

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 17 June 2025 7.30 p.m.

Present

Cllr Hughes, Cllr Carlisle, 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 items 4(a), 4(b) and 7.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held Tuesday 13 May 2025 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) were discussed.

Cllr Carlisle requested one minor amendment. He had inspected completion of the allotment wall repairs and not Cllr White. The Clerk agreed to make this amendment.

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

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

Cllr Carlisle introduced a local resident (Mark Thompson) who was interested in co-option and had been invited to attend the meeting to observe how the Council functioned. Cllr Hughes confirmed that whilst discussions had taken place with several potential candidates for co-option there were no others interested at this stage. The Clerk confirmed that he had not received any enquiries about co-option and introduced himself to Mr Thompson, who was known to all the others present.

Cllr Hughes confirmed that he had submitted all four register of interest forms to Durham County Council by the 3 June 2025 deadline.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £219.00 Snow clearance contribution – Blenkiron
£57.81 Investment interest
£27.11 Bank Interest

(b) Expenses since last meeting £32,000.00 Long term investment – Redwood Bank
£700.00 Clint Gardens Rent 24/25 & 25/26 – Youngs
£438.00 Cemetery snow clearance – Mark Tiplady
£411.00 Allotment wall and bench repairs – RB Watson
£270.00 April and May Grass-Cutting – R Toward
£66.72 Playground inspections 24/25 – D.C.C.
£5.14 Postage reimbursement to clerk (4 stamps)
£4.49 Bolts reimbursement to Cllr Hughes (playground)

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

- £543.00 Clerk salary Q1 2025/26 (payable 30/6/25)
- £270.00 Grass-cutting (2 cuts) – R Toward
- £135.60 HMRC PAYE Q1 2025/26 (payable 30/6/25)
- £120.00 24/25 Internal Audit – Butler & Gee
- £84.99 Microsoft 365 software license (clerk refund)

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the May 2025 meeting, although the long-term investment was approved under agenda item

19(a) and the cemetery snow clearance under item 15(b). See item 7 for an explanation of how settlement was reached and the funeral director invoiced for their 50% contribution.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 31 May 2025 (month 2)

The Clerk presented Appendix B showing receipts and payments to year-end compared with the profiled budget. The Clerk explained that at the end of May 2025 reserves were just 0.4% (£182) more favourable than forecast because most of the expenditure deferred from 2024/25 had been incurred. The underlying position is unchanged with £38,000 of reserves anticipated at 31 March 2026. It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report** – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(f) Bank reconciliation at 31 May 2025

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 31 May 2025 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£12,470.78** was held. In addition, a long-term investment of **£32,000** was now held with Redwood Bank. It was **resolved to accept the bank reconciliation** – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(g) 2024/25 Internal Audit Report.

The Clerk explained that Butler and Gee had completed the annual internal audit and signed their report, a copy of which was included at Appendix D of the agenda pack. There were no control weaknesses or recommendations. Internal Audit had ticked 'yes' for every applicable objective. Cllr Hughes welcomed this positive independent assurance. It was **resolved to accept the internal audit report**– Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(h) 2024/25 Annual Review of Internal Control

The Clerk introduced the report at Appendix E and explained that internal control is assessed as effective reflecting the positive internal audit report. It was **resolved to accept the annual review of the effectiveness of internal report**– Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(I) 2024.25 Annual Governance Statement

The Clerk stated that the draft Annual Governance Statement contained within the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) at Appendix F was answered 'yes' for every applicable assertion to reflect the internal audit report and annual review of internal control. However, councillors were required to consider if this was appropriate before approving the AGAR. It was **resolved to approve the Annual Governance Statement with 'yes' answers to every applicable assertion** – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(j) 2024/25 Accounts

The Clerk explained that the draft accounts contained within the AGAR at Appendix F had been agreed to the cash book and asset register as part of the internal audit and showed the financial outturn previously articulated to the Council in budget monitoring reports and bank reconciliations. He had signed the accounts in advance as RFO and after Council approval both the Annual Governance Statement and Accounts required signing by Cllr Hughes as Chair. It was **resolved to approve the 2024/25 Accounts and for Cllr Hughes to sign the AGAR in the relevant places** – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

