



# BUXTED

## PARISH COUNCIL

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10<sup>th</sup> August 2021

### MINUTES

**Minutes of the meeting of the Council held in the Reading Room, Church Road, Buxted on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at 7.30 p.m.**

**Present:** Cllrs. Blandford (Chairman), Cox, Coxon, Humphrey, Johnson, McQuarrie, Moss and Roberts.  
Also present: ESCC Cllr. Galley and Clerks Beccy Macklen and Claudine Feltham.

**Public:** 6

A local resident and member of the Horticultural Society wished to raise the following points:

1. The application for development at Moorings, High Street was refused at the WDC Planning Committee 9 votes to 3. She wished to thank the PC for its support. We continue to await the outcome of the appeal for the previous application.
2. She also wished to address the issue of the Reading Room and would ask the PC to retain a community facility within the village albeit the existing RR or new hall as St Mary's Hall is smaller than the RR. She also requested any facility should have a stage to support the Horticultural Society and Buxted Players who have used the existing Reading Room for many years.

Member of the Buxted W.I. – commented that after reading social media posts she believes that the parish council been on the receiving end of some extremely unfair comments, and she wished this to be noted.

Member of the Art Club – She expressed that as much as she wished to keep the Reading Room, she is still against spending too much money on it when hardly anyone uses it. Whatever you spend on it, to then market it for new groups is going to be very difficult.

Members of the parish council expressed their thanks for the positive response from those members of the public who had attended the meeting in person and who had spoken at this point in the meeting.

**01/08/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received and accepted from Cllrs Bolton, Illingworth, Marshall, Rose, ESCC Cllr Galley and clerk Claudine Feltham

**02/08/21 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**

All councillors declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Ionides Trust by virtue of the parish council being managing agents of the site.

Cllrs. Cox and Moss declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the allotments by virtue of being an allotment holder's

Cllr. Moss declared a personal interest in matters relating to a wildflower area on the Ionides site (see Ionides Trust update below) due to requester being a family member.

03/08/21 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING** The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

04/08/21 **ESCC/WDC REPORT**

None, due to the absence of both Cllrs Galley and Illingworth

05/08/21 **OUTSTANDING MATTERS**

**Mobile Phone Coverage:** No update

**Public footpaths:** Nothing to report

**Trees:** Noting to report

**Road Safety:**

• **Parking issues on Buxted High Street and Police response**

For some time now the Parish Council and a local resident has been in contact with Sussex Police with regards inconsiderate and illegal parking in the layby opposite Crusader Vehicles (which has time limitations) and the zig zag lines outside Buxted village shop. Despite providing photographic evidence we have been advised of the following by Sussex Police:

*“Unless the parking is causing a significant obstruction which is significantly dangerous, we will not issue parking tickets. Obviously, pedestrians trying to cross whilst a car is parked on zigzags is something which would fit into this category and something my team and I will continue to look out for when patrolling Buxted. I also identified this issue to the Parish Council, and I have sent them several emails in relation to pushing funding for signs in the area. Have you also made contact with them as I advised?”*

*Officers with the power to issue tickets have been advised by our Chief Superintendent not to issue tickets unless vehicles are dangerously parked. Although the school bus stopping on a main road can cause traffic to build, the parking is not considered to be dangerous and therefore, we will not issue tickets in these circumstances. I appreciate that the bus stopping on the road could present an issue if cars are carelessly/dangerously overtaking the bus. I will try and arrange for more police presence in the area with your local PCSO when school is running to try and combat this. Further, the Chief Superintendent for my team has been having meetings with the council and the MP for Wealden (Nusrat Munir Ul-Ghani) in relation to how we can move forward with parking as this an overall issue in Wealden which we currently do not have the capacity to deal with as effectively as we would like. I would encourage you to express your concerns over parking enforcement to Nusrat as she may be able to review the current system and provide additional council resources that would allow parking to be enforced*

*more efficiently.”*

The Parish Council has looked at the area outside of the shop and it would be very difficult to install any signage or erect any new poles to house the signage, therefore the only possibility would be to contact the resident in front of the zig zag lines to ask if a sign could be attached to the wall – clerk pursuing this possibility.

