

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 12th March 2024 at the village hall.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair),
Gill Jarvis, Philip Stiles, Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump;
District Cllr: Indunil Wijenayaka; 10 parishioners,
2 representatives of Pigeon and 1 representative of Thurlow Estate.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Bennett.

Cllr Korona attended briefly but had to leave due to illness – this was approved by the PC.

2. Public Forum for parishioners

Representatives of property developers Pigeon, will be presenting and answering questions about the site they are promoting in Withersfield.

Pigeon representatives introduced themselves and handed out maps of the potential site. It was explained that the Hales Barn Road roundabout would be the potential access point to the development. They are promoting the high-level site through the West Suffolk Local Plan, the consultation for which closed today.

The following were mentioned as benefits and features of their plans:

Landscape led scheme, screening, will provide significant Biodiversity Net Gain, being informed by landscape architect, emerging policies with the Neighbourhood Plan, enhanced cycle improvements, potential for up to 250 homes, sustainable location, edge of parish, emerging housing policy – 100 affordable homes, taken on board traffic calming issues and gateway features.

Questions and concerns raised by parishioners and Councillors included:

- Infrastructure – increased pressure on healthcare and schools.
- Density of houses.
- Volume of traffic – increase rat run to Cambridge through Withersfield.
- The one access point and its location. The road all the new traffic will have to endure.
- Previous nearby estate was supposed to be low density and then got changed.
- Building on the green corridor boundary between Withersfield and Haverhill.
- Green field, out of settlement area.
- Hales Barn Road is meant to be the outer boundary of Haverhill – this breaches that.
- Impact of building new homes near to proposed anaerobic digestion plant.
- Provision for car parking.
- How does this enhance Withersfield or Haverhill?
- The flow of rainfall water on the area and flooding risks.
- Withersfield parish is designated as type B in the Local Plan with no requirement for additional housing sites.

Pigeon said they plan to offer 40% affordable housing. The plan needs to be deliverable and technically sound. If the site was allocated, the local authority would need to ensure it was deliverable and that there is robust evidence. It is not for land developers to deliver sites for schools, healthcare etc, but there would be a consultation with the County Council and it is most common for a contribution to be made towards infrastructure and maintenance costs. The local authority would also need to be satisfied when it comes to transport and traffic and this would be looked at before being approved.

The Chair and parish councillors indicated their agreement with the concerns raised by residents and asked Pigeon whether they were intending to proceed to a planning application if the site is not included in the revised local plan. If the site is not adopted though the upcoming Local Plan, Pigeon are unlikely to pursue the plan further at this stage, but may look to promoting its inclusion in a future revision of the local plan in 5 years' time.

The Chair thanked the Pigeon and Thurlow Estate representatives and parishioners for attending the meeting.

A parishioner brought up the car parking at the village hall issue and said the green and parking provision needs to be improved. He said the PC should be maintaining it and the road leading up to the village hall needs repairing.

The Chair confirmed that the PC lease the green from the Thurlow Estate and pay for the green's maintenance. Suffolk County Council Highways own the road.

Another parishioner explained that at the last PC meeting in January, he offered the PC free Grasscrete blocks in order to improve the car parking on the green for the village hall, and free storage of the blocks until their implementation. He said that the PC declined this offer and the longer the parking is left the worse it will get and the more expensive it will become to have it improved in the future.

It was agreed at the last PC meeting that the PC needed quotes for the haulage of the blocks to Withersfield and the implementation of the works before committing. It was also clarified that the PC were not in a position to commit to accepting the Grasscrete blocks without confirmation of permission for the implementation of the scheme from the Thurlow Estate and Highways.

The Chair explained that after receiving estimated costs from the parishioner, the PC felt it was not a priority at this stage and it was agreed that the project did not take precedence over current schemes the PC are working to implement.

The PC were very grateful for the offer of the blocks and it was suggested that the Village Hall Management Committee may wish to move forward with the scheme and funding it themselves as they are able to bid for grants - which the PC cannot do - and have a healthy regular source of income from hiring the hall. The chair indicated that if the Village Hall Committee did wish to proceed with the scheme, then the Parish Council would consider making a contribution towards the costs of the scheme.

Cllr Jarvis confirmed that VHMC are interested in implementing the Grasscrete blocks and the Chair of the VHMC had been in contact with the Thurlow Estate asking for permission for these works to go ahead. He is awaiting a response.

3. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenyaka said the Council had passed their budget in February and the Local Plan consultation had closed today.

SCC Local Transport Plan consultation is now running and Cllr Wijenyaka encourage the Cllrs to submit their views.

Cllr Wijenyaka has secured another thermal camera up until 8th April. If anyone would like their homes to be checked, please get in touch with him.

Cllr Wijenyaka has been working on getting the speed camera available for Withersfield and local parishes. There is an upcoming Villages Road Group meeting where this will be discussed.

4. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett's County Councillor reports for February and March 2024 can be found on the PC website.

The Chairman closed the public section of the meeting.

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 January 2024

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

7. Parish Councillor vacancies

Cllr Sheila Horton had resigned as Parish Councillor but will continue to liaise with the PC regarding the village hall as the secretary for the VHMC. Her huge contribution to the work of the Parish Council was acknowledged.

Jaclyn Lake had applied to join the Parish Council so the Chair invited her to introduce herself to the PC and speak a little about why she wanted to join.

Jaclyn explained that she lives on the Arboretum and is the partner of Cllr Wijenyaka. She works for Natural England, advising landowners on management of land for wildlife across the Fens part of Cambridgeshire and she is interested in all things environmental. Jaclyn currently helps with the delivery of the Withersfield News in the parish and has been involved with community events. She would like to become a Councillor as she is keen to

help maintain the area and has several concerns which she would like to be involved with improving for the parish.

The Cllrs thanked Jaclyn for applying for the position and it was proposed by the Chair to co-opt Jaclyn onto the Parish Council. This was seconded by Cllr Stiles and all the Councillors voted in favour.

There is one Councillor vacancy remaining on the Parish Council.

8. Matters arising – updates from previous Parish Council meetings

- a) Parish projects and use of reserved funds – Cllr Wijenayaka to report back his enquiries into the implementation of a playground

Cllr Wijenayaka has the contact at West Suffolk to discuss the feasibility of implementing a playground. He will request information regarding what is involved, costs, and routes of finance, as the first stage at looking at whether it would be possible for the PC to pursue. He will report back at the next PC meeting.

9. Discussion about the information received from Pigeon property developers

The Cllrs discussed the information they heard from the representatives of Pigeon earlier in the meeting and the concerns raised by parishioners. As the representatives indicated they were promoting the site through the Local Plan and would be looking at promoting the site in the next Local Plan in 5 years' time, it was thought that it seems like a long-term plan and may not be something that will progress immediately. Having said this, the PC are aware a planning application can be submitted at any time.

10. Update from the Muck-Off campaign – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka told the PC that the applicant had been asked further questions regarding the application from the County Council. The deadline for comments is the end of March and the campaign will then be looking at arranging their next meeting.

It was suggested that the scale of additional information which has been requested from the applicant, may result in a further consultation. This could lead to another consultation period and the PC would expect to be consulted on this extra information.

The campaign and the PC will need to be ready to communicate their comments once the additional information had been received.

11. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Korona

Cllr Korona had requested for a meeting but has not had a response. The PC has concerns over the time the Plan is taking to complete in terms of the grants received to carry this out and requested for District Cllr Wijenayaka to step in and look into moving the process along. Cllr Wijenayaka will look into this and liaise with Cllrs Korona and Stiles.

12. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve explained that a site visit had been arranged with Cllr Bennett, Highways, and the cabinet holder for traffic. As he is unfortunately unable to attend the date set and it cannot be changed, Cllr Eve said he will try to arrange for a member from the TWG to attend the meeting on 25th April in Withersfield.

The next TWG meeting is 7:30pm on the 26th March. They will also be discussing the 20's plenty campaign.

As requested at the previous PC meeting in January, Cllr Eve emailed Cllr Bennett requesting for an options appraisal to be carried out on the Arboretum junction. He awaits a reply from Cllr Bennett with a response from Highways and information regarding costings of an appraisal.

13. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Jarvis

Cllr Jarvis went through the report which VHMC secretary Sheila Horton had sent as an update to the PC. She explained the finances and that they are trying to change the use of the lottery grant of £20,000 to be able to pay for the disabled access cost. The new storeroom is almost complete. A problem with the electrics was identified and is being sorted. Bookings for the hall is still healthy and the committee are considering increasing the hire charge. The extension is soon to be signed off by the building inspector and the fire service will be visiting also to do their checks.

The VHMC are going ahead with the plan to install the Grasscrete blocks on the green to improve the parking at the village hall and are awaiting written permission from the Thurlow Estate whom own the land before they can proceed any further. The VHMC have provisionally allocated £7,000 towards the car parking improvements. The PC discussed the donation they would like to make to the car parking improvements and it was proposed by Cllr Eve for £3,000 to be earmarked from our unrestricted reserves, as a contribution towards the costs, which was seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka, on the condition that the rest of the funds are raised by the VHMC and approval is granted from the Thurlow Estate and Highways. Cllr Jarvis will relay this to the VHMC and request that their Chair further communicates the VHMC's plans with the parishioner who has offered the Grasscrete blocks.

Upcoming events include the quiz night on the 23rd March and a table top sale on the 14th April.

The committee is still looking to appoint a treasurer. The Chair is undertaking this role in the meantime.

The next meeting is on the 22nd May at 7pm in the Committee Room and the AGM will be on 17th July at 6.45pm.

14. West Suffolk Local Plan consultation – Cllr Stiles

As the PC planning lead, Cllr Stiles confirmed he had submitted comments towards the Local Plan on behalf of the PC.

15. Finance

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

Considered and approved - proposed by Cllr Eve and seconded by Cllr Stiles.

- c) To agree the budget for 2024-25

The budget was approved.

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

The Cllrs agreed to appoint SALC for the PC's internal audit. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Jarvis. The Clerk will make the arrangements with SALC.

16. Correspondence

- a) Email – SCC Local Transport Plan Consultation

Cllr Eve agreed to take the lead in responding to the consultation on behalf of the PC.

- b) Email – Sir Robin Wales

Sir Robin Wales had requested to attend the PC meeting as a prospective Labour Party candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk. It was agreed that it would not be appropriate to have only one party attend and all parties would need to be invited. As the next PC meeting is after the election, it was decided that the PC should thank Robin for his communication and if he is elected, the PC would be interested in him attending a future PC meeting.

17. Planning

- a) **Borough notifications since last meeting**

Noted.

- b) **Applications received since last meeting for consideration**

All were considered and noted.

It was proposed and agreed by the PC to submit the following comments:

DC/24/0087/VAR:

The Parish Council continues to support this development with the amendment to conditions proposed by the applicant.

DC/24/0136/HH:

The Parish Council feel that the design and materials should be in keeping with the existing building.

18. Agenda items for 14th May 2024

- Annual election of Chair and Vice-Chair
- Annual allocation of Cllr responsibilities

The meeting closed at 21:10.