

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 17th March 2026 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Julia Korona, Jaclyn Lake, Elaine McInnes-Rich, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka; the vice-chair of the Village Hall Management Committee and three parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. District Councillor's report

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

Cllr Wijenayaka explained the new recycling and food waste bins. From June, households will have:

- Food waste collected, weekly
- Paper and card (grey recycling bin with green lid) collected once every four weeks
- Mixed recycling (blue bin) collected once every four weeks
- Non-recyclable waste (black bin) collected once every two weeks
- Garden waste (paid for service) collected once every two weeks
 - Your garden waste collection day will not change.

Please read the guidance which will be sent out to all households as to what goes in what bin and when collections will be.

Cllr Wijenayaka mentioned that 'Forest City' are holding a meeting in Little Thurlow village hall on 26th March from 7pm. They recently held an event in Haverhill which was ticketed. Cllr Wijenayaka's personal opinion is that he is opposed to the idea.

The Council has passed its budget for the next two years which includes a fund for improvements to Haverhill's town centre.

Cllr Wijenayaka is currently working on 'unmarked bus stops' as part of his portfolio for Growth.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett's County Councillor report for February 2026 had been circulated and can be viewed on the PC website.

It was noted that the upcoming changes to the boundaries will result in Cllr Bennett no longer being the County Councillor for Withersfield. The Parish Council extend their gratitude to Cllr Bennett for all her support as County Councillor for the parish over the years.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

Request to speak: Mr Pinder

The Chair invited Mr Pinder to speak.

Mr Pinder had sent a letter to the PC ahead of the meeting which was shared with the Cllrs. Mr Pinder reiterated the points he had made in the letter. He asked for an open apology from Cllr Wijenayaka and the Chair, for being interrupted several times during his allotted time to express his views during the public forum in the most recent PC meetings. He said the Cllrs jumped in aggressively and should not shut down members of the public when they are trying to voice their opinions.

The Chair read out the response which was sent to Mr Pinder in reply to his letter:
I acknowledge your letter raising your complaint about how you feel about your recent attendances at Parish Council meetings.

The Parish Council welcomes the contribution of parishioners during the public forum section of its meetings.

Members of the public are able to put forward their points of view and raise concerns. Inevitably, points raised will lead to reaction and response from Parish Councillors, and the Chair has a responsibility to ensure that good order is maintained - by all parties - and that the meeting is able to progress and ensure that all business is conducted properly.

I am sorry if you feel that you have not been given space to fully express your views. This is not the intention of the Parish Council. However, views and opinions put forward by parishioners may reasonably lead to challenge and/or disagreement. This does not imply that a view has not been heard or considered. Councillors will inevitably balance a number of views and opinions in the conduct of its business and in its decision-making.

The Parish Council consists of a number of your neighbours who have put themselves forward on a voluntary basis with the sole intention of seeking the betterment of parish life. Parish Councils are at their most effective when there is shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and mutual respect on all sides.

Should you wish to raise a formal complaint against the conduct of an individual or all of your Parish Councillors, you are advised to contact the Monitoring Officer at West Suffolk Council. The email address is as follows: councillor.conduct@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Cllr Wijenayaka apologised to Mr Pinder. He said it was not his intention to shut him down and not felt heard.

Mr Pinder said he felt this should be dealt with within the PC rather than involving West Suffolk Council, as suggested. He said anyone from the village is entitled to speak at PC meetings without being cut short, within reason. He said the Cllrs represent the parish and not individual opinions. Mr Pinder said he appreciated Cllr Wijenayaka's apology.

The Chair thanked Mr Pinder and asked if there were any other issues he wanted to raise. As there was not, the Chair said that if he felt there was any misconduct, Mr Pinder should contact the Monitoring Officer at West Suffolk Council.

Request to speak: Mr Huckstep

The Chair invited Mr Huckstep to speak.

