

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 13th September 2022 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Frank Eve (Vice-Chair), Sheila Horton, Julia Korona, Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump; District Cllr: Peter Stevens; 4 parishioners; Tim Barling of Thurlow Estate; and 2 representatives of Acorn Bioenergy.

1. Apologies for absence

None received.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Stevens was pleased to share the news that the Milton House appeal AP/22/0012/STAND had been dismissed due to the effect on the conservation area and trees. The Chair thanked Cllr Stevens for his support with objecting to the application along with the PC and many parishioners.

Cllr Stevens went on to explain that the refuse operation is currently under severe pressure because of the inflationary pay, causing struggles with some of the services. The Council are endeavouring to continue through.

Due to the sad news of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, many planned meetings had been cancelled during the national period of mourning. Operation London Bridge duties are being carried out to show respect for the nations' loss and also show support to the new King.

The Chair requested for Cllr Stevens to put the PC in touch with the local Parish Council at the nearest anaerobic digestion plant in Suffolk.

3. County Councillor's report

None received.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

Parishioners were invited to raise items of interest and/or concern

A parishioner explained she had been having some trouble with a neighbour and a particular piece of land which she had for years used for parking. The neighbour has taken to erecting 'no parking' signs, placing large logs and other items to prevent vehicles being able to fit, and interrogating anyone who does park on the land. The neighbour wants proof that the land does not belong to him. The parishioner explained she had looked at the village plan back to 1750 and there was no name stated.

The parishioner asked the PC for advice on the matter.

Tim Barling, of Thurlow Estate, said he would be able to look to see whether any of said land was Estate owned land.

Cllr Stevens recommended using the Ordnance map to acquire a field name or plot number of the piece of land which the County Council rights of way could then use to look into. The Chair asked Cllr Stevens to email this information to the parishioner, which was agreed.

Representatives of Acorn Bioenergy presented the proposals for a new anaerobic digestion plant at Spring Grove Farm.

It was explained that the presentation was a part of their public consultation process along with the public exhibition at the village hall being held tomorrow.

The representatives explained that anaerobic digestion facilities generate biogas from feedstocks which is then refined to biomethane. The main biproducts of this are CO₂ and Digestates. CO₂ is captured, refined, and used for commercial purposes. Digestates are used as organic bio-fertilizers. The low carbon biomethane would be directly injected into the gas grid to create renewable heat, and used as an alternative fuel to power heavy goods vehicles.

The proposed site would be located on agricultural land along the A1307, north west of Haverhill. The site would cover 11 hectares and a new access track would be constructed to provide site access. Screening would be implemented to limit any visual impact. Site lighting would not be required outside working hours. The plant would be staffed by up to 5 people on site during the hours 07:00-19:00 Monday to Friday, with shorter working on the weekend. However, peak harvest periods may lead to alterations in working hours.

The benefits were listed and included:

- Providing environmentally friendly fuel for HGVs
- 14/15 roles created
- Supplying cheaper Carbon Dioxide to local businesses
- At least 15% improvement in biodiversity
- Helping tackle climate emergency
- Securing crop diversity and income for local farms

Traffic movements for the proposal was described as follows:

- The site would require 3 gas transporting HGV trips per day,
- On average, the site would see roughly 11.4 feedstock deliveries per day, which equates to 1 delivery every hour. Silage deliveries will be lower during winter months and increase during harvest season.
- There would be approximately 9.6 digestate movements per day, equating to 1 movement per hour.
- HGVs would generally follow the A1307 taking gas to the injection point in Newton Longeville.
- Farm vehicles would use farm tracks where possible.
- Vehicle movements would be timed to avoid peak traffic periods (8-9AM, 5-6PM).

Acorn Bioenergy is waiting for the outcome of the Environmental Impact Assessment report. Once the assessment results have been received, they plan to submit their application with the hope to start building on site in spring/summer 2023.

Tim Barling told the PC that the Thurlow Estate own the land of the proposed site and are supportive of the scheme.

Parishioners and Councillors voiced their concerns about the proposal which included:

1. Flooding

Spring Grove Farm is Flood Zone 1 but the area north of the farm where the plant would be positioned is Flood Zone 3, as classified by the Environment Agency. If the area flooded when in full production it would be an environmental disaster.

2. Odour

The prevailing wind is from the South and West. Should there be any leakage or breakdown in the process, the wind will take any odours straight toward Withersfield. Parishioners stated that if there is a smell from the plant, this would de-value properties in Withersfield.

3. Traffic movements

The A1307 and Three Counties Way is known as a high-risk accident road that already has significant problems due to the volume of traffic using the road between Haverhill and Cambridge. This added volume will only make matters worse. The scheduled new housing development to be completed by 2024 on the Arboretum estate will only add further to the congestion.

The Thurlow Estate's transportation plan calls for 30,000 tons of silage to be transported across the Thurlow Estate via farm tracks. This will result in one traffic movement per hour. These lorries will however have to intersect the existing road system around Withersfield before entering the main site through one gate. This will mean that at the junction of Silver Street, Skippers Lane and Hollow Hill there will be an extra Lorry every hour converging on a known traffic hotspot.

Cllr Eve asked the representatives about the hub in Herefordshire as there have been reported problems here. He also asked about the company's experience.

The representatives said that the company was newly established and had not built any plants but the individuals working at the company have experience. It was also stated that they are supported by Ofgem and the government.

The Acorn representatives said that the planning authority would look at the traffic movements and impact in detail.

It was stated that this type of AD plant would not have an odour – the odorous plants are the food waste plants, which this one is not.

In conclusion, the representatives clarified that the point of the public consultation is to look at any issues raised and address them before submitting their application.

It was asked where the nearest AD plant to Withersfield was and it was guessed it would be in Euston, Suffolk. The Baldock plant is of similar size to the proposal at Spring Grove Farm, but it is a food waste plant.

Cllr Stevens added that the West Suffolk waste hub had similar concerns raised prior to implementation but has been very successful.

The Chair thanked Acorn Bioenergy for presenting the proposal and answering questions. If an application made, the PC would like them to attend another PC meeting to present amendments made due to the points raised this evening.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and closed the public section of the meeting.

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 12th July 2022

These were approved – proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

7. Parish Councillor vacancies

There had been no expressions of interest received since the last PC meeting. A couple of the Cllrs had been speaking with some parishioners who they thought may be suitable candidates. Cllr Horton said that at the upcoming church open day, she would prepare something where visitors could write their name down if they were interested in joining any of the parish committees, including the Parish Council.

There are two Parish Councillor vacancies.

8. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

None.

9. Update from the Traffic Working Group

Cllr Eve said that County Cllr Bennett had sent in a report to cabinet holders listing the problems that the Villages Working Group had put forward and requesting them to attend a meeting with the working group. A response is awaited and Cllr Eve ensured the Villages Working Group would keep the pressure on for resolutions on the traffic issues raised with Cllr Bennett.

10. Neighbourhood Plan update

The draft design code, which had been shared with the Cllrs prior to the meeting, was discussed.

Cllr Korona made the point that she would prefer if her address wasn't included in the document and so it was agreed that the Clerk would look into an alternative.

Cllr Eve highlighted a few points in the draft where re-wording was considered.

It was also mentioned that the design code is very detailed and it was queried whether this needed to be less precise in some parts, for example where it specified for

‘rendered, white houses’.

The Chair questioned why Silver Street was not included in the design code.

The PC agreed that the points raised needed to be relayed back to the consultants Oneill Homer, by Cllr Korona who will also find out what the responsibilities are for the next stage. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton.

11. Update from the Village Hall Committee and VHMC annual report 2022

The annual report was shared with the PC prior to the meeting for Cllrs to view.

Cllr Horton told the PC that with the Chair of the VHMC soon to be leaving, they are looking for a new Chair. The committee is looking to get the agreed extension work started as soon as possible. The outside painting is currently being done and there will be events at the village hall coming up.

As in charge of the regular defibrillator checks, Cllr Horton arranged and ordered a new battery as the previous one needed replacing.

Cllr Horton informed the PC about the church open day on the 1st October, where there will be information given to visitors about the history of the church. She is currently in the process of writing a bid for the repair work needed to the church tower. For the open day, a portable toilet has been donated, as there are no toilet facilities at the church at present. Cllr Horton asked the PC for their opinions of the possibility of the portable toilet remaining in place until toilet facilities are installed in the church. The PC had the following concerns:

1. How it would affect the view of the church from the graveyard, which the PC have worked hard to maintain as a pleasant, peaceful, green space,
2. Potential vandalism,
3. Maintenance of the loo and management of odours.

It was agreed that such a facility would benefit the church, however, unless it is screened (so will not be seen from the graveyard) and secure, the PC would not be happy to support its installation. Cllr Horton would pass this decision on to the vicar.

12. Playground discussion – Cllr Horton

Cllr Horton told the PC that she had been approached by a family with young children who had expressed their desire for a playground within the village, which is a view also taken by other young families in the village. Installing a playground was looked into a few years ago and Cllr Eve had shared his research and findings with Cllr Horton. It was agreed that for a playground to be implemented, a working party would need to be formed which the PC would support. Cllr Horton agreed to canvas views of parishioners to see, as a first step, if there is a sufficient number of parishioners willing to work on a playground working group.

13. Discussion around the new anaerobic digestion plant proposal at Spring Grove Farm

The presentation and concerns raised in the public forum were discussed. All the Cllrs shared the views of the issues raised, being:

- Flood risk
- Traffic movements
- Odour
- Previous hubs having gone bankrupt
- Problems at the Herefordshire hub
- Very new company which has not built any plants
- Environmental factor and sustainability

Worried by the proposal, the PC agreed to write to the Thurlow Estate clearly outlining their concerns and to stress due diligence to this newly established company.

14. Review of environmental works contract draft – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka had looked at the previous contract used in 2020 to tender for environmental works in the parish, and made some amendments which included more environmentally friendly points. The draft was discussed and it was agreed that Cllr Wijenayaka, with the comments made, would make some modifications to the draft. This would then be shared to the rest of the PC ready for approval at the next PC meeting.

15. Order of wreath and arrangements for Remembrance Sunday

The wreath options were discussed and it was agreed for the PC to order wreath type F with a donation of £20 to The Royal British Legion. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Korona. It is noted that this will be an S137 payment of £20.

The Remembrance Sunday service will take place on Sunday 13th November at 10:50am at the war memorial.

16. Finance

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

These were noted and agreed. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Korona.

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

This was considered and agreed.

- d) To note the effectiveness of the internal audit

Noted.

- e) Agree to reimburse Cllr Horton for the replacement defibrillator battery

This was agreed.

17. Correspondence

- a) Emails – Webnos defib site checks

Noted.

- b) Email - SAAA 2022 opt-out communication

Noted. No action required.

18. Planning

- a) Borough notifications since last meeting

These were all discussed and noted.

- b) Applications received since last meeting

All applications were discussed.

The PC submitted the following comments to planning application DC/22/1237/TCA:
“The Parish Council have no comment however, would suggest that work should wait until fruiting has finished so wildlife could have a good food source over the autumn/early winter.”

The PC submitted the following comments to planning application DC/22/1303/ADV and DC/22/1316/LB:

“The Parish Council have concerns over the impact of the proposed lighting for the residents of Hollow Hill who live opposite the pub.

The residents are generally very supportive of the pub but do have some concerns about light pollution.

The following points should be followed to ensure little disturbance to the neighbouring properties:

- 1. This should only be low level lighting to highlight existing or necessary signage, not floodlighting of outside areas,*
- 2. The lighting must go off at by a reasonable time,*
- 3. The lights should not be outward facing and back light appropriate signage only, and only go on for opening times,*
- 4. The signage and lighting should be appropriate for a listed building and a village pub.”*

19. Agenda items for next meeting on 15th November 2022

- Environmental works contract – Cllr Wijenayaka
- Anaerobic digestion plant
- Neighbourhood Plan