HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting of Hermitage Parish Council held at
Adelaide Room, Holy Trinity Church, Hermitage, Berkshire RG18 9ST
on Thursday 26th June 2025 at 8.00pm

Present: Cllr A Goldsmith (Chairman), Cllr R Cottingham, Cllr I Govier, Cllr D Brown, Cllr J Rigby, Cllr A Williams, Cllr J Willey, Ms N Pierce (clerk).
R. Mogan had expressed her commitment to joining HPC and attended the meeting but subsequently resigned.

01.06.25 Public participation
Four residents attended to express concern at the access arrangements indicated for RSA22 in the local plan review (LPR). Concerns were expressed that this development of ~34 properties would increase the number of cars using Station Road and Priors Court Roundabout, which are already dangerous, doubling. They also noted that the mains supply to Hermitage Green has burst three times and were concerned that this supply could not cope with the additional load.

02.06.25 Apologies for absence
Dist Cllr H Codling, Dist Cllr P Dick, Cllr V Burgess.

03.06.25 Minutes of meeting held on 15th May 2025
The minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3.1 Actions and matters arising from minutes not referred to elsewhere.
Pump track – no progress to report (Action IG)

04.06.25 Declarations of interest
None.

05.06.25 Chairman's introduction
Cllr Goldsmith advised that the agenda and minutes form part of the communication with the village, the village should know exactly what was discussed at the meeting should they wish to influence in any way. If details are not in the minutes, it wasn't said, the minutes should capture the essence of what was discussed, this is partly to protect Councillors. Minutes are available on all notice boards and the website; the clerk also takes a recording of the meeting which is deleted after the minutes have been approved.
To advise new Councillors, everything must be agreed at a meeting, except minor things; even the Chairman has limits on what can be done on behalf of HPC. All Councillor roles and outcomes must be agreed at Council meetings. Planning matters: to come in with open minds, and any individual Councillor views should be submitted after the HPC meeting of the planning application being discussed.

06.06.25 District Councillors Report and Information from West Berks Council
Report distributed.
The Chairman noted the proposal to merge councils and that consultations were taking place in WB during June but it was agreed that HPC could not comment as there was a lack of detail.

07.06.25 Councillor Roles
Councillor's roles were reviewed and discussed. No volunteers for Finance Working Party or Speed watch. Cllr Jon Willey agreed to do Playground inspections and was thanked by the Chairman. Templates to be sent to Jon. **Cllr Govier**
Chairman thanked Cllr Govier for his work on playground inspections so far.

08.06.25 Planning

8.1 New Applications:

25/01293/HOUSE, Lark Rise, Oare, Hermitage (adjacent parish). Two storey and single storey addition to detached dwelling. Cllr Brown expressed the opinion that HPC should not comment on adjacent parish proposals but leave it to Chieveley. No-one had reviewed

No comment

Cllrs Goldsmith and Cottingham advised that there were no restrictions on what applications councils can comment on. Neighbouring developments can have adverse effects upon the lives of parishioners, so we need to keep these under review and comment where appropriate.

8.2 Decision notices:

None.

8.3 00815 planning inquiry

Cllr Cottingham had attended the enquiry and reported that it was unclear which way the decision would go.

Since Ms Cottingham's report had mentioned the LPR, the Chairman spoke about this issue, apologising that the access issue had not been raised during consultation but advising that it was too late now to make any changes to the document as it had been reviewed by Government, and no other action could be taken until such time as a planning application was made. She assured residents that planning permission could not be granted unless appropriate safe access arrangements were assured and Thames Water were satisfied that their systems could cope. It was her understanding that the latter was the reason that the Cala development had not yet occurred.

09.06.25 Finance

Lloyd's account. The sum of £40,000 was transferred from the Lloyds current account to the Lloyds deposit account on a fixed term deposit account for 92 days, the interest rate is 1.50%. The clerk thought the interest rate to be too low, FWP stated it was not concerned about the interest rate because of the very healthy state of free funds, interest was only one of the issues to consider: availability of funds if required and shortage of institutions willing to hold PC investments being major challenges, such that this was considered the best option at the current time even though higher-rate options are available. This would be kept under review. The maturity date is 11th September, to place on August agenda to consider whether to retain on deposit or move to current account.

