

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE** Committee held at **GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION** on **Monday 14th August 2023 at 7pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Nick Anderson, Andrew Fane, Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly, Penny Lawne, Deviani Parekh-Jones, Linsey Winter (Chair)

In attendance: Deborah Siddle – Clerk
2 Grant applicants (to item 5)

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Council.

The representative for the grant application (agenda item 5) from Dorset Arms Angling Club was present at the meeting and spoke about their application.

He explained that they fish in the Parish on the Medway and the Grom and that sections are seriously polluted which have led to the decline in species. They met with the Environment Agency last month and will undertake a fish survey.

DAAC plan to re-establish the health of the river. They have undertaken habitat improvements at considerable cost to bring back brown trout, and this work will be for nothing if pollution continues.

The DAAC already have one testing kit, the grant would buy a second kit which would allow additional test sites. The results of tests are entered into a national database which can be viewed by anyone. Last month the DAAC's testing picked up a pollution incident which they reported to the Environment Agency. Previously this would have gone undetected.

Councillors asked how this links with other groups undertaking water testing. The representative explained that they are testing for different things which are important to the health of the water and species, whereas other groups may be detecting for E-coli.

The representative flagged up the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which would be of interest to the Council.

The representative for Wild Groombridge was also present at the meeting and spoke about their application. They explained that Wild Groombridge was set up to observe wildlife locally and contribute findings to the iNaturalist website. In the last 2 years they have made 2591 observations with 134 observers.

Wild Groombridge met with Sussex Wildlife Trust who suggested nest boxes for 'red listed' birds such as Swifts which have declined rapidly. Groombridge Place funded 15 boxes for various species and in the first year one third of the boxes were occupied as it can take time for them to be used and they hope to see better occupancy in the second year. They would like to install a further 30 boxes, made by Groombridge Mens Shed. They would like GMS to do the work as they are local, the quality of workmanship will be good, and they can stipulate FSCS timber. The objective is to make a difference to conservation in Groombridge and create a wildlife corridor from the RSPB site to other wildlife sites.

Councillors asked about barometers of healthy ecosystems, and the representative confirmed that birds are an indicator species. They were also asked about Groombridge Place as it has changed hands. Wild Groombridge are working with the UK Raptor Centre, which is based there and they hope to build a relationship with the new owners.

Councillors asked how the figure of 30 boxes was arrived at. This was done by considering red listed birds, which they would like to encourage as well as a range of birds and those which are most likely to be successful.

Asked what Wild Groombridge would do if WPC were unable to provide a full grant, they would look for more funds and grants from elsewhere. It was also queried why only one quote was provided; for the reasons above GMS are the preferred contractors. In terms of the quote provided, Councillors asked what the costs were and the representative explained their understanding is that its mostly materials with some costs towards GMS' overheads as they are a non-profit. Should they purchase boxes off the peg, a Swift box might still cost £25 and be of an inferior standard.

1. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING - none.

2. APOLOGIES - none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Cllr Robert Gordon-James for item 8 as he is a Director of the Withyham Parish Community Interest Company.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 30th May 2023

002548

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 30th May 2023, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2588	Clerk	Surface under swings at Balls Green secure
002510	Clerk	Reduced grant of £500 offered to The Good Company People, will be paid once GCP confirms
Pg.2731	Clerk	GCP asked to provide an update report on the project and Council's expenditure
Pg.2731	Clerk	Grant guidelines regarding partnership funding updated
Pg.2731	Clerk	Grant guidelines regarding how funds are likely to be allocated updated
002511	Clerk	Replacement sign with revised wording for Groombridge Playground installed
Pg.2732	Clerk	Pre-opening site visit with the main playground contractors completed
002512	Clerk	Drainage pipe at front of office cleared

Finance/14.8.2023 – 002790

002513	Clerk	Gullivers completed works covered by the warranty
002514	Clerk	£20,000 transferred from WPC's Nationwide account to the HSBC current account
002515	Clerk	HSBC, Nationwide and Lloyds bank mandates amended to reflect the current members of the Finance Committee
002516	Clerk	Financial regulation 4.1 first bullet point amended
Pg.2733	Clerk	Update not required to the Scheme of Delegation
Pg.2734	Clerk	Future meetings to receive the Withyham Parish Community Interest Company cashflows

Outstanding items not on this agenda

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2002	Clerk	Pursue free opportunities for advertising the meeting rooms
Pg. 2413	Clerk	Ask other Wealden Clerks which streetlighting contractor they use
Pg. 2691	Clerk	Obtain quotes to repaint Parish Office kitchen
Pg. 2692	Clerk	Resecure posts in the ground and hang the old Cook's Corner noticeboard at Teasley Mead
Pg.2732	Clerk	Obtain quotes for repointing, to be considered at the next Finance Committee
Pg.2732	Finance Committee	Review whether any further damp works are needed once drainpipe works done
Pg.2733	Clerk	Produce 2 year budget after work is undertaken on the next Parish Plan 2024-2028

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action
002549	Clerk	Make grant to Dorset Arms Angling Club
Pg. 2791	Clerk	Defer grant for Wild Groombridge to September meeting pending further information
Pg. 2792	Maintenance Person	Undertake actions found at play equipment inspections
Pg. 2792	Clerk	Chase roundabout provider - loose banding
Pg. 2792	Clerk	Arrange structural test of Groombridge Recreation Ground goal posts
Pg. 2792	Clerk	Order replacement goal for Teasley Mead
Pg. 2792	Clerk	Remove bin at Balls Green Community Space
Pg. 2792	Clerk	Monitor top beam of swing at Balls Green Community Space during routine inspections
002550	Clerk	Accept the 5 year Sovereign playground compliance package
Pg. 2793	Clerk	Undertake a consultation about dogs on leads on Groombridge Recreation Ground

Finance/14.8.2023 – 002791

Pg. 2793	Clerk	October Council meeting to consider a dogs on leads policy at Groombridge Recreation Ground
Pg. 2793	Clerk	Write a letter to remind Groombridge Cricket Club that the gate should be closed behind cars
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Write an up to date Risk Assessment for the Maintenance Role
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Set up a Building Based Assets Working Group
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Replace bench at Youth Shelter with a memorial bench
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Add repainting of the Ridge telephone box to Maintenance person list
Pg. 2794	Maintenance Person	Look at hinges on the gate between Groombridge Recreation Ground and Groombridge Place, and block the gap beside the gate if it can be fixed
Pg. 2795	Council	Receive quarterly cashflows and reports for Groombridge Post Office/Shop
Pg. 2795	Finance Committee	Only consider matters relating to Groombridge Post Office/Shop as necessary.
002552	Clerk	Accept a three-year agreement with Mulberry & Co (auditors)
002553	Clerk	Recommend the revised Child Protection Policy to Council
Pg. 2795	Clerk	Query with internal auditors how bank statements can be obtained for the prepaid card

5. GRANTS**5.1 Consider applications received for the 2023/24 budget**

Councillors noted that £4,334.38 remained of the total Grants budget available for 2023/24.

Dorset Arms Angling Club – The Committee agreed that it is important support rivers in our parish and that we should reference rivers more specifically in our Parish Plan. It was AGREED unanimously to support this grant application at the request of £215.

Wild Groombridge – The Committee felt that this was also an important project. As Wild Groombridge has no bank account and planned to use GMS', the Committee was concerned for Audit purposes about paying a grant to a difference organisation's bank account. They also felt that the quote from GMS lacked detail and would like to see a breakdown of costs by the type of box. The application was therefore deferred to the September Committee meeting and the applicant was asked to:

- discuss with other members of Wild Groombridge the setting up of a bank account
- obtain a more in-depth quote from GMS
- indicate which boxes would be a priority incase a lower grant was offered

002549 RESOLVED to fund a grant to Dorset Arms Angling Club of £215 from the 2023/24 Grants budget remaining of £4,334.38. This leaves £4,119.38 for future meetings.

The members of the public left the meeting.

