

Minutes of the **WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING** held at **THE OLD STATION, GROOMBRIDGE** on **11th July 2022** at 7.30pm

PRESENT Cllrs Andrew Fane, Nick Anderson, Alan Gaukroger, Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly (Chair), Keith Obbard (as District Councillor for item 6), Jill Pardey, Marcus Tarling, Paul Watkins, Linsey Winter

In attendance: Deborah Siddle - Clerk (minutes)
Sarah Cooper – Groombridge Playground Group (item 8)
County Cllr Taylor

Members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity for members of the public to address the Council. There was one member of the public present for item 9, St John's car park and road safety issues. She had attended a previous meeting to talk about residents' concerns about the introduction of charges at the St John's car park by the Ashdown Forest Conservators (AFC). This had also highlighted concerns about traffic and road safety around the school.

The resident updated the meeting that she was unsure what AFC planned to do at the St John's car park but she understood that Fairwarp church/village hall car park would not be chargeable. Whether AFC do or do not charge at St John's car park she felt that road safety will only get worse.

Cllr Kelly updated the meeting that together with Cllr Tarling they had met with AFC and discussed the proposed charging. AFC had concerns that not charging would cause the carpark to become very popular with walkers, reducing spaces for school traffic. They were therefore trying to decide whether or not to introduce charging but with a waiver at school drop off and pick up times.

The resident suggested that if they choose not to charge then signage might help to deter walker parking in the week, although she understood this would not be enforceable. She asked whether Council would take over management and maintenance of the car park on a licence.

In addition she said that road safety is an existing problem which would be exacerbated by AFC charging, and mentioned traffic issues on the School sports day. She suggested creating more spaces at the car park to help alleviate problems. The resident recognised that there is an issue with traffic and parking at all the parish schools and that solutions could be costly, but hoped that WPC would be able to assist.

1. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING: None.

2. APOLOGIES – Cllr Jennie Paulson-Ellis – family commitment
District Cllr Millward

Council noted that Cllr Pope had resigned due to family commitments and thanked him for his service. Over the summer the Clerk would be in contact with residents interested in filling the councillor vacancies.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – None**4. MINUTES**

4.1. To resolve that the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Monday 13th June 2022 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

002311 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2022 were approved.

4.2. Matters outstanding from these minutes (not listed as separate agenda items)

Matters resolved from previous minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item
Pg. 2490	Clerk	'Wild Groombridge' are progressing a wildflower verge at Newton Willows
Pg. 2490	Clerk	Back Lane boundary is on this agenda
Pg. 2491	Cllr Kelly	Meeting held with Conservators' CEO where St John's car park was discussed
Pg. 2491	Clerk	WPCs involvement in the St John's car park in the late 1980s/early 1990s investigated
Pg. 2515	Clerk	June Post Office/Shop report circulated to councillors
Pg. 2515	Clerk	Title information relating to Persimmons provided to Cllr Anderson
Pg. 2516	Clerk	Groombridge Place Licence application withdrawn
002296	Clerk	Notified residents that WPC will fund a tree and Queen's Green Canopy plaque at Blackham
Pg. 2516	Clerk	East Sussex Highways grass cutting map provided to Cllr Obbard
Pg. 2516	Clerk	Additional Council meeting for Groombridge Playground item not required
Pg. 2516	Clerk	Query made regarding a re-valuation of the Council Tax band at Phoenix House
002297	Clerk	Balls Green Community Space reserve reallocated to General Reserves.