The issue with parking matters appears is that Sussex Police do not have the resources and are therefore forcing the hand of the County Council to decriminalise parking as per the majority of councils in the country. However, WDC and ESCC are strongly resisting this option as it would mean charging for on street parking and car parks which would affect the trade all the small towns and villages in the district.

It was **agreed** to write again to Nus Ghani raising this issue and to ensure the Chief Superintendent and the Police Crime Commissioner are also copied in. Any response received would be published.

**Wealden Local Development Framework: No update**

**Property issues:**

- **Reading Room – Response from Insurance company and way forward**

At the time of the meeting, the parish council had not yet received a response from the insurance company. However, in the light of misinformation circulating on social media the clerks wished to make the following statement:

#### **Statement from Buxted Parish Council Clerks Regarding the Refurbishment/Redevelopment of The Reading Room**

Buxted Parish Council has a policy of councillors not responding to social media posts (unless factual information), however as Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer of Buxted Parish Council, Claudine and I as clerks have felt that some recent posts have brought into question our integrity of running the council and its finances, therefore it is important for us to provide as much accurate information to parishioners as possible, in this case in relation to the status and historical facts regarding the Reading Room.

#### **Redevelopment of the Reading Room in Association with a New Hall**

In 2006 parishioners gave a clear steer to the Parish Council via the Parish Plan that a new hall was desired in the village of Buxted. The Parish Plan gave leverage to the Parish Council to request funds towards a new hall from the redevelopment of the Grampian site, Five Ash Down (which is now Ashdown Place). The new hall would be situated on the Ionides Trust site and be fit for purpose for all types of user groups, surrounded by open green space with full disabled access. Funds were secured from the developer of £108,000 which were tied by legal agreement to be spent on or associated with building a new hall for Buxted. As part of this project, the Parish Council agree to support a community led project wherever possible, which included eventually selling the Reading Room for redevelopment to provide funds for the new hall. To this end and when it seemed that the new hall would be going ahead the Parish Council secured planning permission for semi-detached houses on the site of the Reading Room in preparation for when the funds were needed.

#### **What Changed? Why Then Refurbish the Reading Room?**

The new hall was always a community led project, supported by the Parish Council, but sadly a number of circumstances eventually led to the Buxted Community Hall Trust folding in 2019. By this stage, the footings for the new hall had been

completed which means the project could still be taken forward at any future time. At this point the Parish Council were left with a situation where they could either take up the hall project or look to refurbish the existing Reading Room. As enthusiasm and drive for a new hall (or at least the one which had permission) had dissipated, the Parish Council decided to refurbish the Reading Room. A survey was sent to each user group and every household in the village and advertised online. This questionnaire asked for what improvements/changes could be made; however, it did not give the option of the closing the hall as this was never the intention. We received a very small response of 3% which mostly highlighted the improvements which were already thought to be necessary.

Once a decision was made, it was always the intention of the Parish Council to refurbish the Reading Room, and this is reflected in the working party notes from 2019 to the beginning of this year. Professional advice was sought, and fire and electrical wiring surveys were undertaken, highlighting some serious issues. It was only when the surveyor provided total estimated costs of £200,000 for works, that a refurbishment was brought into question. The Parish Council initially budgeted £50,000 of public money towards the project, with a total possible spend of up to £100,000. However, when the estimate of £200,000 was provided this presented the Parish Council with a very difficult decision, given that it does not have this much money to spend.

**Parish Council funds are public money, and the Parish Council has a responsibility to provide best possible value for that money. Can the Parish Council therefore justifiably spend parishioners' money (or money raised by grants if available) on a village hall that is grossly underused and even if modernised and would always have a limited usage due to its design, layout, and lack of parking?**

#### **Current Usage of the Reading Room**

In the last 'normal' year, 2019, the regular user groups were the daytime Art Club (once a week), Evening Art Club (once a week), W.I. (once a month), Horticultural Society approx. 6 times per year and Buxted Players (2 weeks, 2 times per year in addition to rehearsal times). There were four other ad hoc hires of the hall that year. Two groups use the Reading Room free of charge, this is a long-standing arrangement. All of this is very different to the thriving hall in Five Ash down and a well utilised hall in High Hurstwood.

Costs for the Reading Room for financial year 2018-19 were £3,693 revenue and £6,159 expenditure

Yes, the hall is a community asset and is heavily subsidised by the Parish Council, but is this enough usage to warrant a £200k spend on the hall without a guaranteed increased income?

