

Minutes of the Additional **FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING** held on
24th March 2025 at 7pm at The Old Station, Groombridge

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

In attendance: Deborah Siddle, Clerk (minutes)

Members of the public are encouraged to come to the meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Council. There were 7 members of the public present, the majority of which were representing grant applications.

The representative for Blackham Church explained that last year they were able to have fewer cuts of the churchyard due to the weather. However, all of WPC's grant had been utilised. Their current application was also for £800 for cuts around the graves with a strimmer and to keep brambles back and hedges tidy in the area which is next to be use. The representative explained that the church itself receives minimal funds because of its low usage.

The representative for Blackham Village Hall clarified that the current wooden fire door needs replacement as it sticks when wet and is a security concern. They confirmed the level of Reserves that the Village Hall currently holds.

The representative for Wild Groombridge explained that their application was for unrestricted funds for things such as website and insurance costs, and equipment for their action days. Equipment would be stored securely in their shed.

The representative for Withyham Watch explained that they intended to obtain other funding from Sussex Police Funds and Go Fund Me. They expect the cameras to go on private land, which would be easier and less expensive to obtain consents than public land. The applicant was unable to confirm maintenance costs or whether the Police would have a direct link to footage.

The representative for St Michael's School Withyham confirmed that, should they receive funding from the remaining 2024-25 Grants budget, they would be able to purchase the equipment before 31st March. They explained that they are a trained Forest School practitioner and as well as using the school grounds and local environment, the whole school would be going to Wilderness Wood. The Forest School woodwork activities link with elements of the Design Technology curriculum.

The representative for Ripple Effect confirmed that they were applying for costs of testing kits and the volunteer coordinator. They confirmed that they are aware of the testing that Dorset Arms Angling Club does, but they test different things and on a different river, although they do have more cross over with the Tunbridge Wells Angling Club. Ripple Effect water testing results are on their website.

A representative for Groombridge Sports Ground Association was also present in case Councillors had any queries relating to agenda item 6 regarding grass cutting at the Tanyard. There were no questions.

Cllr Winter thanked the members of the public and explained that WPC has £10,000 in its grants budget each year. Members of the public were welcome to remain but they chose to leave the meeting and receive feedback from the Clerk.

Members of the public left the meeting. The meeting opened at 7.23pm.

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

2. APOLOGIES – Cllr Andrew Fane - illness

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Cllr Lawne's husband is a Trustee of Groombridge Sports Ground Association (item 6). The Clerk advised that this was not a prejudicial or pecuniary interest.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2024

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2024, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

4.3 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2992	Clerk	Amended process to review supplier bank details agreed at March Council
Pg.3077	Clerk	Groombridge Tennis Club confirmed timetable for their grant
002812	Clerk	Grant of £331 made to Tiny Fishes
Pg.3077	Clerk	Tiny Fishes and St Thomas' Church notified it is exceptional to give two grants in the same year
Pg.3077	Clerk	Competitive nature of grants process stressed to grant applicants
Pg.3077	Clerk	Groombridge Cricket Club aware WPC would like a Councillor to be photographed with the mower
Pg.3078	PMP	Groombridge play area actions undertaken
Pg.3078	Clerk	Good Company People notified about meeting room charges
Pg.3079	Clerk	WPCIC notified that WPC does not feel there is a need to amend the lease
002814	Clerk	Council agreed the WPCIC subsidy for 2025/26
Pg.3079	Clerk	WPC/WPCIC memorandum of Understanding circulated
Pg.3079	Clerk	Meeting between WPC and WPCIC arranged
002815	Clerk	2025/26 budget and Precept of £235,675 agreed by Council

Pg.3080	Committee	2025/26 Earmarked Reserves agreed by Council
002816	Clerk	Risk Assessment & Management Policy agreed by Council
002817	Clerk	Petty Cash Policy agreed by Council
002818	Clerks	Quote for SME to continue providing IT support accepted

Outstanding items from previous meetings

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2002	Clerk	Pursue free opportunities for advertising the meeting rooms
Pg. 2945	Assistant Clerk	Promote school safety signs to our schools with information on alternative funding
Pg. 2992	Clerk	Check with Auditor whether GPoC negates need to report other legal powers in minutes
Pg. 2993	Clerk	When smart meter fitted arrange to export electricity generated from the solar panels
Pg.3038	Clerk	Monitor the GRG drainage situation and notify any complaints to Finance Committee
Pg.3080	Clerks	Complete Risk Assessments
002819	Clerks	IONIS not on Gov.UK supplier list, review web hosting

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action	Completion Date
Pg.3151	Clerk	Defer AAKSS and Wealden Citizen Advice applications to June	June 2025
Pg.3151/52	Clerk	Arrange payments for successful grant applicants	April 2025
Pg.3152	Clerk	Re-request monitoring reports from Groombridge Tennis Club, AAKSS, St John's Church, Groombridge Guides, St Thomas' Church and Folly	June 2025
Pg.3152	Cllrs Kelly and Winter	Arrange visits with successful Grant applicants	Ongoing
Pg.3152	Committee	Consider treatment of repetitive and maintenance Grant applications during review of Guidelines	Autumn 2025
Pg 3152	Clerk	Report back to GSGA and request update to Autumn meeting	Autumn 2025
Pg.3152	Clerk	Contact contractor to request fewer cuts at the Tanyard	April 2025
Pg.3153	Cllr Anderson	Attend the GSGA AGM for WPC	April 2025
Pg.3153	Clerk	Recommend to Council to dispose of the Blackham bus shelter to BETSI	April 2025
Pg.3154	Clerk	Chase WDC about run-off from Teasley Mead Recreation Ground	April 2025

FINANCE/24.3.2025 – 003151

Pg.3154	Clerk	Report back Finance Committee comments on planters to CEAG	April 2025
Pg 3154	Clerk	Recommend Financial Regulations to Council	April 2025
002904	Clerk	Recommend Finance Committee Terms of Reference to Council with amendment	April 2025
002905	Clerk	Recommend revised Fees and Charges Policy to Council	April 2025
002907	Clerk	Recommend Borrowing and Investment Strategy to Council	April 2025
002909	Clerk	Recommend the Risk Management Policy to Council	April 2025
002910	Clerk	Recommend the Pay Policy to Council	April 2025
002912	Clerk	Make the agreed Journals	April 2025
Pg.3155	Clerk	3 Year budget to next meeting	June 2025
Pg.3156	Clerk	Blackham village green request on a future agenda	tbc
Pg.3156	Clerk	Add items to future agendas	June & Sep 25

5. GRANTS (2025/26 BUDGET)**5.1 Consider Grant applications received to this meeting**

Cllr Winter reiterated that there is £10,000 in the 2025-26 Grants budget. Applications to this meeting totalled £8,524 but that applicants are encouraged to apply early in the year. The Committee was advised to consider diversity of location and activity.

Two applications had not been represented by representatives at the meeting and it was AGREED that these would be deferred to the June Finance Committee meeting as it was felt to be important that applicants attend to respond to queries from the Committee.

St Michael's School, Withyham had applied for £360 towards equipment for Forest School. They had confirmed that they could purchase the items before the end of the financial year and the Clerk had confirmed that there was £309 remaining in the 2024-25 Grants budget. The Committee felt that it was a good project and application and so AGREED to contribute £309.

Blackham Church had applied for £800 towards maintenance of the churchyard. The Committee recognised that the Church has minimal opportunities to fundraise from elsewhere and few attendees but that it is historically important. The Committee AGREED to fund in full at £800.

Blackham Village Hall had applied for £1,800 towards a replacement fire door. The Committee noted that the Hall Committee do have an income as well as Reserves, which some other applicants do not. Whilst considering the need to balance the limited funds available in the Grants budget, they were mindful that the Hall is used

as a Polling Station and so AGREED to make a contribution of £300, expecting the Village Hall to use Reserves for the rest.

Wild Groombridge had applied for £400 towards unrestricted funds. The Committee recognised the importance of what Wild Groombridge does, their hard work in trying to secure funds from elsewhere and that they have no Reserves. The Committee AGREED to fund in full at £400.

Withyham Watch had applied for £2,000 towards ANPR cameras following the spate of recent burglaries and anti-social behaviour. There were concerns about the responsibilities of the Police to fund such things, and queries about privacy and access requirements. However, the Committee felt it important to support the request due to the precedent and model set by Blackham Watch but it was also mindful of the pressure on the Grants budget and the opportunities available for grants through Sussex Police and the Safer Wealden Partnership. The Committee therefore AGREED to contribute £1,500.

Ripple Effect had applied for £1,764 towards testing kits and a contribution to the Volunteer Coordinator costs. The Committee recognised the positive impact of the project and its alignment with WPC's Parish Plan priorities. The Committee was also mindful of the pressure on the Grants budget and therefore AGREED to contribute £1,000 towards expenditure.

00 RESOLVED to fund St Michael's School, Withyham at £309 from the 2024/25 Grants budget.

00 RESOLVED to fund Blackham Church, Blackham Village Hall, Wild Groombridge, Withyham Watch and Ripple Effect at £4,000 from the 2025/26 Grants budget.

The remaining Grants budget from April 2025 to March 2026 is £6,000.

5.2 Note Monitoring Forms received from successful applicants to 2024/25 budget
Completed forms had been circulated prior to the meeting and the Committee had found these interesting to read. The Guide Hut had not yet submitted a report as but had very recently completed drainage works. Groombridge Tennis Club had confirmed that they would commence ground works on the padel court by 31st March.

The Clerk was asked to chase outstanding monitoring forms.

Cllrs Kelly and Winter would be arranging visits with successful applicants.

5.3 Consider future policy for repetitive/annual maintenance applications

It was agreed that the Committee needs to consider how repetitive Grant applications and those for annual maintenance are treated but that it would be most appropriate to do so when reviewing the Grant guidelines in the Autumn.

6. GRASS CUTTING AT TANYARD – consider future GSGA contributions for grass cuts

Further to the December 2024 Finance Committee meeting, the Clerk had provided the Committee's queries to Groombridge Sports Ground Association.

Subsequently, three Finance Committee members and the Clerk had met with one of the GSGA operating team. Notes of the meeting had been circulated.

It was noted that WPC currently arranges and pays for up to 21 cuts every year at the Tanyard. In 2024/25 GSGA had been asked to make a 30% contribution and this was due to be reviewed for 2025/26. Whilst the parish has few publicly accessible open spaces, it was also noted that WPC does not own the land and public use had declined since WPC started doing the cuts.

Members of the Committee raised concerns about lack of use of the land and the public benefit of WPC contributing over £1,000 each year. Members of the Committee were disappointed that more hadn't been done to build user groups following previous meetings where WPC had been given assurances that this would happen. It was however noted that GSGA wishes to find more users and that there is a new team looking at ways of doing so; members who had attended the recent meeting with the GSGA representative had been impressed with his approach.

A useful result of the recent meeting was an agreement that, with current usage, 21 cuts are not needed. The Clerk would contact the contractors to request a reduction to 14 cuts if the contract can be amended.

The Committee AGREED that GSGA should demonstrate to WPC what they have done to increase usage, and provide evidence of increased usage, to the Autumn Finance Committee meeting.

In the meantime, as WPC's next 3 year grass cutting contract is due for renewal, the Clerk would seek quotes using the 14 cuts model but WPC would not continue arranging or contributing to the cost of cuts if usage does not increase and there is not more evidence of public benefit for WPC's expenditure.

Cllr Anderson would attend the AGM for WPC.

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RESOLVED to continue the 30% contribution from GSGA for 2025/26, to be reviewed for 2026/27 in the Autumn 2025 based on evidence provided by GSGA.

7. BLACKHAM BUS SHELTER – consider adoption request from BETSI
January's Council meeting had been asked by BETSI if they could adopt the Ironchurch Lane bus shelter as they felt it is an important hub for residents.

The Clerk provided Finance Committee with the Assets and Disposals Policy. The Committee considered whether to recommend to Council to allow BETSI to adopt the Blackham Bus Shelter.

If WPC were to retain ownership but BETSI undertook maintenance this could be problematic around liabilities and Health and Safety.

It was therefore AGREED to recommend to Council to dispose of the bus shelter to BETSI on the basis that WPC relinquishes all responsibilities and liabilities and would be under no obligation to take it back should BETSI no longer want it.

8. TEASLEY MEAD RECREATION GROUND

8.1 Note drainage issue

A resident had notified the Clerk of water run off from Teasley Mead recreation ground into gardens of adjacent houses. As WPC has a licence from Wealden District Council for the land, the Clerk had notified WDC of the issue and asked them to look into it. No response had been received so the Clerk would chase.

8.2 Consider CEAG planting/planters query

At the last CEAG meeting a Blackham resident had asked whether an area of Teasley Mead recreation ground might be allocated to grow food or whether planters would be possible.

The Clerk asked Finance Committee for their views on whether it would support consultation being undertaken with residents by the Community Engagement Coordinator. The Committee noted that CEAG are already aiming to increase usage of planting areas at Balls Green and Groombridge so recommended the focus should be on those areas first. Should there be more clear support from the Blackham community to progress something there then it could go on a future CEAG and Finance agenda.

9. POLICIES

9.1 Financial Regulations 7.6 and changes from NALC due to the Procurement Act 2023 (to recommend to May Council ASM)

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Financial Regulations to Council.

9.2 Finance Committee Terms of Reference (to recommend to May Council ASM)

The Committee asked that para 11 be amended to clarify it refers to individual grants.

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Finance Committee Terms of Reference to Council with this amendment.

9.3 Fees and Charges (to recommend to May Council ASM)

An amended structure had been recommended in order to encourage more usage of the meeting rooms. It was AGREED to recommend that this is trialled for a year, as there were concerns about additional administrative burden.

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Fees and Charges Policy to Council.

9.4 Borrowing and Investment Strategy

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Borrowing and Investment Strategy to Council.

9.5 Pensions Discretion Policy

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Pensions Discretion Policy to Council

9.6 Risk Management Policy

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Risk Management Policy to Council

9.7 Pay Policy

0028 RESOLVED to recommend the Pay Policy to Council

10. ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

10.1 Note expenditure against budget report (to March 2025) - noted

10.2 Note 2025/26 Budget (from April 2025) - noted

10.3 Authorise payment of any remaining March invoices for 2024/25 budgets

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)									
Payments made between 20/03/2025 and 24/03/2025									
Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
20/03/2025	So Energy	BACS233	130.20			5101	500	130.20	Final gas Phoenix House
20/03/2025	Staff	BACS234	37.79		6.30	4201	201	31.49	spur for fence (Travis Perkins)
20/03/2025	safetec	BACS235	30.24		5.04	4062	101	25.20	Hi Vis vests amblers
20/03/2025	R Bailey	BACS236	40.00			4503	101	40.00	Windowcleaning (Station)
20/03/2025	SME IT Solutions	BACS237	121.26		20.21	4013	101	101.05	Phones & Bband March
20/03/2025	Viking Direct	BACS238	68.92		11.49	4015	101	57.43	Stationery & noticeboard
20/03/2025	Omni Waste Management	BACS239	36.96		6.16	4506	101	30.80	CORRECT - office waste
20/03/2025	Prepaid card	CB1 PPC	227.71			203		227.71	CB1 to PPC 24-25
20/03/2025	Everflow	DDEFOS0325	40.25			4502	101	40.25	Water charges Old Station
20/03/2025	Octopus	DDOCTO0325	302.86			4502	101	302.86	Energy Old Station
Total Payments:			1,036.19	0.00	49.20			986.99	

002 **RESOLVED** to pay the 2024-25 March invoices listed above totalling £986.99+VAT; to pay by BACS or sign the cheques accordingly.

Also anticipated are 2024/25 invoices for grass cutting (Commercial/Landscape Services) and for litter and dog bins (WDC), and an amended streetlights invoice from ESCC, which the Clerk would allocate to 2024-25 budget year.

10.4 Consider any virements and journals for 2024/25 budget lines

The following Journals were AGREED:

- 4013 BACS106 £321.19+VAT to be journalled to 4021 as it is for IT support not for phone/broadband
- 4407 PP7 & PP77 totalling £100.83+VAT to be journalled to 4403 as these were materials for bus shelter repairs

002 **RESOLVED** to make the agreed Journals.

10.5 Receive 3-year budget 2025 to 2028 – deferred to next meeting

10.6 Consider Quotes – no quotes

11. CONSIDER WHETHER TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM 12 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

002 **RESOLVED** to exclude press and public.

12. BUILDING MATTERS

Updates received by the Committee were noted and actions agreed.

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

RESOLVED to invite press and public to return

14. RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO) REPORT

The RFO reported that recruitment for an Administrator had started.

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

The Clerk reported that Blackham residents had enquired about Teasley Mead Recreation Ground becoming a Village Green. Finance Committee AGREED to consider the request on a future agenda when there was the staff capacity to do so.

- June agenda to include Grant applications (including those deferred), monitoring forms and 3-year budget.
- Autumn agenda to include GSGA grass cuts, grant guidelines (including a review of repetitive and maintenance applications).
- When capacity allows, an agenda to include request for Teasley Mead Recreation Ground to become a village green.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – to be held on 30th June 2025 at 7pm at Groombridge Old Station.

The meeting ended at 9.08pm