

## **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 15 May 2024 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall, Witcham**

**Present:** M Housden – Chairman  
S J Bell – Clerk

L Dupré – County Councillor

G Byrne, L Holdaway, K Mackender – Parish Councillors  
Representatives from Witcham Village Hall, Witcham Cricket Club, Witcham Bowls, Archive Group, Witcham Events Committee ((5)  
4 Members of the electorate

Chairman, M Housden, welcomed everyone and thanked them for their support for the village.

**Apologies** for absence were received from S Wilkin, J Lucas, (Parish Councillors) M Inskip (District Councillor), Lead of Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, Editor Witcham What's On Newsletter. Chairman reported that the Village Hall Chairman would probably be a little late as she had been out of the village for the day.  
7.32pm K Mackender arrived.

**Minutes** of the Annual Parish Meeting of 26 April 2023, previously circulated, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposed K Mackender, seconded L Holdaway and agreed. M Housden abstained as he was not present at the last meeting.

**Matters Arising:** There were none.

### **REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

L Dupré presented the Annual Reports from County and District Council, copy on the Parish Council website.

Of note was that Cambridgeshire NHS had put in place a local Dental Improvement Plan – East Cambs is one of the worst dental deserts in the country; Mallings Health had agreed a 12 month extension to their contract at the Sutton GP practice and negotiations ongoing to buy the premises and undertake improvement works to the building. She had asked for a review on how NHS communicates about GP closures.

Household Support Fund would be funded by Government for further 6 months and County Council would continue to issue supermarket vouchers to eligible families. A recent survey revealed that over a half of 18-24 year olds felt lonely and were struggling with mental health. Exceptionally wet winter had caused a great number of flooding issues and she spoke of the Council's work and commitment on climate change. From 2026 the weekly black sack will be replaced by black bin and food caddy system. Fens 2100+ was launched in 2023 to help the Fens adapt to climate change – 25 year strategy. £4.5 billion would be needed to manage flood risk in the Fens (today's cost).

156 roads across the county identified as failing due to soil base, heavier vehicles, extreme weather and history of neglect. Anti-social driving activities at Elean Business Park ongoing and Community Protection Warnings were being issued.

Both she and Mark were very pleased to be re-elected as District Councillors. Plans for the crematorium at Mepal continue. An 'environmental chapter' for the Local Plan was being started – the old Plan is now 9 years old. There was concern about Sanctuary Hereward empty homes. They claim to be focusing on repairing occupied homes first.

She thanked Councillors and Parish Clerks for all their work in supporting the community and advised that she and Mark held regular councillor surgeries at the Community Room at Sutton School.

A member of the public asked questions about the County Council's move to Alconbury and how many staff were now working there now. L Dupré advised that it was a lean staffing level at this site but in any case people worked at satellite venues such as Noble House in Ely and hubs in Huntingdon.

A member of the public asked about the houses that were having to be taken down due to faulty foundations at Darwin Green, Cambridge. L Dupré responded but not all the details were known.

### **ANNUAL BEST KEPT GARDENS EVENT**

Chairman invited discussion to explore alternative options to the old Best Kept Garden Competition. There was no clear desire expressed for another scheme of some sort and it seemed that times had changed and interest amongst the community had waned. The Chairman said there had been some thought as to whether the Witcham Events Committee would take over and asked that people get in touch to give their ideas.

### **2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT OF PARISH COUNCIL, including 2023/24 Annual Accounts (unaudited) and the 2024/25 Precept**

A copy of the Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/4 had been circulated at the meeting and a copy would be delivered to each household in the next few days.

The Chairman gave a brief resume of the main points. The main focus during the year had been completion of the new play and fitness equipment project, which was now being enjoyed by all age groups. Mr Byrne, new Councillor, was introduced and it was noted that he was undertaking the role of co-ordinating the speedwatch team for training and sessions. The MVAS monthly speed results revealed some people were truly exceeding the 30mph speed limit! More volunteers to undertake speedwatch sessions would be much appreciated. The Chairman thanked the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group for their commitment in pushing through getting the survey done and it was noted the Design Code was now finished and published on the Council's website (News). He thanked the newly formed Witcham Events Committee for all the work they were doing in arranging community events. The Christmas tree and lights, the Easter Egg hunt and play park opening with drop in for Neighbourhood Plan had gone very well on 24 March.

### **REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS/CLUBS**

#### **Bowls Club**

24 members, some from other villages – a friendly group and doing well. Club nights would be held all through the summer, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month. New members always welcome.

#### **Cricket Club**

There would be no Saturday matches for Witcham team but he was working with City of Ely Cricket X1 3<sup>rd</sup> team who would be having a few games on the recreation ground at Witcham. The outfield had not been in good shape earlier but this was due to the very wet weather all winter and into March so that the first grass cuts had been delayed. He suggested the contractors ought to be cutting 3 times a month during April, May and June when grass growing fast. Witcham had a few Kirkland Cup friendly matches to play.

#### **Witcham Events Committee**

10 members, to organise fundraising community events and keep the Witcham Peashooting Championship running. Ideas for events welcomed and she thanked everyone who had always supported the Peashooting Championship. It will continue along the same lines as previous years with some changes to update. More helpers would be appreciated and hoped to make more flexible for helpers so that they were able to take time out to move round and enjoy other aspects of the Peashoot.

8.20pm Chair of the Village Hall Committee arrived.

### **Village Hall Committee:**

The Village Hall was doing well. A sink and additional tea and coffee making facilities had been created, the car park resurfaced with gravel again in worn areas, ceiling refurbished, defibrillator serviced and new batteries and pads purchased.

Due to increased staff and electricity costs, hire fees were increasing, the first time since 2017. A remunerated bookings clerk and treasurer had just been appointed. She hoped the Witcham Events Committee would thrive and be successful. She asked if the Parish Council would hold a copy of the Terms and Conditions for the continuation of the World Pea Shooting Championship – an agreement between Witcham Village Hall Trustees and the Witcham Events Committee. If the Witcham Events Committee were to cease, arrangements would pass back to the Trustees of the Village Hall. As a long-term village organisation, the Village Hall Committee asked if the Parish Council would hold a copy of the document for safe-keeping and a copy was passed over.

For the future, the Village Hall Committee would be considering installing an electric box for the Christmas tree lights and solar panels/heat source pump. Noted that ACRE were keen to support these green energy options. The Committee had looked into extending the car park but no land available at present. People using the Village Hall sometimes also wanted to use the recreation ground as part of their event. The Committee would consider making it clearer at the point of completing the booking form that consent was required from the Parish Council to use the recreation ground for an organised event and this should be sorted out at the time of their making the booking with the village hall.

The Chair of the Village Hall Committee thanked everyone for their help and support with the village hall but it was noted that trustees were dwindling.

### **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

In the absence of the Lead of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, Chairman read out the report. It was noted that grant monies had been obtained for the stages of the Neighbourhood Plan up to completion of the survey. Monies had also been obtained to create the Design Code which would be part of the finished Neighbourhood Plan. A drop-in session had taken place, informing the community about the survey results and Design Code, both available to view on the Council's website under the 'News' tab.

At the moment the Working Group is looking at potential community aspirations and projects to be included in the Plan. Further work by Places4People (Consultants on the scheme) was dependent on receiving the next stage of the grant monies, which is to be applied for once the grant application process is open again.

Discussion opened up about making roads into the village eg Hive Road, The Slade and Mepal Road safer for people to walk or cycle to connect up with public rights of way and cycleways. The County Councillor was asked if grass verges could be kept cut very short to make them walkable from Witcham to Mepal since walking on the carriageway was dangerous. She said she would make enquiries. Discussion moved on to whether or not the 30mph speed limit through the village should be reduced to 20mph. The Neighbourhood Plan survey suggested that 30mph was adequate but that much more needed to be done on enforcement of that speed limit.

### **SPEEDWATCH**

There was nothing further to report as this had been covered at earlier points in the meeting and there was nothing more to add.

### **ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS**

There was no other parish business, other than noted at earlier points in the meeting.

9.03pm The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Signed .....

Dated .....