Mr Huckstep began by asking whether he would be allowed the time to speak about the various items as well as the meeting he had recently had with Highways and Cllr Eve. He said that he felt he should not be time limited as considered he had been previously.

Mr Huckstep thanked the PC for contacting the Thurlow Estate regarding the fly-tipping he reported at the last PC meeting. Farms Director, Paul Carrott, had been in communication with the Clerk and had confirmed the site had been cleared and they are looking to install CCTV and move the barrier.

Mr Huckstep mentioned the narrow footpath he raised at the previous PC meeting. Cllr Lake reported this to the Thurlow Estate and the bolt had been cut down. Mr Huckstep said the footpath is still not the standard width it should be but felt there was no need to pursue the issue further as the Estate has obtained consent from West Suffolk to move their double entrance access and presumably this will be happening at some point in the future.

Mr Huckstep asked about the village greens lease, which the PC have with the Thurlow Estate, which has lapsed and asked whether there would be a re-draft.

The Chair confirmed that the PC has sought to update the licence and had put forward amendments to the Thurlow Estate to include items such as the playground, the Grasscrete blocks parking, and others. The PC are awaiting the Thurlow Estate's decision.

Mr Huckstep asked about the grass-cutting in front of the church and why this hadn't been cut recently.

The Chair explained that the front of the church, being the churchyard, is the responsibility of the church and they have their own contractor attend to the upkeep of this. The PC are responsible for the upkeep of the graveyard, which is the area behind the church. The Chair and Cllr Lake had met with the new contractor for the village greens' maintenance last week to confirm the areas he is to attend to. He is to start works soon and will be presenting something in the upcoming Withersfield News.

Vice-Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee, Thomas Mytton-Mills, wanted to clarify that the committee's risk assessment for children using the car parking and village hall. He explained that the Grasscrete blocks were placed on the same side as the hall so that children do not need to cross the highway. Thomas said that the playground being on the opposite side of the road to the parking creates an element of risk to children crossing the road and this would be the liability of the PC. If the PC put the onus on the VHMC, they would no longer be willing to give their support towards the playground implementation.

The Chair clarified to Thomas that the reason the PC had contacted the VHMC regarding the children crossing the road was because the issue had been raised with the PC as a problem which was occurring now, by users of the hall – before there is a playground. The Cllrs were concerned and felt it was their duty to bring it to the attention of the VHMC about the potential danger which had been reported. The PC were exercising due diligence. The PC acknowledged that the VHMC have given the issue consideration – conducting a risk assessment. The Chair reassured Thomas that the PC had not said that the onus would be of the VHMC for children crossing the road to use a playground. The PC are looking into measures to help mitigate these risks.

A parishioner listed her concerns regarding Withersfield Athletic's plans for the use of the recreation ground. These included:

- Times – times of use should be set i.e. Not before 10am
- Parking – little hard standing; needs to be addressed. Avoid neighbours being blocked in.
- Wall by the Pheasantry – not solid, don't want cars parking there
- 'no access' signage
- Litter – she currently litter picks the area; who will be responsible?
- Top end of rec is like a bog/sponge
- Far end hedge doesn't get cut
- Obsolete Portaloos need removing
- Trees which need looking at/removing

She stated that these things need to be included in the agreement the PC make with Withersfield Athletic. The Chair asked if the parishioner would be willing to look over the agreement when it is drafted, for her input before finalising it, to which she agreed.

The Chair agreed the points raised would need to be included in the agreement. He explained that Withersfield Athletic were planning on parking in Haverhill and lift sharing to minimise the number of cars at the recreation ground and they were organising new Portaloos.

It was agreed that a tree surgeon should be contracted to look into the trees.

It was clarified that there is no paper agreement for the recreation ground and PC, and it is not part of the village greens lease. It is believed that the Thurlow Estate gave the recreation ground to the Parish Council some 50 years ago.

The Chair invited Mr Huckstep to speak about the meeting he had attended with Cllr Eve and Matthew Fox of Suffolk Highways.

Mr Huckstep sought to return to the issue raised by Mr Pinder and the Chair asked him to focus on the issues discussed at the meeting. Mr Huckstep took exception to being interrupted, refusing to be guided by the Chair.

Mr Huckstep said that Matthew Fox confirmed there were no funds available for works on the road leading to the village hall, other than for potholes. He said, for the County Council to action any works, the verges need to be a foot deep. Matthew said the PC are able to carry out and fund their own repairs along this stretch of road if they so wish.

Mr Huckstep suggested a passing place is necessary along the road, opposite the Grasscrete blocks parking. This would need to be funded by the PC. Bollards were suggested as an option – he said that Wickhambrook have socketed bollards. Mr Huckstep feels that signage would be ignored.

It was suggested by Mr Huckstep, to ask Mr Tinney, at Hall Farm for a contribution to hard core as they have lots of lorries using the road. He said that if there is no passing place, there will always be a problem with erosion. Hardening the channels is an option and implementing plastic bollards. He also said that water needs to be stopped from running down the road.

Mr Huckstep said he has sources of hard core. The Chair invited Mr Huckstep to draw up a quick specification - with no expectations or obligations - to give the PC an idea of the cost for repairing the eroded verges. He agreed to this. It was noted that if bollards are implemented, the Thurlow Estate would need to give their permission first.

Cllr Korona expressed her shock with the recent Village Hall Management Committee minutes. She felt the line: *“Village Hall committee are happy to work with the Parish Council as long as there is transparency and not coercion. Things need to be represented & documented, free from manipulation & mis-interpretation.”* was offensive and unnecessary. She said she was surprised to read this as had thought the PC meeting which Thomas had attended, was positive.

Thomas Mytton-Mills explained that at the PC meeting which he attended in November, he was expecting to only give an update on the VHMC but at the meeting he was also asked about the committee and the PC working collaboratively together. Thomas said it was difficult for him to answer as he was there as a representative and cannot speak for the Chair of the VHMC.

The Chair apologised if he felt ‘put on the spot’ at the PC meeting to Thomas, and clarified this was not the intention of the PC and there is no wish to be coercive. He said, Thomas’ attendance at the PC meeting provided an opportunity to speak about how the PC and committee can work effectively together moving forward, which was what was discussed.

It is also stated in the VHMC minutes *“Clarity is needed about £3000 – this was bequested by Enid and not from the Parish Council”*. The Chair said this was a mis-recollection and made clear that the bequest did not have anything specifically attached to it and the PC had decided to use the money in three ways, being: 1. Traffic calming, 2. VH disabled access, 3. Playground development. The £3,000 the PC contributed to the implementation of the Grasscrete blocks parking at the VH, came out of the PC reserves.

Thomas said he would rectify this to the VHMC and apologised for any offense caused in the committees’ minutes.

The Chair thanked the parishioners and closed the public section of the meeting. The Vice-Chair of the VHMC and two parishioners left.

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 20th January 2026

The minutes were approved – proposed by Cllr Korona and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Update on Parishioner concerns for Arboretum maintenance – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka has been in contact with the estate manager and detailed the list of issues to him. He is pursuing a meeting with him. Cllr Wijenayaka agreed to keep the parishioner informed.

b) Fly-tipping – Clerk

The Clerk reported the fly-tipping to the Thurlow Estate. Farms Director, Paul Carrott, arranged the clearing of the site and for CCTV to be installed.
No further action required.

c) Footpath – Cllr Lake

Cllr Lake reported the footpath issue raised at the previous PC meeting, to the Thurlow Estate who has cut the bolt down. The access is still narrow but it was agreed that as the Estate have permission to move the entrance gate, that this will then resolve the issue of the narrow access footpath.
No further action required.

d) Road to VH – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve had an on-site meeting with Matthew Fox (Local Engineer, Suffolk Highways) and David Huckstep regarding the condition of the road leading to the village hall. He sent the following summary of the meeting:

I outlined the following concerns to Matthew Fox:

- The number of potholes along the road
- Erosion of the verges caused by cars and commercial vehicles accessing the industrial estate
- The danger to children using the Village Hall and crossing the road to the planned playground area due to passing traffic

Matthew confirmed that there is currently no Council funding available to resurface the road or address the verge erosion, aside from repairing potholes that meet Suffolk Highways' intervention criteria. He advised that any reported potholes will be assessed accordingly.