Actions outstanding from previous minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item
Pg. 2067	Clerk	Enquire whether the Crime Audit Officer can assess Withyham and Blackham
Pg. 2228	Clerk	Work with Blackham group to consult on whether residents would support some play equipment
Pg. 2297	Cllr Fane	Investigate whether any of the Burrswood buildings, gardens or trees require listing
Pg. 2319	Clerk	Arrange for signs requested by Blackham litterpickers
Pg. 2442	Cllr Paulson-Ellis	Provide the Clerk with a list of broken stiles
Pg. 2489	Assistant Clerk	Undertake an annual condition survey of assets

WPC/11.7.2022 – 002537

Pg. 2512	Clerk	Contact residents interested in becoming a councillor
Pg. 2515	Clerk	Ask the Post Office/Shop Manager to provide an update report on the Post Office to the September meeting
Pg. 2515	Clerk	Put Electric Vehicle charge point at the parish office on an agenda after the lease is secured
Pg. 2516	Councillors	Contact the Clerk if they can assist with the Speed Indicator Device
Pg. 2516	Community Warden	Next report to September meeting
Pg. 2516	Cllr Gordon-James	Email councillors to seek volunteers to help with the garden and shed at Phoenix House
Pg. 2516	Cllr Gordon-James	Arrange for Councillors to have a site visit to Phoenix House
Pg. 5217	Councillors	Let Cllr Obbard and the Clerks know of anyone who would like to coordinate or help with Speedwatch

Actions from these Minutes

Minute no.	Who	Item
Pg. 2539	Clerk	Circulate wildflower verge update report from Wild Groombridge to Councillors
Pg. 2539	Clerk	Confirm use of Groombridge Recreation Ground to resident, with own insurance
002312	Clerk	Place order for Groombridge Playground totalling £102,920.30+VAT
002313	Playground Group/ Clerk	Remaining income be used for items such as plaques, picnic benches/seats and contingency (Groombridge Playground)
002314	Playground Group/ Clerk	Add a wheelchair accessible piece of equipment, once income confirmed (Groombridge Playground)
002315	Playground Group/ Clerk	If more funds are raised reinstate the second combination wall, or a similar piece of equipment (Groombridge Playground)
Pg. 2541	Clerk	Contact St John's School about strategies to alleviate road safety issues, and a potential grant
Pg. 2541	Cllr Pardey/ Clerk	Contact Horder Centre about how they might help alleviate road safety issues
Pg. 2542	Clerk	Notify resident that WPC would be unable to adopt Back Lane
Pg. 2542	Clerk	Suggest resident contacts ESCC about overgrown vegetation at Back lane
002316	Cllr Winter	Draft a response to the South East Transport Consultation
002317	Clerk	Notify ESCC Rights of Way team of WPC's support for the 3 diversions, with the request for a condition for FP57a
002319	Clerk	Pay invoices in August in agreement with the Chair and Vice Chair

Pg. 2544	Councillors	Draft objection letter regarding Gatwick night flights
Pg. 2544	Clerk	Circulate notes from WDC Parish Cluster meeting in June
Pg. 2544	Clerk	Reports from Community Warden and WPCIC/Post Office to September meeting

5. COMMITTEE MINUTES

To receive the following draft minutes of committees and to note recommendations contained therein and as far as requisite, the action taken by them.

5.1 Planning Committee – 13th June 2022 - noted

5.2 Rights of Way Committee – 20th June 2022 - noted

5.3 Planning Committee – 28th June 2022 - noted

6. TO NOTE REPORTS FROM DISTRICT and COUNTY COUNCILLORS

County Cllr Taylor explained that she had applied for underspent Community Match funds for several projects in her Ward, including in Withyham parish, which had unfortunately not been successful.

ESCC is trying to re-convene SLRs and enquired whether WPC would like to have these again. The Chair explained that previously there had been a lack of outcomes, and the right people had not attended.

Cllr Taylor is investigating whether empty retirement flats might be utilised better, for examples by carers to help with workforce problems. Cllr Gordon-James suggested allowing owners of the flats to rent them out, which is often prohibited.

WDC is now handling the payments to Ukrainian hosts.

