

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 16th September 2025 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair), Jaclyn Lake,
Patricia Mallalieu, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka;
Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka;
and 14 parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Korona – approved by the PC.

2. Public Forum for parishioners

a) Parishioner requests to speak:

- i. Mr Huckstep (Highways matter, village greens and playground project)**
- ii. Mr Pinder (Playground project)**
- iii. Any others**

While waiting for the arrival of the Thurlow Estate representatives, the Chair inviting Mr Huckstep to speak as he has requested to do so to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

Mr Huckstep began by explaining his time and passion to Withersfield including all the projects he has been involved with such as the village hall extension, Grasscrete blocks car parking, and double yellow lines in front on Meldham Wash Lands.

Mr Huckstep spoke about the issue of parking on the village greens and that residents need space to park. The PC's licence from the Thurlow Estate has expired and he suggested that this is an opportunity to redraft clause 1.1.9 to include some permanent, controlled parking areas for residents.

Mr Huckstep went on to express his views about the proposed playground and the results from the parish survey. He asked for clarification regarding the priorities listed in the survey and why this has led to installing a playground. He also asked the PC to explain what is meant by the statement in the previous minutes that "approximately 3,500 children use the village hall annually" and how this number was arrived at.

It was suggested by Mr Huckstep that a paper postal vote or a door step survey be undertaken regarding the proposed playground. Mr Huckstep said that the village hall needs a lot of improvement works and Withersfield already sports a Children's playground. He suggested that maybe the small fund the PC has available could be put to better use for a greater benefit of all the village.

Mr Huckstep's full script can be found on the PC website under these meeting minutes.

The Chair thanked Mr Huckstep for his contribution and invited Mr Pinder to speak, as he had requested to do so to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

Mr Pinder explained his thoughts on the proposed playground. He said that he had spoken to some residents and questions whether we want, and whether we need a playground. He said that four months of the year it would not be used due to winter and that users of the playground would be parked on the green. He said that if parents were using the village hall, children would be left unsupervised on the other side of a dangerous road at the proposed site of the playground. Mr Pinder questioned where the figure of 3,500 children using the village hall had come from. He asked whether the PC would be able to continue to pay for the building works, maintenance, and insurance of a playground or would it be passed onto the Village Hall Management Committee.

Mr Pinder said that other residents feel that money should be spent on improvements to the village hall instead. He mentioned the Grasscrete blocks parking could have been larger but it stops where it does because of money.

Mr Pinder feels a playground could become a meeting point for youngsters/teenagers and said the Bowls club had previously mentioned children had been banging on the windows of the village hall. He asked whether we want to spoil the village green. Mr Pinder said that people living around the green do not want children making a noise by playing on the green as they are here for a village life.

Cllr Eve said that some excellent points had been made and that they would all be taken into consideration during the Councillors discussions on the playground.

The Chair thanked Mr Pinder and asked whether any other parishioners would like to speak.

One parishioner said it sounded as though the results of the survey did not show a priority of a playground in the village. She felt that the numbers used from the SurveyMonkey parish survey were misleading and asked whether a majority do want a playground.

Cllr Eve explained that the parish survey was a general survey to ask parishioners for their views and feedback on the parish for the Councillors to have some guidance. The aim of the survey was to seek views of parishioners to what else was wanted from the parish and PC. He said that some people had mentioned their desire to have a playground in the village and that there was some interest in this.

Elaine McInnes-Rich – leading the playground project – clarified that the figure of 3,500 children had been worked out by the village hall warden, who is in charge of the bookings and therefore has the data, looked at how many groups hire the hall with children and children's how many birthday party bookings there had been over the last year and averaged the number. Elaine said that surveys do not have 100% response rates and as a small village, it is not expected that a survey would receive many responses. She said she was representing parents and giving a voice to those who expressed an interest in a playground.

Another parishioner said that neighbouring villages have playgrounds and there was a good argument for having one. He lives around the green himself and does not think it will ruin the view on the green. He also said that there was recently a large event at the village hall

and the noise did not offend him, therefore noise from a playground would not be a problem.

Another parishioner said that although we had managed without a playground in the village in the past, children do deserve to have something in the village. She will go for a walk with her grandson and go into the church where there are a few toys, as that is the only option. You have to travel in a car to use a playground. She also mentioned a Ukrainian family who have been living in the village since the beginning of the war who would definitely benefit from such a facility. She said she was unaware of the online parish survey and feels a door-to-door survey might have been better.

Elaine told everyone that she had written articles in Withersfield News about the playground project in the last three editions with her contact details included for people to contact her with their thoughts. She said only one parishioner had been in contact with her about this who she'd had a discussion with. One other parishioner had contacted her asking for permission to apply for funding towards the project through their employer. The pub had today been in contact to give their support and say they'd like to begin fundraising also.

