

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at  
7:30pm on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Julia Korona, Jaclyn Lake,  
Patricia Mallalieu, Philip Stiles, Indy Wijenayaka;  
Clerk: Laura Crump; District Councillor: Indy Wijenayaka;  
and 9 parishioners.

**1. Apologies for absence**

Received from Cllr Eve – approved by the PC.

**2. District Councillor's report**

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

**3. County Councillor's report**

Cllr Bennett's County Councillor report for July 2025 was noted and can be viewed on the PC website.

**4. Public Forum for parishioners**

The public forum began with a couple of the parishioners thanking the PC for their work towards getting the application for Acorn's proposed biodigester plant refused. One parishioner made a negative comment toward the Parish Council suggesting that the Parish Council had done very little and it had been others who had done all the work. The Chair strongly refuted this assertion, pointing out that it had been the Parish Council that had initiated the setting up of the campaign group – Muck-off – precisely because of the need to bring together a broad cross section of the community, and to encompass a wider area than Withersfield. Parish councillors had remained both involved in Muck-Off, some were leading members of the Muck-off steering group, as well as part of the Parish Council being active in its own right. Cllr Wijenayaka verbalised some of what the PC had done to support Muck-off and to develop its own objections. All other parishioners offered their gratitude and support for the role that the Parish Council had played throughout the campaign.

The forum was moved past this topic and a parishioner raised two parking issues within the village being; the 'no parking on the green' signs and the planters near the church.

The parishioner views the signs as hideous and stated there had not been a problem with parking on Burton Green. She said there are now three signs on this green and they do not solve any problem but rile people up and cause a distraction.

The parishioner suggested the PC had reacted to a small number of complaints. She asked the PC to take a step back, remove the signs, and ask the community how to solve the parking problem.

It was shared that there have been some disappointing comments made on the village Facebook page regarding parking. The parishioner reiterated that she would like the PC to remove the signs pending resolution as they are a distraction and overkill.

Another parishioner explained that the two planters in the parking area near the church have taken up two car parking spaces resulting in vehicles parking in the laybys and other unsuitable locations near the church. The parishioner said that he has nearly had three car crashes pulling out of his driveway because of vehicles now parking in this area. He declared that the planters are a solution at one place but have created a problem elsewhere and has put pressure on other houses.

The parishioner stated that the PC have created something dangerous, a health and safety issue, as a consequence of the planters.

A parishioner said she felt there had been a misrepresentation as there was no problem with the parking until the two planters had been put in. She also claimed that the planters have taken up two parking spaces.

A parishioner said he didn't move to the village and spend lots of money renovating his new home to have cars parked in front of his property on the green which cause the mud to churn up in the winter. The parishioner said he does not have a problem with the same area being used for occasional overflow church usage.

The Chair summarised the parking issues raised and told the parishioners that the Parish Council lease the greens from the Thurlow Estate. The license states that car parking on the greens is not permitted. The PC has been receiving lots of correspondence from parishioners with concerns over parking on the greens over the years. After lots of thought over what could be done, it was decided to have signs installed. This has been discussed and minuted in PC meeting minutes over the last year or so and also published in the village newsletter. These signs were not a quick or unilateral action but openly discussed and agreed upon. The PC acted in accordance of their responsibilities with the lease they hold with the Thurlow Estate and tried to respond when people have raised concerns about the impact of parking on them.

In regards to the planters on Church Street – the Highways Authority had consulted the Parish Council about their application to have these installed. The PC considered this and decided not to raise objections.

A parishioner asked how the 'no parking' signs were funded to which the Chair confirmed that the Thurlow Estate had agreed to pay for the signs.

A parishioner asked the PC to reconsider their previous decision over the 'no parking' signs.

The Chair closed the public section of the meeting and said that the issues raised would be considered further by the parish Council when considering parking later on the agenda.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for 5 minutes whilst parishioners who wished to, left the meeting.

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

None.

**6. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish and Parish Council meetings held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

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

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

a) Parishioner Arboretum concerns – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka had requested a meeting with the property manager at RMG regarding the issues raised but still hadn't heard back. Since the last PC meeting, the parishioner has sent the list of issues to RMG, Taylor Wimpey, and Greenbelt. RMG had replied saying it had been referred to the property manager. Cllr Wijenayaka agreed to push for a meeting with the property manager and also see if he could get the Arboretum community involved with a meeting.

**8. Update on Acorn Biodigester Application**

The application was refused permission by the committee at the Development & Regulation Committee meeting on 19 June 2025. It has been indicated by Acorn that they will be appealing this decision. It is believed that they have six months to submit their appeal.

It was agreed and noted that Cllr Eve did a great job at speaking on behalf of the PC at the committee meeting. Thanks was also given to the Chair for hosting an informal meeting prior to the committee meeting in order for Cllr Eve to share and practice his speech.

Cllr Stiles agreed to seek advice from Andy Rutter at SCC and planning advisor Sarah Stevens, who advised the PC previously, on the potential grounds for appeal and in particular whether Acorn are able to make reference to their recently stated intention of injecting CO2 directly into the main on site. The Planning Officer should be asked if this would require a fresh application as it is a substantial change from the application as submitted.

It was noted that Cllr Eve had already been in contact with Andy Rutter – reported at item 12.

Cllr Wijenayaka confirmed that the 'Muck-Off' campaign will continue and plan to reconvene when necessary to submit comments to an appeal.

The Chair confirmed that a celebration event to mark the refusal has been organised to take place at The White Horse in Withersfield on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July. The finger food, welcome drink, and staff are being funded by the grant received from Cllr Wijenayaka's locality budget to fund a community event. Thanks were given to The White Horse who have kindly waived the charge of hire of the venue and have negotiated a favourable rate for food and welcome drinks.

The Parish Council has invited all involved in the Muck-Off campaign, Haverhill Town Councillors, County Councillor and MP – who has given his apologies.

## **9. Village greens 'no parking' signs**

The Cllrs discussed the feedback received during the public forum regarding the 'no parking on the green' signs which have been installed on the two village greens. The PC were disconcerted with the dissatisfaction from some parishioners as the process of implementing the signs had taken over a year. Designs for the signage had taken many hours to choose and the PC had picked what they thought was a professional appearance. The location of the signs were carefully chosen to be subtle, non-confrontational spots and a local contactor/parisioner was commissioned for the installation work. The intention to install the signs had been published in the Withersfield news, which is delivered to each household, and the subject mentioned in each of the PC meeting minutes since July 2024. As a response to complaints received about cars being parked on the greens previously, the Chair had written letters to residents near to the greens but cars were still being parked on the greens and so, the complaints continued. The PC lease the greens from the Thurlow Estate and in the licence it states that car parking on the greens is not permitted. Therefore, the PC believe that installing the signs was the appropriate action to take in order to reinforce their duty to the Thurlow Estate in not allowing cars to park on the greens. It was not the intention of the PC to cause any disharmony to parishioners. The Thurlow Estate agreed to pay for the signs. It was noted that many other villages around the area have similar 'no parking on the green' signs. All the correspondence received regarding the signs were considered and noted. The Cllrs confirmed they do not wish to get involved in disputes between neighbours.

It was suggested by Cllr Wijenayaka that a working party could be formed as a way for parishioners to come together to look at ways to deal with the parking problems and a way the PC can facilitate help on the issue. The Cllrs agreed this might be one way forward, although no Cllr present was able to commit to a new working party at this time. It was agreed for the suggestion of a parking working group to be deferred to the next PC meeting to see whether any Cllrs availability has opened up.

As a similar topic of parking, the PC went on to discuss the planters on Church Street which parishioners spoke about during the public forum. It was confirmed that the resident on Church Street applied for a licence from Suffolk County Council Highways, who approved the application and the PC did not object. The resident had contacted SCC who had recommended the planters. On reflection, the PC agreed that they may not have considered all of the implications fully when approached by Suffolk Highways and the resident. They were unaware that no other consultations had been conducted by Suffolk highways prior to approving the license.

The Clerk will contact Highways Street Furniture team to seek clarification as to what consultation they are required to conduct in such instances.

However, it was agreed that there was nothing that the Parish Council could do regarding this issue as the license had been granted.

## **10. Update on Playground Project**

Elaine McInnes-Rich updated the PC on the work carried out so far. As an interest was shown by a number people completing the Parish Survey for a playground in the village, a playground working group had been formed.

The Thurlow Estate have confirmed that they are happy in principle to consider allowing a children's playground on Town Green. The initial thoughts are for the playground to be

located on the Town Green adjacent to the village hall, being a quiet area and away from traffic. Approximately 3,500 children use the village hall annually, who could make use of the playground as well as the children living in the village.

The working group met with Active Play and Leisure, a local playground supplier who have installed playgrounds in the neighbouring villages to Withersfield. Due to the conservation area, it was agreed that a wooden themed playground would be most suitable for Withersfield, with wooden fencing around the area.

An initial quote from Kompan, a larger playground supplier, was around £25,000-£30,000. The working group are waiting for a quote to come through from Active Play and Leisure.

The next steps are to discuss as a project team when the quotes have been received. Plans would need to be drawn up and planning permission sought. A full open consultation with the parish would ensue further down the line.

A conversation has been requested with one of the Principal Planners at West Suffolk Council Planning for some general advice about developing a play area and also to find out if it would fall under the Parish Council's permitted development rights.

Cllr Wijenayaka was asked to prompt the officer to contact the working group. He also advised the working group about possible funding towards playgrounds and suggested reaching out to Thurlow parish for advice.

The Cllrs gave their thanks to Elaine and are supportive of the working group.

#### **11. Update on the Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Stiles**

Cllr Stiles said that the last thing that had been requested was to collate the appendices for the Consultation Statement. Cllr Korona said she would have another look through her documents and Chris Oakes said he would have a look also.

Once complete, the Plan will go to an assessor and following this will be a formal consultation and referendum.

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

In his absence, Cllr Eve sent the following update:

We still await Suffolk Highways approval of our application for the gates.

The PC had requested for permission from the Thurlow Estate to install one of the gates on their land (on Horseheath Road) who decided they could not grant permission at this time.

Cllr Eve had a telephone conversation with Andy Rutter about a possible appeal by Acorn and the late submission of information at the planning committee meeting. Andy advised that if Acorn appeal, he would expect it to come in at the latest possible time which will be in December. It was also agreed that some of the information submitted late, such as injecting direct into the gas grid, ghost lane, and the paper on traffic, should not be admissible in the appeal process as they were submitted too late to be considered by the committee and contained incorrect information. It was suggested to Cllr Eve that he write up a note now and send to him if and when there is an appeal. This will be presented by Cllr Eve at the next Parish Council meeting.

### **13. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Mallalieu**

The AGM is being held on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July, 6.45pm in the Village Hall where the Chairman, Secretary and another trustee will be stepping down from the committee. There are three remaining trustees, including Cllr Mallalieu who represents the PC. The PCC were unable to nominate anyone else to join. The committee have tried to recruit new trustees but the viability of the Charity is at risk. As the PC has ultimate responsibility for the village hall, this is something that needs to be discussed.

Income from the lettings has increased by over £5.5K this year and stands at just over £18,000.

The Village Hall committee have commented on the use of the grasscrete block parking area as follows: In principle there is not a problem as the hall does not have any responsibility for the green, their boundary goes as far as the hedge around the car park – however, the grasscrete blocks were installed to enable safe and dry parking for those attending functions at the hall. If it were to be regularly used by residents this may limit spaces available to hall users.

They have also given some early consideration on the issue of the playground proposal. They have highlighted the following issues

- 1) Liability
- 2) Health and safety
- 3) Insurance
- 4) Emergency contacts in case of accident
- 5) Maintenance and inspections

It has been suggested that it would be an added incentive for those booking the hall to be able to use, however, this would have implications on our booking contracts, and we would have to include a disclaimer for any accidents that occurred.

These comments will be shared with the working group.

### **14. 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 1, 2025/26

The accounts were considered and accepted – proposed by Cllr Korona and seconded by Cllr Stiles.

- d) To note that AGAR form 2 was completed instead of form 3 - meaning the PC cannot claim exemption, which was approved at the previous meeting. The exemption was not submitted and the signed AGAR forms were accepted with the additional information required

This was explained by the Clerk and noted.

- e) Consideration of Internal Audit Report from SALC
- f) Consideration of the 'Action Plan' in response to the Internal Audit Report from SALC

The internal audit report was discussed and accepted and the action plan was approved. The recommendation for the Clerk to hold a .gov email address will be considered at the next PC meeting.

- g) To note the Annual Internal Audit Report received for AGAR, which has been submitted

Noted.

- h) To note the effectiveness of the internal audit

Agreed and noted.

- i) To note that the Clerk completes the PC's re-enrolment duties every 3 years under the Pensions Act 2008. The last re-declaration of compliance was completed in 2023.

Noted.

- j) Clerk annual salary appraisal

The Clerk left the room so the PC could talk about the Clerk's salary. The PC agreed to the annual progression of the Clerk's salary. The Clerk's salary will be moved to SCP 17 on the Local Government Services salary scale, backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025. It was noted that this is the top of the LC1 pay scale range and any future salary progression will require a review of the Clerk's responsibilities. The Local Government pay claim 2025/26 is still being negotiated.

The PC expressed their gratitude to the Clerk and relayed that County Councillor Bennett had commented on the well organisation of the Parish Council, along with District Councillor Wijenayaka.

## 15. Correspondence

- a) Email - .gov Email addresses

Noted. To be considered at the next PC meeting.

- b) Email – SARS donation request

Cllr Korona proposed the PC send a donation of £50 to SARS (Suffolk Accident Rescue Service). This was seconded by Cllr Stiles.

- c) Email – 'No Parking on the Green' sign

Noted. This was discussed at item 9.

- d) Email - Kingsway solar farm update

Noted.

- e) Email – Car parking in the village

Noted. This was discussed at item 9.

## **16. Planning**

- a) **Borough notifications since last meeting**
- b) **No applications were received since the last meeting**

Noted.

## **17. Agenda items for the PC meeting being held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

- .gov email addresses
- Playground update
- Neighbourhood Plan update
- Village Hall Management Committee update following AGM
- Possible future parking issues working group
- Acorn appeal news and feedback from planning officers

*The meeting closed at 21:10.*