

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 17 March 2026 7.30 p.m.

Present

Cllr Hughes (Chair), Cllr Thompson, Cllr White, Mr Ross Woodley (Clerk and RFO)

1. Apologies and declarations of interest

Cllr Carlisle and Cllr Tipping sent their apologies. Cllr Hughes declared an interest in item 8.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held Tuesday 20 January 2026 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) were discussed.

It was **resolved to accept the circulated minutes. Proposed by Cllr Thompson seconded by Cllr White.**

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

The Clerk confirmed that the 2026/27 precept was notified to Durham County Council on time and the budget is now on the website. Cllr Hughes updated the Council on the issue regarding an electrified perimeter fence at Low Field Farm. Cllr Carlisle had discussed the matter with the landowner and Cllr Hughes stated that he would inspect the site and follow up if necessary.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £200.00 Memorial Fee – Raine

£108.39 Investment Interest (January)

£101.17 Investment Interest (February)

(b) Expenses since last meeting £143.86 Annual website fee – Hugo Fox

£43.27 Clerk GDPR overtime – R Woodley

£20.00 New councillor training - CDALC

£11.99 Email accounts (January) – Hugo Fox

£11.99 Email accounts (February) – Hugo Fox

£10.60 PAYE on GDPR Overtime – HMRC

£6.00 Bank charges (January)

£6.00 Bank charges (February)

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

- £560.24 Clerk salary Q4 – R Woodley
- £336.79 Two lockable filing cabinets – Viking Direct
- £180.00 Clerk Reference Manual ('Arnold Baker on Local Council Administration') – LexisNexis (as out of stock in SLCC bookshop)
- £140.20 PAYE Q4 – HMRC
- £104.00 Membership fees – SLCC
- £88.32 Playground inspections 26/27 – DCC

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the December 2025 meeting, or in the case of bank and email charges are monthly contractual payments, except the new councillor training approved at the September 2025 meeting (late bill) and the annual website fee, for which there is a direct debit instruction (invoice now obtained). Retrospective approval was given for this annual fee, which is unchanged from the prior year. – **Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

(e) Budget Monitoring to 28 February 2026 (month 11)

The Clerk presented Appendix B for receipts and payments at month 11 of 2025/26.

The Council are 5% (£1,916) below the profiled budget, primarily due to outstanding playground repairs, for which a contract is to be awarded at item 15 of this agenda, in addition to payments postponed because the February meeting was inquorate. As last month, a net underspend of £500 is forecast meaning that £38,500 of reserves are anticipated at year-end, which is in line with the 2026/27 Budget. However, if the playground repairs are not completed and paid for by 31 March the year-end underspend will be higher without any change to the underlying financial position. As last year, significant expenditure will be deferred from the year it is budgeted to be incurred to the next year, with no effect on reserves at the end of that year. It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

(f) Bank reconciliation at 28 February 2026 (month 11)

The Clerk presented Appendix C, for the bank reconciliation at 28 February 2026 (month 11).

This shows the balances on the Unity Trust bank accounts reconcile to the cash book without any reconciling items. It also shows the long-term investment with Redwood Bank as a memorandum item. It was **resolved to accept the bank reconciliation – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

5 Planning

Cllr Hughes declared that there had been one planning application within the parish council boundaries since the January 2026 meeting, but he had checked on the Durham County Council planning portal and it had been withdrawn. He intended to look out for a revised application.

