

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at  
7:30pm on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair), Sheila Horton, Gill Jarvis,  
Julia Korona, Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump; District Cllr: Indunil Wijenayaka;  
and 7 parishioners.

**1. Election of Chairperson and Vice Chair**

It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka, and seconded by Cllr Eve, for Cllr Rich to be the Chairman. All Cllrs were in agreement.

It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka, and seconded by Cllr Rich, for Cllr Eve to be the Vice-Chair. All Cllrs were in agreement.

**2. Results of Parish Council elections and note one Councillor vacancy**

The Chair explained that all 7 previous Parish Councillors had been re-elected as Councillors due to having an un-contested election. There is one Councillor vacancy available for co-option.

**3. Results of District Council election**

The Chair congratulated the new district Cllr; Indy Wijenayaka. The Chair had emailed the Parish Council's thanks to outgoing district Cllr, Peter Stevens, and asked whether County Cllr Bennett might be able to pass on the PC's thanks to him for his help over the previous years.

**4. Apologies for absence**

Received from Cllr Stiles. The PC agreed for Cllr Stiles to sign his 'Declaration of Acceptance of Office' at a later date due to his absence.

**5. District Councillor's report**

Cllr Wjenayaka gave his thanks for the support he had received for the recent election and becoming the new district Cllr. His aim is to have more interaction between parishes.

**6. County Councillor's report**

Cllr Bennett shared her report in the APM which can be found on the Parish Council website.

**7. Public Forum for parishioners**

The parishioners who had attended were there to be involved with discussions of recent planning applications received and would have their chance to put across their views at item 10.

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

The Chair declared that as a tenant of land owned by the Thurlow Estate, he would not be able to be involved in any voting or decisions when in discussions about planning application DC/23/0572/FUL on item 10a3, as the Estate is the applicant.

## 9. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

These were approved - proposed by Cllr Jarvis and seconded by Cllr Eve.

## 10. Planning

a) Applications received since last meeting for consideration:

1. DC/23/0493/FUL: Planning Application - five dwellings (following demolition of existing house) | Milton House Thurlow Road Withersfield Suffolk CB9 7SA

Representatives of J.A.P Architects had confirmed their attendance ahead of the meeting, however did not appear. Parishioners were invited to give their views on the application.

After listening to the parishioner's points raised, the Cllrs discussed and all were in agreement to object to the application on the same grounds as the PC's previous objections to this application, as there had been little change made.

The Parish Council agreed to submit the following objection:

*The Parish Council objects to this application as it represents an overdevelopment of the site and will have a detrimental effect on the neighbouring householders' properties at the Old Bakehouse and Thistledown Cottage.*

*The application is essentially the same as the application previously rejected by the Committee and on appeal. The changes do not materially change the issues raised in our previous objections in relation to overdevelopment, impact on the neighbouring properties, parking pressures on and adjacent to the site and the potential dangers of traffic movements on a dangerous blind bend. We consider that the development is more suited to a semi urban environment rather than a village such as Withersfield. The cul-de-sac and courtyard hard standing covering a large proportion of the site is inappropriate to the village environment. Gardens of the 5 properties squeezed on to the site are all of a minimal size which is out of character and inappropriate to the environment.*

*The Parish Council would welcome a redevelopment of the site and the replacement of the existing Milton House property with a suitable development of 2 or 3 houses. This would have the potential to enhance our conservation area rather than negatively impacting on it as with the current proposal.*

2. DC/23/0490/FUL: Planning application - a. one detached dwelling with integral garage following demolition of existing garage b. replacement garage to Phoenix House c. vehicular access to host dwelling | Phoenix House Turnpike Hill Withersfield Suffolk CB9 7RY

The applicant gave a brief outline of the application and offered to answer any questions the PC had.

It was agreed by the PC that the application is consistent with the provisions of the draft Neighbourhood Plan which records the importance of retaining the distinctly rural character of the village of Withersfield, and an aversion to over-development of sites within the settlement area and in particular infill developments.

The PC agreed to respond in support of the application.

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

The applicant did not attend the meeting. Parishioners were invited in turn to give their views on the application.

After listening to the parishioners' comments, the PC discussed the application and the number of objections the application has received. All were in agreement to object on the grounds that the objectors had raised. Cllr Bennett added that if the application is linked with the proposed anaerobic digester plant, that it should be made with the planning application for the plant.

The Parish Council agreed to submit the following objection:

*The Parish Council objects to this application as we believe that it is not necessary for the purposes stated by the applicant.*

*We believe that a key test on the reasonableness of this application is whether the proposed development is necessary for the purposes of the agricultural activities currently undertaken on this site.*

*The applicant claims that this proposal is needed to support existing activity. This is clearly not the case for the following reasons:*

- *The current field access at Horseheath Road supports some 200 acres. The present gated entrance is typical of similar field accesses on the Estate – a horizontal hinged pole, chain and padlock. This particular access is, in fact, a double access able to accommodate the largest farm vehicles used by the estate.*

*In the event the proposed new access at Horseheath Road is permitted then a prior approval application will need to be submitted to link the new access to the existing track. Again, this would require the key test that the track is 'reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture'.*

- *There is, and never has been any safety issues/accident records with the alleged pedestrian/vehicular interface. However, the proposal would result in a cross over between footpath and farm track, and potential associated risks.*

- *These fields are also served by five other access points including from the A1307 which is able to take the largest of vehicles and on Queens Street. this access is shared with Anglian Water and is an access to the Sewerage Treatment Works for the village.*

- *The land in question is arable predominately cereal crops in monoculture.*

- *Assuming a yield of four tonnes to the acre the land might produce some 800 tons. This volume does not require any greater capacity of vehicles - either size or number than are currently accommodated by existing access points.*

*If as the evidence shows there is no need for the development to support current farming activities it can only be that this application is to support the proposal to develop a Biodigester plant at Spring Grove Farm.*

*This extremely contentious proposal will be determined by the County Council when an application is finally submitted and it is the Parish Council's view that this application. Should be seen as integral to that proposal and considered as part of that application.*

*The proposal is clearly designed to taken increased volumes and size of traffic and as such will have a hugely detrimental impact on village roads, notably Skippers Lane, Horseheath Road, Silver Street and Hollow Hill. These roads are already adversely impacted by volumes of HGV and large farm vehicle traffic and have no capacity to take increased size and volumes of traffic.*

*The access will create a significant hazard on Horseheath Road.*

*The access will also be located on and largely destroy an ancient meadow on Horseheath Road. The plan indicates a large concreted area which may well end up becoming a farm vehicle holding area which will cause visual blight on the area. It is adjacent to our local public house which relies on clientele enjoying the pleasant rural setting. This development will adversely impact on the pub and its business.*

*We believe there should be a full impact assessment on the potential detriment and damage to this beautiful historic meadow.*

*In summary this application has no merit for the purposes stated on the application. As such it should be rejected.*

*If the applicant had hoped to provide access for a future industrial plant at Spring Grove Farm - the Acorn Biodigester scheme, then this should be clearly stated and considered alongside that application - probably by the County Council who will determine the application for the Biodigester scheme.*

4. Other applications received

Considered and noted.

b) Borough notifications since last meeting

Noted.

**11. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings**

None.

**12. Allocation of councillor roles and responsibilities**

The responsibilities were discussed and the Cllrs agreed to the following:

Village Hall – Cllr Horton and Cllr Jarvis

Defibrillator – Cllr Horton

Highways – Cllr Eve  
Speed Watch liaison & VAS Coordinator – Cllr Eve  
Graveyard – Cllr Korona  
Planning – Cllr Korona  
Safeguarding – Cllr Korona  
Finance – Cllr Rich  
Environment and Footpaths – Cllr Wijenayaka

### **13. Update from the Muck-Off campaign - Cllr Wijenayaka**

Cllr Wijenayaka said they were still awaiting a planning application to be submitted for the anaerobic digestion plant. Cllr Stiles had shared the news that he had found out there is definitely an intention to build an AD plant in Horseheath. There is no application yet.

As previously discussed at item 10, there is concern that planning application DC/23/0572/FUL for a new agricultural access, is associated with the AD plant. If this is the case, the application would be preliminary and should be made with the planning application for the plant. The Estate has insisted that the agricultural access application is not commercial but an agricultural development. Cllr Eve suggested that incorrect wording may have been used and that a more direct question needs to be asked to the Estate about the intention of use for the new access.