6. HEALTH AND SAFETY

6.1 ROSPA Safety Inspections – receive reports and consider proposed actions
ROSPA had undertaken annual safety inspections of equipment at Balls Green Community Area, Teasley Mead Recreation Ground and Groombridge Recreation Ground (the play equipment had recently been inspected post-installation).

The Clerk presented the Committee with an issue and action report. Finance Committee noted this and agreed the following:

- Maintenance Person (if employed) to undertake actions identified by the Clerk
- Clerk to chase roundabout provider about loose banding
- Bench by youth shelter at Groombridge Recreation Ground to be replaced (see item 7.3)
- Due to its low risk, likely high costs and possible trip hazards at its edges, grass matting not necessary in front of youth shelter
- Structural test of Groombridge Recreation Ground goal posts to be undertaken. Clerk to bring back to Committee if costs are significantly higher than the previous year's quote
- Clerk to order replacement goal for Teasley Mead as this is in budget
- Bin at Balls Green Community Space to be removed (only close residents use the space and can use their own bins)
- Clerk to monitor top beam of swing at Balls Green Community Space as part of regular inspections

It was reported that parents had queried the gap around the roundabout, worried of finger entrapment, and asked if the roundabout could be raised. The Clerk confirmed that WPC has an installation certificate to show compliance with specification from the supplier. The RoSPA safety check would also have picked it up if it hadn't been installed properly. As it is a fully accessible roundabout it has to be flush with the ground as it was designed to be and cannot be raised.

6.2 Consider updated Sovereign playground compliance package

The revised inspection and maintenance package for Groombridge playground was presented to the Committee and they agreed that this was better value for money than the previously considered package.

002550 RESOLVED to accept the 5 year Sovereign playground compliance package at £399+VAT.

6.3 Groombridge Recreation Ground – receive and consider reported dog incident

The Clerk had received an email report regarding a child being bitten by a dog on Groombridge Recreation Ground near to the youth shelter. Finance Committee was asked to consider this as it has responsibilities for health and safety. A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting, including comments from a member of the public who had emailed to the Clerk. An email had also been received shortly before the meeting which was shared.

The Committee noted that this was the first incidence of a dog bite. There had also been incidents of excitable dogs off leads which had been reported to July Council where it had been agreed to monitor the situation with the possibility that a dogs on leads policy might be required.

Since the new playground opened, the Committee agreed that the whole Recreation Ground had become more popular with families and so it has become more of a family space. Whilst the needs of all users, including dog owners, had to be approached sensitively, safety also needed to be prioritised.

The parent of the child who had been bitten had asked the Committee to consider a dogs on leads policy and the Committee agreed that this was not an unreasonable request. Unfortunately, whilst most dog owners do act responsibly, a few had behaved unacceptably by not using their leads around picnickers and children playing.

The Committee considered whether dog owners could be asked to use a lead at certain times of the day, but it was felt that this would likely be unduly complicated and so would not work.

It was therefore AGREED that a consultation would be held to gather Recreation Ground user's views. This would be flagged up in the Groombridge Church and Village magazine and held across September, giving sufficient time for responses. The Council meeting on the 9th October would receive the responses and will consider a 'dogs on leads' policy across Groombridge Recreation Ground.

It was also reported to the meeting that there had been multiple posts on the Groombridge Community Facebook page following the dog biting incident. These included an offer of a free fence at the playground; the Clerk confirmed that an offer had not been made directly to the Council so it was agreed that it could not be considered at the meeting, and the Committee confirmed that a fence would not have prevented the incident which had been discussed.

With regards to health and safety at the site, members of the Committee noted that the vehicle gate was being left open by the Cricket Club on match days. The Committee recognised that Cricket Club members will be concerned about safety and the Clerk was asked to write a letter to remind Groombridge Cricket Club that the gate should be closed behind cars.

6.4 Review current list of Risk Assessments

This list had been circulated and was noted, Councillors are welcome to view any risk assessments they wish. The Committee agreed that an up to date Risk Assessment for the Maintenance Role was required.

7. PARISH ASSETS

7.1 Building based assets – note proposal to start considering future options

The Council owns Phoenix House and rents Groombridge Old Station where the lease ends 2028. Finance Committee noted that both properties will require maintenance works which will require budgeting. Also that consideration needs to be given to what happens at the end of the Old Station lease. It was AGREED that a Building Based Assets Working Group would be set up consisting of Cllrs Gordon-James, Parekh-Jones, Lawne, Anderson and Kelly.

7.2 Groombridge Recreation Ground – consider offer for an additional dog waste bin

A resident had kindly offered to purchase a dog waste bin to position at the playground end of Groombridge Recreation Ground. It was noted that there are already 2 bins along the line of footpath 33 and that daily weekday checks had not shown there to be a dog mess issue around the play area. Due to the absence of an issue and the weekly emptying cost it was agreed not to pursue this.

7.3 Groombridge Recreation Ground – consider a request to install a memorial bench

A resident had applied under the Council's Memorial Bench Policy to pay for a memorial bench. Under item 6.1 Councillors had noted the need to replace the bench near to the Youth Shelter and it was AGREED that the replacement bench could be sited there.

The Clerk was asked about progress on picnic benches at the play area. The Clerk confirmed that there are funds in budget but advice was being sought from the Community Engagement Coordinator on the most environmentally friendly option.

7.4 Parish Maintenance task list – for consideration

Staff Committee had agreed that a person who had shown an interest in the Parish Maintenance job should be invited for an informal interview.

In preparation for if the role was offered to this person, the Clerk had written a task list. The Committee considered this and asked that repainting of the Ridge telephone box be added.

It was also noted that the hinges on the gate between Groombridge Recreation Ground and Groombridge Place is broken. Maintenance Person to look at this, and at blocking the gap beside the gate if it can be fixed.

8. GROOMBRIDGE POST OFFICE/SHOP – cashflow for noting

At the time of the meeting only May's cashflow was available due to the shop manager being on holiday. Cllr Gordon-James confirmed that figures have improved as improvements had been made to stock and displays, and a leafleting campaign was going to be undertaken.

Finance/14.8.2023 – 002795

The Committee noted that September Council would be receiving a more up to date cashflow. It was AGREED that in future Council should receive quarterly cashflows and reports while Finance Committee should only consider matters relating to Groombridge Post Office/Shop as necessary.

9. ACCOUNTS & FINANCE

9.1 Note expenditure against budget reports to August 2023 (including Earmarked Reserves) - noted

9.2 Authorise the payment of August invoices/note regular payments (delegated)

Time: 12:52

Cashbook 1

User: DS

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)

