

## **Minutes of the Buxted Annual Assembly held at Buxted Primary School on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 7.35pm.**

### **1. Present:**

Cllrs. Blandford (Chairman), Cox, Hoggan, Illingworth, Johnson, McQuarrie, Roberts and Wells.

Also present: WDC Cllrs Illingworth and Lunn, and Clerks Beccy Macklen and Claudine Feltham and approximately 60 members of the public.

### **2. Apologies for absence:**

Received from Cllr Rose, ESCC Cllr. Galley, Mrs Downing, Mr & Mrs Cox and George Claydon (BCHT)

### **3. Minutes of the Annual Assembly held on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017:**

The minutes were signed as a correct record of the Assembly

### **4. Buxted Pavilion Management Committee Trustees:**

Four trustees had to be appointed and on the proposal of Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr McQuarrie, 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:

Buxted Art Club, Buxted Players, Buxted Park Bowls Club, Allotment Association, Five Ash Down Village Hall and Miniature Dolls Society, Buxted Football Club, Buxted WI, Buxted Scouts, Buxted Bonfire Society, and Buxted Community Hall Trust.

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

### **Update from the Buxted Community Hall Trust – Chris Hitchens, Chairman of BCHT**

Thank you for the introduction. Good Evening, by way of an introduction, I am Chris Hitchens, one of the Trustees of the BCHT. I have recently taken on the role of Treasurer from George Clayton who remains the Company Secretary. The BCHT committee has prepared this statement for the Buxted Parish Assembly.

We have the opportunity to build a new centrally located village hall that is warm and welcoming, has flexible space, with state-of-the-art facilities. A new hall will allow our community to access a wider range of activities within our expanding village and will also enable the existing community groups and societies to sustain and grow their membership. If we do not take this opportunity we will condemn the next generation in our community to the prospect of a dwindling choice of activities within their village, whatever those future activities might be, due to the confines of the existing facilities.

Following our AGM in January we reviewed the QS estimate with the architect. The QS cost estimate has been split into two parts, the ground works and the building itself. At current values the estimated cost of the building would be £700k whilst the ground works estimate was £250k. The cost of the ground works is considerable due to the sloping nature of the Ionides site. Possible savings were considered, e.g. to replace the 'green' roof with a high

quality flat roof, and to use cheaper alternatives for the doors and windows. Savings could be made, but these would have to be weighed against a lower quality of finish and, potentially, cost of new drawings and List of Materials.

Since the AGM, both Buxted Construction and Tourle have been approached with a view of obtaining newer/better estimate of the potential cost of the ground works and the building. The new estimates are still outstanding at this time.

BCHT has around £80K of funds available at the moment. We have a pledge of the proceeds from the sale of the Reading Room, which is approximately £250K at today's values but would not be forthcoming until the new Village Hall was near completion or finished. A further pledge in the form of a loan with the repayments made by the Ionides Trust has been discussed. Further efforts to secure pledges of both funding and in kind is in the future plans. However, no fundraising or securing charitable funding applications can be undertaken until our lease is signed. This lease was formalised during 2016 and with signatures planned for 2017 but is now held in abeyance in order to allow time for renegotiation between other leaseholders and the Ionides Trust.

Notwithstanding the problems in not officially having a signed lease, in order to be able to move on in organising small events during the year and fundraising applications the assistance of enthusiastic helpers is needed:

- To organise and run small events
- To advise and assist in the preparation of applications for grants

Without any such assistance, any future plans may have to be put on hold.

If anyone has any questions, then please approach either myself or one of the other Trustees after this meeting who will discuss them with you.

### **Ionides Land Management Update – Cllr. Vivienne Blandford**

This is that group who has worked, seemingly invisibly behind the scenes to improve the piece of land, almost in the centre of Buxted that was given to the village in 1953

Before the surgery was built there was no money to maintain the land and few stalwarts worked very hard to raise enough money, mainly through a village fete, to provide the finance to carry out essential maintenance. The building of the new surgery changed all that, not only by altering the landscape but by providing a regular income to enhance and open up the land. During this time an outgrown hedgerow was removed to provide access and vistas into the parish council recreation ground, thus properly joining the two pieces of land for the first time, Ionides and Recreation land. Regular mowing takes place during the summer and hedge cutting is carried out at the appropriate times. New trees have been planted. As you can appreciate it takes a good deal of time and effort to manage this land but is a priceless asset for the village and built into the charity scheme document was the provision for trustees to appropriate part of the land for a new village hall (1999). The scheme was amended in 2010/11 to allow for the provision of the new surgery to be built with a definite non-commercial condition on the lease.

Historically the Ionides Trust charitable scheme laid down a list from organisations from within the village as to whom could become a Trustee. Some of these organisations no longer exist and some never sent a representative in recent years. Therefore, earlier this year, the charity scheme was changed so that the parish council could become a managing Trustee and, with its paid officers, to provide a day to management back up which individual Trustees

were unable to do. This was done with the full knowledge of the charity commission, a legal advisor and a representative from Action in Sussex and all the correct steps taken to carry out this action were undertaken, led by charity commission guidelines.

The Ionides Trust had difficulty in finding, in the first place, Trustees willing to join the Ionides Trust who have time to commit to the managing of the site, and secondly, the onus for carrying out the work falls has always fallen on one or two individuals, and always has done. Under current land management this is too onerous for individuals. The future of the Trust is assured because the parish council will always have to find representatives even if no member of the outside organisations provides one. The charitable status remains the same and is run separately to the parish council. All income/expenditure is paid for by the Ionides Trust and has a separate bank account. Representatives from the varied stakeholders are invited to join the management committee without having to become parish councillors.

No one can have failed to notice the problems in parking at the surgery and perhaps few realise that the Ionides Trust car park was built for light use only, unlike the tarmac surface of the surgery. The heavy use of that car park by surgery users has meant that the Ionides Trust have to pay for essential repairs. The week before Christmas it was found someone had driven into the barrier and it was loose in the ground. It cost in the region of £800.00 repairing it and putting down some extra surfacing to make it safe. The ground alongside the car park has been damaged by inconsiderate drivers parking to use the surgery and there are problems with members of a local business using it to park there on a daily basis. All these problems are going to have to be addressed and solutions found.

The new work, carried out to secure the planning permission, took place early this year, was not quite finished as part of the area was to be put to grass which included part of the area previously used by the scouts for parking. This area was not meant to be driven over until works were completed. Unfortunately, the area was driven over, and damage was sustained in the wet and inclement weather conditions at the time. Recent talks with representatives of the Scouts and Ionides Trust discussed various ways the entire site could be improved.

The Trust does not have infinite sources of funds and we will now look at the site holistically and carry out what improvements we can, when it can afford to do so. The Ionides Land is for the benefit of the entire village and that must guide our decisions.

Negotiations have been underway for some considerable time with the Scouts about their new, and extended lease, to enable the lease for the new village hall to be confirmed.

It remains for Buxted Parish Council to thank past and present members of the trust for all the work carried out over many years to preserve and maintain this piece of land and we look forward to working with the stakeholders involved to continue to improve it.

## **Roundup of the year from the Chairman of the Parish Council – Cllr. Vivienne Blandford**

### **Maintenance**

#### **Reading Room:**

- New boiler and radiators in the RR which user groups now report is toasty hot on the cold days.

- Refurb on men's toilets and leaky cupboards in the kitchen (not connected), replaced window on stage with safety glass and having to deal with someone trying to prematurely demolish reading room, slow process to repair going through insurance claim.

### **St Mary's**

The war memorial at St. Mary's church, Buxted, was erected in 1919 and forms part of a Calvary. The Calvary figures were badly damaged by vandals and although repairs were carried out at the time, the weather had finally taken its toll and by the end of 2017 the figures were beyond any further repair. Thanks to a generous grant from Buxted Parish Council this project was completed at the beginning of the year in time for the centenary of the end of the First World War.

### **Fingerposts**

Continuing to maintain fingerposts as they are an important part of our landscape heritage

### **Grit Bins**

Grit bin for FAD as it currently has none

### **Litter**

- New bin for Buxted rec approved, will be installed before the summer
- Supporting litter picking events by providing equipment over and above the minimal amount provided by WDC

### **Defibrillators**

Defibs now in all three of the villages and FAD BT box to be refurbished this year so all should be in the boxes. Thanks to HH residents for refurbishing HH one.

### **Trees**

Agreed to carry out tree/hedgerow maintenance at High Hurstwood recreation ground

### **Traffic Issues**

Much time spent on this issue and Cllr Toby Illingworth will expand on this issue later

### **New Village Hall/Old Village Hall**

Much of which follows is not the remit of the Buxted Parish Council but is a potted history of the history of the new village hall which is run by an independent charity, the Buxted Community Hall Trust but concerns the residents of Buxted. Forgive me if this is old news to you.

