

Minutes of the Buxted Annual Assembly held at Buxted Primary School on Wednesday 4th May at 7.30pm.

1. Present:

Cllrs. Blandford (Chairman), Cox, Hall, Johnson, Milner, Robert, Sheard and Skinner.

Also present: ESCC Cllr Galley, WDC Cllrs Illingworth and Lunn, and Clerks Becca Macklen and Claudine Feltham and approximately 30 members of the public.

2. Apologies for absence:

Received from Cllrs Hall, McQuarrie, Mulvagh, Rose and Warner.

3. Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on 15th April 2015:

Having been available for inspection on the parish council's web site for the last 12 months, these were approved.

4. Buxted Pavilion Management Committee Trustees:

Four trustees had to be appointed and on the proposal of Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Milner, the following were duly elected – Dave Butcher, Karl Harrison, Erick Reilly and Jane Brooker.

5. Presentations:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained how the evening would unfold and thanked all for attending, especially our speakers and those groups who have a presence here tonight. These are, in no particular order:

Wealden Bus Alliance, Buxted Players, Buxted Park Bowls Club, Allotment Association, Buxted Horticultural Society, Football Club, Buxted WI and Buxted Community Hall Trust.

There would be an opportunity to ask questions at the end of each presentation. Everyone was invited to stay once the formal proceedings were concluded for refreshments.

Chairman, Vivienne Blandford:

You will see from the Agenda we have a range of speakers and this year our main topic is:

'The changing face of local government and a gradual dissemination of responsibilities to parishes'.

We are already feeling the effect of the many financial cuts to various services within the community. The police force is gradually withdrawing the Police Special Constable Officer scheme and it is very unlikely that we will see a PCSO in Buxted again. This makes the policing of parking a problem and we suggest that householders report a problem directly by dialling 101 which is the non-emergency police reporting/help line. Anti-social driving or abandoned vehicles can be reported via operation crackdown (<http://www.operationcrackdown.org/>). We are asking our local public to inform us when someone has parked technically illegally and will be posting a message on the parish council website informing how this is best done. If the parish council is to start a campaign against the non-enforcement of illegal parking, we will need evidence based facts to do so.

At Ringles Cross the residents, with the backing of the parish council, successfully petitioned to reduce the speed limit from 60mph to 40mph. The costs involved in getting this scheme realised was £5000.00 of which the parish council were asked by East Sussex County Council to pay half. However, the Highways department at East Sussex did not have enough funds in the budget to fund the scheme last year are unlikely to have the money in this current financial year.

At Buxted School, after various consultations, Highways agreed that this location was suitable for a human crossing patrol, a fairly unusual circumstance. Unfortunately, no human came forward to take up the job. It appeared, from original correspondence that ESCC would bear these costs but it turned out that this would come from the school's annual budget. This might be something that the parish council could help fund in the future. A new dropped kerb, dedicated crossing place was installed by ESCC last month.

We are investigating the possibility of a parish council car park and this would be an expensive undertaking and is not welcomed by all and so is still very much at a discussion stage. However, if an upgrade of the train line become a reality this is something a future parish council would have to consider.

Councillor Roy Galley – East Sussex County Council

Councillor Galley gave a presentation on the overall picture on the county council budget which has been cut dramatically over the last few years – albeit still a big business. Schools are now directly funded by Government, via ESCC, but a budget of over £200m goes direct to ESCC schools. Total annual spend at ESCC is £365.7m, with the biggest expenditure allocated to adult social care at £163.6m. Children's services are the second largest cost at £64.7m which includes assisting families to avoid foster care/adoption. Highways costs £60.8m which covers all of East Sussex, so only a small proportion would be seen by our parish.

The above all funded by three incomes – Council Tax (£246.8m), Business Rates (£70.9m) and the Revenue Support Grant (£45.1m). However, it is proposed to reduce the Revenue Support Grant, it would then be necessary to obtain most revenue via council tax and business rates.

Revenue spend (bits ESCC can spend not including school costs) is mostly spent on employees (£274.8m), followed by third party and transfer payments (£243.7m), then supplies and services (£162.6m).

The Capital programme sets out the Council's investment plans to support its core services. It includes new buildings, extensions, investments in roads and transport infrastructure and improvements to existing assets.

A major focus at ESCC recently has been the 3 counties of East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey making a joint bid to government to take more powers particularly on funding infrastructure, however it is important to remain realistic that as much as local councils would like to control infrastructure spending, it is unlikely that Government would give them the go ahead to spend money when we could be talking about billions if a project like BML2 line were to go ahead, for example.