The following potential measures were discussed for consideration by the Parish Council:

1. Construction of a passing place to allow vehicles to pass without mounting the verges (likely to be the most expensive option).
2. Installation of a line of posts to prevent vehicles from driving onto the Village Green (permission from the Thurlow Estate would be required).
3. Erection of “Children Playing” warning signs to alert drivers. This would be a relatively low-cost option, with the sign and post estimated at approximately £140. The Parish Council could arrange installation through its own contractor without further reference to Suffolk Highways.

David Huckstep also suggested that installing an additional, properly positioned drain, could help prevent rainwater flowing down the road and reduce further deterioration.

In the short term, the Parish Council may wish to consider installing “Children Playing” signs as a cost-effective option. In the longer term, members could review the cost implications of the other options discussed.

The PC discussed and it was reiterated that the safety concern raised by tenants of the paddocks at the farm, is an issue occurring now. Cllr McInnes-Rich said that new electric gates had been installed at the farm which will have a natural impact on the vehicles speed on this road.

The PC agreed that having a ‘slow/children playing’ warning sign is the most reasonable action to take in the first instance. Cllrs considered having a ‘livestock’ sign also.

The suggestion that the road should have a lower speed limit restriction implemented in the future was noted. It was agreed to proceed with the signage which will be paid with out of the traffic calming earmarked reserves.

e) Village greens licence with the Thurlow Estate

The PC had redrafted the previous village greens licence held with the Thurlow Estate, which is currently being reviewed by the Estate. The PC await their decision.

8. Parish Councillor vacancies

Vice-Chair, Frank Eve, sent his resignation ahead of the meeting. The PC acknowledged Frank’s 11 years on the Parish Council and agreed he had been a huge asset and will be greatly missed. The Cllrs considered organising a thank you gift (funded personally and not with PC monies) and placing a piece in Withersfield News to show their gratitude for all of Frank’s work and dedication over the years.

There are now two Councillor vacancies.

9. To consider the election of a Vice-Chair

This was discussed and it was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cll Stiles, for Cllr Lake to take on the role of Vice-Chair. All Cllrs were in agreement. It was noted that this, along

with election of Chair, will be the first item on the next PC meeting, being the annual meeting in May.

10. Allocation of vacant Councillor responsibilities

Patricia Mallalieu had agreed to continue with the defibrillator checks for the time being.

The vacant responsibilities were discussed and it was agreed for these to be held off and re-considered again at the next PC meeting where all the roles and responsibilities of the Cllrs are allocated annually during the annual meeting in May.

It was agreed for Cllr Stiles to become the third signatory for the PC bank account.

11. Sports and Recreation Committee and proposal to set up a charity

The Chair explained his proposal to set up a charity which would work on behalf of the PC to both manage and develop sports and play facilities for the parish. It would be similar to the Village Hall Management Committee. The charity would be able to make agreements with groups to use the recreation ground (e.g. Withersfield Athletic). The charity would be formed of trustees which would include two or three members of Parish Council as well as other interested people. The charity would hold the bank account and would be able to apply for funds from sources which the PC cannot apply for, as it is not a charity. This will also help with fundraising for the playground.

The ground and pavilion have had no investment for many years and the forming of a charity could reignite the use of these assets.

It was explained that there needs to be an income of £5,000 to be a charity – this would include the fundraising quiz nights and grounds fees from Withersfield Athletic.

The PC discussed and it was proposed by Cllr Stiles and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka to set up a charity for Withersfield sports and recreation. All Cllrs were in agreement.

12. Withersfield Athletic - update on arrangements

The Chair arranged a meeting between Jordan (of Withersfield Athletic) and Denis (Former Chair of Sports and Recreation Committee) where they discussed the grounds, limitations, equipment, and so on.

An agreement is to be drawn up for Withersfield Athletic to adhere to. Items to include within the agreement were considered and included;

- > The number of times in a week they can use the grounds - once a week for Sunday league
- > Car parking – parking in Haverhill and car pooling in order to reduce the number of cars parking at the grounds
- > Location of pitch – shouldn't prevent cricket
- > Upkeep of pavilion
- > Litter

The Chair has been in touch with the Thurlow Estate to inform them of Withersfield Athletic and the plans for the use of the recreation ground.

It was agreed for the PC to contract a tree surgeon to look into the reported trees the parishioner had mentioned during the public forum.

The parishioner agreed to give her view and suggestions for the agreement.

The Chair said he would mention to Jordan Addison about the drainage concerns raised during the public forum.

13. Update on Playground Project – Cllr McInnes-Rich

Cllr McInnes-Rich said they had held their first quiz night at the White Horse which raised £308 towards the playground. They are organising a monthly quiz for fundraising.

A parishioner had recently donated £1,000 on the JustGiving page.

https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/w-playground?utm_medium=CF&utm_source=CL

The current fund totals just under £12,000. Any suggestions for fundraising are welcome.

14. Traffic and safety issues adjacent to village hall - proposal for "Children Playing" signage

This was considered at item 7d and agreed to install a 'beware/children playing' sign.

15. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles

West Suffolk have completed their legislative checks for the Neighbourhood Plan and published the referendum version of the Plan and the legislative check on the Withersfield Neighbourhood plan webpage. They are preparing an information statement which explains how the referendum will be carried out in May.

Appreciation was expressed to Cllr Stiles and Cllr Korona for their work on the Plan which began some years ago.

16. Update from the Traffic Working Group

We still do not have a date for the refresh of the SLOW markings on Church Street from Highways.

The PC responsibility for Highways will be allocated at the next PC meeting.

17. Update on VAS - options for replacement or repair

Former Cllr Eve sent the costs for; repairing the VAS with data, repairing the VAS without data, and for a new VAS unit which would include enhanced features. He said he had spoken to Chris Oakes with regard to the operation of the VAS and collection of data, who confirmed that he is willing to continue to operate one VAS but can't commit to managing two VAS sites.

It was noted that the PC still had the £500 grant received from West Suffolk locality budget in the reserves towards speedwatch/VAS.

The Cllrs discussed and it was agreed that it would be sensible to have a discussion with Chris Oakes regarding the options for the VAS at the next meeting, or if inconvenient for Chris, the following.

18. Update on village gates project

The village gates have been delivered to our contractor N J Nunn Surfacing Limited by Glasdon. The installation is scheduled for 26th -27th March.

19. Village Hall Management Committee update

The PC noted the VHMC's latest meeting minutes.

20. To consider adopting the Model Publication Scheme

The PC agreed to adopt the Model Publication Scheme – proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Stiles.

21. Finance

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

These were all noted and approved – proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

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

The PC approved the letter of engagement from SALC and it was agreed to appoint SALC for the PC's internal audit. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka. The Clerk will make the arrangements with SALC.

- d) To note that the Clerk has completed a re-declaration of compliance under the Pensions Act 2008, and that the PC complete their re-enrolment duties every 3 years.

Noted.

22. Correspondence

- a) Email – West Suffolk Public Space Protection Order Review 2026

Noted.

- b) Letter – To PC from Mr Pinder

This was addressed during the public forum.

23. Planning

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

All considered and noted.

24. Agenda items for the Annual Parish and PC meeting being held on 12th May 2026

None suggested.

The meeting closed at 21:21.