

Draft

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 6 May 2026 at 7.35pm in the Village Hall, Witcham.

Present: M Housden – Chairman of Witcham Parish Council
L Dupré - County and District Councillor
M Inskip - District Councillor
G Byrne, L Holdaway, J Lucas, S Wilkin – Parish Councillors
Representatives from Witcham Village Hall and Witcham Events Committee (1),
Witcham Bowls Club (1), Witcham Conservation Group (2)
Parish Clerk

Chairman, M Housden, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Apologies for absence were received from K Mackender (Parish Councillor) (work).

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 30 April 2025, previously circulated, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded G Byrne. and agreed.

Matters Arising: There were none.

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

The Annual Reports were available with the agenda for the meeting on the website. www.witchamparishcouncil.gov.uk

L Dupré gave a summary of the County Council report. Points of note - she was now Deputy Leader of the Council and served on many Committees and Groups including reviewing infrastructure projects. She was substitute for the Leader of Council on the Board of the Combined Authority and Board of Greater Cambridge Partnerships. She explained about the budgets and the financial pressures due to increased demands on social services, roads, schools etc. Most of the street lighting at Witcham had now been switched over to LEDs. The report covered roads and transport, social care and financial support for families in need, healthcare (Integrated Care Boards mergers), concerns for the future of the Arthur Rank Hospital, water resources and flood prevention.

M Inskip gave a summary of the District Council report including the Local Government re-organisation. ECDC still had no plans to enforce on-street parking, leaving it with the Police to deal with. The Mepal Crematorium was due to be completed in August. A new Empty Homes Strategy was to be developed by July to reduce long term empty homes. Black bins were being delivered to villages to replace black sacks, for use from 1 June 2026 plus weekly collection of food caddy. Information leaflets accompanied the bin/caddy delivery. Public Spaces Protection Order to clamp down on antisocial driving across ECDC, eg Elean Business Park had been put in place. The District Council had set aside funding for Neighbourhood Plans which villages could apply for now that the Government had ended their original support scheme.

L Dupré reported on the recent audit report for East Cambs District Council and advised that measures were being put in place to remedy and deal with concerns.

M Inskip and G Byrne reported on the future of the strawburning plant at the Elean Business Park. The Government funding contract expires this year and there is a risk it will not be renewed.

2025/26 PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

A copy of the Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2025/26 had been posted on the Council's website and circulated at the meeting. A copy would also be delivered to each household shortly.

The Chairman presented the report and said the main topics had been included on the agenda tonight, eg Neighbourhood Plan, Speedwatch, Conservation Group, Neighbourhood Watch etc. He thanked the Witcham Events Committee for all their work in organising the Easter Egg Hunt, and reported favourable responses to the Remembrance and Xmas lights events. Monies raised from the 2025 Peashooting Championships had been used to purchase the table-tennis table now installed on the recreation ground.

WITCHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2024-2036 – Action Report

Following successful referendum on 12 February 2026, the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan was formally 'made' (adopted) by ECDC on 24 February 2026. This now forms part of the statutory development plan for East Cambridgeshire.

The Chairman ran through the 8 Community Actions listed in the Neighbourhood Plan. It was noted that during the ECDC Consultation period last summer (before the Examination process by the Independent Examiner), 'representations' included comments regarding affordable housing with some commercial housing and biodiversity gains on meadows off The Slade. <https://eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-guidance/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-10> View "submission and examination documents".

Referring to Community Actions 1 and 5 listed in the Neighbourhood Plan, the Chairman asked the Witcham Conservation Group representatives if they had further data and evidence for the areas outlined in the Plan. It was confirmed that they did and would continue to monitor. Other people in the village who were also interested would be contacted for a rolling report.

At this point the Chairman moved back to **agenda item 5 – Annual Report and Accounts for 2025/6.**

The Chairman invited G Byrne to give an update on the Local Highways Initiative (LHI) for Speed Reduction Measure on the Mepal to Witcham Road and the Clerk to present the accounts.

G Byrne reported that following communications with Highways and Police it had been established that a path to link Mepal and Witcham could not be put in unless the speed was reduced to 40mph. An LHI application to reduce speed had been submitted in January. If it was successful it was hoped the footpath (road planings on old path) could be done in stages over several years via LHI schemes. It was also noted that the Mayor of the Combined Authority had said that with the Government now saying that it would not fund dualling of the A10 there would be an effect on the A142. When the A142 is busy/closed locally, more people use the Witcham to Mepal back road as an alternative route. If the road was reduced to 40mph that would also mean that satnavs would not encourage people to use this back road as they focused on roads with 60mph limits.

The Clerk presented the year-end accounts as summarised in the Annual Report and Accounts document. Receipts for the year £22,645 including Precept £19,000. Payments £19,660.76. Receipts and payments were significantly down on the previous last two years, as grants and expenditure on Neighbourhood Plan and play refurbishment projects were completed in the previous year. Balance to carry forward was £63,485.78 which included earmarked reserves for village projects and work from the Neighbourhood Plan, eg currently cemetery extension £26,606, LHI speed reduction measures and improving safety for pedestrians and equestrians on the Mepal to Witcham Road £4566, village green footway repairs/renewal £5202, and MVAS batteries/maintenance £898.00, costs for admin for Elections next year £500. General reserves £24,736, (for emergencies/delays in getting Precept etc.).

REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS/CLUBS

Witcham Speedwatch Group

G Byrne reported that now the days were getting longer and it was light at peak traffic times the speedwatch sessions had restarted. It was important to keep the sessions going as it demonstrated that the village was serious about dealing with speeding vehicles. The Police

supported the LHI application to reduce speed on Mepal to Witcham road to 40mph and this would mean Speedwatch could monitor this length of road too.

The Group was now down to 6 members and more volunteers would enable more sessions to be run. Volunteers would receive training and needed to be able to give about an hour once a month. The MVAS equipment demonstrated that drivers reduced speed through the village when there were regular speedwatch sessions taking place.

8.43pm M Inskip left the meeting.

Witcham Conservation Group

The Group had been going for two years, promoting wildlife and biodiversity. Children had set sunflowers. Planting had also taken place around the Church and the Churchyard. Pyracantha had been set on the eastern margin of the village green which would provide winter food for local mistle thrushes. They had contacted CCC highways for permission to plant wildflowers in the verge at Headleys Lane, Back Lane and Market Way. A successful mid-winter walk had taken place on 10 January. A donation had been received from the organisers of the summer BBQ. Bird boxes, recently installed, were now being used by blue tits, robins and starlings. The Group hoped to get involved with the CCC Nature Recovery – From the Ground Up scheme which referenced the Parish on-line mapping tool as a means of mapping trees etc. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/> Search 'recovery from the ground up' for details. The Group had also received £177.71 from the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group following their earlier fundraising activities. The Group representatives asked if in future the Council could consider donating the annual RSPB rent money, approx. £1000 pa, to the Group for their projects/schemes.

Village Hall Committee

The Village Hall representative advised that the hall was being well used. It had been decorated last year. There were now 9 on the Committee. The Annual General Meeting was arranged for 20 May 2026 and they were looking for more people to help.

Witcham Events Committee

The Peashooting Championships last year had raised around £2700 which had been used to purchase speakers for this year, more Xmas lights, some events nights and the table-tennis table that had been donated to the Parish Council. It was hoped that profits from this year's event on 11 July could be used for new signs at the entry sites to the village and planters. Consent for these was being sought from the County Council and had been supported by the Parish Council. They still hoped to use the red kiosk as a display unit for the history of the Peashooting Championships but needed more volunteers to share the workload to achieve these projects. She thanked the Parish Council members for their support, enthusiasm and helpfulness.

Bowls Club

The Bowls Club reported that the two teams were doing well and they now had 21 members.

ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS

The Witcham Conservation Group representatives reported that the dog bin on the concrete road opposite the camp site was often over full after the weekend and in a mess. Could the Parish Council sort something out to deal with this situation.

It was noted that people were missing receiving the "What's On in Witcham". This was a much appreciated medium for keeping residents advised on village events and news. It was also understood that the volunteer had lacked support from villagers in providing enough reports/information on village events to publish, and more recently she had had more personal commitments. It was felt that a monthly or bi-monthly A4 double-sided sheet with what was going on in the village was all that was really required.

It was suggested that someone have a word with the volunteer to advise that it was really valued and much missed.

9.10pm L Dupré left the meeting.

It was suggested that the Witcham Events Group could set up a 'WhatsApp Group' to advertise their events.

it was suggested that both the conservation group and the events committee supply regular updates for inclusion which would help support the publication and make it worthwhile.

9.15pm The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.
The Witcham Conservation Group thanked the Parish Council for all the work it does.

Signed

Dated