

Gressingham Parish Council

Unconfirmed Minutes of the of the 397th
meeting
held on 22nd January 2024

A meeting of Gressingham Parish Council was held on 22nd January 2024 in which the following members participated: Martin Brooks (MB) (Chair), Michele Luxon (ML), Grant Parker (GP), Sally Riley (SR) plus the Clerk, Lesley Wareing (LW).

397/1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Neil Read.

397/2 Declarations of Interest

There were no initial declarations of interest.

397/3 Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th November 2023 were approved for signature by the Chair.

397/4 Matters arising from previous minutes (not covered elsewhere on the agenda) No additional matters were raised.

397/5 Finance and Governance

a) 2023/24 in-year financial position as at 22nd January 2024.

It was noted that current bank balance was **£4864.87** as shown on the most recent Virgin Money statement dated 22rd December 2022 and the print-out dated 22nd January 2024.

Members discussed known and possible expenditure and income during the remainder of the 2023/24 financial year. After accounting for the agreed reserve of £2500, contingency fund of £500 (to cover any additional SpID or defibrillator costs) and further known expenditure of £700 due before 31st March 2024 (including the annual insurance renewal premium – see 397/5b below), it was noted that ~£665 would be available for discretionary spending, such as the purchase of a replacement traffic mirror for the bottom of Tenter Hill, costs associated with the possible creation of a community vegetable plot, additional footpath maintenance work, **or** a contribution towards the church lawnmower.

RESOLVED: to approve the financial report to 22nd January 2024 and that the chair should sign the financial statement.

b) Insurance Policy Renewal

It was noted that the renewal premium of £427.92 was due on 15th February 2023 and the Clerk was asked to arrange payment. **Action: LW**

c) Financial regulations, new PC grant application form and data Protection Policy and privacy statement.

The Clerk reported that she was still working on these and would bring them to the next meeting for approval.

d) 2024/25 budget and Precept

The PC considered the budget estimate for 2024/25. During discussion it was **agreed** that:

- as the PC needed to maintain a reserve equivalent to its annual expenditure, if possible the reserve should be increased from £2500 to £3000 for 2024/25;
- that the Clerk's remuneration needed to be increased to £600 p.a. in line with what the PC had agreed in January 2023 i.e. that the Clerk's remuneration needed to be increased incrementally each year to bring it in line with the recommended nationally agreed pay scales;
- operating costs (including Clerk's remuneration, the insurance premium, LALC membership, website and email fees, stationery, routine SpID and defibrillator running costs)) would be ~£1500;
- there needed to be a contingency fund of £800 to cover the cost of any exceptional expenditure relating to the two SpIDs and a defibrillator (over and above the annual routine operating and maintenance costs) plus any salt bin or traffic mirror replacement costs and/or external audit fees and election expenses;
- now that the Old School Room is once again being used for village events, a donation towards the cost of room hire was an appropriate item of Section 137 expenditure for the PC and that the 2024/24 donation should be £400 (although it was agreed to ask the GVT Treasurer to do an up-to-date estimate of actual room hire costs for reference when deciding future donations)
- an additional £700 should be available for other grants and purchases for the benefit of the community.

It was **agreed** that the proposed budget of £3800 would cover all regular annual operating costs, allow for adequate reserves and contingency funds and also provide for Section 137 expenditure on projects and amenities that would benefit as many residents as possible.

RESOLVED: to approve the budget estimates and to set the Precept for 2024/25 at £3800 (proposed MB, seconded SR). Action MB/LW (to submit Precept request to the City Council before the 9th February deadline).

e) PC email address

It was **agreed** that the Clerk and NR would set up an independent email domain for the PC as required by the external auditors. **Action: LW/NR**

f) 2022/23 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

The Clerk reported that she did not think that the 2023/24 AGAR process would be significantly different from 2022/23. Members agreed that the PC should again follow the self-certification process if possible but noted that the PC may well be selected for a full audit this year, in which case a fee would be payable to the external auditors (which could be paid out of the contingency fund). It was **agreed** that the new email address needed to be set up before the audit. **Action: LW**

g) Annual Review of GPC effectiveness

The PC reviewed its activity over the previous year noting that it had:

- carried out thorough and considered responses to planning applications;
- carried out extensive footpath clearance and stile maintenance
- monitored road faults and road safety issues and had communicated with the County Council;
- had continued to support two SpID devices and a defibrillator on behalf of the village and to maintain road safety traffic mirrors;
- had ensured that the footpath over the white bridges was fit for purpose by successfully requesting County Council repairs to the parapet and organising a village working party to clean the footpath surface and clear overgrown vegetation;
- had continued to review of governance procedures and update required documentation;
- had funded and supported amenities and activities of benefit to the community.

