

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 14th November 2023 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair),
Sheila Horton, Gill Jarvis, Philip Stiles; Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump;
District Cllr: Indunil Wijenayaka; County Councillor: Bobby Bennett;
Sarah Stevens and 2 parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Korona - approved by the PC.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenayaka spoke about the Thermal Imaging Cameras Loan Project which is available to the community. The cameras can be used to scan homes and community buildings to identify potential areas where excessive heat loss is occurring. It was advised for anyone wanting to use the camera to contact Cllr Wijenayaka who will have access between 19/12/23 - 15/01/24. He suggested that the village hall could be surveyed.

There is a district wide fund available to update street lighting to LED lights.

Bury St Edmunds bus shelter had been experiencing some anti-social behaviour which meant this was going to be closed. However, funding has been found in order to have security guards as a temporary solution at the bus shelter, to deter any untoward behaviour meaning the bus shelter can remain open.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett's County Councillor reports for October and November 2023 can be found on the PC website. In addition to her reports, she highlighted the following:

The are 2 consultations they are currently working on are:

1. The budget – the budget gap is being looked at by raising the precept and making efficiency savings.
2. Library service – By law they have to reprocure the library service as it is commissioned. SCC are keen to hear people's views about library services.

The recent storms resulted in approximately 750 properties in the area with water inside them. It was mentioned that due to the flooding, some of the roads in the parish had been badly damaged to which Cllr Bennett advised to report this on the online system but she would also flag this.

Cllr Bennett shared she had received news that the design for the 20mph zone in Withersfield was being finalised and the details would be being sent to us in the next few days which will include full costings.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

One parishioner asked the PC to consider looking and sending in comments for planning application CCC/23/110/FUL for the anaerobic digestion plant which is proposed 2 miles from the Spring Grove Farm in Withersfield application, at Streetly Hall Farm West Wickham, Cambridgeshire.

Cllr Stiles will be attending the meeting on Saturday at West Wickham about this and will look further into the application.

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 12th September 2023 and extraordinary Parish Council meeting held on 12th October 2023

Both minutes were approved – proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

- a) Consider possible projects for the bequest from Mrs Enid Rodgers

It was agreed to discuss this at item 12d where the draft budget was being considered.

- b) Light over defibrillator – Cllr Horton

This is in the process of being fixed and an electrician had been out to look at the light.

- c) Website statement – audit

The Clerk is continuing to work on this.

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

Objections to the anaerobic digestion plant application had been submitted from the group's members. There is a meeting on 22/11/23 where they will be looking at deciding on their next steps, how to generate more objections, and how to strengthen their objections.

9. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan

In Cllr Korona's absence, Cllr Stiles reported that he had attending a meeting with Cllr Korona and West Suffolk planning officers to discuss the progression of the Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Stiles said that the amendments Cllr Korona had incorporated had been accepted and that the plan would soon be moving onto the next stage. Cllr Korona is awaiting a response from West Suffolk and then a timetable for independent review and the referendum can be set.

10. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve reiterated that they are expecting the costs for the 20mph zone in the next few days – which had been confirmed earlier by Cllr Bennett.

Speed Watch had held their special event and the data recorded is available if needed.

Cllr Eve had asked Councillors at his last Villages Road Group meeting, to have the Acorn anaerobic digestion facility application on their next PC meeting agendas for discussion and to consider submitting comments. Cllr Eve confirmed that Great Wrattling had done so and submitted an objection to the application.

11. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Horton

Cllr Horton told the PC that the village hall extension was coming along well, albeit their timetable has been delayed due to the recent weather. The committee room will be unavailable to hire until approximately mid-January.

Tom Mytton-Mills has taken on the role of treasurer and Cllr Jarvis has become the Health and Safety trustee for the VHMC.

Cllr Horton explained that they would next be looking for a grant to re-roof the flat section of the hall and for a new disabled access.

There will be events being held in the new year including a table top sale and the village hall is doing well with regular hirings.

