

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 11th November 2025 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair), Julia Korona,
Jaclyn Lake, Patricia Mallalieu, Elaine McInnes-Rich, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka;
Clerk: Laura Crump; County Councillor: Bobby Bennett; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka;
Vice-Chair of VHMC; Thomas Mytton Mills and one parishioner.

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenayaka reported:

LGR:

- West Suffolk Council voted on the 23rd September to submit the proposal for a three unitary model for the Local Government Reorganisation to the Government. If the Government approve this proposal, it will see a Western Suffolk Council taking responsibility for services provided by West Suffolk and Suffolk County Councils.
- It is expected that the Government will run a consultation process in the New Year.

On the 4th November, West Suffolk cabinet voted to approve the recommendation of the Rural Bus Service in West Suffolk Steering Group.

Making the case for rural transport:

1. West Suffolk Council should support the work already underway in Suffolk to ensure communities stay healthy and connected set out in the Steering Group's final report and encourage all elected members to act as Change Champions for public transport in their local communities.
2. Cabinet should monitor developments at the national level, including the Government's response to the Transport Committee's recommendations and seek to strengthen engagement with SCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Suffolk Enhanced Partnership.
3. Cabinet should continue to lobby government (and local government representative bodies) at every opportunity regarding the importance of rural transport, in liaison with SCC and other partners.
4. Alongside its wider support of the transition of public transport duties to a Mayoral Authority through its membership of the Suffolk Enhanced Partnership, Cabinet should share the findings of this review with the new Mayor in 2026 and make the specific case for supporting rural transport in West Suffolk.

Further details of the report can be found on the West Suffolk Council website, or I can send the report to you.

Localities Budget, please advise me of your locality budget demands, it is fast being taken up, so let me know if you need funding for the playground this year, or if you want it for next year allocations. Cllr Wijenayaka said that the localities budget now runs in a calendar year.

West Suffolk Planning Officers have decided on the Farm Access on Horseheath Road/Sliver Street. They have decided via delegations panel for approval. They are viewing it as unconnected with Acorn and the Thurlow Estate's plan for an AD Facility, and felt they could not delay it as the applicant would be within their rights to appeal on the grounds of non-determination. Other factors were taken into account and they believe there are no grounds for rejection.

A parishioner asked whether Cllr Wijenayaka had heard anything about the article reported about a 'new town' between Haverhill and Newmarket. Cllr Wijenayaka confirmed he had heard nothing official, Cllr Bennett concurred.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett said the SCC's single unitary authority proposal had been submitted to the minister and that the extensive business case setting out and explaining the proposal can be found on the SCC website.

Cllr Bennett asked whether there had been any noticeable changes in traffic movement through Withersfield since the new relief road in Haverhill had opened. She is keen to know if this has caused detriment to the village. The PC were unaware of any changes as such but Cllr Eve was tasked to ask the question to his villages road group.

No news had been heard from Cllr Bennett regarding the Acorn digester proposal but she reiterated that her stance had not changed and the parish would have her full support again if an appeal arises.

It was recommended by Cllr Bennett to keep reporting potholes and other highways issues online on the SCC Highways reporting system: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/>

4. Public Forum for parishioners

Parishioner request to speak: Mr Huckstep – did not attend the meeting.

A parishioner reported that the footpath between Thurlow Road and Meadowlands had become overgrown causing it difficult to walk across.

It was believed that the land belongs to the Thurlow Estate and Cllr Lake agreed to report this as the footpaths lead for the PC.

The parishioner also said that there was a dead tree along the footpath from the church into the field on the lefthand side – she said it was dangerous as bits keep falling off of it.

Cllr Mallalieu agreed to take a look at the tree to work out who it belonged to and will communicate with Cllr Lake the result.

It was reminded that problems with trees and footpaths can be logged on the Suffolk County Council online reporting system: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/>

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 16th September 2025

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

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Any update on Parishioner concerns, Arboretum maintenance – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka is still to follow this up – to report back at the next PC meeting.

8. Update on Acorn Biodigestor Application

An appeal must be lodged by 19 December. It is believed that if an appeal goes in, it is likely to be close to this deadline. Cllr Eve said that as this is the last PC meeting before the appeal deadline, he thought it wise to draw up an initial response from the PC which could be considered at this meeting. His draft was circulated to the Cllrs prior to the meeting and the Chair had made a few small amendments. The draft was agreed.

It was reported that the Muck-Off campaign group have a meeting this Friday with a Highways consultant. Cllr Eve asked whether the PC would assist in funding jointly with Muck-Off, the commissioning of the consultant.

The PC agreed in principle that it could contribute towards the cost of commissioning a study into the traffic impact of the proposal subject to: i) an appeal is lodged, ii) an agreed terms of reference for the study, iii) access to the final report and iv) full accountability in relation to the appointment of any consultant.

