

WITCHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 7.35pm in the Village Hall, Witcham

Present: M Housden (Chairman) K Mackender (Vice-Chairman), G Byrne, S Wilkin

In attendance Parish Clerk/RFO

25/035 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from J Lucas (hol), L Holdaway (work). Apologies also received from County and District Councillor L Dupré, and District Councillor M Inskip.

25/036 To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on any items on the agenda

Pecuniary interests - none

Personal interests – none

Prejudicial interests – M Housden – member Witcham Events Committee

Minute 25/042j) & 25/043 – electric cable and use of recreation ground.

25/037 Dispensations

To note any new Dispensations granted: Nil

25/038 Reports from District and County Councillors

Monthly reports had been circulated. Clerk to contact County Councillor for update on progress with the boundary at northern end of Headleys Lane, progress with starting work on cutting back verge on Mepal-Witcham Road to facilitate safe area for walkers and riders, and clarification on engagement with Parish Councils for Government's current local government re-organisation.

Clerk

Regarding the update in the County Councillor's report on the Mepal to Sutton walking and cycling route, and the A1421 Witcham Toll to Haddenham crossroads in respect of fully connecting all the villages, Councillors felt the Mepal/Witcham road must also be included. Regarding the District Councillor's report, it was noted that the District Council, in light of forthcoming local council re-organisation, would not proceed with a review of the existing Local Plan, which is now 10 years through its term and that an earlier review had already been pulled.

25/039 Public Participation There were no members of the public present.

25/040 Minutes

Minutes of the Meeting of 12 February 2025 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman, and the agenda of the same date was signed by the Chairman as confirmation of the business transacted at that meeting. Proposed K Mackender, seconded G Byrne. M Housden abstained as he had not been present at the meeting.

25/041 Matters Arising - None

25/042 Finance and Administration Matters

a) **Receipts and payments schedule** for March 2025. Documentation had been checked by G Byrne and K Mackender.

Resolved to approve the receipts and payments for March 2025.

(Listed at foot of Minutes). Invoice for Places4People still awaited and should be settled as soon as possible. Proposed K Mackender, seconded S Wilkin.

25/042 **Finance and Administration Matters** (cont)

- b) **Policies** (Batch 1) had been circulated for Councillors to review.
Resolved to approve all policies presented under Batch 1. Proposed Chairman, seconded S Wilkin. Policies to be signed by Chairman at the end of the meeting. *All*
- c) **2024/5 Fixed Asset Register**
Updated document had been circulated for Councillors to review.
Resolved to approve the 2024/5 Fixed Asset Register. Proposed G Byrne, seconded Chairman.
- d) **Annual Risk Assessment for 2024/5**
Updated document had been circulated for Councillors to review.
Resolved to approve the Council's 2024/5 Annual Risk Assessment as discussed. Proposed G Byrne, seconded Chairman
- e) **Arrangements for year-end and date of internal audit**
Clerk outlined timetable for year-end processes and confirmed internal audit scheduled for 29 April 2025.
- f) **Annual Report**
Clerk had updated previous year's report and noted accounts to be added following closure of accounts after 31 March 2025. Content and format reviewed and amended for Clerk to redraft. Chairman to prepare Chairman's report.
Resolved to amend format and to fit on A3 sheet for making into 4-page leaflet and to get printed as last year. Proposed G Byrne, seconded S Wilkin. *Clerk*
Final draft to be approved at next meeting for printing and circulation at the Annual Parish Meeting on 30 April 2025.
- g) **Annual Parish Meeting - 30 April 2025**
Draft agenda together with the minutes of 2024 meeting (originally circulated June 2024 Minute 24/109) had been circulated with the agenda for review by Councillors. No amendments required. No refreshments.
- h) **Signage Village Hall and Recreation Ground for Martins Lane**
Clerk had circulated comments from Village Hall Committee and Chairman presented further drafts.
Resolved - mandate for Chairman to take the new draft back to the Village Hall Committee and subject to their agreement, chase the supplier for mock-up and any revised quote. Proposed K Mackender, seconded G Byrne. *Chairman*

Exclusion of the Press and Public: It is hereby resolved that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted at agenda items 25/0042i – 25/042k), namely RSPB lease, deed of public rights of way & car park, and staff matters, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press be temporarily excluded from this meeting and they are herewith instructed to withdraw. Proposed Chair of meeting and agreed.

There were no members of the public present.

- i) **RSPB Lease.** Clerk reported that regrettably there had been no further movement on progress with the RSPB lease over the last month.
- j) **Deed of Right of Way and Parking for Village Hall**
Chairman reported that on behalf of the Witcham Events Committee he had met a builder and electrician to work out location for laying of underground electric cable (in grass on south side of roadway) to take electricity from the Village Hall to new power points to be installed near children's play enclosure and the new garden on the drive adj Martins Lane. He presented location map with cable plotted but the Village Hall's legal adviser had advised that a scaled location plan was required, produced by a professional surveyor, to meet Land Registry requirements. Chair of Village Hall requested that the

j) **Deed of Right of Way and Parking for Village Hall (cont)**

Witcham Events Committee or Parish Council should meet the costs of this additional work.

Resolved that it was the responsibility of the Witcham Events Committee to organise and meet the cost of engaging a Surveyor to produce the cable route document for the solicitors to include with the Deed being prepared for the Village Hall. Proposed K Mackender, seconded G Byrne. (MH abstained)

Clerk

k) **Clerk's Hours and Annual Leave**

Clerk reported she had worked 24.5 of 32 hours in February and would be working the balance during March and April to complete year-end processes which always required extra hours to be worked. Currently, up to 11 March, she had worked 27 hours. Annual leave noted.

Chairman re-opened meeting to the public – there were no members of the public present.

25/043 **Requests from Witcham Events Committee – Use of Recreation Ground**

- a) Egg Hunt 6 April 2025 – Application for consent for use of recreation ground, together with supporting documents, previously circulated, were received and considered.

Resolved that the Council approved use of the recreation ground for the Egg Hunt on 6 April 2025 as per application. Proposed G Byrne, seconded K Mackender

Clerk

- b) 2025 Annual Peashooting Competition on 12 July – Application for consent for use of recreation ground, together with supporting documents, previously circulated, were received and considered.

Resolved that the Council approved use of the recreation ground for the 2025 Annual Peashooting Competition on 12 July as per application. Proposed G Byrne, seconded K Mackender.

Clerk

For all events, the Witcham Events Committee representatives must undertake the inspection of the recreation ground and play equipment before and after the event and not solely rely on the last inspection carried out by the Parish Council, which could of course have taken place several days earlier than their planned events. All sites to be cleared up after each event.

- c) **Proposals for picnic on recreation ground September 2025, Halloween Event 31 October and Xmas lights 30 November.**

Resolved to note, and that the Council would await further details including application forms and supporting documents. Proposed K Mackender, seconded G Byrne.

M Housden asked if there was any advice from the inspector about concerns regarding low voltage electric cable on the play area fence and gates at Christmas. Other than it being electric cable and LED bulbs, albeit with transformer to reduce to 12v, no reason or mitigation measures had been included on the annual inspection report.

25/044 **MVAS, Speed Watch & Speed Reduction Measures Mepal-Witcham**

- a) The monthly speed data report had been circulated and was noted.

- b) CCC response regarding extending 40mph speed limit on the Mepal-Witcham road. (Joint Working for Application under Local Highways Initiative Programme (Witcham and Mepal Parish Councils)).

Response forwarded by Mepal Parish Council Clerk had been previously circulated. County Council Officer, taking into account the very rural with minimal development at certain points on this route, had suggested the current limits were most appropriate. However, he did see that the road could benefit from warning signs and SLOW markings on the road, chevron signs or a combination of the previous with an

- 25/044 **MVAS, Speed Watch & Speed Reduction Measures Mepal-Witcham** (cont)
 advisory limit around the bend such as 40mph. Expected cost in region £10k. Mepal Parish Council awaited the thoughts of Witcham.
Resolved that Clerk should ask for another meeting with Mepal Parish Council representatives on the Joint Working group to advise that Witcham wished to move ahead. Also, G Byrne to speak direct with the County Council Officer dealing with LHI applications to get clarification and further advice on reducing speed. Clerk to forward contact details to G Byrne. Proposed Chairman, seconded K Mackender. *Clerk*
GB/SW
- 25/045 **Neighbourhood Plan**
 Chairman advised that members of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group would be meeting at 6pm on 13 March 2025. Once they were happy with the report and amendments to the draft Neighbourhood Plan, the Parish Council would be required to convene a meeting to note the comments submitted on the Draft Plan, approve the proposed modifications and approve the submission of the Draft Plan to ECDC. ECDC was carrying out the Screening Opinion for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment. After their review they would be responsible for engaging an independent Examiner, and all being well, would then be responsible for arranging for the Referendum. *WNPWG*
- It was noted that information was missing regarding feedback on Community Actions for the Cemetery and Speedwatch and that the Consultant was dealing with it. Comments from Anglian Water and other statutory bodies had been highlighted by the Consultant. Final invoices awaited.
- Resolved** to arrange an extra-ordinary meeting of the Parish Council on Wednesday 19 March 2025 at 7.30pm to review the comments and approve proposed modifications to the Draft Plan and approve submission to ECDC, together with settlement of the Consultant's invoice. Proposed Chairman and agreed by all. *MH/Clerk*
- 25/046 **Recreation Ground and Cemetery Matters**
 Weekly inspections of play equipment and recreation ground had been completed by the Chairman. The parts received from Wicksteed following the annual inspection had been installed by the Chairman and he would speak to the Wicksteed representative again regarding tool for springy animal base. The gap around the mat/train should be filled in. He had treated the moss on the Cricket mats.
- Resolved** Clerk to write to former Cricket Club Secretary to get them to remove the mats urgently. Proposed K Mackender, seconded S Wilkin. *Clerk*
- 25/047 **Planning Matters**
 The following ECDC decision was noted:
 25/00105/TRE 4 Silver Street T1 Prunus - remove due to extensive colonization of Phellinus pomaceus, which has caused several limbs to fail, it is also in close proximity to footpath and roadway. T2 Silver Birch - remove 2x mid crown lateral limbs, 2 meters, rubbing on neighbours roof – Approved. A pre-application was also noted for information.
- 25/048 **Highways and Street Lighting Matters**
 Clerk reported that the dog bin at the bottom of Headleys Lane was back in position.
 Chairman reported that a resident had spoken to him about the potholes and condition of Back Lane at the Headleys Lane end. He had advised them to contact County Council on the Report It system.
 Chairman reported that the bollards and hedge on Headleys Lane were still encroaching the highway verge. (see also Minute 25/038)

25/049 Correspondence

The following items of information/interest, and invitations to events had been circulated and unless recorded below as otherwise, were noted:
 ECDC Devolution – Government plans to abolish District and County Councils:
 Residents had been asked to complete a short [Have Your Say East Cambs survey](#). It asked residents how much they value current services offered by the District Council. Results would be used to help formulate an outline proposal for creating a new unitary authority, which all councils have been asked to submit to government by 21 March. 2 Councillors reported that they had responded as private individuals, ie residents.
 NALC and CAPALC Bulletins and newsletters.
 ECDC press releases, Council and Committee meeting agendas and minutes.
 ECDC Wall mounted display safety.
 ECDC Visitors Guide to East Cambs.
 Cambs ACRE newsletter.
 CCC 2025 Micro Asphalt Programme v1 – preventative carriageway surface treatment.
 CCC Highway Events.
 RBLI VE Day 80 celebrations.
 Soham Town Council Net Zero/climate change meeting 17.3.25 7pm Walter Gidney Pavillion, Soham.
 TMC Incident Report February 2025.
 Chairman drew attention to the Teversham Parish Council letter to Matthew Pennycock MP, Minister of State (Housing and Planning) regarding Planning Review and the need to reduce and summarise reports sent to Parish Councils for planning applications.

25/050 Resident's request for permission to store a medium sized plastic tub at the Witcham bus stop for dog donations for the local dog rescue shelters from local villagers.

The request had been previously circulated.

Resolved to give consent to the resident to place a collection box at the bus shelter for residents to make donations, subject to 6-monthly review. The box must be kept under the seat at the 'book store' end of the bus shelter and collections must be picked up regularly as stated in the application, and area kept tidy. Proposed G Byrne, seconded M Housden.

Clerk

24/051 Date of next meetings: 16 April 2025 (3rd Wednesday – Year-end Accounts)
 30 April 2025 – Annual Parish Meeting
 14 May 2025 – Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Meeting closed at 9.25pm.

Schedule of Receipts and Payments

		£	£	£
Receipts:	Nil			
Payments	002196 Truelink (Feb)	199.60	39.92	239.52
	002197/8/BACS Salary Expenses incl tax	1407.52)		
	Reimbursement Clerk's expenses	136.20)		1543.72
	002199 Witcham Village Hall – meeting			
	room hire	272.00		272.00
d/d	ICO (£52 less £5 for being on			
	direct debit)	47.00		47.00
c/p	MS online services – 7 licences emails	34.30	6.86	41.16

Signed..... Dated