

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 13th July 2021 at the Epicentre, Withersfield**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Ian Kinloch (Vice-Chair);
Frank Eve, Sheila Horton, Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump;
County Cllr: Bobby Bennett; 2 Openreach representatives; and 6 parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllrs Korona and Lord and District Cllr Stevens.

2. District Councillor's report

No report was received.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett joined the PC meeting through Skype and firstly thanked those who she had met on her walk-around of the parish a few weeks ago for their hospitality. She said it had been very useful to hear about the work which had been done in the parish and to discuss current issues and what could be done to take things forward.

There were two matters Cllr Bennett wanted to inform the PC about. The first being the parliamentary constituency boundary review, which could have quite significant impacts for Withersfield to what constituency the parish could end up being in for the next general election. Secondly, Cllr Bennett explained that SCC are commencing a new procurement process for their Highways maintenance. She is keen to hear about any problems of how the current system works so she is able to feedback this information as part of the procurement process.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

- Representatives from Openreach to give an update

It was reported from the Openreach representatives that they are on track with the installation of Fibre broadband. They plan to get approximately 98/99% of the parish complete by the end of September. Once fully commissioned, advertising can commence that Fibre is available to properties. In order to complete the works, there will be an increase in vehicles in the parish. If there are any issues at any time, the representatives asked if parishioners could contact Cllr Wijenayaka about the problems, who would then be able to directly get in touch with the Openreach team for resolving.

The Chair asked whether there would be any problems with getting to the farthest reaches of the parish, but it was assured there would not be.

Cllr Wijenayaka gave his thanks on behalf of the PC for being responsive to previous communications and queries, and for attending the meeting to give an update.

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

The Chair declared an interest for item 17a. As a tenant of Thurlow Estate land, the applicant of planning application DC/21/1215/FUL, the Chair wouldn't be taking part in discussions or decisions for this item on the agenda.

Cllr Eve declared he has a 10% interest in a property development company, and although they are not currently active in this area, this could arise in the future and may impact on his ability to take part in Neighbourhood Plan discussions at some point.

The Chair proposed that item 17a, the planning application for conversion of a redundant agricultural building at "Bitton Farm", was the next item to be discussed as there were parishioners present and joining via Skype who wished to be heard. The applicant Tim Barling from Thurlow Estate was also joining via Skype. This was agreed.

The chair handed over to Cllr Kinloch to chair the item as he had previously declared an interest. (See item 17a)

6. To approve the minutes of the annual and Parish Council meetings held on 4th May 2021

Cllr Eve pointed out that the reference to the £2000 donation from Withersfield Friends should have specified that the money was towards implementing the 20mph zone.

This was noted and it was confirmed that the sum of money is earmarked in the PC accounts to support the 20mph scheme.

Other than this, the annual meeting minutes were approved – proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by the Chair.

The PC meeting minutes were approved – proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by the Chair.

7. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Advertisement sign

The response from the planning enforcement officer regarding the advertisement sign was noted by the PC.

b) Land adjacent to Barsey Close

At the previous meeting, Cllr Stevens had informed the PC that the land had no registered owners but that if an authority (the District Council or the Parish Council) could show that they had maintained it for 5 years the ownership could revert to that body. A meeting was proposed between the PC and the District Council. Unfortunately, this had not yet taken place. The Clerk will chase this up with West Suffolk.

In the meantime, the Chair suggested it may be sensible to look into the costs of maintaining the land through the PC's maintenance contact. This was agreed - proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Kinloch.

c) Tree warden

The Clerk had contacted Alexander Talbot about whether a more local tree surgeon should be appointed for the PC. It was explained that although he lives further away now, Alexander is still in the Withersfield area most days for work and is happy to continue if the PC decide to keep him on.

The PC agreed that they are happy with the service provided and it was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Horton to continue using Alexander as the parish tree warden.

Alexander had also suggested the PC take a look at a small chestnut tree in the corner of Burton Green which has been in decline for some years. It was agreed that Cllr Wijenayaka will go and inspect the tree before a decision is made by the PC.

8. Update from the Traffic Working Group

Cllr Eve gave the following updates on the different aspects the TWG have been working on:

1. We have been selected as one of the first 20 sites in the pilot of the ANPR camera. Cllr Eve is chasing up a date for this.
2. Turning Withersfield Road into a Quiet Lane has been accepted in phase 2.
3. 40mph buffer zones have been signed off by the SCC new lead for traffic. Works should begin in 14 weeks' time.
4. Members of the TWG had met with Cllr Bennett for a walk around of the village where they were able to give her an understanding of the problems around traffic. Cllr Bennett committed to arranging a meeting with David Chenery to look at what traffic calming measures might be applied for the 20mph zone. She also agreed to restart the 'villages working group' which could aid us with funding for the 20mph zone.