6 Correspondence

- (a) The Project Manager of the proposed wind farm near the Stang Forest wrote to the Council requesting the nomination of a councillor representative (and substitute) to sit on the Hope Moor Community Liaison Group ensuring that local communities are consulted and the project team can address local concerns. Cllr Thompson attended the inaugural meeting of the Group and reported back to the Council that plans were at a very early stage with no decision likely for several years. The developers wanted to obtain community views and identify potential obstacles before consulting on a detailed plan. Cllr Thompson was happy to attend future meetings to facilitate this process and Cllr Hughes said that he would be willing to deputise. It was **resolved that the Clerk would write to the Project Manager nominating Cllr Thompson as the Council's representative on the Hope Moor Community Liaison Group with Cllr Hughes as substitute and sharing their contact details – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**
- (b) The Clerk declared that CDALC have asked for more parish councils to participate in the pilot digitalisation of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) project being run by Smaller Authorities Auditor Appointments Limited (SAAA) in 2025/26. SAAA are seeking a sample of smaller authorities in each county area to complete their AGARs using their new on-line tool this year ahead of a proposed mandatory roll-out by 2027/28. The Council considered this invitation but decided against volunteering for this year's pilot.
- (c) The Chair noted that Unity Trust have informed the Council of an increase in bank charges from £6 to £7 per month with immediate effect.
- (d) The Chair confirmed that he had responded to concerns raised about abandoned cars in the village. The correspondent has been referred to the Village Hall Committee.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

Cllr White said that when removing an overgrown shrub at the play park he noted that the flower beds that a resident had kindly cultivated last year needed tidying and replanting, and suggested the Council consider paying someone to attend to all the Council's flower beds and tubs rather than relying on volunteers. Cllr Hughes said that this would need to be a formal agenda item at a future meeting, but he was comfortable in principle with allocating a small budget to gardening.

8 Allotments

Cllr White confirmed that on 8 March 2026, he and Cllr Thompson completed an unannounced inspection of the allotments to ensure that terms and conditions were being complied with. No significant concerns were apparent and the condition of the allotments had improved since the new tenancy agreements were signed in November 2025. The Chair thanked Cllr White and Cllr Thompson for the inspection and welcomed the positive findings.

9 Play Park

Cllr Hughes said that he had inspected the play equipment and stated that there were no new issues arising. The Clerk confirmed that this was consistent with Durham County Council's quarterly inspection. Cllr Hughes agreed to provide his inspection sheet at the next meeting. The Clerk noted that the procurement of a contractor to repair the swing frame is considered under exempt business at item 15.

10 Footpaths

Cllr White updated the Council on progress obtaining quotations for repairs due in 2026/27. As previously agreed, two quotations were requested based on a common specification. He had received one quotation and been promised the other in the next week. The specification requested quotes for four separate repairs and he asked what would happen if the cheapest contractor differed by repair. Cllr Hughes said that whilst it would be simpler to go with the cheapest aggregate bid there was nothing to stop the Council mixing and matching to obtain best overall value.

Cllr White added that he had discussed the repairs with the landowners as required by Durham County Council and whilst all agreed to the work in principle one had a clear preference regarding the choice of contractor. The Clerk confirmed that whilst landowners can not dictate the Council's procurement decision the Council did need their permission before submitting the grant bid, so the risk of not getting this permission was a valid consideration. **The Council resolved to select the preferred contractor in aggregate or for each repair at the next meeting, once the second quotation had been received and Cllr White had discussed the matter further with the relevant landowner. – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr White seconded.**

Cllr White added that he had just identified a further footpath repair on the path from the Annums to Mill Lane. The terraced slope down to the River Greta was becoming increasingly steep and worn down posing a potential risk to health and safety. Cllr Hughes remarked that it was too late to add to the specification for 2026/27 grant-funded repairs but once Durham County Council had responded to the bid the Clerk should inform DCC of this risk, so they could inspect and decide if it needed urgent repair or could be delayed until 2027/28.

11 Data Protection and Retention

The Clerk reminded members that in October 2025, the Council agreed a new plan for ensuring GDPR Compliance and in November 2025 the Council discussed an audit of paper records held by the Council in a filing cabinet and two large crates. The Clerk reflected on this discussion and updated the Data Retention Policy, which was approved at the December meeting. In accordance with the GDPR Plan, the Clerk has now drafted a data protection policy for consideration and approval – see Appendix D.

This plan includes a draft data breach reporting form, privacy notice and data consent form and once approved will be published on the Council's website. The Clerk has transferred those records earmarked for destruction or donation to the historical society to the Chair at the meeting. The October 2025 Plan indicated that the final stage (training of councillors) would take place at this meeting, but following the cancellation of the February meeting, this agenda is quite full, and the Clerk suggested a postponement to the April meeting.

The Chair thanked the clerk for all the hard work on GDPR and thought the idea of distributing the GDPR training material this month but running through it and taking questions either just before or after the April meeting, contingent on whether any residents turned up to the Annual Parish Meeting of Electors, was a good one. He requested one change (inserting the word 'parish' in the first paragraph of Appendix 2, which the Clerk agreed to make before publication.

It was resolved to approve the Data Protection Policy including its appendices and postpone the formal GDPR training to the next meeting – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

12 Risk Register

The Clerk presented the draft risk register (Appendix E) and asked the Council to consider if there are any additional risks requiring consideration, confirm the scores attached to each residual risk seem reasonable and consider remedial action for the one risk classified as 'red' and thus above the Council's risk appetite. The changes from the March 2025 risk register are summarised at the end of the document. There are three new risks and one risk where the risk level has changed. No risks have been deleted.

All agreed that the risk register was complete and appropriate. Cllr Hughes said that urgent action was needed on the red risk of regularly inquorate meetings due to councillor illness. This required co-opting at least one additional person to be a member of the Council. Ideally, this person should improve diversity and resilience but getting younger residents to commit time had previously proved challenging.

It was resolved that the Clerk would advertise a co-option vacancy on the website and the Chair would speak to the Headteacher to ascertain if she knew any parents who might be interested before making a direct approach – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

13 AOB

There was no other business for discussion,

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

The next Ordinary Meeting would take place on Tuesday 14 April 2026 at Bowes Hutchinson's School at 7.30 in accordance with the timetable published on the Council's website. The Annual Parish Meeting of Electors would start at 7pm on that day.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Council resolved to consider and resolve the following two agenda items that require the exclusion of the Press and Public in accordance with the Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act 1960 for matters appertaining to confidential information. – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

15 Appointment of the internal auditor for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28

The Clerk requested fixed price quotes from three internal auditors selected from a list of suppliers issued by CDALC. One internal auditor immediately replied stating that they did not have the capacity for any extra clients, so an alternative internal auditor was invited to bid. Only one quotation was received by the relevant deadline. The Clerk provided details of this quotation at the meeting and advised the Council to approve the appointment, noting that the procurement has identified a shortage of suitable internal auditors and a delay would risk leaving the Council without an internal auditor in place for 2025/26 year-end. The internal auditor (Jenny Linsley) had proposed a fixed fee of £125 per annum for three years, compared to £120 charged by the incumbent internal auditor, who had resigned. She had agreed to deliver the same plan of work and the Clerk was satisfied with her qualifications, experience, and independence.

The Council resolved to appoint Jenny Linsley as internal auditor for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28– Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

16 Appointment of the contractor for play equipment repairs

The Clerk identified six firms that specialised in playground equipment repairs following advice from Cllr White and Durham County Council that the replacement of one of the legs to the swing frame was a complex job that needed to be done in accordance with rigorous health and safety standards. The Clerk received six quotes, the cheapest of which was £1,123 plus VAT. This is significantly more than the estimate of £600 plus VAT used in estimating 2025/26 outturn in the 2026/27 Budget Report. However, the fact that the other five quotes ranged from £1,201 to £1,695 provides assurance that this price is competitive. The Clerk advised the Council to approve a contractor to complete the work as soon as possible, noting the swings remain a medium health and safety risk first identified in July 2025.

The Council resolved to appoint Playdale as contractor for the swing repairs at a price of £1,123 plus VAT – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

Meeting closed at 8.35 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.