

Swilland and Witnesham Grouped Parish Council

<http://swillandandwitnesham.onesuffolk.net/>

Clerk: Mr. Steven Barron

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Parish Council Meeting

Weds 15th November 2023, at Witnesham Village Hall 7:30pm

MINUTES


1. Chair welcomed all to the meeting and highlighted the importance and impact of recent events since the last meeting, which included flooding and a burnt out phone box used as a community book exchange.
Present: Dr Nicol (Chair), Mr Barlow, Mrs Shaw, Mr Dungey, Mr Sharples, Mr Hindle and Dr Williams.
In attendance: ESC DCllr Dan Clery (**DC**) and SCC CClr Elaine Bryce (**EB**).
2. **Apologies:** Mr Roots, Mr Burrows, Mr Collings, Mrs Ellis and Mrs Offord.
Chair asked the meeting to acknowledge Mrs Offord's ill health and grant dispensation for her absence, which was agreed.
3. **The Code of Conduct Declarations of Interest** – Mr Hindle and Mr Barlow had both their dwellings flooded out (Item 5)
4. **To approve Minutes from the meeting held on 20th September 2023**
– These were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.
5. **To Agree Parish Council actions as a result of the recent flooding.**

The PC considered the appalling effect of Storms Babet & Claran on our community. The following issues and draft wording were considered and agreed in principle.

5.1 Denbury Homes Ltd - To Nick Holmes (Operations Manager), Michael Cox (Director), CC James Hopkins (CEO and Director)

Meeting with Denbury on 27/10/23

- a) Acknowledge cordial meeting with our Chair, Vice-Chair and Chair of Planning. Welcome further regular liaison meetings with senior managers
- b) Reiterate need to avoid prolonged closures of B1077, and how it needs to be open in peak hours. Work with SCC to ensure closures for sewage and power occur at the same time.
- c) For works on FP 26 replace steps with slope to road at southern end of site and provide hoggin surface. Investigate the provision of pedestrian access at the north west corner of the site.
- d) Urge early planting of eastern tree belt and hedgerow for 2023/24 season 2, Floods 20th October 2023

17/1/24 

a) It is clear that the surface water flowing from the Wittens Meadow development was a significant contributory cause of the flooding of residents' properties behind the Barley Mow and the pub. In addition the excess water from the site streamed along the road towards Fynn Bridge, flooded properties and was instrumental in the damage caused to the properties there.

b) The PC is dismayed at the cavalier attitude to the planning requirements relating to Surface Water Drainage of the site that led to the devastation to some of our residents. This is particularly concerning when you were aware of the events in May 2023 when run-off from the site caused flooding of gardens in the same area. We deplore subsequent statements denying any responsibility

c) As a responsible developer, we expect you to recompense our residents appropriately for the devastation. As a company (to quote) who 'supports the communities that their homes are a part of', Denbury needs to do the right thing and not hide behind denial statements drafted by lawyers.

d) The PC appreciates help provided, sandbags etc. for later flooding, (Storm Ciaran) several residents took advantage of them in early November.

e) Looking forward, it is essential that residents have complete assurance that the flooding caused by Wittens Meadow can never happen again and expect you to take every action necessary. We expect to see a complete, independent, re assessment of surface water and drainage issues, and whatever remedial work is necessary. And this should include a full assessment in terms of capacity, condition and responsibility for the underground drain/culvert that drains from the site leads into, and subsequently goes behind the Barley Mow down toward the river.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the above draft wording for item 5.1 be redrafted by Mr Barlow and shared with Councillors. Council discussed possibly splitting the correspondence into two letters which would be considered by the Chair, prior to sending to Denbury Homes by the Clerk.

5.2 Suffolk County Council, Lead Local Flood Authority

1) Appreciate the rapid communications from SCC offering practical assistance to affected residents.

2) However ... much of our serious flooding was caused by inadequate, faulty or poorly maintained Highways or Surface Water Drainage systems. The number of properties presently known to be flooded is shown in brackets.

a) Witnesham -Wittens Meadow -Barley Mow to River Fynn (5)

Tuddenham Lane/B1077 junction (2)

Fynn Bridge (4) + (2)

Giles Way- properties backing on to river (3-4)

Bulls Hall Lane to Tuddenham Lane (2)

In addition the flooding caused the B1077 to be impassable at Fynn Bridge and the Church Lane Crossroads.

b) Swilland - Church Lane to High Road (4)



17/1/24

3. Highway Flooding - A complete review of the surface water drainage situation in these areas is required and the necessary remedial civil engineering undertaken. This includes the enlargement of the under road drain in Tuddenham Lane beside 1 Stone Cottage and the complete clean out adjacent highway ditch and drains.

4. PROW Footbridges - Two wooden footbridges across the River Fynn (FP 39 and 37) were dislodged in the floods and need to be repositioned and properly anchored. (one of these was only installed last May)

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the above draft wording for item 5.2 be finalised by Mr Hindle and shared with Councillors prior to sending to SCC by the Clerk.

5.3 East Suffolk Council

1. Wittens Meadow

a) Grateful for and appreciate energetic approach of Planning Officers to the failures of Denbury Homes since the flooding.

b) We need assurance of continuing diligence going forward with requirements for i) a dependable and quickly installed construction phase Surface Water Drainage Plan ii) a reassessment of the long term SWDP that takes account of the flooding events of October 2023 and in addition iii) a full assessment in terms of capacity, condition and responsibility for the underground drain/culvert that drains from the site lead into, and subsequently goes behind the Barley Mow down toward the river.

2. Planning

Whilst Denbury Homes took a cavalier approach to the SWD stipulations, the complete lack of planning control prior to 20th October in ESC is a major contributory factor.

The appalling events of 20 October arose against a background of several warnings from this PC about drainage issues during the assessment of the planning application all of which were largely ignored. This included a request for an assessment, in terms of the condition, capacity and maintenance responsibility of the main drain/culvert that leads from the site down behind the Barley Mow down to the river. This matter was not pursued and it is negligent that this drain failed completely in taking both the runoff from the land and the Denbury site on 20 October. In addition there was a warning of potential SW flood risk when in May 2023 there was flooding of the gardens of cottages behind the Barley Mow caused by water runoff from the site. Both ESC Planning and Denbury were aware of this event, but no action was taken by ESC at the time.

ESC's lack of diligence is verging on negligence; The PC wish to know what actions ESC will be taking to recompense affected residents.

3. Street Farm. (ref DC/21/4111/FUL)

The major flooding incident around the Fynn Bridge and at the lower part of the proposed development stimulated the PC to write to ESC & SCC on 30th Oct asking for a complete overhaul of the surface water and flood risk assessments and mitigation proposals in the planning application.

In particular we sought a review of Flood Risk Assessment and mitigation proposals for the proposed development, and in particular:

- a) impact on nearby properties in The Street and Giles Way, Witlesham.;
- b) site entrance flooding and emergency access and exit.
- c) surface water runoff from the proposed development on the steep slope forming the unallocated part of the site.
- d) inundation of the proposed siting of the drainage retention area near the site entrance.
- e) design and layout of the proposed dwellings
- f) any other factors the authorities believe should be taken into account.

A reply received by return from Ben Woolnough (Senior-Planning Officer) did not inspire confidence that our concerns would be met given the neglect in the past of our warnings on Witles Meadow. Further comments that building on agricultural land often reduces SW flooding risk, is seen as being inappropriate. The PC needs full assurance from ESC that there will be a full review of the SW drainage requirements for this application which ESC has now been considering for over 26 months.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the above draft wording for item 5.3 be finalised by Dr Nicol and shared with Councillors prior to sending to ESC by the Clerk.

4. Collation of Flood EventsHow do we list the properties flooded in Swilland & Witlesham and other serious flooding events. SCC Cllr EB informed the meeting that it was very important that if residents have had water flooding their home or property that they go on the Suffolk County Council website and then into the flood relief subsection and register as a victim. If they don't they won't be considered for funding. SCC inform us that when they do so, they will be issued with a registration number. They will then be rung back after they have given the appropriate information by someone on the flood relief desk who may have follow up questions and advice for them. **It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the Clerk should publish this vital information to residents via the PC email contact list and on the home page of the PC website.**

6. Questions or comments on Reports from ESC DCllr Dan Clery (DC) and SCC Cllr Elaine Bryce (EB).

EB informed the meeting that SCC had a new contractor for Highways and the Scrutiny Committee would be looking at the contract. SCC urgently needs to recruit more LINK foster carers for children with additional needs and disabilities. SCC full report is available via the PC website.

DC reported that he would encourage participation in ESC Community Partnerships. ESC Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management, Kay Yule, was involved in a Planning Service management review. ESC had issued a new Dog Waste Bin Policy. DC was asked if there was any scope for a grant from his locality budget to help fund a replacement picnic table by the Play Area next to the School. **There was some funding available which may help and the Clerk would apply via ESC website.**

7. **The current financial situation** – A report was circulated by the Clerk prior to the meeting. There were no questions. Clerk added verbal update on CIL. No CIL had been received this financial year and the remaining holdings stood at £1546.54. ESC had confirmed after the Clerk wrote to them that the expected CIL to the PC would begin next April from the Witles Meadow

17/1/24 12

development, with half yearly instalments (eg £21,645.02p) totalling £105,731.16p by October 2025.

