

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE** Committee held at **GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION** on **Monday 25th March 2024 at 7pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Nick Anderson, Andrew Fane, Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly, Penny Lawne, 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 twelve Grant applicants present, both present in the room and on Zoom. Cllr Winter welcomed them and explained that a number of applications had been received requesting more than the funds available in budget.

As there were some funds remaining in the 2023/24 Grants budget Cllr Winter asked those applicants who were applying for Capital items whether they could purchase these in the current financial year. St Michael's School, Friends of the River Medway and Groombridge Preschool confirmed that they could do so and the Clerk confirmed that payment could be made that week.

Cllr Winter then gave members of the Committee the opportunity to ask the applicants any questions before the meeting was opened. The following responses were given.

Groombridge Tennis Club confirmed that they would be applying for an interest free loan from the Lawn Tennis Association for the Padel Court and that the LTA had volunteered to help Groombridge Tennis Club with an application to Sports England. The Club would be putting in £20,000 of its own funds and would undertake fundraising events. The representative confirmed that they try to encourage people and families to be members by keeping subs low in comparison to other Clubs in the area.

The representative for Blackham Church explained that it no longer has a flourishing congregation and services are held there on the 5th Sunday of the month where that arises. However, Withyham Church would be having roof works and services would all be at Blackham for that month. The residents next door to the Church, and a couple of other Blackham residents do help in the church yard and in the church.

The representative for Citizens Advice told the Committee that in 2023 they helped over 40 Withyham parish residents with more than 200 issues, the main ones being benefits, tax credits and housing.

The Air Ambulance confirmed that they are an independent charity and rely on public donations for 88% of their income through their Lottery, fundraising, corporate support and parish Council grants.

St John's Church's Quinquennial Report had highlighted some water ingress and plaster damage from the roof. They explained that all churches contribute funds to the Diocese, the amount of which depends on the size of the congregation.

Groombridge Village Hall confirmed that they were hoping to buy stain resistant chairs and that they would be more comfortable for elderly users than the current ones. They will have a phased programme of chairs renewal, room by room with each room having different coloured chairs. They explained that whilst they had been making a

surplus service costs have increased, and that they have a Capital Reserve fund but they have to ensure it is the equivalent of two years' revenue.

St Michael's School confirmed that they had spent time researching the sensory resources they wished to purchase and that they would provide a calm space for all children with special education needs as well as anxiety.

The Friends of the River Medway needed more kits to ensure that there were enough for all the testers and that the kits met the requirements of the Environment Agency. They expected to ally for more funds at a later date for more chemicals to allow the project to continue through local volunteers. The Database of results would be available for the public to view.

The representative for Groombridge Preschool explained they needed instruments to run a weekly music workshop and ensure that all the children and preschool teachers could take part.

Clued Up confirmed that the groups, including the Home School Group for which they were applying, aim to combat isolation for young people by providing recreational services and somewhere to meet. Their annual costs are around £68,000 but they estimate £3,000 for the groups. When asked about the number of people from the parish who would benefit the representative said that she could clarify the figures.

Cllr Winter thanked the applicants and all but the two for Wealden Citizen's Advice left.

The meeting opened at 7.35pm.

1. **ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING** – The Clerk recorded the meeting for the purposes of the minutes and confirmed the recording would be destroyed when the minutes were written.
2. **APOLOGIES** – Deviani Parekh-Jones – scheduled councillor training
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – no prejudicial or pecuniary interests. Cllr Kelly is a member of St Thomas' Church and Cllr Winter is a member of Groombridge Tennis Club.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2024

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2024, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2794	Clerk	Replace bench at Youth Shelter with a memorial bench when a request is received
Pg 2875	Planning Committee	Recommended to Council changes to CIL policy to make it more clear and transparent
Pg. 2908	Clerk	Good People Company revised grant proposal paid
002633	Clerk	Grant paid to St Thomas' School Parents' Association for May Fair traffic signs

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Pg. 2908	Clerk	Circulated updated 2024/25 grant application paperwork
Pg. 2909	Building Assets Group	Recommendations from last meeting in progress
Pg. 2909	Cllr Gordon-James	Negotiations in progress for a further twelve month tenancy (Phoenix House) and rent
002634	Clerk	Recommended the Risk Assessment and Management policy to Council
002635	Clerk	Recommended the Pensions Discretions Policy to Council

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 2812	Clerk	Contact alternative streetlighting contractor
002612	Clerk	Set up an account with Unity Trust Bank

