

## **BUXTED PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Policy Committee held in The Reading Rooms, Buxted on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009 at 7.30p.m.**

**Present:** Cllrs. Rose (Chairman), Crowe, Dopson, Downing, Warner and Wilkes (7.55pm)  
Also present: B Macklen, Clerk to Parish Council.

1. In the absence of Councillor Wilkes at the start of the meeting, it was **resolved** that Councillor Rose should chair the meeting.

**Public:** 3. Mr C Smith & Ms F McQuarrie – Community Pig Group. Mr J Moffatt – Parish Council Internal Auditor.

With the agreement of the Chairman, it was resolved to suspend Standing Orders before item 6 to allow Mr Smith to address the Committee.

- 1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**  
No apologies

- 2 **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS.**

Cllr. Crowe declared a prejudicial interest in respect of item 6 on the agenda by virtue of being a member of the pig syndicate and left the meeting during consideration of this item.

Cllr Crowe declared a personal interest in respect of item 6 on the agenda by virtue of another member of the household having a plot at the site.

Cllr. Warner declared a personal interest by being a member, appointed by the Council, of the Basil Ionides Memorial Centre Committee.

Cllr. Rose declared a personal interest by being a member, appointed by the Council, of the Buxted Pavilion Trust Committee.

- 3 **REVIEW OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

- 4 **REMUNERATION OF CLERK AND CARETAKER 2010/11**

The Clerk then withdrew from the room during the Committee's consideration of this item.

Members reviewed details of the Clerk and Caretakers remuneration for 2010/11 as circulated with the agenda.

The Committee **recommend** to the Full Council that the remuneration for the Clerk and Caretaker/ Booking Secretary be set in accordance with NALC scales as proposed and that budget be allocated as proposed.

- 5 **REVIEW OF TRIENNIAL CHARGES FOR HIGH HURSTWOOD ALLOTMENT RENT**

The Clerk updated that following a recommendation by the Properties Committee in September 2009 she and three other Councillors had researched costs for renting grazing land for horses. It became apparent that an average cost for the land without the benefit of a water supply is between £10 and £15 per week. The Parish Council currently rent the allotment land in High Hurstwood for £250 per annum. Given such a substantial difference exists, it was considered appropriate that the Parish Council should raise the rental cost of the field in line with local charges, in accordance with best practice.

It was therefore **resolved** that:

1. The rent should be increased to £520 per year, payable in two amounts at six month intervals.
2. The tenancy agreement should be renewed annually (not triannually) given the increasing encouragement from Government for community gardening and provision of allotments.

6 **REVIEW OF ANNUAL RENT CHARGES FOR BUXTED ALLOTMENTS – INCLUDING PIG SYNDICATE (COMMUNITY PIG GROUP)**

During consideration of this item, Cllr. Crowe left the meeting room.

*The Chairman suspended Standing Orders to allow Mr C Smith to address the committee.*

Mr Smith advised Members that the pig syndicate has been a community effort which has benefited not only those within the group but also other allotment holders through education and added security to the allotments which are visited twice daily. Although not raised for any commercial purpose, the first year of the scheme has not been financially beneficial to the group as start up costs have exceeded £800 which has effectively made the cost of the end product twice as expensive as it would be to purchase from the shops. Now having received permission from the Parish Council for a second year, the group will still have to face costs of replacing electric fencing and hurdles which were borrowed on a temporary basis for 2009. It is also the intention of the group to increase the number of pigs to 14, but any increase in rent may make this less affordable to potential pig owners. It was therefore requested that the Parish Council continues to support the scheme, but also recognises that start up costs have been high with further costs to be covered in the forthcoming year. Reference was also made to the donation of £451 received by the Parish Council from the pig syndicate towards the new hall fund.

Members agreed that the scheme is laudable and is a great use of land that could not otherwise be used for any other purpose due to the number of trees on the site. The cost implications of setting up such a scheme were also recognised. It was therefore **resolved** that:

1. The annual rent for the land used by the pig syndicate should remain at £140 for the forthcoming year (2010)
2. This amount be reviewed at the Finance Committee in October 2010 as set out in the syndicate tenancy agreement

Members then discussed the current annual rent charges for the Buxted allotment plots. Given the large amount of investment into the site in the current financial year it was considered appropriate to raise the rental charges by a small amount. It was therefore **resolved** that:

1. Allotment plot rental charges should be increased by 10% for 2010
2. Rental charges should be reviewed annually at the Finance Committee as set out in the allotment tenancy agreements
3. Plot No.40 should be re-evaluated to a 'large' plot and should therefore warrant a yearly rental fee of £40.

8 **PRECEPT AND BUDGET 2010/11**

Members discussed the budget proposals in detail, specifically the projected shortfall of funds for the 2009/10 budget of £11,138 which would have to be drawn from the capital reserve account.

Whilst recognising the current national recession, Members were mindful that public expenditure is increasing with more demands from principle authorities being made on Parish

Council funds.

Therefore, following considerable discussion, on the basis that the Parish Council are considerably over budget for 2009/10 due to the reduction in income through business rates; reduction in interest rates; increased basic costs of utilities and calls from the parish to meeting community needs, it is **recommend** to the Full Council that the Precept be increased to £77,924, an increase of 4.9%.

The Committee **recommend** to the Full Council that the Receipts budget be £9,249 and the Payments budget be £87,173. The full budget proposals are attached to these minutes.

It was also **resolved** that the Clerk would investigate grass cutting fees for both High Hurstwood Recreation Ground and Reading Room to ascertain if costs could be reduced.

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## **ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT**

The Clerk advised that the terms of reference of the annual audit has been reviewed against the revised edition of 'Governance and Accountability for Local Councils' and has been found to be in accordance the Parish Council's existing internal audit plan.

In accordance with the annual review of the effectiveness of internal audit as carried out as part of the annual return for the year ended 31 March 2009 a new internal audit time line and flow chart was adopted by the Council on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009 which will take effect within the current financial year 2009/10. This requires the internal auditor to provide a final report at the end of the financial year, from which a more detailed review of internal audit can be completed by the Finance Committee.

As part of the internal audit in the financial year 2008/09, a query was raised by the internal auditor regarding a financial transaction whereby the Parish Council purchase CCTV equipment to be installed on the High Hurstwood Village Hall which monitors land owned by both the Parish Council and High Hurstwood Village Hall Management Committee. The High Hurstwood Hall Management Committee then made a donation to the parish council towards the new hall fund of half of the costs for the CCTV. The parish council subsequently claimed back the total amount of VAT for the CCTV. The internal auditor queried as to whether the parish council should have claimed back the full amount of VAT. Following the initial question raised by the internal auditor and subsequent enquiries with the VAT office it was established that the parish council had followed the correct procedure as set out under Section 33 of the VAT Act 1994.

The Committee **resolved** that is had acted in the correct manner in accordance with VAT law.

The Committee **resolved** that the Annual Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit has been completed in accordance with the revised edition of the Governance of Accountability for Local Councils.

Members thanked Mr Moffatt for his continued work as the Council's internal auditor and advised that if he requires reimbursement for his time or to attend any available courses open to the Council, to please advise.

## **REVIEW OF BUXTED PARISH COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The financial regulations were reviewed and it is **recommended** to Full Council that within paragraph 3.4 of Budgetary Control, the limit should be raised from £200 to £500 by which the clerk may incur expenditure on behalf of he Council which is necessary to carry out any repair replacement or other work which is of such extreme urgency that it must be done at once.

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## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The annual Risk Assessment Programme was reviewed and considered to be up to date,

