

# **Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council**

## **held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 21 January 2025**

### **Present**

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

#### **1. Apologies and declarations of interest**

Cllr Redfern sent his apologies. Cllr Hughes declared an interest in item 7b and excused himself from the discussion of this item.

#### **2. Minutes of the Meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) discussed. It was **resolved to accept the circulated minutes as a true record. Proposed by Cllr Carlisle seconded by Cllr Hughes.**

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

The Clerk confirmed that he had submitted the 2025/2026 Budget to Durham County Council on time, and informed Durham Community Action of the position regarding land for affordable housing. All other matters arising from the December meeting are considered as a separate agenda item below.

#### **4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.**

(a) Receipts since last meeting £754.00 DCC Grant for Footpath Works

£47.49 Bank Interest

(b) Expenses since last meeting £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.

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

- £542.88 New clerk salary Q3
- £252.00 Forvis Mazars 2023/24 limited assurance review
- £152.98 PAYE deducted and payable to HMRC
- £69.06 Old Clerk back-pay Q1 and Q2 post pay award

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

(e) Budget Monitoring to 31 December 2024 (month 9)

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 nine of the 2024/25 financial year was extremely 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 31 December 2024.

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 31 December 2024 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£39,882.08** was held.

(g) Direct Debit Payments

The Clerk explained that the website provider now only accepts payments by direct debit or debit card. Before the next meeting, the annual subscription of £143.86 will be due and a direct debit should be in place for the gov.uk e-mail registration. Government grants will be applied to the latter so the first payment will be taken in October 2025. The Clerk requested council approval to set up direct debits to the website provider in line with their payment plan to avoid disruption to website access. It **was resolved to:**

- Authorise the Clerk to set up a direct debit to pay the annual website subscription to Hugo Fox of £143.86 and a monthly payment from October 2025 of £11.99 for the gov.uk e-mail addresses now in use. Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

## 5 Planning

There have been no planning applications within the parish council boundaries since the December 2024 meeting. The Clerk declared that he had received at least ten e-mails from Woodland Parish Council asking all parish councils in South-West Durham to object to a planning proposal for a leisure and holiday let development in Hamsterley Forest. Cllr Carlisle confirmed that the Council does not usually comment on planning applications outside its boundaries and he saw no reason to depart from this long-established policy. Cllr Hughes agreed and noted that the principal objections such as a lack of transport infrastructure and water access would be considered by Durham County Council as planning authority in due course. The Clerk stated that he was not minded to respond to these blanket e-mails given councillors did not wish to comment on the proposals.

## 6 Correspondence

- (a) Durham County Council have asked if the Parish Council wish to comment on the North-East Local Transport Plan before consultation closes on 26 January 2025. It is a lengthy document but includes a project to divert traffic from Barnard Castle Town Centre by 2040, which could impact on Bowes. There do not appear to be any concrete proposals on how to achieve this. Councillors were aware of this long-term aim and the potential for a new road link within the parish, but did not wish to comment until the route was established.
- (b) CDALC have explained that they are proposing a sector wide response to consultations on strengthening the standards and conduct framework and local audit reform but parish councils may wish to respond separately. The Clerk remarked that from a brief read through the proposals are unlikely to impact an authority as small as Bowes PC significantly, but proposals to allow parish councillors to sit on County Council standards committees and an inflation linking of the external audit exemption threshold seemed sensible. Councillors did not wish to respond to the consultations.
- (c) Northern PowerGrid have informed the Clerk that they are to undertake pruning of trees interfering with electricity cables at the play park and village hall. The Council noted this work.
- (d) Two residents have asked the Clerk if the Parish Council has the power to clear snow and prune trees on Back Lane. The Clerk referred both to DCC as highways authority and councillors confirmed that this was the appropriate response.

## 7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

- (a) Cllr Carlisle confirmed that the green waste left as agreed with the contractor at the edge of the cemetery following grounds maintenance would remain until Spring and burnt when the weather conditions and wind direction were conducive to a bonfire. Cllr White stated that a more urgent need was the repairs to the cemetery wall agreed at the last meeting. The wall had suffered further storm damage and the contractor was waiting for better weather to repair. The Clerk confirmed that he had placed an order based on the contractor's quotation and requested the invoice upon completion.
- (b) The Clerk updated the Council on his discussions with a funeral director about the need for urgent snow clearance before a funeral could take place. Deep snow had remained for a week and represented a health and safety hazard on parish land. A farmer had agreed to clear the snow for a small fee (less than £100). The Clerk had agreed with Cllr Carlisle that the work could go ahead without prior council approval and the snow had been cleared effectively in time for the funeral, but an invoice had not yet been received. **It was resolved to approve payment if and when an invoice was received from the farmer.** Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.