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action
002669	Clerk	Make 2023/24 grants to St Michael's School, Friends of River Medway and Groombridge Preschool before end of March
002670	Clerk	Make 2024/25 grants to Groombridge Tennis Club, Blackham Church, Wealden Citizen's Advice, Air Ambulance, St John's Church and Groombridge Village Hall at April Council
Pg. 2944	Clerk	Notify St Thomas' Church and Clued Up of reasons for deferrals
Pg. 2945	Cllr Gordon-James	Arrange meeting with Groombridge Guides about their Grant application
Pg. 2945	Assistant Clerk	Promote school safety signs to our schools with information on alternative funding
Pg. 2945	Parish Maintenance Person	Bend any broken chainlink inwards on Station Road Groombridge fence
Pg. 2945	Clerk	Monitor condition of Station Road Groombridge fence
Pg. 2946	PMP	Monitor Phoenix House velux windows during heavy rain
Pg. 2946	Cllr Gordon-James	Speak with Clerk if works needed to Phoenix House velux windows or slates
002671	Clerk	Vire £1,700 underspends from 4407 Parish Maintenance to 4000 Salaries
002672	Clerk	Recommend 2024/25 EMRs to Council
002673	Clerk	Recommend to Council to give delegated authority to the Clerk on the Rights of Way Committee budget

Pg.2947	Clerk	Update the Scheme of delegation for the Rights of Way Committee budget
002674	Clerk	Recommend to the ASM the Finance Committee Terms of Reference
002675	Clerk	Recommend to the ASM the Financial Regulations
002676	Clerk	Recommend to the ASM the Scheme of Delegation
002677	Clerk	Recommend to Council the Borrowing & Investment Strategy
002678	Clerk	Recommend to Council the Fees & Charges

5. GRANTS

5.1 Consider applications received for the 2024/25 budget

Cllr Winter noted that the 2024/25 Grants budget is £10,000 and the meeting had received £14,929.97 in grant requests. As WPC operates a rolling programme the Committee would need to consider ensuring there were funds for those who need it later in the year.

In making decisions on the proposals the Committee would therefore need to consider impact on parishioners, fundraising secured from other sources, links to WPC's Parish Plan and whether there was sufficient detail.

As previously mentioned there was £2,782 remaining in the 2023/24 Grants budget and St Michael's School, Friends of the River Medway and Groombridge Preschool were applying for Capital items which could be purchased in the current financial year and paid by the Clerk that week.

In considering their application for £432.97 towards sensory resources for pupils at St Michael's School Withyham, the Committee commended the plans to develop a package to support pupil's wellbeing and agreed to support the application at £433.

In considering the application for £520 towards a test kit for the Friend's of the River Medway's project Ripple Effect, the Committee agreed that it was an important initiative and strong application that ties in well with our Parish Plan and Climate and Ecology Advisory Group. The Committee agreed to support the application at £520.

The Committee agreed to support Groombridge Preschool's application for £278 towards musical instruments as they felt them to be important resources for the children as well as reaching a different demographic to the other applications that we received.

002669 RESOLVED to make grants of £1,231 from the 2023/24 Grants budget.

The Committee then considered the remaining applications to the 2024/25 Grants budget.

In considering Groombridge Tennis Club's application for £2,000 towards a Padel court, the Committee agreed that the Tennis Club is an important facility in the Parish and they wanted to support it. However, as the budget was oversubscribed and it was felt that the amount requested represented a large proportion of the

overall budget, the Committee decided that they would make a contribution of £500 to the project. This is with the expectation that the funds will be spent during the 2024/25 budget year.

In considering the application for £800 towards maintenance of the churchyard at Blackham Church, the Committee recognised that the potential for them to fundraise from elsewhere is limited and that Blackham is part of our Parish that does not receive a large amount of financial support from WPC. The Committee agreed a grant of £800.

In considering the application for £900 towards running costs of the Wealden Citizens Advice service, the Committee agreed that it is a very important service for people in the Parish and they wanted to support it. However, as the budget was oversubscribed it was felt that they were unable to support your request in full and a slightly reduced contribution of £800 was agreed.

The remaining applicants left the meeting.

In considering the application for £350 towards the Air Ambulance Charity Kent Surrey & Sussex, the Committee agreed that it is a very worthwhile service and a modest request so they agreed the request for £350 in full.

In considering your application for £2,000 toward scaffolding for a roof repair at St John's Church Crowborough, the Committee agreed that they wished to support the request as Marden's Hill is a part of our Parish that does not receive a large amount of financial support from WPC. However, as the budget was oversubscribed and it was felt that the amount requested represented a large proportion of the overall budget, they agreed a contribution of £1,000.

