

# **WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

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



## **MINUTES of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee Meeting held at Wethersfield Village Hall on Monday 28 October 2024, commencing at 7:30pm.**

Present: Cllr A Hull (Chairman) (Shalford PC)  
Cllr R Duffin (Vice Chairman) (Finchingfield PC)  
Cllr A French (Shalford PC)  
Mr R Aggis (representing The Salings PC)  
Mr J Pearce (Chair Technical Sub-Committee WASC)  
Cllr G Southgate (Castle Hedingham PC)  
Cllr W Taylor (BDC)  
D Roder (Clerk and RFO)

In Attendance: Members of the Public: 1

### **WA15/24-25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr J O'Brien (Little Bardfield PC), Cllr N Nicholson (Helions Bumpstead PC, Cllr C West (Wethersfield PC).

### **WA16/24-25 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

None declared.

### **WA17/24-25 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2024.**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2024, copies of which had been previously circulated to Members, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposer J Pearce, Seconder R Aggis.

### **WA18/24-25 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Cllr W Taylor advised that she would raise the recent questions from the Clerk, on behalf of WASC, with Cllr M Staines for further discussion at the next BDC Full Council Meeting.

### **WA19/24-25 CLERKS REPORT**

#### **Home Office and Parish Council meeting – 13 May 2024.**

- The Home Office gave a tour around the facility again and the portacabin area.
- There are currently 464 service users on site.
- Ground Contamination survey still to commence, until so users will be capped at 580 but no idea where or why that figure was decided.
- RAF Museum: Cllr C West pressed the HO strongly regarding the decision not to accommodate the museum on site. The HO could accommodate tours potentially, with an off-site building funded by the HO utilising BDC community funding.
- The entire 800-acre site is now under Home Office ownership.

- Next meeting will in June has since been cancelled due Purdah, and arranged for July now after the election.
- The SDO prayer motion was not debated further in Parliament and therefore after 40 days, became lawful.

**Home Office and Parish Council meeting** – June’s meeting was cancelled due purdah. Next meeting scheduled 16 July 2024.

- **Elections:** After the landslide victory of Labour on 4 July, Yvette Cooper has been appointed as Home Secretary for the Labour Cabinet. MP James Cleverly held his seat for Braintree.
- 5 June 2024 a peaceful protest took place outside the main gates of the asylum centre by asylum seekers. They were protesting about the length of stay at the facility.
- 26 June 2024, there was a suicide attempt at the asylum centre. At least 4 ambulances were in attendance.
- It has been reported to the clerk that at least two buildings on the airbase have been demolished by the HO. It appears this happened around July-Sept’23 whilst occupancy was under class Q planning regulations. The Clerk has since reported this with photographic evidence to BDC’s Planning Enforcement officers. An investigation is underway.

**Home Office and Parish Council meeting** 16 July 2024.

- Ryan Outred – new deputy director for AS large sites program.
- New ministerial team. Angela Eagle is their responsible minister. No direct feedback from team yet on future direction.
- Jenny O’Keefe. Responsible officer for Wethersfield.
- 480 on site
- 580 cap still in place due SDO
- Monthly visits for museum visitors under review.
- Littering. Included in information pack now how to dispose of litter in our outside of the site.
- Minibuses. Speeding and tailgating issues to be taken up with CRH.
- Footpaths. Positive feedback received on reinstating pathway between Wethersfield and Finchingfield for both service users and residents. BDC will follow up with ECC on costs for this and but both BDC and HO agreed this is an impact where monies could be spent from the BDC grant awarded by the HO.

**Home Office and Parish Council meeting** 28 August 2024.

- Jenny O’Keefe Jenny O’Keefe provided a general site update. To date there are 550 Service Users on site. An enhanced induction process is in use now. Cultural awareness sessions are ongoing, police attend for day two as a part of the inductions. Migrant help conduct a two-week settling-in process to touch base with new arrivals. There is a steady programme of activities on site. Changing Lives are on site who offer a range of Sports based activities. A running group has been established. There is a good uptake for the English language lessons as well as the sports sessions. Other activities range from Maths, music, basic cookery, and cultural dancing. Community impacts a smaller sign to indicate a No-through Road. These will be in place soon. Recently the bus service was suspended for a day from leaving the site and going into the local towns. This decision was due to the disruption across the country and for the safety of everyone, this decision was made in advance and communicated to Service Users. There were no reported issues on or off site. SDO Conditions – Jenny

O’Keeffe – There is a meeting every few weeks for issues raised by Sculpins Lane residents. Discussions at this meeting have meant new signs have been delivered to site which include a large sign for the entrance and Regarding SDO conditions there are eight still to discharge – Home Office are awaiting further reports, including the water reports.

- Museum - Ciaran Gold Ciaran has spoken to those involved with the Museum project and Braintree District Council (BDC) officers have met with Home Office’s Commercial and financial service teams. The museum is a priority at present for BDC. It was noted that it is taking a while to get responses, as of last week there is one response. The response is not significant in terms of updates. BDC are speaking with the programme manager tomorrow to see where they can go from here. Ciaran is also speaking to residents and council; but is not getting answers on how the funding can be spent. Ciaran is in regular contact with the museum curator and aware of the current state of this project. There are some issues with business rates, and the museum is also looking to get their community Peter Mitchell raised the issue of costs to date interest company accreditation soon. Future Use of site- Ryan Outred Decisions on the future use of current accommodation sites will be made by the Home Secretary in due course. Once there is more direction from the political teams, we will be able to have more discussions on use for other parts of the site. Community Impact Footpaths - The Operational Sculpins Lane meeting is on 22/08/2024. The footpaths will be raised and addressed in that meeting. BDC is talking to the Parish council and commercial to determine costs etc. BDC will give feedback separately to council then to this group.

#### **Home Office and Parish Council meeting 24 September 2024.**

- Future use of site and HO officers recommendations is with Minister (Yvette Cooper) and Dame Angela Eagle Subject to review after recess/conference.
- Finances: Currently continues to provide value for money, commercially confidential and not subject to FOI.
- Service users: c.550 on site, no known significant issues.
- Serious incident last night (23<sup>rd</sup> Sept) with attendance of nine emergency vehicles through Weathersfield and 4 through Bardfield – Police missed turns as no signage. Unmarked police cars and riot vans. One arrest made serious situation took place. Additional security is now onsite, incident was contained to the site and has not impacted the wider areas. 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Sept incident when a user attempted to get into private motor vehicles - no update provided.
- Rt Hon Jenrick has stated in recent days known flags (terrorists) and known parties with criminal past. Biometric and Biodata run on individuals, anyone considered a risk would not be allocated to none detained accommodation and taken into appropriate custody.
- Applications rate / time held @ Wethersfield – HO is progressing with interviews, no decisions will be received at Wethersfield, they will be dispersed before given notice, they will only be given 9mths on site.
- Living arrangement/support for mental health – global tools are on site to provide safeguarding support and ensure appropriate measures are provided to service users. Special Development Order allows for 580 persons on site, this level has not been reached or breached.
- Service users who have been in contact with police are they still on site – will not answer individual cases.
- SDO Matters – PFAS water results expected in Oct; 8 o/s conditions continue to be outstanding; 160 acres North of base not being used cannot be commented; use of HO grant funds, deadlock on release of funds (£3,500 per bed space pa at the site) Essex CC are seeking draw on this funds as they claim they have expenses to discharge their

- statutory duties; BDC are exploring planning breaches; Museum – no further update, BDC are frustrated they cannot unlock monies.
- BDC confirmed they have the funds, and none have been released due to funding grants criteria, which is confidential and cannot be shared.

### **Home Office and Parish Council meeting – 15 October 2024**

- Previous meeting actions Item raised in AOB: Hannah Honeyman to take advice on the extent to which the safeguarding audit terms of reference and outcome report can be shared. As well as the assurance framework. And report back to the group. Update to be provided at the next meeting.
- Site Overview Numbers: Currently there are around 530 Service Users (SUs) on site.
- Activities: activities continue and will look to move these indoors as colder weather draws in; litter picking took place last week also. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Forum: HO provided an update on the first NGO forum, which took place last week – useful conversations took place between stakeholders and the Home Office (HO). This forum will be utilised as a working group to ensure support provided is shared amongst the sectors. I.e., distribution / collection winter clothing.
- Post Incident update: Essex police engaged fully with the post incident review for the incident at the end of September. Feedback from external partners was positive and communication channels recognised. To note the Incident was contained on site. Cllr Roger Duffin requested clarification on the details of this incident. HO provided a quick outline of the incident and updated that that providers have made note of lessons learned from the incident, particularly in regard to ‘nuisance behaviour.’ HO and Providers are ensuring this sort of behaviour is monitored before it can escalate. Furthermore, , active management of issues when they arise, and more active security patrols for noise-heavy areas, are taking place. Anti-social behaviour classes are also going to be held, to build on what is already provided in the briefing when Service Users arrive on site. Cllr Rebecca Gill raised The Snapchat post from a service user which had been shared on Facebook. HO fed back that this was raised with the on-site team by policing colleagues. HO further confirmed that neither the Home Office nor the site have any intel about potential protests. Migrant Help are on site for residents to discuss and escalate their issues. For the issue itself specifically, this is being dealt with by the Providers, Clearsprings Ready Homes. The site is also continuously engaging with SUs and managing their expectations. Cllr Richard van Dulken requested clarification on language translation for this management of expectations. HO informed that Induction packs are in the top ten languages spoken by people claiming asylum in the UK. Migrant Help who delivers their own inductions are required to deliver them in a language that SUs can speak. Some staff on site speak some of the languages spoken by SUs with telephony services also utilised.
- Funding - Ciaran Gold Ciaran Gold - Since the last meeting BDC and Home Office funding teams have met regularly. There are further meetings in diaries to determine what funding can be spent on. BDC wanted to remind Cllrs that the funding is primarily for statutory responsibilities. However, community projects, with the agreement of the Home Office, are in potential scope. BDC reported that they are awaiting definition on what types of community projects will be supported. BDC clarified that there are three to four main projects which BDC have submitted. Regarding the Museum, updates will be provided once confirmation received. HO noted he would look to get further updates to provide to BDC.
- AOB How many SDOs (Special Development Orders) conditions are remaining, which keep the site capped at its current number? Is progress expected to be made? HO advised there are currently 8 awaiting to be discharged, there are 4 that cap the site at 580 SUs. Discharging conditions is a lengthy process, HO will update the group on any discharges in future meetings when applicable. It was asked if the outcome of ground tests be made

public? HO informed RD that they will share what we can. Some concerns raised some of the recent headlines in the media regarding numbers and small boat crossings. This point was also echoed by and asked where individuals are placed following arrival into Western Jet Foil (WJF) and Manston? HO explained that WJF and Manston are a stage early in the processing of people claiming asylum in the UK. Individuals there will stay up to two days. Most small boat arrivals, go into ring-fenced accommodation, and are then routed into accommodation, with one possibility being Wethersfield.

July 2024: It has been reported to the clerk that at least two buildings on the airbase have been demolished by the HO. It appears this happened around July-Sept'23 whilst occupancy was under class Q planning regulations. The Clerk has since reported this with photographic evidence to BDC's Planning Enforcement officers. An investigation is underway – **NO FURTHER UPDATE CURRENTLY.**

## **RAF WETHERSFIELD MUSEUM**

The Home Office finally confirmed that it would not accommodate the museum and a memorial on site due security issues. The Museum has since found a unit to rent in Finchingfield and have secured this however it will require support initially with funding. BDC have been approached for financial support from the HO £200K allocated to the local communities. The museum is currently applying to become a CIO.

The Museum has secured the unit in Finchingfield and are on target to open to the public in August. Further funding will be sought from BDC's HO grant, plus local fundraising by the Museum itself.

Wethersfield Parish Council have agreed a grant of £2K to the museum.

The museum grand opening is being held on 19 August 2024.

## **FINANCE:**

- Finchingfield PC has kindly agreed a further ear marked contribution of £2K 24/25. Total ear marked reserves now stand at £4K
- Shalford PC has kindly agreed a further ear marked contribution of £2.5K 24/25. Total ear marked reserves now stand at £3,160.00.
- Gosfield PC has kindly donated £250.00 for 24/25.
- A private individual has very generously donated £1000.00

## **WA20/24-25 SUB-COMMITTEES.**

Cllr A Hull gave an update: Reed Smith who commissioned the Buro Happold report on behalf of WASC under an agreed confidential banner, has now confirmed the report can be shared to WASC members, on a request only basis. An FOI regarding firefighting records where the MOD confirmed they had no records of such at the site was further escalated. It now appears that the records were transferred to RAF Mildenhall. A further FOI has been sent to the US Military who have confirmed that a search of those number of years would exceed the statutory limit of hours however could be searched on an hourly basis thereafter for a fee of USD25 per hour. The FOI has since been narrowed initially to ask what information could be found in the allocated time permitted under FOI legislation. Reed Smith

is also looking into the PFA's on site and in contact with the Environmental Agency. A meeting is planned with the Shadow Home Secretary in the coming weeks. The Sub-Committee's are awaiting further information from the budget announcement this Wednesday.

## **WA21/24-25 JOINT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Mr J Pearce gave an update and overview of actions of the past 18 months. Regulation 14 commenced 7 November until 22 November 2024. A 6-week consultation of the draft plan has been communicated to residents, business and statutory plus non statutory consultee's. Two drop-in sessions also took place on this in October and were well represented by residents. Once the results of the survey are known, the draft plan will either be adjusted or not adjusted depending on the response and then the draft finalised, upon both Finchingfield and Wethersfield PC will discuss and agree at their next meetings. If agreed by the PC's, the draft will then be submitted to BDC. With regard to the airbase, the plan will support uses of certain criteria's, local needs, and nature in consultation also with businesses and major landowners. A meeting took place with the HO as a major landowner of the plan in August, together with BDC. It was suggested and agreed a tri-partite masterplan between the HO and the NP team should be drawn up and agreed. The draft plan contains 18 policies and 14 actions over the next 10 years for the PC's and is on target to be finalised 1 year from now but as it evolves, it already starts to carry weight.

## **WA22/24-25 FINANCE**

<b>WASC Finance</b>			
<b>Updated 11/10/24</b>			
<b>Invoices Received</b>			
<u>Date</u>	<u>Supplier</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount ex VAT</u>
27/02/2022	Capitol 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 assesment	£ 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	WASC DESKTOP CONTAMINATION	£ 4,950.00
20/04/2023	BURO HAPPOLD	WASC DESIGN NOTE ON EIA SCREENING	£ 500.00
04/07/2023	TRANSPORT PLANNING CONSULTANTS LTD	TRAFFIC ASSESMENT	£ 4,750.00
11/10/2024	BURO HAPPOLD	WASC CONTAMINATION REPORT	£ 5,000.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 33,973.99</b>

<b>Income Received</b>			
<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	Great 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
11/07/2023	Toppesfield Parish Council	Contribution	£ 500.00
06/10/2023	Shalford Parish Council	Contribution	£ 1,121.00
02/10/2023	Finchingfield Parish Council	Contribution	£ 2,000.00
24/11/2023	Gosfield Parish Council	Contribution	£ 250.00
21/05/2024	Gosfield Parish Council	Contribution	£ 250.00
11/10/2024	Private Individual	Gift	£ 1,000.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 38,033.70</b>
		<b>Current Position banked</b>	<b>£ 4,059.71</b>
		<b>EARMARKED RESERVES:</b>	
		Finchingfield Parish Council balance remaining 24/25 EMR	4000
		Shalford Parish Council balance remaining 24-25	2500
		Shalford Parish Council balance remaining 23-24	£1,121.00
			<b>£ 11,680.71</b>
		<i>Wethersfield Parish Council contribution Clerk and Hall Hire (£6500.00)</i>	
		<b>Spending in the pipeline resolved:</b>	
		Water testing	1000
		<b>Total:</b>	<b>1000</b>
		Current balance banked + earmarked reserves	11680.71
		Minus spending agreed but not yet paid	-1000
		<b>Current position including earmarked reserves minus pipeline spending:</b>	<b>10680.71</b>

**WA22/24-25 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS TO BE ADDED TO THE NEXT AGENDA**

*All items should be sent to the Clerk by 15 November 2024.*

**WA23/24-25 NEXT MEETING OF THE WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**

The next meeting of Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to be held on Monday 25 November 2024 at Wethersfield Village Hall.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.13pm.

Signed: .....  
Chairman

Date: .....