The Parish Council agreed that its contribution could not be uncapped and will consider the size of its contribution once an estimate is available.

It was suggested that Cllr Eve ask Andy Rutter what the timeframe would be between a submission of an appeal and the hearing. The PC may need to hold an extraordinary meeting.

Thanks was given to Cllr Eve for his continued hard work on the matter.

9. Update on Playground Project, including the consultation events, funding and planning – Cllr McInnes-Rich

Cllr McInnes-Rich organised two playground consultations in the village hall for residents to attend and discuss their views on the proposed installation of a playground in the village. Lego entertainment was also arranged at the consultations for any children visiting. The consultations were advertised on social media and on the large blackboard by the bus shelter.

Cllr McInnes-Rich also put together a questionnaire which was inserted in the Withersfield News, asking for parishioners' views. The questionnaires were able to be posted in a box in the White Horse, in a box in the bus shelter, or emailed.

Cllr McInnes-Rich has been posting information over social media in an attempt to get the information out to residents. She said she has been contacted by several households in positive support of the project and received responses of the questionnaires from 20 households. Of these households, 43 children were said to be either living in the village or regularly visiting the village and would use a playground. The average age of these children is 6 years old.

The vast majority of response have been positive with only a couple of negative comments received over social media.

Cllr McInnes-Rich has set out an area on the green as an example of the size and location of the proposed playground.

Planning permission may not be needed as small playgrounds are included within a Parish Council's permitted development rights. We have applied to confirm this and are waiting to hear the outcome.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said that fund raising has started but there is more to do. To date, funding has been secured by a resident through the company he works for of £3,000. Cllrs Bennett and Wijenayaka have agreed to offer some funding to the project and the PC have earmarked reserves for the project. The village priest is in support and will approach the Parochial Church Council to request some small funding too. Cllr McInnes-Rich will be applying to the lottery for a grant and believes they will match the amount already raised. Other funding options are being looked into and if anyone knows of any other grants or ideas for funding please do get in touch with Cllr McInnes-Rich.

Vice-Chair of VHMC Tom Mytton Mills reported that the VHMC had discussed the proposal and had decided that they were not opposed to the plan. However, they had a number of reservations: Was there a majority in favour of it? How would it impact on parking for the village hall? How would it effect bookings at the village hall?

Cllr Eve stressed the importance of the Parish Council having data to support its plan.

There was discussion around having enough data to back up the want for a playground in the village as this will be needed when applying for funding. Tom Mytton Mills gave advice how to present the data received from the questionnaires to use as evidence. Cllr McInnes-Rich asked for his assistance further, to which he agreed.

Cllr Wijenayaka spoke about the responsibility of the Parish Council to make decisions on behalf of residents. It is not necessary to establish an absolute majority for projects, that is not how representative democracy works. The Parish Council needs to establish that there is support, that a project will be of benefit, take account of all views, but come to a balanced decision. He believed that in this case, the Parish Council can confidently say it has passed those tests.

Other Parish Councillors also spoke in support and thanked Cllr McInnes-Rich for the work she had done to engage with residents and to progress the project.

In summing up the Chair confirmed that the Parish Council believes that an appropriate demand for a playground has been established and that whilst there are some villagers who are not in support, there have been no significant matters raised which argue against proceeding with the project. Positive data has been received and there has been multiple opportunities for residents to share their views on the project.

The Parish Council unanimously resolved that the playground project should continue as planned.

Thanks was given to Cllr McInnes-Rich for her hard work on the project.

10. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles

Cllr Stiles is working on the list of clarifications which had been requested from the inspector. He will complete and submit the clarifications by the deadline of 24 November.

11. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve had received the total cost for the renewal of the 5 existing "SLOW" markings being: total = £2379.75 plus 10% Contingency £2507.72 (£3009.26 including VAT). However, Matthew Fox of Suffolk Highways told Cllr Eve that he was trying to get the Asset Team to include these markings in their planned scheme of road marking renewal. If they accept these onto their planned schedule, there will be no charge to the PC.

The Chair pointed out that the estimated costs would exhaust the Parish Council's budget for traffic calming including the money specifically identified for the 20mph scheme.

Cllr Eve had also obtained quotes from M J Nunn to see if costs could be reduced. As a qualified joiner, Tom Mytton-Mills said he would be happy to provide the PC with a quote for the gates too.

The PC agreed that based on the update received from Cllr Eve that it would not proceed with the proposal to install the gates at this stage.

Once the "SLOW" markings have been completed and we know whether the Parish Council will be charged for them, the Parish Council will be in a position to reconsider the plan.

12. Update from the Village Hall Management Committee – Cllr Mallalieu

Vice-Chair Tom Mytton Mills reported to the PC that the VHMC were considering charging hirers for the use of storage in the village hall although it has been decided to leave things as they are for now. The VHMC are looking into having the storage cupboards tidied more effectively with the possibility of adding racking.