(k) 2024/25 Exemption Certificate

The Clerk explained that since both receipts and payments in the accounts were well below £25,000 and the other criteria for exemption were met the Council could apply for exemption from a limited assurance review by the external auditor. The AGAR at Appendix F included a draft exemption certificate which he and the Chair would need to sign once approved. He

would then submit it to PKF Littlejohn (external auditors) in advance of their 30 June 2025 deadline. It was **resolved to approve the 2024/25 Exemption Certificate and the Clerk to submit it to the external auditors**– Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.

5 Planning

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

6 Correspondence

(a) North Pennines National Landscaping have invited councillors to their annual conference on 25 June with an application deadline of 18 June. The paramount theme of the conference is Nature Friendly Farming. Cllr Hughes said that he was interested in attending and the Clerk agreed to forward him the invite.

(b) An allotment holder has e-mailed the Clerk expressing concern about the impact of vacant allotments and questioning allotment policy. He has also sent information about footpath damage. The Clerk has responded. Cllr Carlisle declared that the footpath damage referred to was in Gilmonby and Gilmonby Parish Meeting had already met and considered it. He was also comfortable with the current condition of allotments following his recent inspection and agreed that if the allotments were fully let this should solve the problem with vacant plots. The Clerk replied that he had already explained these points to the allotment holder. Accordingly, no further action was required at this point.

(c) County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust have asked parish councils to consider holding a fundraising event on 7 July 2025 as part of the NHS Big Thank You 'Big Tea' campaign. However, Bowes Parish Council would need to hire premises to participate. Cllr Carlisle said that CCDFT probably didn't realise that a separate Village Hall Committee run the village hall, not the Council, and suggested that the Clerk forward the flyer to the Village Hall Committee. The clerk agreed to this proposal.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

The Clerk remarked that the proposal at the Annual General Meeting to share the costs of a snow clearance invoice with the funeral director who ordered the work has been accepted by the funeral director. The Clerk has paid the invoice from the contractor and recharged 50% to the funeral director, which has now been received.

The Clerk sought free legal advice from CDALC, which confirmed this was an acceptable resolution. However, CDALC confirmed that if the Council had an agreed and publicised policy on recharging the cost of snow clearance and communicated this at the time of granting permission for burial they would be entitled to recharge the full cost. The Clerk advised the Council to adopt this new policy to prevent future disputes. Cllr Carlisle said that he thought the Council ought to publish the cemetery charges schedule on its website with a footnote explaining the charging policy in respect of snow clearance and other emergency work between permission for burial being granted and burial. He agreed that the funeral director should be charged the full cost. Cllr Tipping said that whilst he agreed that the policy needed clarifying he was concerned about the costs ultimately being charged to the grieving family. A vote was taken with Cllr Hughes not taking part due to the declared conflict of interest. Cllr Carlisle and Cllr White voted in favour of the proposal and Cllr Tipping abstained, so the motion was carried. It was **resolved to approve the policy of charging the funeral directors the full cost of snow clearance of other emergency work necessary for them to conduct a funeral that occurs after they had paid for permission for burial and for the Clerk to publicise this policy on the website and permission for burial invoices.** – Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr White seconded.

8 Allotments

The Clerk stated that an application has been received to let the one remaining vacant allotment for an initial 4 months starting 1 July 2025 with a long-term commitment to renew the letting from 1 November 2025. Cllr Carlisle clarified the plot was a half-plot to the West of the site that had been vacant for some time and welcomed the application. Cllr Hughes said that it was quite overgrown and a controlled bonfire might be the best way of preparing it for cultivation. He was happy to arrange this with the new allotment holder. It was **resolved to approve the letting of the allotment plot. Cllr Tipping proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.**

9 Play Park

Cllr Hughes provided the latest playground inspection sheet and confirmed that there were no issues that needed attention. He was going to assess the cost of applying preservative to the fencing before the next meeting.

