

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE** Committee held at **GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION** on **Monday 29th January 2024 at 7pm**

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

In attendance: Debbie Siddle – Clerk

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.

There were three members of the public present, two of whom joined by Zoom during the open forum and wished to observe the meeting but did not wish to speak.

The other member of the public was present for St Thomas' School Parents' Association's grant application. He explained that they had applied for funds for advance warning signage to help with their May Fair Traffic Management Plan, which had been provided to the December Council meeting. They intend for the wording to allow the signs to be used over subsequent years and they would raise people's understanding of possible delays during the May Fair. They plan to speak with the WPC Highways Coordinator to identify locations. The signs will be stored securely between May Fairs.

The representative confirmed that, as discussed at Council, the signs are just one part of the Traffic Management Plan which also includes using cones supplied by Highways, volunteers in high-vis helping drivers, and talking again with The Pig about parking at Groombridge Place.

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

2. APOLOGIES – none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – none.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 2023

002632

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 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. 2792	Clerk	Replacement goals ordered for Teasley Mead
Pg 2875	Clerk	Response made regarding CIL funds request
Pg 2875	Clerk	Recommended a subsidy of £18,000 for 2024/25 to Council
Pg 2875	Cllr Gordon-James	Directors made aware that WPC would like the subsidy request decreasing in future years and accompanied by a full report/application
Pg 2876	Building Asset Group	Considered a full list of expenditure on Pheonix House and Groombridge Old Station
002609	Clerk	Recommended budget and Precept of £225,641 to Council

002610	Clerk	Fixed Electrical Services completed works for condensation issues at Phoenix House
002611	Clerk	Instructed JAKK to repair the Victoria fingerpost
002613	Clerk	HSBC business deposit card received
Pg 2877	Clerk	Notified Councillors of requirement at audit to all use Council email addresses
002614	Clerk	Recommended the updated Grass, Hedge & Tree Policy to Council
002615	Clerk	Recommended the updated Bank Reconciliations Procedure to Council
Pg 2878	Cllr Gordon-James	Obtained two more quotes for Phoenix House roof, provided to the Buildings Group
Pg 2878	Cllr Gordon-James	Sought advice from a surveyor about Phoenix House roof

Outstanding items from previous meetings

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2002	Clerk	Pursue free opportunities for advertising the meeting rooms
Pg.2733	Clerk	Produce 2 year budget after work is undertaken on the next Parish Plan 2024-2028
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Replace bench at Youth Shelter with a memorial bench
Pg 2812	Clerk	Contact alternative streetlighting contractor
Pg 2875	Planning Committee	Consider changes to CIL policy to make it more clear and transparent
Pg 2876	Clerk	Review Earmarked reserves closer to the new financial year
002612	Clerk	Set up an account with Unity Trust Bank

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2908	Clerk	Notify Good People Company that their revised grant proposal is still supported by WPC
002633	Clerk	Grant £537 to St Thomas' School Parents' Association for May Fair traffic signs
Pg. 2908	Clerk	Circulate updated 2024/25 grant application paperwork
Pg. 2909	Building Assets Group	Take forwards the recommendations from last meeting
Pg. 2909	Cllr Gordon-James	Negotiate a further twelve month assured shorthold tenancy (Phoenix House)
Pg. 2909	Cllr Gordon-James	Negotiate rent (Phoenix House)
002634	Clerk	Recommend the Risk Assessment and Management policy to Council
002635	Clerk	Recommend the Pensions Discretions Policy to Council

5. GRANTS

5.1 Review expenditure to date for 2023/24

Good People Company had confirmed that their project is slightly amended as they will be starting a lunch club for male carers in Groombridge from February and may build links with Groombridge Men's Sheds. The Committee agreed that the principle is still the same as the initial grant application which was granted £500, and confirmed that the Clerk should release the funds to them.

It was noted that there was £3,319 remaining in the 2023/24 Grants budget for this meeting.

5.2 Consider any Grant applications received

Members of the Committee had received the St Thomas' School Parents' Association's grant application prior to the meeting.

Reflecting on the December Council meeting discussion, the Committee noted that traffic issues during May Fair had increased which is why WPC had requested a Traffic Management Plan. The signage would help warn drivers about potential disruption in advance, and perhaps mean that some drivers avoided the village during May Fair.

The Committee noted that budget was available to support the request, that it was in response to something that WPC had asked the May Fair organisers to think about, and as the signs could be used every year the grant would have a longevity.

002633 RESOLVED to fund a grant to St Thomas' School Parents' Association of £537 for three May Fair advance warning traffic signs from the 2023/24 Grants budget.

5.3 Note NALC Legal Topic note on Church funding

The National Association of Local Councils had issued a new Legal Topic Note outlining that the Local Government Act 1894 had been amended by inserting a new section 19A. This confirms that Councils need to consider requests in respect of church property or property held for an ecclesiastical charity as they would any other funding request. Previously WPC had taken the view, as held by many Councils, that it could only fund churchyards under the 1894 Act.

This guidance was noted and agreed that the grant paperwork should be updated to reflect this.

5.4 Review guidelines for 2024/25 Grant applications

The Committee had received paperwork with recommended updates from the Clerk, including for church funding. They noted that it will continue to be a rolling programme and applicants are encouraged to apply earlier in the financial year when more funds are available. It was acknowledged that the alternative, which is ringfencing amounts for certain meetings, can restrict availability of funds.

The Committee AGREED the proposed updates, and asked the Clerk to ensure that the paperwork is circulated to potential applicants as soon as possible.

6. PARISH COUNCIL ASSETS

6.1 Receive report from Building Assets Working Group on Groombridge Old Station and Phoenix House/Post Office options and recommendations

The Committee had received an update from the last Building Assets Working Group meeting which included recommendations for next steps. Finance Committee AGREED the recommendations contained.

6.2 Phoenix House – consider another twelve month assured shorthold tenancy

AGREED that Cllr Gordon-James should negotiate a further twelve month assured shorthold tenancy.

6.3 Phoenix House – consider rent

AGREED that Cllr Gordon-James should negotiate on the rent.

7. ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

7.1 Consider quotes - none

8. POLICIES

8.1 Review Risk Assessment and Management

002634 RESOLVED to recommend the Risk Assessment and Management policy to Council.

8.2 Review Pensions Discretions Policy

002635 RESOLVED to recommend the Pensions Discretions Policy to Council.

9. REPORT FROM RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO)

The Clerk confirmed that work is underway to ensure all required budget commitments for 2023/24 are met by year end.

The 2023/24 Annual Return will be on an income and expenditure basis for the first time, so the Clerk may need to spend additional time on year end this year.

10. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

The benches and plaques will be installed at Groombridge play area in the coming weeks.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 25th March 2024 at 7pm at Groombridge Old Station.

The meeting ended at 7.35pm