8. To approve the following payments (inclusive of VAT where appropriate)

a)	Administration September	£320.50
b)	Administration October	£320.70
c)	HMRC PAYE Q2	£240.40
d)	Defib pads School car park	£192.00
e)	Bank service charge Q2	£18.00
f)	Mob phone top up	£20.00
g)	Hedge cut back B1077 by Playing Field	£120.00
h)	Clerk's mileage Q2	£80.10
i)	Six months payroll Mar to Sep	£54.00
j)	Replacement Oak tree Rec Ground	£45.00
k)	Annual website hosting fee	£60.00
l)	Hall Hire Jul and Sep	£50.00
m)	Annual SAVID donation	£50.00
n)	Water bill to Oct 23	£47.07

Council agreed to approve all the above payments.

- 9. To agree and approve the Parish Council Draft Budget for 2024 – 2025.** The proposed draft budget for 2024-2025 of £20,528.77 income (including draw on reserves and grants) and £20,520.00p expenditure compiled by the Finance Committee had been circulated prior to the meeting. Chair gave an overview of main points which included the combination of spend headings from "planned" and "reactive" maintenance into one "Maintenance" heading. The WASPs annual rent had been increased slightly to keep with increased grass cutting costs incurred, from £925 to £950. Allotment rents at Coopers Close site were increased by £7 per plot (generally now £17 per annum) to allow for water supply standing charges and likely water usage. Phone box renovation budget of £3000 (including potential grants) and potential PROW exploratory diversions, yet to be agreed under item 12. **It was proposed, seconded and agreed to approve and adopt the draft budget for 2024-2025.**
- 10. To set the Precept for 2024 – 2025.** From the approved budget the proposed precept for 2024-2025 was £16,351.77 which represented a 5% increase on the tax base. **It was proposed, seconded and agreed to approve the precept of £16,351.77p.**
- 11. To decide how the 20's Plenty For Suffolk campaign is relevant to the roads in our community.** The 20's Plenty for Suffolk campaign information had been circulated prior to the meeting. This was discussed and it was felt that a 20mph limit on the B1077 through Witnesham was not acceptable. **It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the "PC supports the 20's Plenty for Suffolk campaign in principle where appropriate in Swilland and Witnesham".**
- 12. Pubic Footpaths , Witnesham FP 20 and FP 16. Proposal -**
"The Parish Council gives support to investigating with involved parties and East Suffolk Council the possibility of diverting parts of these footpaths to incorporate the currently used lengths of "permissive path". Mr Hindle gave an overview of the proposed path changes and maps were distributed. The meeting was informed that actual costs were not clear and it could be expensive. **Currently the proposal was**

to fund £400 per path initial explorative costs only. This was agreed by the meeting.

13. Matters to be brought to the attention of the Parish Council –

Dr Nicol reported that a local resident was enquiring about ownership of the north river bank at the rear of the Hall Lane allotment site. The concern was about vegetation potentially causing a hazard to water flow and a risk of flooding the resident's garden. The meeting confirmed that the land was definitely owned by the PC and Mr Barlow added that under riparian rights the PC would own that bank of the river. Clerk would continue to inquire with the resident and the Environment Agency about any potential mitigating action required by the Council.

Sadly Dr Nicol reminded the meeting that the phone box in Upper Street used as a book exchange for many years had been destroyed by fire today. Fire Service were called at 06:38 and a suspected arson attack crime had been lodged with Suffolk Police. An insurance claim was pending.

Mr Dungey reported that the SAVID SID was being deployed during November at America Hill and Mow Hill. 19-25th November 2023 is Road Safety Week which involves a concerted effort by various parties on speed reduction and a banner will be displayed at a suitable location.

Mr Hindle reported that this year's Boxing Day walk should be from the Barley Mow end of the village.

Dr Williams explained that he was likely to be in greater demand at Swilland Church this year and his input into the PC is likely to be impacted.

Mr Barlow raised concerns that residents were not fully aware of the efforts made by the PC since the flooding and there was some expectation of a public meeting. **It was suggested that some elements of the PC's correspondence or bullet points could be shared with parishioners. Clerk would progress as appropriate.**

14. To approve a back dated NJC National Pay Award from April 2023 for the Clerk – (This item was dealt with the exclusion of press or public presence). Clerk had distributed the pay increase details to all Councillors. **It was proposed, seconded and agreed to approve the NJC pay award for the Clerk back dated to April 2023.**

Meeting closed at 9.15pm

17/1/24
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