The chair pointed out that the Parish Council had established a small fund some years back to support the development of a playground, which had been an ambition of the council for many years. However, this fund will only be a contribution to the project which will only be able to proceed if sufficient funds are raised. The PC have supported and donated to the Village Hall in past improvements such as the Grasscrete blocks parking.

A parishioner asked whether Burton Green had been considered as a location for the playground and had the Thurlow Estate been asked, being their land.

It was confirmed that other possible sites had been considered and that the Thurlow Estate agreed in principle to a playground being installed on the green, subject to planning permission.

All information about the playground project has been made publicly available.

The Chair thanked parishioners for their views which would be considered by the Parish Council as it progressed the project.

b) The Thurlow Estate's Estate Director, Alison Provis, and Farms Director, Paul Carrott, will be in attendance to answer concerns raised about recent spreading of composted materials which caused major inconvenience to village residents.

The Chair welcomed the representatives from the Thurlow Estate and invited them to introduce themselves.

The Thurlow Estate's Estate Director, Alison Provis, introduced herself to all – this is the first PC meeting she'd attended and she said she would like to come to future meetings to build close relationships. The Farm Director, Paul Carrott, introduced himself and explained he had been in his role for three months so far would also like to attend future PC meetings. Paul apologised for the recent compost spreading which caused a lot of

upset among residents. He had received communications from multiple people about it and admitted that they - the Estate - were in the wrong. He said they should have stopped the work instead of continuing. He said that it is his role to raise standards and will be taking the lessons learned from this experience forward. Paul said he had shared his contact details and told the parishioners to contact him directly if any issues occur as he is keen to be aware and if need be, he can act immediately.

The Chair invited members of the public to share their experiences in regards to the recent compost spreading incident.

One parishioner explained that on the day of the spreading the smell was so strong and, as an asthmatic, she felt like she couldn't breathe. She said her house is surrounded by the fields and therefore they rushed to close all the windows when they noticed what was happening but there was black/brown reminiscence everywhere – her carpets were covered, the vents in the windows, garden furniture all covered. The following day they had cleaned everything in the garden as best as possible due to having visitors but after children had played in her garden, they had brown all over their faces. She said that a long time ago she used to receive a note through her door to warn her that they were going to begin harvesting and she couldn't understand why they weren't told in advance. She said that she had contacted Paul Carrott who did get back to her right away and she thanked him for his quick response.

Cllr Eve asked why the spreading had to be done through the night and why they need to come within inches of his hedge. The noise and smell were overpowering and it happened on possibly the hottest night of the year. He also queried that if it was PSA 100 compost, why did it smell so bad?

A parishioner said the spreading was like sandstorms he had experienced in the middle East except with the added stench.

The Chair said that many residents' pet dogs had contracted diarrhoea after the compost spreading.

Cllr Wijenayaka questioned the equipment which was used for the spreading.

A parishioner stated it would have been useful to have had a heads up, she is unaware that there has been another time when compost spreading has had such an impact on the residents. It was stated that the smell got worse the days after the spreading and it smelt sewage like.

Paul Carrott responded to all the comments made. He admitted that they should not have been spreading during the night – he explained that if they do not give the contractors restrictions, they will work whenever. Moving forward there are going to be restrictions to timings of compost spreading and also given the direction to not do so around houses.

Paul explained that PSA 100 is from the 'brown bin' waste. The smell therefore comes from anything that rots down in these bins. He said that they do also spread biosolids

which have a smell but are not dusty, however in this case, it was not biosolids which were spread.

Paul explained the equipment which was used and how it works for spreading the compost - spinner plates are used for dry solids and dribble bars are for liquids.

It was suggested for the Estate to provide information regarding their farming works and plans to be placed in the Withersfield News, which the Estate representatives agreed to.

The Chair thanked Alison and Paul for attending the meeting and for their communications and assurances in future compost spreading.

A parishioner asked Alison whether the Thurlow Estate would be supporting Acorn in an appeal to the Anaerobic Digester plant application. Alison said they were waiting to hear confirmation from Acorn on the matter but that Acorn retain an option on the land and the Estate would be in support. It was stated from the parishioner that the community are confused as to why the Estate would be in support of this.

It was voiced that if an appeal is made the PC would welcome the opportunity for discussion in a future PC meeting with representatives of the Thurlow Estate. Alison said she would be happy to attend future PC meetings and suggested that Acorn should be invited also. It was explained to Alison that Acorn declined to attend any PC meeting previously.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for five minutes whilst those who wished to left the meeting.

3. District Councillor's report

Cllr Wijenayaka's report was noted and can be viewed on the PC website.

4. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett was unable to attend due to being in Ipswich for the full council meeting for local government reform, which was being followed by a cabinet meeting.

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

None.

6. Parish Councillor vacancy application

Elain McInnes-Rich had applied to fill the vacant Parish Councillor position. She had sent a statement of application prior to the PC meeting which had been shared with all the Cllrs. The Chair invited her to speak a little about why she'd like to become a Parish Councillor.

Elaine has lived in Haverhill North and Withersfield for the past 25 years. She is the editor of the Parish Newsletter and the project lead for the village playground project working closely

with the Parish Council. Elaine said she would like to become a Parish Councillor to be able to help shape our local community and to protect our rural environment. Now that Elaine has retired from her career within the NHS, she feels she has the time, and passion, to dedicate to the role of Parish Councillor.

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

7. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 8th July 2025

Cllr Eve had felt the line *“It was explained that as a result of the parish survey, which all parishioners were asked to complete, the desire for a playground in the village was a priority”* was not the correct wording. It was suggested that the following line should replace this: *“As an interest was shown by a number of people completing the Parish Survey for a playground in the village, a playground working group had been formed.”*

With this amendment accepted, the minutes were then approved – proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Eve.

8. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

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

Cllr Wijenayaka said this was still in hand. To report back at the next PC meeting.

- b) Parishioner suggestion of forming a “parking issues working group”

Cllrs were asked whether anyone was able to lead a new working group. Unfortunately, none of the Cllrs have any spare availability to commit to a new working group at this time. However, it was noted that there had been a noticeable lull in complaints regarding parking and few reported incidents of parking on the greens since the erection of the No Parking Signs.

9. Update on Acorn Biodigester Application

No news has been received on an appeal as yet. It was suggested by the Chair to invite the Thurlow Estate to discuss the issue at the next PC meeting about the application.

10. Use of sports ground – Denis Elavia

The Sports and Recreation committee is a sub-committee of the Parish Council, chaired by Denis Elavia. The Thurlow Estate own the land.

Denis explained that the facilities offered no longer meet the expectations or the minimum standards required by clubs who want to play in local leagues. There are no showers, toilets, power, hot water, and no goalposts; as these were once stolen.

The ground being clay doesn't drain well and when used for football, gets very churned up and the committee do not have the equipment to maintain the ground.

There have been requests received recently from a cricket team and a football team looking to hire the ground but without the desired facilities this proves difficult. There is also not the man-power to maintain the grounds for these clubs. Previous hirers were Withersfield Cricket Club and Wratting Lions, who would maintain the ground themselves, but have since moved on.

As the facilities do not meet regulations, it was agreed the committee could not hire the ground to football teams at this time.

It was suggested for an article to be placed in the Withersfield News seeking interest for new members to join and rejuvenate the sports and recreation committee. This would be the first step in determining the viability of the committee and the future of the sports ground with its required improvements. Denis will write a piece for the next edition.

11. Update on Playground Project including application for planning permission – Elaine McInnes-Rich

Cllr McInnes-Rich updated the PC on the project. The investment appraisal had been submitted and shared to the Cllrs. There had been a pre-planning meeting with West Suffolk Planning who were supportive of the project. They said the location seemed sensible and they didn't consider that there would be any concerns from Conservation Officers due to the wooden materials being proposed, the small scale of the playground, and the slope on the green meaning the view from the road would be minimal. Overall, West Suffolk Planning gave positive comments towards the proposed plan.

The next stage is the planning application, pending discussions at this meeting.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said they had met with two playground companies who had given their quotes for the installation and preparing of the grounds for a small play area using rustic wood with enclosed fencing and gate, which both came to a ball park figure of £40k. The details were provided with 3D designs. It was reiterated that the budget for the playground would be fundraised money.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said a villager had applied for funding towards the project of £2,000 through their employer.

District Councillor Wijenayaka and County Councillor Bennett had been contacted asking for their support on the project. Both confirmed that they would look to offer some funding. The 'Thriving Communities' funding can be applied for up until 26th September, for up to £20,000. The Lottery fund is another funding option for up to £20,000 but this cannot be applied for until there is a planning application.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said she had taken all points raised from the public forum and welcomed any questions. She said there would be a consultation further down the line.

The Cllrs discussed the points made from parishioners during the public forum.

Cllr Eve felt that evidence will be needed going forward that there is community support for the project. He suggested that perhaps another survey should be offered to the community

just about a playground as the previous 'parish survey' was intended to just be a way of hearing general parishioner views and not specifically about installing a playground.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said that all the information had been published in the last three editions of the Withersfield News, over the last six months, asking residents to contact her with any questions/queries/comments on the project. She said she had only received one email to which she had spoken to the lady on the phone and assured her that a public consultation would be happening.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said that they were not at the stage of a full public meeting as yet but this would happen. The point was made that residents need to be reassured about this.

It is recognised that it is not the majority of villagers who want a playground but that this is to benefit a small but important part of our community - families with young children, and is for the future of Withersfield.

It was agreed that parishioners need to be kept informed of the project. Cllr McInnes-Rich will continue to share this information in the Withersfield Newsletters. The intention for the PC to contribute towards the installation of a playground has been shared since being reported in the PC budget report in November 2023.

It was agreed that Cllr McInnes-Rich should continue with the fundraising strategy so as to not put the project at risk. If the project does not go ahead, the funding will not be accepted. It was also agreed for Cllr McInnes-Rich to continue to draw up the planning application and that a consultation activity within the community, in advance of submitting the planning application, should be arranged.

The Parish Council confirmed its intention to develop a children's playground and to undertake further consultation and community engagement to ensure that the support for the project can be assured and demonstrated.

Fundraising will continue, including the Thriving Communities Fund, and the submission of the planning application will follow on from the further consultation and community engagement which Cllr McInnes-Rich will be arranging.

12. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles

Cllr Stiles explained that the extra work which was requested from West Suffolk had been completed and now the Withersfield Neighbourhood Plan is live on the West Suffolk website until 16th October - the end of the consultation period. After this period, West Suffolk will process the responses received, which could take three months.

Thanks was given to Cllr Stiles for all his hard work and perseverance.

13. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve thanked Chris Oakes for his support working with him on the details of this project.

Cllr Eve reported that the repainting of 'SLOW' on Church Street was soon to ensue.

New quotes had been received for the village gateways. It was agreed that as the PC have approved the gateways, Cllr Eve should make any further decisions needed in getting the gates implemented so long as the total doesn't exceed the previously agreed to costings.

14. Update from the Village Hall Management Committee following AGM – Cllr Mallalieu

The minutes from the AGM and VHMC 16.07.25 meetings had been circulated.

Cllr Mallalieu reported that the independent examiner has signed off the accounts for the financial year 2024/25. This can now be added to the Annual Report and it will be lodged with the Charity Commission as required.

Five new Trustees have joined the committee; Anne Huckstep - who will lead on finance under her role as Secretary, liaising with Laura the Treasurer, Jo Hilson - who will share the Secretary role and take over operational aspects of the VHMC such as minuting meetings, liaising with Sally the Warden around lettings and website, Thomas Mytton-Mills - who will work closely with James Sleightholm and oversee repairs & maintenance, Stuart McNeil and Dr Sevil Gupta.

James Sleightholm, an existing trustee, has taken over as Chair.

The next VHMC meeting is on 22nd October when these posts will be ratified, as they have all been agreed after the AGM.

There are some maintenance works to be undertaken, but these will be agreed at the next meeting.

15. Building works noise from the Arboretum - Cllr Mallalieu

Cllr Mallalieu explained this item and it was agreed that as the noise began at 8am, within work restrictions, there was no evidence that the building works had taken place outside of the permitted hours and no further action was needed.

16. Order of wreath and arrangements for Remembrance Sunday

The available wreaths on 'The Royal British Legion' website were considered by the Cllrs and it was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka for the PC to order wreath type C, with a donation of £28.49. This was seconded by Cllr Stiles with all Cllrs in agreement. It is noted that this will be an S138B payment of £28.49.

The details for the Remembrance Sunday service will be published in the next edition of the Withersfield News.

17. To consider introducing .gov email addresses

This was discussed and it was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka for the Clerk and all Cllrs to be issued with .gov email addresses. This was seconded by Cllr McInnes-Rich. Clerk to action.

18. Finance

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

Noted and approved – proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Eve.

- c) Parish Council insurance renewal

The renewal was agreed.

19. Correspondence

- a) Email – Church Tower Event

Approval for cars being permitted to park on the green for this event was confirmed.

- b) Email – No parking on the green

The Cllrs discussed the email received and it was agreed that as this is a dispute between neighbours, the PC's involvement would not be appropriate.

- c) Email – Approval for parking on village green 28/08/25

Approval for cars being permitted to park on the green for this funeral and wake was confirmed.

20. Planning

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

These were considered and noted.

21. Agenda items for the PC meeting being held on 11th November 2025

- Thurlow Estate and Acorn
- Neighbourhood Plan
- Playground
- District Cllr – local government reorganisation

The meeting closed at 21:43.