



Bexhill Heritage

Conservation, protection and improvement
of the Bexhill-on-Sea built environment.

Bexhill Heritage complaints' procedure

Who can make a complaint?

Any person may make a complaint to the Bexhill Heritage trustees about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaint procedure.

Trustees expect and require a complainant to have held discussions with trustees or committee members to resolve the issue informally in the first instance.

If complainants have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of the charity, we will respect their views and refer them to another trustee or committee member. We will seek to consider the concern objectively and impartially.

Where informal approaches have failed to resolve the issue, Bexhill Heritage will attempt to resolve the issue, through the stages outlined within this complaints' procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing (by letter or email) or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised informally in the first instance by contacting Bexhill Heritage by email or letter. Communications should be marked for the attention of the Charity Secretary r. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

A template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. The form must be used if the complainant wishes to formalise their complaint.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Charity Secretary will determine whether an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

Complaints must be raised within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will only consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Scope of this Complaints' Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Bexhill Heritage.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Bexhill Heritage will seek to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review Bexhill Heritage's policies in the light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 (Investigation)

Formal complaints must be made to the Charity Secretary, via email or letter (using the Complaint Form).

The Charity Secretary will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 21 working days.

Within this response, the Charity Secretary will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask the complainant to provide further specific evidence as necessary, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Charity Secretary can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Charity Secretary may delegate the investigation to another trustee or committee member to ensure impartiality but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the investigator will:

If necessary, interview or seek further written submissions from those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish

Keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the investigator will provide a formal written response within 21 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint form.

If the investigator is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Bexhill Heritage will take to resolve the complaint.

The investigator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the trustees' complaints' committee, which will be composed of three, impartial, trustees or committee members. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made in writing by letter to the Charity Secretary within 21 working days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. The request will be acknowledged in writing within 21 working days of the request to escalate being received.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Charity Secretary will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 21 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Charity Secretary will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Charity Secretary will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three trustees or committee members with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three trustees or committee members from Bexhill Heritage are available and who qualify, the Charity Secretary will source any additional, independent persons from the general membership.

The complaints committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend.

Note: Complaints about volunteer conduct will not be handled under this complaints' procedure. Complainants will be advised that any volunteer conduct complaints will be considered under Bexhill Heritage's disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 working days before the meeting, the Chairman of the complaints committee will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 working days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the charity's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and trustees with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 10 working days.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Bexhill Heritage will take to resolve the complaint.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the charity has acted outside the requirements of the Charity Commission or in breach of its agreements with the Local Authority, then they can escalate their complaint appropriately.

Bexhill Heritage Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Charity Secretary by letter who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Letter: Bexhill Heritage, (Charity Secretary) (), c/o St Barnabas Church, Cantelupe Road, Bexhill.
TN40 1JG

Your name:
Address:
Postcode:
Day time telephone number:
Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to any Bexhill Heritage member about it.

Please cite or attach evidence to substantiate your complaint.

Please explain how you may wish your complaint to be resolved.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible, providing substantiated evidence.
- co-operate with Bexhill Heritage in seeking a solution to the complaint.
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint.
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
- sensitive and thorough communication with the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved.
- interviewing others relevant to the complaint where appropriate.
- consideration of records and other relevant information
- analysing information
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal

- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the trustees or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints' Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease.
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and Bexhill Heritage are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No member may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between Bexhill Heritage and the complainant.
- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.

Policy Revised: January 2025

Review due: January 2027