

MINUTES of the ANNUAL MEETING of BOXFORD PARISH COUNCIL held on Tuesday 28th May 2024 at 7.00 p.m. in the Village Hall, Boxford.

PRESENT: Cllrs H Phillips, L Wortley, C Parr, K Couling, T Munson, D Warren and H Watts. D Hattrell (Clerk), B Hurren (District Cllr), Sue Downs (Community Action Suffolk) and 2 members of the public attended in person. No Video link was requested.

ELECTION OF CHAIR: Cllr C Parr confirmed he will not be standing for Chair. Cllr H Watts proposed Cllr H Phillips as Chair. This was seconded by Cllr L Wortley. Cllr H Phillips confirmed his willingness to be elected Chair of the Parish Council (**PC**) and it was unanimously passed. The Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Chairman was then duly completed.

Cllr H Phillips therefore chaired the meeting.

APOLOGIES: were received from County Cllr J Finch.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST BY COUNCILLORS: Nothing was declared.

MINUTES OF 23rd APRIL 2024: These were accepted as correct.

COMMUNITY LED HOUSING: Sue Downs from Community Action Suffolk introduced herself as a Rural Housing Enabler and she works with Parishes to bring forward small projects of truly affordable local needs homes. She explained the difficulty getting on the housing ladder as it often takes 12 times Income which is outside the grasp of many people. She explained about Community Land Trusts, Shared houses and Rural Exception Sites. Rural Exception Sites would not normally get planning permission outside the settlement boundary for market housing developments. However, a local housing needs development can be brought forward if the need is established. To help finance the scheme, a small quantity of market housing can be included. She confirmed 14 households have registered for housing in Boxford, however, the numbers usually increase when a scheme is brought forward. The first step would be a Housing Needs Survey to identify the need. It is possible to seek help towards the funding. This would cost £2000 plus stationery and printing and VAT. The Chair confirmed that a lot of research has been undertaken during the Neighbourhood Planning process. Cllr C Parr commented that the Housing Needs Survey would bring out both affordable housing and private housing needs. S Downs confirmed that if the **PC** were not looking for funding towards the survey, it could go ahead without delay. Volunteers would be needed to collate the packs and deliver them to each household in the village. Further spare surveys will be available. For surveys completed online, the data entry costs are reduced. The return rate averages 25 to 30%. The **PC** would need to publicise a month before the surveys are delivered. It was noted that we can combine with other nearby Parishes. Sue Downs was thanked for a very informative presentation.

Cllr C Parr proposed this **PC** proceeds with and funds a Housing Needs. This was seconded by Cllr L Wortley and unanimously carried. The Chair suggested that this **PC** form a steering group to support this process.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

- 1) The potential scraping of Butchers Lane and Wash Lane was discussed. Cllr C Parr has been trying to get support from the County Council. The relevant director has declined to visit. We have a contractor's quote, and permission would be required from the Highways Authority if this **PC** were to authorize and fund the work. It was agreed for Cllr C Parr to try again over the next two weeks and if the County Council do not support us, it will form an Agenda item for the June **PC Meeting - Action Cllr C Parr and Clerk.**
- 2) Footpath from Cox Hill to Fen Street. The Chair agreed to chase for further action in relation to the surface of the path - **Action Chair.** We have received a copy agreement between the landowner and the County Council. District Cllr B Hurren suggested Kevin Verlander, SCC Right of Way Officer, may be able to assist.
- 3) Both Cllr C Parr and District Cllr B Hurren explained concerns with the grass cutting. Cllr Parr had met Richard Parmee, Babergh District Council, as agreed between meetings. Cllr Hurren explained that the District Council (**DC**) were working with Parishes to leave some natural areas, however, the biggest issue leading to the untidy cutting has been the warm and wet weather. Cllr Parr explained volunteers have assisted with raking and disposing of cuttings. The **PC** was thankful to the many volunteers for supporting. Cllr Parr (the Chair at the time) wished to further remedy the poor cutting at Ash Street/Fen Street and Gunary Close between meetings at a contractors quote of £335 plus VAT. The Clerk was unable to support, so Cllr Parr instructed the work as a gesture to the community. He reported that the remedial work was much appreciated by parishioners. He reported that his company has now funded the cut and currently the **DC** were unwilling to refund this amount. The Chair thanked Cllr Parr and urged Cllr Hurren to ensure the **DC** does not let the position deteriorate going forward.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC: A resident explained the issue with the surface of Butchers Lane was raised 3 years ago with both the County and District Councils and he was disappointed both Authorities have allowed it to get in such a poor state. He was concerned that the Police were not taking an interest in the Village. The Clerk agreed to contact the Police again, as their representative failed to attend the recent **PC Meeting** as agreed - **Action Clerk.**

