

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 15th November 2022 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Frank Eve (Vice-Chair), Sheila Horton, Julia Korona,
Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump; County Cllr: Bobby Bennett;
parishioners: Gill Jarvis and Philip Stiles.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from District Cllr Peter Stevens.

2. District Councillor's report

In his absence, Cllr Stevens sent the following comments prior to the PC meeting:

I would like to congratulate you on the draft Neighbourhood Plan which highlights some important characteristics for any future development in Withersfield.

I have been following the application for the bio digester closely and would encourage Councillors to take up the invitation to visit the Euston site and talk to the local parish councils regarding odours. I believe our County Councillor has also been invited to visit the Euston site.

I still have concerns on traffic movements both on farm and HGV movements on the A1307, which may need a transport plan to reassure residents in Withersfield and Haverhill.

Any possible flooding problems will be dealt with by the Environment Agency.

These are the points which need to be answered in the planning process undertaken by the County Council.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett had sent her October report through which was shared with the PC prior to the meeting.

Cllr Bennett made the following additional comments along with her report:

- The Council is still considering on the budget, which requires some difficult decisions. They will prioritise Suffolk's most vulnerable people.
- The Ukraine scheme has now reached the 6-month mark. Some hosts are able to continue with hosting Ukrainians. Those who cannot remain in the same place will either be moved to other hosts or into other housing. However, they will have no priority over others for housing.
- Posters with information and advice have been created to share where help can be sought for those struggling with the current cost of living pressures.

Cllr Eve asked Cllr Bennett about setting up a meeting to discuss the requirements needed for the implementation of the 20mph zone and its costings with Highways. Cllr Bennett said she would raise this with Suffolk Highways.

Cllr Bennett informed the PC that she had been invited by the Thurlow Estate to visit the Euston facility with Cllr David Roach. Even though the location and scale are different to the proposed AD plant at Spring Grove Farm, she encouraged the PC to also make a visit in order to help further understand the proposal, gain more information, and have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the PC's and parishioners' concerns.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

None. The Chairman 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 13th September 2022

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

7. Co-option of Parish Councillors

Two parishioners had sent their statements of applications for the Councillor vacancies prior to the PC meeting. The Chair invited them in turn to introduce themselves and give a little detail about why they would like to join the PC.

Gill Jarvis explained she has lived on the Arboretum estate since March 2016. She works in Melbourn, Royston as a Procurement & Compliance coordinator. Gill would like to become a member of the Parish Council as she would like to help out in her local community providing support and guidance where possible. She is involved with the action group against the proposed anaerobic digestion plant at Spring Grove Farm which has given her the motivation to want to help the community more. Gill feels she would be able to represent the residents of the Arboretum and also bring the community together as a whole and bridge the gap between the Arboretum estate and Withersfield village.

It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Eve to co-opt Gill onto the Parish Council to which all the Councillors voted in favour.

Philip Stiles told the PC that he has been a resident of Withersfield for 10 years and has very strong affection for the village. He is an academic at the University of Cambridge. Philip has recently become involved with the action group against the anaerobic digestion plant as a member of the steering committee and is also keen to help out in other areas such as traffic calming and the upkeep of the church. Upon seeing the vacancy, he felt he had to pursue it as he would very much like to be able to get more involved as a member of the PC.

It was proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Korona to co-opt Philip onto the Parish Council to which all the Councillors voted in favour.

8. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

None.

9. Approval of draft Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Korona confirmed that various amendments previously agreed by the PC had been made to the draft plan which has now been published. Parishioners have been invited to send any feedback about the draft to the PC. The deadline for feedback has been extended to the 23rd December 2022. After feedback has been received and considered by the PC, Cllr Korona will meet with the Neighbourhood Plan consultant Neil Homer, and the Plan would then be submitted to West Suffolk for referendum.

Comments had been received from one parishioner where the mention of Duke's in the Plan had been requested to be removed and the wording of the woodland stated there also needed to be reconsidered. The PC agreed to adhere to the parishioner's wishes.

It was also noticed that there were parts which had been previously agreed to be removed - such as the infill paragraph - though still remained in the draft. Cllr Korona will confirm with the consultant the removal of these parts.

Cllr Bennett praised the draft plan and the hard work put in to create it.

It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton to agree the draft plan with the amendments mentioned. All Cllrs were in favour.

The Chair reminded the PC that the grant received for the development of the Neighbourhood Plan needs to be spent by end of this financial year.

Thanks was given to Cllr Korona for her continuing work on the Neighbourhood Plan.

10. Update from the action group against the proposed anaerobic digestion plant at Spring Grove Farm

Since the last PC meeting in September, the Chair confirmed that he had written to the Thurlow Estate laying out the concerns of the PC for the proposed AD plant. As previously agreed, the Chair looked into the hiring of a planning expert in order to aid the PC with objecting to this impending application. The consultant recommended by the Chair has a good background in planning with expertise in waste and strategic applications having worked for Norfolk County Council. The cost would be £50 per hour and it was agreed that this would be a legitimate expense for the PC. It was proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Eve for the PC to commission this consultant. All were in agreement.

Cllr Wijenayaka briefed the PC on what actions had occurred since the last PC meeting where Acorn had given their presentation about the AD plant proposal. An action group had

been formed which consisted of members of the Parish Council and Withersfield parishioners. The group – Muck Off Acorn – were meeting on a monthly basis with the steering group meeting weekly or fortnightly. Leaflets have been made which will be being distributed locally soon and signs and banners have also been displayed, with land owners' permission. It has been organised for more of these to follow including a large banner at The White Horse pub. These have been paid for with the money raised in the action groups' 'Go Fund Me' campaign, where people have donated generously.

The action group has also reached out to local businesses to make them aware of the proposal and the action group.

The action group also organised a drone flight to show the height the 5 tanks will be – the footage shows they would be of similar height to the Epicentre building.

Cllr Horton explained that the action group were going to be contacting the businesses who donated to the spirit of enterprise roundabout structure about the AD plant proposed to be developed close by.

Cllr Wijenayaka told the PC that there was a possibility of having help and advice received from some Hills Road college students studying geography.

Cllr Bennett recommended that the Cllrs ensure the arguments and objections sent to the Council include material reasoning in terms of planning law rather than including ethical arguments as they will not hold weight in the decision process for the County Council to approve or reject the planning application.

Further actions of the PC were discussed and it was agreed that as the PC planning lead, Cllr Korona would pursue seeking tree preservation orders on the woodland where the AD plant has been proposed.

It was also agreed for the PC to write to the Thurlow Estate asking whether they had considered that the increased use of maize causes a greater risk of rain water run off from fields causing flooding, and the impact this would have on the village, especially considering the flooding history in Withersfield.

The PC then agreed that the Thurlow Estate should also be asked whether they had considered a traffic movement plan as this relates directly to the traffic concerns of the PC.

Cllr Stiles offered to contact Horseheath PC as being a close parish to the proposed development. It was suggested other local Parish Council's should be contacted along with South Cambridge District Council to explain that the development could have an impact on them also and relay the issues it will bring.

Another suggestion was to contact George Vestey at Thurlow Estate to express the PC's disappointment.

After discussions, the PC decided it would likely be necessary to hold a special extraordinary meeting once the planning application has been submitted. Also, at this point, the consultant would begin to compose a formal response and put together suggested points to include as guidance to others wishing to object.

It was agreed by the PC for the Chair to take action on this as soon as necessary.

11. Update from the Traffic Working Group

Cllr Eve explained that he was still awaiting the meeting he had requested with Cllr Bennett and David Chenery of Suffolk Highways, to discuss the requirements for the implementation of the 20mph zone – which has been approved in principle by the County Council, subject to funding. He will chase this up again to attempt to progress.

The Chair asked Cllr Eve to enquire about an Option Appraisal for the new development at the Arboretum estate where there are concerns about the increase of traffic dispersing off the estate onto the main road. Cllr Eve will raise this with Cllr Bennett and Highways

It was reported by Cllr Eve that Withersfield will have the ANPR camera, which is being circulated around Suffolk, for a week in January.

Cllr Eve also told the PC that the VAS has again been set up and is collecting data. This could prove useful along Silver Street for evidence in the objection towards the proposed AD plant on Spring Grove farm.

Cllr Eve is still working with local parishes on the Villages Traffic Group and is going to take up the role of being the Chair for this group. The group will be meeting next in January where all parishes will have the opportunity to express the traffic issues in their parish and Cllr Eve will voice the traffic concerns regarding the proposed AD plant.

12. Update from the Village Hall Management Committee – Cllr Horton

Cllr Horton told the PC that the external decorations are currently being undertaken.

The Chair of the VHMC will be leaving at the end of December. The secretary, Cllr Horton, and the other committee members will be taking up some of the responsibilities including organising of the architect for the extension which they hope to begin works on soon.

The Clerk had shared information found about the possibility of having free broadband at the village hall installed and Cllr Horton is looking into this.

Cllr Horton said the committee were also looking into the possibility of running a ‘warm room’ in the village hall.

13. Playground discussion – Cllr Horton

After investigating further, Cllr Horton believes there is not enough interest to implement a playground within the village and that parishioners seem to be more keen on creating a pathway from the village to Haverhill. This was discussed and agreed this would be quite a considerable project at present. It was agreed there would be no further action for now on this subject.

14. Review format of Notice of Tender for environmental works contract – Cllr Wijenayaka

From the comments made at the previous meeting about the draft Cllr Wijenayaka had put together, amendments had been made to the contract. The contract has now been worded so that there is more onus on the contractor to make the decisions to the number of times certain things need doing but that areas need to be kept maintained. There are also ambitions cited to encourage the contractor of being more environmentally conscious.

Cllr Wijenayaka shared his idea of perhaps having plaques which signposts to parishioners that areas are being maintained. This would also provide advertising for the contractor. The PC are keen to support small local businesses.

The PC discussed the contract and the format was agreed. The Clerk will tender to local businesses for their quotes. These will then be reviewed by the PC and a decision will be made at the next PC meeting in January as to which contractor to employ.

Thanks was given to Cllr Wijenayaka for his work on the contract.

15. 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

These were all noted and agreed. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton.

- d) Draft budget and precept submission for 2023/2024

The Chair explained that himself and the Clerk had drawn up the projected budget for 2023/24 and the Chair had put together his draft budget report, which were circulated to the Cllrs for consideration. Increases had been made in the budget for grass cutting, insurance, and the Parish Council election. Parish projects budget has been reduced due to having to budget for the election.

The precept form has been filled out to show a 0% increase in the council tax.

The draft budget was discussed. Cllr Eve wanted it to be made clear that although the budgeted money for traffic calming was less than in previous years, even though the PC had agreed to contribute towards the implementation of the 20mph zone, that this could be reconsidered at a later date. The Chair explained that once the final figures of the costings for the 20mph limit and a timeline of implementation had been confirmed, the PC would be able to look again at the budget and decide from the balances how much could be allocated to the 20mph scheme and how much should be kept as reserves. It was noted that the £2000 given to the Parish Council by the Friends of Withersfield as a contribution to the implementation of a 20mph zone, has been added to the earmarked reserves for this purpose.

The Chair reminded the PC that the graveyard is a source of income which changes annually. This year the PC is due to make a surplus on the budget.

After these discussions the draft budget and precept submission were agreed - proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton.

The final budget will be agreed in March 2023 PC meeting.

- e) Approval of Risk and Asset Registers for 2023 and insurance renewal

These were approved.

- f) To note the agreed LGA pay award from 1 April 2022, including back payment for the Clerk.

Noted and agreed.

16. Correspondence

- a) Email – WEBNOS defib site check Oct '22

Noted. Cllr Horton explained that the defibrillator had required a new battery. She had organised the replacement and it is now back up in place and running. Cllr Horton has registered the defibrillator with Circuit.

- b) Email – Community Governance Review

It was noted that the PC's request to increase the number of Parish Councillors from 7 to 8 has been approved. This will take effect from the next elections in May 2023.

- c) Letter - Headway Suffolk

Noted.

- d) Letter – EACH donation request

Noted.

- e) Email – Advertising Board

It was noted that the Chair had taken action by contacting the company who had erected an advertisement board on Burton Green without having sought permission. This has been removed since.

- f) Email - Consultation on Proposed Changes to the West Suffolk Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24

It was agreed for the Clerk to respond to the consultation stating that the PC agree with the proposal to increase the maximum discount on Council Tax to 100%.

17. Planning

- a) Borough notifications since last meeting
- b) Applications received since last meeting

All were considered and noted.

18. To determine meeting dates for 2023

The following dates were accepted:

January 17th - Epicentre

March 14th - Epicentre

May 9th

July 11th

September 12th

November 14th

The Epicentre will be used for the first 2 meetings of the year.

19. Agenda items for meeting in January 2023

None.

The meeting closed at 21:37.