

BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL

www.boxleyparishcouncil.co.uk

Clerk - Mrs Pauline Bowdery
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To all members of the Council, public and press

7th November 2011

There will be a meeting of the **Finance Committee** on **Tuesday 15th November 2011** at 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 13th September 2011.**

To consider the minutes of the meeting and if in order to sign as a true record (previously circulated).

4. **Facebook and twitter.**

The Council's Community engagement strategy has identified that to engage all levels of the community consideration will be given to setting up a Boxley Parish Council facebook and perhaps a twitter account. A presentation will be given on facebook and twitter including advantages, disadvantages, management and risk.

5. **Matters Arising.**

5.1 Minute 2310/4.2 Accounting software. Members to receive an introduction to the system.

5.2 Minute 2310/5.3 Bad Debt. Warrant has been issued but no payment has been received. Clerk will give a final update at the meeting.

5.3 Minute 2311/8.4 Compassionate leave addition of parent to list, added by full Council.

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

6. **Financial report.**

6.1 Income/Expenditure report of 7th November 2011 will be submitted to the meeting on the night if not received earlier by post.

6.2 Reconciliation of accounts report of 7th November 2011 will be submitted to the meeting on the night if not received earlier by post.

6.3 Parish Councillor Audit, to receive Cllr Springates' completed audit form (enclosed).

7. **Walderslade Woods Group.**

A request to be considered for the release of some addition funding from the grant see report (page 2).

8. **Outstanding Time off in Lieu.**

Up to date details will be supplied at the meeting.

9. **Policy and procedures reviews and adoption.**

9.1 Grants policy and procedure see report (page 2 - 4).

9.2 Reserves policy sees report (page 4).

9.3 Annual Review Health and Safety and receive report on any accidents in the past 12 months (enclosed as a report for members).

10. **Draft 2012/2013 budget.**

- 10.1 To consider the draft budget (already circulated to members).
- 10.2 Ref 4.4.4 subsistence allowance. In 2012/13 a parish tour is scheduled. Do members wish to increase the subsistence allowance to subsidize the councillors lunch on the day of the tour. Under current guidelines councillors can claim up to £7.70 for a sandwich lunch if on council duties for over 4 hours.
- 10.3 Ref.PR gifts, do members wish to include a budget to purchase some gifts – details of what is available and the cost will be supplied at the meeting.
- 10.4 Ref 4.7.4 £10,000 Community Project Dragon’s Den style

11. **Internal Audit**

- 11.1 To receive the Independent Internal Auditors report, enclosed for members.
- 11.2 Review Independent Internal Auditor, to decide whether to extend the contract.

12. **Grant Request.**

- 12.1 Vinters Valley Local Nature Reserve see report (page 5).
- 12.2 The Samaritans see report and enclosure (page 5).

13. **Outstanding Project 2011/12 Update**

Website see report (page 5 - 6).

14. **Matters for Information.**

- 14.1 Transparency Code for local Councils see report (page 6 - 7)

15. **Date of Next Meeting.**

Tuesday 10th January 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 7 Walderslade Woods Group. *Purpose of report; to consider a request to release some additional funding from the frozen grant.*

The request is to release (in principle) up to £100 to purchase a bat detector. A member of the group has undertaken relevant training and with the equipment can monitor the bat presence and it is hoped that they will lead bat walks in the future.

Item 9.1 Grants policy and procedure *Purpose of item; to consider current policy and decide whether it is still fit for purpose.*

Policy

A grant is any payment or gift made by the Council to an organisation for a specific purpose. The law requires that Section 137 grants must be “in the interests of or will directly benefit the area or its inhabitants, or of part of it, or of some of it” and “the direct benefit should be commensurate with expenditure.” Similar considerations will apply when considering applications for other grants.

At the Finance Committee meeting in January an amount will be set from which grants will be allocated during the following financial year. Once the Grants budget is exhausted, the parish council will only consider emergency requests for assistance, and generally only from organisations with which it has close links.

Application Procedure

Organisations requesting financial assistance will be requested to submit:

- A completed application form.
- Copies of their last year end accounts.
- If possible, the number, or percentage, of members that belong to the organisation and live within Boxley Parish.
- Details of any restrictions placed on who can use/access their services.
- Confirmation (on the application form) that it agrees with the PC's Equal Opportunities Policy or give details of their own policy.

Organisations will normally be expected to have clear written aims and objectives, a written constitution and a separate bank account.

For grant requests for projects costing over £3,000 the Parish Council will require that the organisation has robust tendering regulations, e.g. obtaining a minimum of three tenders. The Parish Council reserves the right to request proof of the tender process. Projects notified to the Parish Council in advance and included in the Parish Council's budget documents will only have the funds released on completion of the work. Whilst Boxley Parish Council would not normally consider applications for Capital Projects, any such applications will require a more substantial case with supporting evidence of the community benefit.

Applications will not be considered from:

- Individuals.
- A political party.
- Private organisations operated as a business.
- "Upward funders" i.e. local groups where fund-raising is sent to a central HQ for redistribution.

Assessment Procedure

A grant request, once received in writing, will be considered at the next meeting of the Finance Committee.

Each application will be assessed on its own merits. However, to ensure as fair a distribution as possible of available funds, the Council will take into account the amount and frequency of any previous awards. Due account may also be taken of the extent to which funding has been sought or secured from other sources or fund raising activities. (The Clerk can advise on alternative funding sources).

Successful Applications

Organisations receiving grants are required to advise their users/members that the grant or equipment had been received from Boxley Parish Council. Where possible, the Council will affix an appropriate label.

Where equipment is gifted to an organisation, the parish council requires that it be insured and maintained at the expense of the user.

Boxley Parish Council Grant Application Form.

Please complete or attach the relevant information and send Boxley Parish Council, Beechen Hall, Wildfell Close, Chatham, Kent ME5 9RU. Tel 01634 861237 e-mail Bowdery@boxleyparishcouncil.co.uk

Application from

Title/organisation	
Contact details	
Telephone/email	

Please state or attach an explanation on the amount of grant requested, why you are applying for a grant and the potential benefits for the residents of the parish. If possible include the number or percentage of members that belong to the organisation and live within Boxley Parish.

If applicable, registered charity reference number.

Have you included a copy of the last year end accounts? YES/NO

Are there any restrictions placed on who can use/access the services. YES/NO.
Please supply details of any restrictions.

This application will not be accepted unless the organisations Equal Opportunities Policy of the organisation is attached or the following (which is the Parish Council’s equal opportunities statement) is signed as an acceptance of the principles.

“No service user, employee or job applicant will be discriminated against or receive less favourable treatment on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, disability, marital status, family commitments, sexual orientation, age, chronic medical condition, religious or political beliefs, social class or trade union activity.”

Signed..... date.....

Statement of understanding.

I have read and understood the Boxley Parish Council Grants Policy and Procedure information. and if a grant is awarded the organisation agrees to abide by the conditions outlined.

Signed.....date.....

Position in organisation.....

Item 9.2 Boxley Parish Council Reserves Policy. *Purpose of item; Members’ requested this be bought back to this meeting to consider whether to allow an amendment due to the change in the MBC Concurrent Functions Grant.*

Members are asked to consider whether they are happy with the way the review of investments is undertaken or whether they consider other methods should be used.

Boxley Parish Council has a number of long term projects, aspirations and liabilities and thus has fairly substantial and earmarked reserves; it also uses the interest gained from the reserves to keep the Precept low.

The Parish Council’s unallocated cash reserve will be maintained at about 33% of the ‘normal’ annual expenditure of the Parish Council and provision will be made in the annual budget for a donation to the reserves to ensure that this figure is met.

The Parish Council is aware that Maidstone Borough Council Concurrent Functions Grant however can be reduced or stopped with no notice. Boxley Parish Council therefore considers it prudent to retain sufficient reserves to ensure it could adequately function for 2 – 3 years if this grant was dramatically reduced or stopped.

Item 11 Grant requests. *Purpose of item; information and also to consider whether to award a grant or additional grant.*

11.1 Clerk's comment. When setting the 2010/11 budget (which was reduced on the previous year) members included a review, at the second grant installment, to the grant set. The review was to consider whether any of the reduced amount would be restored.

From Steve Songhurst, Warden Vinters Valley LNR.

I have attached an update on activities on Vinters Valley Nature Reserve over the last year, which you are free to distribute to your councillors as you feel appropriate. Additionally you might like to know that we keep our website www.vintersvalley.co.uk updated on all activities occurring in the reserve.

I would summarize the financial matters as follows :

The reserve needs around £25,000 a year to operate. During the last financial year (ending 31st August 2011) we raised £13000 from our 'Friends of the reserve' scheme , (an increase on previous years) but required a further £12000 to remain solvent. Boxley Parish Council's grant, plus a smaller grant from The Cobtree Charity Trust, has in the past provided around £6000 a year (ie 24% of our funding requirement). To date grants have totalled £3750 in 2011, £2250 below previous years. I am aware that currently BPC has provisionally agreed to make a second instalment payment of £1725 in the near future, which obviously would be very welcome indeed. During our last financial year, from our own fund generating activities (mainly reptile relocation projects) we were able to bridge the gap in our finances and so remain solvent, although things looked a bit sticky in March of this year!

Successful fundraising since March stabilised our immediate financial position and also funded the creation of three new ponds, plus an expansion to our wildflower meadow, thus re-investing the money in our core activity of creating and maintaining the reserve for the benefit of wildlife and visitors alike.

Funding priorities (in order of importance) for the next 12 months :

- 1) As always, we start with a £12,000 hole each year, to keep the reserve running. Much welcomed grants in the past have reduced this figure to a more manageable level.
- 2) Ideally we need another £2500 - £3000 to make improvements for visitors which includes, signage, pathways and interpretation boards.
- 3) Lastly, we need around £7500 for another pond and habitat enhancement project. Over the last 3 years we have self funded and built 6 new ponds and associated habitat enhancements, mainly for various amphibian species and to date we are 90% of the way towards achieving our goal, of making the reserve suitable for a Great Crested Newt introduction programme, providing a long term safe environment for another European protected species.

Item 1 is critical, items 2 & 3 will get done when and if funding becomes available.

I hope this summary and the attached more detailed report are sufficient for your needs, but do contact me if you need more information.

11.2 Samaritans. Request for a grant (letter enclosed for members. The Annual Report and Accounts for 2011 will be available at the meeting.

Item 13 Website – To give an update (as this impacts on the marketing plan) the following will be submitted to the Finance Committee.

The office has received Cllr Davies's recommendation for the software for the website and this would require purchase, installation and then the designing of the site and then transfer of the information. The office is currently under a lot a pressure with other large projects and does not have the time needed to get this project underway and completed and would like members to consider allowing the office to use an outside company to undertake the work.

The office technology budget was increased to £4,000 and the final spend totalled £2,729.00, leaving £1,271.00. This could be allocated towards purchasing the relevant software enabling the website to be updated. A preliminary quote has been received by the office, which will require further investigation, the initial cost has come in at £1,500.00. This amount includes all design, layout, prototypes and implementations. This amount includes the current 23 pages however the number of pages could be reduced to bring the cost within the budget (with the pages returned after the initial design). Whatever software is purchased it will be checked that the website can be controlled and updated from the office.

Due to the current lack of office time to progress this project It is important that some flexibility is identified to allow the work to be progressed (out of meeting) when time allows so the office is requesting some form of delegated power to be able to proceed. Members views are sought.

Item 14.1 Transparency Code for local Councils. *Purpose of item: information. Members are notified that the Council may in 2011/12 cross the threshold and guidance is being obtained on how this will affect Boxley Parish Council as scans of information may not be acceptable. Legislation states that they must be in a computer readable format.*

770/10 – Eric Pickles publishes final transparency code for councils

Senior staff salaries, spending over £500 and audits should all be regularly published by councils, according to the final code of practice on data transparency.

Following a consultation period earlier this year, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) yesterday issued the final version of the voluntary code.

Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles MP said, “Central government has a role in ensuring that local people can exercise their right to know how their money is being spent and have the information they need to question that spending.”

He said members of the public “shouldn't have to be data experts to see and understand” information published.

Ministers also repeated that they were “minded to make the code a legally binding requirement”, which could open local authorities to legal action if they failed to comply. However, this step would require further consultation.

The provisions in the code apply to all councils, including parishes, with a gross annual income or expenditure of £200,000 or more. National park, fire and rescue, integrated transport and police authorities will also be covered, as well as joint authorities of any kind.

Publication requirements include items of spending worth more than £500 and the salaries, job descriptions and budgets of employees paid more than £58,200, together with the total salary cost of all staff who report to them.

Councils will also have to provide information on the ratio between the highest salary and the average of the whole workforce, as well as councillors' allowances and expenses.

Authorities will also have to publish inspection and audit reports and the locations of publicly owned land and buildings.

To reduce the risk of fraud arising from data publication, the code says authorities should use the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) publication, *Managing the risk of fraud – actions to counter fraud and corruption*.

The code is built around the idea of ‘armchair auditors’. First advanced by Mr Pickles last year, this is based on the belief that encouraging members of the public to comb through information will provide an effective check on waste.

Releasing information “could provide a wealth of local knowledge and spark more improvements in the way services are delivered”, the DCLG said. It will also “open up new possibilities for real-time analysis and response and opportunities for small businesses to enter new markets.”