REVIEW OF ITEMS RAISED BY THE PUBLIC: See above.

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT: District Cllr B Hurren attended and reported on some of the allocation of affordable housing in Boxford in recent years not being appropriate. He is hopeful things will improve for the future as he worked hard to get those matters resolved. As the Elections have been called, the **DC** needs to delay conducting business for the time being. Urgent matters will still be carried out. The **DC** is behind with its External Audit currently. He had commented to the press about brown signs being overgrown and falling over. This was picked up due to the streaming of a **DC Meeting** where Cllr Hurren spoke on the subject. Leisure Centres supported low-income families during the half-term break. Cllr Hurren confirmed the restoration of village benches was almost complete. He suggested some were as good as new so the **PC** may wish to review insurance cover in this respect. The

Chair asked Cllr Hurren to advise us on the replacement values of each bench to aid this exercise. Cllr H Watts agreed to temporarily house one of the benches until a decision is made on the new location for the bench.

COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT: County Cllr J Finch had sent his apologies and, in his report, issued in advance it was confirmed that over 400 Suffolk Roads are set to be surfaced this year and the schedules are available online. 99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place. A new independent Chair has been appointed to lead Special Educational Needs and Disabilities improvement. More Suffolk homes are eligible for energy improvements. A new survey has been launched to find out which aspects of nature in Suffolk are most important to residents. Virtual Fostering and Adoption sessions continue.

FINANCE: This Financial Year opened on 1st April 2024 with total Bank Balances at **£85,210.18**. Receipts in April came to **£33,590.78** including the Precept, Locality Grant and Burial Income. The sum of the payments made during April was £6197.83, most of which was adjusted back into the 23/24 year as the work was completed during March 24. The Bank balances closed on 29th April 2024 at **£36,267.47** in the Community Account, **£14,509.38** in the Deposit Account and **£61,826.28** in the Reserve Account making a total of **£112,603.13**.

The following pre-agreed payments for April paid on 1st May 2024: -

Cheque No.	Payee	Amount	Details
Funds Tr	Employment Costs	1942.31	Salary, ERS NIC & Pension
Fund Tr	Scribe Accounting	788.40	Accounting Subscription
Funds Tr	Vertas Group Limited	768.04	PF Grass Contract
Funds Tr	SALC	528.04	Subscription
Funds Tr	M A Crighton	185.00	Cemetery Contract
Funds Tr	Mortimer Contracts Ltd	162.00	Cemetery fencing
Funds Tr	Mortimer Contracts Ltd	42.00	Cemetery path treatmt
Funds Tr	Boxford Village Hall	94.50	Hall hire

a) VAT reclaim

The VAT payments made during the period from 1st April 2023 until 31st March 2024 of £6490.62 were reclaimed and credited to the Bank Accounts on 9th May 2024. The next VAT reclaim will be for VAT paid from 1st April 2024 to 30th June 2024 in accordance with the new Internal Control Policy.

b) Some proposed changes to the Earmarked funds were circulated to the PC ahead of the meeting.

The changes proposed were as follows: -

- Streetlights from £19,050 to 12,000,
- Churchyard wall from £12,500 to £10,000 (we have recently received a grant of £1750 towards this work),
- Housing Needs Survey from £2,500 to £3,000, and
- the old Gaol from £2000 to £2,250.

All the changes were approved. This was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Cllr K Couling and unanimously carried – **Action Clerk to amend Scribe Accounting.**

- c) The RFO confirmed the new Internal Control Policy approved at the March 2024 PC Meeting had been provided to the RFO as agreed and then circulated to the full PC. This document needs to be reviewed again in this financial year (period ending 31st March 2025).
- d) Cllr C Parr confirmed that he had discussed with Revd. Rob as previously agreed and the grant to the Church of £2500 can now be paid to them – **Action Clerk**.

CEMETERY AND CHURCHYARD UPDATES: Cllr D Warren reported that most of the hard work in the Cemetery and Churchyard has been done. In the future, the fence boundary with The Rectory and the tarmac entrance from Stone Street Road can be considered. There is some minor tree maintenance to be carried out. The restoration of the Churchyard boundary wall is scheduled slightly ahead of the summer holidays and traffic management has been ordered (as previously approved by the PC). There are some concerns over the quality of the cemetery grass cutting. The specification including the frequency of cuts can be considered ahead of the tender process. In the meantime, the concerns are being discussed with our contractor and the importance of blowing the grass cuttings from the monuments is being stressed.

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY UPDATES: A report was given to the Annual Parish Meeting the week before. Natural Boxford were still working on the biodiversity statement and a draft will be circulated for comment soon.

PUBLIC REALMS UPDATES: Cllr K Couling reported that the new lantern is now in place on School Hill. The Invoice is awaited. Once the litter is collected and sweeping done in the centre of the Village, the Community Wardens have been attending to some of the verges causing visibility issues in the Parish. Every effort is being made to ensure the Village looks its best for the Open Gardens.

COMMUNITY WARDEN DUTIES: Cllr T Munson asked whether a schedule of work has been drawn up for the Community Wardens to enable priorities to be debated by the PC. Cllr K Couling reported that the usual contracted hours are being worked. He works with the Community Wardens to prioritize, and we are currently not paying for additional hours. Cllr K Couling explained that some flexibility is needed as the Community Wardens share their equipment over various Parishes and some tasks cannot be done without certain equipment. Cllr K Couling is happy to check the tasks listed by the Wardens and this would be made easier with monthly Invoicing.

MEMBER'S UPDATES: Cllr C Parr reported that the flowers are being planted in the troughs on the bridge and the cost taken care of by sponsors. The Butchers Lane/Ash Street junction has been patched and further surfacing will be required. He went on to report the news that Beeston's were stopping the bus service between Hadleigh and Sudbury (which stopped at Boxford). This will mean the first bus out of Boxford would leave at 10.15 a.m., which is unacceptable. He will continue to work with D Burden and our County Councillor escalating to a high level and including going to press. The Chair and members supported Cllr Parr in his efforts. The school buses will now go directly to the schools without

providing a public service at the same time. Cllr Parr then updated the meeting in relation to the 20-mph proposal. The next stage is for the Engineer to add their report. The importance of all collisions being reported to the Police was stressed. Funding will need to be considered for any traffic calming measures coming out of this project. Cllr Parr then updated the meeting on potential parking restrictions for Church Street. Constructive talks have taken place with M Hall, Suffolk Highways and further liaison will be required with nearby residents. Cllr T Munson updated the meeting on Emergency Resilience, and she will schedule a meeting with the Chair and Cllr Parr in view of their feedback. Venues, volunteers and meeting the cost of rest centres are being considered currently. A tree is currently blocking the footpath near Station Field, and it has been reported on the online reporting tool. Cllr C Parr then read his resignation letter confirming the challenges and successes over the past year. He gave advance notice that he will resign on 17th June. Cllr Parr spoke of the time and effort to being a “can do” Council and of the need to review paid support mechanisms. The current legal framework did not suit his style of management and whilst he pledged to continue to play a significant part in supporting village life it would not be as a Parish Councillor.

CORRESPONDENCE: No report was provided as resolved by the PC. Various emails were circulated to the full PC throughout the month. These included the first draft of the April PC Minutes circulated on 7th May 24. An information sheet was issued on 8th May 24 following up on some of the questions raised at the April PC Meeting. The link to our Code of Conduct was issued again on 8th May 24. A table containing a summary of the Code of Conduct concerns and suggests that training is the best action at this stage to avoid the risks identified. Confirmation that concerns have been discussed with SALC and the Acting Monitoring Officer and the latter has offered to come along to speak to the full PC.

CONSIDER TENDER PROCESS AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURES GOING FORWARD: Cllr L Wortley has investigated our legal framework and the merits of a committee structure and proposed the first step would be to work on detailed specifications for routine, predictable work covered by the PC's current contracts for Cemetery maintenance and Street Cleaning and widening these to include additional work the PC may wish to take on with agreement of the appropriate authority. These specifications can be debated and amended by the full PC ahead of the autumn 2024 tender process. Some flexibility can be built into the contracts. The new contracts will commence from 1st April 2025. Once this has been achieved, the new model Financial Regulations should be reviewed and adapted for the needs of Boxford PC. The Financial Regulations contain provision for urgent/emergency work between meetings usually delegated to the Clerk. Once the tender process and new Regulations are in place, Cllr Wortley felt it doubtful we would require a Committee Structure going forward. The PC approved this approach in principle.

APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR, SUB COMMITTEE'S AND REPRESENTATIVES:

Cllr L Wortley was appointed Vice Chair.

Cllr K Couling resigned also with effect from 17th June 2024.

Cemetery Sub Committee – Cllrs Phillips and Warren

Environmental and Ecology Sub Committee – Cllrs Munson and Wortley

Finance Sub Committee – Cllrs Phillips, Warren and the RFO.

Planning Sub Committee – Cllrs Phillips and Wortley

Public Realms Sub Committee – Cllrs Warren and Watts

All decisions continue to be made by the full Council at **PC Meetings** held in public. Cllr T Munson suggested a proper induction process for new Cllrs going forward. It was agreed that our new Chair will provide reports to Box River News as has been done previously by Cllr C Parr. The Clerk will continue to provide a summary of the Meeting to Box River News.

REMINDER JUNE PC MEETING IS ON 18TH JUNE:

The meeting closed at **9.50 p.m.**

Planning Meeting Held by Boxford **PC** in Boxford Village Hall on **Tuesday 28th May 2024**

The following decisions were advised from the Planning Authority: -

- A) Consent was granted for works to a protected ash at Riverhall, Ellis Street – **DC/24/01618.**
- B) Listed Building Consent was granted for front wall plaster and timber frame at Swan Cottage, 19 Swan Street – **DC/24/01384.**
- C) Planning Permission was granted for a householder application for extensions, changes to fenestration, solar panels and render at Old Chapel House, Stone Street – **DC/24/01313.**
- D) Conditions were discharged for lime render, plaster, backing materials and finishes at 15 Swan Street – **DC/24/01719.**

The following applications were discussed: -

- 1) Application for Listed Building Consent to replace felt on flat roofs at The Old Bakery, 12-16 Broad Street. This was considered between meetings to comply with the deadline – **DC/24/01883.**

The **PC** had **No Objections.**

- 2) Strategic Planning Updates – The Chair updated the meeting on the purchase of the croft and the discussions in relation to a Village Car Park. The purchase of the croft was resolved in a closed session of a **PC Meeting**, and it is now possible to share the news with residents. On completion the **PC** will take on the Freehold. On exchange of contracts which may occur around 6 months ahead of completion, this **PC** could build up a suitable bid for CIL funding including the purchase and work involved. The Environmental Team agreed to form a working group for this purpose. In relation to the potential Village Car Park, the Chair has approached the Trustees of the land and is awaiting a response.
- 3) Any other urgent planning matters – no further matters were raised.