# Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council
# held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 20 October 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 sent his apologies. Cllr Hughes declared an interest in item 8.

2. ## Minutes of the Meeting
Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting held Tuesday 15 September 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 Hughes.

3. ## Matters arising (unless dealt with later in the agenda)
The Chair stated that after further discussions the resident interested in co-option had decided against applying to join the Council. He added that the school had confirmed that they do have a defibrillator, but it is in the staff room and thus only accessible during school hours. As it would be misleading to publish a leaflet indicating villagers had access to two defibrillators it was **resolved not to publish the leaflet discussed at the previous meeting**. Proposed by Cllr Hughes seconded by Cllr Thompson.

The Clerk provided a bank mandate change form for the three councillors to sign and they did so at the meeting. The Clerk will now upload it on the Unity Trust website to support the application to add Cllr White and Cllr Thompson as authorised signatories.

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

(a) Receipts since last meeting £108.39 Investment Interest (September)
£ 60.92 Bank Interest (Q2 2026 2027)

(b) Expenses since last meeting £601.20 Clerk salary Q2 26/27 – R Woodley
£252.00 25/26 external audit – BDO
£150.20 PAYE Q2 26/27 – HMRC
£135.00 Grass-cutting (1 cut) – R Toward
£11.99 Email accounts DD (September) – Hugo Fox
£7.00 Bank Charges (September)

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

- £135.00 Grass-cutting (1 cut, 1 more anticipated) – R Toward
- £70.00 Allotment rent increase (following triennial review) – Youngs RPS
- £57.60 Cemetery training course (from training budget) – SLCC

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the September 2026 meeting, or in the case of bank and email charges are monthly contractual payments.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 30 September 2026 (month 6)
The Clerk presented Appendix B for receipts and payments at the mid-point of 2026/27.

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This indicates a 5% (£2,023) underspend against the profiled budget. This is primarily due to the unpredictable timing of cemetery and village repairs and maintenance, with all now expected in the second half of the year. However, once the Council has received quotes for the cemetery tree work the Clerk will assess if a small underspend is likely. Accordingly, at the mid-point of 2026/27, the Clerk still forecasts a break-even outturn leaving reserves at £38,500 in line with the approved 2026/27 budget.
It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report** – Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

(f) Bank reconciliation at 30 September 2026 (month 6)
The Clerk presented Appendix C, for the bank reconciliation at 30 September 2026 (month 6). This shows the balances on the Unity Trust bank accounts (£11,606) reconcile to the cash book without any reconciling items. It also shows the £32,000 long-term investment with Redwood Bank as a memorandum item. In accordance with financial regulations the bank statements and cash book supporting the reconciliation were provided for the Chair's quarterly check at the meeting. It was **resolved to accept the bank reconciliation** – Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

## 5 Planning

(a) Cllr Thompson attended the Hope Moor Community Liaison Group meeting on 23 September 2026 and fed back to this meeting to keep the Council informed of the developer's response to the initial consultation and plans for further consultation. He said that there remained lots of unanswered questions and most of the feedback during consultation was still under consideration. He hoped that the next meeting would be more useful as firm decisions were expected shortly.

(c) The Chair revealed that whilst there had been no planning applications within the Bowes Parish Council boundaries since the previous meeting at the time the Clerk drafted the agenda an application had now been submitted for a new general use building at Clint Farm. Cllr White said that the building was unlikely to be visible from any properties and all agreed that there was no need for the Council to comment on the application. The Chair also confirmed that Durham County Council have informed the Council of a permitted development at North Side Farm, Boldron. An 18m telecommunication tower is to be replaced with a 25m tower to preserve local services.

## 6 Correspondence

(a) The Chair stated that a Bowes resident has kindly informed the Clerk of her intension to leave the Council a bequest in the will that she and her husband are preparing. The Clerk had explained to the resident that the Council would vote on the use of the income at the time of receipt unless the bequest placed a restriction on that use.

(b) The Clerk explained that Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) have issued an invitation to comment on proposed changes to proper practices for smaller authority accounts and governance set out in the Practitioner's Guide and a new Code of Practice for internal audit. The proposals represent the most significant proposed changes in requirements for smaller authority accounts and audit in over a decade and are designed to take effect from 1 April 2027 (the 2027/28 financial year). The consultation runs until 31 October 2026. The Clerk has reviewed the proposals and whilst generally supportive has some concerns. The Chair asked for examples of the concerns and the Clerk explained that there was a factual error regarding the criteria for exemptions and he regarded requiring in-year as well as year-end internal audits disproportionate for smaller authorities the size of Bowes. The Chair agreed. Accordingly, it was **resolved that the Clerk responds to the SAPPP consultation by**

**the 31 October 2026 deadline on behalf of the Council communicating his concerns.** Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

