

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson School on 17th September 2024

Present

Cllr Carlisle, Cllr Hughes, Cllr Redfern, Cllr White, Cllr Tipping, Mrs H Overfield (Clerk and RFO), Mr Ross Woodley (Clerk and RFO – from 1 October 2024)

1. Apologies and declarations of interest

There were no apologies. Cllr Hughes noted that he was an allotment holder, but he did not need to declare an interest in item 8 (allotments) as it did not impact on his allotment.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 9th July 2024 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) agreed to be a true record, **approved by Cllr Hughes, seconded by Cllr Redfern.**

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

Cllr Carlisle confirmed that the road sign has been repaired.

The Clerk confirmed that training and handover to the new clerk (Ross Woodley) was progressing on track for a contract start date of 1 October 2024. This was expected to be her final meeting after 17 years as clerk / RFO. Councillors expressed their thanks to the Clerk and Cllr Carlisle welcomed Mr Woodley, led introductions, and signed Mr Woodley's employment contract.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £106.77 Bank Interest – confirmed as accurate and complete.

(b) Payments since last meeting £588.15 Zurich Insurance

£270.00 AR Toward Grass Cutting.

£499.98 Playdale 50% deposit for new swings.

Confirmed as an accurate and complete record of payments made between the meeting on 9 July 2024 and this meeting.

(c) Payments to approve at the meeting – **Cllr Carlisle approved and Cllr Tipping seconded** approval of the following payments now due:

- Clerk's salary - £500 and PAYE to HRMC £125 quarter two.
- Internal audit - £204 Butler and Gee.
- Playdale - £499.98 balance on installation of new swings.
- AR Toward grass-cutting - £405 for an invoice received since the agenda was published.

Cllr Carlisle and Cllr White signed the relevant payment authorisation forms.

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – the July meeting approved payment of the deposit to Playdale and the other two expenses shown in (b) above were approved by the Chair in accordance with financial regulations. The clerk confirmed that payment authorisation sheets had been completed and signed for all three of these payments already made.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 31 August 2024 (month 5)

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 five was close to budget, for which a small use of reserves had been planned. The main unbudgeted expenditure related to the replacement swings at the playground, which had cost about £1,000.

(f) Councillors considered virement of £1,000 from the cemetery and village budget to the playground budget but decided against this proposal, because a cemetery inspection prior to the meeting had identified the need for significant grounds maintenance over the winter, which could require the full £2,000 in the cemetery and village budget. **Cllr Carlisle proposed, and**

Cllr Tipping seconded that the budget should remain unchanged and the expenditure on the swings met from reserves.

(g) Bank reconciliation at 31 August 2024.

The Clerk presented Appendix C, which showed that the bank statements at 31 August 2024 agreed with the cash book balance without any reconciling items. A balance of **£42,535.89** was held. The bank statement was checked against the accounts and **approved by Cllrs Carlisle and Cllr Tipping**. The Clerk agreed to contact NatWest regarding her outstanding request to ensure payments are approved by two councillors online rather than one as discussed at the previous meeting.

5 Planning

Nothing to report within the parish boundaries. Cllr Hughes requested copies of weekly planning applications received from Durham County Council to be forwarded to him, even if there were no applications within the parish. Mr Woodley agreed to ensure that this continues to be done.

6 Correspondence

- (a) A local charity (Wheels to Work County Durham) has written to the Council asking for their services to be promoted. Councillors considered adding a flyer to the website and noticeboard and Mr Woodley circulated the flyer. Cllr Hughes thought there were few if any residents that would be interested in loaned equipment to help them access work, but Cllr Carlisle agreed to place a copy of the flyer on the noticeboard providing there was room and Mr Woodley agreed to add to the website.
- (b) Councillors considered an invitation to the Durham City Remembrance Fundraising Dinner to be held on 19 October at Durham City Masonic Hall at 7pm and politely declined.
- (c) Councillors noted that Teesdale and South West Durham Gypsy, Romany and Travellers Forum have informed the Council that Councillor Quinn had been elected as their Chair.
- (d) Councillors noted that the National Association of Civic Officers had issued guidance on marking the death of a national figure.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

As discussed at item 4(f) above councillors were concerned at the extent of grounds maintenance required at the cemetery. The Clerk confirmed that there were few vacant plots left and some reserved plots were impacted by overgrowth from yew trees and elderflower bushes. **Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Carlisle seconded** approaching the Council's grass cutting contractor for an appraisal of the site and quotations for cutting back the overgrowth and if necessary, removing the yew trees, which the Council had originally planted as screening.