## 8 Allotments

(a) The Clerk ensured that councillors were aware of the break-in and criminal damage at the allotments over the festive period. All were aware and expressed sympathy for the allotment holders and surprise that allotment sheds containing nothing valuable had been targeted. The Clerk noted that one of the sheds had been donated to the Council but it was in a vacant plot and the keys were still held by the former allotment holder. The Council had previously decided to wait until the plot was let to obtain the keys and it followed that any repairs would take place at this time.

(b) The Clerk stated that he could not find any record of an award of a contract to repair the allotment walls. Cllr Carlisle stated that the previous clerk had arranged for a minor repair to a seat at the Play Park and the contractor had agreed to provide a quote for a minor repair to the allotment wall, which was likely to be well below the threshold for seeking additional quotations. However, this was a long time ago, so the contractor might have forgotten. **It was resolved that the Clerk should contact the contractor for a quote to repair the allotment walls. Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

## 9 Play Park

In Cllr Redfern's absence it was agreed that the Play Park would be considered at the next meeting with minor, non-urgent repairs discussed at the December 2024 meeting scheduled for the Spring.

## 10 Footpaths

The Clerk confirmed that the 2024/25 footpath work was complete and the DCC grant funding received. Cllr White asked the Clerk to report an issue to the Rights of Way Officer at Durham County Council, which he agreed to do. Rutherford Bridge South East of Mid-Lowfield Farm had been condemned about a year ago but the planned replacement had still not materialised.

## 11 Bank Mandate

The Clerk explained that the bank mandates had finally been updated but he still did not have access to online banking and so could not make online payments. Nat West had requested a new form signed by two signatories to authorise his access. Cllr Carlisle and Cllr Hughes signed the form for the Clerk to scan in and e-mail to Nat West.

## 12 Gov.UK Emails

The Clerk confirmed that these were now in place and he was using [clerk@bowesparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@bowesparishcouncil.gov.uk) for all council business now. Cllr Carlisle said he was struggling to set up his generic e-mail account and asked if they were mandatory for councillors. The Clerk explained that Proper Practice in Part 1 of the Practitioner's Guide currently only requires this for the Clerk, but this section of the Guide was likely to be revised in March 2025. It was good practice for councillors to separate their council and personal e-mails, but as they only usually received council emails from the Clerk and did not handle sensitive data, this was unlikely to cause significant issues. Cllr Carlisle said that in that case he would continue to use his personal e-mail address for the time being.

## 13 Noticeboards

The Clerk remarked that he had found the noticeboards in the bus shelter contained several out-of-date documents and did not contain the website address or clerk contact details. Cllr Carlisle explained that only one of the noticeboards belonged to Bowes Parish Council and since the Clerk's inspection he had ensured that it was up to date. However, **it was resolved that the Clerk would send the Chair a template contact details notice to place on the noticeboard with the summons and agenda for the February meeting and leave permanently in place. Cllr Tipping proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

## 14 AOB

Cllr White asked the Clerk to report two recent highways issues to Durham County Council:

- Streetlights and give way signs not lit up just to the North of the A66 on the A67; and
- Bushes hanging over the road and obstructing the footpath at Clint Bridge,

## 15 Date, time, and venue of next meeting.

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

## 16 Exclusion of Press and Public (none present). To approve the grass-cutting contract for 2025/26 and 2026/27

The Clerk had circulated the draft contract with the agenda pack and all confirmed that they were comfortable with the contents. Cllr Hughes commended the Clerk for a clear and comprehensive contract. The Clerk asked if the contract should be more specific in respect of the location of grass requiring cutting. Cllr Carlisle said that whilst the contractor was familiar with the location it would be helpful to specify that it was grass at the Cemetery and Play Park, which needed cutting. **It was resolved that the Clerk should revise the contract as agreed, sign it on behalf of the Council and e-mail it to the contractor for signing**

*Proposed by Cllr Hughes and seconded by Cllr Carlisle.*

Meeting closed at 20.30. 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.