

Swilland and Witnesham Grouped Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING Minutes

Wednesday 19th April 2023

Witnesham Village Hall 7:30

1. Welcome by Parish Council Chairman – Dr Nicol
Present: Dr Nicol, Mrs Shaw, Mr Collings, Mr Templeman, Mr Dungey, Mr Hindle, Mr Burrows, Mr Sharples, Mr Roots and SCCllr Elaine Bryce.
In attendance: 18 members of the public.
2. To receive apologies: Mr Barlow, Dr Williams, Mrs Ellis, Mrs Offord and 7 reporters (members of the public)
3. Parish Council Chairman's Report – Dr Nicol

Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2023

This year's Annual Meeting is more like business as usual, meaning that we can combine it with a social gathering after the more formal meeting that the Parish Council is required by law to host.

Our local highlight of the year must be the Queen's 70th Jubilee in June celebrations, our community did Her Majesty proud with a stunning array of events across Witnesham & Swilland, co-ordinated brilliantly by Steve Henley with a large group of organisers too many to mention. Unfortunately this was all too soon followed by Her Majesty's death in September.

Parish Council Activities 22/23

Membership

Sadly we lost Tracy Theunisson, early in the year due to health reasons; we look forward to her possible return when she is fully recovered. David Roots joined us early in the year. To my relief and with my gratitude, Simon Barlow continued as Vice-Chairman and Jerry Hindle, Chair of Planning

2023 is a year when all Parish Councillors are up for re-election. All but one councillor (Chris Templeman) have put themselves forward for reappointment at the time of reporting. I would like to thank Chris for his significant contribution to the Council during the years that he has been on board

We are all assisted by our excellent Parish Clerk Steve Barron, without whom we would hardly function. Our clerk is paid to work for us for 7 hours a week. I remain convinced he does far more!

Finance

The Council's core income is from the precept, a part of the Council Tax paid by all householders. This amounted to £14,496 last year, (22/23), a slight increase on the previous year due to an increase in households. A further £1000 is typically received from the fees charged for the use of the playing field and the allotments.

After holding the precept charge per household flat in recent years, increasing costs have made it necessary to seek an increase of 5% for 23/24, this amounts to £1.72 per year for a band D property, ie from £34.41 to £36.13.

Our expenditure largely matches our income for the day-to-day running of the Council and we draw on reserves for extra items that need funding

The Council also receives 15% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) paid by developers. In the last year this amounted to £979. No CIL was spent this year by the council. Adding the existing unspent CIL of £567, gives total remaining CIL to date of £1547. There are restrictions on the use of these funds, for example they cannot be used for day-to-day costs.

Our district councillor, Tony Fryatt, donated £585 from his locality budget for a replacement seat on the corner of Tuddenham Lane.

Planning

All planning applications submitted to East Suffolk Council for Swilland and Winesham are passed to the Parish Council for comment. This is part of the formal consultation process and our views are sent to ESC in a set time-scale to fit their decision process. The Parish Council holds meetings specifically to look at applications and any other related planning matters.

Jerry Hindle chairs planning, bringing years of experience in local government to this important and very busy role. 8 meetings were held this year, to address 28 applications for single dwellings, extensions alterations and two major developments, Street Farm - 20 dwellings and Mow Hill 32. The Street Farm one did not progress during the year despite our seeking clarification from East Suffolk Council (ESC).

The Mow Hill application created more work than all the other applications put together. A special meeting on this one application was held in April to allow residents to express views, followed by receipt of 3 submissions of the enormous application, all seeking comment. Whilst opposing the whole development, we recognised that the flawed 'local plan' had allocated this land, so we sought to engage with the developer, the landowner and planning officers to achieve a development that would be better assimilated into the village, meet local needs and provide some local community benefit. Despite the enormous efforts and expertise of our planning chair and members, I have to report scant success; colleagues were treated with lack of courtesy approaching contempt by planners and the developer, indeed the planning officer refused to meet us or reply to most correspondence. Eventually Jerry Hindle addressed the ESC Planning Committee on 20 /12/22, when the application was up for decision, he outlined five provisions to improve the development. The ESC Committee did not discuss any of them despite support from

both our ESC Councillors and simply accepted with no comment the recommendations of the ESC planners, who on almost every issue seemed to align with the developers. Our frustration with the whole process resulted in a letter of complaint from myself to the Chief Executive of East Suffolk Council and an intervention by our MP.

