

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at 7:30pm on
Tuesday, 16th March 2021, held virtually via Skype**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Ian Kinloch (Vice-Chair);
Frank Eve, Julia Korona, Peter Lord, Indunil Wijenayaka; Clerk: Laura Crump;
District Cllr: Peter Stevens; County Cllr: Mary Evans;
Guests: Phil Royal (OpenReach), Lee Frere (J.A.P Architects);
and 5 parishioners.

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Stevens began his report by speaking about the 'villages traffic group' meeting, which he felt was very useful and hopes a cohesive group can be formed from this. The meeting was set up by Cllr Evans for a group of local parishes to work together with the SCC Highways Transport Strategy team and West Suffolk Council to identify the most effective ways to protect small rural villages from large scale traffic.

Cllr Stevens mentioned there have been a huge number of grants being dealt with lately - particularly for businesses which have been drastically affected by the pandemic.

The creation of a new Freeport which will cover Felixstowe and Harwich has brought the opportunity of expanding a further enterprise zone in Bury St Edmunds, which will bring employment.

The PC's Local Plan submission was noted by Cllr Stevens and he felt this would be very useful moving forward with the consideration of the new plan. A Local Plan committee are about to be appointed that will look into all aspects of the plan and will report back to cabinet later in the year.

Cllr Stevens shared his frustration with the PC that even after quite extensive land searches, the ownership of the land at Barsey Close has still not been identified. It was confirmed that SCC will continue to maintain the area until investigating the ownership concludes.

Up to 197 homeless people have been accommodated during the pandemic which has proved most successful.

A parishioner asked Cllr Stevens whether he was still on the planning committee, to which he confirmed.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Evans sent her report prior to meeting which can be found on the parish website.

Cllr Evans spoke briefly about the 'villages traffic group' meeting with the transport strategy team. She explained that there is some money available so the PC can move on with the 20mph zone as soon as possible.

The Freeport mentioned by Cllr Stevens, is thought to bring 13500 jobs as well as investment into Felixstowe.

It was confirmed that schools are back and working well with the lateral flow testing being successfully carried out.

Cllr Lord asked Cllr Evans about signage for vaccination centres as had seen some anomalies, to which Cllr Evans said she would look into.

As this was the last PC meeting with Cllr Evans as the County Councillor, many thanks and appreciations were extended to Cllr Evans from all of the PC for her hard work over the years.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

Cllr Evans introduced Phil Royal of OpenReach.

Phil explained that in his role, he looks after the rollout of broadband in East Anglia and as Withersfield fits within the Haverhill exchange area, Withersfield village will be covered in the Haverhill rollout this year. They are currently carrying out surveying of Withersfield village. There may be some outliers that may not be covered immediately but certainly most of the village will be covered this year. Those that are not included will be covered in another phase. This is for fibre to the premise and they are looing at around 140 premises at the moment, subject to the survey, for this year.

The PC thanked Phil for his attendance to the meeting and explaining the plans for Withersfield. Phil assured he would keep in touch so as to give prior notification to when works will be carried out or if there are any issues or queries which the PC can aid with.

Chairman closed the public section of the meeting

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

Sheila Horton declared she would not take place on item 24b for planning application DC/21/0287/TCA as she is the applicant.

6. Co-option of new councillor

The Chair invited Shelia Horton, who had sent her Parish Councillor application to the PC prior to the meeting, to introduce herself to the PC and speak a little about why she wanted to join.

Sheila explained she was retired and has recently moved back into the village. She shared some of her relevant experiences which would aid her as a Parish Councillor which included

working for a charity and previously being on the Withersfield Village Hall Committee. Sheila feels strongly about community and is keen to help where she can.

It was proposed by the Chair to co-opt Shelia onto the Parish Council to which all the Councillors voted in favour.

7. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 19th January 2021

Approved – proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by Cllr Lord.

8. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meeting

a) Withersfield broadband

This was covered at item 4 where Phil Royal of OpenReach explained the plans for Withersfield broadband.

b) Support grant which caused the amended precept form

Noted.

c) 'Arboretum traffic email' update from Cllr Wijenayaka

It was suggested that the issues mentioned in this parishioner's email could be looked into by the Traffic Working Group. The Chair asked Cllr Eve to take forward the items mentioned in the emails to be raised at the next TWG meeting. Cllr Eve will action this along with liaising further with the parishioner.

9. Land adjacent to Barsey Close - update from Cllr Stevens and West Suffolk District Council

Cllr Stevens covered this during his report at item 2. Cllr Stevens assured he would instruct officers to write to the residents at Barsey Close clarifying that the SCC will continue to maintain the land to a reasonable condition until ownership is discovered.

10. Covid-19 - update and any future actions

The Cllrs discussed whether there was anything more the PC could be doing to support the community. The parish support leaflet would be shared within the parish magazine again along with information regarding assistance for transport to vaccination centres.

