

## **Heart of Buxted Notes**

**Good evening, everybody and thank you for coming out tonight**

**I am Vivienne Blandford, chair of Buxted PC. You will have three presenters this evening, all giving you a different aspect of a possible new hall project. I became involved with the new hall when I first joined the PC way back in 2009, so I'm good on the history. Apologies to those who know the history, but I am sure there will be those here tonight who are not so familiar with the trials and tribulations of the recent years.**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> slide      So What has Changed**

#### **There is a Long History concerning new village halls**

The 1<sup>st</sup> attempt to build a new hall, that I know about, was back in 1948 and then 20 years later. It is interesting to note the problems are the same, lack of funding, lack of enthusiasm, where to build, it is only time that changes. However, tonight, we are now talking about a more recent attempt, one that kicked off with the village plan, published in 2006 and has rumbled on ever since.

At the very beginning it was decided that a separate charity would be set up to build and manage the new hall project with the parish council helping with some funding and obtaining the planning permission. Incidentally, obtaining the planning permission was thought to be the easy bit. With hindsight, obtaining planning permission was a major stumbling block. To begin with, the project was called 'the Heart of Buxted Initiative'. The new build was to be on the Ionides land, surrounding by green spaces and as close to a village green as we were ever likely to achieve. The charity took on the name the Buxted Village Hall Community Trust.

Earlier the discussions started with WDC in 2008 regarding a co-joined development of a new parish hall and surgery. However, the surgery project went ahead faster than the new hall project and the two architects did not agree with each other. The hall project had many public meetings and different interested bodies which grew ever smaller over time. Finally in 2011 the first planning application was submitted. It was not until March 2012 that issues were raised by WDC Planning. We were to find out about the no development rule within 7km of Ashdown Forest and the planning application had to be withdrawn or it would be otherwise refused. Also, the new hall was deemed to be too large.

### **3rd slide      What has Changed**

#### **Planning permission obtained for both new hall and Reading Room site**

Negotiations took place to change the design for a smaller hall, agree the old one could not be sold and would have to be left empty with very restricted parking at the new hall. Planning permission was eventually obtained with compromises on both sides.

From the very outset of the plans to provide a new hall for Buxted it had been the intention to sell the Reading Room as it would no longer be required. Initially WDC put on a planning condition that when the new hall was built the old one would be 'mothballed' boarded up and could not be used for any purpose, but this was one of the negotiated changes. Subsequently the parish council started the process of obtaining planning permission for the Reading Room site which turned out to be a somewhat controversial one. After various consultations, the proposed development was scaled back, and planning permission was secured for two semi-detached small houses on the site.

### **Buxted Community Hall Trust:**

As a result of the many setbacks, lack of a lease, lack of funding and lack of any real enthusiasm from the wider village led the original committee to call it a day, wind up their committee in 2019 and they transferred the balance of their funds to the Ionides Trust to be kept for a new hall fund.

### **Demise Reading Room:**

When the new hall project was mothballed the parish council decided to renovate the Reading Room. Unfortunately, not so easy a task as surveys and subsequent advice on Health and Safety aspects proved that it would take some £200,000.00 to complete, over time, the job satisfactorily. The parish council made the decision to close it permanently. The bottom image shows just how rotten the windows are, an easier picture to take than the condition of the roof.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> slide      What has Changed**

### **Lease:**

Finally in 2020 the lease was signed by the scouts after having taken around six years of negotiations. A draft lease had already been drawn up for the new village hall site with the Ionides Trust. The images shows the scout and hall leased areas.

### **PC more active role:**

The parish council thought it good opportunity to talk to the village at the annual assembly to try to gauge whether there is community enthusiasm for a new hall project to be restarted.

## **4<sup>th</sup> slide      What's already been achieved?**

### **Groundworks**

Phase 1 of the groundworks were begun in late in 2017. This was in order to keep the planning permission extant for perpetuity. The groundworks included the construction of a new access with crossover and gates. Re-alignment of the access track, disabled parking space and some of the foundations for the community hall.

## **4<sup>th</sup> slide      What's already been achieved?**

### **A good amount of regeneration of the open space**

This has been ongoing ever since the Ionides Trust began to collect rent and for the first time had money to carry out regular maintenance and improvements to the land.

There were lengthy landscaping negotiations with contractors about earth moving with both the surgery build, and the car park build took place as WDC stipulated that the spoil was not to be taken off site. This led to some levelling of the site and more interesting landforms all laid to rough grass.

This also enabled the removal of hedge line between Ionides Land and recreation land, making one big open space joining the two parts together. 106 developer led funds were used to install play equipment and enough left over funds to maintain it. All this was carried out by the Ionides Trust who have always worked in close collaboration with the Buxted Community Hall Trust, the PC and since 2018 the PC as Managing Trustees of the Ionides Trust. We now employ a contractor to help maintain the recreation and Ionides Land.

## **5<sup>th</sup> slide      What's already been achieved?**

Plan of groundworks

Work that has already been completed showing the footings, levelling off of the access and making the access to Framfield Road ESCC Highways compliant.

## **6<sup>th</sup> slide      What's already been achieved?**

**Car Park**

Using the plans for the new village hall the community car park was enlarged and a fit for purpose surface laid with drainage around the children's playground. This was completed between lockdowns, and I now notice it is becoming busy again.

**Covid memorial**

Late last year the COVID memorial was installed, an enterprise suggested, and part paid by local residents. The cherry trees looked stunning this spring and have taken well. All part of a well maintained green open space in the heart of Buxted.

## **7<sup>th</sup> slide      What's already been achieved?**

**Plan hall**

Finally, a plan of the new hall and there are some paper copies and please feel free to ask any questions about these later. I will do my best to answer them.

**Now Peter Coxon** who was involved with that village plan of 2006 when a new hall was on the wish list of the residents of Buxted.

**Following Peter and James**

The chairman reiterated the need for new parish councillors or committed people to help take the project forward. The current parish council cannot take this project on without some dedicated help and is it something the villages wishes to take forward anyway?

Clipboard were circulated for interested people to leave contact details. Everyone in attendance to come and talk to us afterwards.

Open floor for discussions