

**Minutes of Withersfield Parish Council meeting held at 7:30pm on
Tuesday, 12th May 2020 held via Skype**

Present: Cllrs Terry Rich (Chairman); Ian Kinloch (Vice-Chair); Frank Eve, Jill Johnson, Peter Lord, Sam Molyneux-Summers; Clerk: Laura Crump; District Cllr: Peter Stevens; County Cllr: Mary Evans.

The meeting was also attended by 10 parishioners

1. Election of Chairman and Vice Chair

It was proposed by Cllr Lord and seconded by Cllr Kinloch that Cllr Rich should continue and be confirmed as the Chairman. This was agreed.

It was proposed by Cllr Lord and seconded by Cllr Molyneux-Summers for Cllr Kinloch to continue and be confirmed as the Vice-Chairman. This was agreed.

2. Apologies for absence

None received

3. District Councillor's report

Cllr Stevens began by explaining that as there has been a new civil parking enforcement brought in, members of the public are able to contact the department and highlight where there are any parking problems so that officers can visit the area and either issue tickets or give warning to the offenders. This was mentioned due to the parking problems at Melbourne bridge listed on the agenda.

Markets have been closed for some time now and so the Council are looking across the borough and discussing the possibility to restart markets - mainly for food outlets - with safe distancing measures involved to regenerate visits into the market towns.

To coincide with this, car parks – which currently are not charging – will be reviewed alongside how the markets are picking up after the restrictions, and when to bring the charges back in will be addressed later in the month.

Cllr Stevens urged those applicable in Withersfield to contact the West Suffolk Covid-19 grant section as he is aware some of the small businesses have not taken up the grant on offer.

The Chair asked Cllr Stevens to confirm his position on the planning department to which Cllr Stevens agreed that he is on development control. In reference to the planning application at Milton House, which is a main topic for discussion at this meeting, Cllr Stevens assured he had seen and noted written objections towards to the application. It was explained that if a resident would like to speak as an objector to the planning committee, they should firstly apply to the Council. The resident would be given 3 minutes in front of the committee to put their objections across. A representative of the Parish Council can also have 3 minutes to put further objections forward to the committee at the appropriate time.

4. County Councillor's report

Cllr Evans shared her written report with the PC:

The total scale of financial implications of the Covid-19 crisis for Suffolk County Council is in the region of £75m with £32.5m made up of “response” costs and £43m attributed to “recovery” at this stage.

A new Suffolk-focused community service was set up on 24 March to support people who need help during the Covid-19 pandemic. Called ‘Home, But Not Alone’, the service has been launched to help connect people who want to volunteer in their communities with neighbours who are most in need. A “postcard” has been sent to every home in Suffolk.

- If you are home alone and need shopping or medication and urgently need help, call 0800 876 6926
- If you are the victim of domestic abuse and need help but speaking puts you in danger, call 999 and press 55 The police will know it’s an emergency.
- If you are worried a child or adult is suffering abuse call 0808 800 4005

Food banks across Suffolk were given initial funding of £60,000 by the county council to keep their supplies well stocked. We have since under written the 42 foodbanks to the tune of a further £250,00.

Testing stations have been set up in Ipswich and at Stansted airport. We now also have mobile units, run by the military around the county. The SCC C19 testing web page <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/testing> gives the latest position with testing.

We are very grateful to Suffolk businesses who responded to our appeal for PPE with donations of stock they are not using during lockdown. If businesses have any unused: Fluid repellent face masks, Nitrile non powdered disposable gloves, Disposable aprons, Disposable eye protection/splash goggles and Sanitiser gel, please email PPE@Suffolk.gov.uk. Equally, if people need PPE to work safely, they can contact us via that email address.

Coronavirus cases within care homes has become a serious concern. The county council is working with all care home managers to support them with allocations of PPE etc regardless of whether we have a contract with the home or SCC funded residents in the home.

To date, none of the staff or children in the SCC own children’s homes have symptoms of Covid-19.

The provisional figures released on 11 May for West Suffolk Hospital show that to date 187 patients testing positive for Covid-19 that had been admitted for treatment, 79 patients recovered well enough to be discharged home. Very sadly 52 patients have died at the hospital.

Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership has set up a new website to promote the protection of vulnerable children and adults.

Suffolk County Council announced yesterday that we are reopening the household waste recycling centres on Thursday 14 May for pre-booked visits only. To make a booking, please visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/recyclingcentres or call 0345 606 6067.

The council are now working on recovery plans looking at how we can support communities and commerce to re-build.

The Local Government Boundary Commission proposals for Suffolk County Council has been put on hold and the existing divisions will be retained for the 2021 election.

5. Public Forum for parishioners

The Chair explained that the agenda had been set out so the 'Planning' section was up next and therefore, parishioners could voice their opinion at the appropriate time in the meeting. The main topic for discussion being the planning application at Milton House, and reason for many parishioners' attendance.

6. Planning

a) Borough notifications since last meeting:

All noted

b) Applications received since last meeting:

All noted

The Chairman invited Lee Frere, architect of planning application DC/20/0623/FUL: 6 dwellings (following demolition of existing dwelling) at Milton House, to explain any changes to the application made since their presentation to the Parish Council and parishioners at the PC meeting in January.

Lee Frere detailed:

At the stage when they presented to the Parish Council in January, it was at a fairly advanced stage of the design in the sense that a detailed appraisal of the conservation area in the village had been carried out. They had had meetings with planning officers and explored the various schemes, densities and generic ideas, for how the site might be developed. Constraints were established and at this point they approached Withersfield Parish Council to arrange sharing their initial plans, with relatively detailed but still sketch proposals, to the parish. The issues that came out of the meeting in January were numerous - ranging from conservation area, trees, landscaping, and the proposed number of dwellings and the relationship of those dwellings to the immediate neighbours.

Following the meeting, they have since designed the buildings and have endeavoured to address the relevant issues. Upon reading the objections, there is a repeated theme of 3 or 4 key issues.

A new tree report is being submitted tomorrow as there was an issue where the topographical surveyor had carried out a laser survey of the site and wrongly picked up a cluster of trees.

The design is bespoke and care has been taken to ensure the dwellings will not be overlooking or impact unacceptably to other dwellings in the area. Sustainability issues on the proposal have been improved from providing charging points to bat boxes.

The Highways issues has been discussed at some length and the standards required of the Highways Agency, have been met. The access proposed is significantly safer than the existing access. It is on a bend, however, visibility upon leaving the site is very good. Liaisons with Highways have been carried out and plans were not submitted until having fulfilled detailed consultations.

A crucial concern raised is the drainage problems. Historically there was a watercourse that came from the site through to neighbouring properties and over the years, it has been culverted to facilitate the construction of those dwellings. The problem already exists and the development will not be adding to the situation. Drainage engineers are investigating the problem using camera footage and working on a positive scheme of remediation for a report be ready in the next few days.

From the detailed 14-page analysis of the conservation area, which was based on local knowledge, experience and knowledge of conservation areas and historical development, a site responsive development has been designed – the houses have been designed for this one development only. It is acknowledged there are many concerns and they are happy to answer any questions and concerns.

The Chairman asked parishioners to indicate if they would like to contribute.

Cllr Stevens stated he will take forward the PC's deliberations and decision to either the delegation panel or development control, while also taking into account the Highways and Environment Agencies judgements.

A number of parishioner's spoke in turn outlining their main concerns and objections for the planning application. The main points and issues raised were:

- Density of dwellings
- Out of character of the village
- Detracts from the conservation area
- Proposed dwellings are too close to the boundary of neighbouring properties
- Development is on a dangerous bend - not enough car parking for the dwellings leading to vehicles inevitably parking on this road causing further hazards
- The proposal for one dwelling on the land adjacent to Lilley Barn, was refused mainly due to conservation issues and the fact that Withersfield is a linear village and there are listed buildings close by – which is also relevant for this application.

One parishioner expressed his perception that the virtual meeting could not be classed as a public meeting and felt the application should be delayed to a time when a proper public meeting could occur for a consultation and review of the application.

Parishioners urged the PC to take their written views into consideration which had been sent to the PC prior to the meeting.

The Chair asked the Councillors in turn to make their thoughts clear and deliberate what the PC's decision and comments should be towards the planning application.

Cllr Kinloch agreed with the points made by the residents and particularly highlighted the president set by the refusal of the development proposed on the land adjacent to Lilley Barn.

Cllr Eve was also in agreement with the points raised by the parishioners and listed the main points discussed for the PC to use as justifications on their comments on the application.

Cllr Huckstep felt the planning policy should be challenged as the number of parking provisions on the application is in accordance with the policy. The general consensus is there are not enough parking spaces provided which causes great concerns and this should be raised further up.

Cllr Johnson stated that the PC needed to deliberate to find the right balance between appealing to new young families to move into the village to sustain it into the future and retaining the conservation area and beauty of the village.

Cllr Molyneux-Summers was of the view that the village could benefit from 2- or 3-bedroom houses which could be affordable for younger families. He believes a compromise could be found so there could be more relevant housing of what is needed in the area and also to allow for more parking.

The Chair put forward the following draft for what the PC's comments should be towards the application:

Whilst the Parish Council would welcome an appropriate redevelopment of this site, the current proposal cannot be supported as:

- 1) It does not conform with published planning policies which state that for an infill village (as Withersfield is designated) developments of new housing should be of a maximum of 5 properties – the proposed development is for 6 homes. Any suggestion that as there was already a house on the site, one house is merely a replacement for the demolished house and therefore there only 5 additional houses should be rejected as a distortion of the fact that the development proposes six new houses on a single plot.
- 2) The development is situated in a conservation area, yet the development does not respect the style and predominate layout of the village. The style of the development with a condominium style construction (where one house overlaps the other) is not

seen elsewhere in the village nor is it consistent with the conservation area status and would set a dangerous precedent.

- 3) The development's design is a back-fill which does not respect the linear nature of the village nor of the street-scape at this part of the village.
- 4) Houses 1 and 6 are located in positions which are too close to existing homes and will have an adverse impact on their privacy.
- 5) The proposal would represent an over-development of the site with each home having only a small plot much of which is taken up with parking spaces. This is out of keeping with the style of development within the village where houses are generally located on a more generous plot. Even where small clusters of homes have been developed – e.g. Homestall Crescent, these have been developed with a much smaller house to acre ratio.
- 6) A development of 2 or 3 properties would be more appropriate to the size and layout of the site and be more likely to be able to comply with Withersfield's Conservation Area status.
- 7) The total number of bed-spaces is such that this development will have a disproportionate impact on the density of this part of the village which as is noted in the Local Plan has limited local facilities.
- 8) Whilst 13 parking spaces meets the policy requirements of 2 per household, it can be expected that within a short space of time there will be far in excess of 13 cars associated with residents, not to mention visitors to the development. This is all the more inevitable because as an infill village there are no local facilities and shops etc are only accessible by private transport.
- 9) There is likely to be an increase in parking on the street outside of the development with the associated inconvenience of existing homeowners and residents and risk of further traffic accidents.
- 10) The access/egress from the close-style development is on a dangerous bend in the road. There have been a number of accidents at this point in recent years – the most recent being earlier this year. 13 car spaces indicate that there is likely to be considerable traffic movements in and out of the development
- 11) Mature trees are proposed to be removed – there is no evidence that these trees are diseased beyond salvage – a Tree Surgeons report should be required
- 12) The development is located in a place where there is a history of localised flooding and inadequate drainage for rain and run-off waters from fields. 6 additional homes and the associated road and parking hard standings could exacerbate this problem significantly.
- 13) An approval of this application would be inconsistent with refusal determination (upheld on appeal) of the application at the rear of Lilley Barn. It is the Parish Council's view that the comments in that case sets a strong precedent against which this and future applications for back-fill developments should be judged."

All Councillors agreed to object to the planning application on these grounds. This was proposed by Cllr Kinloch and seconded by Cllr Johnson with no votes against.

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

None

8. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 21st January 2020

Approved – proposed by Cllr Eve, seconded by Cllr Lord.

9. Covid-19 and Parish Council actions

Due to the lockdown, the last PC meeting had to be cancelled. The Chair took action at this point to put together a leaflet containing phone numbers of those in Withersfield offering their help and support to anyone who may need it at this difficult time. The expenditure of the leaflets was approved - proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Lord.

The leaflets have proved effective and those within the parish who have needed support, have been grateful for the efficient response from the volunteers. This has also been linked to the West Suffolk 'Home, but not alone' scheme.

The Chair plans to update and renew this offer of support to parishioners by publishing information in the next parish magazine.

Cllr Molyneux-Summers believes the Arboretum parishioners have been using their Facebook group effectively in communicating any help and support needed and offered during the pandemic.

10. Matters arising - update from previous Parish Council meeting

a) 'Website Accessibility' email – update from Cllr Lord on his findings

Cllr Lord has made appropriate updates to the layout of the parish website, working on the feedback received from host of the site. These adaptations mean the website now meets the guidelines making it accessible for users with a disability.

Some images still need tagging with appropriate text which Cllr Lord is in the process of rectifying.

b) Car parking along Melbourne Bridge

There are still ongoing issues with dangerous parking at Melbourne Bridge, which Cllr Eve has been trying to make progress with by communications to David Chenery. David has disclosed that it was not his department who approved the double yellow lines on the bridge and has been attempting to find out who it was.

Cllr Huckstep announced the yellow lines need to be extended regardless who originally approved them. He proposed the PC contact Highways requesting for an urgent site review so the double yellow lines can be extended, this was seconded by Cllr Eve.

c) Progress with the Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman informed the PC that he has made a useful contact with a retired professor of planning, who has offered to give some free advice and guidance on putting

together the Neighbourhood Plan and has already shared some useful consultation material. The Chair proposed we don't progress further until we are out of lockdown but will prepare the draft document based on advice received in the meantime.

Cllr Stevens requested to be kept up to speed with the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan because as the Local Plan evolves, they can incorporate any desires the PC has for Withersfield, in the consultation period.

11. Allocation of councillor roles and responsibilities

The Councillors agreed to continue with their existing responsibilities, being;

Cllr Eve – Highways

Cllr Johnson – Village Hall

Cllr Kinloch – Graveyard, Planning

Cllr Lord – Data Protection, Website, Footpaths

Cllr Molyneux-Summers – Village Hall

Cllr Rich - Finance

Cllr Huckstep was not appointed a responsibility as has only recently joined the Parish Council.

12. To receive an update from the Traffic Working Group

An introduction to the Traffic Working Group was given by Cllr Eve, who explained that it was set up to provide a vision for traffic control through the village which they have been working on for the last 12 months.

Upon reading the 20mph speed limit zone report that Cllr Evans had sent through from the SCC Highways, Cllr Eve summarised that the police were reluctant to support such a scheme for the following reasons:

- The speed of cars (particularly up Turnpike Road)
- The width of the road
- The need for police enforcement

After liaisons with Cllr Evans and David Chenery to find a way to progress, Cllrs Eve and Evans have come up with an amendment which they suggest the Parish Council agrees as its response to Highways, to ask for the inclusion of the following paragraph:

“Withersfield Parish Council would like to include an alternative option if the current proposal is rejected in the light of the comments by the Police. This option would meet the needs of the Police and keep a 20mph Zone for the whole village as a long-term vision but pilot a 20mph Zone in the Church St section of the village. We recommend a pilot 20mph Zone in the Church St area for the following reasons:

1. This section of road is very restricted at one end by the bridge over Stour Brook and with the introduction of some traffic calming at the other end, would not need police enforcement
2. It is narrow and has a dangerous bend with a history of accidents
3. The Speed Survey shows mean speeds of only 1 or 2 mph above 24mph requirement and with Buffer Zones to be introduced this will bring mean speeds down inside the speed requirement.

4. There are limited pavements in this stretch of road which is frequently used by children, horse riding and cyclists. There are horse riding stables at each end of the road and a regular cycling club meets at the White Horse every week.

This pilot would be reviewed with another Traffic Survey after a suitable period to evaluate its effectiveness and to see if it could be extended to the whole village in due course.”

Cllr Evans ensured that she believes that this is a good and effective amendment. She also revealed that the CC are looking across the county into implementing community led ANPR.

Speed watch coordinator Chris Oakes, agreed that this is a good plan a positive way forward.

Cllr Eve added that after having spoken with David Chenery, the buffer zones have formally been agreed and the invoice is imminent for the PC.

The PC noted the reports from the TWG and Cllr Evans and agree to propose the alternative option as outlined – proposed by Cllr Eve, seconded by Cllr Kinloch.

It was agreed that the PC would pay the incoming invoice of £6100 for the implementation of the buffer zones and would seek the contributions of people who have pledged towards this at the same time – proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Molyneux-Summers. Once the invoice is received, a letter will go out to those who have who have promised to contribute asking for them to pay to the PC their pledge.

13. Village Hall Management Committee – Updates from Cllrs Johnson and Molyneux-Summers

Cllrs Johnson and Molyneux-Summers reported back from the VHMC annual meeting which they had attended at the beginning of march. Discussions were made over the plans to install new heaters in the village hall and the extension of the store cupboard; however, the focus of the meeting was predominantly on the arrangements for the quiz they were organising. Unfortunately, the quiz had to be cancelled in the end due to the Coronavirus pandemic. There haven't been any minutes come through as yet from the meeting.

The Chair posed the original question the PC had concerns over being; is there a viable management committee operating and can we be satisfied that this asset of the village is in safe hands? Cllr Johnson explained the VHMC accounts had been willingly shared with them, which upon perusing them, are being kept in a reasonable way; albeit there are no controls meaning this may be something to explore in the future. Cllrs Johnson and Molyneux-Summers advised the PC to give a further period of time as it would not be appropriate to take any under the current circumstances. They confirmed to still having some reservations around the VHMC but as things ease from lockdown and regular business can ensue, as the PCs' representatives on the Management Committee, they will progress to make further efforts to improve things.

14. To consider the following graveyard drafts put together by Cllrs Kinloch and Johnson and the Clerk

Cllr Johnson explained how herself, Cllr Kinloch and the Clerk had met up to discuss and put together the updated pricelist and arrangements for the graveyard. She briefed the PC on the changes including the new feature of the introduction of a reservation fee and that the rates had been raised to bring into line with other graveyards, which were used to compare and aid this decision process.

It was proposed by Cllr Johnson and seconded by Cllr Kinloch to accept the new rate of charges. Clerk is to implement these new rates.

15. Cllr Kinloch to report back from the February Haverhill Area Forum

Cllr Kinloch had shared the minutes received from the forum and gave a brief summary.

This report back was noted by the Council.

16. To discuss the sofa in the bus shelter on Burton Green – Cllr Kinloch

Cllr Kinloch put across the question of what should be done about this sofa. Should an effort be made to get it removed? Does a sign need to be erected to deter this sort of thing happening?

The Councillors discussed the matter and came to the conclusion that it is essentially fly-tipping. It was agreed that the PC would look into having the sofa removed - proposed by Cllr Kinloch, seconded by Cllr Lord.

