

**Minutes of Withersfield Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday,
14 May 2019 at 7.00 pm in the Village Hall**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman), Ian Kinloch (Vice Chair), Frank Eve; Lucy Guest; Peter Lord; County Cllr Mary Evans; District Cllr Peter Stevens; Clerk: Jill Johnson; New Clerk: Laura Crump, and around 10 parishioners.

**1 a Traffic calming in Withersfield
Question and Answer Session with County Cllr Mary Evans, and members of the
Parish Council Traffic Working Group (TWG)**

Cllr Eve opened the session explaining that the TWG had been established by the Parish Council to address concerns over increased volumes, and speed, of traffic using the village, and to put forward suggestions for solutions. The members of the TWG were himself as Chair, Cllr Kinloch, and two members of the Speed Watch team.

The TWG was approaching their task through conversations with other councils, consideration of relevant data, consultation within the parish, and putting forward potential measures, with indicative costings, which could be taken to mitigate the problems. David Chenery, of Suffolk County Council (SCC) Highways was assisting the TWG, together with County Cllr Evans.

As a start, a visit had been made by Cllr Eve to the Jelly Cat Warehouse at West Wickham, the location of which resulted in a lot of lorries using the village. Cllr Kinloch indicated that the management there did not control movement of delivery and pick-up lorries and therefore an email had been sent to the head office in London about routes that should be taken, and attempting to raise their awareness and understanding of the problems experienced. No response had been received to date. Cllr Eve explained that the aim of the TWG was to get lorries re-routed. The Speed Watch team had proposed a solution which would route lorries through Cambridgeshire without affecting Suffolk, and therefore Withersfield.

A member of Speed Watch informed the meeting that the team used speed guns to determine speeds of traffic at certain points and at certain times, but the most valuable data was obtained from the Vehicle Activation Sign (VAS) which could be placed at 8 different locations. This confirmed issues of volume mainly related to Queen Street, Church Street and Skippers Lane which had seen a 66% uplift in traffic movement since 2010, and of speed to Thurlow Road where the highest speed recorded had been 75 mph.

Problems were exacerbated by problems with the A1307, and the new housing developments in North East Haverhill were likely to increase traffic using Withersfield even further.

The TWG had confirmed that these ongoing problems would not be addressed unless its members took action. So far a number of potential solutions had been put forward. Those more straightforward included: 20 mph speed limit in two places in the village (data was available to support this change); buffer zones on 4 routes into the village to which SCC had already agreed in principle; insets (or more accurately build-outs) at entrances to the village; a weight restriction on the bridge in Church Street; and additional and changed signage. More complex solutions included: speed tables with street lighting (conversations were taking place with SCC which had confirmed that lighting should be present in places where the speed limit was over 20 mph); rising bollards at the bridge in Church Street; and a one-way system through the village.

It was explained that the Parish Council had already put aside a contribution towards the funding of the measures adopted, but before deciding what these should be consultation should be undertaken as widely as possible. It would also be necessary to consider the 'urbanisation' impact of any measures implemented.

Cllr Rich indicated that this session was the first step in such consultation and invited comments from parishioners present. A parishioner confirmed the importance of how measures would affect the look of the village as many people want Withersfield to retain its rural feel. Insofar as a weight limit for the bridge was concerned, a parishioner considered that this might be a solution. However, it was pointed out that it had already been determined that the bridge could withstand heavy vehicles but there were political and environmental strands that could be pursued. There were concerns about how rising bollards could operate, with it being explained that these could either be time or vehicle triggered.

Cllr Stevens suggested a further solution which was already in use on an approach into Ipswich, that of a flashing sign indicating no right turns during rush hours. Discussion returned to the problems caused by traffic going to and from the Jelly Cat warehouse. Cllr Evans confirmed that SCC could introduce an environmental weight restriction on the bridge but not on other routes. She suggested that measures should be introduced one by one accompanied by an assessment of the impact of each. A parishioner suggested building up the sides of roads because of the damage caused by heavy vehicles but Cllr Kinloch informed the meeting that David Chenery had indicated that roads had been growing wider because of work to edges.

In starting to sum up, Cllr Rich considered that parishioners had indicated some skepticism with rising bollards, but no views had been expressed on speed tables or build-outs. The Speed Watch co-ordinator said that speed tables in rural France worked, they do not need enforcement and look after themselves, and he was not convinced they would spoil the rural nature of the village. Cllr Evans pointed out that speed tables could be introduced without lighting if they were in a 20 mph zone; however, a 20 mph speed limit could only be introduced where average speeds were low. She also pointed out that some parishioners had asked for them to be installed and then requested removal because of noise problems; this had wasted valuable SCC resource. Cllr Eve considered that a combination of weight and speed restrictions together with a speed table could work on the bridge in Church Street. The need for real penalties for speeding was mooted, with a suggestion of use of an ANPR system with automatic penalties for transgressions.

Cllr Rich thanked members of the TWG for their update on progress to date and enquired about the timescale for firm recommendations. Cllr Eve indicated that the TWG had been given 12 months to do its work and thought it would take another 3 months to consider options in turn and to consult widely. The TWG was asked to also consider the displacement effect of individual measures, eg if traffic was decreased in Withersfield would this have a knock-on effect on, say, Thurlow?

b Progress towards a Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Rich reported that it had been agreed some months ago that the parish should develop a Neighbourhood Plan. Initial investigations had confirmed that such development was complex and the only way forward was to secure funding to employ a consultant to produce the plan. Cllr Rich referred to a first draft of an application to designate Withersfield as a Neighbourhood Plan area which had been circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. His explanation of why Withersfield should be so designated had included reference to its distinct rural character with its accompanying tranquillity but sitting close to the expanding urban community of Haverhill. Because of the constant pressure for development in and around the area as a whole, the Parish

Council needed to establish parameters for future developments within the parish, including the research park adjacent to the Arboretum Estate. He had also included reference to the high volume and speed of through traffic and the need for any plan to include consideration of an effective traffic management plan.

Cllr Stevens suggested that much of the above could be achieved through effective input into the revision of local plan about to be undertaken by West Suffolk Council; this approach would achieve the desired amendments without going through the pain and expense of development of a Neighbourhood Plan. However, a counter-view was expressed that a new local plan increased the imperative for a Neighbourhood Plan in that this could influence the content of such local plan.

A parishioner commented that development of a Neighbourhood Plan was perhaps the most sensitive step currently being considered by the Parish Council and emphasised the need for in-depth consultation, including knocking on doors. People held differing views and were not always happy about changes currently taking place. On the other hand, Cllr Rich pointed out the current frustration on the part of councillors who currently were powerless to affect decisions on, say, planning applications to which a number of residents objected.

Cllr Rich enquired if the parishioners present were generally comfortable with the Parish Council pursuing development of a Neighbourhood Plan, and no overt objections were made. Cllr Stevens confirmed that an important point could be made about the separation between the village and the urban area where a buffer would be essential, and indicated that he could take such points forward in discussions about the new local plan. Cllr Evans informed the meeting that Hargrave had been the first village in Suffolk to develop a Neighbourhood Plan; this village had wanted more houses to make the village sustainable but wished for a definite limit to be agreed and a say in where the houses should be located. Despite having local expertise, the development of their plan had been time-consuming and expensive. Cllr Evans said that she could support the development of a Withersfield plan with some funding, and despite Cllr Stevens' view that all could be achieved through input into a new local plan, Cllr Evans advised a focus on both.

2 a Report from Chair of Parish Council, Terry Rich

Cllr Rich provided the meeting with an overview of his report. The full report is available on the Parish Council website:
withersfield.onesuffolk.net/

b Report from County Cllr Mary Evans

Cllr Evans reported that the County Council had put up council tax but by 1% less than last year's increase. Around 80% of spending by SCC goes towards the care and support of elderly and vulnerable young people and children. A lot of co-ordinated work was being undertaken involving SCC, district councils and the police, particularly in connection with reducing the risk, eg because of county lines, of young children in Suffolk's main towns. There was a new plan to create 800 additional places for children with special needs and disabilities due to an 18% increase in demand – this was caused by increased cases of autism, and children with disabilities surviving longer. New special schools were being created, including residential ones, together with attachments to mainstream schools. Having been appointed as Deputy Leader of the Council, with responsibilities including Highways, Cllr Evans recognised the need to approach such aspects as dealing with potholes more efficiently. Additional funding had been secured from central government to hire machines to deal with potholes over the winter, together with money for smart street lights which power themselves and have temperature gauges which could be used to inform where, say, gritting was required. SCC was also hoping to get innovation funding for new plastic roads.

c Report from Borough Councillor Jane Midwood

Cllr Rich expressed his thanks to Cllr Midwood who had stood down at the last election. Her report is available on the Parish Council website.

A parishioner welcomed new District Cllr Peter Stevens. He noted that there had been a 12% increase in the police component of council tax, and asked that the Parish Council should ask the Police and Crime Commissioner how this additional funding was going to be used.

d Report from Parish Tree Warden, Alexander Talbot

None was submitted

e Report from Chair of Village Hall Management Committee, Tom Mytton-Mills

None was submitted.

f .Report from Chair of Sports and Recreation Committee, Denis Elavia

Denis's report is available on the Parish Council website.

A parishioner commented that the trees surrounding the sports and recreation ground were killing the grass and action needed to be taken. It was agreed that the Parish Council should consider how to make an approach to Mr Vestey who leased the ground to the parish.

g Report from Haverhill Police

None was submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

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