In considering the application for £1,500 towards replacement chairs for Groombridge Village Hall, the Committee agreed that the Village Hall is a well used and well run facility in the Parish and they wanted to support it. However, as the budget was oversubscribed and the Committee noted the level of Capital Reserves held, they agreed a contribution of £1,000 with the expectation that the funds will be spent during the 2024/25 budget year.

In considering St Thomas' Church's request for £1,150 towards maintenance of the churchyard the Committee was sorry that the applicant was not present. They noted that there were no recent accounts or bank statement supplied, and only one quote. They also felt that the application did not explain how the proposal would meet at least one of the objectives in the Parish Plan and could have explained more about the in kind contribution provided by volunteers. The Committee therefore recommended that the application was resubmitted to the next meeting.

In considering the application for £2,000 towards Clued Up's Home School Group and continuation of the Girls' Group, the Committee agreed that Clued Up fills a real gap for young people and their needs. However, the Committee did have several queries that they felt need further information before they could make a final decision, namely the number of beneficiaries from the parish, clarity on the

monetary figures, a clearer description of what Clued Up do and what they are applying for, and to identify one or more specific priorities in our Parish Plan. The Committee therefore recommended that the application was resubmitted to the next meeting.

002670 RESOLVED to make grants of £4,450 from the 2024/25 Grants budget.

5.2 Note grant made to Groombridge Guides from 2023/24 budget under Delegated Authority

The Clerk explained that a grant had not been made to Groombridge Guides under Delegated Authority due to the complexity of the application and the request for £3,000, which was higher than expected.

The Committee discussed the information that they felt was missing, their concerns about the costs of the works and the level of grant requested, and the extent of the Guide Hut's boundary and impact on WPC land. They noted that WPC had provided some sand bags and the Parish Maintenance Person had cleared debris from the curtilage, but liability was not clear and the drainage expert felt that nothing that WPC had done had adversely affected the Guide Hut. It was agreed that Cllrs Gordon-James and Lawne, and if possible, Cllr Winter would meet with the applicant for clarification and to discuss next steps.

6. SCHOOL SAFETY SIGNS – Consider WPC budget lines

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting regarding a scheme where schools can sign up with ESCC to use temporary "school keep clear" signs on their zig zag section road. The school would be responsible for placing and removing the signs at drop off and collection times. The cost of the signs in the pilot was £615.60 for six.

The funding note within the ESCC document suggests asking the Parish Council to fund these signs and the Committee was asked whether there was a budget for this if schools were to approach WPC.

It was AGREED that due to constraints on WPC's budgets, the initiative should be promoted to the schools in the Parish but with contact details for other funding organisations.

7. PARISH COUNCIL ASSETS

7.1 Groombridge Recreation Ground – drainage - Deferred for further information.

7.2 Groombridge Station Road fence – condition update

In February the hedge behind the chain link fence was 'laid'. The person doing this recommended keeping the chainlink in place for 12-18 months to allow the hedge to become established and therefore offer an adequate barrier. In undertaking this work the condition of the chain link fence is now much clearer (see photos below). In places the chain link is broken and there are sharp edges, some of the concrete posts are broken.

The Committee AGREED to maintain the chainlink fence until it can be removed in 12-18 months' time:

- The Parish Maintenance Person to see if he can bend any broken chainlink inwards so that it doesn't catch on pedestrians
- The Clerk to monitor the concrete posts on a monthly basis to ensure they do not become unstable and pose a threat to parked cars

7.3 Phoenix House/Post Office roof – receive condition survey and consider next steps

The Committee noted that the survey shows no need to replace the entire roof but some issues were identified. The velux windows are leaking in places and the Parish Maintenance Person would monitor them during heavy rain. Ideally some tiles would need to be replaced or refitted but as scaffolding would be required these would be left for now. Should works become urgent Cllr Gordon-James would contact the Clerk for Delegated Authority or to go to Council or Finance Committee.

8. ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

8.1 Note expenditure against budget report to March 2024 – noted

8.2 Authorise the payment of remaining March invoices for 2023/24 budgets

The following were AGREED to be paid and reported to Council:

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)									
Payments made between 20/03/2024 and 28/03/2024									
Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
21/03/2024	Agrifactors (Southern) Ltd	BACS258	360.00		60.00	4065	101	300.00	Seeds (Newton Willows verge)
						338		-300.00	Seeds (Newton Willows verge)
						6000	101	300.00	Seeds (Newton Willows verge)
21/03/2024	SME IT Solutions	BACS259	120.64		20.11	4013	101	100.53	Phone/Bband
21/03/2024	ESALC	BACS260	96.00		16.00	4007	101	80.00	Cllr Finance training x2
21/03/2024	N Brett	BACS261	9.00			4015	101	9.00	Plug adapter (office)
21/03/2024	N Brett	BACS261	3.00			4064	101	3.00	Plates for Community Cafe
21/03/2024	Everflow	DDEFPO0324	44.95			5101	500	44.95	Water (PO/Ph Hse)
21/03/2024	Everflow	DDEFWPC324	20.88			4502	101	20.88	Water parish office
25/03/2024	Wealden District Council	BACS262	60.00			4007	101	60.00	2x Cllrs WDC Parish Conf
25/03/2024	St Michael's School Withyham	BACS263	433.00			4101	102	433.00	Grant - sensory resources
25/03/2024	Friends of the River Medway	BACS264	520.00			4101	102	520.00	Grant- testing kit
25/03/2024	Groombridge Preschool	BACS265	278.00			4101	102	278.00	Grant - musical instruments

8.3 Consider any virements and journals for 2023/24 budget lines

002671 RESOLVED to vire £1,700 underspends from 4407 Parish Maintenance to 4000 Salaries.

Other overspent budget lines were noted but Virements were not felt to be necessary.

8.4 Consider Earmarked Reserves 2024/25

002672 RESOLVED to recommend the following 2024/25 Earmarked Reserves to Council:

Code	Name	Est at 31.3.23 (£)	24/25
325	Teasley Mead Play Equipment (<i>in progress</i>)	2,500	2,500
327	Groombridge Play Area [£3,027 is the balance on the funds raised]	2,761.60	3,027
329	Road Safety Projects	3,000	3,000
332	WPC Volunteers (<i>ringfenced as this was a grant from WDC</i>)	1,940.10	1,940.10
333	Parish Office Repairs	3,000	3,000

336	CiL	18,832.16	18,566.76
337	Parish Assets <i>e.g. new bus shelters, benches, noticeboards etc</i> Agreed 24/25 Precept would include £35K for this budget	3,000	38,000
338	Environmental Improvements (CEAG)	4,017.42	4,017.42
340	Streetlights (<i>new columns are £3-4K</i>)	3,000	3,000
341	Post Office/Phoenix House Maintenance	475	475
342	FUTURE Elections <i>May 2023 - WDC cost scenarios:</i> • £12,800 (<i>Groombridge Ward £8,400 & Marden's Hill Ward £4,400</i>) assuming that the District Ward is uncontested • If District and Parish are both contested, estimate £8,000 – that includes contingency of 15%. • If none of the Parish Wards are contested, then there is still a charge £1,432.	6,768.39	6,768.39
		48,804.67	83,804.67

8.5 Consider request to delegate authority for expenditure from Rights of Way budget

In 2023 members of the Rights of Way Committee set up a Group called Withyham Path Minders under the umbrella of Sussex Ramblers. In doing so they benefitted from their insurances etc, and ESCC allow them to do more than if they were part of WPC. It is not therefore part of Withyham Parish Council, but membership does cross over between the volunteer group and our Committee, and the intention is that the Committee will identify paths in the parish that it feels need attention and ask Withyham Path Minders to add those paths to their list.

Members of Withyham Path Minders asked the Clerk whether they can have help with buying materials for paths that the Withyham Path Minders group is working on that our Committee has requested.

002673 RESOLVED to recommend to Council to give delegated authority to the Clerk on the Rights of Way Committee budget so that every recommendation that the Committee makes does not have to go to a Council meeting for authorisation.

The Clerk would also update the Scheme of Delegation.

8.6 Consider Quotes - none

9. POLICIES to recommend to Council:

9.1 Finance Committee Terms of Reference (for May ASM)

002674 RESOLVED to recommend to the ASM the Finance Committee Terms of Reference.

9.2 Financial Regulations (for May ASM)

002675 RESOLVED to recommend to the ASM the Financial Regulations

9.3 Scheme of Delegation (for May ASM)

002676 RESOLVED to recommend to the ASM the Scheme of Delegation

9.4 Borrowing & Investment Strategy

002677 RESOLVED to recommend to Council the Borrowing & Investment Strategy

9.5 Fees & Charges

002678 RESOLVED to recommend to Council the Fees & Charges

10. REPORT FROM RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO)

Nothing further to report.

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

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 3rd June 2024 at 7pm at Groombridge Old Station.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm