

Minutes of Bucklesham Annual Parish Council Meeting

Held on Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 7:00pm

In Bucklesham and Foxhall Village Hall, IP10 0DZ

Present

Cllr David Brinkley (Chair)

Cllr Rhea Gardner

Cllr Clive Lenton

Cllr Gemma Marriage

Cllr Kathryn Roper

Cllr Lynda Seagroatt

Cllr Lee Reeves (ESC)

Cllr Mike Ninnmey (ESC)

Ruth Johnson (Clerk)

3 members of the public were present

1. To elect the Chair of the Council for 2024/25 and signing of the ‘Declaration of Acceptance of Office’.

Cllr Roper nominated Cllr Brinkley to be Chair of the Council for the coming year and he agreed. This was seconded by Cllr Lenton and all were in favour. Cllr Brinkley then signed the ‘Declaration of Acceptance of Office’.

2. Apologies for absence:

a. To receive apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Cllr Bickers (illness).

b. To accept apologies for absence.

Cllr Marriage proposed that Cllr Bickers’ apologies be accepted, this was seconded by Cllr Brinkley and all were in favour.

3. To receive any:

a. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest.

There were none.

b. Declarations of Non-Pecuniary Interest.

There were none.

c. Applications for Dispensation on Agenda Items.

There were none.

d. Declarations of Gifts or Hospitality received over the value of £50.00

There were none.

e. Notification of Lobbying with reference to Planning Applications to be discussed.

There were none.

4. Public Participation – To receive:

a. Reports from County and District Councillors:

- Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy:

Apologies were received from Cllr Mulcahy before the meeting. No report had been sent since February. The Chair reminded those present that the difficulties in the working relationship with Cllr Mulcahy would be discussed at item 15.

Chair’s initials:

East Suffolk District Cllr Mike Ninnmey and Cllr Lee Reeves:

Monthly reports had been sent by Cllrs Ninnmey and Reeves and these had been circulated. Cllr Reeves was thanked for his help with regards to finding information about the cancellation of the local bus service. It was recognised that this was not a District Council matter, but rather a County Council one, and the Chair thanked Cllr Reeves very much for his interest and help.

Both Councillors encouraged the Council to apply for the free bulbs from ESC as part of their East Suffolk in Bloom project. The Clerk confirmed she had already applied. Cllr Gardner asked for an update on the Foxborrow Farm planning application and both Councillors confirmed this was going to planning committee.

Cllrs Reeves and Ninnmey were also thanked by the Clerk for the speed with which they reply to emails, for always forwarding relevant information from the Council, and for helping to identify the problems with regards to the disrupted refuse collections.

Action: Clerk

b. Questions from any member of the public:

There were none.

5. To appoint persons to the following offices:

Position	Person Nominated
Responsible Finance Officer	Clerk
Village Hall Rep	Cllr Lynda Seagroatt
Archer Cartwright Rep (2 positions)	Cllr Rhea Gardner Cllr David Brinkley
SALC Rep	Cllr Kathryn Roper
Felixstowe Peninsular Community Partnership Rep	Cllr Rhea Gardner
Speed Indicator Device Wardens	Cllr Clive Lenton Hilary Garlick Keith Woods

Cllr Brinkley proposed that all offices be appointed. This was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour.

6. To remind Councillors to review their Register of Member’s Interests entry at East Suffolk Council system (guidance notes previously sent to Councillors).

The Clerk reminded Councillors it was their responsibility to check their entry on the ESC Register of Member’s Interests. Councillors should remember to include their own homes when listing ‘Land where the member has an interest’. The Clerk had previously sent guidance on how to fill this in correctly.

Chair’s initials:

7. To review and confirm all Direct Debits and Standing Orders presently set up by the Council.

The Clerk confirmed there was presently one Standing Order established on the Council's Bank Account: Information Commissioner's Office for £35.00 per annum. Cllr Brinkley proposed that the Council continue with this Standing Order. This was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt and all were in favour.

8. To agree Minutes of meeting dated 13th March 2024.

All Councillors agreed that the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting. Cllr Gardner proposed that the minutes should be signed, this was seconded by Cllr Lenton and all Councillors agreed.

The minutes had already been published on the website in draft form in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.