Although ESCC no longer run the schools, it is still responsible for overseeing schools and therefore have to comply with OFSTED and was recently awarded an overall rating of GOOD.

Of capital money, just over £100m went on link road between Bexhill-Hastings which is hoped will unlock future development in that area, and has been a long time in the planning.

It is always good to remember that ESCC spends a lot of money on vulnerable parts of our population with 75% of budget being spent on 15% of population a few years ago. It is thought that spending could now be even greater. Work continues on child protection plans, safe place schemes for the vulnerable, and tackling domestic and sexual abuse, together with a better care fund combining County and Health Service resources to establish integrated care.

However, we spend most of our time locally talking about Highways – a new highways contract begins in May with Costain CH2M, which will now run the whole of the maintenance programme leaving approximately 90 direct council employees to undertake the planning work and monitoring Costain, who have promised a better service.

Pot Holes and resurfacing. 13,337 potholes have been fixed since January and the aim is to fix emergency holes in 24 hours and less dangerous in a month. New technology, a dedicated App, should allow members of the public the ability to find out when and where works have/are due to be carried out. If it works, it will be very useful.

Looking forwards there is a changing emphasis within ESCC – there is less money so county can no longer take on all schemes but it is possible for parishes to contribute to what they would like to do through the Community Match scheme, as per the Ringles Cross speed reduction scheme. Although funding hasn't been made available this financial year It is hoped that the works will be carried out in the next financial year. Fingerposts, ESCC no longer maintain or clean the signs unless there are safety issues – this is now a parish council responsibility.

Councillor Galley then received the following questions/comments:

- There are a large amount of pot holes in Chillies lane. It was advised that these issues are reported to ESCC and also to the clerk to chase up with Cllr. Galley.
- *Speed markings through the Buxted village are unreadable?* – Cllr. Galley would report this back to Highways
- The pavement from Buxted village up to school is in a terrible state with the bank falling into the pavement, making is very dangerous especially for school children – Cllr. Galley would take this back to Highways.
- *Are Costain monitoring roads and pavements?* – Cllr. Galley advised that the area is too large to monitor every road and pavement so Costain have to rely on the public to report pot holes, pavements etc. Pot holes should be filled within the month. To clarify a pot hole needs to be 10cm depth and 30cm in width to be filled.
- *Does ESCC have any plans to sort out the verge on Royal Oak Lane/Hurstwood Road?* – Cllr. Cox advised that the High Hurstwood Village Hall Committee (HHVHC) have received a donation to help resolve this issue. ESCC are happy to go along with whatever the local residents would like to do. A compromise was reached between residents. ESCC is willing to issue a licence to the HHVHC to carry out these works but nothing happened as yet. The parking is largely inconsiderate, but with no illegal parking. Cllr Galley advised that he will await with interest how it is proposed to be resolved.

Michael Lunn – Wealden District Council

Cllr. Lunn concentrated on planning issues – he advised that he sits on the North Planning Committee at WDC and wanted to provide some information on how plans are determined and the current situation with regards planning policy for Wealden.

A few years ago Government brought in radical changes by way of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) partly as there had been a slowdown in housebuilding. This is starting to have an impact on WDC in addition to changes in national policy. Under NPPF, each planning authority should have a constant 5 year supply of housing land in accordance to housing need within the district. At the moment Wealden has a shortfall in housing supply which currently requires 900 homes to be built per year. The result if this shortfall means that it makes it more difficult to defend hostile development as we don't have enough supply for the demand. Although we have a certain number of restrictions within the district i.e. Ashdown Forest, South Downs, High Weald AONB WDC are expecting more applications to come forward. Thankfully in the Buxted area due to the Ashdown Forest and some parts sitting within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it means there are restrictions to where development should be – however developers are challenging this all the time. What does this mean for the parish? We can

expect more applications for the parish – maybe conversion of one or two homes but equally you might get hostile applications coming forward in for a large amount of houses. Although we may not always agree, we are constrained by planning policy and there is an assumption in favour of development. If you do have concerns or are supportive of the scheme, please contact us and copy us (WDC and parish councillors) into your comments so we are aware of public views and we can hopefully use to support/put conditions on or use for reasons for refusal.

WDC councillors have good communications with the parish and we have worked very well with the parish council on issues as they arise.

Councillor Lunn then received the following questions/comments:

Please clarify the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty protected area? – Cllr. Lunn advised that from a district council perspective, we still have policies in place to protect the AONB however there are a number of exemptions e.g. adjacent to a village boundary, a developer could challenge a site using the basis of the 5-year land supply of housing as an excuse. There are also recent changes in legislation that make an allowance for a redundant (and proved to be redundant) barns to be converted to a dwelling. Brownfield sites – there is a register of these at Wealden and these will have automatic planning permission if new housing legislation is passed by Government.

If these applications are granted, what contributions do developers make? It was advised that Section 106 Legal Planning Agreements were the only way of collecting developer contributions, however the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) came into force from in April 2016 which is a mechanism to collect a roof tax from each new dwelling (if over 5 houses). This money is pooled and allocated towards an infrastructure plan for the whole of the district. However, there are exceptions, such as self-build or affordable housing.

Due to the current and future changes in planning legislation, would it be possible to release the land on which the Reading Room is on, on order that any funds from this site could be directed towards building a new village hall? Cllr. Lunn advised that at the moment we have a section 106 planning agreement in place which effectively mothballs the Reading Room at the point of occupation of the new hall. There is a period of time where we can legally challenge the decision if policy has changed. This is a possibility especially when the Housing and Planning Bill becomes and Act as this automatically releases brownfield sites for development.

Eco-friendly properties – previously submitted an application for an eco-friend house but declined due to the 7km rule. Would it be worth putting this in again? Cllr. Lunn advised that this would be challenging as even though there is a shortfall in housing, planning inspectorate say it has to be a contribution to the shortfall – if it was 5 or 10 houses there could be an argument but not for one house.

Toby Illingworth – Wealden District Council

Cllr Illingworth started by talking about the council's finances.

This year's budget had to be judged, not just on the year ahead, but the 5 years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The settlement from the Government's Revenue Support Grant will disappear over the next few years. In the previous year 2015/16 our Revenue Support Grant was £2.3m. This reduces to 1.2m this year, to 290 thousand in 2017/18 and zero from then on.

The council's revenue spend for 2016/17, after taking out the Capital Expenditure Charged to revenue, will be £15.4m with 73% of that funded through Council Tax.

Over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2020/21 this will fall to £15.1 and the proportion funded by council tax rise to 82%.

Regrettably, it is therefore important to raise Wealden's share of council tax this year by 1.9%, which is the equivalent of 7 pence a week for the average Band D household.

The role of the council is primarily to provide a set of services to residents, for the best possible value.

Unfortunately, as we have seen with the County Council, the choice is between increasing revenue or cutting services. This is certainly not a position the District Council want to be in. We have therefore taken the discussion now to protect the council's finances for the next five years, and in doing so ensure Wealden continues to provide the services that residents need.

In other news.

The council has launched a free weekly email information service, called My Alerts, providing households with useful information such as the waste and recycling collections taking place that week in their road, local planning applications as well as news about Council events. It is already being sent to around 25,000 households across the District, but if you have not received a My Alerts from Wealden, please go online to www.wealden.gov.uk/myalerts and register for what we hope you will find to be a useful service.

Last month, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its Draft Recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Wealden District Council. The Commission's website sets out all the details including an interactive map. The changes locally are quite dramatic with our current ward of Buxted & Maresfield split in three. Maresfield will be grouped with Nutley and Fairwarp, Buxted and High Hurstwood will become their own Ward and Hadlow Down will be part of a new ward with Rotherfield. Each of these new Wards will be single member and contain roughly the same number of voters. The overall number of Councillors on Wealden District Council will also be reduced from 55 to 50.

Cllr Galley would be able to better outline more about the ESCC divisions, but the idea is that they will be worked around the district wards so that there will three District Wards to every county division.

The District council is also in charge of elections. We have two votes in the next couple of months. The 1st is tomorrow for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and the second on 23rd June for the EU referendum. The Police and Crime Commissioner election is expected to have a low turnout, so each vote could make a huge difference. The referendum is one of the biggest decisions we have had to make as a nation for decades. Cllr. Illingworth urged everyone to check they are registered to vote, in the Referendum before the 7th June deadline. Unfortunately, registration for the PCC elections is now closed. He also encouraged everyone to vote in both polls.

Councillor Illingworth then received the following questions/comments:

A member of the public questioned why no leaflets or paperwork had been received in relation to the PCC elections?
Due to restrictions leading up to the elections, Cllr. Illingworth was unable to discuss any political issues but advised

that some parties have tried to leaflet, others haven't covered the area. It was also recognised that not everyone is online, however it was mentioned that all candidates were pitching in the local papers.

Sheila Bartholomew – Buxted Community Hall Trust

The work of the trustees still continues on two fronts: raising funds to meet the cost of providing the new hall, and working to progress the building project. We have sufficient money pledged to start the building work, but not enough to complete it. We therefore plan to split the project into two phases.

Currently our Structural Engineer and architect are working on the detailed plans for the building regulations application. They are also working with a landscape architect looking at the landscaping requirements for the site. Phase one includes access roads, earth moving, utilities, drainage and foundations. It is possible that not all of these works will be undertaken in phase one but almost certainly the earthmoving and drainage will be completed. We are also discussing how the site will be landscaped after the completion of phase 1 while we fundraise for phase 2, the construction of the hall itself.

A prime requirement of the design team is to obtain good estimates of the cost of the project, as a whole and split into two phases. Once we have this information we will be able to submit bids for funding from charitable foundations.

We hope that the first phase, will start in 2016/2017. The main pressure to get the project underway is the need to do so within 3 years from the date that the planning application was approved, or we risk having to submit a new planning application. This means that we shall be starting the first phase of the project without the funding needed to start and complete the second phase.

Working toward this first phase will entail lots of discussion with The Ionides Trust, the Scouts and the surgery to make sure that any issues raised are dealt with promptly, thereby minimising disruption to all concerned.

The hall is an investment in the future of our community, but it will only go ahead with your continued support. If you can donate your time and expertise we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Rick Burton – Ionides Trust

Rick advised that Section 106 contributions has been awarded (held by the parish council) for off-site play equipment to be located on the Ionides Trust site following the granting of planning permission for the Beechbrook Park development. As the equipment is required to be for 11 year olds and older the Ionides Trust first approached the year six pupils at Buxted Primary School who came up with great ideas of what they would like. Ideas such as a zip wires, table tennis table, a place they would meet and things that would challenge them and also an area where they could hang out with their friends and socialise were put forward. In addition to this there was also a call for adult exercise equipment. All ideas were collated and the Trust then approached 5 of different companies – including a firm of landscape architects as the vision for the land is to have an enhanced green space and not just to turn the site into a playground. Shortlisted companies visited the site and came up with different ideas. For a variety of reasons, it soon became apparent that we are fairly limited as to where we can put the equipment. These include land already earmarked for the new village hall development, the location of the Scout Hut and a sloping, uneven site with close proximity of residential properties. Two short listed companies came up with plans that were broadly acceptable.

It has therefore been suggested to put the adult exercise equipment adjacent to the football pitch as we are keen to open up the area between the Ionides site and the recreation ground where the football pitch is. Some concerns

locally were raised that the equipment will be hidden away, but the intention is to put more equipment in this area. The plan is to install a double zip wire and giant swing at the end of the football pitch and adult exercise equipment alongside the football pitch (down one end) to the rear of the houses along Framfield Road. It is hoped to place a Table Tennis table (concrete) in the recently opened up area behind the scout hut. Following this, the Ionides Trust would then re-consult with community on what is then wanted. This would also allow any initial groundworks for the hall to have taken place to establish how the ground on the Ionides land has been disturbed and moved. Phase 2 could also allow for a social meeting hub for children, although this has faced some opposition, but there is strong evidence to support that provides young people with a space they can call their own and they will take pride in looking after it. Much work has already been carried out to improve the site and open it through to the recreation ground.

Chairman – Vivienne Blandford

This year the precept for the parish of Buxted was only raised by 2%. Indeed, Maresfield raised its precept by 30% this year which amounted to an extra £3.97 per household per month. Although this seems quite high, they only have 666 households within the parish, so their precept would be higher than in Buxted with 1605 households. Isfield raised theirs by 44% which equates to £2.64 a month or £24.00 per annum for a Band D tax payer. They said whilst they accepted that this raise was difficult for those on fixed incomes the increases were needed to look after the assets of the parish council and also fund initiatives to query possible allocation of new houses. Danehill had a raise of 54% between 2014-2015 and another increase of 18% this last year. Not surprisingly there has been some opposition to these increases, in fact only this week we have been advised that residents of Danehill parish held a public meeting and agreed on a vote of no confidence in the chairman. This led to the automatic resignation of the chairman, followed by all councillors and the clerk!

Therefore, it became obvious to Buxted parish council that we might need to raise the precept substantially to carry out work no longer paid for by ESCC or, indeed WDC. Obviously, if the precept were raised substantially, those living within Buxted Parish just might take a closer interest in how the parish council spend their money. In the majority of cases where the precept had been raised there had been little or no opposition to the raise but all queried the best way to inform the people of the parish of the intent and reason as to why the precept was being raised. Whilst I emphasise we have, as yet made no decision as to what next year's precept may be, we thought this Annual Assembly was a good chance to let everyone know what may well happen in the future and has been happening in the last few years very locally.

The Chairman thanked all for attending the evening and asked all to stay, talk to all the various representatives and have some refreshment

The above was followed by drinks and conversation with those in attendance.