But we are not alone, a number of Parish Councils in East Suffolk have similar experiences with ESC planners. The PC recently joined ESPA (East Suffolk Planning Alliance) , a group of Parish Councils aiming to improve local planning going forward. Hopefully ESPA will result in homes being built in sensible locations and of the type that are actually needed by a community, ie actually affordable and social housing for rent.

Highways & Footpaths

Most of our activities on highways involve liaising with SCC Highways dept. *Most items remind one of Groundhog Day.*

I reported last year that the Gibraltar crossroads long fought for continuous 40mph section should be in place within the next year. A year has now passed, its not there yet but promised for July 2023!

Thanks to the perseverance of Dr Brian Williams, Tuddenham Lane and Kirby Lane will still become Quiet Lanes, we are assured that the signs will be in place shortly.

We remain active participants in SAVID (PCs working together on Safer Village Driving) being conscientiously represented by Andy Dungey. The portable ANPR trial encouraging drivers to drive within the 30mph limit on the B1077 is still to happen but posts are now in place to take portable cameras which should appear soon.

After much encouragement from Jerry Hindle, the bridge on the footpath leading from Hall Lane should be replaced for the coming summer, local residents have lost count of the number of SCC vehicle visits it has taken to get this far.

We bid for a school crossing patrol on the B1077 near the Swilland junction with the aim of encouraging more parents to feel safe walking their children to school. *Catch 22 is the movie on this occasion.* Despite school and parent support, stimulated by Faye Ellis, and our appealing the decision, SCC rejected our application because not enough children were walking to school. We will be shortly be installing a temporary speed indicator device on the B1077 to try and calm the traffic to see whether this helps in any way to encourage more walking and less car congestion.

Council member David Roots stepped-in where SCC failed to act and cut the hedges that were overhanging the B1077 footpath.

Allotments

Whilst there have been some changes in tenancy during the year, the allotments in Coopers Close and Hall Lane are all occupied.

After requests from allotment holders, a water supply has been installed at Coopers Close. The installation itself has been plagued by problems with contractors. We are working to get the tap running in time for this year's watering season.

Playing Field and Recreation Ground.

The PC has a peppercorn lease on the playing field, car park and play area near the school from SCC. In return we maintain the area. We sub-lease the playing field to the WASPS junior football club. The rent charged contributes partly towards the grass cutting costs.

The lease expires in 2024 and negotiations have begun on its replacement. We will be meeting with the School and SCC shortly to discuss the way forward; SCC views seem to have changed since we began discussions. Our aim must be to reach an arrangement that supports the WASPS and benefits the whole community for the future. We encourage views and ideas on the way forward. We see our first opportunity to consult being this Annual Parish Meeting.

Witnesham Pre-School

The pre-school has been a valuable asset for young families for over 50 years. The Parish Council were concerned to learn of their hitting a 'perfect storm' as far as funding is concerned; a combination of Covid hangover, demographics and inadequate Government funding per child. Income from September looked secure but they had a large funding deficit, beyond the resources of the PC, that threatened closure at Easter. A herculean effort by the staff and committee, with help from SCC, has managed to close the gap. The PC supported the team there and set aside some limited funds in case we need to step in to avoid closure. We will continue to support their efforts to improve the funding model; the welcome support of Dan Poulter MP might release some further grant opportunities.

Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

In addition to the stunning array of events referred to in my introduction, Council members Chris Collings and Chris Templeman (our tree officer) organised the planting of around 250 trees as part of The Queen's Green Canopy initiative. These had to be on public land so were split between the Recreation Ground and the Playing Field near the school. The Jubilee Oak also planted by the recreation ground sadly suffered greatly over the dry summer, a replacement seems necessary.

King Charles III Coronation Weekend

Dr Brian Williams has represented the Parish Council on a group that was set up to coordinate village events. The PC will be presenting mementoes of the event to every child at the School and all young people up to the age of 16 in Swilland and Witnesham. So far we are aware of a Street Party for Swilland residents in Church Lane on the Sunday and a joint service with music for Witnesham on the Burrows' meadow by Witnesham Church.

Anti-Social Behaviour.

Pauline Offord attended the ASB liaison meeting between Parish Councils, the ESC community team and Suffolk Police. This allowed us to influence policing priorities around ASB and to an extent - speeding. Organised by East Suffolk Council this was sometimes useful, but appears to have been discontinued.

Witnesham Village Hall

Councillor Kim Shaw is our link to the village hall management committee

Village Recorder

Whilst not a formal Parish Council role it is right here to recognise the contribution of our new recorder Erica Burrows. She has hit the ground running. Her 'In Touch' reports are entertaining and help keep us all informed.

Communications

All Parish Council and committee minutes and financial records are available on the Council website, and all meetings open to the public. Main council meetings take place in the Village Hall, committees usually meet in the side-room of the Baptist Chapel. Summaries of Parish Council minutes are published in 'In Touch' magazine.

In addition our clerk holds an email distribution list of parishioners who have agreed to receive notices, event news etc. and we make use of the Witnesham Community group on Facebook.

A paper archive of past meetings and Parish Council documents going back 50 years at least is kept in the Village Hall

Thanks

Our County Councillor Elaine Bryce and District Councillor Tony Fryatt are regular attenders at our meetings and both have been great supporters on various issues. I am grateful to them both for their help and support. Sadly, Tony recently stood down due to health issues, we will miss him and wish him well.

An efficient Parish Clerk is vital in the smooth running of a Parish Council. In Steve Barron we have a professional manager, well versed in the increasing complexity of the legalities surrounding local government and someone with whom it is a pleasure to work. The number of day-to day issues that need attention with even a small PC such as our own are unbelievable, without Steve much would be missed.

I conclude by thanking our Parish Councillors. All are volunteers who give up their time to help the community, it's certainly not glamorous and is often frustrating. They bring a vast range of experience, expertise and specialisms to the Council. Their individual contributions are many, various and usually unsung. I am grateful to them all.

We need more of these great people, so if you would like to become involved please speak to any councillor....

Richard Nicol

Chairman Swilland & Witnesham Grouped Parish Council.

5th April 2023

On the future of the Playing Field and the pending lease renewal, the Council encourages views and ideas on the way forward. We see our first opportunity to

consult being this Annual Parish Meeting. The audience were asked to consider this and an opportunity to share ideas would come at the end of the meeting.

Various other Annual Reports were given as below:
(all reports published on the PC website)

4. SCC Councillors Report – Elaine Bryce also thanked the PC for their co-operation throughout what had been a difficult year.
5. ESC Councillors Report – None (Tony Fryatt stood down due to health issues)
6. Witnesham Primary School
7. Village Hall Management Committee
8. Poor's Land Swilland – Kim Shaw/
9. Reports from Village Organisations
 - A,S & W Women's Institute
 - Village Show Community Group
 - Royal British Legion
 - Witnesham WASPS
 - St Marys Church Witnesham
 - St Marys Church Swilland
 - Village Voices of Witnesham
 - Witnesham Baptist Church
 - Witnesham Pre-school
 - Village Recorder Witnesham
 - Village Recorder Swilland
 - Fynn Valley Golf Club
 - Greenacres Small Holding
 - Talitha Koum
10. Questions and closing remarks – Ideas put forward for the future of the Playing Field from those in attendance included:
Provision of toilets, A common pavilion possibly catering for WASPs, Pre-School etc. A management plan for the pitch area to maintain the grounds. To consult with WASPS. To consider multi surface and other sports.

Meeting closed 9:03pm