Metro account. The sum of £1,500 was requested to be moved from the Metro account to Lloyds current account on 11th June.

Financial position as of 31st May 2025

Balance carried forward (Inc. S106 contributions)	£240,206.86
Receipts to 31st May	£42,812.27
Authorised Payments to 31st May	£19,956.26
Payment not processed by 31st May	£2,550.00
Balance in hand (total)	£265,612.87

9.1 Report of Financial Officer (Clerk's report)

Report not circulated this month as discussed under relevant subject matter in Agenda.

9.2 Payments for consideration June 2025

The following were approved.

9.2.1	Sunshine Commercial Services Ltd monthly charge	£331.56
9.2.2	Grass maintenance/Contractor	£841.25
9.2.3	Cost of administration	£1,159.97
9.2.4	HMRC, tax and NI	£188.39
9.2.5	Administration expenses, ink, postage, envelope	£45.98
9.2.6	Tactical Management Ltd, dog bins (April)	£242.94
9.2.7	Steve Tilbury Consulting	£250.00
9.2.8	West Berkshire Countryside Society, 3rd May	£100.00

9.2.9	Zurich Insurance 2025-26	£2,078.87
9.2.10	Wicksteed, 4 playground inspections	£547.20
9.2.11	Ruth Cottingham, expenses for attending public inquiry	£44.06
Total	**All approved, and endorsed online**	**£5,830.22**

Direct Debits previously approved
Noted.

1&1 Ionos (website) monthly payment	£8.40
NEST monthly payment	£122.74

9.3 Receipts May 2025
CIL £5,609.62, Taylor Wimpey (land off Pinewood Crescent) £5,200.

9.4 Receipts and Payments to date
1. Receipts and Payments to date reviewed.
2. The purchase of a reconditioned laptop ahead of Windows 11 compatibility update in October was approved. Budget set aside is £700, reconditioned laptop cost under £300. Clerk to confirm the warranty of laptop. **Clerk**

9.5 Annual Return 2024-25
1. The Annual Governance Statement was approved and duly signed by the Clerk and Chair.
2. The Annual Return 2024-25 Account Statement was approved and duly signed by the Clerk and Chair.
3. The RFO had prepared the notice of Public Rights and publication of the unaudited AGAR would take place.

9.6 Account authorisations
The email instructions authority form for CCLA was approved.

9.7 Internal Audit
Recommendations from the Internal Audit were noted and actioned as below:-
1. To undertake and minute review of the Risk Assessment during the year of audit.
The financial risk assessment is on the schedule considered in item 10 which will be reviewed monthly to ensure it is undertaken and decisions recorded,
2. When applicable, the council's response to the Internal Audit recommendations should be contained in the minutes of the meeting.
This is the minute for the current audit.
3. It is a requirement to appoint the Internal Auditor during the year of audit and record the decision in the minutes of the meeting.
Clerk to ensure this is on the agenda at the appropriate time.
4. It is a requirement that any issues raised by the External Auditor should be recorded in the minutes, along with any actions agreed by the council.
Noted.

10.06.25 Administrative matters
1. Agreement of revised Standing orders (SO).
The Chairman had updated the Standing Orders agreed earlier in the year to reflect recent changes to the model SO. These had been circulated to all Councillors but several councillors reported that they had not had time to review the changes. So, it was agreed to defer agreement to the following meeting.
Any comments to be sent to the Chairman by 7th July after which time, the Standing Orders will be deemed ready for formal approval. **All councillors**
2. Review of Financial Regulations.
Cllrs Cottingham and Burgess, with Clerk have an action to review the regulations. It was agreed to update and circulate by 11th July for comment. **FWP & Clerk**
3. Review of schedule for policies and procedures

There are several policies that require updating per schedule sent to all Councillors. Cllr Govier noted that many of these should be easy to review and confirm no need to revise. Cllrs to advise any interest in reviewing specific items by the July meeting. **All councillors**

To place Open Spaces policy on the July agenda for approval. **Clerk**

11.06.25 Burial ground

1. Memorial Plaque for the late Roy Marr has been fitted to the memorial bench. The clerk has asked the contractor to clean the other plaques on the memorial bench.
2. It was agreed there would be a single charge for the burial of two sets of ashes at the same time. Clerk to advise accordingly.

12.06.25 Highways

Noted resurfacing of Yattendon Road was limited to the kerb in front of the Fox and a small patch in front of it. Other points on the road are marked for attention.

HPC decided not to update the footpaths leaflet, which references Hermitage House and does not show Eling Way. Cllr Cottingham has ~1,000 copies.

WBC is having a peer review of highways surfaces performed and has invited the consultation panel to provide input: A Teams meeting has been arranged but the Chairman (who is on the panel) cannot attend and has had no response to a query as to whether parish councils will be involved. Cllr Goldsmith to send date to Cllr Brown with view to attend. **Cllr Goldsmith**

The bollards at the end of Eling Way are dangerously low. Clerk has contacted WBC and they will be lifted.

13.06.25 HPC properties

13.1 Playgrounds

HPC had considered Annual Playground inspection reports regarding how to take forward.
Cllr Govier expressed the view that HPC should at least tackle the significant safety risk (Surface under Cantilever Swing in Pinewood) and not repair the Body Twist until someone complained.

He said that Hermitage Green was an exception and reiterated his previous view that cleaning/ painting the equipment should only be carried out by playground specialists. Cllr Goldsmith noted that the last time we had work done, the specialist would not do painting.

The safety officer (Cllr Goldsmith) said we should aim to reduce the minor hazards where it would not incur cost and aim to show we care about the equipment by keeping in good order.

It was agreed that there should be an initial review to see if the Thursday team or contractor can do some of the minor work. **Cllr Cottingham**

The Chairman wanted to understand what resurfacing options there might be to minimise the risk the swing surface needed repeat mending.

To contact Wicksteed (who did the inspections) to see if they had any recommendations not in the report, noting that there is a second layer of grass mat under the surface because this could not be lifted when the new surface was laid **Clerk**

To source manufacturer's maintenance requirements for swing and for gym equipment **Clerk**

Hermitage Green play area: to go back to original company to see what they recommend for the woodwork repainting that is required. **Clerk**

13.2 Furze Hill & Recreation Ground

Chairman had reported that rabbits had got under the fence in two places and dug dangerous holes in the playing field. Thursday team to consider repairs **Cllr Cottingham**

13.3 Other open spaces

Nothing to report.

13.4 Transfer of land off Pinewood Crescent

Fence is now installed but leaves "no-man's land" between gas regulator and back gardens.
Option of transfer to residents to be pursued **Cllr Cottingham**

At this point Ms Mogan left the meeting and the Chairman reduced discussion to important items. Other items to be deferred.

14.6.25 Other matters

14.1 Village Hall
After some discussion regarding accuracy and whether it was offensive, it was agreed that Cllr Goldsmith would apologise for naming Cllr Govier in her June Pathfinder article, as already offered to Cllr Govier **Cllr Goldsmith**

14.2 Defibrillators
Checks done.

14.3 Action plan from resident's survey April 2025
Working group's draft Action plan distributed to all.
To provide comments on plan **All Councillors**
To provide a link for councillors to add comments to a single version **Cllr Rigby**

14.4 Meeting start times.
Agreed 7.30pm for next meeting.

15.06.25 Other Correspondence received
Correspondence noted on agenda.

16.06.25 Reports on Meetings of Outside bodies
Cllr Govier attended The Downs Community Forum on 23rd April and provided a report.

17.06.25 Any other business (information only)
NALC advice on transferring to gov.uk website received. Message will be forwarded for councillors to follow links to discuss at next meeting.

18.06.25 Date of the next meeting
Thursday 17th July 2025 at 7.30pm in the Adelaide Room, Holy Trinity Church
There being no further business the meeting closed at 22.17pm.

Signed____________________________ Dated___________________________