As you will be aware the first stage of building the new village hall was completed early this year when some of the foundations were laid and a new entrance, with the disabled parking bays built. All these works were paid out of 106 developer contribution funds which can be used for no other purpose. These 106 funds are agreed between the developer and WDC at time of planning, sometimes known as planning gain for works that will benefit the community affected by a development. These funds, if not spent on the new hall they would be, in time, returned to the developer. The final tidying up of the site is being carried out, and paid for, by the Ionides Trust.

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. However, 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, however, last year they had a change of heart and said we could develop the reading room site. Subsequently the parish council started the process of obtaining planning permission 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. The Reading Room will not be sold on to a developer until the new hall is nearing practical completion and the parish council can be assured that the new hall will be finished. A loan, for the building of the hall, could be secured, by the BCHT, on the security of the money to be raised from potential sale of the site to a developer but obviously, at this stage no further details are available. The parish council will not be taking out any loans to fund the building of the new hall.

This will ensure that there will be a shorter period when there is no 'village hall'. The parish council is not putting any funds into the new village hall other than that which has been in the reserves since 2011. There are plans for increased parking at the new hall site which makes the new hall site more attractive to users.

The site for the new village hall is not a green site, but one that contained farm buildings that were converted to a Boys Club, an Oast House, a Rifle Club and Scout Hut with some remnants of hard standing that was associated with the farm. Some buildings on site since the 18th century or earlier.

For those of you concerned about the presence of Japanese knotweed in the grounds of the Reading Room, hopefully it will be eradicated soon as we are nearing the completion of a five-year eradication programme. This was jointly paid by the parish council and the next-door neighbour who discovered it in her back garden. Reporting the presence of knotweed, if present, is done only when the site sold on.

## **Social Media**

There is, inevitably, much discussion, at times on Social Media, about the workings of the parish council. We would ask if members of the community wish to know more about the work of the parish council they contact us directly through the parish clerks or attending meetings. That way there is less likely to be misunderstandings about what has happened in the past and what role the parish council can undertake. There is also the BCHT website. Both websites are easily found by someone with a computer and internet connection. Type in 'Buxted' on Google and Buxted Parish Council comes up about 8th but on the first page, unsurprisingly enough ahead of us, are the Buxted Inn and Buxted Park Hotel.

Finally, not only I would like to thank our hard working, and approachable clerks, for all the help and support they give to the parish council and the wider community as they are the first port of call for any queries from the public. But also, a reminder to all that councillors are unpaid volunteers all of whom work, some commuting to and from London, and other places. whilst still managing to make most meetings. This role needs endless patience, tolerance and a sense of humour. For the record the parish has had no contested elections in least the last fifteen years and all the present set of councillors volunteered their time freely. We are glad to welcome two new ones, David Welles and Martin Hogan who responded to the challenge recently. However, next year are the council elections, so if the community is unhappy with the performance of the parish council, we suggest they put themselves forward for election.

Thank you for your patience and I hope that answers some of the questions that have been under discussion in the public domain recently. I will just ask the rest of the Buxted Parish Councillors if I have omitted anything or they have anything to add.

The chairman then invited questions from the floor.

#### **Questions from the floor:**

A member of the public commented that the building of the new village hall seems to be going to go on forever and he could not understand why the money cannot be transferred to the pavilion site on the recreation ground and build a new hall on the that land rather than the Ionides land.

*The chairman advised that the Section 106 Development Contribution funds cannot be transferred to an alternative site. The recreation ground had been ruled out some 10 year ago, but the parish council would have to check what the reason was for this.*

A second resident of the public commented that the hall fund raising events have been great and the efforts put in by the BCHT members are commendable, but he disagreed with the comments made regarding safeguarding for future generations when there are other available halls in the parish (specifically the school hall), and the new hall would be built on the existing green space in the village. Building it on this piece of land would take the green space away from the future generation and is considered a step backwards. It is assumed that residents are all happy about the building, but some people do not share the assumption that we need another hall.

*The chairman took on board all of the comments made but did wish to make the point that the new hall is being built on what is currently a car park space on the Ionides Trust site. A member of the Buxted School PTA commented that the school hall is available to rent in the evenings but isn't available during the day which is when the Reading Room is mostly used. She added it had been found that there was not much call for the school hall during the evenings and thought people preferred a more central location.*

A resident commented that the grass verge at the end of Gordon Road is enormously overgrown and unkempt.

*The chairman advised that ESCC Highways have recently changed grass cutting contracts to two cuts per year with the parish council being able to provide further cuts if necessary. We are currently awaiting notification from ESCC of when the Highways cuts will take place so that it can arrange further cuts if and when necessary. The chairman did ask members of the public to let the parish council know if cuts have taken place as we are not always advised of when they are due to take place.*

It was also commented that if the parish council are in discussions with ESCC to please advise of the 40mph sign close to Buxted School which is in a state of disrepair. *Agreed.*

Following a question from the floor the chairman confirmed that the offer of land west of the station to create a new station car park was not pursued as it was considered too expensive being priced at £5,000 per space. This was simply too large a cost for a parish council to take on.

#### **Buxted Speed Survey and Feasibility Study – Cllr. Toby Illingworth**

Cllr. Illingworth updated that the parish council are currently trying to find a solution to the traffic problems in Buxted and Five Ash Down.

It is worth bearing in mind that unless a specific matter is also a priority for ESCC Highways, the parish council have to match fund any projects that happens in the parish, which is a big change from when ESCC used to pay for everything.

### **Specific Projects**

We are currently working on three particular issues which are:

1. A crossing over the A272 by the mini roundabout which has been requested since the Beechbrook Park development was completed. There was an island in between the dropped kerbs outside of The Buxted Inn, but this had to be removed due to it restricting traffic in and out of the driveway to The Buxted Inn and George Rose. We have been through a very elongated process with ESCC on how we can fix this which started in June 2017 – when the parish paid for a feasibility study £500 to be given a simple ‘no’ response. We were then advised we needed to spend £400 on a speed survey and £400 on pedestrian survey, which we have now done. We have now been advised that ESCC require £500 to analyse the surveys. Hopefully we should get a basic idea of what might or might not be possible. In terms of costs though, a zebra crossing costs between £35,000 to £40,000 with a traffic island costing £20,000.
2. East of High Street, Buxted – a speed survey showed that all traffic drove over the speed limit. The parish council are currently working with ESCC to establish what can be done to lower traffic speeds on this stretch of the A272.
3. Court Lane, Five Ash Down – it has been highlighted to the parish council that Court Lane is being used as a cut through at excessive speeds to avoid the Ringles Cross traffic lights – so the parish council are about to embark on the same process as above, but at least this time we are far more aware of what is required to obtain the correct information.

There is some good news however. Thanks to very committed residents of Ringles Cross and Five Ash Down a campaign to reduce the speed limit from 60mph to 40mph has been successful and should be implemented in July, but this is after a number of years hard work and commitment to the cause.

### **Parish Telecommunications Mast – Cllr. Toby Illingworth**

As some of you are aware, there has been a few applications within the parish to erect a mobile telephone mast within High Hurstwood. Of primary concern to the parish council is that masts are effectively permitted development and there is little legislation in place to be able to tackle and fight against a mast. Therefore, in order to try and direct masts to be located in a situation that residents are happy with (if any) the parish council has sought to reach out to telecommunications providers to try and find a suitable and agreeable location for residents and businesses and which suit the telecommunications. He wished to make it very clear that this is not the parish council imposing a mast in the parish, it wants to work with the community to find a compromise.

Residents of High Hurstwood asked why the parish council has not engaged with HHARM when – 90% of residents of High Hurstwood do not want or need a mobile mast. In response to this, other members present disagreed and stated that mobile phones may be needed for all sorts of situations, including emergencies when landlines or home hubs are not available.

It was made very clear that this isn't necessarily a 'High Hurstwood' mast and could be situated anywhere in the parish that is agreeable to both residents and the telecommunications company. It was also commented that if a mast is agreeable, the parish council would be looking to work with a company that would be a multi service provider, so not just one company on its own to ensure the widest possible coverage. Finally, it was mentioned that the emergency services will be moving from having their own towers to working off the mobile telephone network.

Finally, the Chairman advised that WDC Councillor Michael Lunn is present for those in attendance who are interested in hearing about the latest developments to the local plan - it is well worth talking to him about it. Please do not forget to visit those representatives from the community who had taken their time and trouble to attend this evening. A good collective of what volunteers can bring to the community.

The chairman thanked all for attending

Meeting officially closed at 20:33.

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