The Clerk explained that the external auditor had queried the value and purpose of the earmarked reserve for an extension to the cemetery. Cllr Carlisle explained that £27,000 had been received in March 2024 from the sale of land unconnected with the cemetery and it was informally earmarked to purchase land adjacent to the cemetery. However, relevant landowners had not been approached to assess their willingness to sell land and it was possible that costs would exceed the earmarked reserve once the cost of creating a new footpath and planning applications were considered. Cllr Carlisle agreed to contact the landowner and provide an update to the next meeting so the earmarked reserve could be quantified and formally approved as part of 2025/26 budget setting.

8 Allotments

The Clerk confirmed that following notice given by one allotment holder there were two vacant plots for the 2024/25 allotment rental period and one person remained on the waiting list. **Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded** giving this person the choice of the two vacant plots and sending him the allotment rules. Mr Woodley agreed to implement this before the next meeting.

9 Play Park

Cllr Redfern circulated a post-completion inspection sheet for the playground. This illustrated that following the installation of four new swings all equipment was in satisfactory condition.

The Clerk revealed that she had just received an e-mail from a contractor willing to provide a limited number of parish councils with new play equipment known as a 'ninja trail.' Councillors agreed that free new play equipment would be welcome but discussed the limited space available and impact on the existing equipment supplied by Playdale. They agreed that any new equipment would need to replace some of the original equipment and thus there could be an installation and removal cost. The Clerk agreed to liaise with Mr Woodley to ensure that the Council expressed an interest but request further details. A decision was deferred until the next meeting.

10 Parish Paths

Cllr White confirmed that Durham County Council had agreed to meet the £754.00 cost of repair work at Bull Banks. This would be claimed once the work was completed.

11 Bank accounts

Mr Woodley explained that parish councils generally obtained the best savings rates through CCLA investments in the same way as they received preferential loan rates from PWLB. Currently, CCLA were paying five per cent interest. Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded that before the next meeting Mr Woodley opened a CCLA account and transferred an initial £25,000 from earmarked reserves into this high-interest rate account.

12 Domain and Generic E-mail Account

Mr Woodley explained that parish councils were no longer permitted to use personal e-mail accounts to conduct council business and the 2024 Practitioner's Guide strongly recommended the use of Gov.Uk domains both for the website and e-mail accounts. He had attended a government webinar explaining the funding available and steps required to migrate to a gov.uk domain. The migration was only possible using an approved registrar.

However, the Clerk had just received an e-mail from the existing website provider (Hugo Fox) indicating that they expected to receive accreditation as an approved registrar 'shortly' and they would manage the migration free of charge for existing customers. Whilst there was a slight risk that Hugo Fox's application was unsuccessful, and this wasn't identified until the funding for using existing approved registrars was exhausted councillors agreed it was best to wait for Hugo Fox as they were satisfied with the service provided.

Cllr Carlisle proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded that:

- (a) The Council would move to a Gov.Uk domain as soon as Hugo Fox were approved as a registrar;
- (b) The domain name would be www.bowesparishcouncil.gov.uk
- (c) Quotations from existing approved registrars were not required at this stage;
- (d) There was no reason to change the current website hosting; and
- (e) Gov.UK e-mail addresses would be requested for the Clerk, Chair, Cllr Hughes and Cllr Tipping.

13 AOB

There was no other business.

14 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 15 October at 7.30 pm at Bowes Hutchinson School.

Meeting closed at 20.55. There were no members of the press or public present.