(c) The Chair declared that Durham County Council are consulting on their 2027/28 Budget and 4-year Medium Term Financial Plan. Last year, the County Council elected not to increase council tax by the amount assumed by the Government in funding settlements and together with national pressures created by rising demand for social services and special educational needs this has created a significant deficit, which the Council aims to bridge through a four-year savings programme. Providing that in future the Government's assumed council tax increase of 4.99% per annum is approved, savings of £21.5M would balance the budget. £9M savings largely from reducing discretionary welfare support and the extent of grounds and winter maintenance are proposed. It is assumed that the residual £12M savings will be delivered through AI-driven efficiency improvements, although these schemes are still being developed. Bowes Parish Council usually declines to comment on the County Council's budget proposals but if it did wish to comment this year the consultation period runs until 15 November, with online consultation events available for booking over the next few weeks. The Chair suggested the Council might wish to comment on the proposal to cut the winter maintenance budget. Cllr White and Cllr Thompson agreed, noting that Bowes had much greater snowfall than most other parts of the County due to its altitude and remoteness and could be disproportionately affected by cuts in winter maintenance. The Clerk received complaints about the existing service in January 2025. Accordingly, it was **resolved that the Clerk responds to the DCC consultation by the November 2026 deadline on behalf of the Council communicating the Council's concern over the proposed winter maintenance savings.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

(d) The Chair asked if there was any interest in attending Durham Community Action's '*Future of Ageing Well'* conference on Thursday 22 October from 9.30 to 4.30 at Durham County Cricket Club in Chester-Le Street. None of the councillors were able to attend.

## 7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

(a) The Clerk advised the Council to consider an increase to cemetery fees for 2027/28 in accordance with a previous resolution to update the fees for inflation every two years. The last increase (for 2025/26) reflected the fact that they had remained fixed since 2008 and it is best to avoid such an enormous increase in a particular year by regularly updating them for inflation. The 2025/26 review involved benchmarking against other cemeteries as well as an inflation update and then rounded each fee up to the next £25. If a similar approach is taken for 2027/28 most of the fees will not change as the rounding provides a buffer against modest inflation. The exceptions are:

- Interments in unreserved cremation plots (residents) increasing from £300 to £325;
- Reservations of burial plots (non-residents) increasing from £275 to £300;
- Reservations of cremation plots (non-residents) increasing from £200 to £225;
- Interment of child (non-resident) increasing from £200 to £225;
- Interment in reserved burial plot (non-residents) increasing from £725 to £775;
- Interment in unreserved burial plot (non-residents) increasing from £2,250 to £2,375; and
- Interment in unreserved cremation plot (non-residents) increasing from £725 to £750.

Cllr White said that it was important to keep the charges in line with inflation and Cllr Hughes noted that all bar one of the increases applied to non-residents. Thus, it was **resolved to increase the above cemetery fees by the amounts stated.** Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr White seconded.

(b) At the September 2026 meeting the Council discussed the need for cemetery tree work as it is two years since the last such work and the yew trees have grown considerably. The 2026/27 Budget includes provision for the work. The Clerk has written to three potential contractors to seek expressions of interest. The Chair has visited the cemetery and assessed the extent of work required. The Chair said the extent of work looked greater than anticipated and Cllr White agreed to visit the cemetery with him again to prepare a common specification that the Clerk could send to interested contractors. It was **resolved that the Chair would e-mail the Clerk with details of the work required, so the Clerk could send a specification to interested contractors before the next meeting and the contract awarded at the meeting on 8 December 2026, with the work to be delivered within two months of appointment.** Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr White seconded.

## 8 Allotments

The Chair noted that the Council approved a fee increase which took effect on 1 November 2025 and the clerk is in the process of preparing bills for the year starting 1 November 2026. The Clerk suggested the Council may wish to adopt a similar fee setting strategy as with the cemetery, which would mean freezing allotment rents this year and uprating at least in line with two-year inflation next year rounding up to avoid fees involving pence. Councillors agreed that no formal inspection of compliance with allotment rules was required at this stage as informal inspections suggested no issues. It was **resolved to freeze allotment rents for 2026/27 and the Clerk to send out bills later this week** – Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.

## 9 Play Park

Cllr Hughes said that he had inspected the play equipment and found that there were no new issues arising. He passed the relevant inspection sheets to the Clerk. Cllr White said that the fence might need repairing and agreed to look with Cllr Hughes when they visited the cemetery.

## 10 Footpaths

Cllr White stated that no progress appeared to have been made by the contractor appointed to undertake the approved P3 footpath works for 2026/27 and he would speak to the contractor before the next meeting. It was **resolved that Cllr White speaks to the footpath contractor about the need to expedite the work** – Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

## 11 Charities

The Chair reminded members that the Council are not sole trustees of any charities but councillors do make up most of the trustees on the John Bousfield and Kipling charities. The last meeting of these charities was in November 2025 and the trustees are required to meet at least annually as approved at this meeting. The Clerk (as Treasurer and Secretary of the two charities) intends to arrange the 2026 charities meeting to take place immediately before the November 2026 Bowes Parish Council meeting and for the main agenda item to be agreeing this year's payments from the fund to support charitable objectives. All councillors were comfortable with this timetable and the Clerk agreed to check the availability of the other trustee before preparing an agenda.

## 12 AOB (for discussion only)

The Chair requested any other business noting that the pothole previously raised has been repaired. Cllr White enquired into the outcome of the Chair's discussion with a resident who

had kindly planted flowers in the flower tubs and the Chair was going to ask to plant the flower bed at the Play Park. The Chair replied that he had not received an answer, so he would speak to the resident again.

## 13 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting.

The Council agreed a 2026/27 meeting timetable at the Annual General Meeting in May 2026. The next meeting is scheduled for 10 November 2026.

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.

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