10 Footpaths

The Clerk declared that he had received approval for £2,027.30 of P3 Footpath Grant from Durham County Council. DCC rejected the application for an additional £2,141 for more substantive repairs at West Low Field as there were insufficient funds left in the grant pot and they would also need convincing that work of this scale was necessary and provided value for money through a quote from a second contractor before approving any future grant claim in respect of this project. Cllr White indicated that DCC were expecting 2026/27 grant applications much earlier and quotes would be needed in September 2025. He agreed to ask the 2025/26 contractor to complete the work by early September and to provide a new quote for West Low Field at this time. The Clerk agreed to send an official order to the contractor for the 2025/26 work, making the completion deadline and need for hardwood (preferably oak) clear. He would approach a second contractor to quote for West Low Field in September.

11 Bank and Investment Strategy

- (a) The Clerk confirmed that the first stage of the new banking and investment strategy approved at the Annual General Meeting had been implemented. £32,000 has been invested in a two-year fixed term deposit with Redland Bank. The final interest rate was 4.12%, compared to a current base rate of 4.25%. Considering consistent economic forecasts of falling interest rates it is likely the return will exceed the base rate over the life of the investment. Cllr Hughes thanked the Clerk for securing such a positive investment.
- (b) The Clerk advised that the next stage is to switch the current account and instant access savings account to Unity Trust Bank as agreed. The Council will need to agree the terms of the bank mandate. The Clerk advised that it allows for any two signatories on all transactions (except internal transfers between accounts) and at least two councillors are named along with the Clerk as authorised signatories. Cllr Carlisle agreed that two councillors plus the Clerk should be sufficient to manage the mandate and any two of these could authorise payments, whilst the Clerk could authorise transfers. Cllr Hughes and Cllr Tipping said that they would like to be on the mandate to perform payment authorisation. It was **resolved to approve the Clerk to set up the Unity Trust account with a bank mandate involving him, Cllr Hughes and Cllr Tipping as authorised signatories, any two signatories with authority to approve payments and the Clerk with authority to approve transfers between Unity Trust bank accounts. Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.**

12 Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Complaints Policy

Cllr Hughes said that he had read the new policies at Appendix G (the draft anti-fraud and corruption policy) and Appendix H (the draft anti complaints policy) and thought that they were excellent documents. It was **resolved to approve the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Complaints Policy. Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Tipping seconded.**

13 AOB

Cllr Carlisle said that he was concerned that solar panels had been installed on a property within the conservation area, which he did not think was allowed. Cllr Hughes said that he thought planning approval ought to have been obtained as they were facing on to the street-front and he didn't recall seeing an application. The Clerk agreed to write to Durham County Council to ascertain if planning permission was required and if so if it had been obtained as the Council would have welcomed the opportunity to consider the pros and cons of such a change in the landscape of the main street in advance of the work and were concerned about the precedent if such work was allowed without due process being followed.

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

The next Ordinary Meeting would take place on Tuesday 15 July 2025 at Bowes Hutchinson's School at 7.30 and would start with ratifying Mark Thompson's co-option on to the Council and declaration of acceptance of office if he decided to join the Council

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider and resolve the 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. Mark Thompson left the meeting.

15 To approve the contract for repairs to the cemetery walls

The Clerk stated that the Council have received two quotes for repairing the cemetery walls. The quotes are not currently like for like as the repair methods differ. However, there is little difference in the price quoted. Accordingly, the Council may resolve to let the contract to the contractor whose method they prefer or request a new quote from the other contractor based on adopting the preferred method. Cllr Carlisle said that he thought the extra cost of the materials alone would explain the difference in quotes and once additional labour was factored in the lower quote would inevitably end up more expensive. Accordingly, he proposed going for the first option and accepting the higher quote. It was **resolved to approve letting the contract for repairs to the cemetery wall to Ray Watson.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded.

Mark Thompson re-joined the meeting and discussed joining the Council with councillors and the Clerk. He stated that he would like to be co-opted and was keen to get started. The Clerk explained that he would need to sign a declaration of acceptance of office and complete a register of interest form after the co-option was ratified at the July meeting. He could then participate in the remainder of that meeting as a councillor.

Meeting closed at 8.45 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.