11. Update from the Traffic Working Group:

a) Buffer zones

It was confirmed by Cllr Eve that Highways have gone into a consultation for the buffer zones, advertising that they are being put in. Subject to no objections being received between 7th-21st March, the implementation will go ahead.

b) 20mph zone

Cllr Eve reported on some further issues in relation to moving forward with the 20mph zone. He had approached Cllr Evans for her assistance and this had led to a meeting taking place involving SCC Highways (see 11e below).

c) Double yellow lines extension by Melbourne Bridge

Cllr Eve has drafted a consultation document which was shared with all the Cllrs for perusal prior to the PC meeting. The consultation period was suggested by Cllr Eve of up to the 22nd April for residents to respond. If Cllrs are happy with the draft, Cllr Eve will deliver the consultation leaflet to all houses along the effected road - from Melbourne Bridge to the Withersfield Road roundabout.

All Cllrs were in agreement with the consultation and for Cllr Eve to action this.

The funding for implementation is still outstanding

d) Quiet Lanes

Cllr Eve told the PC how this is an aspirational project funded by SCC to highlight roads that are used by cyclists and walkers, to make traffic aware that they are sharing the space. The roads have to be single lane with no markings, and have less than 1000 traffic movements per day. The only road which fits the criteria in the parish is Withersfield Road extending into Great Wratting. Cllr Eve is working on the project in conjunction with Great Wratting, with Great Wratting PC taking the lead.

We are now in the preparatory stage, which is to be completed by 31st April. A consultation document was drafted by Cllr Eve, outlining the plan and informing residents of the process. They have been delivered to the residents on Withersfield Road with the consultation ending on 7th April. A copy of the consultation will also go in the Withersfield News. If anyone objects or requests to have an open meeting about the project - this will have to have be held before the 31st April.

Following the preparatory stage, we will move into the completion stage where Suffolk Highways give the go ahead and provide the final estimate of costs (if any, as being in wave 2 should mean SCC will fully fund the project). The PC would then sign off at the May meeting, and Suffolk Highways then issue Notice to Designate and start their own consultation process.

It was agreed by all Cllrs to support the nomination of Withersfield Road as a Quiet Lane in principle, provided a successful outcome of the consultation.

e) A1307 improvements

It was brought to the attention of the PC by Cllr Eve that the A1307 is going to be changed quite dramatically over the next few months. Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership are working on plans which include average speed cameras between

Haverhill and Linton, a new major roundabout at Bartlow together with traffic light crossings for cyclists, a new cycle lane from Linton to Abington, and another traffic light junction at Abington.

This will slow traffic from Haverhill to Cambridge however there has been no research into how these changes may cause traffic to 'rat-run' around the A1307.

With this, Cllr Eve pressed County Cllr Evans about the 20mph zone in Withersfield. Cllr Evans and District Cllr Stevens decided it would be sensible to organise a meeting with local villages to form a 'village working group' to together form a strategic plan to find a way of keeping traffic on the A1307. At the meeting, Cllr Eve presented the parishes plans around the buffer zones and the 20mph zone at the meeting. It was revealed there may be some Section 106 money for Withersfield from the North Haverhill housing development, which will be looked into by SCC. It was agreed that we should look for funding to complete the project and a number of avenues for funding were shared.

12. New arrangements for the use of the VAS

Cllr Korona has taken on the role of being in charge of the arrangements of the VAS in Withersfield. She is on top of re-locating and re-charging and is planning to move the location of it this week. The Chair expressed his thanks to Cllr Korona for adopting this and urged her to call upon the other Parish Councillors if she needed any help at all. It was agreed that it is worth continuing to have the VAS set up as a visual reminder to motorists.

13. Milton House revised planning application

The Chair introduced the item by explaining that firstly Lee Frere of J.A.P Architects representing the applicant, would have 5 minutes to address the PC to outline changes that have been made to the application considering the concerns which have previously been raised. Then a representative of the objectors would have 5 minutes to address the PC on why they feel the application is still not acceptable. After this, the Cllrs would have their discussion and decide whether or not to raise an objection to the application.

The Chair invited Lee Frere to speak.

Lee Frere explained that after the previous refusal they decided instead of appealing, to look again at the scheme and focus on addressing the local authorities' reasons for refusal which comprised of the following:

Drainage and flooding –specialist engineers were appointed and the existing drainage situation has been fully assessed. The problems have been identified and is largely due to a poorly maintained inspection chamber and culvert. The new proposal includes a fully worked through and detailed drainage design which incorporates a new culvert and a series of new inspection chambers. The engineers' conclusion on this is there will be no risk of additional flooding from the new development and the design will also mitigate the problem which exists now.