Payments made between 11/07/2023 and 14/08/2023

Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
11/07/2023	Mrs S Chapman	BACS87	7.98			4064	101	7.98	Bags for community cafe
11/07/2023	D Siddle	BACS88	18.00			4015	101	18.00	Reimburse keys cut
11/07/2023	W Swift & Son	BACS89	180.00		30.00	4220	201	150.00	Drainage investigation
						327		-150.00	Drainage investigation
						6000	201	150.00	Drainage investigation
18/07/2023	Octopus Energy	DDOCTO0723	87.58			4502	101	87.58	Parish Office elec
14/08/2023	Society - Local Council Clerks	BACS100	72.00		12.00	4007	101	60.00	Finance training
14/08/2023	Society - Local Council Clerks	BACS101	222.00			4008	101	222.00	Membership fee (DS)
14/08/2023	Playsafety Limited (RoSPA)	BACS102	270.00		45.00	4222	201	75.00	Play equip inspections (Gb)
						4270	203	150.00	Play equip inspections (BG&TM)
14/08/2023	Groombridge Village Hall	BACS103	35.56			4064	101	35.56	Com Cafe hire Jul23
14/08/2023	SME IT Solutions	BACS104	114.96		19.16	4013	101	95.80	Phone/Bband Jul
14/08/2023	Managed Technology	BACS105	36.00		6.00	4017	101	30.00	Copier support Jul-Oct
14/08/2023	Various	BACS106	4,204.84			4005	101	126.00	Jul o/t
						4000	101	4,078.84	Aug Salaries
14/08/2023	S J Osborne & Son	BACS90	36.00		6.00	4503	101	30.00	Key stuck in lock (office)
14/08/2023	Ray Bailey	BACS91	40.00			4503	101	40.00	Windows (parish office)
14/08/2023	Martin & Co (RGJ)	BACS92	90.00			5101	500	90.00	Gas cert (Ph Hse) Zap
14/08/2023	Everflow Water	BACS93	22.54			5101	500	22.54	Water (Ph Hse)
14/08/2023	D Siddle	BACS94	7.10			4510	101	7.10	Coffee (parish office)
14/08/2023	WPCIC	BACS95	1,750.00			5001	500	1,750.00	Post Office Subsidy (Aug)
14/08/2023	David Newcombe Tree Services	BACS96	180.00		30.00	4230	201	150.00	cut up clear fallen limb (GRG)
14/08/2023	British Gas	BACS97	194.78			5101	500	194.78	Elec Ph Hse
14/08/2023	Biffa Waste Services Ltd	BACS98	88.23		14.70	4506	101	73.53	Office bins July
14/08/2023	East Sussex Association of Loc	BACS99	96.00		16.00	4007	101	80.00	Planning Training
14/08/2023	Business Stream	DDBS0923	1.00			4502	101	1.00	Water charges Old Station
14/08/2023	NEST pensions	DDNEST0823	444.22			4001	101	444.22	Pensions (Aug)
14/08/2023	Octopus Energy	DDOCT0823	89.39			4502	101	89.39	Elec office July
14/08/2023	Opus Energy	DDOPUS0823	36.77			4502	101	36.77	Gas Old Station
14/08/2023	HSBC	HSBC0923	8.00			4600	101	8.00	Bank charges to 23
14/08/2023	Prepaid card	PPC0823	30.28				203	30.28	cb1 to ppc Aug23
14/08/2023	The Premier Trust N A Houghton	SONH0823	666.67			4012	101	666.67	Rent old station Aug
14/08/2023	The Premier Trust T J Newman	SOTN0823	666.66			4012	101	666.66	Rent old station Aug
Total Payments:			9,696.56	0.00	178.86			9,517.70	

Prepaid card									
Payments made between 11/07/2023 and 14/08/2023									
Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
14/08/2023	Milk & More	PP24	11.50			4510	101	11.50	milk parish office
14/08/2023	Zoom Video Comms Ltd	PP25	15.59		2.60	4016	101	12.99	Zoom subs
14/08/2023	AmazonUK	PP26	3.19		0.53	4015	101	2.66	adhesive hooks
Total Payments:			30.28	0.00	3.13			27.15	

002551 **RESOLVED** to pay the August invoices listed above, to pay by BACS/sign the cheques accordingly

9.3 Consider draft cashflow - noted

9.4 Consider any Virements and Journals - none

9.5 Note works authorised under Clerk's Delegated Authority – damp works at The Old Station and branch removal at Groombridge Recreation Ground – noted.

9.6 Internal auditor arrangements and costs

Finance Committee AGREED that they are happy with Mulberry & Co acting as our internal auditor. They noted the £5 per hour fee increase and that this would be fixed for 3 years if a long-term agreement were in place.

002552 **RESOLVED** to accept a three-year agreement with Mulberry & Co at a fixed hourly rate of £65.

10. POLICIES

10.1 Child Protection Policy – proposed revisions including references to vulnerable persons

002553 **RESOLVED** to recommend the revised Child Protection Policy to Council.

11. REPORT FROM RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO)

The RFO reported that the 2022/23 External Audit had been completed successfully with no causes for concern. Under 'other matters' PKF had noted that no yearend bank statement had been provided for the prepaid card. The Clerk would seek feedback from Mulberry & Co as the prepaid card reporting system does not allow for bank statements.

The Crowborough Beacon Lodge were thanked for the £753 which they had fundraised for Groombridge playground.

12. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA - none

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 25th September 2023 at 7pm to be held at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda

The meeting ended at 9.05pm