9. Clerk's Report – To receive updates on matters not requiring debate or decision.

The Clerk had continued to inform the Councillors of ongoing issues via a weekly email. Much of the work that the Clerk had been involved with was on the agenda, however some specific points were highlighted:

- i. The Bugle Bulletin is a free service from Mailchimp. The Parish Council are allowed 1,000 free emails a month. As we now have over 150 subscribers we will be allowed to send no more than 6 subject emails in a month, so we need to be mindful of the importance of the content.
- ii. The Beacon Brazier has been made by Mick Jackson and will be positioned in place on the Playing Field in the next few weeks. The agreed spot on the field was decided by Mick, David Riddleston, representatives of the FOPs (Friends of the Playing Field), and the Clerk. The plaque to be attached to the Beacon has been made by Signs For You.
- iii. Two village children noticed one of the foot pegs on the Monkey Challenge Wall had not been attached with two bolts and instead was attached with only one. The Clerk contacted Finding Fitness, who supplied the wall, who apologised profusely. They suggested they send a spare bolt in the post to be fixed in place by the Council, and they would send £100 to the Council as a gesture of goodwill. This was gratefully accepted by the Clerk.
- iv. The grass cutting on the Field had been agreed by East Suffolk Services (ESC) to start in March, however the first cut had not been until mid April. This had meant that the grass was very long and resulted in a poor finish. A complaint about the state of the grass cutting had been received from a resident and this had been forwarded to ESC. The Clerk suggested that the Council may need to re-think the reduction of cuts from 12 to 8 per year, which had been necessary due to budget restraints.

- v. As Councillors will have been aware from regular SALC bulletins, there is a recommendation that Councils adopt uk.gov domain names in the future. At the moment this is not compulsory, however it may soon become so. Bucklesham Parish Councillors all use bpc@gmail email addresses and the Clerk reinforced the importance of using these addresses rather than their private ones. If the uk.gov domain names become compulsory in the future, the cost is likely to be in the region of £350 per Council per year.

10. To discuss the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the Bucklesham Allotments from East Suffolk Council (ESC).

The final report from Sam Read, Solicitor from Barker Gotelee, had been received and circulated to Councillors on 22/04/24. Cllr Brinkley had signed the agreement on behalf of the Council, and once Cllr Lenton has also signed then the CAT will be complete. The Clerk had received signed Tenancy Agreements from all tenants. An informal meeting of tenants with the Clerk and Cllr Lenton had been very successful and all were hopeful of an excellent working relationship moving forward. All empty plots had now been taken and there was one family on the waiting list for the next available plot. The Clerk will invoice all tenants in October for the year ahead. The money generated from the rents will be enough to cover all costs, ensuring that there will be no additional costs to village Council Tax payers via their precept.

Action: Clerk

11. Highways:

- a. To discuss Suffolk Highways’ rejection of the request for the reduction of speed limit on the Brightwell road to 40mph (see Appendix C)

Although Cllr Mulcahy had unofficially informed the Clerk via email that this request had been rejected by Suffolk County Council, no official response had been received from Suffolk Highways Officers. Councillors agreed that no action could be taken until the official response had been received.

12. Planning:

- a. To receive report from Gary Bareham on progress of the Castlemore Homes development.

An update on the progress of the development had been received and circulated by the Clerk. The development is in the final stages and the majority of the properties have been sold. The Chair expressed his hope that the new villagers were happy in their new homes and felt able to join in with village life. Cllrs commented that it was very disappointing to read that the work widening the road on Levington Lane had once again been pushed back two months.

Action: Clerk

- b. To discuss DC/24/1519/P3MA conversion to dwelling, Barn, Tenth Road, Bucklesham.

The Chair noted that all Councillors had studied the documents provided prior to the meeting. Councillors were reminded to align their comments to material planning considerations.

Councillors made the following comments:

- There is no apparent difference to the previous application for the same site, received in June 2023, which had then been withdrawn.
- As the Council had not objected to the original application there should be no objection to this application.

Cllr Lenton proposed that the Council register a comment of ‘No Objection’ to the application. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all were in favour.

Action: Clerk

13. Finance Matters:

- a. To accept and sign Annual Accounts for Year End 31st March 2024

The Clerk was thanked for producing the accounts so quickly after 31st March and congratulated on the presentation of them by the Chair. Cllr Brinkley proposed they be adopted. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all Councillors were in agreement.

- b. To accept Internal Auditors Report for 2023/24 and ‘Internal Audit Report’ of Part 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR 2023/24).

Both these documents had been sent to Councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr Gardner proposed they be accepted and acknowledged as received. This was seconded by Cllr Lenton and all Councillors were in agreement. Cllrs referred to the comments from the Internal Auditor as to the Clerk’s hard work in producing the accounts and the excellent standard to which they were produced. The Auditor had generously invoiced the Council a reduced fee due to the Clerk’s excellent standard of presentation which made the audit much easier and quicker to undertake.

- c. To agree and complete Section 1 of Part 3 of the AGAR 2023/24

The Clerk read each point of Section 1 Part 3 of the AGAR in turn. Cllr Roper proposed that the Council answer in the affirmative to each point. This was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt and all Councillors were in agreement.

- d. To agree and complete Section 2 of Part 3 of the AGAR 2023/24.

This section had previously been sent to Councillors. Cllr Marriage proposed the figures were correct and should be reported in the AGAR. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all Councillors were in agreement.

The Chair signed all relevant papers, the Clerk agreed to publish these on the website and to send a link to all documentation to PKF Littlejohn as per the instructions.

Chair’s initials:

e. To agree the CIL Report for 2023/24.

The CIL Report had previously been sent to Councillors. Cllr Gardner agreed it was a correct statement, which was seconded by Cllr Lenton and all Councillors agreed.

f. To agree Reserve Allocations as at start of 2024/25.

Cllr Seagroatt proposed the Reserve Allocations was a true record of Reserves as at start of 2024/35 financial year. This was seconded by Cllr Roper with all in favour.

The Internal Auditor had once again raised concerns at the lack of General Reserves. The Council's Reserves Policy states that there should be 9 to 12 months expenditure set aside for various emergencies, which would equate to £11,720. The current General Reserves are £3,346. The Clerk informed the Council that the Reserves Policy would be reviewed at the September meeting and the figure could be amended if the Council so wished.

g. To receive the Internal Control Statement for year ending 2023/24.

This document had been previously sent to all Councillors. Cllr Marriage proposed the Internal Control Statement be accepted. This was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt and all were in favour.

h. To review accounts as at 30th April 2024 and review Bank Statements.

The accounts for 30th April 2024 had been sent to all Councillors and there were no questions.

i. To discuss investment opportunities with CCLA Investment Funders.

This item had been requested by Cllr Bickers after listening to a seminar on CCLA Investment Funders at the SALC conference. All Councillors had read the report previously sent by the Clerk and agreed this was an excellent opportunity to invest Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds while the Council found appropriate projects to spend such funds on. Cllr Lenton proposed the Clerk invest £60,000 of the £61,551.51 CIL funds currently being held by the Council. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all were in favour.

j. To discuss Community Benefit Fund Draft Agreement with Bucklesham Solar Ltd.

The Clerk had received very welcome advice from ESC Cllr Owen Grey, who had recommended that the Council do nothing with regards to signing the CBF at this point. If and when the second necessary planning application for connection to the grid has been permitted, the Council will look again at the proposal. The Clerk had contacted Novus on two occasions requesting information on the progress of the second planning application but had received no response.

k. To discuss the purchase of wild flower seeds for the Playing Field.

This item had been carried over from the last meeting as Councillors wanted to know the exact state of the Council’s finances, following the end of year audit, before discussing this request. It was agreed that there were not sufficient funds in the Council’s Reserves to reimburse the resident who requested this, and that unfortunately CIL funds could not be used. Cllr Marriage reiterated her opinion that the seeds would still be suitable for use in the Churchyard following the repair of the roof and agreed to contact the resident to discuss this.

Action: Cllr Marriage

l. To authorise the following invoices for payment:

i. Bucklesham Village Hall (agreed renovations from CIL)	£3,000.00
ii. Bucklesham Community Council (D-Day celebrations from ECB)	£1,000.00

m. To note payments made since last meeting:

i. HMRC (Clerk’s PAYE Jan/Feb/Mar)	£223.00
ii. SALC (payroll service)	£22.80
iii. SALC (annual subscription)	£279.84
iv. D Bracey (Playing Field inspections)	£390.00
v. Print 4 U (Spring Bugles)	£108.00

n. To note payments received since last meeting:

i. ESC Precept	£5,860.00
ii. ESC (CIL)	£43,246.26
iii. Finding Fitness (donation)	£100.00

o. To note Bank Balances as at 30th April 2024:

i. Current Account	£16,082.39
ii. Savings Account	£56,385.86

Cllr Brinkley proposed that finance matters j to o were accepted, seconded by Cllr Roper, with all in favour.

Action: Clerk

14. To agree date for Clerk’s Annual Review and confirm pay scale and hours.

Cllr Brinkley and Cllr Gardner agreed to conduct the Clerk’s Annual Review to be held on 25th June at 2pm in the Village Hall. Following a recommendation from the Internal Auditor in the Internal Audit Report, the Council confirmed that they had previously agreed to increase the Clerk’s hours by 2 per month, from 30 to 32, and to pay the Clerk on NALC pay scale 18 as of 1st April 2023. There had been a typographical error in the July 2023 minutes which detailed the Clerk’s salary as scale 17. This was incorrect as the agreed scale was 18. This correction to the minutes was proposed by Cllr Gardner, seconded by Cllr Brinkley and all were in favour.

Chair’s initials:

15. To discuss the on-going difficulties of a working relationship with Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy.

This agenda item had been requested by all Councillors. The Clerk reminded the Council that in the 36 months since Cllr Mulcahy's election in May 2021, the Council had only received eight monthly reports – none at all in the first 12 months, then four in 2022, three in 2023 and one in February 2024. The Clerk also reminded Councillors that Cllr Mulcahy rarely responds to emails, has repeatedly not given apologies for absence at Parish Council meetings, and has made incorrect statements regarding her Locality Budget allocation, as has been verified by Suffolk County Council's Democratic Services.

The Parish Council had previously complained to Cllr Graham Newman, then-Chair of Suffolk County Council, in November 2022, with regards to the lack of engagement from Cllr Mulcahy. Cllr Newman expressed he was 'deeply concerned' and had urged Cllr Mulcahy to engage as a matter of course. Since that date, on the occasions that Cllr Mulcahy had excused herself from meetings, she had stated various reasons for non-attendance.

Councillors made the following comments:

- The lack of engagement has been ongoing since Cllr Mulcahy was first elected.
- I understand if Cllr Mulcahy cannot attend all our meetings, but once again we have no report so we have no idea what work, if any, she has been involved with on behalf of our residents.
- The comments made in a group email by Cllr Mulcahy claiming she personally had '*recent success in providing Bucklesham Parish Council guidance in negotiating and setting up the Community Benefit Fund*' is completely incorrect and totally untrue.
- Her statement about the Council benefitting from the Community Benefit Fund '*for not objecting to the Solar Farm Development*' was outrageous and potentially dangerous to the Council's reputation.
- Her comments in a group email stating she was '*slightly bemused by the outrage shown by Bucklesham Parish Council*' at the loss of the bus service shows a complete lack of understanding of local issues facing our residents.
- The incorrect information received about the Locality Budget is very concerning. Why has she been reluctant to distribute this fund?
- I have been a Councillor for over a year now and this item has been on the agenda for all 7 meetings. We need to take action as we have given Cllr Mulcahy many chances and have been very patient.
- We need to write to the present Chair of Suffolk County Council, Cllr Matthew Hicks, and the Monitoring Officer expressing these concerns.

The Chair agreed to write to Cllr Matthew Hicks, the Chair of Suffolk County Council, and the Monitoring Officer, detailing all the issues raised.

Action: Cllr Brinkley

Chair's initials:

16. To receive agenda items for the next meeting of the Parish Council (Wednesday 10th July 2024).

Cllr Roper requested 'to discuss suggested projects for CIL funds' as an agenda item. The Clerk reminded Councillors that all projects going forward would be included and that any new items should be notified to her at least one week before the meeting.

Action: Clerk

The meeting closed at 8:23 pm.

Signed:
Chair

Date:

Ruth Johnson
Clerk to Bucklesham Parish Council

Chair's initials: