Highcliffe & Walkford Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of **Full Council** held on Wednesday 11th March 2026 at 18.30 in The Old School, 254 Lymington Road, Highcliffe. BH23 5ET.

Present: Cllrs A Sofianos (Chair), A Martin (Vice Chair), T Butcher, R Ede, B Hutchings, W McNeill, S Skinner, S Slatter, S Walters and J Webster.
In attendance: Nicki France (Assistant Clerk) and six members of the public.

323 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received and noted from Cllr D Martin (work commitments) & P Hilliard (prior engagement). Vanessa Ricketts – Clerk was also noted (approved annual leave) It was therefore:

RESOLVED: That the apologies for absence be accepted.

324 Declarations of interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

325 Minutes of meeting 14th January 2026

A member made an observation in relation to items 288 and 289 of the minutes. The minutes properly record that amendments in respect of these items had been agreed by Council, although councillors had not seen updated versions of the affected documents.

It was acknowledged that the minutes accurately recorded the decisions made at the relevant meeting. The Chair and Assistant Clerk offered to liaise with the Clerk upon her return from leave, and arrange the circulation of the updated documents in question.

RESOLVED: The minutes were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chair.

The updated documents relevant to items 288 & 289 will be circulated, with any further queries to be brought back to the next Full Council meeting if required.

326 Chair remarks:

The Chair noted that the Clerk was currently on annual leave for the next few weeks, and that the Assistant Clerk, would be covering this meeting and the upcoming Amenities meeting. Members expressed appreciation for Nicki's previous experience clerking Full Council meetings in recent times.

Two updates were provided since the last meeting:

- The appeal by the prospective developer of Jesmond Wood had been rejected, meaning the process returns to square one. Further details would be provided later in the meeting.

- Work on the High Street project had continued in line with recent Council resolutions. The Chair and Vice Chair had undertaken on-site measurements and photographic surveys to support the development of proposals. A request for further information and costings had been sent to BCP in accordance with previous resolutions, and the project would be brought back to Council once responses were received. With other projects progressing, it was hoped that the High Street could become the next major deliverable.

A Member raised a query regarding whether the High Street Working Group remained active following the restructuring of committees and working groups in November 2024. This would be double-checked and confirmed.

A Member raised concerns about the narrow width of the High Street pavements and the difficulty this creates for drivers, particularly older residents, when exiting vehicles. It was noted that pavement and highway widths fall under the remit of BCP Council as the Highway Authority. Previous attempts to address this had been rejected by BCP, though it was acknowledged that the matter could be revisited when the High Street project returns to the agenda.

327 Public Representation: None

328 BCP Councillors Reports

Cllr A Martin addressed the council:

Significant concerns remain regarding parking and road-safety issues around both the secondary school and Highcliffe St. Mark's School, including parents parking on yellow lines and unsafe driving during peak times. A meeting with residents of Nada Road had taken place, and a site visit with BCP traffic officers was scheduled to assess the situation further.

An update was also provided on the High Street improvement proposals submitted to BCP, which include repainting all existing bollards, installing additional bollards between Bure Close and Stanley Road to prevent vehicles mounting and damaging the pavement, repairing areas of sunken paving, installing new planters and benches, and repainting the metal railings between Mill Lane and the roundabout to enhance the entrance to Highcliffe. Wider structural changes, such as widening parking bays, were noted as outside the current scope due to cost.

Further updates included BCP’s ongoing consideration of the former day centre building for potential SEND provision; progress on the shoreline paths project, with planning applications submitted and works expected to commence in spring or early summer; and notification that the Wolverley Road recycling centre would be closed for maintenance from 23–27 March. Members were also informed of recent vandalism at the seafront shelters, with damage to panels and railings, and a site meeting with BCP officers was arranged to address repairs and ongoing issues. Recognition was given to local volunteers who regularly support the community through litter-picking and maintenance work, with suggestions that formal thanks be offered.

329 Resolutions report

Members received and reviewed the actions against resolutions report:

Members discussed the structure and presentation of the ongoing issues report. It was suggested that all ongoing items be grouped at the start of the document, with completed items removed at the appropriate time, as previously planned by the Clerk. Members noted that the report had become lengthy and that reordering it would improve clarity and prevent repeated questions about previously resolved matters.

A Member raised a query related to an action from Minute 291 of the previous meeting (regarding the access road to Roeshot Hill Allotments). An action was taken, but the relevant matter remains unresolved, and may take time to conclude. The ongoing item will be flagged for inclusion in the next version of the resolutions report. In the meantime, the Chair confirmed that the sale of the adjacent site has not yet been finalised, and the Clerk will continue to chase for updates on this. The Chair also confirmed that the issue had been raised in a recent meeting with the Roeshot Allotment Committee.

330 Finance

Members considered Part A (financial statements, receipts and payments, and bank statements for January and February) and Part B (bank reconciliations for the same period).

a) Members noted the approved schedule of Accounts and the current bank balances for January and February.

A Member raised a query regarding the internal checking of invoices. It was explained that invoices are manually reviewed by the Chair or Vice-Chair alongside the Clerk or Assistant Clerk, with initials recorded as evidence for audit purposes. A further check also occurs when authorised signatories approve payments through the bank, separately from officers entering them.

Clarification was also sought on a payment of £1,010 marked in the accounts as for “eco areas”. The Assistant Clerk offered to double-check what this payment related to, and to confirm this outside the meeting.

With no further questions, members resolved to approve the financial statements, receipts and payments, bank statements, and authorised the Chair to sign them. The proposal was moved, seconded, and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that the schedule of account and bank balances be approved and signed by the Chair.

b) Members noted the bank reconciliations for January and February.

A Member raised a query regarding the assurance available to members when signing the bank reconciliation, particularly regarding large cumulative figures such as total receipts across the year to date. It was noted that while the Unity Trust Bank balance is directly verified through statements, other total figures are system-generated and rely on the accounts system and the Council’s internal processes.

The Member also queried whether the Chair should be signatory of the reconciliation, or whether the Clerk should sign instead. It was agreed that this query would be reviewed by the Clerk upon her return from leave.

The Member also raised a query regarding the provision of the quarterly budget monitoring report for Q3, which will also be reviewed by the Clerk upon her return from leave.

RESOLVED that the Bank Reconciliations be approved and signed by the Chair.

331 Health and Safety Policy

Members considered the draft Health and Safety Policy and accompanying handbook, which had been sourced by the Clerk after identifying that the Council did not currently hold a comprehensive policy of this type. It was noted that the combined documents totalled over 130 pages and were based on a standard template commonly provided to parish councils. Members discussed the relevance of certain sections, particularly those referring to employees, contractors, environmental responsibilities, and operational matters that may not directly apply to the Council's activities.

A Member queried where the policy covered councillors, and whether this should explicitly address the responsibilities of councillors themselves. It was agreed that this point would be referred to the Assistant Clerk for clarification.

Members also discussed how the policy interacts with the Council's insurance arrangements, with reassurance given that councillors are covered under existing liability policies should an incident occur. It was acknowledged that, as with many council policies, the document is intentionally broad to ensure compliance and demonstrate that the Council has appropriate procedures in place, even where some sections may be more relevant to officers than to members.

No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED: Members agreed to adopt the Health and Safety Policy. The Chair was authorised to sign the required acknowledgement page on behalf of the Council once the final document is prepared and printed.

332 Grants Policy

Members considered the draft Grants Policy, noting that its purpose was to introduce a fairer and more structured approach to awarding community grants. It was explained that, in previous years, the grants budget had been opened each April and allocated on an ad-hoc basis, which had occasionally resulted in a large proportion of funds being committed immediately, leaving limited scope for later applications.

The proposed policy introduces two assessment windows each year, in September and March, with the annual grants budget divided between them to ensure a more balanced distribution of funds. Members discussed the clearer criteria within the policy regarding eligible and ineligible applications, as well as the new requirement for recipients to provide follow-up information on how grant funding had been used.

A proposal was made to add the word "normally" to two sections of the policy—first, the clause limiting organisations to one application per year, and second, the clause splitting the budget equally between the two windows—to allow flexibility in exceptional circumstances. Members agreed that this amendment would preserve discretion while maintaining fairness.

RESOLVED: to adopt the Grants Policy subject to the inclusion of the proposed wording changes.

333 Meeting Dates

Members considered the draft schedule of meetings for the forthcoming Council year, noting that it followed the established pattern of Full Council on the second Wednesday of each month and Amenities on the fourth Wednesday, in line with room availability. It was reported that the proposed date for the September Staffing Committee meeting was no longer available, and members agreed to provisionally schedule it for 30th September 2026, with flexibility to amend nearer the time.

A question was raised about the number of months in which no Full Council meeting is held, and the impact this may have on opportunities for the public to raise matters formally. Members noted that although Full Council is not formally scheduled to meet in April, August, December or February, Planning and Amenities Cmtee meetings take place at other times through the year, providing alternative opportunities for public engagement, and that the concentration of meetings from late March to May makes an additional Full Council meeting difficult to coordinate.

It was also highlighted that residents regularly raise issues directly with ward councillors (and the chair) outside formal meetings.

Members further noted that committee membership would be reviewed at the Annual Council meeting in May. A Member requested that at the appropriate time, the terms of office for committee appointments would be explicitly recorded in accordance with standing orders. With these points acknowledged, it was therefore

RESOLVED: the meeting schedule was approved, subject to the amended September Staffing Committee date.

334 Council Insurance

Members considered the annual insurance quotation from the Council's appointed insurer. A query was raised regarding the previous year's premium, and it was confirmed that the 2025–26 premium had been £2,080, representing an increase of approximately 10% in the new quotation. Members noted that the rise may in part reflect updated valuations of insured assets, including Nea Meadows, Wingfield Sports Ground and the office contents. It was suggested that the Council should, at an appropriate point in the future, test the market to ensure continued value for money. No further questions were raised, and members agreed that the cover provided remained appropriate for the Council's needs.

RESOLVED: to accept the insurance quotation as presented, with the proposal seconded and carried unanimously.

335 Old School Update

Members noted the report that the Clerk had prepared, and the two governance options now available for the transfer of the Old School following updated legal clarification.

Option 1, the direct transfer of the building to the Parish Council, remains the simplest route, offering clear governance and the ability to complete the process in

the summer, though it would not allow the cottage to be transferred until after the next election when the Council may qualify for the General Power of Competence.

Option 2, involving the Parish Council becoming sole trustee of a newly converted CIO, would allow the cottage to be included immediately and may offer financial advantages, but would introduce significant administrative and governance complexity, including the need for entirely separate staffing, banking and operational systems.

Members discussed the risks, workload and potential delays associated with Option 2, as well as the importance of progressing the project after several years of work. Following debate, it was therefore:

RESOLVED: to proceed with Option 1, the direct transfer of the building to the Parish Council.

336 Allotment Fees

Members considered the annual review of allotment rents, noting that rising maintenance, administrative and improvement costs made an update necessary. It was confirmed that the last rent review took place in March 2024 and that, under allotment legislation, tenants must be given 12 months' notice of any change, meaning a decision was required now for implementation on 1 April 2027.

Members discussed the current rent of £9.50 per standard rod and the recommendation to apply an increase of between 2–4%. It was noted that the most recent inflation figure (January RPI) was 3%, and that setting the increase now would protect tenants from potential higher inflation over the coming year.

Clarification was provided that both the Roeshot Hill and Walkford Road allotment sites were included, and that the Allotment Association is in the process of formalising its charitable status as part of wider governance updates. Members agreed that rents should be reviewed annually going forward, using the January inflation figure each year to allow sufficient time for statutory notice to be issued by 1 April.

A proposal was made and seconded to apply a 3% increase to allotment rents from 1 April 2027, to adopt an annual review process based on the January RPI figure, and to continue monitoring site maintenance requirements. The proposal was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED: To apply a 3% increase to allotment rents from 1st April 2027, this 3% being the RPI rate at January 2026.

337 UK Town of Culture

Cllr A Martin addressed the council on BCP Council's intention to submit an expression of interest for the newly established UK Town of Culture competition, which sits alongside the long-running UK City of Culture programme. Although the competition is designed for single towns, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has invited Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to submit a joint bid.

The expression of interest will be submitted by the end of the month, and if shortlisted, BCP will receive £60,000 and six months to prepare a full bid. The winning town will receive £3 million to deliver a year-long programme of cultural

activity in 2028. Members were advised that the bid is being developed in partnership with a wide range of cultural organisations, from major institutions such as the BSO and Lighthouse to grassroots and community groups. Parish and town councils are identified as key stakeholders, and the Parish Council was invited to endorse the bid and, if successful, participate in cultural activity in 2028.

Members expressed verbal support and noted the importance of ensuring that any future funding benefits communities across the whole conurbation, including Highcliffe and Walkford.

338 Cliffhanger Toilets Update

Cllr A Martin updated members on the planned improvements to public toilets, noting that funding originally allocated in last year's budget had been reduced due to the High Street improvement programme. It was reported that the Cliffhanger had previously intended to install a new block of toilets as part of its site remodelling, but this was withdrawn when neither BCP Council nor the Parish Council was willing to assume responsibility for the ongoing cleaning and maintenance, which sits within the operator's lease obligations. As a result, the Cliffhanger is instead refurbishing the existing facilities.

The Parish Council has been exploring the possibility of match-funding improvements to enhance durability, reduce vandalism and improve usability, but a formal quotation from the Cliffhanger has not yet been provided despite repeated requests. The operator has indicated that the total cost is likely to be under £25,000, and a detailed quote is expected shortly. Members expressed disappointment that the proposed new toilets had been removed from the plans by the Cliffhanger, noting that they had been a significant feature of earlier designs. The matter will be brought back to a future meeting once full costings and further project information are available.

339 Highcliffe Library Decking Update

Cllr A Martin updated members on the proposal to replace the decking at the rear of Highcliffe Library, following earlier discussions about the suitability of using CIL funding. It was confirmed that CIL was not an appropriate funding source, and members had previously suggested that the library service submit a grant application instead. The updated quotation for the works is £6,800, only slightly higher than the original 2024 estimate.

The library service outlined the current and potential uses of the decking area, including children's sessions such as Wiggle and Rhyme, toddler groups, reading groups, outdoor seating for residents, and a safe enclosed space for families and older residents who regularly use the library as a warm and welcoming community hub. Members noted that BCP Council has no available budget for maintenance or improvements to library buildings, and that without Parish Council support, the works would not proceed.

Members expressed broad support for the project in principle and agreed that a formal grant application should now be submitted. The Assistant Clerk will provide the new grant application form to Cllr. Martin, who will liaise with the library service to complete and return it for consideration at a future meeting.

340 Jesmond Wood Update

Members received an update following the Planning Inspector's decision to dismiss the developer's appeal regarding Jesmond Wood. The Inspector rejected the application at the first stage, confirming that the land is not suitable for development, particularly on environmental grounds. Members welcomed the decision but noted that the long-term security of the site remains unresolved while it remains in private ownership.

The Council discussed the current uncertainty around next steps. Options include approaching the landowner to explore a transfer or sale to the community, waiting for the landowner to initiate contact, or the possibility that the landowner may seek to sell the land back to BCP Council. Members noted that the original sale contract (2015/16) requires the owner to use "all reasonable endeavours" to pursue development; it is likely that this threshold has now been met, meaning BCP Council may need to determine whether the owner can be released from those obligations. If so, BCP may need to consider reacquiring the land at the original sale price plus interest.

Concerns were raised about the condition and safety of the fencing around the site, which has been repeatedly reported to BCP without action. Members expressed frustration that previous requests to address the fencing had not been pursued by BCP, despite sections having blown onto the footpath in high winds. While some members wished to see the fencing removed, others noted the importance of protecting the wildlife corridor and avoiding uncontrolled public access.

It was agreed that the matter remains in a holding position until the landowner or BCP Council indicates their intentions. Cllr. Martin will raise the fencing issue again with BCP and seek clarification on available options.

341 Matters for Consideration

Members were invited to propose subjects for future agendas.

A request was made to consider additional Christmas decorations, specifically exploring whether a tree or festive feature could be installed on the opposite side of the Highcliffe traffic lights, as local businesses in that area felt overlooked. This will be incorporated into the forthcoming Christmas planning discussions, expected at the April Amenities Committee.

A Member raised the maintenance of the grassed area along Beacon Drive and the slope leading down to the cliff, and that the land, currently maintained by BCP Council, had only been cut once in 2025 and was in poor condition. Members noted that the Parish Council's remit traditionally focuses on maintaining assets directly owned or managed by the Council, and that any transfer of land would need to demonstrate clear benefit to the wider community. The Chair will discuss the matter with the Clerk and report back on whether it should be brought forward for formal consideration.

Members were reminded that additional suggestions can be submitted to the Chair or Clerk by email at any time.

342 Parish Meeting Date

Members noted the date of the Annual Parish Meeting, which is a public community event rather than a formal meeting of the Parish Council. The meeting will take place

on Wednesday, 27 May, at the usual time. It was confirmed that the event will follow the established format, providing an opportunity to reflect on the Parish's achievements over the past year and engage with residents, with refreshments available. One apology for absence was received from Cllr B Hutchings.

343 Date of the Next Meeting

Wednesday 13th May 2026 at 6.30pm

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 20:28.

Signed …….. Date ……