

## WITCHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 7.32pm in the Village Hall, Witcham

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

*In attendance* Parish Clerk/RFO

The Chairman welcomed Mr G Byrne to his first meeting. Clerk confirmed the Declaration of Acceptance and the Registration of Interests forms had been completed.

Copy of policies and procedures including NALC Email advice had also been distributed to all Councillors and would be due for review in the coming months.

24/046 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from L Holdaway (previous commitment). Apologies also received from County Councillor/District Councillor L Dupré and District Councillor M Inskip.

7.34pm S Wilkin arrived

24/047 **To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on any items on the agenda**

Pecuniary interests - none

Personal interests – Planning 24/00129/FUL M Housden

Prejudicial interests (and to inform the Chairman if they wish to speak on the matter during public participation) - none

24/048 **Dispensations**

To note any new Dispensations granted: Nil

24/049 **Reports from District and County Councillors**

Monthly report for February had been previously circulated and was noted.

24/050 **Public Participation**

There were no members of the public present.

24/051 **Minutes**

Minutes of the following Meetings were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman, and the agendas of the same date were signed by the Chairman as confirmation of the business transacted at that meeting:

14 February 2024 Proposed S Wilkin, seconded K Mackender

6 March 2024 Proposed J Lucas, seconded S Wilkin

24/052 **Matters Arising**

*24/029 Annual Parish Meeting:* Clerk reported that there had been a change in post of the Planning Manager at ECDC and she was awaiting response as to whether the new incumbent would be able to attend the APM on 15 May 2024.

*Clerk/APM*

24/053 **Finance**

**Receipts and Payments** schedule March 2024 had been circulated.

Documentation had been checked by Chairman.

Noted that the monthly payment for MS online services – emails, would rise from £31.50 per month to £34.30 plus VAT with effect 18 March 2024.

Some invoices for the current financial year were still outstanding, eg Places4People, CAPALC training and play park signs.

- 24/053 **Finance** (cont)  
**Resolved** to approve the receipts and payments for March 2024 and release cheques. Proposed Chairman, seconded J Lucas (Listed at foot of Minutes). *Clerk*  
**Resolved** to give consent to Clerk to arrange for payment of the outstanding invoices for current financial year and report at the April meeting in accordance with Financial Regulations. Proposed J Lucas, seconded Chairman. *Clerk*
- 24/054 **Neighbourhood Plan**  
Minutes of February and March meetings had been circulated to Councillors by the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. There were no recommendations for the Council to consider. G Byrne and J Lucas asked for a copy of the Survey results. Clerk confirmed she needed to get end of grant report in for current works by 31 March 2024 and expected to get invoice for payment from Places4People after the drop-in session. *Clerk*  
Chairman advised that the Group would be meeting on 19 March to finalise for the Drop-In session and again on 26 March to review the said event. Details for applying for Locality Grant for 2024/5 were awaited.
- 24/055 **Best Kept Gardens**  
Options regarding Best Kept Gardens were reviewed. There had been no response for 2023 despite having offered more classes to engage a wider interest within the community. It was noted that originally Best Kept Gardens had evolved many years ago when the village was regularly entered in the Calor Best Kept Village Competition, at which Witcham always did very well in its class as winners and runners up. It had also been supported by having an annual Produce Show as an event at the Village Hall but these had all lapsed over the last decade or so. In recent years there had been an Open Gardens event to raise money for charity and it was wondered if this might be an alternative that could be explored. It was decided to defer a decision and Chairman would make further enquiries. *Chairman*
- 24/056 **Recreation Ground and Cemetery Matters**  
a) **Weekly inspections** of play equipment and recreation ground had been carried out by Chairman and he advised that all was in order. Noted that corner by play equipment was soggy due to all the excessive rain that had been experienced all winter. It was noted that he was unable to attend inspection refresher training in April and refund had been requested from CAPALC. Wicksteed had provided guidance document covering inspection and maintenance of the new equipment. *Chairman*  
b) **Applications for use of recreation ground** – application for Peashoot awaited.  
c) **Tree contractor's** current insurance and risk assessments methodology and operators' skills certificates had been received and were approved.  
d) **Play and Fitness Projects.** Working party report and recommendations received from Chairman for Phase 1 and Phase 2. Signage for new fitness equipment discussed at length. Arrangements for introducing the official opening of the play park were agreed. *Clerk*  
The publicity item for Phase 2 was reviewed and amended for Clerk to send to Grantscape for approval and then be forwarded for publication as for Phase 1. (No official opening of this equipment which was due to be installed mid/endApril)  
**Resolved** that Clerk to contact Wicksteed again to get confirmation that instructions for use of each piece of equipment, including medical fitness and height of users was already included on the apparatus. *Clerk*  
Proposed Chairman, seconded J Lucas.

24/056 **Recreation Ground and Cemetery matters (cont)****Play and Fitness Projects (cont)**

**Resolved** to accept and approve the risk assessment for the opening of the play park prepared by Chairman. Proposed K Mackender, seconded J Lucas and agreed unanimously.

*Chairman*

Chairman to liaise with Witcham Events Committee regarding response from their Chair about donation of cakes and raffle prizes.

**Resolved** to delegate powers to the Working Party to deal with any other matters requiring attention for the official opening on 24 March 2024. Proposed J Lucas, seconded K Mackender.

*LH/KM/  
MH*

- e) **Cemetery Flooding** and meeting with Cambs County Council 26 February 2024. Chairman and Clerk gave a report. The Flood Resilience Team would visit again to investigate the chamber in the verge at the end of the ditch running between farmers field and cemetery. This would be after the end of this financial year. The CCC Officers had also had a look at the ditch on the bend at Martins Lane/Mepal Road and walked down Martins Lane to view ditch and piped areas, including noting that manholes were in the grass verge. CCC insisted these ditches and manholes would be the landowners' riparian responsibilities.

24/057 **Planning Applications and Tree Works:**

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/planning/current-planning-applications>

24/00143/FUL Witcham House, Headleys Lane To add two stables and store area to existing stable block.

**Resolved** that the Council had no concerns for this application. Proposed J Lucas and K Mackender

*Clerk*

8.45 M Housden had declared a personal interest as a neighbour although he had not been included for consultation by the District Council Planning Department. He handed Chair to Vice Chair for this item:

24/00129/FUL 24/00129/FUL 8 The Slade Construction of timber workshop Amendment: Change of materials on side elevation from render to hardie plank.

**Resolved** that the Council had no concerns for this application. Proposed J Lucas, seconded K Mackender. M Housden abstained.

*Clerk*

8.46 M Housden returned to the Chair.

The following ECDC Decisions were noted:

23/01277/VAR The Old School, High Street To Vary Condition 4 (restriction on use of annex) to allow use holiday accommodation of previously approved 91/00531/FUL for alterations to existing buildings (including part demolition) to form detached dwelling and ancillary accommodation plus erection of garage – Approved

24/00072/TRE Recreation Ground, Maintenance Tree Works:T1 Prunus - Crown lift to 2 meters; T2 Ash - Reduce Northern lower crown spread by 2.5 meters, reduce Southern lower crown spread by 2 meters, clear BT lines by 0.5 meters; T3 Rowan - Formatively prune and crown lift to 2 meters; T4 Hornbeam - Crown lift to 3.5 meters over grass; T5 Norway Maple - Crown lift over recreation ground to 3 meters, reduce back from roadway by 1.5 meters; T9 Cherry - Crown lift to 4 meters and remove dead wood; T10 Maple - Crown lift to 3.5 meters; T11 Maple - Remove lowest lateral limb over recreation ground, remove dead wood; T12 Cherry - Crown lift to 4 meters and remove dead wood; T14 Prunus - Crown lift to 3.5 meters; T15 Rowan- Formatively prune; T16 Maple - Crown lift to 5.5 meters over road way and 4 meters over grass – Approved

24/058 **Highways and Street Lighting Matters**

- a) Chairman had received two complaints about the state of the **verge near new Kings Meadow development**, which he had reported on the County Council website. This would be for the developer to reinstate as part of planning consent.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/roadworks-and-faults>

- b) **CCC Review of Highways Operational Standards in Relation to Weed Management.** Noted and accepted that chemical weed control measures would be reinstated by the County Council from May 2024. A one off non-chemical weed removal programme would be implemented to cleanse all areas affected by weeds, serving as a deep clean measure before the cyclical chemical weed treatment began.
- c) **Public Rights of Way Drove Management Plan** – Bury Road. Clerk had investigated further and spoken to ECDC Tree Officer. Report previously circulated. Noted the TPOs in the area would continue and did not end on expiry of the Drove Management Plan at the end of 2023.

**Resolved** that the drove over the last 10 years, under the Management Plan, had been maintained by a combination of Highways and landowners, and the Parish Council sees no reason why this approach cannot continue without a Management Plan. Proposed J Lucas, seconded G Byrne.

The landowner requesting that the Drove Management Plan be put in place for another 10 years, to be advised accordingly.

*Clerk*

It was noted that other than for a session in November 2013, no known volunteers had come forward during the period of the Plan.

- d) **Speed data** and latest reports had been circulated by the Chairman. Traffic had been heavy when the A142 was closed due to an accident at Mepal Bridge. Speeds of up to 50mph were still being recorded over the crossroads at the centre of the village. Speedwatch sessions needed to be organised as soon as possible. Councillors were pleased to hear that another volunteer for the sessions had come forward. G Byrne asked for more information about the Co-ordinator role and Clerk to forward details. Chairman confirmed speed equipment battery was charging but unsure how long a session it would run. He had made enquiries about a replacement battery which was about £60 plus £60 carriage and VAT. He understood our existing MVAS equipment could be used for speedwatch exercises.

*Clerk  
GB*

*Chairman*

- e) Noted that the village volunteer had contacted ECDC for equipment and would undertake a **litterpick** on 18 March 2024 in accordance with ECDC guidance.

*Chairman*

- f) A young person undertaking the **Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme** had asked to borrow the litterpicker tool to carry out litterpicks around the village for 12 weeks. Members were concerned about lending equipment to a young person regarding insurance and working unsupervised. Chairman to speak to parents.

*Chairman*

24/059 **Correspondence**

The following items of information/interest, and invitations to events had been circulated and unless recorded below as otherwise, were noted:

East Cambs Community Safety Partnership newsletter – initiatives etc – Neighbour-hood Watch and ATM Watch, Stop Hate, Shop Watch, Safer Communities Funding, East Cambs Neighbourhood Policing, and Community Safety Team updates.

24/059 **Correspondence** (cont)  
 NALC Bulletins and Events Reconnecting communities through community transport; emerging trends local government finance; Unleashing the power of local councils to tackle the climate emergency; Decoding the future of artificial intelligence in local governance; the future of Neighbourhood Plan  
 CAPALC Training courses for Councillors  
 Keystone Marketing – Volunteers Toolkit  
 ECDC Press releases  
 East Cambs Parish and Community Forum - Wed 20th March - 2pm

24/060 **Exclusion of Press and Public**  
**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 special and confidential nature of the business about to be transacted at Agenda Items 24/060a) to 24/060c) listed below, 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 by Chairman and agreed. There were no members of the public present.

a) Review Pre-application from ECDC

**Resolved** that Clerk submit comments, as dictated at the meeting. Proposed *Clerk*  
 K Mackender, seconded G Byrne

b) To receive update on progress with RSPB Lease.

Clerk reported that there had been no feedback/advice since depositing documents from Cambridgeshire Archives, despite reminder of this meeting coming up. *Clerk*

c) To receive update Deed Public Right of Way and Parking.

Clerk reported that two Fixed Fee quotes had been received and third was still awaited for sending off to Village Hall Committee.

24/061 **Date of next meetings:**  
 10 April 2024  
 8 May 2024  
 Annual Parish Meeting – 15 May 2024

Review Actions – omitted.  
 Meeting closed at 9.30pm

**Schedule of Receipts and Payments**

		£	£	£
Receipts:	IONOS (Refund)	36.62		36.62
	Groundwork (Locality grant)	1633.00		1633.00
Payments	002122 Truelink (Feb)	80.00	16.00	96.00
	002123/25 Salary Expenses	1538.26		1538.26
	002126 Witcham Village Hall Neighbourhood Plan meetings	280.00	)	
	“ Witcham Village Hall Neighbourhood			
	“ Plan Drop in session	40.00	)	
	Witcham Village Hall PC meetings	260.00	)	580.00
	002127 Seton (Brady) dog signs	27.03	5.41	32.44
	002128 Cartridgesave	122.47	24.50	146.97
	002129 Reimbursement Clerks expenses	71.00		71.00
	c/p MS online services – 7 licences emails	31.50	6.30	37.80
	d/d ICO	35.00		35.00

Signed..... Dated .....