

Minutes of the **WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING** held at **THE OLD STATION, GROOMBRIDGE** on 13 April 2026 at 7pm

PRESENT Cllrs, Emma Bowers, , Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly (Chair), Jill Pardey, Sue Skinner, 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.

Three members of the public were in attendance. One spoke regarding an increase in traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles, between the A264 and the B2110 via Station Road and Beech Green Lane in Withyham. A second member of the public was there to observe this discussion

Any members of the public with concerns were recommended to contact East Sussex Highways and County Councillor Georgia Taylor

Another member of the public was in attendance in an observational capacity with an interest in becoming a councillor.

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

2. **APOLOGIES** – Cllr Lawne Family Commitments
Cllr Winter – Family Commitments
Cllr Anderson Family Commitments
Cllr Rhodes– Work Commitments
Cllr Gaukroger Family Commitments

Cllr Parek-Jones – No Apologies Received

County Cllr Georgia Taylor Work Commitments
District Cllr Jessika Hulbert Family Commitments

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – None

4. **MINUTES**

4.1. Resolve that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 9th March 2026 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

003200 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 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 3330	Clerk	To receive Tree Survey Report and make recommendations to Council on actions.	February	Finally received March 2026
003120	RFO	Draft update to Financial Regulations (authorisation thresholds and payments) for March Finance Committee / May ASM.	March Finance Meeting	Completed ready for May ASM
003120	RFO	Amend policy review spreadsheet so Fees and Charges are reviewed at budget setting, not the ASM.	March Finance Meeting	Completed
003120	RFO	Update Councillor Acceptance of Office forms to include consent for electronic summonses and agendas.	March Finance Meeting	Completed
003120	RFO	Update Investment Policy to remove A-rated bank requirement; report to March Finance Committee / May Council (FSCS limits apply).	March Finance Meeting	Completed agenda item 17.2
Pg 3381	Clerk	To provide Councillor Hulbert with information received from Speldhurst Parish Council regarding Burrswood	March	Completed
003176	Clerk	To offer the Parish Maintenance Person a new 6-month Contract	March	Completed and accepted
Pg 3386	Clerk	To confirm to the Community Engagement Officer there will be a regular agenda item for CEAG update of news for council meetings	March	Completed – see agenda item 9
003179	RFO	To proceed with the drawdown of the PWLB loan and to complete the purchase of Groombridge Old Station.	March/April	Completed
003180	RFO	Advise Responsible Finance Officer: If the interest rate changes and the resulting annual loan repayment exceeds the current rental income, the shortfall will be met from Earmarked Reserves	March/April	Completed without exceeding current/previous rental amount
003183	RFO	Advise Responsible Finance Officer: Agree budget overspend /use of earmarked reserves for work at Post Office/Phoenix House	April	Completed

Actions from previous Minutes not yet completed

Minute no.	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete	Update
003044	Clerks	Conduct a consultation on fencing the playground in Groombridge in the Spring	Spring 2026	The Parish Council's consultation is now live: 7th April to midday 25th May 2026.
Pg 3290	Clerks	To consider Unsung Helpers event 2026	Spring 2026	
003120	RFO	Draft Members' Allowances Policy, including Chair's allowance, for May Finance Committee / June Council; publish allowances on website.	March Finance Meeting	Drafted ready for ready for Finance/June Council Meeting
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	February	Email sent to First Responders to see if they would like to be involved – need to follow up
Pg 3369	Councillors	To agree a Councillor lead to be part of the Amblers Lead Team	February	Agreed to have a Councillor lead – Position is still available
Pg 3369	Councillors	To contact the community engagement coordinator if they would like to be involved	February	Position still available
Pg 3385	Clerk	To chase status of A264 fingerpost with Jakk	March/April	Chased – will be removed from site in April with work to follow
003182	Clerk	Contract Solar Dynamics for Inspection/Annual Service of Solar Panels and also to enquire regarding cleaning	April	Connectivity of meter to solar panels ongoing due to UKPN delays

Actions from these Minutes

Minute no	Who	Item	Deadline by which to complete
Pg 3405	Councillor Gordon-James	To request a copy of the Traffic Management Plan from St Thomas' School PTA Representative	April
Pg 3405	Clerk	To consider uses for the telephone box at The Ridge and request to convert to book exchange to bring to council for approval	May
Pg 3405	Clerk	To review the donated football goal net	April
003201	RFO	Adopt the Pensions Discretions Policy	April
003202	RFO	Adopt the Borrowing and Investment Policy	April
003203	RFO	Adopt the Asset Register and Disposals Policy	April
003204	Clerks	Adopt Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy	April
003205	Clerks	Adopt the Lone Worker Policy	April
003206	Clerk	To respond to support GVH Public Consultation to convert to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on behalf of Withyham Parish Council	April
003207	Clerk	To respond to support the replacement telecommunication infrastructure	April
003209	RFO	To agree the Earmarked Reserved as recommended by Finance Committee	May
003210	RFO	To re-appoint Mulberry LAS for 3 years 2026/2029	May
003211	RFO	To obtain an alternative free of charge prepaid card	May
Pg 3408	Clerk	To follow up on Councillor vacancy	May
Pg 3408	Clerk	To seek quotes following tree survey	April
Pg 3408	Clerk	To speak with Highways Coordinator regarding attending occasional Council meetings to provide updates	April

5. COMMITTEE MINUTES

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 Rights of Way & Advisory Committee 2nd February 2026 - Noted
- 5.2 Planning Committee – 23rd March 2026 - Noted
- 5.3 Finance Committee – 23rd March 2026 – Noted

6. PURDAH

It was noted that the Parish Council is now in the pre-election period of Purdah. The 'pre-election period' is a term that is used to describe the period leading up to an election – commencing on the date the Notice of Election is published and ending at the close of the poll on election day.

Although normal Parish Council business continues through the pre-election period the Local Government Act 1986 prohibits a local authority from publishing any material at any time "which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party".

The recommended code of practice was also noted together with the link for further information : : <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/voting-and-elections/elections-and-purdah/>

7. REPORTS FROM DISTRICT and COUNTY COUNCILLORS

No reports were received

7.1 Councillor Taylor was thanked for submitting a question to County Council and the work she does to support the parish.

8. WARD REPORTS

(a) Groombridge Ward (Groombridge) Councillor Gordon-James has met with St Thomas' School Groombridge PTA representative and discussed agreed Traffic Management Plan for 2026 Councillor Gordon- James to request a copy

It was noted there has been another sewage leak in the River Grom, Project Ripple Effect is a good site to look for updates and action

The Royal Mail closing the post box outside the post office is still causing problems ahead of its replacement

The Residents of The Ridge have requested consideration of converting the telephone box into a book exchange – this will be considered at a later council meeting

(b) Groombridge Ward (Withyham/Blackham) A resident has donated / is donating a football net at the Community Space at Ball's Green. The clerk advised that this needs to be reviewed with regard to maintenance and positioning within the area It was reported that a Withyham resident had kindly worked on improving the flowerbeds at Balls Green – Councillor Bowers has been asked to pass on our thanks

(c) Marden's Hill Ward : it was noted that the road conditions are still in poor condition but slowly improving in some areas/patches. Everyone was encouraged to continue reporting issues to East Sussex Highways

9. CEAG UPDATE FOR NOTING

Report noted with thanks

10. TO ADOPT THE FOLLOWING POLICIES

10.1 Pensions Discretions Policy (as recommended by Finance Committee)

003201 RESOLVED to adopt the Pensions Discretions Policy

10.2 Borrowing and Investment Strategy (as recommended by Finance Committee)

003202 RESOLVED to adopt the Borrowing and Investment Strategy

10.3 Asset Register and Disposals Policy (as recommended by Finance Committee)

003203 **RESOLVED** to adopt the Asset Register and Disposals Policy

10.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy (new)

003204 **RESOLVED** to adopt the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

10.5 Lone Worker Policy (updated)

003205 **RESOLVED** to adopt the Lone Worker Policy

11. GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION PURCHASE

It was noted the building purchase has successfully been completed
All those involved in achieving this were thanked
Councillors commented that they had received positive feedback

12. ANNUAL STATUTORY MEETING

Agenda item moved to after agenda item 18

13. PLAYGROUND FENCING CONSULTATION

It was noted that the public consultation is now open and available for completion until noon 25th May 2026. The clerk also advised that there would be a table at the APA to encourage involvement

14. GROOMBRIDGE VILLAGE HALL - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Council agreed to support this consultation, the Clerk will send the response and additionally confirm Withyham Parish Council is happy to share any social media posts provided by Groombridge Village Hall

003206 **RESOLVED** The Parish council expressed their support for the proposed change a response will be submitted accordingly.

15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

15.1 The update from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government was noted, and no decision has been made at this time pending further consultation. Elections still expected in May 2027

16. REPLACEMENT TELECOMMUNICATION MAST

16.1 It was agreed that in acknowledgement of previous Parish Plans to improve faster broadband and mobile phone signals to support the proposed replacement mast

003207 **RESOLVED** to support the proposed replacement mast

17. FINANCE

17.1 Note the report showing payments made to date against budgets – Noted

17.2 Note payments made from 2025-26 budgets prior to year end

17.3 Authorise the payment of April (2026-27) invoices/note regular payments
£17,869 + VAT invoices/note regular payments

Time: 12:38

Cashbook 1

User: DS

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)

Payments made between 15/08/2025 and 09/09/2025

Nominal Ledger Analysis							
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c Centre	£ Amount Transaction Details
12/08/2025	Employee	BACS95	1,007.41			4000 101	1,007.41 Aug salary
15/08/2025	Society - Local Council Clerks	BACS96	144.00		24.00	4007 101	120.00 ILCA fee
15/08/2025	HSBC	HSBC0825	8.00			4600 101	8.00 bank interest
15/08/2025	Society - Local Council Clerks	MACS97	315.00			4008 101	315.00 Subs SLCC (Clerk)
05/09/2025	OmniWaste Management	BACS100	38.49		6.42	4506 101	32.07 Office waste July
09/09/2025	Mulberry Local Authority Servi	BACS101	240.00		40.00	4007 101	200.00 Training
09/09/2025	DM Payroll Services Ltd	BACS102	144.00		24.00	4040 101	120.00 Payroll admin Apr-Sep
09/09/2025	Viking Direct	BACS103	154.29		25.72	4501 101	54.93 fans
						4015 101	73.64 stationery
09/09/2025	National Association of Local	BACS104	42.00		7.00	4007 101	35.00 Training - Green Growth
09/09/2025	Society - Local Council Clerks	BACS105	510.00		85.00	4007 101	425.00 Training
09/09/2025	Volunteer	BACS106	4.95			4421 401	4.95 Highways Coord mileage
09/09/2025	Various	BACS107	5,439.42			4003 101	379.17 Salaries Sep25
						4000 101	5,060.25 Salaries Sep25
09/09/2025	Various	BACS108	454.10			4011 101	454.10 Members Allowances (half yr)
09/09/2025	Chairperson	BACS109	1,300.00			4010 101	1,300.00 Chairman's allowance 2025/26
09/09/2025	HMRC	BACS110	3,997.23			4001 101	3,997.23 Tax & NI Qtr2
09/09/2025	Employee	BACS111	12.80			4510 101	12.80 Milk (July & Aug)
09/09/2025	R Bailey	BACS98	40.00			4503 101	40.00 Window cleaning
09/09/2025	SME IT Solutions	BACS99	1,543.95		257.33	4013 101	123.18 phones & broadband
						4018 101	9.99 Website hosting
						4021 101	345.46 ITsupport
						4016 101	808.96 New PC & upgrades
09/09/2025	Employee	BASC112	26.19			4407 401	26.19 Mileage (July) PMP
09/09/2025	Prepaid card	CB1 PPC 09	138.87			203	138.87 CB1 to PPcard Sep
09/09/2025	British Gas	DBG0925	95.88			5101 500	95.88 Electricity PO/Ph Hse
09/09/2025	Everflow	DDEF0S0925	28.01			4502 101	28.01 Water Old Station
09/09/2025	Everflow	DDEFPO0925	71.84			5101 500	71.84 Water PO/Ph Hse
09/09/2025	Various	DDNEST0925	780.14			4001 101	780.14 Pensions Sep
09/09/2025	The Premier Trust N A Houghton	SONH0925	666.67			4012 101	666.67 Rent Sep
09/09/2025	The Premier Trust T J Newman	SOTN0925	666.66			4012 101	666.66 Rent Sep
			£17,869.71				

003208 RESOLVED to pay the April invoices listed above totalling £17,869 + VAT; to pay by BACS or sign the cheques accordingly.

- 003209** 17.4 Agree 2026-27 Earmarked Reserves (recommended by Finance Committee)
RESOLVED to agree 2026/27 Earmarked Reserves of £112,063.68

17.5 Re-appoint Mulberry LAS for 3 years 2026-2029 (recommended by finance Committee).

Council noted the recommendation from Finance Committee to reappoint Mulberry LAS and agreed that they are independent and competent

- 003210** **RESOLVED** to re-appoint Mulberry LAS for 3 years 2026-2029

17.6 Consider any quotes –

A verbal explanation was given by the Clerk that the current prepaid card supplier is now charging a £25 monthly fee and that an alternative supplier has been sourced with no charges. It was also requested that should this supplier not be viable an alternative supplier can be found.

This card will continue to be in the Clerk's name and members of the Finance Committee are given as people of financial control

- 003211** **RESOLVED** to obtain an alternative provider of a free of charge prepaid card

18. CLERK'S REPORT

It was noted that a councillor vacancy still existed and that the clerk would follow up with interested parties regarding Co-option

The Clerk advised, following receipt of the tree survey, further action was required on one tree branch for which quotes would now be sought.

It was brought to Councillors' attention the number of hours our Highways Coordinator dedicates to Withyham Parish Council in reporting and following up on issues relating to roads and drainage. It was suggested that, where appropriate and convenient, it would be beneficial for the Highways Coordinator to provide an occasional in-person report to the Council.

It was noted that a member of the Rights of Way & Access Advisory Committee had attended a meeting on Withyham Parish Council's behalf following an invitation from Speldhurst Parish Council regarding public access around Burrswood. Reassurance was given that access would continue with some restriction during construction

12. ANNUAL STATUTORY MEETING (moved from earlier in the agenda)

Councillors were reminded that the date of the ASM 18th May and all are expected to attend.

It was further noted that there was an anticipation of the election of a new Chairman of the Parish Council at this meeting.

19. REPORTS FROM MEETINGS AND TRAINING ATTENDED BY COUNCILLORS

Nil to report this month

20. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON FUTURE AGENDA:-

The sad news of ex-Councillor Andrew Fane was noted and that representatives would be attending his funeral on the Councils behalf and Councillors were welcome to join them

- 21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING** – The Annual Statutory Meeting is Monday 18th May 2026 at Groombridge Old Station at 7pm unless otherwise notified by the agenda

The meeting ended at 8.19pm