17. To discuss the shipping containers being kept at a property – Cllr Kinloch

Cllr Kinloch explained that he had looked into the location of the particular containers, believing they are outside of the settlement area but inside of the conservation area which brings concern that there is a breach of conservation requirements.

It was agreed that as the PC's planning lead, Cllr Kinloch is to raise the matter with the enforcement team and to report back if he is unable to reach a resolve.

18. Reintroduction of Neighbourhood Watch – Cllr Kinloch

Cllr Kinloch informed the PC that he had been approached by a resident who would like the Neighbourhood Watch scheme to return.

The suggestion from the Chair to publish the website which provides information about setting up the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the parish magazine, was accepted by the PC.

19. To receive an update on issues with Meldham Flood Park – Cllr Huckstep

A summary was given by Cllr Huckstep to update the PC on ongoing issues with Meldham Flood Park. The Environment Agency has requested a meeting in the last exchange of correspondence with Cllr Huckstep. There are many issues to discuss with the Environment Agency one being the footpath which currently terminates in the middle of a roundabout and therefore, needs diverting. There are issues around the hedge which was wrongly cut down to ground level in 2018 which they have not since replanted.

It was suggested by the Chair that another Parish Councillor should accompany Cllr Huckstep when the meeting with the Environment Agency can occur. It was agreed this should be Cllr Johnson.

Cllr Molyneux-Summers informed the PC that he had recently gone through one of the entrances to Meldham Flood park and had caught his hand on barbed wire which was wrapped around a tree. Cllr Molyneux-Summers is to get a photo of the barbed wire to Cllr Huckstep so he can raise this with the Agency also.

To resolve; Cllrs Huckstep and Johnson are to pursue negotiations with the Environment Agency around the good management including the footpaths and access points around the Meldham Flood Park and keep the PC informed. Proposed by Cllr Kinloch, seconded Cllr Eve.

20. Fly-tipping in watercourses adjacent to the Water Treatment works access – Cllr Huckstep

Cllr Huckstep described the photos which he had shared with the PC of the fly-tipping. It is believed that the land is owed by the Thurlow Estate.

It was agreed that the PC would make contact with The Thurlow Estate to enquire and request they deal with the fly-tipping in this location - proposed by Cllr Huckstep, seconded Cllr Kinloch.

21. Parking provisions for the Village Hall – Cllr Huckstep

The problems with the parking at the village hall was discussed with the aid of the photos shared of the apparent issues. Cllr Huckstep thinks provisions for parking at the village hall is needed and suggested Grasscrete block paving as a simple and green solution.

This was discussed and agreed that the views from the VHMC and Thurlow Estate would be needed. It was proposed by Cllr Eve, seconded by Cllr Huckstep, that as the PC's leads for the village hall, Cllrs Johnson and Molyneux-Summers would raise this topic with the VHMC for their opinion on the matter.

22. 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 Eve and seconded by Cllr Molyneux-Summers

- c) To note internal audit will be conducted by SALC – Clerk is to email requested documentation over from 4/05/20

Agreed - proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Kinloch

- d) Confirmation that the Parish Council meets the criteria for exemption for 2019/20 and wishes to be an exempt authority

Agreed – Proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Molyneux-Summers

- e) Consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement

Approved - proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Kinloch

- f) Consider and approve the Accounting Statements

Approved - proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Kinloch

- g) Approval of the end of year accounts 2019/20 and Chairman’s Annual Accounts Report

The draft accounts presented were accepted – proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Eve

- h) Approval of Internal Controls 2020

- i) Approval of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Code of Conduct

- j) Confirmation of receipt of 2020/21 precept

These were all noted and agreed. Proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Kinloch

23. Correspondence

- a) Letter - Headway Suffolk Thank You
- b) Email - Suffolk Grass Cutting 2020 programme
- c) Email – Civil Parking Enforcement
- d) Email – Defib Site Check

All were noted.

24. Agenda items for meeting to be held on 14th July 2020

None - request to email the Clerk on any items for discussion.

The meeting closed at 9:54pm