

## **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 27 April 2022 at 7.38pm in the Village Hall, Witcham**

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

L Dupré – County Councillor  
M Inskip – District Councillor  
J Bibby, J Lucas, L Holdaway, S Wilkin – Parish Councillors  
First Responder Co-ordinator for Mepal, Witcham and Sutton  
Representatives from Witcham Village Hall, Witcham Cricket Club,  
Witcham Bowls, Witcham Archive Group, Speedwatch (No.4)  
6 Members of the electorate

Covid-19 Protection Measures - Hand gel and masks were available, and the room had been set out distancing chairs, with windows/doors open to minimise risks.

Chairman, M Housden, welcomed everyone and thanked them for their support for the village. The Parish Council welcomed feedback from everyone in the village so as to help the members understand what people wanted and how the Parish Council was doing. The Council wanted to improve communications with people; the new website was up and running, the 3-4 newsletters were still being published, together with the Council's Annual Report and Accounts.

**Apologies** for absence were received from K Mackender, Parish Councillor (work commitments)

### **PRESENTATION - FIRST RESPONDER CO-ORDINATOR ESTABLISHING NEW GROUP**

Chairman welcomed the First Responder Co-ordinator covering Mepal, Witcham and Sutton who gave a full round up of the role of First Responders. They are local volunteers who may be contacted by the NHS system to go to nearby locations to help people with suspected heart attacks, strokes, breathing difficulties etc to give care until an ambulance can reach the patient. He explained the kits carried which included defibrillator, oxygen, resuscitation equipment etc.

He was trying to set up a group covering Mepal, Witcham and Sutton and was keen to recruit volunteers who would be prepared to commit a minimum of 12 hours a month averaged over the year. NHS training provided. Additional kits, approx. £2000 each would be required, including phone. Currently volunteers passed the kit between themselves as and when they offered their availability each week and cover a 5 mile radius. The old First Responder team had faded away some time ago and apart from himself another person from Mepal had recently completed training and another coming on. They urgently needed to recruit volunteers from Sutton and Witcham to improve provision of service. Getting medical assistance to heart attack and stroke victims within minutes of symptoms was critical to saving lives and a good recovery. With current high demands on the ambulance service, the role of First Responders was ever more important. He was trying to raise funds to buy more kits and safety boots etc which the group would purchase via the NHS. More kits would provide a better service since the one kit allocated to the group had to be passed around between members as and when required so limited responsiveness. He was seeking funding from the Parish Councils for Mepal, Witcham and Sutton.

The First Responder was thanked for his interesting and informative presentation.

**Minutes** of the Annual Parish Meeting of 28 April 2021, previously circulated, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposed J Bibby, seconded M Housden and agreed by those present at that meeting.

**Matters Arising:** None

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

Full reports available at [www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports](http://www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports)

County Councillor L Dupré presented a summary of the report on County Council work over the year, confirming that Shire Hall Cambridge was now finished and operations re-located to Alconbury. She reported on the Committees she served on and general activities of the Council over the past year. She thanked the electorate for re-electing her as the local County Council representative last May for another term of office. Main topics were managing climate change, flood risk strategy, health and social care, waste management, transport and bus services. The Council would be making it easier for villages to implement 20mph zones in certain areas as a means of managing antisocial driving and safety of road users and pedestrians.

During the summer there would be an opportunity for people to engage in the consultation process in respect of traffic in Cambridge which would include people in East Cambridgeshire. There was a forecast of 30% increase in traffic in Cambridge over the next 10 years, when of course there was already severe congestion with resulting consequences for the bus services.

District Councillor M Inskip outlined the main items of interest at the District Council for the past year, eg Covid grants, proposed crematorium at the old Mepal Outdoor Leisure Centre, climate change and Government changes in respect of the Planning processes. Locally, developers had successfully gained consent for further housing on the old airfield, bringing the total to 250. He outlined the benefits of a Neighbourhood Plan as a measure for local people to have some say in delivering the type of homes and supporting infrastructure for their village.

The District Council remains one of the few who have not taken on Civil Parking Enforcement. There had been problems with bin collections following recent rescheduling of the rounds and these were being logged and addressed. Problems with night-time joyriding at the Elean Business Park and other places at Witcham and Sutton Gault were being discussed at meetings with local police. There appeared to have been some improvement to the situation since some 30-50 letters had been sent to culprits.

The County and District Councillors advised that they were having surgeries as usual but by zoom rather than face to face in view of Covid problems. People were invited to contact them over any issues they could help with at any time not just at the surgeries. The Chairman thanked them for their informative reports.

8.30pm The First Responder left the meeting

## **2021/22 ANNUAL REPORT OF PARISH COUNCIL Including 2021/22 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND 2022/23 PRECEPT**

A copy of the Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2021/22 had been circulated at the meeting and the Chairman highlighted the main points of his report. The Council strived to represent the views of the residents and comments were always welcome. Main items of interest included new website, consultation on proposals for new play and fitness equipment at the recreation ground together with tree management. More trees would be planted in the year and proposals to do some work around the entrance on to the roadway leading across to the village hall. He thanked those who had made donations to enable the planting of the

trees last November and also those who came out to help with planting. Any parishioners who wanted to help with the tree projects – most welcome.

He gave a summary of the findings of the MVAS equipment and it was shocking to have recorded traffic speeding through the village at 50mph over the crossroads first thing in the morning. Information was being passed to the Police and the local Speedwatch team for further action. He said there was less litter found at the Spring litterpick and thanked those who helped with this and also all those who regularly pick up litter on their walks. Witcham had a good community spirit and he thanked residents for this.

Other comments on the report:

- **Neighbourhood Watch** – J Lucas said there was nothing further to add to her report. She welcomed new residents and suggested neighbours tell new residents about the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in order that they might join.
- **Public Rights of Way** – J Lucas said there was little to add to her written report but stressed that the County Council's interactive site for reporting issues – both on public rights of way and the highways and footpaths – had a quick response for getting issues looked into.
- **Cycle rack for Recreation Ground** – Chairman said cycle rack was due to be installed by the County Council on the corner of the village hall carpark by the metal container.
- **Play and Fitness Facilities for Recreation Ground** – L Holdaway updated her written report and advised that anyone wanting to know more should contact either herself or the Clerk. New revised plans would be posted up and funding applications were to be made.
- **Annual Accounts and 2022/23 Precept** – summary published within the report. Receipts, including £15300 Precept, was £21084. Payments £16,774. Balance to carry forward including all earmarked project funds was £51,138.

The budget for 2022/23 had been set, with a Precept of £16,000, which included covering costs to increase the Clerk's hours to 32 hours per month to cover additional work that had been generating over the last year or so, and capital projects.

- **Speedwatch** – latest figures and trends for sites at The Slade and Martins Lane.
- **Best Kept Garden Competition** – deferred again this year but to be reviewed for next year.
- **Website** – Council's news, agendas, minutes and financial information published regularly.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Chairman said the Council had been attempting to engage with residents regarding whether or not to undertake producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Witcham. Previously a Village Appraisal and Village Plan had been produced with the help of residents. A Neighbourhood Plan was a bigger project that would give residents an opportunity to voice their wishes for future development in Witcham – what types of housing, where and what supporting infrastructure, including community and leisure facilities. It was known that there was a desire for housing that was affordable to local families. The Neighbourhood Plan, which would require a working party drawn from residents, would involve working with expert consultants for which grant funding was available. Key was consultation with the people in the village and finally a referendum for acceptance. It would then form policies to be taken

into account in determining planning applications and supplementing the District's Local Plan pertaining to Witcham.

The Chairman appealed for more residents to come forward to help with the process and said this would be further discussed at the next Council meeting.

### **WHAT'S ON EDITOR**

Chairman advised that the volunteer editor for the monthly free village newsletter, "What's On" was retiring and he sought comments from the public regarding discontinuing or finding another volunteer. The retiring editor said the newsletter had been discontinued during Covid-19 pandemic and now needed new ideas to freshen up and relaunch. Several people had reported that it had been missed and that they would like to see it up and running again. It took a couple of hours a month to collate information and set up for printing. The July and August edition were combined as one as was the December and January, making 10 editions per annum. The Parish Council reimbursed the editor for the printing costs (done by Ely Print Centre - approx. £12 per month for a copy for each household).

The Chairman thanked the editor for all her work on producing the "What's On" for the last 20 years. This was endorsed by all present.

### **RECREATION GROUND**

#### **Childrens Play Equipment And Fitness Equipment, Tree And Grounds Management**

There was nothing further to add following item on Annual Report earlier in the meeting. The Chairman added that the Council was considering raising the area around the entrance to the roadway to the village hall and planting trees and bushes.

### **NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH CO-ORDINATOR**

There was nothing further to add following item on Annual Report earlier in the meeting.

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

**Archive Group** – the representative said she had received the County Council invoice for the annual fee of £100. Nothing had been added to the site over the past year or so and efforts should be made to get it going again.

**Village Hall Committee:** Chair of Village Hall Committee, reported that the village hall had re-opened in April 2021 following Covid-19. Many groups had come back, eg Mother and Toddlers, Cricket, Fitness, the Band, Parish Council, Bowls, Bridge, Camera Club and Pilates. Unfortunately Mother and Toddler had now stopped and the Friday Bridge Club had also stopped. Extra cleaning procedures had been put in place to cope with requirements for managing Covid-19, such as sanitizing. Covid grants had helped the village hall and it was financially presently secure. The Village Hall Committee had decided to purchase 3 benches to put on the recreation ground for users of the Village Hall and the general public and a plaque would be fixed to commemorate the Queens Jubilee. It had been decided to cancel the Annual Peashoot again but there would be further discussions in September to discuss what to do next year as they really would like to hold the 50<sup>th</sup> event. A new website had been launched and was getting lots of hits. She had noticed that people choose to hold conversations about the hall/peashoot on facebook so she had arranged for a special note to be posted up directing the public to the village hall website, from which questions and concerns can be addressed by the Village Hall Committee <https://www.witchamvillagehall.org>

Hallmark 1 had been achieved again for a further 3 years and they were now trying for level 2. The Village Hall Annual General Meeting would be held on 18 May 2022 at 7pm in the Village Hall and all residents were invited. There would be vacancies to fill on the Committee/Trustees and ad hoc committees, eg the peashoot. There was a feeling that some of the usual fundraising events had been missed by people as community events were important to individuals and efforts would be made to get things organised to bring the community together.

Chairman thanked her for the report and commended the Committee on their achievements and creating a good reputation for the facilities.

**Cricket Club:** The representative advised that the Saturday side would not be running. It appeared that several members were footballers and their season had been adjusted to work in with the world cup matches so they would not be able to provide a team for cricket. There would be mid-week matches but the game was changing at the moment and he hoped that things would improve for another year.

**Bowls Club:** The representatives reported that the AGM had been held the previous night. There were 22 members and 2 teams. The league had been reduced and there was only 7 teams, down from 11. Covid had impacted on Bowls and Cricket. They were fortunate to have two teams as not many villages managed this. They would be having club nights once a month in the summer so people could come along to try the sport.

**Speedwatch:** The co-ordinator reported that no checks had been made during Covid-19 but arrangements would be put into place to re-start soon. Some of the team pre-covid were still interested in helping with events and others volunteered. It was felt important to regularly carry out the checks and make their presence known even if there was no resulting prosecutions. Those present were appalled to learn from the MVAS data that speeds of 50mph were being recorded going over the crossroads, Martins Lane/The Slade early mornings.

#### **ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS**

Residents sought clarification about taking animals on to the area known as the Recreation Ground aka Village Green. It was confirmed that this covered the whole parcel of land including the village hall roadway and the little path that was laid to give access from High Street to the childrens' play equipment and village hall when the play equipment was last updated as part of a conservation scheme some 20 odd years ago. The Parish Council was asked to consider improving signage so that it was crystal clear that dogs were not permitted on any of the site, specifically the play areas, green field, paths and roadways. It was noted that dog signs already existed at each entrance point and on the bank near the bus shelter. There were complaints of dog poo near the children's play equipment. This had been kindly and thoughtfully cleared away by a resident. Others present said they regularly cleared up after other people's dogs in the streets. People are urged to report dog fouling to the District Council, who will arrange to clean and sanitise. If people can identify the owners of the dogs, ECDC staff will contact the culprits. (Enforcement - Public Spaces Protection Order – Dog Fouling 2022)

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/dogs/dog-fouling-complaint>

J Lucas reported that she had recently attended the Food, Farming and Countryside event which had been organised by ACRE to give personal views on places where we live, relationships with land and nature and hopes, aspirations and fears about potential land use, and she would be reporting back to Council at the next meeting on this interesting topic.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.33pm.

No refreshments were served due to local high covid-infection rates.

Signed .....

Dated .....