

HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting of Hermitage Parish Council held at
Adelaide Room, Holy Trinity Church, Hermitage, Berkshire RG18 9ST
on Monday 27th October 2025 at 7.30pm

Present: Cllr A Goldsmith (Chairman), Cllr R Cottingham, Cllr D Brown, Cllr H Codling, Cllr P Dick, Ms N Pierce (clerk). Cllr V Burgess, Cllr M Foster & Cllr M Powers from item 05.10.25.

01.10.25 Public participation

1 member of the public attended to observe the meeting.

02.10.25 Apologies for absence

None

03.10.25 Minutes of meetings held on 18th September 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

None discussed

04.10.25 Declarations of interest

Cllr Burgess declared an interest in agenda item 12.5 Land off Pinewood Crescent.

05.10.25 Councillor Co-option

1. Proposal for co-option of Vanessa Burgess was seconded and carried unanimously
2. Proposal for co-option of Mark Foster was seconded and carried unanimously
3. Proposal for co-option of Martyn Powers was seconded and carried unanimously
All nominees provided signed declaration of acceptance of office and register of interest forms and were duly accepted onto council and joined the meeting at this point.

06.10.25 District Councillors Report and Information from West Berks Council

Report distributed 15th October. No questions raised.

07.10.25 Planning

7.1 New Applications

The following responses were agreed.

25/01838/FULMAJ, Field opposite Windmill Farm, Everington Lane, Hermitage RG18 9UG.

Change of agricultural land to a dog walking facility. No objection.

Draft response was agreed with the addition of replacement of elephant grass by native planting.

25/02069/HOUSE, The Corner House, Yattendon Road, Hermitage, Thatcham RG18 9RW. Two-storey infill rear extension and addition of rooflights to attic space. No objection.

25/02216/HOUSE. Long Barn, Yattendon Road, Hermitage, Thatcham RG18 9RQ. Proposed side dormers including Velux windows and internal alterations. No objection.

25/02359/FUL, Windmill Farm, Everington Lane, Hermitage, Thatcham RG18 9XP. Section 73: Variation of Condition 13 - BREEM of planning permission reference 22/03032/FUL

(Replacement of Existing Buildings with 2 no. Commercial Buildings Providing 5 no. Units for Use Class E(g) and B8 together with the relocation of an access and provision of car parking).

The proposal was that the BREEM requirement should be replaced by inclusion of a solar energy array and associated works. HPC objected on the grounds that it was not clear why BREEM could not be complied with, but advised that, if the development should be allowed, there should be additional screening and extension of existing footpath would be appreciated.

7.2 Decision notices

25/01756/HOUSE, Blenheim House, Deacons Lane, Hermitage, Thatcham RG18 9RH. Demolish existing rear extension and replace with rear single storey extension. Relocate off road parking to the side and front of property. Replace side wall with part fence, part wall over 1 metre.

WBC approved.

Cllr Dick questioned how the new councillors would be involved with the review of planning applications. Cllr Brown is the lead councillor on this but all councillors should each look at planning applications.

Cllr Foster would like some training on this. Clerk to look at BALC/HALC training and Cllr Foster to spend time with Cllr Brown.

Clerk

It was noted that applications and decisions rarely cite the Neighbourhood plan, so it is not obvious that this has been considered in reaching planning decisions; hence need for HPC to mention in responses as appropriate, and to appear professional. Cllr Cottingham to provide new councillors with copies of Neighbourhood plan and Design Code.

Cllr Cottingham

08.10.25 Finance

RFO report circulated and noted.

Financial position as of 30th September

Balance carried forward (Inc. S106 contributions)	£240,206.86
Receipts to 30 th September	£79,532.61
Authorised Payments to 30th September	£35,587.69
Payment not processed by 30th September	£550.00
Balance in hand (total)	£284,701.78

8.1 Payments for consideration

The following were approved.

Sunshine Commercial Services Ltd monthly charge	£331.56
Grass maintenance/Contractor	£805.25
Cost of administration	£1,159.97
HMRC, tax and NI	£188.39
Admin expenses, ink and laptop	£310.30
Tactical Management Ltd, dog bins (September)	£242.94
PKF External Auditors, limited assurance review to 31 st March 2025	£378.00
Redlynch Leisure Installations, surface beneath cantilever swing, P Park	£5,742.00
West Berkshire Countryside Society, 21 st October	£100.00
All approved and endorsed online on 28th October 2025	£9,258.41

Direct Debits previously approved

Noted.

