

Minutes of Bucklesham Parish Council Meeting
Held on Wednesday 10th July 2024 at 7:00pm
In Bucklesham and Foxhall Village Hall, IP10 0DZ

Present

Cllr Trevor Bickers

Cllr Rhea Gardner

Cllr Clive Lenton (Vice Chair)

Cllr Gemma Marriage

Cllr Kathryn Roper

Cllr Lynda Seagroatt

Cllr Lee Reeves (ESC)

Cllr Mike Ninnmey (ESC)

Ruth Johnson (Clerk)

10 members of the public were present

1. Apologies for absence:

a. To receive apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Cllr Brinkley (illness).

b. To accept apologies for absence.

Cllr Lenton proposed that Cllr Brinkley's apologies were accepted. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all were in favour. In Cllr Brinkley's absence, Cllr Bickers proposed Vice-Chair Cllr Lenton act as Chair for the meeting. This was seconded by Cllr Gardner and all were in favour.

2. To receive any:

a. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest.

There were none.

b. Declarations of Non-Pecuniary Interest.

Cllr Lenton declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 as his children would directly benefit from any additional facilities on the Playing Field.

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.

3. Public Participation – To receive:

a. Reports from County and District Councillors:

• Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy:

Cllr Mulcahy sent her apologies stating she had a previous commitment. A report was received but Councillors commented that it contained no information at all with regards to what work Cllr Mulcahy had been doing on behalf of the Parish. Instead, it contained a summary of the work that the local Trading Standards department had been dealing with. The Clerk contacted Cllr Mulcahy as she assumed that she had been sent the wrong document in error. No further report was sent. Councillors agreed that further discussion about the lack of engagement from Cllr Mulcahy would be had at item 11.

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. Both Councillors were thanked by the Chair for their attendance at the village D-Day celebrations.

The Chair asked Cllr Reeves if they had allocated their Enabling Communities Budgets and if the Council could request any for village projects. Cllr Reeves stated that this had been allocated to another Parish that was more in need of financial support. All Councillors understood and accepted this as Bucklesham had received financial help from both Councillors on many previous occasions.

b. Questions from any member of the public:

Several members of the public had attended the meeting with their children to request the Parish Council consider installing some bicycle jumps on the Playing Field for the older children. Two members of the public spoke at length explaining their request. The Chair thanked them for their attendance and explained that this would be discussed by the Council at item 5.

4. To agree Minutes of meeting dated 29th May 2024:

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

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

Action: Clerk

5. To discuss the request for bicycle jumps on the Playing Field

Several residents had contacted the Clerk to request that the Parish Council consider installing some bicycle jumps on the Playing Field. It had been noted that there were no facilities on the Field for older children and that some bicycle jumps could provide an outlet for their energy.

James Perks from Twisted Oaks had met with the Clerk and Cllr Lenton to informally discuss what could be achieved on the site. The volunteer Playing Field Manager, David Riddleston, had given his full support to the project. Jake Nichols from TRU7 had been contacted with regards to support for the project and had offered the earth moving equipment free of charge. Jake had also offered to work with James and the Children to design the area. The Clerk had contacted Hiscox Insurance Company to enquire as to the increase in premium. No reply had been received at the time of the meeting.

The Councillors agreed that this would be an excellent addition to the facilities on the Field and were all in support of the project. The Clerk confirmed that this project could be paid for using CIL funds and Councillors agreed this would be an excellent use of the money. Cllr Roper proposed that the Clerk continue to investigate the insurance costs with Hiscox, and the total cost of the project with Jake Nichols, and that subject to costs being acceptable to Councillors, the Council approve this project. This was seconded by Cllr Bickers and all were in favour.

Chair's initials:

6. 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 Clerk reported that the Council had received many emails of thanks for installing the roadside signs on the path to school, and for the continued pressure put on Highways to cut the path. An email requesting an urgent meeting with Cllr Paul West, who had responsibility for Highways, had not been answered. The Clerk agreed to continue pursuing this.
- ii. The Community Asset Transfer of the Allotments had finally been agreed and the Council are now legally the owners of the site. All plots are taken and there is a waiting list should any plots become available. The Clerk has built up an excellent relationship with all tenants and will invoice them as agreed in October. Some tenants have requested a fence deterring the wild deer be considered by the Council, and that a project to clear the pit be started. The Clerk had requested quotes for the work, and improvements to the Allotments would be on the next agenda.
- iii. The D-Day 80th commemorations had been very successful, thanks to the Community Council. The Clerk had written to Mick Jackson thanking him and his team for the magnificent Beacon that had been installed on the Playing Field. Plans are underway for VE Day 80th Commemorations that will take place on 8th May 2025. The Clerk is keeping an eye out for funding sources.
- iv. Royal Mail had installed the new post box at Forge Close although it was not yet in use.
- v. Despite it being 15 weeks since Cllr Mulchay told the Council of the rejection of the request to reduce the speed limit on the Brightwell road, no official response had been received until the afternoon of the meeting. The Clerk had emailed Suffolk Highways on four occasions and had been told the report would be sent when it was ready. The report had been written on 16th March, but not received until 10th July. The Clerk has requested an investigation into why it took so long for the Council to be informed of the decision. Suffolk Highways described this as 'an administrative oversight'.

Despite the decision-makers acknowledging that *'comments raised by the Bucklesham Parish Council, supported by the Local County Councillor, the School, and District Councillors, make a compelling safety case'*, they then concluded that there is *'not a clear case for reducing the speed limit'* and therefore they rejected the request.

The Clerk requested details on how to appeal the decision. Keith Sampson from Suffolk Highways replied that *'there is no appeal process to the decision outcome, and that is final'*.

Councillors agreed they had investigated all avenues open to them and noted that their campaign for the reduction in speed limit on Brightwell road had spanned more than 25 years.

Chair's initials:

It was suggested that the parents at the school may have more success taking this forward and perhaps consider contacting the local press. Councillors agreed that they would fully support the parents of the school children with whatever actions they take.

7. To receive report from Cllr Roper on the SALC AGM held on 01/07/24.

Cllr Roper attended the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) Annual General Meeting on 1st July 2024. A full report had been previously sent to Councillors.

Cllr Roper reported that the keynote speaker had been Carol Eagles, CEO of Citizens Advice, West Suffolk. Sir Edward Greenwell was elected as SALC President. Sir Terry Waite CBE and Clare, Countess of Euston, Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, were elected Vice Presidents of SALC. No local MPs were elected at the time due to the ongoing election process. SALC had received no nominations for SALC board members.

SALC are currently reshaping their small team and recruitment is underway for a training officer. They will be changing the way they communicate with Councils so that messages are more relevant. The member portal is now open to Councillors and there will be ongoing development work of the SALC website.

SALC (and NALC) are encouraging Parish Councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge. This is a nationwide project to start a culture change for the local council sector. Following consultation with member councils from April 2024, some minor changes were agreed to the SALC Board constitution.

The Chair thanked Cllr Roper for her attendance and for representing Bucklesham, and for her report. All Councillors agreed that they would study the Civility and Respect Pledge and the Clerk was asked to put this on the agenda for the September meeting.

Action: Clerk

8. Documentation:

a) To adopt the Code of Conduct

Councillors had all read the Code of Conduct (2020) and informed the Clerk that they had understood the requirements.

b) To adopt Financial Regulations (as sent to Councillors on 16/05/24).

The Clerk reminded the Council that NALC (National Association of Local Councils) had updated their model Financial Regulations and these had been circulated to all Councillors prior to the meeting. There were a few minor amendments made by the Clerk to ensure the new regulations were relevant to Bucklesham.

Cllr Bickers proposed that the new Financial Regulations be adopted by the Council. This was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour.

Action: Clerk

9. Finance Matters:

a. To review accounts as at 30th June 2024 and review Bank Statements.

The accounts for 30th June 2024 had been sent to all Councillors and there were no questions. The Clerk asked Cllr Gardner to sign the Bank Statements.

b. To Review our Internal Accounting Procedures

The Clerk had previously sent an email reminding Councillors that one of the annual tasks the Parish Council needs to complete is a review of our Internal Controls for dealing with financial matters and the efficiency of our Internal Audit. This annual review had taken place at the meeting on 10th January 2024 and were minuted as such:

Financial Controls

We have the following financial controls in place:

- Clerk checks invoice against estimate (where appropriate) and queries any differences
- Clerk draws cheque
- Two signatories see invoice and reconcile with cheque (then sign cheque, cheque stub and initial invoice)
- Bank reconciliation is produced at the end of every month and sent to Councillors
- A Councillor reviews the Bank Statements at each meeting (i.e. at least 6 times a year)
- Financial Regulations are in place and reviewed annually

Councillors agreed that these Controls will not need further review until January 2025.

c. To discuss the choice of Internal Auditor for 2024/25 audit.

The Clerk had been asked to research local Internal Auditors to use for the 2024/25 Audit. The Council had used the services of Trevor Brown for many years and, although he was considered an excellent Auditor, it was recognised that it was not good practice to use the same Auditor year after year. Trevor had understood the concerns and had agreed that the Council should look to employ the services of an alternative auditor for the next audit.

The Clerk had used the services of SALC to reach out to all affiliated Clerks asking for their recommendations. Ironically, Trevor Brown received the most positive feedback as he was widely considered by all those replying to be the most efficient, the most professional and the most thorough.

Cllr Gardner proposed the Clerk investigate the services of the auditor used by Trimley St Mary. The Clerk agreed to contact Trimley St Mary Clerk for contact details. SALC auditors could be used as an alternative, although they would be expensive.

d. To discuss investment with CCLA Investment Funders.

The Council had previously requested the Clerk invest £60,000 with CCLA and the Clerk reported that this process was underway. The initial application had been submitted and all checks were in the process of being undertaken.

e. To discuss ideas and suggestions for allocation of CIL funds.

The Clerk had previously sent a list of proposed projects for the CIL funds to all Councillors. Despite an advert requesting suggestions for projects in the latest Bugle Newsletter, none had been received.

A lengthy discussion took place as to the validity of some of the projects. Those that were deemed unworkable were dismissed. Some did not fit the criteria for CIL projects so were also shelved. The Clerk was asked to obtain updated quotes with regards to the remaining proposed projects. The Clerk reminded Councillors that they had 5 years to spend the CIL funds, and that in the meantime any funds invested with CCLA would be earning significant interest to boost Council's Reserves.

f. To discuss how to allocate the remainder of the donation from Castlemore Homes.

Castlemore Homes and their contractors had very generously donated £1,450 for the construction and installation of the D-Day Beacon. There was still £615.11 remaining from this money after all payments were made. Cllr Roper proposed that this money be paid to the Community Council for future village events, particularly the VE Day 80th Commemorations due to take place in May 2025. This was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour.

g. To authorise the following invoices for payment:

i. None £0.00

h. To note payments made since last meeting:

i. Signs For You (Beacon plaque)	£134.08
ii. Barker Gotelee (Allotment Conveyance)	£1,140.00
iii. Print 4 U (D-Day flyers)	£38.00
iv. R Johnson (printer)	£179.99
v. Signs 4 U (Slow Down signs)	£126.77
vi. Mick Jackson (Beacon Brazier)	£720.00
vii. R Johnson (Clerk's Salary and expenses April/May/June)	£1,610.75
viii. SCL (Grass cutting on Playing Field)	£210.00
ix. C Lenton (lighting equipment for beacon)	£114.89
x. Print 4 U (Summer Bugles)	£108.00

i. To note payments received since last meeting:

i. Enabling Communities Budget (for D Day celebrations) £1,000.00

j. To note Bank Balances as at 30th June 2024:

i. Current Account (No. 80152285)	£9,099.85
ii. Savings Account (No. 00605875)	£56,539.06

Cllr Lenton proposed that finance matters *g* to *j* were accepted, seconded by Cllr Gardner, with all in favour.

10. To discuss the Clerk’s Review and approve recommendations arising from it.

Cllrs Brinkley and Gardner had met with the Clerk on 11th June 2024 to review the Clerk’s working practises over the past year. Details of the Clerk’s Review had been sent to all Councillors.

It had once again agreed by David, Rhea and Ruth that the relationship between the Council and the Clerk remains excellent. Communication is very strong between all parties and there were no issues raised at the Review. All Councillors had been given an opportunity to raise any concerns with regards to Ruth’s work and none had been brought forward. Ruth thanked the Council for their support and encouragement during what had been another very busy year.

The Council agreed that once again there had been a significant increase in the Clerk’s workload in the past year, and there would be a further increase now the Council have completed the CAT of the Allotments, and likely projects generated due to spending CIL funds. Cllrs Brinkley and Gardner had recommended in their report that any ‘Cost of Living’ increment be awarded once negotiated with the unions by NALC. Ruth was grateful for this commitment. The Budget had allowed for this.

Although Ruth agreed that her workload had increased, she suggested that the Council did not increase her hours, or award a pay scale increment, in this financial year as there is currently no money in the budget to do this. Cllr Gardner proposed that the Council look at this again at the January meeting when the budget for 2025/26 will be agreed, with a view to increasing Ruth’s hours if finances allow. Ruth was thanked for her understanding.

It was agreed by all Councillors that the Parish Council is in an excellent position, from where it was to where it is now. Ruth was thanked for her time, enthusiasm and commitment to the village.

11. To receive updates on the formal complaint made towards Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy.

Following the previous meeting, the Chair Cllr Brinkley had written to Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, sharing the Council’s concerns and disappointment with the continued lack of engagement from Cllr Mulcahy. An acknowledgment of the email had been received but there had been no further comment. The Clerk had emailed and made a telephone call to Cllr Hicks’ office to chase a response, but no reply was received.

The Clerk reported that other than the incorrect document sent for this meeting, there had been no report received from Cllr Mulcahy since February 2024. Cllr Roper had asked the Clerk to ascertain whether other Parish Councils wished to join the Council in a letter of concern to Cllr Hicks. Despite many other Parish Councils in Cllr Mulcahy’s ward appearing to have similar issues with her engagement, no other Councils wished to join together to make a formal complaint.

Chair’s initials:

It was noted that there had been many Highways issues in Bucklesham that Cllr Mulcahy should have helped with, notably the request for the reduction of speed limit on the C375 Brightwell Road, and the overgrown path to school.

The Council had requested that Cllr Mulcahy retract her false statement that Bucklesham Parish Council had benefited £20,000/year for 40 years for not objecting to the Solar Farm Development. Cllr Mulcahy had refused and doubled down on her statement.

The Clerk informed the Councillors that any formal complaint needed to show Cllr Mulcahy had breached the Code Of Conduct. The Clerk suggested that Cllr Mulchay had breached the Code of Conduct in four ways. Details of the alleged breaches would remain confidential at this stage.

Cllr Bickers proposed that the Clerk make a formal complaint through Suffolk County Council’s formal complaints procedure, detailing all alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct as set out by the Clerk in a confidential document. This was seconded by Cllr Gardner with all in favour.

Action: Clerk

12. To receive agenda items for the next Parish Council meeting (Wednesday 11th September 2024).

There were no other agenda items as at the meeting from the Councillors, but the Clerk reminded them 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 8:14 pm.

Signed:
Chair

Date:

Ruth Johnson
Clerk to Bucklesham Parish Council

Chair’s initials: