

WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2024

The last year has again been dominated by the threat of the **Acorn Biodigester proposal** at Spring Grove Farm. After long delays, the company finally submitted their application and the Parish Council submitted a comprehensive dossier of objections to the plan. Hundreds of local residents, as well as local businesses, Haverhill Town Council and of course Muck-Off Acorn also submitted detailed objections.

The County Council raised a large number of questions and issues with Acorn which they required to be addressed before their application could be considered complete and fit for determination. They were given until the end of April to respond – and to date we await confirmation that they have done so. The planning officer has assured us that once Acorn have submitted their answers a further round of consultation will take place.

Throughout the saga, we have sought but failed to secure the support of local MP Matt Hancock. Of course, Hancock is standing down at the forthcoming general election and it was good to see that Conservative candidate Nicholas Timothy has come out with a public statement saying that if elected he will oppose the plant being developed.

Given recent polls show that the outcome of a general election in for West Suffolk is “too close to call” I took the opportunity to meet with the Labour candidate, Rebecca Denness to explain to her the Parish Council's opposition to the plan. She has assured me that she fully supports our opposition.



Parish Council chair Terry Rich explains our opposition to the Biodigester plant to Labour's Rebecca Denness, on a recent visit to the site.

The plan for 5 homes squeezed onto the site of **Milton House** has also on our agenda through the year. A revised application was soundly rejected by West Suffolk Planning Committee but the applicants have once more put in an appeal. We shall continue to press our opposition and make the case for a smaller scale development on the site.

Our **Traffic Working Group** continues its endeavours, pressing for implementation of the 20mph zone covering the village. Despite promises made, it now seems that the plan is unlikely to proceed due to the

lack of support from the current Cabinet member for Highways, Cllr Richard Smith. We are grateful for Cllr Bobby Bennett's continued support pressing our case despite the volte face of her colleague. We are now pursuing the highways engineers' suggested way forward of introducing further measures to reenforce the current 30mph restriction.

Despite Cllr Julia Korona's best efforts, we have struggled to bring our **Neighbourhood Plan** to a conclusion so far. All being well we hope that a referendum will be held in the coming months. The plan seeks to strengthen our defence against inappropriate developments in the village and wider parish, ensure Withersfield retains its unique rural characteristics and is not swallowed up by an expanding Haverhill.

Thanks to all who joined us at the beginning of April to help out with the **annual village Spring Clean**. As ever a mixed array of discarded items and detritus were cleared – bags full of the usual fast food packaging, cans, bottles, car tyres and discarded Road Closure signs left behind by highways contractors.

The Parish Council continues to work to be **open and transparent**, this includes regular reports in the Parish Magazine, and more information about how we spend the money that we manage on your behalf. Our partnership with the Parish Church to produce the Parish Magazine is now in its 6th year and it continues to be fully self-financing through advertising. Thanks to editor, Elaine McInnes-Rich and to Stella Eve who marshals the team of volunteers who deliver it to every home in the parish 6 times a year. We also continue to publish formal business and records on the Parish Council website: www//withersfield/onesuffolk.net

Attached to this report is a summary of our income and expenditure over the last year and our draft **budget for the year ahead**. The Parish Council's budget comes from a small proportion of the money that we all pay in Council Tax. Our budget is small, but as Councillors we appreciate that we have a duty to use your money well. We hope that we provide value for money but welcome your comments and suggestions for areas that need our attention.

This year we have created some **reserves of money set aside for particular improvements and projects**. This includes a sum to fund traffic calming, money towards developing a children's play area and money that can be used to fund emerging projects. We are keen to hear from you on what you think should be our priorities in the year to come. Do you think that a children's playground should be developed? Are there things that you would like to see happen in Withersfield that would benefit you and your family's quality of life.? Please do get in touch and let us know.

Thanks to my fellow Parish Councillors for their contribution and hard work over the past year. And special thanks to Sheila Horton for all her hard work over many years. Sheila recently stood down as a councillor but continues to work hard and successfully as secretary of the Village Hall Management Committee.

We have welcomed **new Parish Councillor** Jacklyn Lake from the Arboretum to our number, and we still seek one more person to fill our last vacancy. If you might be interested, please get in touch.

Thanks go to Cllr Bobby Bennett our County Councillor and Cllr Indy Wijenayaka our West Suffolk District Councillor for their support over the past year.

Also, last but by no means least, thanks to Laura Crump our **Parish Clerk** since 2019.



Terry Rich Chairman, Withersfield Parish Council May 2024