1&1 Ionos (website) monthly payment for September	£8.40
NEST monthly payment for September	£113.94

8.2 Receipts September 2025

Precept £31,750

8.3 Receipts and Payments to date

1. Receipts and Payments to date reviewed. Cllr Dick expressed interest in a more detailed review of the receipts and payments to include the various bank accounts monies are held. He asked that we review what monies we hold to ensure we are maximising our holdings and can identify monies to invest in village facilities.

Cllr Cottingham advised that some of the lines would be over budget at the year end, but it was not currently clear that any would exceed the 10% deviation that requires formal approval.

Cllr Foster suggested a forecast column would be of use, or something to help predict position at year end. The Clerk noted that both trees and playgrounds can bring unexpected costs, the remaining costs are largely one-off annual payments or regular monthly payments.

8.4 Items for Budget 2026-27

Councillors were advised that, if they wanted any items to be funded under next year's budget, they should prepare a proposal including a justified cost and send to the clerk for consideration.

The Chairman has sourced budget prices for options to repair surfaces at Hermitage Green and Furze Hill playgrounds where they have shrunk and to add a new item (sprung animal) and provided separately. Since then, a WBC RoSPA inspection has advised that the trip hazard could be addressed by planting grass in the gaps; not previously suggested.

To consider options for playground surfaces to enable decision at next meeting

All

Clerk to draft the budget and forward to Cllr Cottingham

Clerk

9.10.25

Administrative matters

1. Financial Regulations

Cllr Cottingham is halfway through the review; Cllr Goldsmith has supplied her an edited version of model regs for consideration. Cllr Cottingham to complete and distribute to all prior to next meeting.

Cllr Cottingham

2. Progress update on review of Financial Risk Assessment and Schedule.

Work has been done on the Risk Assessment, clerk to circulate to all. The Health & Safety policy has been reviewed, no changes needed. Clerk to update website.

Clerk

3. Website. Update on potential upgrade and transfer to gov.uk domain

Govt wants all councils to move to gov.uk websites. Clerks will need to have gov.uk emails or similar to sign off 2026 AGAR. No councillor should be using personal email for PC business. Clerk has received feedback from several WB clerks on their email and website hosts.

Chairman has been looking into the issue and will forward info to new Cllrs. All Cllrs to advise what facilities they would like to have included in an RFQ by 31 October.

All

Chairman will then draft spec for comment and to send to selection of companies.

4. Agree actions arising from the final external auditor report

Response of Yes to Section 1, Assertion 5 was incorrect: risk management arrangements were not reviewed and approved by the authority during the year.

Chairman had reviewed in July and suggested changes, which clerk has responded to but still needs to be formally agreed and approved. To circulate to all.

Clerk

Section 2, Box 11 (a) had been marked "yes" in error, although the clerk had given the same response in previous years. Clerk to ensure correct for 2025-26.

The date recorded for AGAR approval was after the start of the period for the exercise of public rights. So, Assertion 4 should have been answered "no". Clerk to ensure proper provision for the exercise of public rights during 2026/27.

The Chairman noted that HPC needs to ensure that decisions and reviews are clearly minuted to demonstrate we have complied with requirements.

5. Update on purchase of new laptop (clerk)

Purchased and set up but software installation still required.

6. To consider 24 hours overtime payment to clerk for working during holiday

Approved. This was due to failure to retain sufficient councillors to remain quorate and to recruit in accordance with requirements.

7. To consider 10 hours overtime payment to clerk for additional work at year end preparing AGAR.

Approved. This is additional work to routine and has been approved in prior years.

8. Laying of Poppy Wreath – to agree representation

Clerk to collect the wreath and Cllr Burgess to lay the wreath at the service on 9th November.

Clerk/Cllr Burgess

9.1 Christmas Tree event 5th December

Cllr Burgess to liaise with The Fox and to design poster. Cllr Cottingham has booked the choir, Cllrs Cottingham/Burgess will arrange mince pies. Clerk to order Christmas Tree.

Cllr Burgess/Cllr Cottingham/Clerk

10.10.25 Burial ground

Nothing to report.

11.10.25 Highways

Further work is to be carried out shortly on Eling Way to finish the section by the railway line and associated signage. HPC thanks Clive Toombs of West Berkshire Council for his efforts to complete this Highway.

1.To receive/discuss update on road safety/parking hear Hermitage School

Cllr Dick advised Highways has not visited the school, some work has been done historically and as such WBC has stated it is not an imminent priority but will get accelerated up the list. Cllr Dick will chase monthly for progress. Police Team will visit at school drop off and collection times and issue tickets as appropriate. To update at future meetings

Cllr Dick

11.1 Speed reduction gate on Yattendon Road

Quotation approved in the sum of £591.36 plus VAT to replace post and repaint the gate.

Clerk to suggest to contractor that post savers are used to prevent rotting.

Clerk

12.10.25 HPC properties

12.1 Trees

Order placed with Ruskin Trees Consultancy for remedial works as price was lowest and within previously agreed budget. Contractor to provide a date for works to be done. Clerk/Cllr Cottingham to liaise with residents as necessary.

Clerk

The price for leylandii would feed into decision as to what to do with the land off Pinewood Crescent. To prepare a paper for the November meeting.

Cllr Cottingham

12.2 Playgrounds

Playground inspections have been done. The following Councillors agreed to carry out in November: Hermitage Green (DB) Furze Hill (VB) Pinewood Park (RC)

Future inspections to be included in discussion of councillor roles next month.

List/ detail of roles to be forwarded

Clerk/ Chairman

Noted that replacement of surface under Pinewood Park cantilever swing has been done.

HPC has received an offer for community-led upgrade of Pinewood Park but only enquiring about planning permission. No-one present or their contacts knew the individual who had offered or anything about consultation having taken place. It was agreed to invite the individual to present and discuss their proposals at the November meeting as an extension to the public participation session.

Clerk

12.3 Furze Hill & Recreation Ground

WBCS volunteers visited on 21st October; all tasks accomplished.

Cllr Goldsmith asked that rabbit holes on the recreation ground be filled on next visit and holes in the fence letting the rabbits through repaired properly: ground had been too hard

Cllr Cottingham

12.4 Other open spaces

Nothing to report.

12.5 Land off Pinewood Crescent

Land behind gas governor has been completely fenced off. Planning permission does not allow use for housing, so not clear if this would allow it to be part of a garden. Wimpey advised this has not been sold to the adjacent householder.

Nothing was agreed about consultation on the remainder of the land: see item 12.1.

13.10.25 Other matters

13.1 Village Hall

The Chairman noted that Dr Lawler had complained that previous minutes suggested that HPC had authorised parents to use the CH car park.

For avoidance of doubt, the Chairman stated that HPC has never given permission to anyone to use the VH car park, use by parents is courtesy of the VH trustees.

Rather than simply nominating someone to attend meetings as previously actioned, it was agreed to ask Trustees if they would like to have a HPC representative at meetings. Chairman to respond to Dr Lawler and to offer to meet to discuss if preferred. **Cllr Goldsmith**

13.2 Defibrillators

Checks done.

Chairman proposed that HPC take over responsibility for purchasing supplies for the defibrillator located at the Primary School for community use. Motion seconded and carried.

13.3 Eling Estate

Chairman has had an informal meeting with the Eling estate. Not discussed.

Cllr Cottingham advised that she had misunderstood an earlier discussion as meaning the Chairman had formally spoken to Eling Estate regarding trees (theirs and ours) currently fallen over fencing at FH with a view to them arranging works and splitting costs. Hence action not yet completed. **Cllr Cottingham**

13.4 BALC AGM Thursday 13th November 2025, 7.30pm to 9.30pm

1. Any proposed motions.

None, however, the date for motions had already passed.

2. To agree attendance.

Cllr Cottingham and Cllr Burgess to attend.

14.10.25 Correspondence received

Councillors to advise if they want to see any items listed separately. Clerk to prepare a communications list for monthly meetings as previously.

15.10.25 Reports on Meetings of Outside bodies

Cllr Cottingham and Cllr Goldsmith attended the District Parish Conference and had provided a brief note. Of note is that WBC is offering to provide services at cost to councils where it cannot afford to provide them without help; it was suggested this was akin to "going private" to beat BHS queues. Cllr Cottingham has a hand-out of what's currently being offered, but HPC did not currently see any need to use this service.

16.10.25 Any other business (information only)

None

17.10.25 Date of the next meeting

Thursday 20th November at 7.30pm in the Adelaide Room, Holy Trinity Church.

Use of the Woodland Lodge at the school will be retained as a possible alternative.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 21.34pm.

Signed:

Dated: