

**WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**  
**REPRESENTING WETHERSFIELD, BLACKMORE END & BEAZLEY END**



**MINUTES of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee Meeting held at Wethersfield Village Hall on Monday 27 February 2023, commencing at 7:30pm.**

Present: Cllr A Hull (Chairman) (Shalford PC)  
Cllr A Hooks (The Salings PC)  
Cllr J Pearce (Wethersfield PC)  
Cllr D Coverdale (Finchingfield PC)  
Cllr A French (Shalford PC)  
Cllr T Roberts (Toppesfield PC)  
Cllr G Inch (Ridgewell PC)  
Cllr J O'Brien (Little Bardfield PC) and acting Clerk.  
Cllr S Short (Wethersfield PC)  
Richard Aggiss

In Attendance: Members of the Public: 1

**WA117/22-23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr P Kennedy (Great Bardfield PC), Cllr M Gurney (Ridgewell PC), Cllr S Harris (Sible Hedingham PC), Cllr G Southgate (Castle Hedingham PC), Cllr R Duffin (Finchingfield PC) and Donna Roder (Clerk & RFO)

**WA118/22-23 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

None declared.

**WA119/22-23 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 NOVEMBER 2022.**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022, 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 Pearce.

**WA120/22-23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

A member of the public asked whether an environmental consultant was to be appointed and if so whether this would be done by WASC or SWAP. Cllr A Hull said he would be covering this in his Strategy and Co-ordination Sub-Committee update later in the meeting.

A member of the public confirmed that the chair of SWAP was taking some time out and that Beverley Ault was standing in as temporary Chair.

### **WA121/22-23 MEMBERSHIP**

The withdrawal of Panfield Parish Council from WASC was discussed and acknowledged.

### **WA122/22-23 CLERKS REPORT**

There was no Clerk's report as the Clerk is currently on compassionate leave.

### **WA123/22-23 SUB-COMMITTEES**

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

#### **Meeting with Rt Hon James Cleverley**

A meeting with Rt Hon James Cleverley took place on 2 December 2022 with Cllr A Hull, Cllr J Pearce, Cllr R Duffin, Dr R Sidebottom and C. Cottage of the Technical Sub-Committee present. The Rt Hon James Cleverley was impressed with the work of the Technical Sub-Committee and was interested in the proposed alternative uses (community energy, community housing and community workspaces) for the site. He understood the problems associated with the site being used as a Mega-Prison and agreed that WASC's proposed alternative uses were consistent with Government Policy and was supportive of the joint Neighbourhood Plan proposal, but he was not willing to get involved in planning applications. Follow up correspondence had been sent to Rt Hon James Cleverly, but his reply had been disappointing, and he was unable to offer any positive assistance.

#### **Environmental Testing**

Following the results of the PFAS testing Cllr A Hull has contacted 3 PFAS experts to see if they would act on behalf of WASC in providing further environmental advice. None were prepared to stick their heads above the parapet and comment on the PFAS testing. C. Cottage has contacted Hugh Mallett of Buro Happold who is prepared to act on behalf of WASC carrying out a Phase 1 Desktop Assessment and who has considerable experience in this field. In contrast the Phase 1 Environmental Survey which the Ministry of Justice will carry out, this survey will cover the whole of the airfield (as opposed to just the area where the prison would be sited). It will also take into account documentary evidence held by Ross Steward, curator of the Wethersfield Airfield Museum and other first-hand witness accounts. The cost of the survey is £5,000 plus VAT. Given that it had not been possible to find more than one environmental expert prepared to carry out this work, one quote would be sufficient to allow a vote on whether to commission the report.

**RESOLVED:** It was resolved to instruct Hugh Mallett of Buro Happold to carry out a Phase 1 Environmental Survey on behalf of WASC. Proposer Cllr T Roberts, Seconder Cllr J Pearce.

A request would be made to SWAP to contribute £3,500 towards the cost of the environmental survey.

#### **Asylum Processing Centre**

There had been information from multiple credible sources that the Home Office intend to house 1500 single male asylum seekers on the airfield using a mixture of the existing

accommodation and portacabins. Concerns were expressed as to how 1500 asylum seekers (more than the population of Wethersfield) would integrate into the local villages. It was felt that the local community would have similar concerns to those expressed regarding the prison, i.e. increased traffic to access the centre and for deliveries for food and other supplies, difficulty recruiting staff and question whether an asylum centre would place an undue burden on local policing and medical services. Questions were raised as to how the asylum seekers would get around with very limited bus services. Cllr J Pearce said that 3 times recently his daughter in law had been unable to return from Braintree by bus, because the scheduled bus service had failed to turn up. Cllr J Pearce said that planning law for this was a bit of a grey area, but he felt that planning would most likely be required for change of use of the existing accommodation blocks and planning would also be required for siting temporary buildings on site. Cllr J Pearce referred to an open letter from Asylum Matters and other charities which support asylum seekers. This letter describes housing large numbers of asylum seekers in rural ex-military camps as likely to cause serious harm to those people and damage community relations.

**RESOLVED:** It was resolved to write to Rt Hon James Cleverley expressing WASC's concerns and asking for more details as to how the asylum processing centre would be integrated into the local community. Proposer Cllr J O'Brien, Seconder Cllr T Roberts.

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

The Phase 1 Works Programme required to be carried out prior to planning application stage is now complete and costs have been contained within budget. The Technical Committee are now beginning to think about what further work will be required to be done if a planning application is received. This might involve work to do with the environmental survey and commissioning a photographer to take views of the local landscape to capture the character of the area. These photographs could be included within a planning objection.

Officers with Braintree District Council have no more information as to when or whether a planning application is likely to be received. There has been no published response to Cllr G Butland's letter to the Ministry of Justice asking for clarity as to when or if a planning application might be submitted.

The application has been made to Historic England for the listing of Heritage assets at the airfield. They have possibly visited the site.

The Government originally announced plans to build 6 mega prisons. Out of the original selected sites 3 have gone to planning appeal. In Chorley the Inspector's Report rejected the appeal, but the Secretary of State has intervened and given the MOJ until April to come up with a different highways arrangement. The Secretary of State has indicated that it would be minded to grant the appeal if a satisfactory highway's arrangement can be agreed. Lots of useful information was contained in the Planning Inspector's report on the approach taken to appeals. Chorley appeared to be a far more suitable site for locating a mega-prison than Wethersfield, as it was near a town, the site was less green and there is a requirement for more prison places in the North West.

Dr. R Sidebottom has produced another report on behalf of WASC entitled "Are rural Mega prisons in the Local Socio-economic Interest" this follows on from his previous report "Are

rural Mega prisons in the National Interest”. Cllr J Pearce felt the information contained in these reports was far better evidence than that provided at the Chorley Planning Appeal. Cllr T Roberts to circulate the report to the Rt Hon James Cleverly, District Councillors, BALC, Essex County Council and the press. Cllr J Pearce would provide Cllr T Roberts with a list of people the report is being distributed to directly by the Technical Sub Committee.

Wethersfield Parish Council has agreed the terms of reference for the Joint Neighbourhood Plan and Finchingfield Parish Council will be doing the same. Those working on the Toppesfield Neighbourhood Plan had expressed concerns about altering the boundary of their existing Neighbourhood Plan to exclude the airfield as this might result in delays in their plan being adopted. Cllr T Roberts said that this would be discussed and agreed at the next Toppesfield Parish Council meeting. Toppesfield will only be able to be part of the Joint Neighbourhood Plan if the area of the airfield within their parish boundary is excluded from their current Neighbourhood Plan as it cannot be covered by 2 Neighbourhood Plans. Sible Hedingham would only participate in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan if Toppesfield do so, because the area of the airfield within Sible Hedingham’s parish boundary did not connect to land within the Finchingfield and Wethersfield parish boundaries without Toppesfield.

## WA124/22-23 FINANCE

### WASC Finance Updated 1/2/2023

#### Invoices Received

<u>Date</u>	<u>Supplier</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount ex VAT</u>
2/27/2022	Captial Road Safety	Traffic Monitoring	£600.00
3/10/2022	Sedley Place	Prison Model	£2,137.50
3/1/2022	CBA	Mobilisation Payments	£2,000.00
2/28/2022	Andrew Martin Planning	Briefing note and research	£1,000.00
5/5/2022	CBA	Consultancy	£2,800.00
7/15/2022	Spectra Studios	Prison Model	£1,200.00
8/1/2022	CBA	Landscape assessment	£3,895.00
11/10/2011	CBA	Heritage application	£5,000.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>£18,632.50</b>

#### Income Received

<u>Date</u>	<u>Payee</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
2/21/2022	Shalford Parish Council	10% Contribution 21/22	£2,150.00
3/14/2022	Toppesfield Parish Council	Contribution	£500.00
4/11/2022	Little Bardfield Parish Council	Contribution	£300.00
4/8/2022	The Fields/SWAP	Grant	£5,000.00
5/5/2022	Bardfield Parish Council	Contribution	£1,000.00
5/18/2022	Finchingfield Parish Council	Contribution	£4,474.20

6/20/2022	Sible Hedingham	Contribution	£500.00
8/1/2022	The Fields/SWAP	Grant	£5,000.00
8/10/2022	Castle Hedingham	Contribution	£300.00
10/25/2022	Helions Bumpstead Parish Council	Contribution	£100.00
12/1/2022	Finchingfield Parish Council	Contribution	£4,748.50
<b>6/17/2022</b>	<b>Shalford Parish Council</b>	<b>10% Contribution 22/23</b>	<b>£2,150.00</b>
<b>12/12/2022</b>	<b>Sible Hedingham Parish Council</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>£2,375.00</b>
<b>1/24/2023</b>	<b>The Salings Parish Council</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>£500.00</b>
		<b>Total</b>	<b>£29,097.70</b>

Current Position

<b>£10,465.20</b>
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Cllr A Hull gave an update on Finance. There is an outstanding invoice for £5,000 from the Highways Consultant. There will also be £1,500 to be paid towards the Phase 1 Environmental Survey. It will be necessary to be careful with funds going forward.

**WA125/22-23 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS TO BE ADDED TO THE NEXT AGENDA**

*All items should be sent to the Clerk by 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023.*

**WA126/22-23 NEXT MEETING OF THE WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**

The next meeting of Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee will be held on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at Wethersfield Village Hall.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.31pm.

Signed: .....  
Chairman

Date: .....