

Minutes of the Meeting of Bowes Parish Council

held at Bowes Hutchinson's School on 9 December 2025 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 Tipping and Cllr Carlisle sent their apologies.

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held Tuesday 11 November 2025 (circulated as Appendix A of the agenda) were discussed.

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

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

All actions arising from the previous meeting are discussed in the relevant section of the agenda. However, Cllr Hughes followed up on a matter arising from the previous meeting by noting that the sign left behind after roadworks had now been collected.

4. Finance & Accounts – See summary below.

(a) Receipts since last meeting £2,027.30 P3 Footpath Grant – Durham County Council

£12.50 Allotment Rents (25/26)

£108.39 Investment Interest (December)

(b) Expenses since last meeting £2,432.76 Footpath repairs – Gibson

£936.00 Cemetery wall repairs – Watson

£270.00 Grass-cutting – Toward

£83.34 Clerk GDPR overtime

£21.40 PAYE on clerk overtime – HMRC

£11.99 Email accounts (monthly) – Hugo Fox

£6.00 Bank charges

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

- £560.24 Clerk Q3 salary (payable 31/12/2025)
- £140.20 PAYE Q3 (payable 31/12/2025) – HMRC

(d) Retrospective approval of urgent payments – all the expenses at (b) above were approved at the November 2025 meeting, or in the case of bank and email charges are monthly contractual payments, so no retrospective approval was required at this meeting.

(e) Budget Monitoring to 30 November 2025 (month 8)

The Clerk presented Appendix B for receipts and payments at month 8 of 2025/26 compared with the profiled budget. The Council are 1% (£418) below the profiled budget due to the playground budget underspending by a similar amount and other underspends and overspends netting off. The report indicates that the underlying position is unchanged with £38,000 of reserves anticipated at year-end because a quotation for playground repairs is outstanding. However, agenda item 11 refers to the 2026/2027 budget setting process and estimates that even after making a prudent provision for playground repairs the 2025/26 budget is now likely

to underspend by about 1% because the highest expenditure items in the budget have already been spent.

It was **resolved to accept the budget monitoring report** – **Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.**

(f) Bank reconciliation at 30 November 2025 (month 8)

The Clerk presented Appendix C, for the bank reconciliation at 30 November 2025 (month 8). 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 Thompson proposed, and Cllr White seconded.**

5 Planning

There have been no planning applications within the parish council boundaries since the November 2025 meeting. However, there were two decisions on planning matters discussed at previous meetings, a heat-pump being accepted and a vehicular access being refused.

6 Correspondence

- (a) Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments Limited (SAAA) have written to the Council to inform them that they have appointed BDO Limited as the 2025/26 external auditor. The Council will need to submit an Annual Governance and Accountability Return for BDO to complete a limited assurance review because the £32,000 investment that the Council made in the year means that payments exceed the £25,000 threshold for exemption. The Chair asked the Clerk to confirm that the cost of an external audit every time the investment was made or matured was less than the additional interest earnt through investing long-term. The Clerk confirmed that the additional interest far exceeded the £210 cost of a limited assurance review by the external auditor every other year and this net benefit would increase as interest rates fell because the interest rate on the investment was fixed.
- (b) The Clerk declared that the Council's grass-cutting contractor had confirmed that the invoice approved at the last meeting was the final one of the 2025/26 financial year, so the total number of cuts was within the range permitted by the contract. The Council agreed that the contractor's performance was satisfactory.

7 Cemetery & Village maintenance

The Chair summarised the results of the Clerk's research to identify if the Bowes and Gilmonby Burial Board was formally dissolved as requested at the last meeting.

The Burial Board last met in January 1983 and the minutes of this meeting confirmed that Teesdale District Council had indicated that the Burial Board should have been reconstituted to a joint committee of the burial authorities (Bowes Parish Council and Gilmonby Parish Meeting) when Section 214 of the Local Government Act (1972) came into effect. Schedule 26 of the Act required the burial authorities to act jointly unless the principal authority (Teesdale District Council) authorised the transfer of rights and obligations to one burial authority. The minutes indicated that the Burial Board (which included a Gilmonby Parish Meeting representative) had received this authorisation and going forward Bowes Parish Council would have sole responsibility for managing the cemetery. Representatives of Gilmonby Parish Meeting would be invited to attend parish council meetings in a non-voting capacity.

The Chair asked if it was necessary to send the summons and agenda pack to Gilmonby Parish Meeting each month given they were published on the website and Cllr Carlisle was a Gilmonby resident. The Clerk advised that the Council consulted Gilmonby Parish Meeting to confirm that this sufficed and noted that at the last meeting Cllr Carlisle had agreed to liaise with Gilmonby Parish Meeting to establish their understanding of rights and obligations regarding the cemetery. The Chair agreed and added that currently Gilmonby

residents receive the same discount on cemetery fees as Bowes residents, without having to pay via council tax towards its upkeep. The Clerk cautioned against changing these arrangements, which could have been a condition of the dissolution of the Joint Burial Board and noted that very few interments were affected. It was **resolved that before the next meeting the Clerk would liaise with Cllr Carlisle to establish if Gilmonby Parish Meeting required a formal invite to Bowes Parish Council meetings – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

8 Allotments

- (a) The Clerk provided an update on progress collecting the 2025/26 rent and signed new tenancy agreements. The Council have now received full payment of the allotment rents due for 2025/26 and written agreement to the terms of the new tenancy agreement from each allotment holder. The allotments are now fully allocated and an allotment holder who complained about the condition of one allotment has since confirmed that work to remove rubbish from the plot has commenced. The Chair welcomed this progress.
- (b) The Clerk reminded members that at the last meeting the Council resolved to review the contract to rent land adjacent to the allotments for grazing, which expires in 2026. The Clerk has since checked the existing contract and it does not expire until 31 December 2026, with no grazing permitted in the subsequent three months. Accordingly, the resolution to review the agreement and seek alternative bids in February 2026 is premature. The Clerk advised the Council to offer an extension to the existing tenant to 31 March 2027 and conduct the review and negotiation in February 2027 instead of February 2026. It was **resolved to postpone the review and negotiation of the grazing contract to February 2027 providing the existing tenant wished to extend the contract by three months to 31 March 2027 – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

9 Play Park

Cllr Hughes provided the latest playground inspection sheet for the playground, noting that Durham County Council have confirmed that they will provide a quotation for repairing the swing frame, but have not done so at the time of drafting this agenda. There were no new defects to consider.

10 Footpaths

The Clerk explained that Durham County Council promptly reimbursed the Council for the 2025/26 footpath repair invoice approved at the last meeting (see items 4a and 4b above). Councillor White provided an update on his discussion with the contractor to consider repairs for 2026/27. A list of potential repairs had been agreed but he now needed to agree a specification based on a similar quality as the 2025/26 repairs. This could then be used to obtain like for like quotations from two contractors.

11 2026/27 Budget and Precept

The Chair referred members to Appendix D for a detailed report setting out the draft 2026/27 budget and the precept to be requested from Durham County Council and implications for council tax bills. The Clerk explained that the report includes the 2025/26 forecast outturn and closing reserves and proposes a balanced budget to maintain reserves at £38,500 throughout 2025/26. It also shows the impact of two alternative precepts. The Council are asked to approve the budget and precept or suggest amendments before the budget is submitted to Durham County Council in January 2025.

The Chair said that he favoured Option 1 (a precept of £7,000 equating to an increase in council tax of 4.18%). This was the middle way recommended by the Clerk as RFO, balancing the financial resilience of the Council with the cost-of-living pressure faced by

residents. Cllr White asked if Durham County Council were likely to freeze council tax making an increase in the parish precept more controversial. The Chair said that he doubted DCC would be able to freeze council tax and in any case the proposed increase in the parish precept was tiny compared to the overall council tax bill and low compared to the precepts from the police and fire authorities. The Clerk agreed and stressed that the proposed increase only added £1.45 per annum to the council tax bill. He added that Bowes precept was considerably lower than the Teesdale average and last year's increase was considerably lower than the Teesdale average, meaning that the gap was widening. The Chair agreed that the comparison with other parishes was useful context and noted a few minor typographical errors in the budget report. The Clerk agreed to add a table showing the parish precept comparison and to correct the errors before the budget was finalised.

It was resolved to approve the 2026/27 budget and precept based on option 1 (a precept of £7,000 – 4.18% increase) subject to the agreed corrections and additional comparative data – Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

12 Data Protection and Retention

The Chair 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 has reflected on this discussion and updated the Data Retention Policy at Appendix E. The Council are asked to approve this policy, which allows for the separation of paper records between those for retention and destruction by the next meeting. It was **resolved to approve the Data Retention Policy at Appendix E – Cllr Hughes proposed, and Cllr Thompson seconded.**

13 Internal Audit

The Clerk stated that Butler and Gee have undertaken the Council's internal audit for at least ten years. Although the Clerk considers it unlikely that another experienced and competent internal auditor would deliver the work cheaper than Butler and Gee it is good practice to test the market every few years and rotate auditors if an alternative provider is able to provide similar value for money. This helps mitigate the familiarity threat to independence referred to in auditing standards. Accordingly, the Clerk advised the Council to seek three quotations from a shortlist of internal auditors recommended by CDALC to provide internal audit for the next five years (2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/20). Internal auditors will be asked to provide fixed price quotations for the period based on a common work plan, which the Clerk agreed with Butler and Gee in 2024/25. The Chair said that he supported this recommendation. The Clerk said that as an afterthought he wondered if seeking fixed prices for five years might deter suitable quotations and a three-year fix with an option to extend might be preferable. The Chair agreed that inflation uncertainty could either deter a bid or result in an unnecessarily high bid. It was **resolved to seek quotations from three CDALC approved internal audit providers for an initial three-year period at a fixed price with the option to extend for a further two years subject to both parties' agreement – Cllr Thompson proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.**

14 AOB

- (a) Cllr White noted that a small shrub at the playground was limiting the view on a road bend and draining the soil. He was happy to remove it at no cost. The Chair stated that no planning permission was required and removal was appropriate.
- (b) Cllr Thompson stated that a resident had asked him to clarify responsibility for repairing headstones at the cemetery. The Chair explained that unless it was a health

and safety risk responsibility lay with the family that had arranged its erection. Cllr Thompson agreed to inform the resident.

(c) The Chair informed the Council that he had now planted the spring bulbs in the flower tubs in memory of his late wife.

It was **resolved** that Cllr White would remove the shrub at the playground— Cllr White proposed, and Cllr Hughes seconded.

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

The next Ordinary Meeting would take place on Tuesday 20 January 2026 at Bowes Hutchinson's School at 7.30 in accordance with the timetable published on the Council's website.

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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