### **14. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Korona**

Cllr Korona told the PC that she had been in communication with Amy, Senior Planning Policy Officer at West Suffolk, who had suggested that it is likely to be September when the plan will be adopted. Cllr Korona is awaiting a further update from Amy due this month.

There had been multiple things that Amy had previously informed Cllr Korona about as further comments from West Suffolk that may help redrafting the policy. Cllr Korona has been able to make minor amendments needed and has contacted the consultant, O'Neill Homer, in respect to the others.

### **15. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve**

Cllr Eve explained that he had contacted Graeme Mateer, Head of Transport Strategy at Suffolk County Council, to arrange a meeting to discuss the highways issues for Withersfield and the neighbouring parishes, to which Cllr Bennett agreed to also attend. Graeme told Cllr Eve that he would ask his Strategic Transport colleagues to contact him and Cllr Bennett for a discussion.

The PC discussed the Section 106 money for the Arboretum Phase 2. The PC had requested SCC to carry out an options appraisal at the Arboretum as the new housing being built will increase the existing traffic problems. SCC has not yet agreed to this but the PC felt it would be sensible to ask for the cost of the options appraisal as it could fall to the PC. It was agreed for the PC to look to fund the options appraisal and research into funding/bids for schemes also. Cllr Bennett may be able to help with the payment.

### **16. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Horton**

Cllr Horton had reported the recent news for the VHMC in the APM. She reiterated that they were currently working to get the extension works started and that the AGM is being held in July.

#### **17. Discussion for the charging for use of village green and village hall events parking**

The Chair put forward the suggestion that the Village Hall Management Committee make an annual contribution to the PC towards the upkeep of the green, which is used by hirers of the hall for car parking. The greens maintenance has increased in cost this year which the PC pay for. The Chair explained that the Sports & Recreation Committee readily agreed to make a contribution of £150 per annum towards the insurance of the pavilion, when he raised with them the PC's cost pressures. It was agreed by the Cllrs that this seemed a fair and good suggestion and Cllr Horton was asked to take the proposal to the VHMC.

#### **18. Environment working group – Cllr Wijenayaka**

Cllr Wijenayaka intends to set this up with the hope to widen it to the district and have neighbouring parishes involved. He hopes to have nature champions in different parishes and use this to form a strong network. An article will be published in the parish magazine. Cllr Eve offered to mention this at his next village road group where he meets with local parishes.

#### **19. Graveyard rules amendments to include clarification on number of years for Exclusive Rights**

The PC discussed the years for exclusive rights and it is noted that the PC are choosing to not set a limit on lease at present.

The Chair raised the previous issue of the sunken grave and it was agreed for Cllr Korona to investigate further into whether the funeral directors should be ensuring the gravedigger should return a few weeks after an interment.

#### **20. Finance**

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

These were approved – proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Korona.

- c) Approval of the end of year accounts 2022/23 and Chairman's Annual Accounts Report

The end of year accounts was approved - proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Korona.

- d) Confirmation that the Parish Council meets the criteria for exemption for 2022/23 and wishes to be an exempt authority

Confirmed - proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Eve.

- e) Consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement
- f) Consider and approve the Accounting Statements

The AGAR was considered and approved – proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Eve.

- g) Approval of Internal Controls 2023
- h) Approval of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Code of Conduct

These were all approved. Proposed by Cllr Eve and seconded by Cllr Horton.

- i) Confirmation of receipt of 2023/24 precept

Noted.

- j) To note the Clerk continues as the PC's Responsible Financial Officer

Noted.

## **21. Correspondence**

- a) Letter - Open letter to PC re: Neighbourhood Plan/community rights – planning

Noted.

- b) Email – Webnos defib site checks

Noted.

- c) Email - Church St Footbridge

The Clerk had received an email from Suffolk Highways about a report of the rotten wood on the bridge which needs repairing. A heavy yellow plastic panel has been placed over the defect. The Clerk replied explaining that the bridge is maintained by Suffolk Highways and not the PC and requested for the necessary repair works be carried out. No further communication has been received so the Clerk will chase this up.

## **22. Agenda items for 11 July 2023**

- '20's Plenty in Suffolk' – Cllr Eve.

*The meeting closed at 21:10.*