

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at
7:30pm on Tuesday, 18th January 2022 at the village hall, Withersfield.**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Ian Kinloch (Vice-Chair);
Frank Eve, Sheila Horton, Julia Korona, Indunil Wijenayaka;
Clerk: Laura Crump; District Cllr: Peter Stevens.

COVID-19 precautions

All attendees confirmed that they had completed a Lateral Flow Test prior to attending the meeting and that their test had been negative.

1. Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Lord.

2. District Councillor's report

Cllr Stevens told the PC that there have been no communications yet about an appeal towards the proposed development at Milton House, however he has forwarded further objections he has recently received to the officer to bolster an objection.

It was explained by Cllr Stevens that West Suffolk Council are inviting applications from hospitality, leisure and accommodation businesses for the new Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant. He hopes that The White Horse applies to what they are entitled to. Cllr Horton added that she is in the process of applying for this grant for the village hall.

After the last meeting where representatives of Taylor Wimpey had attended to discuss their proposed development plans at the Arboretum, Cllr Stevens was able to get confirmation from Highways that £22,000 is to be set aside for improvements for the County Council Highways. It was noted that the PC should be consulted about how the money is used.

Cllr Stevens reported that the Council is looking into how to adopt new collections for their recycling and waste strategy. This could include a weekly food collection and curb side glass collection. They are currently looking at the challenges and how it can come into force in 2024.

3. County Councillor's report

Cllr Bennett did not attend the meeting but circulated her report to the PC; a copy of which can be found on the PC website.

4. Public Forum for parishioners

There were no parishioners.

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 16th November 2021

These were approved. Proposed by Cllr Wijenayaka and seconded by Cllr Horton.

7. Chair's Report

The first item the Chair brought up, was the absences of Cllr Lord to PC meetings. In normal circumstances when a Councillor does not attend meetings for six consecutive months, they cease their position on the PC. This period has now expired for Cllr Lord, therefore, it was discussed and agreed that due to being in exceptional circumstances with anxieties caused from Covid, to the extension of the six-month attendance period. Prior to the PC meeting, measures were put in place in order to keep everyone as safe as possible and to give some assurances. All attendees were asked to carry out a Lateral Flow Test, to wear face coverings, and to seat spaced apart. With keeping these measures in place, it was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Kinloch, to extend Cllr Lord's non-attendance period to the next PC meeting in March. However, if Cllr Lord fails to attend the March meeting, he will cease to be a Councillor.

The Chair then explained how he had read the information received on the Community Governance Review (item 17c) and believed that the PC may be able to ask for an increase of the number of councillors on the PC. According to the information, the rules state parishes with under 2500 residents, can have 6-10 Councillors. It was discussed and the PC felt having an extra Cllr on the PC could be beneficial. This will be agreed at item 17c.

Finally, the Chair explained to the PC that the Clerk had requested for a review of her salary. It was proposed by Cllr Horton and seconded by Cllr Eve for the Clerk to contact SALC for information for comparable parishes. The Chair and Vice-Chair would then discuss options and bring their suggested proposal to the next PC meeting.

8. Matters arising - updates from previous Parish Council meetings

a) Land adjacent to Barsey Close

There has been no progress - the PC still had received no correspondence from the officer who originally wanted to discuss the maintenance of the land over 8 months ago. At the previous PC meeting, the Chair requested that Cllr Stevens ask the officer to outline what the Council's maintenance cost to the PC would be for the upkeep of the area. Cllr Stevens assured he would chase the officer about this again.

b) Permissive footpaths – Cllr Wijenayaka

It was reported by Cllr Wijenayaka that the PC's request of permissive footpaths to the Thurlow Estate, had been rejected. Cllr Wijenayaka asked for the Cllrs opinions on whether to alter the request and attempt again to get it approved.

It was agreed for the request to the Estate to be changed to a lesser number of footpaths and for Cllr Wijenayaka to pursue this. Cllr Horton offered her support.

Cllr Wijenayaka also announced he would contact West Suffolk to ask if it would be possible for them to increase the number of footpaths across the area in order to improve parishioners' health and wellbeing.

Cllr Stevens agreed to speak to the Estate about the permissive footpaths also to try and come to a compromise and make progress.

c) Graveyard tree removal - approval of estimate

The Chair had acquired a quote for the removal of the tree which has grown too large at the graveyard. The PC agreed to accept the quote and request that the tree surgeon also remove the stump without disturbing any graves. If this is not possible, the request is to treat the stump to deter regrowth. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Eve.

9. Update from the Traffic Working Group

Cllr Eve gave the following updates on the ongoing traffic calming measures the TWG have been working on:

- Review of lorry routes – this was submitted in December '21 and was endorsed by Cllr Bennett.
- Quiet Lanes – the signed placements were agreed 18/10/21, but there have been no communications since.
- ANPR – this was agreed 20/05/21 and chased up in July/August '21 by Cllr Eve, but is not yet operational.
- Yellow lines extension in Queens Street – there was a Highways meeting to find out the cost on 9/11/21 but there has been no information shared since.
- 40mph buffer zones — due to a shortage of signs, this is slowly being completed.
- 20mph zone – Cllr Eve is working to get this moved up the priority list and would like a meeting with Highways and Cllr Bennett to discuss further. Cllr Eve also wants to talk to the parishes traffic group to make this a part of their initiative to reduce the rat run traffic from Haverhill to Cambridge.

Cllr Stevens gave an example of a village who had implemented a 20mph zone, suggesting the PC could contact them for advice.

It was agreed that a meeting needed to be arranged between Cllr Eve, Cllr Bennett and Highways to decide what traffic calming measures are appropriate and required to move forward with the implementation of the approved 20mph zone. The cost of this also needs to be determined.

The Chair agreed to email Cllr Bennett explaining that the PC are concerned that no progress has been made with the 20mph zone, reminding her that it has been approved, and to press for a meeting with her and Highways about this.

10. Update from the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group

Cllr Kinloch explained to the PC that the consultant, Oneill Homer, had contacted West Suffolk to ask for their comments on the proposal to create a Conservation Area Appraisal which would help form design policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. West Suffolk believe that a full conservation area appraisal is not necessary for the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

As producing a conservation area appraisal had not originally been on the project plan from Oneill Homer, a new plan has been made. Due to this change, a project change request had been sent through to Groundwork at Neighbourhood Planning, who approved the budget variation. Cllr Kinloch also told the PC that more funding would be required which would need to be applied for in the next financial year.

The Chair requested for further clarifications on why a conservation area appraisal shouldn't be progressed as this was something Oneill Homer had recommended to the PC. The PC were under the impression that having a conservation area appraisal would help in planning matters for what would be acceptable in the parish.

The PC agreed to submit further applications for funding and for Cllr Kinloch will continue to consult with Oneill Homer.

Cllr Stevens said he would seek some explanations about West Suffolk's reluctance to adopt a conservation area appraisal and will advise the PC of any findings.

The Chair thanked Cllr Kinloch for his ongoing work on the Neighbourhood Plan.

11. Update from the Village Hall Committee – Cllr Horton

Cllr Horton shared the plans for the extension which were perused and discussed among the PC. It was agreed that the new plans were; more sympathetic to the current line of the building, more suitable for neighbouring residents, and the tree would no longer need to be removed, as with the previously approved plans.

Cllr Horton said that quotes for redecorating were being sought and this was hoping to be carried out around March time. The kitchen will be being refurbished with the inclusion of an oven and a new floor will come after the extension works. The VHMC meeting was the following evening where details of these would be discussed and confirmed.

It was agreed by the PC to approve the plans for the village hall extension. The PC would like to receive from the VHMC, their overall programme for improvements and modernising facilities plan including the costs and proposed payments for these using what reserves and grants. Cllr Horton would share this with the VHMC. Planning permission for the extension will now be sought.

12. Graveyard control – Cllr Kinloch

Cllr Kinloch told the PC that some more research into this was required including acquiring some similar information on other parishes' graveyards in order to aid writing up suitable rules. The Clerk will also attempt to look through old paperwork to find any previous rules set for the graveyard.

At the previous PC meeting, Cllr Kinloch had informed the PC about the DEFRA consultation on Amendments to Burial Regulations which lead to him making enquiries to establish the water level in relation to the parish graveyard and whether this was going to be conducive to a problem. As a result of carrying out these correspondences, Cllr Kinloch told the PC that the water level will not cause issues to the parish graveyard and proposes no further action.

13. QR codes for footpaths – Cllr Wijenayaka

Cllr Wijenayaka explained that he will be affixing QR codes to wooden posts at the beginnings of footpaths in the parish. These have been supplied by SCC as a part of their Discovering Suffolk initiative. Cllrs offered to help Cllr Wijenayaka and he will organise this.

14. Village Greens maintenance contract - annual review of performance

The PC reviewed the work commenced in 2021 and confirmed satisfactory performance. It was agreed to continue into the third year of the three-year contract with the maintenance company. The Chair asked the PC to think about whether there would be any changes requested for the greens' maintenance contract starting in 2023 as the PC will tender for environmental works in the autumn.

15. To consider a date for the 2022 Annual Spring Clean

It was agreed for this to take place on 2nd April 10am-12pm meeting at the war memorial. The Clerk will organise the equipment and rubbish collection. Cllr Wijenayaka will write a piece advertising the event in the parish magazine.

16. 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 accepted and noted – proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka.

- d) To note the precept form has been submitted

Noted. The precept for 2022/2023 being £9440 with a 0% council tax increase/decrease.

17. Correspondence

a) Email – SARS

It was proposed by Cllr Korona for the PC to donate £100 to the charity which was seconded by Cllr Wijenayaka. It was noted that this will be an S137 payment of £100.

b) Letter – BSEVC Community at Heart

Noted.

c) Email - Community Governance Review

As discussed earlier at item 7, it was agreed to put a request in for an increase of one councillor on the PC so there would be 8 Cllrs from the next election.

18. Planning

a) Milton House Planning Application Appeal

The West Suffolk Planning Department are yet to receive any communications from the Planning Inspectorate for an appeal, however, the PC discussed and agreed to submit an objection under the same grounds as previously to the application, when the consultation has been received. It was agreed that if Cllrs think of any comments to add to the objection, to share these ideas with the rest of the PC. These can then be inserted into the PC objection when it is to be submitted.

b) Borough notifications since last meeting

c) Applications received since last meeting

These were discussed and noted.

19. Agenda items for meeting to be held 15th March 2022

- Website.

The meeting closed at 21:04.