

WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL
REPRESENTING WETHERSFIELD, BLACKMORE END & BEAZLEY END



MINUTES of the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee Meeting held at Wethersfield Village Hall on Monday 31 July 2023, commencing at 7:30pm.

Present: Cllr R Duffin (Vice Chairman) (Finchingfield PC)
J Pearce
Cllr T Roberts (Toppesfield PC)
Cllr J O'Brien (Little Bardfield PC)
R Aggiss
Cllr B Foulkes (Castle Hedingham)
Cllr S Short (Wethersfield PC)
Cllr T Strudwick (Gosfield PC)
Cllr P Kennedy (Great Bardfield PC)
Cllr A French (Shalford PC)
Cllr N Nicolson (Helions Bumpstead PC)
D Roder (Clerk and RFO)

In Attendance: Members of the Public: 0

WA20/23-24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr A Hull (Chairman) (Shalford PC), Cllr D Hockley (Great Bardfield PC), Cllr G Southgate (Castle Hedingham PC), Cllr M Gurney (Ridgewell PC), Cllr C West (Wethersfield PC).

WA21/23-24 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

None declared.

WA22/23-24 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JUNE 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2023, copies of which had been previously circulated to Members, were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman. Proposer Cllr T Strudwick, Seconder Cllr T Roberts.

WA23/23-24 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- None
- Cllr T Roberts stated this will be her last meeting with WASC as she is leaving the area. Toppesfield PC will be appointing another representative to replace her. The Vice Chairman thanked Cllr Roberts for all her incredible work and dedication to the Committee.

WA/24/23-24 CLERKS REPORT

WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE ASYLUM RECEPTION CENTRE

BDC lost their appeal for their injunction hearing which was heard on 12 June 2023.

Three judicial review hearings were heard on 11 and 12 July 2023 at the High Court. Braintree District Council brought a judicial review of the same plans in Wethersfield. West Lindsey District Council brought a judicial review challenging plans to accommodate asylum seekers at RAF Scampton, and local resident Gabe Clarke Holland bought a third judicial review of the plans at Wethersfield.

All three claims were granted permission on two grounds, the Court finding that it was arguable that:

1. The Levelling Up Secretary produced an unlawful Environmental Screening Direction because it failed to consider relevant considerations; and
2. the Home Secretary may have acted unlawfully by relying on emergency powers to push through the plans.

Braintree District Council was also granted permission on a third ground arguing that the decision was unlawful because it was based on an insufficient Equality Impact Assessment which failed to consider the impact on community relations.

A further meeting took place between the Home Office, and parish/district councils (virtual) on 22 June 2023. The Home Office confirmed plans to start moving asylum seekers on the site on 11 July 2023. The site will be run by Clearsprings Ready Homes, and they have experience working with this contractor. We asked if the Home Office would come and speak to residents of Wethersfield face to face to hear their concerns. The HO advised that Chief Inspector Jenner would be organising meetings with residents and that it would be preferred for the police to handle any questions or concerns by residents. The Home Office again confirmed that both Wethersfield and Finchingfield parish councils would be invited to visit the site, week commencing 26 June 2023 however no invitation has been received yet. Concerns were again raised over traffic and large vehicles using the roads which cannot cope with it. At the time of the meeting, 3 large out of gauge loads were stuck in Sible Hedingham causing traffic chaos since 7am because they could not continue their journey to the airbase as the road was too narrow. The Home Office confirmed they were aware of this and that the situation occurred as people had parked on the street outside their homes, and were being asked by the police to move them. They confirmed these residents' cars were not parked illegally and at 3pm the vehicles had to turn back and abort the journey. The Home Office advised they are mitigating where possible the impact to roads, businesses, and the local sewage system in Wethersfield. They are installing chemical toilets on site and underground sewage tanks. They confirmed they are working with providers for phone masts to support 1700 additional users. Primary would be used for longer than 12 months and that no compensation would be provided to home owners whose insurance policies has increased to the asylum centre plans. The sewage survey is 95% completed however the Home Office will not share the results, and Anglia Water are surveying the water works at patches bridge and will inform the Home Office the available capacity. If there is no capacity, they will not be able to use the site.

On 12 July 2023, 46 asylum seekers were moved onto the base. 2 left to live with relatives and 2 have disappeared. As far as we are aware, no further AS have been moved on site since. It would appear there is a problem with sewage, and 3 huge septic tanks have been moved on base which will be buried underground. There are reports of a lot of digging at the base, and it appears the rest of the blocks are still not ready for habitation. 18 portacabins reported on site now.

The Home Office are holding a drop-in session on 31 July 2023 at 3.30pm Wethersfield Village Hall for women and vulnerable residents to ask questions. The session will last 1.5hrs.

THE FIELDS ASSOCIATION

The equality impact assessment was refused by the Home Office under several FOI's. The report has since been received and in the public domain by TFA from the lawyers representing Gabe Clarke Holland.

All AS banners were removed the day before the first AS arrived.

WETHERSFIELD PROTEST

The peaceful protest group organised a demonstration at the main gate of the site on Saturday 8 July. Around 200 people attended in addition to ITV and BBC news.

WASC MEMBERS

Welcome to new WASC members Cllr C West (Wethersfield PC), Cllr B Foulkes (Castle Hedingham PC), Cllr T Strudwick (Gosfield PC) and Cllr J Warner (Finchingfield PC).

Cllr A Hooks will no longer be representing the Salings PC as she now holds a District Councillor position sitting on the planning committee.

WA25/23-24 SUB-COMMITTEES

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

On the mega prison proposal by the MOJ, Wethersfield airbase is still currently the first in line of reserves. The appeal hearing at Grendon, Alsbury has been pushed back to September 2023. Market Harborough appeal decision is expected 4 September and Chorley 19 September 2023.

On the Asylum Centre it was reported in the Times newspaper that a further cohort of 50 male asylum seekers would be arriving at Wethersfield today. The Home Office previously stated that they would pause program once 200 are on site and evaluate until any further cohorts arrive. We understand there are sewage issues on site as there are currently three huge septic tanks that have been delivered to the airbase. Reports of scabies and TB however the Home Office confirmed today there were no active cases of TB. The turnaround of applications is expected to be 9 months where those successful will enter the dispersement system. Currently around 25% are returned, however out of 45,000 last year only around 200 were returned. There are also now two policemen assigned here but not on site though.

Contamination: The Aecom commissioned report by the HO appears not to exist and no risk assessment has been carried out.

Equality: The equality assessment report has been received via an FOI.

The Fields Association: raised £4.6K from the Quiz/Auction they held in July, of which 50% of the monies will be going toward funding the Gabe Clarke Holland judicial review.

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

The Technical Sub-Committee met a couple of weeks ago together with BDC chief planning officers who confirmed there as been no further communication from the MOJ.

The traffic assessment report has been produced and will be distributed shortly.

Alternative usage plans have been sent to BDC planners, and our MP. These will also form part of the joint neighbourhood plan.

Ecology: Natural England are interested in the open mosaic habitat value of the airbase.

Judicial Review: 3 grounds found and granted; A full hearing is expected in October/November 2023. If found unlawful it is likely the HO will apply for a special permitted development order through parliament. If there are no objection by MP's then it will go through. Priti Patel needs contacting on it.

Heritage: Application needs to be chased up.

WA26/23-24 LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

J. Pearce gave an update. James Cleverley contacted Baroness Scott on the levelling up bill. 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.

WA27/23-24 JOINT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

J. Pearce gave an update, BDC have approved the plan area and leaflets have been distributed to residents about the plan and how to get involved.

WA28/23-24 PHOTOGRAPHY

RESOLVED: It was agreed to commission professional photographs of the area to support our case in the event of a planning application coming forward, at a cost of £200.00 +VAT. Proposer Cllr S Short, seconder Cllr A French.

WA29/23-24 FINANCE

WASC Finance			
Updated 1/7/2023			
Invoices Received			
Date	Supplier	Description	Amount ex VAT
27/02/2022	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 assesment	£ 3,895.00
10/11/2011	CBA	Heritage application	£ 5,000.00
15/03/2023	T ROBERTS	WASC POSTAGE COSTS	£ 141.49
20/04/2023	BURO HAPPOLD	WASC DESKTOP CONTAMINATION	£ 5,940.00
20/04/2023	BURO HAPPOLD	WASC DESIGN 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

- Toppesfield PC have resolved to donate £500 to WASC
- Finchingfield PC have resolved to earmark £4000 to WASC

WA30/23-24 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS TO BE ADDED TO THE NEXT AGENDA

All items should be sent to the Clerk by 18 August 2023.

WA31/23-24 NEXT MEETING OF THE WETHERSFIELD AIRBASE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

The next meeting of Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee will be held on Tuesday 29 August 2023 at Wethersfield Village Hall.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.56pm.

Signed:
Chairman

Date: