

Minutes of the **WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING** held at **THE OLD STATION, GROOMBRIDGE**
on **13th January 2025** at 7pm

PRESENT Cllrs Nick Anderson, Emma Bowers, Alan Gaukroger, Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly (Chair), Penny Lawne, Jill Pardey, Beth Rhodes, Sue Skinner, Judi Tuke, Linsey Winter

In attendance: Deborah Siddle - Clerk (minutes)
County Cllr Taylor (to item 8)

Members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity for members of the public to address the Council. There were no members of the public present.

1. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING

2. APOLOGIES Cllr Parekh-Jones – family commitment
District Cllr Hulbert

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Cllrs Gordon James and Tuke for item 14 (Directors of WPCIC).

4. MINUTES

4.1. Resolve that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Monday 9th December 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

002838 RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2024 were approved.

4.2. Matters outstanding from minutes (not listed as separate agenda items)

Matters resolved from previous minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item
Pg. 3062	Cllr Gordon-James	Is meeting with the May Fair organisers to discuss the 2025 Traffic Management Plan
Pg.3088	Clerk	Responded to GMS' container enquiry
002825	Clerk	Notified WPCIC of subsidy for 2025/26
002826	Clerk	Made 2025/26 Precept request of £235,675
Pg.3089	Clerks	Publicised 2025/26 Precept information
002827	Clerk	Submitted response on remote attendance at meetings/proxy voting
002828	Clerk	Sent response to consultation on Household Recycling Sites
002829	Clerk	Adopted the Assessment & Management Policy
002830	Clerk	Adopted the Petty Cash Policy

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002833	Clerk	Put in place results of Assistant Clerk's Role Evaluation
Pg.3091	Clerks	Circulated Christmas closure dates on social media
Pg.3091	Clerk	Circulated website address for defibrillator locations to Councillors
Pg.3092	Clerks	Guidance about accidents involving deer/Folly Wildlife was on Facebook not on our website
Pg.3092	Clerk	Response awaited from the Conservators re play equipment at the Reading Room

Actions outstanding from previous minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete
Pg.2792	Assistant Clerk	Develop a resilience area of the website	Early 2025
Pg.3064	Clerks/CEC	Coordinate consultation on urban grass cuts to inform 2026/27 decision	May-25
Pg.3067	Cllrs Anderson/ Gordon-James	Use thermal imaging camera at Phoenix House	December
Pg.3087	Clerks	Notify residents once footbridge claim confirmed	February
Pg.3088	Clerks	Put a Speedwatch recruitment post on Facebook for Cllr Bowers to share to Blackham village page	February
Pg.3089	Council	Consider Earmarked Reserves March/April 2025	April 2025
Pg.3091	Clerks	Telephone Switchover information to go in parish notes and at the APA	March

Actions from these Minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete
Pg.3099	Cllr Kelly	Talk to the Guide Hut representative about making their garden area more presentable	February
Pg.3099	Cllrs Bowers & Skinner	Undertake playground inspection training and start inspections at Balls Green and Teasley Mead	March
Pg.3099	Clerk	Adoption of Blackham bus shelter by BETSI to go to Finance Committee	March
Pg.3099	Clerk	Contact ESCC Rights of Way team about the metal speed strips on Gillridge Lane	February
Pg.3099	Clerk	Report empty grit bin on Canterbury Hill to ESH	February

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Pg.3100	Finance Committee	Consider Members Allowances at updated levels, travel and subsistence rates and costs for child/dependants' care in 2026/27 budget setting	Autumn
002839	Clerk	Retain WPC Members' Allowances for 2025/26 as per the 2020/21 financial year	March
Pg.3100	Council	Consider response to Standards Consultation (Cllrs Kelly, Gordon-James and Lawne to draft)	February
Pg.3101	Clerk	Update Memorandum of Understanding before providing to WPCIC	February
Pg.3101	Clerk	Arrange a meeting with WPCIC regarding subsidy and the Memorandum of Understanding	February
Pg.3101	Council	Agree final Memorandum of Understanding	March
Pg.3102	Cllr Gordon-James	Become link councillor with WPCIC rather than a Director after MoU agreed	April
Pg.3102	Councillors	Bring any confidential WPC shredding to the office before end of January	January
Pg.3102	Clerks	Arrange a thank you for Amblers and Community Café for 10 year anniversary	Summer
Pg.3102	Cllrs Kelly & Gordon-James	Consider attending NALC Power Shift Conference on 23 June	February

5. COMMITTEE MINUTES

To receive the following draft minutes of committees and to note recommendations contained therein and as far as requisite, the action taken by them:

5.1 Staff & Administration Committee – 2nd December 2024 -Noted

5.2 Finance Committee - 2nd December 2024 - Noted

5.3 Planning Committee – 9th December 2024 - Noted

6. REPORTS FROM DISTRICT and COUNTY COUNCILLORS

County Cllr Taylor confirmed that she has been chasing several highway issues with varying levels of success. She asked that if things are not addressed that we re-report to East Sussex Highways or with Cllr Taylor.

Cllr Taylor explained the Government proposals in the Devolution White Paper for the introduction of Mayors and Unitary Authorities and described ESCC's response. ESCC has delayed elections while transition is in progress. Although not implicitly mentioned in the White Paper, she hopes that if any implications arise from Devolution for Town and Parish Councils then they will be properly resourced to deal with them.

Councillors had the opportunity to ask questions and agreed that Withyham Parish Council should follow the progress of Devolution closely to identify any impacts on our Parish or on the Parish Council.

7. WARD REPORTS

(a) Groombridge Ward (Groombridge)

Corseley Road still has water running down near the entrance to the Forest Way, Cllr Taylor would raise this again.

It was noted that the scarecrows near the entrance to Groombridge Recreation Ground had been there since September. Cllr Kelly would talk to the Guide Hut representative about making the garden area more presentable and how WPC might be able to help or advise.

(b) Groombridge Ward (Withyham/Blackham)

Cllrs Bowers and Skinner agreed to help with playground inspections at Teasley Mead and Balls Green. Cllrs Winter and Tuke would arrange to show them what to do.

Cllr Bowers notified the meeting that Blackham residents had secured a further defibrillator at the junction of Ironchurch Lane and A264. Crowborough First Responders are funding and providing it and a resident is hosting it.

BETSI would like to adopt the Ironchurch Lane bus shelter as they feel it is an important hub for residents. The Clerk was asked to check the process and arrange authorisation.

Cllr Skinner reported that she has had progress with arranging a road closure for the Withyham Church Remembrance Service.

(c) Marden's Hill Ward

Cllr Pardey confirmed that Parish Council grit bins are full around St John's/Marden's Hill.

The Clerk was asked to contact ESCC Rights of Way team to enquire about the metal speed strips that have been installed on Gillridge Lane.

The Clerk was asked to report to ESCC that their grit bin at the bottom of Canterbury Hill on Beech Green Lane needs refilling.

8. ROAD SAFETY AND SPEEDWATCH

Cllr Tuke reported that she will post recruitment leaflets for Speedwatch volunteers along The Ridge as several residents have shown interest.

Cllr Taylor left the meeting.

9. CONSIDER THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT ON MEMBERS ALLOWANCES 2025/26

The report had been circulated prior to the meeting recommending a 3% increase to Members Allowances. The Clerk confirmed that allowances were currently frozen at 2020/21 levels.

Councillors agreed to continue with that freeze in order to remain within the budget set for Members Allowances in 2025/26. However, they also felt that WPC should consider raising the allowance to recommended levels in 2026 as printing

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and paper costs have increased and they wouldn't want prospective councillors to be put off by the costs associated with undertaking the role.

It was AGREED that Finance Committee would consider including Members Allowances at updated levels, travel and subsistence rates and costs for child/dependants' care in their 2026/27 budget setting.

002839 **RESOLVED** to retain WPC allowances as per the 2020/21 financial year (£167 Basic and £288 Chairman's Allowance) in 2025/26 but consider changes during 2026/27 budget setting.

10. POLICIES & PROCEDURES

10.1 Note the Fire Safety Advice for Staff, Councillors & Volunteers - noted
The Assistant Clerk was thanked for the progress on Fire Safety and wider Health and Safety.

11. CONSULTATIONS

11.1 Consider whether to respond to the consultation on Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England

Councillors AGREED that it would be beneficial to have a stronger Standards framework in place and that WPC should make a response. Cllrs Kelly, Gordon-James and Lawne would draft a response for February Council to agree.

Councillors noted that they can also respond as individuals.

12. FINANCE

12.1 Note the report showing payments made to date against budgets - Noted

12.2 Authorise the payment of January invoices/note regular payments

Time: 11:43

Cashbook 1

User: DS

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)

Payments made between 06/12/2024 and 08/01/2025

Nominal Ledger Analysis								
Date	Payer Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount Transaction Details
06/12/2024	UK Debt Management Office	PWLBP01224	8,389.48			5100	500	8,389.48 Loan repayment Ph Hse/PO
06/01/2025	Streightights.co.uk	BACS178	753.95		125.88	4450	402	628.29 Streetlight maintenance (1to2
06/01/2025	ADN Roofing	BACS179	5,688.98		944.83	6200	500	4,724.15 Phoenix House roof
						341		-4,724.15 Phoenix House roof
						6000	500	4,724.15 Phoenix House roof
06/01/2025	RBailey	BACS180	40.00			4503	101	40.00 Window cleaning Dec
06/01/2025	ADN Roofing	BACS181	159.60		26.60	4500	101	133.00 Office roof (chimney/brick)
06/01/2025	Octopus	DDOCTO1224	88.89			4502	101	88.89 Office electricity Nov
06/01/2025	Everflow	EPOS1224	31.89			4502	101	31.89 Water charges office
06/01/2025	Everflow	EFPO1224	858.88			5101	500	858.88 Water charges Ph Hse/PO
06/01/2025	Viking Direct	BACS182	119.40		19.90	4015	101	99.50 Stationery
06/01/2025	Omni Waste Management	BACS183	37.20		6.20	4506	101	31.00 Office bins Nov
06/01/2025	Holman & Sons	BACS184	5,520.00		920.00	5200	500	4,600.00 Retboard & plaster Ph Hse
						341		-4,600.00 Retboard & plaster Ph Hse
						6000	500	4,600.00 Retboard & plaster Ph Hse

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08/01/2025	North Wealden Community Transp	BACS185	157.00	4401	401	157.00	Wealdlink Ctr4
08/01/2025	Society - Local Council Clerk	BACS186	38.00	6.00	4007	101	30.00 Training (D)
08/01/2025	SME IT Solutions	BACS187	506.74	84.29	4013	101	100.27 phone/Eband
					4021	101	321.18 IT support
08/01/2025	Highways Volunteer	BACS188	10.35	4421	401		10.35 Mileage
08/01/2025	Employee	BACS189	9.00	4407	401		9.00 Mileage (FMP)
08/01/2025	Various	BACS190	7,700.37	4003	101		364.00 Salary
				4005	101		189.57 Overtime payments
				4000	101		7,146.80 Salaries +Adjustments
08/01/2025	HMRC	BACS191	3,317.64	4001	101		3,317.64 Tax & N Qtr3
08/01/2025	Prepaid card	CBI PPO125	164.26	203			164.26 Cbl to PPOCard Jan25
08/01/2025	British Gas Lite	DOBGO125	180.62	5101	500		180.62 PO/Ph Hse Elec
08/01/2025	Nest	DDNEST0125	888.08	4001	101		888.08 Pensions
08/01/2025	HSBC	HSBC0125	8.00	4000	101		8.00 bank charges Nov-Dec
08/01/2025	The Premier Trust NA Houghton	SONH0125	668.67	4012	101		668.67 Office rent Jan
08/01/2025	The Premier Trust T J Newman	SOTND125	668.66	4012	101		668.66 Office rent

002840

RESOLVED to pay the January invoices listed above totalling £33,842.98+VAT; to pay by BACS or sign the cheques accordingly.

12.3 Note the availability of the Bank Reconciliations file

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the bank reconciliation file can be inspected at any time by contacting the Clerk. Bank reconciliations are completed monthly by the Clerk/RFO and counter-signed by the Chair of Finance Committee.

12.4 Consider any quotes – none.

13. CONSIDER WHETHER TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM 14 PURSUANT TO SECTION 1(2) OF THE PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960 ON THE GROUNDS THAT PUBLICITY WOULD BE PREJUDICIAL TO THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF THE BUSINESS

002841

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

Cllrs Gordon-James and Tuke chose to leave the meeting for item 14.

14. WITHYHAM PARISH COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY – Subsidy expectations and Memorandum of Understanding

A paper had been circulated by the Clerk prior to the meeting which was discussed. It was noted that members of the CIC had asked for clarification from WPC about future expectations around the subsidy granted.

A discussion followed and it was AGREED that WPC should continue to support the CIC to deliver the Post Office through an annual subsidy at a level based on the CIC's requirements and without expectations that the subsidy must be decreased.

Councillors felt that the Memorandum of Understanding covers the relationship between WPC and WPCIC well, including the subsidy. They made some changes for the Clerk to incorporate before sharing with the CIC. One of these changes was that WPC should have a link Councillor to attend CIC meetings on behalf of WPC who was not a Director.

The final document would return to Council for agreements after the CIC had reviewed it.

The Clerk would arrange a meeting to discuss these matters between those members of the CIC and WPC Finance Committee who could attend.

15. INVITE THE PUBLIC TO RETURN TO THE MEETING IF THEY WERE EXCLUDED FOR THE PREVIOUS ITEMS

002842

RESOLVED to invite the press and public to return to the meeting.

Cllrs Gordon-James and Tuke returned to the meeting.

Cllr Tuke confirmed that she would like to remain as a CIC Director and Cllr Gordon-James offered to be a link councillor to the CIC rather than a Director.

16. CLERK'S REPORT – including 10 years of the Amblers and Community Cafe

The Clerk notified the meeting that 2025 is 10 years since the Council began the Amblers and Community Café initiatives. Councillors thanked the volunteers involved for all their hard work, and plans are in place to celebrate their achievement.

In agreeing the Precept for 2025-26, Council had used the 2023-24 Tax Base to estimate the impact on Band D properties as the 2025-26 Tax Base had not yet been available. The Clerk updated the meeting that it had now been supplied and the Precept increase agreed was equivalent of 2.8% or £4.75 per Band D property.

If Councillors have confidential Council paperwork that they would like shredded they should bring to the Parish Office before the end of January.

The Clerk confirmed that the Ward Boundary Review mentioned at a previous meeting had been postponed due to the Devolution White Paper. It was noted that the Volunteer Administrator is providing invaluable support to the office.

17. REPORTS FROM MEETINGS AND TRAINING ATTENDED BY COUNCILLORS

The NALC Power Shift Conference on 23 June was noted. Cllrs Kelly and Gordon-James would check their diaries.

Cllr Lawne would be unable to attend the WDALC AGM.

Cllr Kelly reported that she and the Assistant Clerk had met with an Old Groombridge resident and Speldhurst Parish Councillor at the River Grom to consider an alternative proposition to the current bridge. The views of The Pig would be sought and, should it be feasible, further information will be brought back to Council.

18. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA: Response to Consultation on Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework; WPCIC Memorandum of Understanding

- 19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING** - note that the proposed date of the next Council meeting is Monday 10th February 2025 at 7pm, to be held at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda.

The meeting ended at 8.35pm.