The VHMC are looking at potential heating options and there are some maintenance tasks to be carried out.

The annual report will be shared to the PC.

On the subject of the proposed playground, Tom relayed that the committee members were not against a playground but thought there should be a general consensus in favour of it and they wouldn't want users of the playground to negatively affect hirers of the hall.

The Chair expressed the PC's desire to work collaboratively with the VHMC and explained that as the Parish Council is the owner of the Village Hall, it is able to reclaim VAT on improvement/capital projects so long as these are "approved and commissioned" by the Parish Council. The VHMC can then get greater benefit from any PC contribution towards the project. This is what happened with the installation of the grasscrete blocks parking area. Likewise, there are times the PC are unable to access certain funds as it is not a charity but the VHMC may be able to. An example of this may be in relation to raising funds to support the playground project. Therefore, working together could be a benefit to all. Tom agreed this sounded sensible and reasonable and that the VHMC would like to work well together with the PC. He would feed this back to the rest of the VHMC.

13. Kingsway Solar Farm – Cllr Stiles

Cllr Stiles asked whether the PC should write a letter expressing their views towards the proposed solar farm. It was agreed that information and a proposal would need to be brought to the next PC meeting in order for the PC to consider.

14. Consider the drafted 'Notice of Tender' for environmental works contract – Cllr Lake

The Chair explained that as we were coming to the end of our three-year environmental works contract, we need to tender again for a new contract to begin in 2026. As the Environment lead for the PC, Cllr Lake was asked to draft a new tender. She shared her draft which was an update of the previous contract. The PC approved the tender. The Clerk will send this out to companies to tender for the environmental works in the parish and the quotes received will be considered by the PC at the next meeting.

15. Consider to adopt the Safeguarding Policy and Equality and Diversity Policy

As the safeguarding lead for the PC, Cllr Korona had looked over both draft policies which were from the SALC website. She had made a few minor amendments to make them relevant to Withersfield Parish Council. She recommended the PC adopt the two policies. All Cllrs agreed to the policies. The Clerk will publish these on the PC website.

16. Draft budget and proposed precept submission for 2026/2027

The Chair had circulated the draft budget report to the Cllrs prior to the meeting for consideration. He explained that the budget estimate report proposed a small increase in Council Tax (3%) for next year. The Band D charge in 2025-26 is a monthly charge of £30.68, and would therefore rise to £31.60 in 2026-27. The report sets out the reasons why the increase has been proposed which includes the likelihood that when we re-tender for the environmental works maintenance contract, we are likely to face further increases.

Cllr Wijenayaka asked whether a larger increase might have been prudent given the increases in costs that we face. The Chair said that all efforts had been made to keep the increase as low as possible.

The draft budget and precept submission were discussed and agreed - proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Eve. The budget report can be viewed on the PC website.

17. Finance

- a) Presentation of monthly accounts – Income and Expenditure and Bank Reconciliation
- b) To note payments made since last meeting
- c) Quarterly report of expenditure and comparison to budget – quarter 2, 2025/26

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

- d) To consider the final external auditor AGAR report from PKF and decide what, if any, action is required

Considered and noted. No action required.

- e) To note the 3-year fixed price guarantee of £509.73 insurance renewal

Noted.

- f) Approval of Risk and Asset Registers for 2026

These were approved.

18. Correspondence

- a) Email – Christmas Bazaar Banner on village green

Noted.

- b) Email - Permission to park on green

Noted.

- c) Email - Headway Suffolk

Noted.

- d) Email – Community Governance Review

Noted.

19. Planning

a) Borough notifications since last meeting

DC/23/0572/FUL: Planning application - new agricultural access
Back White Horse Field Horseheath Road Withersfield CB9 7SH

Decision: Approve application

Noted – it was agreed this was disappointing.

b) Applications received since last meeting for consideration

DC/25/1733/TCA: Trees in a conservation area notification - a. one Tulip (T1 on plan) overall crown reduction by up to two metres b. one Magnolia (T2 on plan) overall crown reduction by up to one metre c. one Honey locust (T3 on plan) fell

Noted.

DC/25/1724/HH: Householder planning application - a. conversion of garage to annexe b. door canopy to front elevation c. changes to fenestration d. rear extension to garage

The Clerk had invited the applicants to the PC meeting.

The Cllrs discussed the application – it was noted that it is in the conservation area and the PC hadn't been approached with any objections from parishioners. It was agreed that the PC have no objections to the application.

20. To determine meeting dates for 2026

The following dates were accepted:

January 20th

March 17th

May 12th

July 14th

September 8th

November 10th

21. Agenda items for the PC meeting being held in January 2026

- Kingsway Solar Farm – Cllr Stiles
- Acorn appeal
- Fundraising update for the playground project
- Tenders received for the 2026 environmental contract

The meeting closed at 21:30.