Cllr Horton will be proposing the VHMC annually donate £75.00 to the Parish Council to go towards the upkeep of the green at the next VHMC meeting in January. The green is used for parking by village hall hirers and maintained by the PC.

The PC recognised the effort in the extensions works and thanks all the volunteers who are helping this to be realised.

12. 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

These were all considered and approved - proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Horton.

- d) Draft budget and precept submission for 2024/2025

The Chair explained that himself and the Clerk had drawn up the projected budget for 2024/25 and the Chair had put together his draft budget report, which had been circulated to the Cllrs for consideration.

There have been significant increases in costs including rises in the village greens grounds maintenance and the insurance policies. Due to the PC's increased expenditure, it is proposed for a 6.49% increase in the council tax. This equates to an increase of 0.04p per week, per household.

As a result of the auditors advising that the PC is holding more in unrestricted reserves than is advisable or needed, the Chair proposed a number of designated reserves to be established:

- Traffic calming / 20mph implementation reserve
- Playground development fund reserve
- Parish assets maintenance fund reserve
- Miscellaneous projects reserve
- Contingency reserve fund (elections etc)

Expenditure on items in these categories would be removed from the revenue budget and charged to these reserve funds.

The draft budget was discussed. It was confirmed that the bequest received from Mrs Rodgers, would be divided between three projects being:

1. Traffic calming
2. Village playground
3. Miscellaneous reserves - for upcoming projects (possible village hall disabled access or other)

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

The final budget will be agreed in March 2024 PC meeting.

- e) Clerk annual salary appraisal and NALC Local Government Local Pay Agreement 2023-24

The Clerk left the room so the PC could talk about the Clerk's salary. It was agreed to implement the National Joint Council for Local Government Services pay award and backdate the payment to 1st April 2023, as advised by SALC, and to the annual progression of the Clerk's salary to SCP 15, backdated to 1st June 2023.

- f) Approval of Risk and Asset Registers for 2024 and insurance renewal which includes an increase in the fidelity guarantee

These were approved by the PC and signed by the Chair. It was noted that the fidelity guarantee has been increased as advised on the internal audit.

13. Correspondence

- a) Email - WSC Grass cutting and grounds maintenance

Noted - no further action.

14. Planning

- a) Agreement to Parish Council objection to Acorn anaerobic digestion facility application SCC/0045/23SE

Since the extraordinary Parish Council meeting held on 12th October 2023, where the PC agreed to object to planning application SCC/0045/23SE, the Cllrs had been working collectively on their objection. The Chair had circulated the latest version, being 28 pages long, of the objection to the Cllrs for perusal and final thoughts. Sarah Stevens, a villager with experience as a planning consultant, had been assisting the PC with their objection. All points had been thoroughly covered which had been agreed at the previous meeting and all Cllrs were happy with this final draft. It was agreed for the Clerk to submit the objection. It was suggested that the PC's objection was made widely available and to share it with other local Councils. The objection can be viewed on the PC website.

Sarah advised the PC to think towards next steps and lodge their request to speak at the committee meeting. The Clerk will request this in the cover email when submitting the objection.

Thanks was given to all the Cllrs and Sarah in pulling an extensive objection together.

b) Update on Milton House application

There had been news that despite a further bat report, there was still not sufficient ecological information available to determine the application. Since then, the holding objection has been removed and therefore the application could be considered at the next development control committee. The PC will look out for the next agenda.

c) Update on Horseheath Road farm entrance application.

Cllr Wijenayaka said that this was not due to go to committee and they were awaiting more information from the Acorn anaerobic digestion application.

d) Borough notifications since last meeting

e) Applications received since last meeting for consideration

All were considered and noted.

15. To determine meeting dates for 2024

The following dates were accepted:

January 16th

March 12th

May 14th

July 9th

September 10th

November 12th

The Clerk will request for the use of the Epicentre for the January meeting.

16. Agenda items for January 2024

None.

The meeting closed at 20:36