CASTLE SOWERBY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 4 December 2025 at 7.00pm in Millhouse Village Hall

Councillors present: Mrs Philippa Groves (Chair), Kath Worrall (Vice Chair), Mr Sidney Asbridge, Mr Gerald Bainbridge, Mr John Bell, Mrs Helen Kerry, Mr Richard Little, Mr Jonathan Stalker & Mr Michael Strong

In attendance: Ms J Cornah Wade (Clerk)

Apologies: Westmorland & Furness (WAF) Councillor Mr Colin Atkinson

1. **Apologies for absence** – to receive apologies for absence.
   There were no absences

2. **Requests for Dispensations, Declarations of interest, Gifts and Hospitality –** to receive any requests for Dispensations, Declarations of Interest from Councillors relating to items on the agenda, in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct
   Nothing was declared

3. **Public participation** – to receive questions from members of the public relating to items on the agenda, in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and Standing Orders.
   No members of the public were in attendance

4. **Report from the Westmorland & Furness Councillor**
   WAF Cllr Atkinson provided a report prepared by Andrew Howson, Bridge Engineer at WAF. As the document was not available in time for circulation prior to the meeting, it is appended as Appendix A.

   WAF Cllr Atkinson had also requested that the Council provide an update on whether Fibrus are engaging with members of the community regarding the telegraph pole installation, as well as on any other issues arising from the meeting. This will be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

5. **Minutes –** to confirm the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 October
   The Council **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the meeting on 30 October be accepted as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

6. **Update on progress from the previous Minutes**
   The Clerk/Chair provided a report on the progress of outstanding items which do not require further decision.
   - **Register of Interests** – Councillors are to complete the revised WAF Register of Interests. The Clerk will forward the forms to Cllr Groves for distribution.
   - **Council Assets** – The former Clerk has handed over the Council laptop and confirmed that no printer is available. The Clerk will update the Asset Register accordingly.
   - **Noticeboards** – The purchase of two replacement A3 noticeboards will be deferred until the accounts have been audited.
   - **Highways Issues** – Cllrs Groves and Worrall met with a representative from the Highways Department and identified 25 issues, including the need for traffic calming measures. Councillors and members of the community are encouraged to report highways concerns via the Westmorland and Furness Council website.

7. Finance

a. Bank Reconciliation

I. The Council **RESOLVED** To receive and note the monthly reconciliation and balance to 24 October 2025:

Barclays Bank: Community Access £7,832.61

ii. Bank Statements – to acknowledge scrutiny and acceptance of the previously circulated bank statement
The bank statement for 24 October 2025 was reviewed and accepted

b. Invoices for Payment - to consider and approve invoices totalling £1,065.10 for payment itemised on the payment schedule
The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the following payments totalling £1,065.10:

Voucher	Date	Description	Supplier	Net payment	Payment inc VAT
20	04.12.25	Website domain & hosting 2023, 24 & 25	A Ward AWT Services Ltd	440.00	440.00
21	04.12.25	Internal Audits 2023, 24 & 25	D Johnson	192.50	192.50
22	04.12.25	Postage	Clerk	6.96	6.96
23	04.12.25	Mileage	Clerk	54.36	54.36
24	04.12.25	Salary November	Clerk	185.64	185.64
25	01.01.26	Salary December	Clerk	185.64	185.64

c. Receipts – to acknowledge and receive the following receipt totalling £199.25
The Council received the following receipts totalling £199.25:

Voucher	Date	Description	Supplier	Total
2	17.10.25	Recycling Credit	Westmorland & Furness Council	199.25

e. Statements of Accounts for the years ending 31 March 2023, 2024 and 2025
The Council noted that the agenda had listed the Asset Registers before the Statements of Accounts. In line with the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioners' Guide, the Chair confirmed that the Statements of Accounts must be considered first. The Council therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the Statements of Accounts for the years ending 31 March 2023, 2024 and 2025 as true and accurate records of the Council's financial position.

d. Asset Registers for the years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25
Following approval of the Statements of Accounts, the Council reviewed the Asset Registers. It was noted that the registers reconcile with the figures approved in the Statements of Accounts. The Council **RESOLVED** to confirm the Asset Registers for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 and agreed the minimum value of assets for inclusion at £100, with donated items of community value recorded at £1.