**The Parish Council has knowingly allowed the Reading Room to get into a state of disrepair?**

This is untrue, the Parish Council has continued to maintain and repair the hall, when necessary, which has included a new heating system, various roof repairs and very recently the installation of a telephone and internet line. What it has not done however is to replace the entire wiring system or replace the roof and windows with all up to date requirements at a large expense when it was the intention to demolish the hall to provide capital funds for the new facility. The estimated costs of £200,000 now include all the above in addition to the requirements for the fire regulations and installation of a new kitchen and toilets (all of which can be viewed on the agenda details for the 10 August 2021 parish council meeting)

#### **What Happens Next?**

Armed with the knowledge from the surveys, the Parish Council remains very uneasy to continue to use the hall in the long term until further advice has been

received from our insurers which is the position, we are currently in. The safety of the hall users is paramount which in part explains why the estimated costs are so high. It is also important to note that those volunteer Cllrs would be personally liable should something happen, and we were considered deemed not to have taken action to prevent it following the receipt of the surveys. At the current time and until clarification is sought from the insurance company the hall will not be available for hire.

As mentioned above, Parish Council money is public money, your money, and councillors are unpaid, volunteer custodians of these funds with a responsibility of spending where necessary and for best value.

Finally, I would comment that all parish council finances are audited both internally (by an internal auditor outside of the parish council) and externally by a government appointed auditor and are also available to any member of the public on request.”

It was noted that all contributors to the social media post were absent from the meeting. Therefore, the statement will be included in the minutes and uploaded to the Facebook pages, BPEC with a link to the PC website for further information.

All councillors endorsed the production of the above statement and agreed that some of the posts were calling into question the integrity of the paid officers of the parish council which is completely unacceptable. Councillors wished it to be recorded within these minutes that they understand why the clerks were upset and applaud the decision to provide the statement and wholeheartedly agree with the statement.

Cllrs. discussed whether there should be a small group of councillors who would collectively respond to social media statements via the clerk. This matter is to be referred to the September meeting when there are more councillors in attendance. It was agreed that the provision of factual statements, posted, to social media would be acceptable and perhaps avoid future misunderstandings.

**Communications Matters:** Nothing to report.

## 06/08/21 **CORRESPONDENCE**

P1 Local Resident - Request that the parish council contact Nus Ghani MP with regards the lack of parking enforcement by the Police (see Road Safety above)

P2 Local Resident - Request for a larger dog bin at Buxted Park (clerk has asked Buxted Park if they are prepared to replace the existing one) – clerk has contacted Buxted Park and they have provisionally agreed to replace the dog bin with a larger one on the proviso that they are not charged more for emptying. I confirmed that it is in fact the Parish Council that pays for the emptying of the bin.

P3 Buxted Allotment Association - Request that the PC help with filling holes on the allotment track – Despite the clerk asking the owner of the track to contribute to the repairs, no response has been received. Therefore, as the condition of the track is only likely to worsen, it was **agreed** to purchase some crane sacks of Type 1 aggregate given that the allotment holders themselves have volunteered to carry out the work to fill the holes. The landowner will be made aware that this work will be taking place and a contribution towards the aggregated would be appreciated.

## 07/08/21 **COMMITTEE MEETINGS** None

**08/08/21 FINANCE**

- i) **Payments:** On the proposal of Cllr. Roberts seconded by Cllr. Cox, payments totalling £5,798.17 covered by cheque numbers 4712 and 4721 were approved.

**09/08/21 OTHER MEETINGS**  
No other meetings**10/08/21 MEMBERS QUESTIONS**  
No questions**11/08/21 ANNOUNCEMENTS**  
None

The meeting closed at 20.02p.m.

<b>DATE RAISED</b>	<b>CASE NO</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>OPEN/CLOSED RESOLUTION</b>
21/12/2020 <b>ONGOING</b>	00529461	Britts Farm Alleyway – access through difficult due to blocking by vegetation and fallen fence	21/12 – passed to officers 31/3 – map received by clerk showing part of alleyway in ownership of Highways and part Rights of Way Team. Clerk written to Rights of Way Team to ask that trees on their part (footpath 67) be assessed. 31/3 Rights of Way Team confirm the trees are on ESCC land however could be the responsibility of the landowner which ESCC are not. I wait to be advised. 19/7 – drainage works taken place in footpath – clerk chased an update on overgrown vegetation issues
21/12/2020 <b>ONGOING</b>	00527587	Switching off streetlamps in Britts Farm alleyway, or at least switching off one on 24 hours	21/12 – passed to officers 26/1 – still being discussed by officers 22/2 – resident advised that the orange light has now changed to a bright white light and is still on 24 hours (so worse situation) 10/3 – apologies from ESCC for slow response. Explanation of why lamp was changed to white light. Still looking at putting timers on lights 11/3 – Response by clerk. Crossed wires, we want the lights turned off not on timers. 23/3 – ESCC confirm they are still looking into being able to switch off lights 15/4 – ESCC confirmation that lights cannot be switched off for safety reasons but will be replaced with different bulbs and will not be on all night. Works will take place late summer 19/7 – clerk chased an email sent asking for further clarification as to why lights cannot be switched off
21/01/2021 <b>ONGOING</b>	00539076	Blocked drain outside St Mary's Church, Church Road, Buxted	25/1 – passed to officer to investigate

<p>27/01/2021 ONGOING (HEDGE ISSUE)</p>	<p>00541323</p>	<p>Width of pavement between St Raphaels and Toll Farm Triangle, Buxted</p>	<p>27/1 – passed to officers. 9/2 – officers could not identify location they need a better description! Email response sent. 31/3 – after more correspondence between Cllr Galley, ESCC Officer Johnson and Local Resident, Cllr Galley has confirmed this matter cannot be pursued any further. Pavement is a fair width, and the hedge has been recently cut back. Engineering works and cameras will not be installed by ESCC on this section of road. 20/4 – Cllr Galley confirmed hedge and width of pavement will be investigated by Highway Steward 30/4 – Highway report that one owner of the hedge is disputing that it is their responsibility to cut the hedge. Passed to Enforcement. Until hedge cut back Highway Steward cannot ascertain if siding works are required. May 2021 – edged of overgrown pathway cut back along with some of the hedges alongside the road. Other hedges remain overgrown. July 2021 – ESCC Enforcement writing to all owners of overgrown hedges</p>
<p>09/06/2021 ISSUED CLOSED</p>	<p>00585063</p>	<p>Junction of Howbourne Lane/A272, Buxted</p>	<p>Overgrown verge making visibility dangerous. Reported to Highways ESCC agreed to cut verge</p>
<p>10/06/21 ISSUE CLOSED</p>		<p>Verge west of Station along pathway</p>	<p>Overgrown verge partially blocking pavement and causing visibility issues when leaving station car park. ESCC agreed to cut verge</p>

## **Ionides Trust Update**

### **1. Sale of surgery land**

The parish council via social media have become aware that the surgery is for sale. The clerk contacted the current building owner who advised that he is selling his shares in the company that owns the surgery. It would appear that the purchaser is already planning a sub-sale of the company. However, the GPs are completely unaffected by the change of ownership of the Company

### **2. Annual return and YE account Balance sheet etc (as per Claude's' request)**

This was circulated to all members and noted. Proposed by Cllr. Roberts and seconded by Cllr. Johnson. The finances of the Ionides Trust will be discussed further at the AGM in November.

#### **Finance**

- 1) To note that the Annual Return for 31.3.2021 has been submitted to the Charities Commission.
- 2) To note the end of year accounts sheet

### **3. Request for a wildflower meadow on the Ionides land**

An initial request for a wildflower meadow on the Pound Green Triangle was submitted to the Parish Council. This site was thought to be too small so a second suggested site on the Ionides Trust land was suggested. Members were concerned that any wildflower meadow could come under threat by those using the land. The bund on the Ionides site is totally compacted so is an unsuitable site. Any site would need to be fenced off and hand weeded. It was suggested that there is a piece of land adjoining the railway line which houses some trees. If you come forward from the fence line at the back of the bund there is an area of natural soil which could be left and not cut to let it grow out and see what wildflowers grow. It was suggested that VB and CH meet with the local resident on site to explain the location.

### **4. Update on COVID memorial**

The memorial bench has now been delivered and the trees are due to be delivered early September with planting and a formal opening date to be arranged for autumn.

**Meeting closed at 20:17**