

Minutes of the **WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING** held at **THE OLD STATION, GROOMBRIDGE** on **9th February 2025** at 7.45pm

PRESENT Cllrs, Emma Bowers, Alan Gaukroger, Diana Kelly (Chair), Penny Lawne, Beth Rhodes, ,Judi Tuke

In attendance: Kelly Gaynor – Clerk (Minutes)
Natalie Brett – Assistant Clerk (observe)

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 in attendance.

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

2. **APOLOGIES** – Cllr Jill Pardey – Family Commitments
Cllr Nick Anderson - Family Commitments
Cllr Linsey Winter – Family Commitments
Cllr Deviani Parekh-Jones – Illness
Cllr Sue Skinner – Family Commitments
Cllr Robert Gordon-James - Illness

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – None

4. **MINUTES**

4.1. Resolve that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 12th January 2026 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

003145 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2026 were approved.

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

Actions reported to this meeting as completed

Minute no.	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete	Update
Pg 3328	Clerk	To contact East Sussex County Council regarding reported empty grit bin.	February	Completed
Pg 3330	Clerk	To publish in noticeboards and online streamlined Parish Office opening hours	February	Completed

Pg 3330	Councillors	To report back information of note from recently attended meetings	February	Cllr Gaukroger provided an update on the Ashdown Forest & Parish Liaison meeting & Cllr Lawne provided an update on the latest WDALC meeting (which was not quorate)
003120	RFO	Implement Members' Allowances in line with IRP Level 1 band for 2026/27 (£201 Basic Allowance; £349 Chairman's Allowance).	February	Completed

Actions from previous Minutes not yet completed

Minute no.	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete	Update
3044	Clerks	Conduct a consultation on fencing the playground in Groombridge in the spring	Spring 2026	The Parish Council's consultation is planned to take place from 30th March 2026 to 23rd May 2026 . More detailed information will be shared in due course, closer to the time.
Pg 3290	Clerks	To consider Unsung Helpers event 2026	Spring 2026	
Pg 3328	Cllr Lawne	To provide details of surface water problem at the Clappers at the waterworks to Councillor Taylor	February	

Pg 3330	Clerk	To receive Tree Survey Report and make recommendations to Council on actions.	February	Outstanding – chased 28/01/26 and again on 12/02/26–
003120	RFO	Draft update to Financial Regulations (authorisation thresholds and payments) for March Finance Committee / May ASM.	March Finance Meeting	
003120	RFO	Amend policy review spreadsheet so Fees and Charges are reviewed at budget setting, not the ASM.	March Finance Meeting	
003120	RFO	Update Councillor Acceptance of Office forms to include consent for electronic summonses and agendas.	March Finance Meeting	
003120	RFO	Update Investment Policy to remove A-rated bank requirement; report to March Finance Committee / May Council (FSCS limits apply).	March Finance Meeting	
003120	RFO	Draft Members' Allowances Policy, including Chair's allowance, for May Finance Committee / June Council; publish allowances on website.	March Finance Meeting	
Pg 3330	Councillors	Councillors to arrange cover if they cannot attend their allocated Community Café and advise Parish Office of Replacement	Ongoing	

Actions from these Minutes

Minute no	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete
003146	Clerk	To confirm to CEAG that Council are in agreement for CEAG to produce and print 100 copies of the amended Gardening for Wildlife booklet subject to a budget expenditure of £210	
003147	Clerk	To confirm to CEAG that Council are in agreement for CEAG to run and energy event, for residents subject to an expenditure limit of £100	
003148	Clerk	To advise CEAG that Council adopted the Biodiversity Action Plan	

003149	Clerk	To confirm to CEAG that Council supports a biodiversity audit to be undertaken by an ecologist subject to quotes being within £400 budget	
003150	Clerk	To commission a survey of the Parish to identify locations for additional defibrillator(s) Costs for the survey to be considered under the Clerks delegated authority	
Pg 3369	Councillors	To agree a Councillor lead to be part of the Amblers Lead Team	
Pg 3369	Councillors	To contact the community engagement coordinator if they would like to be involved	
Pg 3369	Councillors	It was agreed to put forward a list of suggested names for the Community Engagement Coordinator to approach regarding potential involvement in the team. Councillors also agreed to notify the Community Engagement Coordinator of any other local walking groups they are aware of, to support networking and wider engagement.	
003154	Clerk	To action the acceptance of quote B for a new photocopier	
Pg 3371	Clerk	To circulate the East Sussex County Council Rights of Way Officer proposed diversion of Public Footpath 57c to Councillors for emailed response	13/02/2026
Pg 3371	Clerk	To respond on behalf of the Council regarding the proposed footpath diversion 67c to East Sussex County Council Rights of Way Officer	23/02/2026

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:

All noted

5.1 Rights of Way Minutes 06.10.2025

5.2 Staff & Administration Advisory Committee Minutes 24.11.2025

5.3 Finance Committee Minutes 24.11.2025

5.4 Planning Committee Minutes 12.01.2026

5.5 Climate & Ecology Advisory Group 13.01.2026

5.6 Planning Committee Minutes 26.01.2026

6. REPORTS FROM DISTRICT and COUNTY COUNCILLORS

East Sussex County Councillor Taylor was unable to attend the meeting but submitted the following report:

- *Notes were provided about the budget that is being presented tomorrow. ESCC is having to open up a £70m credit line with government, which charges over the market interest rates. Also, ESCC portion of the council tax will rise by 5% as last year.*
- *We have been told that we will find out about the local government reorganisation results by mid-March – we will then know whether East Sussex will be one unitary or whether it will be split into 2. But with all of the uncertainty in central government, I am concerned that might slip.*

- *The Sussex mayoral authority is being set up and will receive 40% of the full budget this year. There is already a CEO in place and a team working on the organisation. The Mayoral Board will consist of representatives from the County Councils and Brighton and Hove. We have requested that there also be representation from the Districts and Boroughs. The election of Sussex Mayor will be in May 2028.*
- *I am chasing Highways about resurfacing the A264 at Blackham. I was up there yesterday, and it is in a terrible state, and very dangerous. I will let you know what I hear. The roads across the whole area are breaking up and Highways is just not keeping up with the work. Drains are also a big problem, and I am chasing action on a large number across the division.*

7. WARD REPORTS

- (a) Groombridge Ward (Groombridge) – nil of note
- (b) Groombridge Ward (Withyham/Blackham) – nil of note
- (c) Marden's Hill Ward - noted the significant potholes in the Ward Report to www.eastsussexhighways.com)

8. TO AGREE AMENDMENT, EXPENDITURE AND PRODUCTION OF 100 COPIES OF THE GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE BOOKLET AS RECOMMENDED BY CEAG

Councillors felt this would be a useful resource for the community.

003146 RESOLVED to produce and print 100 copies of the amended Gardening for Wildlife booklet subject to a budget expenditure of £210

9. TO AGREE TO RUN AND FUND A COUNCIL EVENT HOSTED BY CEAG ON SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Council felt that this event would benefit the community and fits well with Community Resilience. It was noted that the event would be informal to encourage residents to attend. A budget of up to £100 was agreed. More details would be brought back to Council.

003147 RESOLVED, CEAG to run an energy event, for residents subject to an expenditure limit of £100

10. TO ADOPT THE WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN AS RECOMMENDED BY CEAG

Members of CEAG and the Community Engagement Coordinator were thanked for producing an excellent action plan.

003148 RESOLVED to adopt the Biodiversity Action Plan as Recommended by CEAG

11. TO AGREE TO CONDUCT A BIODIVERSITY AUDIT FOR PARISH COUNCIL OWNED / MANAGED LAND AND BUILDINGS SUBJECT TO COSTS BEING WITHIN BUDGET AS RECOMMENDED BY CEAG

It was agreed that this would be useful information for the Parish Council to hold and would help inform future decisions taken on Parish Council assets. Some concerns were raised on possible implications that may arise from the findings but it was agreed this would still be valuable information to inform decisions.

003149 RESOLVED that a biodiversity audit be undertaken by an ecologist on Parish Council owned / managed land and buildings subject to quotes being within £400.

12. TO CONSIDER A SURVEY OF THE PARISH FOR FUTURE DEFIBRILLATORS LOCATIONS

It was agreed that defibrillators in the parish were a vital asset and contributed to Community Resilience. It was noted that the Crowborough First Responders would be ideally placed to conduct the survey, and the Clerk was asked to approach them. Any costings for the survey were delegated to the clerk under her delegated authority. Locations identified would be brought back to Council for future consideration. It was further noted that grants are often available for new defibrillators.

003150 RESOLVED to commission a survey of the Parish to identify location(s) for additional defibrillator(s). Costs for the survey to be considered under the Clerks delegated powers.

13. TO ADOPT THE FOLLOWING POLICIES:

13.1 Carbon Policy as recommended by CEAG

003151 RESOLVED to adopt the Carbon Policy

13.2 Councillor code of conduct

003152 RESOLVED to adopt the Councillor Code of Conduct Policy

14. AMBLERS (A WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL INITIATIVE)

14.1 To agree a Councillor lead to be part of the Amblers Lead Team

This item was deferred to a future meeting although it was agreed in principal that a Parish Councillor lead would be a preferred option as the amblers is a parish council initiative

14.2 To agree any other Councillors who wish to be involved

Councillors were asked to contact the Community Engagement Coordinator if they would like to be involved.

14.3 To request Councillors find others within the community who would like to be part of the Amblers lead team

Councillors agreed to consider names to provide the Community Engagement Coordinator for her to approach to become part of the team. It was also agreed that Councillors would advise the community engagement coordinator of any other local walking groups they were aware of to facilitate networking.

15. FINANCE

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

15.2 Authorise the payment of February invoices/note regular payments

Date: 05/02/2026 Withyham Parish Council

Time: 12:05 Cashbook 1

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)

Payments made between 10/02/2026 and 28/02/2026

Nominal Ledger Analysis							Transaction Details
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Am	£ Creditors	£ VAT	£ Amount	
10/02/2026	Richard Price Consulting Ltd	BACS189	450			450	PAID CiLCA programme
10/02/2026	Omni Waste Management	BACS190	38.49	6.41		32.08	PAID Office waste Dec
10/02/2026	Commercial Services Trading Lt	BACS191	2,238.41	373.07		101.75	Grass cutting Tanyard
						81.38	Grass cutting Teasley Mead
						325.35	Grass cutting St Johns
						1,356.86	Grass cutting Groombridge
10/02/2026	Society - Local Council Clerks	BACS192	200			200	Membership Fee NB
10/02/2026	East Sussex Association of Loc	BACS193	306	51		255	Training x7
10/02/2026	Managed Technology	BACS194	385.87	64.31		321.56	Copier costs Oct25-Jan-26
10/02/2026	DM Payroll Services Ltd	BACS195	144	24		120	Payroll admin Oct25 to Mar26
10/02/2026	N.Wealden Community Transport	BACS196	164.25			164.25	Wealdlink Jan-Mar26
10/02/2026	Employee	BACS197	10.24			1.65	Milk
						8.59	Stationery, Milk
10/02/2026	Employee	BACS198	45.06			45.06	PMP items & mileage
10/02/2026	Employee	BACS199	2.39			2.39	Milk
10/02/2026	Various	BACS200	5,418.15			379.17	Feb Salary
						54.48	Jan overtime
						4,984.50	Feb Salaries & Jan overtime
10/02/2026	Sayers Maintenance Services	BACS201	634.2	105.7		528.5	EICR Old Station
10/02/2026	FIX LINK M Anderson	BACS202	342	57		95	Landlord service Old Station
						190	Landlord service Phoenix Hse
10/02/2026	SME IT Solutions	BACS203	578.4	96.4		110.58	phone, Bband to website support
						361.43	IT support
10/02/2026	Prepaid card	Cb1Ppc0226	356.02			356.02	Cb1 to PPCard Feb-26
10/02/2026	British Gas	DDBGPO0226	161.69			161.69	PO/Ph Hse Elec Dec-Jan
10/02/2026	Everflow	DDEFOS0226	40.78			40.78	Water charges
10/02/2026	Everflow	DDEFPO0226	51.16			51.16	Water charges PO/Ph Hse
10/02/2026	NEST pensions	DDNEST0226	657.33			657.33	Pensions Feb
10/02/2026	The Premier Trust N A Houghton	SONH0226	666.66			666.66	Feb Rent
10/02/2026	The Premier Trust T J Newman	SOTN0226	666.67			666.67	Rent Feb
Total Payments:			12,957.77	0	777.89	12,179.88	

003153 **RESOLVED** to pay the February invoices listed above totalling £12,179.88 VAT; to pay by BACS or sign the cheques accordingly.

15.3 Consider any quotes – Replacement photocopier
The clerk was thanked for her report.

003154 **RESOLVED** to accept quote B for a new copier over 5 years as recommended by the Clerk

16. CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk advised that the Rights of Way Committee had been asked to respond to East Sussex County Council's Rights of Way team regarding the proposed diversion of Public Footpath Withyham 57c.

The Rights of Way Committee supports the proposed diversion, subject to one consideration relating to a missing bridge along the route.

The Clerk would circulate the relevant information to all Councillors and request an emailed response by **13 February 2026**, indicating one of the following options:

- a) Support the recommendation from the Rights of Way Officer
- b) Do not support the recommendation from the Rights of Way Officer
- c) Abstain

This would enable the Clerk to finalise the Parish Council's formal response to East Sussex County Council's Rights of Way Officer.

The Clerk advised that workloads continue to be high with requests for information from the public especially regarding potholes, flooded roads and footpaths, streetlights and planning. Headway has been made with a number of action points

The Clerk noted that CEAG had developed the station flowerbed and that an amount of peat had been offered to the community for collection which had gratefully been utilised

The Clerk noted the Candy Cane Streetlight within Groombridge is currently out of order with no power supply and now requires assessment by UKPN

17. REPORTS FROM MEETINGS AND TRAINING ATTENDED BY COUNCILLORS

Cllr Lawne attended the WDALC meeting reporting that unfortunately the meeting was not quorate, so several agenda items were deferred. There was a very informative presentation by Trevor Scott from Wealden District Council on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution. The passing of the WDALC Chair was also noted with sadness.

Cllr Gaukroger attended the Ashdown Forest Parish Liaison meeting. It was noted that the car park charges have earned sufficient revenue to fill the deficit left by the removal of funding by East Sussex County Council. Surveys of the car park were underway with repairs expected in the spring/summer.

18. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA: To agree a Councillor lead to be part of the Amblers Lead Team

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - noted that the proposed date of the next Council meeting is Monday 9th March 2026 at 7pm, to be held at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.