f. Internal Audit Report for the years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25
The Council **RESOLVED** to receive the report and noted the following recommendations:

- Monthly bank reconciliations should be undertaken and approval minuted; Members should be emailed with details where possible to aid transparency (actioned);

- Standing Orders & Financial Regulations: copies should be available for review (actioned);
- All payments must be properly authorised, minuted, and supported by vouchers (actioned);
- An original, numbered, signed set of minutes must be retained; loose-leaf minutes should be initialled and dated by the Chair (actioned);
- More detail should be recorded in agendas/minutes to justify donations, and a schedule of standing orders and direct debits should be confirmed annually;
- The asset register must be updated annually, reconciled with accounts, and approved by Members; valuations should reflect current market values, with older assets recorded at nominal value where appropriate;
- Policies & Procedures should be reviewed annually (ideally at the May meeting), annotated with approval/review dates, and clearly marked with the Council's name;
- A satisfactory risk assessment and management framework should be implemented;
- Governance: Members should be reminded of Code of Conduct obligations; records of interests, declarations of acceptance, and attendance should be maintained;
- Human Resources: Clerk's job grading and salary range should be documented; annual appraisal and salary review should be introduced (actioned).

g. Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGAR) Signature Redaction – to consider redaction of the signatures on the web versions of the AGARs to protect the signatories from 'specific and identifiable threats' of identity theft and GDPR concerns.
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree to redact the signatures on the online version of the AGAR acknowledging that this was against the Accounts and Audit Regulations, but that it was to protect the signatories from the specific and identifiable threats of identity theft. There was no issue with the full documents being viewed in person

h. External Audit 2022/23

i. Certificate of Exemption – to consider whether to complete the Certificate of Exemption from submission to the External Auditor due to being under the £25,000 threshold or to have a Limited Assurance Review
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree to complete a Certificate of Exemption from submission to the External Audit and agreed the figures of £4,230.00 for the annual gross income and £2,800.00 for the annual gross expenditure as stated in the Statement of Accounts. Both figures were below the £25,000 threshold

ii. Section 1: Annual Governance Statement – to consider the questions and respond accordingly
The Council considered each of the questions within Section 1 of the Annual Governance Statement. It was **RESOLVED** that the Council was unable to agree to Statements 1 – 7, agree to Statement 8, and recorded Statement 9 as not applicable,

The Clerk would prepare and provide to the external auditor a separate explanatory sheet for each 'No' response, describing how the Council will address the identified weaknesses. These explanations will be published alongside the Annual Governance Statement.

The Chair and Clerk signed the form.

iii. **Section 2: Annual Accounting Statements** – to consider and agree the accounting statement figures
The Clerk provided the meeting with the figures and the Council **RESOLVED** to agree the Accounting Statements. The Clerk / RFO had signed the form prior to the meeting, the Chair signed the form following the agreement.

iv. **Electors' Rights**
The Council acknowledged that the statutory requirements under Regulation 15(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 were not met in 2023, as the commencement date for the Exercise of Public Rights was not set and the required information (including the period of public rights and the name and address of the external auditor) was not published on CSPC's website before 1 July 2023.

v. **Statement of Variance** – to consider the draft Statement of Variance
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the Statement of Variance

i. External Audit 2023/24

i. **Certificate of Exemption** – to consider whether to complete the Certificate of Exemption from submission to the External Auditor due to being under the £25,000 threshold or to have a Limited Assurance Review
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree to complete a Certificate of Exemption from submission to the External Audit and agreed the figures of £2,737.00 for the annual gross income and £3,518.00 for the annual gross expenditure as stated in the Statement of Accounts. Both figures were below the £25,000 threshold

ii. **Section 1: Annual Governance Statement** – to consider the questions and respond accordingly

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v. **Statement of Variance** – to consider the draft Statement of Variance
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the Statement of Variance

j. External Audit 2024/25

i. **Limited Assurance Review**
The Council noted that a statutory recommendation was issued on 18 March 2025 and confirmed that it is not eligible to certify itself as exempt**.**

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v. **Statement of Variance** – to consider the draft Statement of Variance
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the Statement of Variance

k. **Budget** – to receive the Budget Monitoring Report forecast to end March 2026
The Budget Monitoring Report forecast to end March 2026 was presented and received

l. **Budget 2026/27** – to consider the draft budget
The Clerk presented the draft budget, which was duly considered by the Council. Following discussion, the Council agreed to reduce the donations budget line by £500. The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the budget for 2026/27 and further **RESOLVED** that part of the projected shortfall be met from the General Reserve.

m. **Precept 2026/27** – to consider and agree the setting of the Precept
Having agreed the budget and taken the Reserves into account the Council **RESOLVED** to set the Precept at £2,700.00, an 8% increase of £200.00 on the previous year. Based on the 2026/27

Tax Base of 156.40 the annual cost to a Band D household would be approximately £17.26, an increase of £1.28.

The Clerk would inform WAF.

8. Governance and Consultation

a. Policy Adoption – to consider adopting the following policies.

I. Councillor Code of Conduct - to consider adoption of the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Code of Conduct, noting that it reflects the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and is consistent with the Councillor Code of Conduct adopted by WAF in December 2023. This will replace the current Code of Conduct.

The Council considered the Code of Conduct provided by the LGA and **RESOLVED** to agree to adopt it.

II. Information Technology (IT) – to comply with Assertion 10 which has been added to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26 all smaller authorities (excluding parish meetings) must also have an IT policy.)

The Council considered the IT policy provided by the National Association of Local Councils and **RESOLVED** to agree to adopt it.

III. Sexual Harassment - to acknowledge that from October 2024 new legislation (s40A Equality Act 2010) created additional legal requirements for all Employers, to take proactive steps to prevent Sexual Harassment at Work.

The Council considered the Sexual Harassment policy provided by Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) and **RESOLVED** to agree to adopt it.

b. CALC Subscription Increase – to note the provisional subscription fee for 2026/27 is £193.87, representing an increase from £187.30 in 2025/26, and to consider renewal of membership.
The Council noted the provisional subscription fee of £193.87 for 2026/27 and **RESOLVED** to renew its membership of CALC.

c. Website Access – to note that the former Castle Sowerby Parish Council website has been restored whilst pending the transition to a .gov domain and can be found here: https://www.castlesowerby.org.uk/
The Council noted that the former website had been restored and agreed that the Clerk would endeavour to maintain it whilst pending the transition to a new .gov domain.

9. Planning

a. Planning Applications - to consider all recent applications received from Westmorland and Furness Council detailed below and any other planning applications submitted between the circulation of this agenda and the meeting:

i. 2025/1790/FPA at Hall Field Farm, Hesket Newmarket, Wigton CA7 8HR for an 'agricultural workers dwelling'
The Council considered the application and **RESOLVED** that there were no comments or objections to the proposal.

b. Notices of Decision – to note any notices of decision received.

The Council noted the following notice of decision

i. 2025/1809/PAPP at Low Buildings, Sebergham, Carlisle CA5 7EB for 'prior notification under schedule 2, part 6, class A, for the erection of a roof over an existing midden' Permission for development – 20 October

10. **Kell Springs** – to consider a request from a member of the community
The Council considered the request to use Kell Springs for recreational purposes and **RESOLVED** not to grant permission. It was further agreed that Cllr Groves would respond to the member of the community.

11. **Correspondence** – to note correspondence received not otherwise on the agenda where decisions are not required (other than adding to the agenda for a future meeting)
Nothing additional had been received

12. **Items for information or next Agenda only** – all items for the next agenda to be submitted to the Clerk by Friday 9 January

13. **Date of next meeting** – Thursday 22 January 2026 at 7.00pm in Milhouse Village Hall

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

X _____

Cllr P Groves
Chair

Date: 22.01.26
castlesowerbypc@outlook.com

Appendix A

Road and bridge closure on U3016 at Nichol Ghyll, Sowerby Row

- A contract was let earlier in the year for works scheduled during the in-river working window (mid-June to end-September), requiring ecological surveys and mitigation measures.
- In September, barriers were deliberately moved, allowing vehicles to cross the closed structure. This caused further damage, including cracking of the arch barrel and deterioration of the abutments.
- Additional barriers were installed to protect public safety, but vandalism continued.
- Due to the increased damage, the planned works are no longer sufficient. A new contract must be let under procurement regulations to cover the extra work.
- The Council hopes the additional works will be completed by the end of March, enabling the road to reopen.
- In the meantime, stabilisation works under the current contract will begin imminently to reduce further deterioration over winter.
- The Council recognises community frustration but stresses that public safety must remain the priority.