

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 20th January 2026 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Frank Eve (Vice-Chair),
Julia Korona, Jaclyn Lake, Elaine McInnes-Rich, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka;
Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka; and four parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Bennett. Patricia Mallalieu did not attend as had resigned from the Parish Council the same day as the meeting.

2. District Councillor's report

The PC noted Cllr Wijenayaka's report. This can be viewed on the PC website.

3. County Councillor's report

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

4. Public Forum for parishioners

Parishioner request to speak: Mr Huckstep

Mr Huckstep informed the PC that there was continued fly-tipping occurring at the access to the old sewage treatment works off Queen Street - he provided photos. He asked whether a barrier with padlocks could be arranged. He explained that the recycling centre does not accept paint pots and steel from cars which could be a reason for some of the fly-tipping. He said he had reported this to Cllr Bennett. He asked the PC to speak to the Thurlow Estate about installing a locked barrier.

Mr Huckstep then spoke about the footpath on Horseheath Road which has two timber barriers with FO signs leaving just a 10-inch access through to the footpath – photos were provided showing this. He asked the PC to contact the Thurlow Estate asking how pedestrians should access the footpath.

Mr Huckstep went on the talk about the combined footway and Highway outside of the village hall. He said there were potholes 100mm deep and the drains were blocked – photos were shared. He said it was a trip hazard and the road leading to the village hall looked a tip. Mr Huckstep said he had some Grasscrete blocks available which he offered to the PC for free.

Mr Huckstep then questioned the procedure regarding the playground project and whether it had been taken forward by the PC.

The Chair explained that at the previous PC meeting in November, the PC had an extensive discussion about the playground and agreed unanimously to proceed with the project.

Approval had been received from the Planning Department and external funding is being sought. All information regarding the project is available to view on the PC website.

Mr Huckstep was thanked for the information he had shared. The Clerk would contact the Thurlow Estate again regarding the fly-tipping issue, Cllr Lake agreed to contact the Thurlow Estate about the footpath on Horseheath Road and Cllr Eve agreed to speak to Highways about the road to the village hall. It was also agreed that the Clerk would contact the Thurlow Estate again about methods to prevent the fly-tipping although it was considered that a padlocked barrier might not be appropriate given that the track provides access to a village resident.

Parishioner request to speak: Mr Pinder

Mr Pinder asked whether the playground was for the villagers or for those who live elsewhere. He said that most children using the village hall are not from Withersfield. Mr Pinder said that there is a safety issue with the road access to the village hall. He said he sees lots of children coming out of cars parking on the grass, walking through the slippery banks and puddles, then waiting outside for the next class in the village hall. He stated there is not enough room for parking.

The Chair confirmed that the playground will be for children who live and visit the village including children using the village hall. It is anticipated that children using the playground will in the main be supervised by parents/carers.

Cllr McInnes-Rich said that the safety of children using the village hall was a serious issue which needs to be looked into now by the village hall committee. She clarified that this concern is happening now and not due to the future implementation of a playground.

Cllr Wijenayaka also expressed a concern that if members of the village hall management committee consider children to be at risk, that they have a duty to look into the matter and to take steps to resolve the problem now.

The Chair pointed out that consideration of traffic measures would be part of implementation of the playground project, however, there may be measures that could be considered now. He asked Cllr Eve to raise the safety concerns for the road to the village hall with Matthew Fox of Suffolk Highways and ask about possible options to make the road safer.

Mr Pinder expressed a view that the village hall is an asset and needs a lot of money spent on it and said that the Parish Council should spend its money on this rather than a playground.

The Chair explained that at the last PC meeting in November the vice-chair of the Village Hall Management Committee had attended and a conversation was had about working collaboratively together, which was agreed. It was also noted that the Village Hall Management Committee as a charity is able to raise funds from sources unavailable to the Parish Council. It was also noted that the VHMC has considerable reserves and is not in difficulty with funding necessary repairs, maintenance, and improvements. The Parish Council remains willing to discuss how it can assist where it can.

Mr Pinder was thanked for his contributions.

Mr Huckstep asked about the expired greens licence from the Thurlow Estate. The Clerk confirmed she had been chasing the Estate about an updated licence for some time now and keeps being told that the issue is in hand and a new licence will soon be produced. Mr Huckstep said it was an opportunity to re-draft the licence.

The Chair thanked the parishioners, closed the public section of the meeting, and two parishioners left. It was agreed that the remaining two parishioners would speak during item 9.

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 11th November 2025

Cllr Eve pointed out that the wrong name had been recorded on item 11 during the traffic working group update. The Clerk amended the minutes then they were approved. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Stiles.

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) An update on 'Parishioner concerns, Arboretum maintenance' – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenyaka has been in contact with RMG and is in the process of arranging an on-site meeting to relay all issues around the Arborteum Estate.

8. Update on Acorn Biodigestor Application

Acorn did not submit an appeal by the deadline but have indicated that they intend to submit a further application. The Parish Council acknowledged the work of Muck-Off Acorn in spearheading the successful campaign to defeat the application. The role of the Parish Council in setting up the campaign group and the tireless work Parish Councillors over the past years was also noted. The PC remain watchful of this but recognise the victory in no appeal being made.

9. Use of Sports Ground

The Chair invited the two parishioners to speak and give their presentation.

Jordan introduced himself and his grandfather, Freddie. He is the manager of Withersfield Athletic – the village football club he is re-starting on behalf of his grandparents who have recently had big health scares. His grandparents had lived in the village their whole lives and his grandad was the chairman of the old Withersfield football team until it folded in the early 2000s. He had planted the trees around the sports ground.

Jordan spoke about how he felt it would be valuable to the community for the football team to re-start. He believes it will bring the local village community closer together by gathering people up to the local playing field to watch and support the team on a Sunday morning. He also spoke about how sport has a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing.

It was explained by Jordan that the club would take on the upkeep of the grounds themselves and that they are planning on having men's and women's Portaloos. They have already held a fundraising event and will look to hold another in the future, possibly for money towards renovating the pavilion. The Football Association provide funding for goal posts and he will be applying to affiliate the team in May, when the applications open. They have opened a bank account and have a company designing and supplying a kit and secured a sponsor. In the future they hope to offer younger children's teams, disability teams, and more men's teams.

Jordan asked the PC if they could have permission to use the sports ground and what the charge would be.

The Cllrs were impressed with the proposal and work already carried out by Jordan. The Chair suggested Jordan write a piece to be published in the next Withersfield News so as to inform Withersfield residents and neighbours of the sports ground about the plans and giving them a chance to share their views.

Cllr Wijenayaka said he would look into possible funding opportunities for Jordan and Cllr McInnes-Rich also said she had some funding ideas she has come across while researching for the playground project which she will share with Jordan.

Cllr Wijenayaka will also put Jordan in touch with appropriate Council officers at West Suffolk who may be able to assist in the football club becoming formally constituted as a community group. This will make it more straightforward for the Parish Council to work with Withersfield Athletic.

In principle the PC were supportive of the proposal from Jordan. The Chair agreed to contact the chair of the Sports and Recreation Committee about Withersfield Athletic and the possibility of them taking over the custodianship of the grounds on behalf of the PC.

The Cllrs thanked Jordan and Freddie and they left the meeting.

10. Update on Playground Project – Cllr McInnes-Rich

Cllr McInnes-Rich told the PC that a Certificate of Proposed Lawful Use or Development from the planning department had been granted. This means we have the green light from planning to develop the village playground.

A pledge of £1,000 from the Church has been received bringing the total raised so far to £11,000. Cllr McInnes-Rich hopes the Lottery will match fund therefore they aim to raise between £20-25,000.

The White Horse pub has been raising money for the playground and we are in the process of organising monthly fundraising quiz nights. Details will be published in the next edition of the Withersfield News.

A Go Fund Me page has been created; please consider donating and share the link with your networks:

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

An event in the village hall will be held in the future to finalise the equipment.

The road safety issue which was raised during the public forum was discussed. It was reiterated that this is a current problem and not connected to a future playground. It was agreed that the PC should work with the village hall committee in implementing necessary improvements to make the road safer. Signage was discussed and it was agreed that Cllr Eve would ask Matthew Fox from Highways for advice. The concerns will be raised with the village hall committee along with advising a review of their letting terms.

11. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles

Cllr Stiles reported that the inspector had asked for some clarifications which had been accepted. There was, however, one suggestion which the PC need to decide on. The inspector has recommended the deletion of ‘Policy Withersfield 4 Landscape Buffer’ and the associated supporting text from the Neighbourhood Plan. It was explained that the reasons being; and the policy sets out a strategic approach towards maintaining the distinction between Haverhill and Withersfield and national legislation states that a Neighbourhood Plan should not address strategic issues, and an objection to the policy had been received from developers Pigeon. The inspector said that this should not be taken as anything else other than an assessment of the policy against the basic conditions and that he is satisfied that the recently adopted Local Plan includes a range of strategic policies to secure the outcomes that the PC seeks to achieve regarding the ongoing separation of Withersfield from Haverhill.

The PC discussed whether to agree to the deletion of policy 4 and are concerned about the assurance in the Local Plan in regards to the buffer between Haverhill and Withersfield not being developed on in the future.

It was agreed that Cllr Stiles should have a conversation with the officer at West Suffolk to stress the importance of the spatial buffer and ask whether the policy could be amended/re-worded so it could to remain in the Neighbourhood Plan. If it was not possible, the Cllrs agreed to its deletion so as not to risk the entire Plan. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Eve. Once this has been completed the Plan will go to referendum.

12. Village Gates project and revised costs – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve had a meeting with Matthew Fox of Suffolk Highways and Mike Nunn. An assessment of all the sites for each gate had been carried out and it was confirmed that no traffic management will be required when the gates are installed and there are two signs that do not need to be replaced, therefore there will now be six new gates to install instead of eight. The total estimated cost for the six gates is £10,143.12.

Thomas Mytton-Mills had carried out a site visit in order to provide a quote for the gates but as specialist equipment would be required, he recommended the PC use Mike Nunn.

It was proposed by Cllr Eve to proceed with the implementation of the six village gates at three locations entering the village. This was seconded by Cllr Stiles. All Cllrs agreed.

13. Update from the Traffic Working Group – Cllr Eve

Cllr Eve began by reporting that it had been discovered that the SID (speed indicator device) was no longer working. It had been sent back to the manufacturers who confirmed that there are problems with the radar. The cost to fix this total £1,169.50. There is a cheaper option for fixing if data was not needed, but it was agreed that data does need to be collected.

The PC discussed whether to make this expenditure and it was agreed for Cllr Eve to go back to the manufacturers and ask for further details including the estimated lifespan of the SID once it has been fixed, and the cost of a new SID and the lifespan of this. Cllr Eve agreed to bring back his findings to the next PC meeting with a proposal of whether to replace or repair the SID.

Cllr Eve then reported on a highway flooding issue in the village which had been brought to his attention. It is believed that the flooding is being caused by a blocked culvert under the recently installed driveway access to Virginia House. This has been reported to SCC Highways. Cllr Eve has contacted Cllr Bennett also about the matter who is looking into the issue.

14. Update from the Village Hall Management Committee

No update received as the PC Village Hall representative Patricia Mallalieu resigned.

The Parish Council discussed Mr Huckstep's offer of the Grasscrete blocks as mentioned during the public forum. It was agreed that the PC do not have the resources or space to transport or store the blocks, and it was suggested that Mr Huckstep offer the blocks to the Village Hall Management Committee instead. The Clerk was asked to inform My Huckstep of this decision.

15. Kingsway Solar Farm – Cllr Stiles

Kingsway Solar Farm Development had made some localised changes to the scheme design and a targeted consultation had been sent out. The deadline for responses is 4th February 2026.

Whilst some discussion took place which considered that solar farms were far preferable to biodigesters, there were concerns about the scale and environmental impact of this proposal. Cllr Stiles expressed his view that the PC should object to the scale of the proposed development. The PC agreed that they are not opposed to a solar farm, but it was agreed that the scale should be objected to. It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka for Cllr Stiles to draft an objection to the proposal's scale to be submitted by the deadline; this was seconded by Cllr Eve.

16. Consider the quotations received for the environmental works/village greens maintenance contract

The Parish Council received quotes from two companies. After some discussion, Cllr Korona proposed to accept the contract from Blackthorn Landscapes due to it being the less expensive option, which was seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka. All Cllrs were in favour.

17. To consider a date for the 2026 Annual Spring Clean

The Cllrs agreed to an annual spring clean in the village on Saturday 28th March, meeting at 10am on the village green. The Clerk will arrange the equipment and rubbish collection.

18. 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 3, 2025/26
- d) To note the precept form has been submitted

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

19. Correspondence

- a) Email – Citizens Advice Donation Request

Noted.

- b) Email – Community Governance Review

Considered and agreed no action required.

- c) Email - Land at Hales Barn Road Pigeon

The PC discussed the invitation to a meeting with the planning manager at Pigeon and it was agreed to suggest to Pigeon that it would be more appropriate that Pigeon should be the ones to arrange a public meeting to outline their ideas to local residents, including Parish Councillors. The PC would be willing to assist in facilitating such a meeting. The Clerk to respond the Pigeon accordingly.

- d) Email – Parishioner Arboretum Concerns

The issue of the need for a crossing at the bus stop was agreed to be a particular concern.

Cllr Wijenayaka has raised the issues reported with County Councillor Bennett and has been in contact with the parishioner.

Cllr Eve agreed to add the issue to the agenda for future Traffic Working Group meetings.

- e) Email – War Memorial

Noted – no action required as a full renovation had taken place in recent years.

20. Planning

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

All considered and noted.

21. Agenda items for the PC meeting being held on 17th March 2026

- Update on Neighbourhood Plan
- Parish Councillor vacancy
- Village Hall Councillor responsibility vacancy
- Progress update on the Withersfield Athletic proposal

The meeting closed at 21:31.