

Withersfield Parish Council Meeting 16th Sept 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I am conscious of time I have been allocated five minutes and will read my notes and submit them to the clerk in pdf format for inclusion in the minutes.

By the way of introduction for those here that don't know me my name is David Huckstep. I built my house opposite the Flood Park in Withersfield in the very hot summer of 1976 for those that can remember it on what was the Old Brickworks to the town.

I have raised my family in the village and my daughter was christened in St Marys Church.

Over that period, of some 49 years, work permitting I have been a member of the PC serving under five chairmen including the present chair.

I drafted the Plans for the original village hall extension and built it back in the eighties.

I also built the recent storeroom addition, at literally half the cost of the estimate submitted by a local contractor.

I met with the Thurlow Estate at home with the chair of VHC to seek their consent for the recent Grasscrete paving. I surveyed the site, produced the plans and over saw the installation and donated the Grasscrete blocks Free of Charge to the village.

I was also responsible with for securing the new bridge by the Church when County had condemned the old one and refused to replace it. Without my challenge and Highway knowledge we would not have a bridge there today.

Nearer to home I secured the TRO for the double yellow lines in front of Meldham Wash Lands and around the old railway bridge which is effectively the towns West Park.

To date, I in conjunction with my professional colleague, Planning Consultant John Brigham have been, and still are, heavily committed to the MOA Campaign. I have personally met all legal and professional costs to date for Johns involvement in MOA.

Hence you will understand that I am quite passionate about our village, and believe I have made a positive contribution to our community and the quality of our village life.

Therefore, I would ask if you give me the courtesy of listening to what I have to say as on two previous meetings I have not been allowed to speak freely by the chair and like others have been dismissed.

With regards to the issue of Parking on the Village Greens one has to understand why in the first instance we are cutting the grass on land owned by George Vestey. It was essentially a perceived risk mitigation measure by the PC to enter into a licence agreement with the Estate, the liability of overhanging branches and trees adjacent to the green was transferred from the Parish to the Estate in return for an agreement for the PC to essentially cut the grass and maintain the greens. We will come back to risk later if time allows. A simple Licence was drafted and entered into 2019.

The licence expired on the 1st June last year but essentially cl 1.1.9 headed "Permitted Use" excludes car parking other than overflow parking from the Village Hall max 10 cars. "If consent is sought to park more than 10 cars consent will not be unreasonably withheld." Interestingly the lease provides for the Licensee to charge for parking, all receipts to be used exclusively to fund the cost of cutting the grass.

Residents need space to park, fact, we have a problem that will not resolve itself. We have the opportunity to redraft clause 1.1.9 to include some permanent, controlled parking areas for residents. Please would the officers consider revisiting the Licence, review the red line drawing, and speak with the Estate and Stuart Tinney.

We are lead to believe from two articles in the Parish magazine that the village has voted for a children's playground adjacent to the Village Hall following an online survey compiled by the aptly named Survey Monkey, The Withersfield News stated in ***the survey confirmed interest in developing a children's playground***. These carefully scripted words repeated verbatim in two separate articles either by intent or default would imply that the Council is acting on the wishes of the village. Given the age demographic of the village the participation and responses on line as you would well imagine was very low. Total of 51 responses. Which includes 3 from outside the parish.

Q4 of the survey States that the Parish has a small fund to spend on Parish projects and offers 4 named possibilities to vote for, ironically the village hall was not included in this multiple choice question.

44 people responded, Playground came fourth of four, bottom of the list. Where is the confirmed interest? I cannot reconcile the numbers. This is direct conflict with item no 10 of the last PC minutes which states ***as a result of the Parish survey, which all parishioners were asked to complete, the desire for a playground in the village was a priority. What is the perverse rationale of promoting the least voted for option, and then calling it a priority, please can the Council explain the thinking behind this? I am confused.***

The minutes go on to say that some **3,500 children** use the village hall annually. **Please can the council explain what is meant by this number and how this number was arrived at?**

I would propose to the PC that a proper paper postal vote or a door step survey is undertaken to all householders in the village. *(Hand out page 4/11 the % and counts are all over the place, meaningless. Discuss)*

Why when the PC is risk adverse are we thinking of embarking on an annual insurance risk and maintenance liability that we do not need or want. Withersfield already sports a Children's playground.

The PC is ultimately responsible for the village hall, the minutes of the meeting endorse this: The Hall serves all the community and beyond and is our biggest most important asset. The fabric of the building needs attention, the wooden floor needs treatment and the heating system is not only poor but financially crippling and needs replacing. The kitchen roof will need attention the joists are rotting and the rain water gutters from the main building discharge on the flat roof sections and are in a poor state. The sandstone copings on the gable end are decaying and need of immediate repair.

The Village Hall has Charitable status I accept that but it does not have the funds for this work to hand.

Maybe the small fund the PC has available could be put to a better use for a greater benefit of all the village

This, surely would be a better legacy for the PC if that's the rationale behind the proposal?

Please listen to the people you purport to represent in a fair and democratic way as this does not seem to be the case at present.

Thank you.