Cllr Bennett confirmed she was investigating matters raised on the walk around and will support the PC in endeavours for funding.

9. Neighbourhood Plan Working Group progress report – Cllr Kinloch

It was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group had met on a few occasions since the last PC meeting including meetings with consultant Neil Homer who had also attended a 'walk-about' of the parish with members of the Working Group.

Arising out of these meetings, Cllr Kinloch and the Chair drafted a document containing a series of issues and questions to put out to all parishioners, inviting them to give their opinions on a Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Kinloch stated the working group needs direction from the PC.

The draft document was discussed among the PC and working group and it was a general consensus that it covered all of the relevant issues but needed some work to improve clarity. It was agreed that the document needed to be informative, pictorial and clear. Once distributed, it was suggested there could be a drop-in session for parishioners to attend to ask any questions in person.

There was discussion concerning whether to include **requests** regarding possible future development sites. Some felt it was not advisable to give any indication that future developments might be acceptable. **The Chair said that some had suggested identification of where developments might be tolerated could strengthen our ability to resist less acceptable developments.** Others felt that some small-scale development could be positive for the village and parish.

It was agreed that at this stage the questions should be asked, so that we are best able to gauge how parishioners feel on these issues.

It was agreed that members of the NPWG would work on the document and circulate it among the PC for further comments and once finalised, would be inserted into the next edition of the parish magazine. It was also agreed that the NPWG would arrange their next meeting and would organise a drop-in session for parishioners.

Cllr Kinloch went on to explain that he had recently had a meeting with Pigeon Investment Management after they had been in contact with the clerk, requesting a meeting with members of the PC. He explained that the company had been approached by a landowner in Withersfield about potential development on their site and wanted to gauge opinions from the PC about this possibility. Their proposal was a large-scale development of land within the parish boundary on the borders of Haverhill and could directly impact on the separation of Withersfield from Haverhill by impinging on the green country-side that now separates village from town.

Pigeon had offered support with traffic management issues if they were able to progress their development plan. Cllr Kinloch had expressed his concern that this proposal had come forward in this way.

It was agreed that this reinforces the need for a Neighbourhood Plan. The PC agreed to write to the landowner to express the PC's initial concerns.

10. Church hand over of graveyard to parish

Cllr Kinloch explained that the PCC (Parochial Church Council) had approached him with the question of whether the PC would be interested in taking over the church graveyard. It was agreed that the PC owned graveyard and does not require expansion for some time yet, therefore there is no need to take on the church graveyard for the time being. No further action.

11. Permissive footpaths – update from Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka had met with the Thurlow Estate together with the Chair of Great Wratting Parish Council about the request of additional permissive footpaths within the parish. He had prepared a PowerPoint presentation making a number of proposals based on feedback from other Councillors. A decision is still pending.

The Parish Council discussed the possibility of offering to enter into a licence agreement with the Estate for use of permissive paths if the Estate is willing to enter into discussions about the request. Cllr Wijenayaka will chase further for a conclusion.

SCC had been in contact regarding installing new fingerpost plaques, which Cllr Wijenayaka had responded offering his support.

The PC endorsed the approach taken by Cllr Wijenayaka.

12. Village Hall Management Committee update - Cllr Horton

Cllr Horton told the PC that the secretary of the VHMC had recently been updating policies and organising and sharing out the different responsibilities among the committee members. Cllr Horton shared that the planning permission for the village hall store room had expired however, the VHMC are planning to apply for a bigger extension on the village hall and are also currently looking at quotes for re-decorating. Upcoming events at the village hall include a craft fair on the 18th September and a quiz in October. After seeing the correspondence received detailing the Community Restart Fund, Cllr Horton plans on applying on behalf of the VHMC.

Cllrs asked Cllr Horton whether she felt the governance of the VHMC were showing signs of improvement, to which she felt confident that things were going in the right direction with meetings being more regular again and plans in place. Cllr Horton will continue to keep the PC updated.

13. Post Covid-19 and Jubilee celebrations - Cllr Horton

Ideas were shared and it was agreed that Cllr Horton will take the lead in making links with others in the parish including the VHMC regarding organising such events and will come to the PC if support is needed. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Eve.

14. To agree on a PC Safeguarding lead

The Chair declared he has many years' experience of safeguarding knowledge and would be happy to take this responsibility on. It was proposed by Cllr Horton for the Chair to take on this role, which was seconded by Cllr Kinloch.

15. Finance

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

These were agreed and noted.

The receipt of the grant to support the development of the Neighbourhood Plan was noted.

c) Consideration of Internal Audit Report from SALC

Noted and agreed as a good outcome. The Clerk will look further into the only 2 'partly met' items and what is required to meet them fully.

d) To note Annual Internal Audit Report received for AGAR which has been submitted

Noted.

e) Quarterly report of expenditure and comparison to budget

Noted.

16. Correspondence

a) Email – Suffolk Community Restart Fund

Cllr Horton passed this information onto the VHMC and plans to write the grant bid.

b) Email – Meeting with Pigeon Investment Management. Cllr Kinloch to report back.

This was discussed at item 9.

c) Email – Hedge on Horseheath Road

The concerns raised in this parishioner correspondence were discussed and noted by the PC. It was agreed that the Clerk will advise the parishioner that the maintenance of the hedge is down to the landowner therefore the PC suggest they contact them directly if the hedge becomes a nuisance.

17. Planning

a) To consider representations from applicant and neighbouring residents for:

DC/21/1215/FUL: Planning application - Conversion of redundant agricultural barn to dwelling

- Plot Bittons Farm Wratting Road Withersfield Suffolk

This item was discussed earlier where it was agreed by the PC to bring this item forward in the meeting, after item 5, for there were a number of attendees at the meeting only wishing to be involved in this item on the agenda.

Vice-Chair Cllr Kinloch chaired this item on the agenda as the Chair had declared an interest.

Cllr Kinloch asked parishioners in turn to express their concerns to the PC and ask any questions to the applicant.

The various points raised by the parishioners were:

- The application is for a residential conversion outside the Withersfield settlement boundary and as such is a new development in the countryside unsupported by Rural vision 2031.
- The proposal is an under-development of the site being a converted milking shed for a one-bedroom conversion and raises the possibility of the application being amended to multiple dwellings once the land has been re-purposed to residential.
- The building is unsuitable for conversion to a residence in keeping with the area due to its size and position.
- The site is on the edge of the Withersfield Conservation Area. Expanding the village will not protect and enhance the area.
- There is no evidence of attempted economic re-use as required by JDMPD.
- The site would cause a loss of amenity and privacy to Windwhistle adjacent.
- There are highway concerns given that this site is on a Quiet Lane and access is limited.
- The ecology study was conducted in January and is therefore unrepresentative of wildlife. There are great crested newts, bats, owls and slow worms on the site.

One parishioner asked the applicant to remove and change the name on the planning application as it has the exact address as their residence, which has nothing to do with the planning application.

Tim Barling stated he understood the concerns raised and responded to the comments made:

- Tim apologised if the name is the same as another property and ensured this would be looked into.
- It was explained that it is a redundant building with no agricultural future and they would like to make something of its potential use.
- Whether they comply with the policy and/or need to submit further information will be picked up during the planning process and Planning Officers will let them know.
- The reason the planning is only for a one-bedroom house is because the small size of the property being 550sq.ft, would only allow this.
- It was agreed that it is outside the development boundary and within the conservation area. From a conservation point of view, if there are any adjustments needed to fit the criteria, they are more than happy to make these amendments.
- If there are any specific concerns in terms of its design, landscaping, access, that they can address, they'd be happy to look into that.

Cllr Kinloch thanked the parishioners and applicant for their comments and asked the Councillors for their views. The PC were in agreement to raise an objection on the points made by the parishioners and also on an environmental basis. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton.

b) Applications received since last meeting

All noted.

The Clerk had circulated details of application DC/21/1372/TCA which was to reduce the height of the hedge at Jacobs Manor by 0.4 metres. This had been received after the agenda had been published.

It was agreed that a representation supporting the application be made on grounds that it would:

- a) improve pedestrian movements which were obstructed by the hedge
 - b) enhance the visual amenity of the village and of the conservation area.
- c) Borough notifications since last meeting

All noted.

It was noted that the Chair had spoken on behalf of the PC at the development control committee meeting for the Milton House planning application which resulted in a further refusal of the application with a vote of 11 to 4 in favour of refusal.

- d) To consider the south of Haverhill housing development scheme put forward as part of the Local Plan

Cllr Eve wanted to bring this to the attention of the PC as he believes this would add to the traffic problems through the village.

It was agreed the PC should make representations about this when a formal application is submitted.

18. Agenda items for meeting to be held on 14th September 2021

Updates from the working groups.

The meeting closed at 21:28.