Impact on the conservation area – the arboriculturist has confirmed that the two trees at the front are both Category U trees and are diseased and have a projected very short life span. The scheme now includes a replacement specimen tree on the front with new hedging and ground cover.

Lee went on to explain that they accept that Withersfield is characterised by linear development however another key local characteristic is the intermittent clusters of buildings that are set back from the highway. The proposed courtyard comprises four modest dwellings with the fifth effectively replacing Milton House (which will sit as part of the linear street scene).

Having previously reduced the proposal from 6 dwellings to a scheme of 4 courtyard dwellings and 1 in the street scene, their view remains that very highly quality smaller visually integrated more affordable dwellings is a sustainable enhancing and financially accessible solution. They have adopted a 1.5 storey scale across the whole scheme.

Biodiversity and impact on trees – ecologists have been reengaged on this and it is still their opinion that there will be a net gain in biodiversity. Features have now been more than doubled, including bat boxes, bird boxes, hedgehog habitats, and so on.

Impact on neighbouring dwellings – even though the previous proposal was within design guidance in terms of separation, this was revisited and plots 1 and 5 have been moved away from their respective neighbours.

Parking – a flier has been distributed recently showing on the scheme 23 cars. This is way above parking standards and breaches copyright. Highways parking standards have been met and exceeded.

Across the scheme, numerous tweaks we have made to the design. Lee offered to answer any questions.

The Chair invited the parishioner representing the objectors to speak.

The parishioner had looked back over the objections and noticed that in almost every case, the word 'over-development' had been used as a reason for objection.

The parishioner admitted that the number of cars shown on the flier was a worst case scenario, but felt the image the applicant had shown with 5 houses and 3 cars, was unrealistic. As Withersfield has no facilities, there is a much higher average of ownership and use of cars in the village.

He stressed that other clusters of houses in the village are nearly all converted agricultural buildings. This proposal is a completely different situation where a garden is being turned into a courtyard development.

On the matter of removal of trees – the parishioner stated that it is now believed that some of these trees do actually recover if they are left to attempt this and that habitat cannot be replaced by boxes and artificial items; habitat is a natural environment.

The Chair invited Councillors to make their contributions on whether the PC should support the application or object.

Cllr Wijenayaka voted to object in particular on grounds of biodiversity.

Cllr Eve stated it is still an over-development causing him to feel concerned over the traffic and car parking implications.

Cllr Kinloch expressed his view that the new montage by the applicant appeared attractive, however he believes the reality is one of over-development and is not sustainable.

Cllr Lord acknowledged the work on modifications and improvements to the original proposal carried out including finding solutions to the flood risks. Despite this, he feels the density of the site is more typical of a semi-urbanised area rather than a rural setting and considers it an over-development.

Cllr Horton agreed with the other Cllrs to it being an over-development and it would also set a dangerous precedent for Withersfield.

Cllr Korona reiterated the same concerns which included the lack of parking spaces potentially leading to vehicles parked illegally, and it being a gross development in an area which does not wish to be urbanised.

The Chair shared his views being that he was pleased to have had the opportunity to speak to the developer after the following previous application was declined, where he assured the applicant that the PC aren't opposed to development. The Chair gave credit to the applicant for the effort which has been made to the design to address some of the concerns. However, fundamental issues with it being an over-develop still remain.

The Chair laid out the three options the PC needed to choose between being:

1. Support the application
2. Make no comment
3. Object on the grounds that the amendments made do not address the objections that the Council has previously set out – specifically regarding over-development of the site, the design and the impact or the development on traffic movements, parking and on the environment.

It was proposed by Cllr Kinloch that the PC go with option 3 to object. This was seconded by Cllr Korona and all Cllrs voted in favour of this.

The Chair thanked all participants for attending.

Cllr Stevens confirmed he had carefully noted the objections raised.

14. Neighbourhood Plan - appointment of consultant

The Chair and Cllr Kinloch met with an organisation who could work on creating a Neighbourhood Plan. It was explained that the cost for their services would be covered by the grant which they apply for on behalf of the PC. Opinions of this organisation, who had only limited experience, were discussed and it was agreed that the Chair and Cllr Kinloch would bring more options of organisations for a decision to be made at the next meeting.

15. Cricket ground pedestrian access - appointment of contractor

The chair had approached Thurlow Estate about providing pedestrian access to the cricket ground. They had declined as they wished to deter "trespass" on farm tracks. However, they pointed out that there is an overgrown access on the Withersfield Road which could be reinstated. This was originally a wide vehicle access but it is intended to reopen as a pedestrian access. Quotes had been sought after and shared among the PC for this work and it was proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by Cllr Horton to accept the lower quote and to appoint 'Starling's Handyman Services' for the job.

16. Village Hall Management and assigning Cllr to responsibility

It was suggested that Cllr Horton would be the sensible choice for this role having had previous experience of being on the Village Hall Committee. Cllr Horton agreed to take on the responsibility.

The Clerk informed the PC she had contacted the Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee regarding the fast-approaching expiry date on the planning permission for the extension to the village hall store. Unfortunately, she had received no response on the matter.

17. Cllr Kinloch to report on the recent Haverhill Area Forum

Cllr Kinloch gave feedback to the PC about the meeting where he had reiterated comments made by Cllr Stevens about Withersfield. Cllr Kinloch agreed to circulate the minutes from the forum to the rest of the PC.

18. Hedge cutting - advice to landowners and residents

It was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Eve for Cllr Wijenayaka to write a piece on this to be published in the next parish magazine.

19. Village Greens maintenance contract - annual review of performance

The PC reviewed the work commenced in 2020 and confirmed satisfactory performance and so it was agreed to continue into the second year of the three-year contract with the maintenance company.

20. Village Spring Clean – latest advice

At the previous PC meeting a date was provisionally set for this. The PC looked at the current advice from Keep Britain Tidy which states that litter picking activities should be carried out alone, with members of your household/support bubble, or with one other person from a different household. With this, it was decided that instead of holding a village spring clean event, to encourage individuals to tidy outside of their areas over the 'spring clean weekend' on 27th March. This was proposed by Cllr Eve and seconded by Cllr Korona.

21. Next meeting date – impact of legislation allowing virtual meetings

The legislation brought in last April which enabled the holding of virtual meetings ends on 7th May. While NALC, the LGA and other bodies continue to press for the legislation to be extended, there are currently no plans to extend the regulations. The Clerk suggested in order to hold the annual and parish meetings in May virtually, they could be moved earlier before the legislation ends.

It was agreed that the May meetings would be moved forward a week to the 4th May unless the legislation is extended and therefore allowing a virtual meeting to be held on the originally scheduled date of 11th May.

22. Finance

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

These were approved and noted. Proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by Cllr Eve.

- c) To consider appointing SALC to carry out the annual internal audit

It was agreed to appoint SALC for the PC's internal audit. Proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by Cllr Eve.

23. Correspondence

- a) Email – Skippers Lane Repairs

It was noted that this had been dealt with by Cllr Eve.

- b) Email – Jacob's Manor

Noted.

- c) Email – Advertisement Sign

It was noted that the Clerk had actioned the enquiry for this and was awaiting a resolve.

d) Email – West Town Park Footpath

It was agreed that the Clerk would refer the communication received to the Environment Agency for clarification on the matter.

e) Email – Haverhill Research Park

The PC agreed the action to be taken here is for the Clerk to request District Cllr Stevens to give a view on the issues raised.

24. Planning

a) Borough notifications since last meeting.

These were noted.

b) Applications received since last meeting.

All were noted.

As previously discussed at item 13, the PC object to planning DC/21/0367/FUL and agreed to submit the following comments:

“Withersfield Parish Council objects to this application as it considers that it represents an over-development of the site, in the context of the surrounding environment and its location in a rural village.

Whilst planning policy CS4 allows for developments of "up to 5 houses" in an infill village, the policy does not advocate that all developments should be of 5 homes. This development is not a "small scale in-fill development" it is one that maximises the possible built footprint and hard surfacing on a previous single dwelling and garden site. The Parish Council does not consider that this complies with the spirit or intention of this policy.

In addition, the design of the development, whilst having some attractive features, is more suited to a location which is already semi-urban. Imposed on this particularly rural part of our village, it is out of keeping with the character of the area.

The density of homes and bed spaces on this site will, we fear, result in significant additional car and vehicle movements both within the courtyard area, around the entrance, and inevitably spilling out onto the road, where there is a blind bend with a history of collisions. Withersfield has no local facilities (shops, schools, GP surgery, nursery, playground, public transport) which results in a high car ownership level and car journeys being required for the majority of purposes - school runs, shopping, work, social contacts. 5 homes on a single site may well result in 15 cars belonging to residents, added to which will be visitors, and the growing fleet of on-line shopping delivery vehicles. We do not feel that the full implications of this has been taken into account by the developer, nor by officers who are recommending approval.

Whilst we acknowledge that the developer has sought to address environmental factors in their new application, the Parish Council believes that there will be a significant loss to the environment by the loss of green space and trees on this site. There will be a significant area of hard standing and roadway as well as the footprint of the houses. Each home will have only a small private garden with limited opportunity for planted and wild areas. We cannot agree that this development has a positive impact on the environment and biodiversity.

In summary, despite some modifications, this development remains essentially the same as the one rejected by this committee. We believe that it is essential that a clear message is sent to the developer that cramming as many homes as possible onto this site is unacceptable and is disrespectful of the spirit of the planning policies, of the local community who must live in its shadow and on the quality of our rural environment.”

25. Agenda items for meeting to be held in May 2021

None raised.

The meeting closed at 21:49