected invoices not yet received. Members confirmed that the small use of reserves planned when the budget was approved was still anticipated, but if overdue invoices were not received by the next meeting year-end reserves might remain at 2023/24 levels or even increase slightly.

It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.**

(f) Bank reconciliation at 31 January 2025.

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 31 January 2025 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£40,646.10** was held. Cllr Carlisle inspected the supporting bank statements and signed the bank reconciliation to evidence the quarterly check. It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.**

5 Planning

There have been no planning applications within the parish council boundaries since the January 2025 meeting. However, two previously notified planning applications have now been approved by Durham County Council.

6 Correspondence

(a) CDALC have informed the Council that all councillors seeking re-election in May 2025 must complete and submit nomination papers between **Fri 21 March at 10am and Weds 2 April at 4pm**. In addition, the Annual General Meeting must be held between **Tues 6 May and Weds 21 May** inclusive. Cllr Carlisle stated that in prior years the Clerk had obtained the nomination papers electronically, but each councillor had to hand in their completed and signed papers in person at County Hall. He added that the guidance was often unclear. It was **resolved that the Clerk would obtain nomination papers and guidance and forward to councillors to read in advance but complete together at the next meeting. Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Redfern seconded.**

Cllr Carlisle suggested arranging the Annual Meeting of Electors for Wednesday 16 April (before the elections on 1 May) with the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 13 May (after the elections). The Clerk said that these dates should be compliant with legislation providing no agenda items for the meeting of electors could be considered publicity as it would fall within the restricted ‘*Purdah*’ period. Cllr Carlisle remarked that the annual meeting of electors was an opportunity for electors to ask questions and make suggestions for the Council to consider after the elections but in many years no electors attended. Thus, he did not see ‘*Purdah*’ as an obstacle to an April meeting but agreed that the Clerk should check with CDALC and approving the dates should be deferred to the March meeting.

(b) The Clerk stated that Middridge Parish Council have offered parish councils free furniture in excellent condition. It includes a table and six chairs ideal for council meetings. He asked members to consider this offer, noting that the furniture would need collecting and storage agreed with the school. Cllr Hughes noted that collecting the furniture should not be an issue and the furniture would be extremely useful if the school were prepared to store it in the room used for parish council meetings, but he thought this was unlikely. Cllr Carlisle said he would like to see photos of the furniture as a first step and then receive confirmation that it was still available before the Clerk spoke to the school about storage. It was **resolved that the Clerk would e-mail the Chair photos of the furniture and confirm availability with MPC before approaching the school about storage. Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.**

(c) Durham Community Action have informed the Clerk that they are presenting the results of their affordable rural housing survey at Mickleton Village Hall on 4 March. The Clerk shared a flyer with councillors. Cllr Hughes agreed to attend and report back to the next meeting.

(d) The Clerk stated that a resident had informed him of a large hole that had appeared near the eastern wall of the upper cemetery. She would like it filled in as it is adjacent to her relative’s grave. Cllr Hughes agreed to inspect the area and report back to the next meeting on any remedial action taken or proposed. He suspected that the hole might be an opening to a rabbit warren in an adjacent field that could easily be filled in and was unlikely to be the result of human digging.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

(a) The Clerk noted that he had received a request to approve the erection of a headstone by WM Allison and shared the relevant design and inscription. **It was resolved to approve the headstone design and inscription.** Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr White seconded.

(b) Cllr White updated councillors on the repairs to the cemetery wall, which the Council had approved in December 2024. The work had been delayed by harsh weather but would take place in the next few weeks, so an invoice was likely before the next meeting.

8 Allotments

(a) The Clerk confirmed that he contacted the relevant contractor for the outstanding quotation for repairs to the allotment walls (as requested at the January 2025 meeting) but has still not received a reply. He suggested that the Council may wish to consider requesting a quote from the contractor who is conducting repairs to the cemetery walls. Cllr Carlisle said that both contractors were longstanding contractors who had provided excellent value for money in the past, but as verbal agreement had previously been reached with one of them, he would ring this contractor to confirm their commitment to undertake the work before considering alternatives. It was a small job unlikely to appeal to many contractors and the value would be below the level for two estimates in financial regulations (£500).

9 Play Park

Cllr Redfern presented the latest playground inspection reports and confirmed that there were still only minor, non-urgent repairs as discussed at the December 2024 meeting and scheduled for the Spring (washers and bolts). Durham County Council had also noted wear and tear in the surfacing but this did not merit resurfacing at this stage. He would monitor this together with the ramp to the slide, which may require replacement earlier, but not in this financial year.

10 Footpaths

No agenda items this month, but the Clerk agreed to email DCC to request a copy of the 2025/26 grant application form when available.

11 Bank Mandate

The Clerk confirmed that the bank mandates have finally been updated and access to on-line banking granted. The Clerk suggested that the old clerk is now removed from the mandate and as agreed at the September 2024 an investment account is opened with CCLA, which has paid roughly twice the interest paid by Nat West in the past year. At the September 2024 meeting a CCLA deposit of £25,000 was agreed. The Clerk suggested that the Council may wish to consider increasing this as reserves are expected to remain about £38,000 and funds invested with CCLA can be accessed without notice or penalty.

Cllr Hughes said that it was good news that the bank mandates were finally up to date and agreed that the old clerk should now be removed. Cllr Carlisle signed a mandate update form to request this deletion. Cllr Hughes also thought increasing the CCLA deposit from £25,000 to £35,000 was prudent to help secure the level of bank interest assumed in the 2025/26 Budget. **It was resolved that before the financial year-end the Clerk would transfer £35,000 from the Nat West Savings Account to the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund and ensure that the previous clerk was removed from the bank mandate.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.

12 Gov.UK Emails

The Clerk sought clarification on which councillors have activated their gov.uk email accounts and wish to receive emails from the clerk using these new accounts. At the date of the meeting no councillors present had activated the accounts, but Cllr Tipping had informed the Clerk that he planned to do so and Cllr Hughes asked for the guidance to be re-sent so he could consider

this before the next meeting. The Clerk agreed to re-send guidance and log-in details to any councillors that requested it but confirmed that he would send emails to (or copy in) councillors personal email addresses, until councillors had informed him that they wished to use their gov.uk accounts in future.

13 Noticeboards

The Clerk sought approval for placing the contact details template previously circulated on the noticeboard. Cllr Carlisle suggested some minor changes and said that he would laminate the notice and place it on the noticeboard with the agenda for the next meeting.

It was **resolved that the Clerk would make minor changes and e-mail the revised template to the Chair to place on the noticeboard before the next meeting.** Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

14 Risk Management Strategy

(a) The Clerk presented the risk management strategy at Appendix D highlighting:

- The risk management policy at paragraphs 9 and 10;
- The risk appetite that the Council wishes to adopt as referred to at paragraph 18;
- The risk assessment matrix to score each risk at paragraph 19; and
- The proposed risk register format at Appendix 2.

Cllr Hughes commended the strategy and thought that policy, scoring system and risk register format were appropriate. Cllr Carlisle asked if the strategy was based on examples used by much larger councils as it was a very detailed document for such a small organisation. The Clerk confirmed that he had referred to several risk management strategies published by larger parish and town councils as well as the Practitioner's Guide but he considered it appropriate to all sizes of local authority. Cllr Carlisle agreed but noted that when the Council considered the risk register at the next meeting, they needed to avoid the process becoming too burdensome by focusing on assessing the most significant risks and setting a risk appetite so action was only required for residual red risks. It was **resolved to approve the risk management strategy including the risk management policy, scoring matrix and risk register format and set the risk appetite at the level indicated by residual red risks.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.

(b) Councillors had an initial discussion of risks that members would like the Clerk to include in the draft risk register presented to the March 2025 meeting. No new risks were identified but councillors agreed to consider this further when they received the March 2025 agenda papers including a draft risk register prepared by the Clerk.

15 AOB

Cllr Carlisle said that the small garden area of the play park was looking quite bare and would benefit from planting some spring bulbs. The Council also owned a few planter tubs in the village that could benefit from a refresh. He was aware that a neighbouring town council had an annual planting programme using inmates from the local prison. Cllr Hughes added that DCC had a Clean and Green Team that provided a similar service. It was **resolved that the Clerk e-mail the prison and DCC Clean and Green Team to see if they could help BPC plant spring bulbs in the play park and tubs and report back to the next meeting.** Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Redfern seconded.

16 Date, time, and venue of next meeting.

The next meeting was confirmed as to take place on Tuesday 18 March 2025 at Bowes Hutchinson's School with a 7.30 start.

Meeting closed at 8.25 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.