It was agreed that the Clerk and the Chair should draft an annual report for presentation to the Annual meeting of the PC in May and thence to the Annual Parish Meeting. Action LW /MB

h) Monitoring against Annual Governance Cycle

It was **noted** that all actions had been carried out at the required times and included in relevant agendas and minutes.

397/6

Gressingham and Eskrigge Community Emergency Plan (CEP)

It was **noted** that NR had continued to update the CEP with information about resources available in the village including the supply of sandbag purchased by the PC.

397/7

Police and Crime reports update

MB reported that a successful crime prevention drop-in session had been held in the OSR on the 10th January 2024 with three members of the Lancaster and Morecambe Neighbourhood Policing Team who had advised residents on crime prevention measures.

397/8

Planning and Tree Works

a) It was **noted** that no new applications had been received since the 27th November meeting.

b) **Application previously considered by PC and now decided by City Council:**

23/01033/FUL: Snab House extension application. This had been supported by the PC and subsequently approved by the City Council subject to approval of by the Planning Office of building materials and window design.

397/9

Road Maintenance, safety and traffic

a) Traffic issues and road safety

It was noted that:

- NR had carried out an annual safety check of the west end SpID system and that the SpID itself was working OK;
- A new system for powering the west end SpID is to be set up shortly at an estimated costs of £100 - meanwhile the SpID is working OK from its current power pack;
- NR had written to the Highways Dept to pursue the 20mph zone request;

- NR had chased the Highways Department re “Unsuitable for HGVs” signage for Loyn Bridge and all other village approach roads– to be installed before Fall Kirk closure schedule for late March 2024;
- the new enhanced speed limit signs in Rabbit Lane have now been installed;
- a new salt bin had been purchased and installed on Lea Lane;
- the Clerk had received no response from Highways Department to the PC’s response to the Fall Kirk Closure Notice;
- that the road traffic mirror at the bottom of Tenter Hill would need replacing in the near future but the other mirrors were in satisfactory condition;
- MB had approached the BHA about the installation of “Dead Slow” signage on the village;
- additional drainage on Fall Kirk outside Stone Cottage might help with surface water flooding off the opposite pasture and flowing across the road and flooding residential properties. **Action: LW to contact the Highways Department.**

b) Road fault reports

The Clerk reported that she had received no response to her email detailing problems with LoveCleanStreets – the County Council’s online fault reporting tool – but would continue to pursue.

397/10

Amenities and facilities

a) SR reported that, following inspection by the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS), the defibrillator was found to be faulty and has to be sent to the USA for repair by Zoll Medical. A temporary machine has been loaned by NWAS. SR has written to Zoll Medical to request a replacement machine so that NWAS can have their loaner back. She has also written to the cabinet suppliers (Defibrillator Store) as it appears that the amount of condensation collecting inside the cabinet might have affected the defibrillator. It is not yet known what costs the PC might have to pay to get a working defibrillator back. The PC recorded its thanks to SR for her work. **Action: SR**

b) Lancashire CC footpath clearance and biodiversity grants update.

The Clerk reported that the PC has still not been paid the 2023/24 grant applied for but she would continue to chase the County Council for information. It was agreed that, in the meantime, footpath clearance work should be carried out (by M A Brooks Ltd) to utilise the still unspent 2022/23 grant of £500. The £300 Biodiversity grant from 2022/23 was being used to build and install bird nesting boxes and bat boxes – see **397/10e** below.

c) Litter Pick

It was noted that Tim Millar had kindly agreed to organise a village Litter Pick on 2nd March 2024 and that NR has updated the relevant Risk Assessment.

d) White Bridges path update.

It was noted that the working party had been well-supported and the work had now been completed. The PC recorded its thanks to Grant Parking for power-washing the pathway and to SR for organising the working party.

e) Greener Gressingham

- MB reported that 50 bird nesting box and 15 bat box kits had been prepared ready for a village box construction event planned for Saturday 24th February. The boxes will be installed during the spring ready for the 2024 nesting season.
- The Clerk reported that she is still trying to find out from City Councillor James Sommerville if the City Council has given permission for the patch

of land they own near Robin Croft to be used a community vegetable plot.
Action: LW

f) OSR/GVT update.

MB reported that the GVT is in the process of changing its constitution re the number and composition of trustees and is also pursuing funding opportunities for essential repair and improvement work needed in the OSR. The PC asked the Clerk to write to the chair of the GVT to ask to be kept informed about governance issues. **Action: LW**

397/11

Date of next meeting

Monday 25th March 2024 was agreed as the date of next meeting This would allow the PC to agree the 2023/24 final accounts for submission to the internal auditor.

Note: these minutes are unconfirmed until ratified by the next meeting of Gressingham Parish Council