District Cllr Obbard had supplied a report which had been circulated prior to the meeting. In summary:

- The bin lorry strike has ended and the teams will be getting back to normal as fast as they can
- The Council has decided that the scheduled price-rise for the Green Waste service will be delayed for a year
- In advance of the District Council Elections in 2023 the Council ran two “Become a Councillor” events to encourage a greater diversity of people who are Councillors. Sadly these have not been well attended.
- Wealden District Council has won a national award for our Great Crested Newt Licensing Scheme which is now part of the planning application process
- There have been several planning applications decided recently which WPC commented on, with different decisions to WPC’s recommendations

In addition, Cllr Obbard updated the meeting:

- There has been another outbreak of avian flu; residents are advised not to handle dead birds and to report them to DEFRA
- WDC has stated making payments to Ukrainian people and hosts, there were some delays as WDC is very fraud aware

District Cllr Obbard was asked about recent planning approvals for Long Acre, Luibeg and Tanyard, which WPC had not supported as they are in the AONB and outside the development boundary.

Cllr Obbard reiterated his response made to this question at the Planning Committee that evening, which was predominantly about the sustainability of the proposed development at Tanyard outweighing the harms to the AONB. Cllr Obbard noted that the development boundaries have been breached before and so there is a precedent for doing so, and that if it isn't possible to build new houses in the village then where can they be built.

Councillors voiced their dismay about encroachment on the AONB, and pointed out that the extent to which the proposal is sustainable is subjective. When asked whether sustainability of developments will outweigh the AONB moving forwards Cllr Obbard felt the land supply will likely have more weight.

A member of the Planning Committee stated that WDC has a legal duty to protect the AONB but does not have a legal duty to build houses; the 5 year land supply does not affect that. In terms of infringement, each application should be considered on its own merits and a precedent should not be set. It was pointed out that the 'Overdevelopment in Wealden' group of parishes is looking at these issues.

Members of the Planning Committee explained that they are finding they can no longer rely on planning criteria like the AONB and development boundaries and queried how they should comment. Cllr Obbard encouraged the Committee to continue responding as before, as a Statutory Consultee WPC has the right to state its opinion.

7. WARD REPORTS

(a) Groombridge Ward (Groombridge) to include update on Newton Willows wildflower verge

Cllr Watkins provided an update on the Newton Willows wildflower verge. The group 'Wild Groombridge' is working with WPC's Administrator and are undertaking monthly surveys of the flora and fauna; over time they should establish an impressive wildflower verge at Newton Willows.

It was suggested that WPC should have carried out more consultation with people living in Newton Willows. It was agreed that communication is important. There are updates on social media, there will be outreach work with the school, and signage at the site. The Clerk would circulate an update report from Wild Groombridge to Councillors.

A resident had asked to hold their child's party on Groombridge Recreation Ground on the evening of 25th July, to include a bouncy castle. Council AGREED this subject to them having their own insurances in place.

(b) Groombridge Ward (Withyham/Blackham) – nothing to report.

(c) Marden's Hill Ward

It was noted that the appeal at Hoadleys stables was refused.

It is expected that the results of the Boundary Commission's consultation on the constituency boundary will be available next year.

8. GROOMBRIDGE PLAYGROUND – to receive fundraising and cost updates and instruct Clerk to place order for equipment

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting which confirmed fundraising amounts achieved, and updated costs. Sarah Cooper, the representative for the Playground Group explained that the majority of items could be afforded and suggested removing one of the play walls so that costs are within income. The intention is to have a wheelchair accessible piece of equipment as well, perhaps a roundabout, a resident would be helping with accessing funds for that. The lead in after ordering would be around 20 weeks, the Clerk was unsure how long the fitting would take.

The Clerk was asked about warranties and confirmed that information had been available at the time of agreeing the Tenders, but was not to hand at the meeting.

002312 **RESOLVED** to place the order for equipment totalling £102,920.30+VAT (special castle, speaking tube, playwall combo 2, crawling tunnel, Viking Tau swing and ring/single/double swing with toddler swing)

002313 **RESOLVED** that the remaining amount (£3,340.20) be used for items such as plaques, picnic benches/seats and contingency

002314 **RESOLVED** to add a wheelchair accessible piece of equipment, once income is confirmed

002315 **RESOLVED** that if more money is fundraised then to reinstate the combination wall that was removed from the quote, or a similar piece of equipment

Sarah Cooper left the meeting.

9. ST JOHN'S CAR PARK AND ROAD SAFETY ISSUES – to consider updates

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting which provided a briefing on meetings attended (with the AFC about the car park, and a meeting with representatives of several agencies about road traffic safety), and research the Clerk had undertaken into WPCs involvement in the initial set up of the car park.

The research that the Clerk had conducted confirmed that WPC had contributed £1,500 in 1989 to create the access to the car park, however AFC had continued to manage and maintain the land.

At the meeting with AFC about charging at the car park, AFC had concerns that not charging would cause the carpark to become very popular with walkers, reducing spaces for school traffic. They were therefore trying to decide whether or not to introduce charging but with a waiver at school drop off and pick up times and might trial different approaches.

At the meeting about road traffic safety Cllr Obbard reported back that several options had been discussed, including engineering solutions, which would require WPC to pay £500 towards a feasibility study for each option it would like to further explore. Should it wish to proceed with an option WPC could then apply to ESCC Community match for ESCC to contribute up to 50% of the cost of the scheme. The Road Safety Officer at ESCC had provided further comments on the viability of different options, along with ball-park figures, which were in the paper.

The suggestion of further spaces at the Church carpark was discussed and it was confirmed that there is an existing arrangement that people may park there for the school. WPC has contributed grant funding towards materials to maintain that car park and drive on previous occasions. It was also noted that the same issues of walkers parking to avoid charging could move to the Church carpark.

Council considered whether it should further explore the viability of WPC taking over the management and maintenance of St John's carpark. It was felt that this was a drastic way of solving a problem that should rest with the AFC, and that WPC does not have the Precepted or Earmarked Reserve budgets to do this. WPC therefore did not support this.

Council considered whether to undertake feasibility studies into the road safety issues. It noted the issues raised by the ESCC Officer into the viability of each of the solutions, and the costs to WPC if it went to Community Match. Based on these concerns it was not felt to be a good use of public money to undertake feasibilities.

Council therefore considered other strategies and felt that the school could be doing more to manage the situation, such as a walking bus from the car park. It noted that the school had struggled to recruit a Crossing Patrol person, and queried whether it could be advertised in different ways and whether it could be undertaken by a group of volunteer parents. St John's School could apply to WPC for a grant towards costs of equipment and high-vis clothing.

Council also considered the impact of the Horder Centre on traffic in the area and agreed to put a case to them to help the community around them. Suggestions were to provide an area of parking that could be used by school traffic, scheduling deliveries and running classes outside of peak times. Cllr Pardey would draft a letter for the Clerk to send.

County Cllr Taylor explained that ESCC has been trialling a 'School Streets' project to address the safety of school children travelling to school, and the impact on residents. She has been advocating for St John's School.

The Chair noted that WPC does put funding into St John's, for example through the maintenance of the reading room and through its grants. It is therefore open to supporting St John's, but these requests are beyond WPC's financial restraints.

The member of the public left the meeting.

10. BACK LANE - to consider adoption request

A resident had asked whether WPC would adopt Back Lane. The Clerk had investigated this and a paper had been circulated prior to the meeting.

As Back Lane is designated as a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT), the Clerk emailed ESCC Rights of Way team for their and they confirmed that “Back Lane isn’t an adopted lane, but it is ancient highway and so all of the surface is vested in ESCC, regardless of title or common law ownership of the sub-soil”. Other than as Common Land or Adverse Possession, the Council would also not be able to adopt it.

Council AGREED that WPC would be unable to adopt Back Lane and that it wouldn’t be in the public interest to do so if it could as through ESCC it already has protections.

The resident had also mentioned overgrown vegetation. The Rights of Way team acknowledged responsibilities for some of the verge, and also believes the landowner to be responsible for some. The Clerk would therefore recommend to the resident that they notify ESCC of the vegetation that is an issue and the Rights of Way team would then identify whether it is an obstruction or impediment to the enjoyment of the right of way, ascertain ownership and contact the landowner to have it attended to.

11. SOUTH EAST TRANSPORT CONSULTATION – to consider a response

The details of this consultation had been circulated prior to the meeting. It was AGREED that Cllr Winter would draft a response for agreement on email as the deadline is prior to the next diarised Council meeting.

002316 **RESOLVED** to agree a response to the South East Transport Consultation on email, for the Clerk to submit prior to the deadline.

12. RIGHTS OF WAY DIVERSIONS – to consider responses to 3 consultations

ESCC Rights of Way team has sent WPC consultations relating to applications to divert three public footpaths in Withyham Parish:

- FP27 Sherlocks Farm, Motts Down, Groombridge TN3 9PB
- FP51 Summerford Barn to Forest Way, TN7 4DA
- FP57a Highfields Farm, Beech Green Lane, Withyham TN7 4BD

Members of the WPC Rights of Way Advisory Committee had been consulted all those who responded supported these diversions. In terms of FP57a, as all the stiles were supposed to be replaced with gates as a condition of planning permission for the new farm track, the Committee recommended that WPC requests this to be a condition of the diversion.

002317 **RESOLVED** to notify ESCC Rights of Way team of WPC’s support for these 3 diversions, with the request for a condition for FP57a.

13. FINANCE

13.1 Note the report showing payments made to date against budgets

Noted

13.2 Authorise the payment of July invoices/note regular payments

Time: 13:28

Cashbook 1

User: DS

Current Bank A/c (HSBC)

Payments made between 15/06/2022 and 11/07/2022

Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
15/06/2022	V Kubillus (Standard Build)	BACS67	3,357.50			5200	500	3,357.50	Additional works at Phoenix Ho
						339		-3,357.50	Additional works at Phoenix Ho
						6000	500	3,357.50	Additional works at Phoenix Ho
28/06/2022	castle Water	DDCW0722	5.00			4502	101	5.00	Water charges
28/06/2022	EE ltd	DDEE0622	9.83		1.64	4013	101	8.19	PMP phone
04/07/2022	V Kubillus/Standard Build	BACS68	13,115.55			5200	500	13,115.55	Remaining amount - 5%
						339		-13,115.55	Remaining amount - 5%
						6000	500	13,115.55	Remaining amount - 5%
04/07/2022	V Kubillus/Standard Build	BACS68	13,115.55			5200	500	13,115.55	VOID amend-EMR allocation
						339		-13,115.55	VOID amend-EMR allocation
						6000	500	13,115.55	VOID amend-EMR allocation
04/07/2022	V Kubillus/Standard Build	BACS68	13,115.55			5200	500	1,579.25	Phoenix House/correct entry
						5200	500	11,536.30	Phoenix House/correct entry
						339		-11,536.30	Phoenix House/correct entry
						6000	500	11,536.30	Phoenix House/correct entry
04/07/2022	S Chapman	BACS69	21.65			4062	101	21.65	Mileage & cafe items
04/07/2022	S.A.L.C.	BACS70	96.00		16.00	4007	101	80.00	Clir training x 2
04/07/2022	SME IT Solutions	BACS71	352.29		58.72	4013	101	87.27	phone/bband
						4021	101	206.30	IT support
04/07/2022	Biffa Waste Services Ltd	BACS72	150.82		25.14	4506	101	125.68	Parish Office waste
04/07/2022	Wealden District Council	BACS73	277.00			5101	500	277.00	Council Tax Ph/House
04/07/2022	Groombridge Village Hall	BACS74	132.75			4020	101	132.75	Hall Hire APA
04/07/2022	Rialtas Business Solutions Ltd	BACS75	154.80			4016	101	154.80	RBS accounts software
04/07/2022	D Siddle	BACS76	24.30			4421	401	24.30	Mileage - archives
04/07/2022	D Siddle	BACS76	10.00			4421	401	10.00	Parking/photo approval@Archive
04/07/2022	Viking Direct	BACS77	53.38		8.90	4015	101	44.48	Nail gun & staples
04/07/2022	VARIOUS	BACS78	3,647.10			4000	101	3,647.10	Salaries July22
04/07/2022	HMRC	BACS79	2,200.81			4001	101	2,200.81	Tax & NI Qtr1
04/07/2022	N.Wealden Community Transport	BACS80	137.00			4401	401	137.00	WealdlinkQtr2
04/07/2022	V Kubillus/Standard Build	BACS81	3,123.95			5200	500	3,123.95	Works @ Phoenix House Final 5%
04/07/2022	Prepaid card	cb1 to ppc	40.40			203		40.40	CB1 to PPC Jul22
04/07/2022	NEST pensions	DDNEST0722	289.54			4001	101	289.54	Pension contributions Jul22
04/07/2022	Opus Energy	DDOPUS0722	31.45			4502	101	31.45	Gas (parish office)
04/07/2022	HSBC	HSBC0722	10.00			4600	101	10.00	Charges June
04/07/2022	The Premier Trust N A Houghton	SONH0722	625.00			4012	101	625.00	Rent 0722
04/07/2022	The Premier Trust T J Newman	SOTN0722	625.00			4012	101	625.00	rent 0722
Total Payments:			28,491.12	0.00	110.40			28,380.72	

Prepaid Card

Prepaid card

Payments made between 15/06/2022 and 11/07/2022

Nominal Ledger Analysis									
Date	Payee Name	Reference	£ Total Amnt	£ Creditors	£ VAT	A/c	Centre	£ Amount	Transaction Details
04/07/2022	Milk & More	PP18	8.16			4510	101	8.16	Milk June
04/07/2022	Zoom Video Comms Ltd	PP19	14.39		2.40	4016	101	11.99	Zoom Jun
04/07/2022	AmazonUK	PP20	17.85		2.98	4015	101	14.87	marker pens & picture fixers
Total Payments:			40.40	0.00	5.38			35.02	

002318 RESOLVED to pay the July invoices listed above, to pay by BACS/sign the cheques accordingly

13.3 To delegate authority to the Clerk to pay invoices in August in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, and to report to September Council

As there will be no August Council meeting this was agreed, and the list should be reported to September Council.

002319 **RESOLVED** that the Clerk should pay invoices in August in agreement with the Chair and Vice Chair.

13.4 Consider quotes - none

13.5 Note the availability of the bank reconciliation file for inspection

Councillors were reminded that the bank reconciliation file can be inspected at any time by contacting the Clerk.

14. REPORTS FROM MEETINGS ATTENDED BY COUNCILLORS

Cllr Watkins had attended a Zoom meeting about changes at Gatwick including ground infrastructure, reduced onsite parking and the Zero Jet Gov proposal to get omissions to net zero by 2050.

Councillors had been made aware of a proposal to increase night flights, which are already at 100%; a letter would be drafted.

Cllr Obbard had attended the WDC Parish Cluster meeting in June, the Clerk would ensure that the notes had been circulated. The Local Plan is still stalling as there are concerns about publishing it at a time of political unrest in case housing supply numbers change.

15. CLERK'S REPORT

Councillors were reminded that there would be no Council meeting in August but Planning Committee meetings would go ahead.

16. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA:

- Update report on the Post Office (September meeting)
- Community Warden Update report (September meeting)

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - note that the proposed date of the next Council meeting is Monday 12th September 2022 at 7.30pm, to be held at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm