

BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL

www.boxleyparishcouncil.co.uk

Clerk - Mrs Pauline Bowdery
Assistant Clerk – Mrs Melanie Fooks

Beechen Hall
Wildfell Close
Walderslade
Chatham
Kent ME5 9RU

Parish Office
Tel. & Fax. 01634 861237
E mail – Bowdery@boxleyparishcouncil.co.uk

To all members of the Council, public and press

5th March 2012

There will be a meeting of the **Finance Committee** on **Tuesday 13th March 2012** at Parish Office, Beechen Hall, Wildfell Close, Walderslade commencing at 7.30 p.m.

1. **Apologies and non attendance.**
To receive apologies from members unable to attend.
2. **Declaration of Interest or Lobbying.**
Members are required to declare any interests or lobbying on items in this agenda.
3. **Minutes of the meeting of 10th January 2012.**
To consider the minutes of the meeting and if in order to sign as a true record (previously circulated).
4. **Matters Arising.**
 - 4.1 Minute 2355/5.1 Accounting software. Members to receive an introduction to the system.
 - 4.2 Minute 2355/5.2 Bad Debt see report (page 2).

To adjourn to enable members of the public to address the meeting.

5. **Financial report.**
 - 5.1 Income/Expenditure report of 5th March 2012 (page 7-9).
 - 5.2 Reconciliation of accounts report of 5th March 2012 will be submitted to the meeting on the night.
 - 5.3 Clydesdale Bank 3 month investment bond see report (page 2).
6. **Independent Internal Audit Report.**
To receive the report (enclosed) on the inspection on 9th February 2012.
7. **Outstanding Time off in Lieu.**
Up to date details will be supplied at the meeting.
8. **Policy and procedures reviews and adoption.**
 - 8.1 Minute 2371/3 Annual grants to Vinters Valley Nature Reserve, Walderslade Woods Group, Museum of Kent Life and Kent Wildlife Trust see report (pages 2-4).
 - 8.2 Terms of Reference – to review and recommend any amendments to be approved at the April meeting – See (page 4).
9. **Walderslade Woods Group.**
 - 9.1 To receive a request from the group to release the remaining unallocated budget see report (pages 5-6).
 - 9.2 To receive the Chairman's report (page 6) on recent and future work/plans.
 - 9.3 To receive the groups 2012/13 budget (enclosed).
10. **Grant Request.**
To consider any applications.
 - 10.1 The Heart of Kent Hospice (pages 10-11) – The Parish Council has supported this charity in previous years.

11. **Matters for Information.**

To consider any relevant information.

12. **Date of Next Meeting.**

Tuesday 22nd May 2012 at Beechen Hall, Wildfell Close, Walderslade commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Clerk to the Council.

Issues to be returned to agenda as they develop. None.

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Item 4.2 Bad debt. *Purpose of report; information.*

A further payment has been received and this can be directly attributed to the debtor. So far 2 x £50 payments have been received. Whilst they are not on the date (the 23rd of a month) agreed by the court they have been received on consecutive months. The office will continue to monitor the situation and will regularly update the committee. Debt remaining £1087.15.

Item 5.3 Clydesdale Bank 3 month bond *Purpose of report; information.*

The Clerk had applied to the Council to perhaps open a 6 month bond and also needed to deal with the maturing 3 month bond. Due to reasons concerning ensuring adequate cash availability to pay some potentially large bills; lack of control over when some bills would be due and no precise date of precept payments into the bank there was potentially a 2 or 3 week period where there might be a cash flow issue. In view of this I took the decision (which was allowed by the Council if it was needed) to reinvest the maturing 3 months bond back into Clydesdale. There is an added benefit of this in that the maturing date will coincide with the period where the Council should be 'cash rich' and so the situation will be much clearer. Also if the decision is taken, at this time, to put some money into a 6 month bond its maturity will be at a time when the 12 month bonds are maturing and will enable a fuller review of the long term investments.

Item 8.1 Annual grants to Vinters Valley Nature Reserve, Walderslade Woods Group, Museum of Kent Life and Kent Wildlife Trust. *Purpose of report; to consider the report and make a decision.*

At its 10th January 2012 meeting the Finance Committee agreed (Minute 2371/3) to a review of current procedure and policy of how these grants are awarded and paid.

The annual grants of these 4 community groups are identified in the budget. As these payments are made from the MBC Concurrent Functions Grant (a use it or lose it grant) and set by the budget there has not been much supporting policy or guidance. With little specific guidance the parish office was left to organize things and as these actions were accepted by members they became the default practice.

MofKL and KWT - traditionally cheques are written and sent out in April/May. There is no policy/guidance attached to these payments to require the organisations to apply for the grant,

to present an annual report etc. The only request is that the grant is spent on publicizing the venues as a place to visit.

VVNR. Cllr Vic Davies is the Parish Council Trustee for the organisation (approved each May Annual Meeting of the Parish Council). The Trust is not required to apply for a grant, produce a budget or send in regular reports. Only at times when there have been problems has there been any level of higher interaction between the Parish Council, Trust and PC Trustee. Occasionally Cllr Vic Davies will make a remark at a meeting about the Nature Reserve but the working practice, concerning the grant, is for the Clerk to liaise with the Warden and Treasurer. The e-mail address is vintersp@yahoo.co.uk and the office has only ever received a response from the Warden to any correspondence.

There has been some policy surrounding the annual grant. Currently it is that payments are made twice a year however the Clerk has been given permission to be flexible if for instance a request for services is received (VAT can then be reclaimed) or if there is a cash flow problem. The Council has also allowed the grant to be paid in advance to the financial year it should be paid in but this was a specific request (to pay for tree felling costs) and members made the decision at a meeting.

It should be noted that the grant for Vinters Valley Nature Reserve has up until the 2012/13 financial year been the responsibility of the Estates Committee and Cllr Vic Davies is the Chairman of this Committee. There has therefore never been any 'pressure' for a regular report from the Council's Trustee and perhaps no incentive to give one – the Chairman of the Estates Committee knows what is going on. The Trust has been very successful and is much admired by the Councillors and Council and it is likely that because of this Councillors felt that it was unnecessary to interfere.

Clerk's comment; Cllr Vic Davies has followed Code of Conduct requirements and has in the past declared pecuniary interest. It should be noted the grant is in the 2012/13 budget now under the remit of the Finance Committee.

Walderslade Woods Group. Cllr Springate is the liaison between the Council and the Group. Cllr Springate is required to give monthly reports and there is a standing agenda item on the Environment Committee.

From 2011 the Finance Committee required the Group is required to submit a budget and any expenditure outside of this agreed budget (but still within the grant amount) has to receive authorisation from the Finance Committee. The group also had a ceiling on expenditure per item and if this was exceeded then permission had to be sought however this has recently been removed as the group had proved their ability to manage their expenditure. The Clerk is required to use common sense on the expenditure of the group and only report to the Environment/Finance Committee if there are any concerns.

Other grants. The Council has a robust application procedure and policy for the other grant budgets (general and village hall). Groups are required to complete an application form – giving exact reasons for the grant, and provide end of year accounts. Members get a copy of the application form/letter (in some cases) and often debate whether the group deserves a grant/support. Previous payments to the group have to be available at the meeting when the decision is taken.

Possible options.

1. Do nothing keep everything as it is.
2. Agree a new procedure for groups to follow based on the current grant policy for other applications.

For example all groups could be required to put in an application prior to the production of the Council's budget. The application could require very specific information on how the grant would be spent or require a statement if it would be used for day to day running costs. Members must decide whether they will require, in future, specific expenditure or whether the grant could be for general day to day costs. *Clerks comment: if the Parish Council places an order or purchases equipment it can claim VAT and thus the grant goes 20% further.*

3. Have a mix and match approach for all 4 organisations. Budget for and pay the grant but require a visit or report from a representative of the group to explain how the grant was used. If this option is followed then the Council must decide what to do if this visit/report does not happen. For example would the next years grant be held until the report was received?
4. Agree individual requirements for the 2 types of organisations. If members wish to follow this route then it would be good practice to be consistent and there must be clear guidance/policy to follow.

Other issues.

Loss of flexibility. If strict policy and procedure is identified then this can stifle the ability to react. For example VVNR had a grant paid early as urgent tree work was needed. If the Council states that the grant is for the Wardens wages then this would not happen.

Trustees/representative. These are volunteers and any strict requirements may discourage people from standing.

Growth. If volunteer groups are too tightly encased in policy and procedure this can stifle growth. By being too controlling the Council does not help volunteers develop financial management/leadership skills. The alternative view to this is that by being so controlling and requiring groups to 'bid' for their grant you are actually developing presentation/report writing skills.

Open and accountable. The grants do come from tax payers and so a strict open and accountable regime would not meet requirements for the Parish Council to be prudent and careful.

Cllr Vic Davies comment "I would add that we have always seen VVNR yearly accounts and the current accounts when requested, and sometimes with somebody in attendance to present and answer questions".

Item 8.2 Terms of Reference. *Purpose of report: to see if any changes will be recommended to the Parish Council at its April meeting.*

Role

The role of the Finance Committee is to oversee/manage the following aspects of the financial administration of the Parish Council including arrangements for the preparation and audit of the Council's systems and accounts. Deal with the employment of office staff and personnel issues relating to all staff. Responsibilities

The Finance Committee shall:

1. Develop and, where necessary, recommend to the Parish Council policies and procedures for the financial management of the Council. Advise the Parish Council and committees as necessary.
2. Oversee the investment strategies of the Parish Council and advise accordingly.
3. Receive and consider annual draft budgets prepared by each Committee or budget holders.
4. Recommend an annual budget and precept for the Council
5. Maintain an overall view of manpower requirements and the allocation of manpower resources and to deal with matters pertaining to staff, subject to all new posts on the council establishment being approved by the council.
6. Deal with the appointment of office staff.
7. Deal with personnel matters generally and in particular;
 - 7.1 Establishment of new positions.

- 7.2 Recruitment and appointment procedures for office staff and, where necessary, to guide/advise the Estates Committee on such procedures for the recruitment and appointment of the Caretaker and Relief Caretaker.
 - 7.3 All Training.
 - 7.4 All Staff Welfare.
 - 7.5 Terms and Conditions of Service for office staff and where necessary, to guide/advise the Estates Committee on such procedures for the recruitment and appointment of the Caretaker and Relief Caretaker.
 - 7.6 All staff disciplinary and grievance issues.
 - 7.7 Matters arising under legislation relating to contracts of employment and industrial relations.
 - 7.8 Matters relating to staff under Health and Safety Legislation.
8. Monitor reserves to ensure that surpluses are not built up other than for working capital or for earmarked projects and known liabilities, ensuring that sufficient reserves are retained for future maintenance, replacement or upgrading of items for which the Council is responsible.
 9. Monitor income and expenditure against budget and take/recommend appropriate action to the Council or committees.
 10. Consider requests to vire, where necessary, the Contingency Budget to other budget headings.
 11. Undertake a financial risk analysis annually and review the Council's insurance arrangements to ensure that the Council is adequately insured.
 12. Receive and review Audit Reports and ensure the implementation of any recommendations.
 13. Deal with requests for grants and Section 137 donations.
 14. Make recommendation to the Council on the implications of undertaking loans. If approved to manage the council's loan debt.

Committee Budget

1. To draft the budget and decide priority ratings for the Finance Committee (for consideration with the recommendations from other committees).
2. To manage the budget and vire, where necessary, between budgets held and managed by the committee.
3. To manage, according to Financial Regulations, the contracts and tenders for any projects within the budget of the committee.

Membership

1. The Committee shall consist of up to eight councillors, including as per standing orders, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Parish Council and committees.
2. The committee may appoint working parties to undertake any specific project work as necessary

Other.

The Parish Council has the right to identify issues that will be dealt with at the full meeting of the Parish Council.

Item 9 Walderslade Woods Group. Walderslade Woodlands Group (WWG). *Purpose of report: information: decision to be made.*

Item 9.1 2011/2012 Budget. The WWG currently has around £1,364 of budget that has not been released by the Finance Committee. The WWG Chairman is requesting that this be

released for a new chainsaw (pole – to reach higher up branches) and training (£1,012) to use the equipment. Members originally released an additional £100 for a bat detector but the model that is recommended costs £130 and so any 'spare' budget will go towards purchasing this.

Item 9.2 Walderslade Woodlands Group (WWG) Chairman's report for the financial year 2011/2012.

The Group has come a very long way since this time last year. When I took over the position of Chairman in February 2011, our goals were extremely short term. Ensuring the best possible use of the grant from BPC was an imperative.

The main difference this year is that we now have a much clearer vision of our goals and objectives, and also we have a detailed plan of how to get where we want to be, and this is achieving properly managed and maintained woodlands and plateaux, which go to make up the Walderslade Woodlands.

Indeed, I would eventually love to be able to reach a level of self-sufficiency by pursuing activities such as the sale of wood for burning, and wood chippings for gardens. But this is some way off at the moment.

I am very pleased to say that one of my major fears has been eased somewhat. That is the group's static membership. We are, albeit slowly, increasing our membership by publicising ourselves, and our works, and I hope this trend will continue.

I think the best way for me to give at least a feel for what has been and still needs to be done, is to list some key achievements, tasks to be done, and issues still to be addressed.

- Grubber/mower purchase, training program, transportation & maintenance completed.
- Chain saw purchase, basic training program & insurance completed.
- All required risk assessments completed.
- All required protective clothing purchased.
- A suitable level of specialised First Aid knowledge is being acquired.
- A minimum standard of protective clothing is still to be defined and provided for all volunteers.
- Felling and coppicing training is still to be completed.
- A pole saw is to be purchased, and the required training/insurances set up.
- A motorised wood chipper is to be purchased, maintained and stored.
- Bat detectors are still to be purchased.
- Animal boxes are still to be acquired and deployed.
- A 5 year management plan is to be defined for the plateaux.
- The 5 year management plan for the woodlands needs to be brought up to date.
- 'Awards For All' scheme is to be investigated, as to whether it suits our kind of volunteering.
- Co-ordination with other groups is to be set up, to look at how we can share the skills and resources we have.
- To protect our woodlands and plateaux in the long term, by the pursuit of Village Green Status for Walderslade Woods.

I am very optimistic given how far we have come since this time last year, and am looking forward to growing our partnership with BPC, so that we can make even greater strides next year.

Rob Burrows.
Chairman WWG.

