

WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

REPRESENTING WETHERSFIELD, BLACKMORE END & BEAZLEY END



MINUTES of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee Meeting held at Wethersfield Village Hall on Monday 5 June 2023, commencing at 7:30pm.

Present:

Cllr A Hull (Chairman) (Shalford PC)
Cllr R Duffin (Vice Chairman) (Finchingfield PC)
J Pearce
Cllr J Warner (Finchingfield PC)
Cllr T Roberts (Toppesfield PC)
Cllr J O'Brien (Little Bardfield PC) and acting Clerk.
R Aggiss
Cllr B Foulkes (Castle Hedingham)
Cllr S Short (Wethersfield PC)
Cllr T Strudwick (Gosfield PC)

In Attendance: Members of the Public: 1

WA11/23-24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr A French (Shalford PC), Cllr P Kennedy (Great Bardfield PC), Cllr S Harris (Sible Hedingham PC), Cllr A Hooks (The Salings PC), Cllr G Southgate (Castle Hedingham PC), Cllr N Nicholson (Helions Bumpstead PC), Cllr M Gurney (Ridgewell PC) and Donna Roder (Clerk & RFO)

WA12/23-24 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

None declared.

WA13/23-24 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023, copies of which had been previously circulated to Members, were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposer Cllr Roberts, Seconder Cllr O'Brien.

WA14/23-24 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

WA15/23-24 CLERKS REPORT

Correspondence

1. Little Bardfield Parish Council have kindly donated 10% of their precept for this fiscal year to WASC.
2. BDC have lodged an appeal for their injunction hearing which will be heard on 12 June 2023.
3. A letter was sent by WASC on 3 May to BDC Dan Gascoyne CEO, cc. Graham Butland regarding the court of appeal requesting instruction of a barrister of KC standing plus a request for WASC to be part of the Strategic Migration Partnership. A further reminder was sent 1st June as no response received.
3. A further meeting took place between the Home Office, WPC and FPC (virtual) on 26 May 2023.
4. RT HONARABLE JAMES CLEVERLEY: A public meeting was held at Wethersfield Village Hall on 28 April 2023 between 160 members of the public and James Cleverley, The Home Office and ECC Police. Follow-up communication has since been sent from James Cleverley responding to questions raised at the meeting.

The Fields Association

The grant application for £3500.00 toward the contamination desktop survey has been approved and paid to WASC.

Crowd Justice Funding has been set up by an individual resident to issue a further JR pending the outcome of the injunction appeal hearing by BDC. Lawyers Deighton Pierce Glynn area also working with BDC, however they would like to intervene at the appeal hearing because the outcome of the appeal and JR lodged by BDC, could set a precedence for this private JR plus Scampton's Judicial Review. Further details can be found by visiting <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/stop-the-inhumane-asylum-camp/>

Wethersfield Protest

The peaceful protest group organised a demonstration at the Ride London event on Friday 26 May 2023 at Wethersfield and Finchingfield.

Wethersfield Conservation Area Review

A final plan has been submitted by BDC for the Parish Council's review and comment, Our response as consultee, will be finalised at the July Parish Council Meeting and submitted to BDC.

WASC Members

Post May elections both Cllr David Coverdale (Finchingfield PC) and Cllr J Toocaram did not stand again as Councillors, and therefore will no longer be members of WASC.

WA16/23-24 SUB-COMMITTEES

Cllr A Hull gave an update on the work of the **Strategy and Co-ordination Sub-Committee:**

Home Office Meeting with local business owners and farmers

It was apparent from this meeting that the Home Office had no idea about the site itself or the surrounding areas. Cheryl Avery from the Home Office was not aware of the Buro Happold Geo Environmental Desk Study, despite a copy having been sent to her. The Home Office would be carrying out their own study but would not be publishing the results. As regards traffic and highways a service provider would be looking into this. Cllr J Warner explained his understanding that the Home Office had only surveyed the entrances and exits to the airfield, not the rest of the road network or the pinch points. The Home Office's intention is that there will be an ongoing review of the traffic situation as the number of asylum seekers housed at the airfield is increased.

Pro-Bono legal advice from Reed Smith

Law firm Reed Smith is providing Cllr A Hull with pro-bono legal services in relation to a potential claim relating to the findings of the Buro Happold Geo Environmental Desk Study and the likelihood that the airfield is heavily contaminated. Reed Smith had been unable to bring a claim for judicial review against the Home Office's decision to house asylum seekers at the airfield because a crucial document had not been disclosed by Home Office in time. Reed Smith have carried out a FOIA request for this document and hope to intervene in the claim for judicial review being brought by Gabriel Clarke-Holland once this document has been provided. In the meantime, Reed Smith in conjunction with the Good Law Project, are continuing to carry out further FOIA requests and investigate other possible avenues to enable a claim to be raised. The Good Law Project have paid for advice from an expert environmental law barrister, David Hart KC.

J Pearce gave an update on the work of the **Technical Sub-Committee**:

Works Programme

J Pearce ran through the tasks already carried out under the Phase 1 and 2 Works Programme for the benefit of the new councillors present at the meeting. It was agreed that copies of the reports which had been carried out would be circulated to the new members of WASC.

Initial land use study Plan of Wethersfield Airfield and Joint Neighbourhood Plan

A copy of the Initial Land use study Plan for Wethersfield Airbase produced by J Pearce, M Nash and R Sidebottom from the Technical Sub-Committee of WASC was given out to all present. J Pearce thanked Cllr Duffin for arranging for the plan to be printed. A copy of the plan had been given to Cllr Butland at the last Wethersfield Parish Council meeting. The study has had regard to all local and national planning policies, levelling up policies and Essex County Council's net zero strategy. This is the first step which will build into the joint Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan that will develop objectives for what we want to achieve and come up with policy and proposals for the area. Part of the concept of the airbase plan is that it will open up access points across the base, allowing the site to be accessible from all directions.

Braintree District Council need to approve the Neighbourhood Plan area, this is currently with them and the consultation period expires at the end of June and then it goes to the

Cabinet to be formally approved. The first Neighbourhood Plan team meeting is on 15th June, more volunteers from Finchingfield are needed.

Caught Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

A report has been prepared by Dr. Richard Sidebottom entitled “Caught Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” which compares the effects of the asylum centre with the effects of the mega prison proposal on the local area. It shows that both proposals will have very similar negative social and environmental impacts which will permeate across the entire district of Braintree. The report also highlights the huge number of asylum seekers per 1000 residents in Wethersfield (1,576) should the asylum centre go ahead, in comparison to numbers across the rest of the country which are far lower (between 4.5 and 9.6). Similarly, the mega prison proposal would increase the prison places per prisoner in the East of England to much higher than exist in the remainder of the country.

Heritage

In response to WASC’s listing application, Historic England have produced a report recommending that the Victor Alert Hangars, weapons storage area and chapel should be listed. This now needs to be ratified by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. If listing is successful, it might be possible to look at listing other buildings on the airfield including the WW2 hangars and some of the early accommodation.

Planning Appeals for other prison sites

There are currently planning appeals ongoing for prisons at 3 other sites, Chorley, Grendon and Market Harborough. As Wethersfield is a back-up site for a prison, the technical sub-committee have been watching these appeals closely. Looking at the approach of the MOJ in relation to these appeals, particularly around jobs has been helpful. A report carried out earlier this year by Dr. Richard Sidebottom into whether rural mega prisons are in the local socio-economic interest showed that there is little demand for the type of low paid, unattractive jobs which a mega prison might bring to the area. Given, the remoteness of the area the ability of those who might be attracted by these sorts of jobs to travel here would be challenging.

Clause 101 Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

J Pearce explained the significance of this for the benefit of new WASC councillors. Clause 101 introduces a new provision which allows the Secretary of State to grant planning permission on matters which are of national importance but **not urgent** in relation to Crown Land, examples of developments which might be permitted under this clause have been given as prisons and defence installations. If this Bill is passed without any amendment to Clause 101 it will mean that planning applications of “national importance” at the airbase will be determined by the Secretary of State and Braintree District Council will be merely a consultee.

Transport Consultants

Unfortunately, the Transport Consultants commissioned by WASC to carry out a traffic report have had health problems. It is now looking like it will be necessary to instruct new consultants. Alternative comparable quotations have already been obtained as part of the

original tender process. It was discussed that it would be advisable to do a traffic count now and then again once the first intake of asylum seekers arrive. It would be important to understand how an increase in numbers of asylum seekers housed at Wethersfield is affecting the roads and whether this can be used to restrict the number of asylum seekers which are ultimately housed at Wethersfield.

Photography

Quotations have been obtained from professional photographers to take photos of the area to capture its rural nature, beauty and views which will be important to use if a planning application for the mega prisons is received. Depending on the photographer the cost is likely to be around £200.

WA17/23-24 FINANCE

WASC Finance Updated 1/6/2023

Invoices Received

<u>Date</u>	<u>Supplier</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount ex VAT</u>
27/2/2022	Captial Road Safety	Traffic Monitoring	£600.00
10/03/2022	Sedley Place	Prison Model	£2,137.50
01/03/2022	CBA	Mobilisation Payments	£2,000.00
28/02/2022	Andrew Martin Planning	Briefing note and research	£1,000.00
05/05/2022	CBA	Consultancy	£2,800.00
15/07/2022	Spectra Studios	Prison Model	£1,200.00
01/08/2022	CBA	Landscape assessment	£3,895.00
10/11/2022	CBA	Heritage application	£5,000.00
15/03/2023	T Roberts	WASC Postage Costs	£141.49
20/04/2023	Buro Happold	Desktop Contamination	£5,940.00
20/04/2023	Buro Happold	Note on EIA Screening	£600.00
		Total	£25,313.99

Income Received

<u>Date</u>	<u>Payee</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
21/02/2022	Shalford Parish Council	10% Contribution 21/22	£2,150.00
14/03/2022	Toppesfield Parish Council	Contribution	£500.00
11/04/2022	Little Bardfield Parish Council	Contribution	£300.00
08/04/2022	The Fields/SWAP	Grant	£5,000.00
05/05/2022	Bardfield Parish Council	Contribution	£1,000.00
18/05/2022	Finchingfield Parish Council	Contribution	£4,474.20
20/06/2022	Sible Hedingham	Contribution	£500.00

01/08/2022	The Fields/SWAP	Grant	£5,000.00
10/08/2022	Castle Hedingham	Contribution	£300.00
25/10/2022	Helions Bumpstead Parish Council	Contribution	£100.00
01/12/2022	Finchingfield Parish Council	Contribution	£4,748.50
17/06/2022	Shalford Parish Council	10% Contribution 22/23	£2,150.00
12/12/2022	Sible Hedingham Parish Council	Contribution	£2,375.00
24/01/2023	The Salings Parish Council	Contribution	£500.00
28/04/2023	The Fields/SWAP	Grant	£3,500.00
22/05/2023	Little Bardfield Parish Council	Grant	£315.00
Total			£32,912.70

Current Position

£7,598.71

Cllr A Hull gave an update on Finance. Just over £25,000 has been spent on surveys and work to date. Parish Councils have typically been providing grants of approximately 10% of their precept to WASC. Grants had also been received from The Fields Association. Currently there is approximately £7,500 left in funds out of which the Transport Consultants will need to be paid between £4,000 to £5,000.

WA18/23-24 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS TO BE ADDED TO THE NEXT AGENDA

All items should be sent to the Clerk by 26th June 2023.

WA19/23-24 NEXT MEETING OF THE WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

The next meeting of Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee will be held on Monday 31st July 2023 at Wethersfield Village Hall.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.41pm.

Signed:
Chairman

Date: