

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 4th March 2025 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair),
Jaclyn Lake, Patricia Mallalieu, Indy Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump;
County Councillor: Bobby Bennett; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllrs Korona and Stiles - these were approved by the PC.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenayaka had the devolution consultation to report on for which he waited for the item on the agenda. There was nothing else to report.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett said the suggested date for the planning hearing for the anaerobic digestion plant application was the 24th April and a site inspection would occur beforehand. Cllr Bennett reported that more objections had been received against the application and she had objected herself also.

Cllr Bennett explained that the County Council are planning on bringing libraries back in house after being run by a charity for many years due to not being able to come to an agreement between the two during the re-procurement process. Cllr Bennett said the CC's driving force is to keep the libraries open with no changes to the mobile libraries service also.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

There were no parishioners.

5. Declaration of members' interests for any agenda item at this meeting

None.

6. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 21st January 2025

The minutes were approved – proposed by Cllr Eve and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Update on playground feasibility study – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka said he was still awaiting details he had requested for this and will continue to chase this up. To report back at the next meeting.

b) Parishioner Arboretum concerns – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka will be reporting the issues raised to RMG and Taylor Wimpey.
To report back at the next meeting.

c) Parking on Town Green and Burton Green – sign request to Thurlow Estate

The Thurlow Estate agreed to have the two “no parking” signs erected on the greens.
The Chair is looking into a supplier for the signs for the Thurlow Estate to pursue.

8. Acorn Biodigester:

- Update on application
- Update from Muck-Off campaign
- To approve the Parish Council's response to the County Council's re-consultation
- To endorse the response submitted to West Suffolk Planning
- To discuss and agree next steps

As mentioned earlier by Cllr Bennett, the planning application was likely to come to committee on 24th April and a site visit on a date prior to this.

It had been agreed by SCC for the PC to submit comments after the deadline of 3/3/25 to a few days after the 4/3/25 PC meeting.

Cllr Wijenayaka told the PC that Muck Off have generated more public objections through community engagement. The campaign has submitted their objection. They will ensure that come the committee meeting date, the public are engaged and informed. They are organising transport for public presence at the committee meeting.

Cllr Eve highlighted that Haverhill Town Council had identified that Acorn had changed wording of some of the regulations from an “and” to an “or” and also lots of little errors within the text.

The PC had been drafting their response to the revised application, with all Cllrs writing different sections which had all been incorporated and pulled together by the Chair. The objection was approved and will be submitted to SCC. Thanks was given to all the Cllrs for their efforts and the Chair on the time-consuming task of bringing the document together.

Cllr Eve had submitted the PC response to West Suffolk which was endorsed by the PC.

It was proposed for Cllr Eve to represent the PC at the planning committee meeting. All were in agreement.

The Clerk has arranged for the Cllrs to meet with MP Nick Timothy this week.

It was agreed to request from SCC details on the arrangements for the committee meeting and request for a PC representative to be able to speak at the meeting. It was also suggested to ask how many people can be accommodated in the gallery as their may be a substantial amount of people attending. Details regarding the site inspection will also be requested for and whether there is facility for PC presence and PC comment during the visit.

9. Devolution consultation

Cllr Bennett explained that local government reorganisation would see the abolition of the county, districts and borough councils and replacement with a single unitary council, with no change to town and parish council structures. Devolution would happen alongside local government reorganisation in Suffolk which would see the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority, with mayor elected in May 2026. The mayor would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health and blue light services – along with devolved government funding.

The government consultation on proposals to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk runs to the 13th April 2025.

Cllr Bennett said the government had announced that Norfolk and Suffolk will be part of the Devolution Priority Programme.

The CC are proposing a single unitary for Suffolk and their draft plan will go to the minister this month, who will be making the decision.

It was said by Cllr Bennett that at present, there are more unknowns than knowns but she could see that there would be opportunities for PCs to have more powers.

Cllr Wijenayaka is asking for feedback from parishes to what they feel would work best for their community and residents. He explained that Ipswich were proposing for three unitary councils in their area. West Suffolk council will be debating at a council meeting on the 18th March and he requires parishes thoughts so he can vote accordingly to enable the best result for residents. Cllr Wijenayaka clarified that once council has debated the options, an initial proposal will be submitted to Government with a more detailed proposal going in on the 26th September.

There were discussions over whether Suffolk should be covered by a single or multiple unitary councils. Disadvantages to being one large unitary were vocalised as being too distant from communities.

The PC agreed that a two unitary authority would be more advantageous than a single unitary for Suffolk. It was therefore proposed that the PC to respond to the consultation in support of the creation of the local government reorganisations but favour a two unitary authority for Suffolk instead of one. All Cllrs were in agreement.

10. Update on parish survey – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve shared the 48 responses which had been received so far, which showed the different areas of concern the parishioners have and ideas for the PC to focus on. It was agreed for the survey to remain live up until two weeks before the annual meeting on 6th May. This is so that Cllr Eve has time to consolidate the results to be able to present these at the annual meeting. The URL will be shared again on the village Facebook groups and in the Withersfield News.

11. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles

In his absence, Cllr Stiles informed the PC via email that after meeting with Cllr Korona, a revised version of the Neighbourhood Plan had been sent to West Suffolk Council.

12. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve said he had met with the Suffolk Highways engineer regarding the gateways and refreshing of road markings and the full costings for these had been established. The total being £18,860.51, including VAT. The PC re-confirmed their agreement. Cllr Eve was asked to share this approval with the engineer so works can begin, less the section 106 monies due. The Clerk had requested permission from the Thurlow Estate for the installation of the gates on one of the entrances to the village as the verges are owned by the Thurlow Estate. The Estate acknowledged the request and said it had been passed on for approval.

13. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Mallalieu

Cllr Mallalieu is still finding her feet in this role but informed the PC that the VHMC were having a meeting next week.

14. Finance

- a) Presentation of monthly accounts – Income and Expenditure and Bank Reconciliation
- b) To note payments made since last meeting

These were noted and approved – proposed by Cllr Eve and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

- c) To agree the budget for 2024-25

The budget was agreed. The final figures would be finalised at the annual meeting.

- d) To consider appointing SALC to carry out the annual internal audit

The PC approved the letter of engagement from SALC and it was agreed to appoint SALC for the PC's internal audit. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Eve. The Clerk will make the arrangements with SALC.

15. Correspondence

- a) Email - Duties and Responsibilities of Parish Councillors

Noted.

- b) Email - Fly Tipping

Noted.

16. Planning

- a) Borough notifications since last meeting**
- b) Applications received since last meeting for consideration**

All were considered and noted.

The PC submitted their objection to DC/23/1726/CCES and will be submitting their objection to SCC/0045/23SE as agreed at item 8.

17. Agenda items for the annual and PC meetings being held on 6th May 2025

- Presentation of village survey results
- AD plant

The meeting closed at 20:39.