

Minutes of Bucklesham Parish Council Meeting
Held on Wednesday 8th January 2025 at 7:00pm
In Bucklesham and Foxhall Village Hall, IP10 0DZ

Present

CLlr Trevor Bickers
CLlr Gemma Marriage
CLlr Kathryn Roper

CLlr Rhea Gardner
CLlr Kathryn McDonald (from item 12)
CLlr Lynda Seagroatt (Vice-Chair)

CLlr Clive Lenton (Chair)

CLlr Mike Ninnmey (ESC)

CLlr Lee Reeves (ESC)

Ruth Johnson (Clerk)

4 members of the public were present

1. Apologies for absence:

- a. To receive apologies for absence.
There were none.
- b. To accept apologies for absence.
There were none.

(Item 12 was discussed at this point in the meeting)

2. 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.

3. Public Participation – To receive:

- a. Reports from County and District Councillors:
 - Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy:

No report or apologies had been received from Cllr Mulcahy. The Clerk informed the Council that no correspondence from Cllr Mulcahy had been received since August 2024. An update on the Council's formal complaint with regards to Cllr Mulcahy's lack of engagement would be discussed at item 10.

- East Suffolk District Cllr Mike Ninnmey and Cllr Lee Reeves:

Cllrs Reeves and Ninnmey were thanked for their attendance and their detailed monthly reports which had been circulated to all Councillors. The two Cllrs talked at length about various issues involving the District Council, and updated the Parish Council on many local topics, including many big changes that were about to happen such as the National Planning Policy Framework, the North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood, and the Devolution project amalgamating both District and County Councils into one larger unitary Council.

- b. Questions from any member of the public:

Members of the public were reminded by the Chair that any questions of the Council about agenda items could be asked at this time, but once the meeting reconvened members of the public would not be permitted to speak again and may only observe the proceedings (in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972).

A member of the public spoke with regards to their request for the Council's support with starting up a youth football team. This matter would be discussed at item 6.b.

4. To agree Minutes of meeting dated 13th November 2024:

All Councillors agreed that the Minutes were an accurate record of the meeting. Cllr Roper proposed that the Minutes should be signed, this was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt 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. Clerk's Report – To receive updates on matters not requiring debate or decision.

The Clerk had continued to inform the Council 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. East Suffolk's Planning Team is holding a Planning Forum for Town and Parish Councils on Monday 3rd February from 9:30am to 12:30pm. Bucklesham may send two representatives. The Clerk reported that she was unable to attend but that it is highly recommended that someone from each Council be there. Details would be forwarded to all Councillors following the meeting.
- ii. Cllrs Lenton and Seagroatt will be attending SALC training on the role of the Chair on 29th January 2025. This will hopefully aid them both in the procedures of Chairing a Parish Council meeting, and this continued professional development will help the Council remain proficient with knowledge of the latest correct procedures.
- iii. The meeting scheduled for the 8th December on the Allotments had needed to be cancelled and it had been decided not to make another date before Christmas. Cllrs Lenton and Marriage had agreed to meet the tenants on the Allotments on a Sunday afternoon in January at 2:30pm (date to be confirmed).

Chair's initials:

6. **Playing Field**

- a. To discuss the recent safety inspections by D Bracey and the removal or replacement of the Play Equipment.

The most recent inspection of the Play Equipment had highlighted several pieces that were nearing the end of their life and were in need of replacement. However, it was important to note that no pieces were deemed unsafe and in need of immediate removal.

The Clerk reminded the Council that the Play Equipment had been installed in 2005 and that the guarantee on all pieces had been 15 years. The purchase of the equipment had been a mammoth task, with the Council raising over £87,000 from fundraising and had obtained five separate grants. The Clerk informed the Council that any replacement of the equipment would again be a very large, time-consuming project and it would be necessary to have the support of a lot of residents, and the District and County Councillors, if grant applications were to be successful.

Cllr McDonald proposed the Clerk obtain quotes for the replacement of the equipment and investigate any available grants as providing such an area for the village children is an essential responsibility of the Council. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all were in favour.

- b. To discuss the request for a youth football team.

The Clerk had been approached by two village children asking if a youth football team would be allowed to use the Field as their home ground and training pitch. The Clerk reminded Councillors that football teams using the Field had stopped in 2020, when the Bucklesham Wanderers team had folded due to lack of numbers, and the external teams were asked to find alternative venues due to their abuse of the facilities.

The minutes of the Parish Council meeting dated 10th September 2020 stated that:

‘Any Bucklesham villager who wishes in future to manage a village team consisting of at least 50% villagers, will be encouraged and supported by the Council.’

The Chair stated that although the provision of a football team was not the responsibility of the Parish Council, he felt the idea should be supported and encouraged, providing they adhere to certain stipulations: the team must be affiliated with the Football Association; the Team must be managed and regulated in an appropriate way; and at least 50% of the team must be residents of the village. This was seconded by Cllr Roper and all were in favour.

The Clerk was asked to contact the parents of the children who requested the team be reinstated offering support to get the team established and explaining the stipulations. It was suggested the Clerk could publicise the team in the next Bugle and on village notice boards.

Action: Clerk

7. Highways:

a. To discuss the speeding vehicles on Levington Lane.

The Clerk had been made aware of the death of three pet cats during the last year due to cars speeding on Levington Lane. It was noted that since the new development of Oak Tree View the volume of traffic had increased considerably. The Clerk had been contacted by a resident of Levington Lane asking what measures the Council could take to slow traffic down. The Clerk reminded the Council that Highways issues were not the responsibility of the Parish Council and that any traffic calming measures had to be implemented by Suffolk Highways.

If the Parish Council wished to request changes to the speed limit on village lanes, or to request the implementation of traffic-calming measures, a survey of the village roads needed to be conducted by Suffolk Highways, costing in the region of £15,000. The Chair reiterated that the cost of £15,000 was for the survey alone, before the cost of any improvements resulting from the survey were implemented. The Clerk reminded the Council that Highways refused to further discuss the reduction of the speed limit on the C375 Brightwell Road following their recent decision to dismiss the request, so this could not be added to any survey.

Cllr Lenton proposed that the Council purchase signs similar to those installed on the path to school encouraging traffic to slow down. It was recognised that erecting signs on the highway is not permitted and that they may be removed by Suffolk Highways. Cllr Roper seconded this and suggested agreement from home owners who lived on Levington Lane where the Council intended on installing the signs should be sought before fixing them in place. All Councillors were in favour.

b. To discuss the missing bus stop sign at the school.

The Clerk was asked to report this again stating the difficulties faced by wheelchair users when using this bus stop.

c. To discuss the uneven tarmac and concrete, and overgrown hedges encroaching on paths and pavements.

The Clerk had been contacted by a wheelchair user explaining that many properties on Levington Lane and Main Road had hedges that encroached on the pavements, meaning passing them was very difficult. Cllr Lenton proposed that the Clerk write a polite letter to the owners of the offending properties, explaining the problem and requesting that they cut their hedges back. If the problems were not addressed in the next few weeks it was suggested that the Clerk then report the problems to Suffolk Highways to contact the homeowners. This was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour.

Action: Clerk

8. Planning:

- a. To discuss 24/4139/FUL Engineering works and laying of underground cable connecting to Solar Farm, land to the east of Bucklesham Hall.

All Councillors confirmed that they had studied the planning documents in relation to the application before the meeting. The Council had received the thoughts of Mr and Mrs Riddell from Bucklesham Hall, whose detailed letter to East Suffolk Planning was very helpful to the Council in aiding them with their discussions.

Councillors made the following comments:

- Permission for the solar Farm has already been granted. We are no longer in a position to judge the merits or otherwise of the Solar Farm, this application is for the underground connecting cables.
- It is concerning that the Riddells from Bucklesham Hall have had no official notification about this application and have had to receive details from the Parish Council in order for them to officially comment.
- It is unclear from the maps exactly where the Southern and Northern access points are. Both look to be on the C375 Brightwell road with a speed limit of 60mph which is of concern.
- There is likely to be an impact on local traffic using the C375, particularly during school drop off and pick up times, and for the residents of Bucklesham Hall and neighbouring cottages. We should request this work is carried out during school holidays to avoid issues with school bus to Kesgrave.
- The C375 floods considerably during heavy rain and there is a concern that any construction work in this area will exacerbate this.

The Clerk reminded Councillors that they made 'No Objection' to the original planning application for the Solar Farm. Their response to this application could be to 'Object', to 'Support', or to make 'No Objection'. Cllr Gardner proposed the Council make No Objection to the application but wished the above points to be noted. This was seconded by Cllr Bickers and all were in favour. The Clerk was asked to register the Council's decision on the ESC Planning Portal.

- b. To discuss the Parish Council's response to the Community Benefit Fund draft document from Innova (Bucklesham Solar farm).

This draft document had been sent to the Council in January 2024 and had previously been discussed at the meeting on 13th March 2024. Bucklesham Solar Ltd had sent the Community Benefit Fund (CBF) Agreement with regards to the amount of funds that would be generated for the benefit of the village once the Solar Farm was in operation. The Clerk had previously requested assistance from ESC planning department with regards to this, but had been informed this was not something they could advise on as CBFs are not a material planning consideration. The Clerk had also asked other Suffolk Parish Councils with Solar Farms in their parishes for their advice, and Suffolk County Cllr Patti Mulcahy if she could assist the Council with information on the CBF.

Councillors had previously agreed it was extremely important that the Council receive legal advice regarding the CBF as it was imperative to ensure the agreement was in order. Pretty's Solicitors had quoted £2,500–£2,750 to administer the document before the Council agree to sign. The Clerk had enquired if CIL funds could be used to cover this cost but this was refused as it did not meet the funding criteria.

The Parish Council had previously decided to defer any decision with regards to the CBF until the second planning application regarding the underground connecting cables had been approved or otherwise. Innova contacted the Parish Council again on 16th November 2024 asking if the document would be agreed by the Council and had shown a willingness to cover the costs involved if the Council sought a second quote. Cllr Roper proposed the Clerk obtain a further quote from a local solicitor and gain an agreement from Innova that these costs would be covered by them before any solicitor be instructed. This was seconded by Cllr Bickers and all were in favour.

c. To discuss SCC/0268/ - discharge of Conditions relating to Bucklesham Quarry, Tenth Road.

The Parish Council had not been formally contacted with regards to this but as the Clerk monitors all applications with 'Bucklesham' in the title, it was able to be placed on the Agenda.

Councillors all agreed they had studied the documents forwarded by the Clerk prior to the meeting and made the following comments:

- As the site has been mothballed for many years it is impossible to know whether the conditions that were set are working.
- No complaints have been received from any neighbouring properties.

Suffolk County Council informed the Clerk that they did not request the Parish Council's opinion on the Discharge of Conditions.

d. To discuss DC/24/4357/FUL – conversion of former pump house into self build dwelling.

Cllrs Lenton, Roper and Bickers, along with the Clerk, attended a site visit on 18th December 2024. Also present at the meeting were representatives from Anglian Water and the architects. Councillors all confirmed they had studied all planning documents relating to the application prior to the meeting. Councillors made the following comments:

- It was a very productive meeting and all our questions and concerns were answered.
- It's great to see an old building being brought back into use.
- It is a fascinating project and one we should support.
- There are further plans to develop the rest of the site at a later date.
- I can see no issues here.

Cllr Lenton proposed the Council Support the application, this was seconded by Cllr Bickers and all were in favour. The Clerk was asked to register the Council's Support of the application on the East Suffolk Planning Portal.

Action: Clerk

Chair's initials:

9. Finance Matters:

- a. To review accounts as at 31st December 2024 and review bank statements.

There were no questions regarding the accounts. The Clerk asked Cllr Lenton to sign the Bank Statement and Accounts Sheet.

- b. To review our internal Accounting Procedures and appoint an Internal Auditor for 2024/25.

The Clerk reminded 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.

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

Efficiency of Internal Audit

The Clerk recommended that the internal auditor appointed for 2024/25 is SALC as they are efficient and competent for the following reasons:

- They have a team of experienced and knowledgeable Auditors
- It is an electronic/paperless process saving time and money
- The Council will receive a comprehensive written report
- The return times are very quick
- They have been recommended by many other Councils.

Appointment of Internal Auditor

Cllr Roper proposed that all procedures in place were adequate, and that the Council request the services of SALC for the Internal Audit of 2024/25. This was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt and all were in favour.

In line with this, the Clerk informed the Council that she had once again been using the Year End Preparation Checklist, in preparation for the audit. This had been circulated previously by email. It had proved very useful as it had helped to avoid having several items on the agenda all at once as the Council had spread the necessary tasks throughout the year and had a few at each meeting.

- c. To discuss the two quotes for grass cutting on the Playing field from East Suffolk Services (ESS) and SCL Landscape Ltd (SCL).

The Clerk had sent the two quotes to Councillors prior to the meeting. ESS had increased their costs from last year by several hundred pounds as they had changed their method of charging.

Contractor	Price for Playing Field Per cut	Price for Allotments per cut	Total per cut	Estimated total (dependant on actual cuts)
East Suffolk Services	£114.00	£42.75	£156.75	£1,872.00
SCL Landscape Ltd	£95.00	£50.00	£145	£1,740.00

It was agreed that ESS had been less than reliable over the last few years and although the individual workmen had always done a good job, their hands were tied with regards to the timings of their visits. Cllr Bickers proposed SCL be awarded the contract for the year ahead as they had been recommended by other authorities. This was seconded by Cllr McDonald and all were in agreement.

- d. To discuss and agree the Budget for 2025/26.

The budget had been sent out previously and the Council debated at length the various funds allocated. Cllr Lenton stated that he felt the planned expenditure was very cautious and that although the Budget was very well laid out and explained, there was very little room for unexpected expenditure. Councillors had previously suggested that the amounts allocated for the columns where the Council had overspent in the previous financial year be increased. The Clerk had adjusted the figures to reflect this.

The Clerk reminded the Council that despite prudent financial management, utilising the interest gained from moving CIL reserves into the CCLA investment account, and the revenue gained from the allotments, the Budget would have to be increased by 10%, which equated to £5 per Band D household per year, to cover the additional estimated price increases. This equated to 10p per Band D household per week. The Clerk also reminded the Council that of their own General Reserves Policy, and the recommendation from the Internal Auditor of the requirement to hold twelve months Net Reserve Expenditure (NRE) (which would be £11,720) and that currently there was only £6,074 NRE held by the Council.

Cllr Lenton proposed the Budget be agreed, this was seconded by Cllr Bickers with 6 Cllrs in favour and 1 abstention.

e. To discuss and agree the Precept for 2025/26.

Following the previous discussions with regards to the Budget, a lengthy discussion took place regarding the necessity for a rise in the Precept to cover the increased costs. It was agreed that although the Parish Council manage the finances very well, and the Council were extremely mindful of the continued financial hardships that many residents continue to face, it would be necessary to request an increase in the precept. This would likely mean an average increase of 10p per household per week. It was proposed by Cllr Lenton that a figure of £14,159.00 be requested from East Suffolk Council for the precept. This was seconded by Cllr Seagroatt with all in favour.

f. To authorise the following invoices for payment:

i. None £0.00

g. To note payments made since last meeting:

i. Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal	£50.00
ii. Noticeboard Company (for allotments)	£1,240.00
iii. T Young (refund of Allotment fee)	£20.00
iv. Clerk's salary and expenses and reimbursement of admin (Oct, Nov, Dec)	£1,1773.19
v. T Seagroatt (village maintenance)	£246.36
vi. D Bracey (playing eq inspection)	£180.00
vii. Amazon (office equipment)	£69.99
viii. Print 4 U (Bugles)	£108.00
ix. ESS (Grass cutting)	£925.06
x. Bucklesham Village Hall (Hall Hire)	£300.00
xi. SALC (Chairmans Training)	£84.00

h. To note payments received since last meeting:

i. None £0.00

i. To note Bank Balances as at 31st December 2024:

i. Current Account (No. 80152285)	£4,987.57
ii. Savings Account (No. 00605875)	£0.03
iii. CCLA investment Account (PS1007890-001)	£57,000.00

Cllr Bickers proposed that finance matters *f* to *i* were accepted, seconded by Cllr Roper, with all in favour.

Action: Clerk

Chair's initials:

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

The Clerk had received the final report from the Monitoring Officer, appointed by East Suffolk Council, who stated his findings as follows:

- *Cllr Mulcahy has acted within her remit and has done so in a courteous and respectful manner.*
- *If Cllr Mulcahy had erred in any matter, she has corrected herself for example on the Locality Budget issue which indicates an adherence to the Nolan Principles.*
- *Cllr Mulcahy has wide discretion to how she uses Locality Budget funding.*
- *Cllr Mulcahy has sought the views /advice of other Senior Cllrs and officers.*
- *Cllr Mulcahy had supported projects and expenditure for the benefit of the Bucklesham PC, for example in the matter of the Speed Restriction Order.*
- *Cllr Mulcahy has 8 PCs within her division, and she has to decide on the best use of her time and her resource.*
- *Any disputes between Cllr Mulcahy and the Bucklesham PC are best mediated possibly with the assistance of the Senior Suffolk County Cllrs to reach a consensus and compromise if so required.*

*On my review of these matters, I am of the view that the complaint(s) does not fall within the Suffolk Members Code of Conduct jurisdiction. In this regard I do not find that the Code of Conduct is engaged, thereto I do not find Cllr Mulcahy has breached the Suffolk Members Code of Conduct. To conclude, the outcome of the complaint is **no further action**.*

The Chair noted once again that Cllr Mulcahy could have been helping the Council with the many Highways issues in Bucklesham if she had been in attendance at this meeting. The Clerk also informed the Council that Cllr Mulcahy had not contacted the Council since August 2024.

It was agreed that the Parish Council had acted appropriately in making the formal complaint due to the continued lack of engagement from Cllr Mulcahy since her election to office 4 years ago, and that many residents had asked for this action to be taken. The Clerk advised all those present that the most effective way to show Cllr Mulcahy of their disappointment with her conduct would be at the ballot box in May 2025, if indeed these elections were to take place and the Devolution proposal did not automatically keep her in post until 2027.

Action: Clerk

11. To discuss where to install the spare cycle racks sent in error.

The Council had accidentally been sent two lots of bike racks (when only one had been ordered) with the grant money received to celebrate the Tour of Britain passing through Bucklesham. It had previously agreed that the Shannon be offered the racks as many people do cycle to the pub and leave their bikes leaning against the wall. Unfortunately, while the Shannon had gratefully accepted the racks, installation had not been possible. David Wardle, the Church Warden, had expressed an interest in the racks for use as a hand rail when exiting the vestry. Cllr Lenton proposed the racks be given to the Church, this was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour.

Action: Clerk

Chair's initials:

(Item 12 had been discussed after item 1)

12. To Co-opt Parish Councillor and signing of ‘Declaration of Acceptance of Office’.

A resident of the village, Kathryn McDonald, had come forward to stand as a Parish Councillor following an advert in the Bugle, and after discussing the role with Cllr Marriage. Mrs McDonald read aloud a statement as to why she would like to be considered for the role and took questions from the Councillors.

The whole Council agreed that Mrs McDonald would make an excellent Councillor and the Chair thanked her very much for her interest. Cllr Lenton proposed that Mrs McDonald be co-opted on to the Council. This was seconded by Cllr Marriage and all were in favour, therefore Mrs McDonald was successfully co-opted on to the Parish Council.

Mrs McDonald signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, and the Clerk said she would be in contact with Cllr McDonald in the coming days with details of how to complete the Register Of Interests with East Suffolk Council.

13. To receive agenda items for the next Parish Council Meeting (Wednesday 12th March 2025).

Cllr Lenton requested that ‘Encouraging wildlife in the Playing Field’ be added to the next Agenda. There were no other agenda items as at the meeting from 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 8:53pm.

Signed:
Chair

Date:

Ruth Johnson
Clerk to Bucklesham Parish Council

Chair’s initials: