

WESTHORPE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 22 September 2026 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

PRESENT: Cllrs David Barker (Chair), Richard Brown, Steve Caley, Diane Gladders and Robin Lambert. Also in attendance: Ginny O'Hegarty (Clerk), County Cllr James Patchett, District Cllr Andy Mellen and 4 members of the public.

1. Apologies and approval of absences. Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Steve Christian and Martin Brown.
2. Declarations of interest and dispensations. None declared.
3. Minutes of the Council meetings held on 19 May 2026 and 18 August 2026 and the Annual Parish Meeting held on 19 May 2026 were unanimously approved and signed by the Chairman.
4. County Councillor Report. Cllr Patchett's full report has been added to the website. Cllr Patchett reported that:
 - a. Following the wildfire on Dunwich Heath, the Suffolk Fire Brigade Union had written to the government explaining that more investment in equipment is needed to fight wildfires. Suffolk receives less than average funding for its fire service.
 - b. Homeowners can apply for a government grant of up to £9,000 towards replacing old boilers with heat pumps. Funding towards solar panels and insulation is available from Mid Suffolk District Council by way of a grant of up to £5,000 means tested to £80,000; and low interest loans are being offered by Suffolk County Council for amounts between £2,000 to £15,000.

Cllr Barker requested a site visit with Cllr Patchett to discuss clearing a silted culvert.

The Clerk requested assistance from Cllr Patchett in following up on Council's grit bin application.

5. District Councillor Report. Cllr Mellen's August and September reports have been added to the website. Cllr Mellen reported that:
 - a. Plans for local government reorganisation in Suffolk are to be withdrawn and reviewed therefore district elections will take place next May.
 - b. The government announced changes to the National Planning Policy framework which came into effect in August. A further change will be made at the end of October when councillors will no longer be able to call in planning applications to a planning committee.
 - c. Mid Suffolk District Council was a finalist for a national award for its work on nature recovery.
6. Speed Indicator Device update. The device is working and the batteries are charged periodically.
7. Planning: Council noted the following planning applications are still awaiting decisions: DC/23/05193 and DC/23/05077 Bacton Middle School. The developer wishes to vary their application. The Parish Council's objections to the variation were submitted on 7 December 2023.
8. Neighbourhood Plan update and consideration of a conditional offer of funding. A conditional offer of £8,000 to help bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan had been received from Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils. The offer is conditional on the Parish Council submitting an application seeking designation of the proposed neighbourhood plan area and allocating sufficient sites to make an agreed contribution to meeting district-wide housing needs. Council agreed to proceed with submitting an application to designate the proposed neighbourhood plan area.

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9. Repairs to the noticeboard. Quotes will be obtained.
10. Finance Update

The Chairman reported that online banking was up and running.

 - a. The RFO reported the bank balance at 31 August 2026 was £12,212.25 held as follows:

Savings Account:	£1,572.58
Current Account:	<u>£10,639.67</u>
Total:	£12,212.25

The Chairman signed the bank reconciliation.
The spend against budget was reviewed and confirmed to be on track.
 - b. Council noted and ratified the following payments made since the 19 May 2026 meeting:
 - i. 21.05.2026 Cheque number 100516 V O'Hegarty £163.41 (Clerk's salary May 2026)
 - ii. 09.06.2026 Direct Debit to Nest Pension £6.81 (May 2026)
 - iii. 09.07.2026 Direct Debit to Nest Pension £6.81 (June 2026)
 - iv. 09.07.2026 V O'Hegarty £163.41 (Clerk's salary June 2026)
 - v. 24.07.2026 V O'Hegarty £170.22 (Clerk's salary July 2026)
 - vi. 24.07.2026 WelMedical Ltd £293.94 (Defibrillator battery)
 - vii. 24.08.2026 Westhorpe Village Hall Ltd £50.00 (hall hire – Jan, Mar, May, Aug 2026)
 - c. Council approved the following payments:
 - i. £37.80 +VAT towards Clerk training course – Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration
 - ii. £214.00 Zurich Municipal Insurance premium
11. Insurance: Council approved the insurance quotation from Zurich Municipal Insurance in the amount of £214.00.
12. Internal Audit 2026/27: Council approved instructing Victoria Waples as Internal Auditor.
13. Council agreed the dates for the 2027 Parish Council meetings as: 12 January 2027, 16 March 2027, 17 May 2027 (including the Annual Parish Meeting), 21 September 2027 and 11 January 2028.
14. Questions for the Chairman: Emergency Plan to be reviewed and added as an Agenda item for the next meeting. It was requested consideration to be given to wildfires as well as situations where the internet and phone systems are down.
15. Date of next meeting Tuesday, 12 January 2027 at 7.30pm at the Village Hall.
16. Meeting closed at 8.31pm.

.....Sign and Date

Chair

Signed as confirmation that they are a true record.