

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

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair),
Jaclyn Lake, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka;
Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka;

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllrs Jarvis, Korona, and Mallalieu – these were approved by the PC.

2. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett's County Councillor report for October 2024 was shared with the PC and can be found on the PC website.

3. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenayaka shared gave the following update:

The playground feasibility study request has been bouncing around between officers, however it seems that Simon Collin in the Operations Team wasn't the right person, so Cllr Wijenayaka has asked Jon Eaton in Families and Communities to take a look at the request.

He asked the PC to consider contributing to the purchase of a thermal camera. This will make it easier for residents in the ward to access the ability to give better heating energy consumption advice to our residents. Gt Wratting have agreed to contribute and hold the camera, and Cllr Wijenayaka said he'd contribute with some locality budget, but there will be a short fall.

Also plans for the Simpler Recycling were approved at the Extraordinary Meeting at West Suffolk council on the 15th October. The changes will come into effect from April 2026 and will not see any decrease in the General Waste collection frequency. West Suffolk is committed to working with our residents to ensure we provide as much awareness as possible to make this change beneficial. It will see additional collections for food waste, glass and then plastic film in 2027.

Cllr Wijenayaka encouraged Parish Councillors to take part in the SCC Local Transport Plan survey, it closes on the 25th Nov. He is encouraging all parishes and residents to have their say, but especially Withersfield, as we are so close to Haverhill yet using public transport seems very difficult.

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/transport-planning/suffolks-local-transport-plan>

Our local markets in Haverhill, Mildenhall and Brandon have seen a marked improvement in numbers of traders and shoppers. This is due to the investment of £300k over 3 years which was put forward by me as portfolio holder for growth and agreed by the rest of the cabinet. Cllr Wijenayaka encouraged as to take a visit to one of our markets.

Presents Galore Christmas Fair will be returning to Newmarket Racecourse on the 29th November to the 1st December, which will see over 120 stalls, including some of our Young Traders who won a place to be at Presents Galore, with thanks for the organisers of Presents Galore and the Newmarket Charitable Foundation for making the spaces available to them. Those Young Traders took part in the Young Traders competition this year and made it to the regional final held at Bury St Edmunds and were awarded a place at Presents Galore. Please do pay it a visit.

The Cllrs discussed the thermal camera. No proposal was made but it was agreed that a Cllr could put together a proposal for the next PC meeting demonstrating how the parish could make use of a thermal camera.

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 17th September 2024

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

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Update on playground feasibility study – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka covered this point in his report. He is awaiting requested information from West Suffolk.

b) Parking on Burton Green – sign request to Thurlow Estate – Clerk

The Clerk had asked the Thurlow Estate for an update but was still awaiting a response.

c) Footpaths email – Cllr Lake

As the footpaths lead for the PC, Cllr Lake had reported both issues raised by a parishioner in regards to the cutting of footpaths around the village. She had been told that the footpath from Thurlow Road towards Haverhill, will be given a winter cut back and the Council will be looking into whether any money can be used to upgrade this footpath. The officer told Cllr Lake that they couldn't do anything about the footpath from the church towards West Wratting as this was the responsibility of landowners. The PC discussed the next steps here and agreed that no action needs to be taken at present but for Cllr Lake to seek clarity from the officer as to whether the CC contact landowners in these cases.

- d) Overgrown reeds causing visibility problems on Arboretum junction and obscured signage along A1307

This had been reported to West Suffolk Highways by parishioners and Cllrs. Cllr Bennett informed the Clerk that the Highways Assessment Officer carried out an inspection of the Arboretum junction and he determined that it does not meet the HMOP criteria for reactive action at this time and there is enough visibility at the junction to see oncoming traffic. They said they would continue to monitor this during routine inspections and in response to any report received.

Cllr Bennett assured that she has repeatedly asked for this to be reassessed but is still being met with a firm no.

The officer also reported that following the concerns raised by a resident about obscured signage, he had driven the whole length of Cambridge way in both directions and couldn't find where these are. In response to this, Cllr Wijenayaka took a photo of the obscured sign which was passed on to Cllr Bennett by the Clerk. The Clerk will follow up about this.

8. Draft parish survey – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve has been working on putting together a survey for all parishioners in order for the PC to retrieve their views of parish needs. Cllr Eve asked the PC for their thoughts on the cost of putting together an online survey which would be either an annual subscription of £228, or a monthly cost of £75. The Cllrs discussed this and agreed to pay for a year's subscription. This means the PC can use the online survey platform throughout the year for other surveys for Withersfield residents. The cost would be paid for out of the miscellaneous reserves.

The timing of when to begin the subscription was discussed and agreed that the end of January would be best. This gives Cllr Eve the opportunity to recirculate the draft questions and make any amendments to the survey in time to be approved at the January PC meeting. This would then lead to receiving the results in time for the Annual Parish Council meeting in May.

9. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Stiles said that he had completed all but one of the 'further comments' received from West Suffolk for amendments on the Neighbourhood Plan. The outstanding point to complete is regarding a map and he has arranged a meeting with the officer to clarify the modification needed on 18th November. Cllr Stiles believes after his meeting; he will be able to send off the completed amendments the same day. The Plan will then be ready to go to an assessor. The PC expect the referendum to be carried out in Spring. Cllr Wijenayaka offered his assistance to Cllr Stiles to aid pushing the process along as District Cllr.

10. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve told the PC that he now has the speed watch equipment and if anyone wants to start up speed watch, to let him know.

It was reported that the VAS wouldn't download the data recently and this is now in storage. Once traffic calming measures have been implemented, the VAS will be put up again for further data collection.

The estimated costs for different traffic calming measures retrieved by Cllr Eve from Suffolk Highways, was shared to the PC and discussed.

Gateways at five locations, which create a pinch point on entrance to the village, was estimated at a cost of £15,000-£18,000. It was agreed for Cllr Eve to ask Highways for the proposed spec for the installation of the gates in the five locations in Withersfield for future consideration. The PC could look to tender the work from then and Cllr Wijenayaka suggested there is potential for funding to become available for this sort of project in the future.

Cllr Eve told the PC that the engineer he had met with to discuss the traffic calming options, had advised that the option of refreshing all current road markings would not be a good use of funds as the road markings will be replenished over time.

The PC agreed to refresh the painting of the 'SLOW' markings on the bend on Hollow Hill/Church Street which has an estimated cost £2,500. Cllr Eve suggested asking the Council to fund this with the section 106 money. If this was not possible, the PC agreed to pay for the works from their reserves.

11. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Jarvis

The PC had received the VHMC annual report which the Cllrs viewed. The Grasscrete blocks have been installed to improve the parking at the village hall. The PC have paid for the full invoice of the works, and the VHMC will be reimbursing them for £10,217.87, which is less the £3,000 donation from the PC for the works and less the VAT which the PC will be able to claim back.

12. Update from the Muck-Off campaign - Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka reminded the PC that Acorn had been sent questions to answer from the Council some time ago. This information has now been received and the case officer said that it looks like February 2025 could be when the application will come before the committee. A further public consultation is expected therefore, the campaign will be holding a public meeting to review the application and for support in submitting further comments to the proposed application.

13. Christmas social event

The Cllrs all agreed that they would be interested in a small gathering of the three committees of state in Withersfield. No public funds would be used.

14. 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, 2024/25

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

- d) To note insurance renewal

Noted.

- e) Draft budget and precept submission for 2025/2026

The projected budget for 2025/26 had been drawn up and the Chair had put together his draft budget report, which had been circulated to the Cllrs for consideration. The precept form has been filled out to show a 0% increase in the council tax.

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

The final budget will be agreed in March 2025 PC meeting.

- f) To note the NALC Local Government Local Pay Agreement 2024-25

Noted and agreed to the Clerk's backpay.

- g) Approval of Risk and Asset Registers for 2025

These were approved.

15. Correspondence

- a) Letter – Lloyds Bank change of account

Lloyds Bank advised the PC that the bank account will be changed over to a Community Account in January. This will incur a fee of £4.25 per month. This was noted.

- b) Email - East Anglian Air Ambulance donation request

Noted.

- c) Email – Christmas lights on cedar tree

A parishioner had requested if they could display Christmas lights on the Cedar tree near the war memorial, at their own cost. The PC agreed.

- d) Email – Christmas Bazaar banners

Permission was requested for the banners advertising the Christmas Bazaar – the PC agreed. It was also agreed by the PC that they give their ongoing approval for the

erection of signs advertising village events being held by the Village Hall Committee or the Church.

- e) Email - Burton Hill and Duke's Cottage
All correspondence was shared with the PC and noted.
As a result of these communications, an internal review was carried out at item 19 on the agenda.

16. Planning

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

All were considered and noted.

17. To determine meeting dates for 2025

Cllr Wijenayaka asked if the dates could be checked against his West Suffolk meetings for any clashes. Therefore, the revised following dates were accepted:

January 21st

March 4th

May 6th

July 8th

September 16th

November 11th

18. Agenda items for next PC meeting in January 2025

- Parish Survey

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Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka;

19. Confidential Item

Cllr Eve took over Chair for this item.

Cllr Eve explained that an internal review had been carried out to establish what can be learnt from the event where recently a parishioner felt unhappy with the actions taken by the Chairman on behalf of the PC. The review was undertaken to improve Parish Council procedures and improve communication between the Parish Council and parishioners. The report writes in detail the events and the correspondence which occurred.

The following recommendations have been developed with consideration taken to the views of all parties involved:

1. The Parish Council should draw up a guide to Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors and the Chair, which should be published on the Parish Council website to enhance parishioners' knowledge and awareness of the Parish Councils' role(s).
2. Ensure that all actions of Cllrs and the Chair are reported to the next available Parish Council meeting to confirm that they conform to that guidance.
3. The Parish Council should endeavour to avoid involvement in disputes between individual Parishioners, their landlords, or their suppliers, only becoming involved when the matter is urgent, or where there is potential danger to a parishioner or their property.
4. If the Parish Council does become involved in a dispute it should seek to identify all parties concerned as quickly as possible and encourage them to find a solution together to avoid any danger of being seen as a "go between".

The recommendations are designed to assist in avoiding misunderstandings in the future.

All Cllrs agreed with the report and the recommendations. It was agreed for a 'Roles and Responsibilities' document to be drafted and brought to the next PC meeting for further discussion and approval.

The meeting closed at 21:09.