

WITCHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 27 September 2023 at 7.33pm in the Village Hall, Witcham. This meeting had been convened as the normal scheduled meeting of 13 September was, on the day, inquorate.

Present: M Housden (Chairman), K Mackender (Vice-Chairman), L Holdaway, J Lucas, S Wilkin

In attendance Parish Clerk/RFO
District Councillor M Inskip

23/127 Apologies for absence

Received from County Councillor/District Councillor L Dupré.

23/128 To receive declarations of interest from Councillors in any items on the agenda

- i) Pecuniary interests – none
- ii) Personal interests – M Housden Item 23/136e – quotees)
- iii) Prejudicial interests (and to inform the Chairman if they wish to speak on the matter during public participation) - none

23/129 Dispensations:

To note new Dispensations granted: Nil

23/130 Reports from County and District Councillors

Monthly reports for August and September, previously circulated, were noted. J Lucas sought clarification regarding proposals for weekly collection of food waste and M Inskip explained this was part of a new strategy coming down from central Government. Food waste would be separate from green waste. Chairman asked about progress with the crematorium at the old Mepal Outdoor Centre and M Inskip said this would be the subject of an agenda item at ECDC in future regarding business case information.

23/131 Public Participation There were no members of the public present

23/132 Minutes

Minutes of the Meeting of 12 July 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman, and the agenda of the same date signed by the Chairman as confirmation of the business transacted at that meeting. Proposed S Wilkin, seconded L Holdaway and agreed.

7.50pm M Inskip left the meeting

23/133 Matters arising

23/118 Clerk's Report Clerk confirmed Parish Councillor vacancy had been re-advertised with closing dates so applications for co-option could be considered at the October meeting. Information packs prepared for interested people and available on request from Clerk. Copy to go to people who had recently expressed an interest to councillors.

23/119 Neighbourhood Plan Working Group – Clerk reported that the invoice for £30 had still not been received. Chairman advised that the Group would be paying this themselves from fundraising monies raised by the Group.

23/118 Planning Workshop(SLCC) – Clerk asked if everyone had received the link to review the content of the course and asked if there were any questions. There was none.

23/121 Recreation Ground- Chairman had cut back some of vegetation overhanging seats on northern side of recreation ground.

Clerk

23/134 **Planning Applications**

23/00868/VAR Land South West Of Ely Model Aircraft Club Hive Road To Vary Condition 4 (use of building) of previously approved 22/00163/FUL for proposed agricultural barn open fronted to store straw size 27m x 8.7m. Also, additional information – clarification on how building used. (including amendment 21 September 2023 clarifying that use would be for straw (thatching) and hay (cut from adjoining land))

Resolved that the Council had no concerns. Proposed J Lucas, seconded K Mackender.

Clerk

The following ECDC decisions were noted:

23/00121/DISA Yew Tree House Silver Street To discharge Condition 6 (tree protection scheme) of decision of 24 May 2023 for 23/00121/FUL for conversion outbuilding to studio annex ancillary to main dwelling

23/00736/TRE 20 High Street, T1 Eucalyptus in back garden on Easterly boundary – dead wood and reduce height by approximately 4-5 metres - Approved

23/00683/TRE The Hall, High Street T1 Horse Chestnut - Reduce to a 5-metre trunk to retain as a wildlife feature as dead plus colonized by Ganoderma (sp) fungus. T2 Yew - Crown raise over pathway to 3 metres from ground level, removing 2 metres. G3 Lime Trees x2 - Crown raise over pathway to 3 metres from ground level, removing 2 metres. T4 Horse Chestnut - Crown raise over driveway to a height of 4 metres from ground level, removing 2 metres and basal epicormics for access – Approved

Chairman gave update following meeting with Leader of ECDC regarding various issues on planning items. Letter of 6 September received and discussed. Councillors were invited to an Autumn Planning Briefing at ECDC Council Chamber and to forward any matters they wanted including at this event. Date awaited.

Cllrs

Resolved that a letter expressing the Council's dissatisfaction be sent. Proposed J Lucas, seconded Chairman.

Clerk

23/135 **Neighbourhood Plan**

- a) **Locality Grant** Noted that in July the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had confirmed funding would be available, via Locality, for the full continuation of the Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme for a further year, to 31 March 2024. Clerk had immediately informed Working Group and Consultant. Clerk had now asked Consultant to forward draft application for consideration and approval at next Council meeting. Locality Officer had contacted Clerk and urged getting on with grant application and Design Code as matter of urgency. The progress made by the Working Group and future funding from Locality was discussed in depth. Noted next Group meeting was 24 October and K Mackender said he would attend with M Housden.

MH
KM

Resolved that Clerk, with Councillors, to draft the letter for sending to members of the Working Group. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin.

All

- b) **Minutes of meeting** of 25 July 2023 Neighbourhood Plan Working Group received and noted.

Minutes of meeting of 26 September had been circulated earlier in the day by the Leader of the Working Party. The coffee morning and announcement of best photos had been poorly attended despite notices on village noticeboards and community social media. It was noted there was nothing recorded about discussion regarding plans for work – timeline and content – for completion of application for further funding from Locality in order to proceed to next phases of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. Noted the Group was now addressing the Design Code work and the August meeting had been cancelled as little business to discuss. Clerk had posted updates on website and newsletters. The Group posted Minutes at bus shelter noticeboards, and events in “What’s On In Witcham”, community social media and it was important to keep this up daily during coming stages.

- c) **NPWG monthly summary of the Working Group’s activities completed with aims for future months.** (see item b) above)

23/136 **Recreation Ground/Bus Shelter and Cemetery Matters**

- a) **Quotes for bus shelter**, roof repairs and painting. Chairman had spoken to contractors and 2 quotes were circulated in the meeting. One excluded painting and the other did not give the price for the roof repairs. Further clarification to be sought regarding tiles and roof refurbishment.
- b) **Tree works** – Recreation Ground. Clerk and Chairman had met the tree surgeon to discuss works and an estimate had been circulated prior to the meeting. Confirmed meeting being set up with ECDC Tree Officer to discuss further. MH
Clerk
- c) **Community Book Sharing** Chairman reported that the volunteer who had set up the scheme to use the bus shelter to deposit and share books in the community now wanted to give up responsibility. There had been problems with volume and quality of books. S Wilkin gave details of a new volunteer and Chairman had also had a resident who had expressed an interest.. **Resolved** that S Wilkin should follow-up with her volunteer to take over. Chairman would thank the contact he had spoken to. Proposed J Lucas, seconded K Mackender. SW
MH
- d) **Cemetery Memorial Inspection Report**, previously circulated to Burial Board members of the Council. Clerk advised she had put a note in Council's newsletter and on the cemetery and crossroads noticeboards asking families to contact the Council if their family members' memorials needed work. **Resolved** that the Council would review in a few months. Proposed K Mackender, seconded Chairman.
- e) **Interments and works at Cemetery**. Clerk reported that the interment of ashes had been cancelled, and documents and refund now required (see tonight's schedule of payments). A memorial had been erected by Kent Memorials of Boston and all appeared satisfactory. Clerk
- f) **Recreation Ground path and Cemetery tap** Chairman reported that tap had needed replacing rather than just a washer replacement. He had spoken to local contractor about repairs to cracked path across recreation ground and had purchased tarmac repair kit and filled. **Resolved** to reimburse Chairman for tap and tarmac kit as per invoices (see tonight's schedule of payments). Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway.
- g) **Weekly Inspections** of play equipment and recreation ground had been completed by the Chairman and nothing to report for requiring attention. He reported that Wicksteed contractors had started work on Monday to remove old equipment and carry out groundworks ready for installation of the new equipment under Phase 1. Notices had been put up at play area advising of closure for works and letters delivered by Clerk to nearby houses. Information also published in newsletter and updates on website. Heras fencing had been installed around the site. Chairman confirmed that the two new benches would be placed in the enclosed play area and L Holdaway advised that positioning of the benches and train and station had been amended with the contractor and Wicksteed sales team contacted. Quotes required to repaint the existing fencing. One of the old benches to remain where it was outside the play area and the one that was in the play area to be re-positioned near the swings and phase 2 fitness equipment. Topsoil from the excavations for new equipment had been moved across to heighten the bund at the entrance to the roadway up to the village hall. Chairman advised that former councillor had advised that plants were ready and would be set out soon to finish this area.
Chairman confirmed all the cricket matches had been played.
Chairman reported that Truelink had cut hedge at cemetery but not the west side. Clerk to send reminder as hedge on recreation ground not yet cut. Clerk reported that Truelink were asking if further additional cuts were required on the top of the recreation ground. Budget reviewed.
Resolved that as the grass was still growing due to unusually warm weather and it would be used by youngsters for football all winter, Truelink be instructed to make one, possibly two cuts, to keep under control until next Spring. Proposed K Mackender, seconded Chairman.

23/136 **Recreation Ground/Bus Shelter and Cemetery Matters (cont)**

- h) **Play and Fitness Project** In addition to items covered in g) above, Clerk had circulated notes from Wicksteed meeting with Council representative and contractors on 30 August, together with insurance, risk assessments and methodology documents - these were accepted by Councillors. A representative from the Village Hall had also attended to be included in discussions about delivery and installation arrangements, and the Clerk had advised Village Hall Committee Chairman and bookings clerk when installation date had been brought forward to 25 September 2023. They had confirmed this was acceptable and not expected to interfere with their bookings.
- i) **Phase 2 – Grantscape application.** Clerk had been contacted and provided further information and it was now with the Advisory Panel for assessment. An updated quotation for a pair of goals with hinged bottom net support was received and considered, and it was noted the additional £495 plus VAT to upgrade new goals by the manufacturer had not therefore been included in the Grantscape application. As the net supports would not be required this would make a difference of £390 plus VAT.

23/137 **Highway and Street Lighting Matters**

- a) **Items to report to Highways**
Councillors reported: Hive Road/Gravel Drove, road breaking away at edges worsened – to be re-reported, and encroachments in Headleys Lane. *Clerk*
- b) **August speed data**, circulated by Chairman, noted.
- c) **Village Co-ordinator for village Speedwatch Scheme.** This role had been advertised in noticeboard and newsletters for some weeks and no one in the village had come forward to express an interest. S Wilkin said she had a volunteer who could undertake the role but not for another year or two. Clerk to inform the area co-ordinator that at present there was no one in the village interested in volunteering for this role. *SW*
Clerk
- d) **Extension of speed limit on the Mepal to Witcham road.** Email from Mepal Parish Clerk had been circulated to Councillors. It was noted that when the 30mph and 40mph was extended around Witcham Equestrian Centre and The Slade the Council was advised that it would not be possible to extend speed restrictions down the whole road to Mepal.
Resolved that Witcham Parish Council was happy for Mepal to pursue extending speed limit and Witcham would support as much as it could. Proposed K Mackender, seconded S Wilkin. *Clerk*
- e) **Highways Weed Spraying** Councillors had received correspondence from the County Council's Executive Director of Place and Sustainability and a County Councillor in Fenland regarding the County Council's policy on ceasing to treat weeds which was affecting the look and usability of paths, cycleways and roads across the County and impacting on drainage systems. The County Council had ceased chemical spraying of road edges, channels and footpaths on a risk-based approach from April 2023. This was to improve the natural environment and biodiversity and reduce operational running costs. There had been no consultations before policy implemented. Councillors had received no complaints from villagers and were keen to protect the environment and wildlife. Noted there had been items on social media about it and people had been encouraged to report to the County Council via their website any areas of concern so that it could be assessed and dealt with as necessary.
Resolved that the Council could not support objecting to the County Council's new Highways Weed Spraying Policy as there appeared to be no problem with Witcham streets. Proposed J Lucas, seconded K Mackender. *Clerk*
- f) **Litter** The voluntary village litterpick organiser had advised that a litterpick had been organised with ECDC for Saturday 7 October 2023.

23/138 **Finance and General Administration**

- a) **Receipts and Payments** September Schedule, including August payments, had been circulated prior to the meeting. Documentation had been checked by J Lucas.

23/138 **Finance and General Administration** (cont)

Resolved to approve the receipts and payments listed on the September schedule and release cheques, and approve the payments made during August. Proposed J Lucas, seconded S Wilkin.

Clerk

- b) **Quarterly reconciliations and budget to 30 June 2023** Documents previously circulated. Original bank statements circulated at meeting. **Resolved** to approve the quarterly reconciliations and budget report to 30 June 2023, and to write off the 10p difference between cashbook and bank as discussed. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin.
- c) **External Auditor's Report AGAR S3** The External Auditor's Report had been previously circulated, and it was noted there were no concerns. **Resolved** to accept the External Auditor's Report. Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway. Clerk advised that the Completion of Audit notice had been posted on the noticeboard and website as required.
- d) **Fixed Term Deposit (2.9%)**. Term ended 7 September and monies automatically moved to Instant Business Savings account. Savings accounts to be reviewed at next meeting and would take into account cashflow requirements for play projects.

Clerk

9.35pm J Lucas left the meeting

- e) **Street light electricity** Unit price to increase from 1 September 2023 from 33.8p/kWh to 50.188p/pkWh was noted.

f) **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 23/138g) to 23/138i) namely contractual 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 Chairman and agreed.

There were no members of the public present

- g) **Village Hall Car Park** Document circulated and Clerk to contact solicitors to see if they held an original.

Clerk

- h) **RSPB Lease** Draft document for renewal of Lease with RSPB for drove land at Ouse Washes had been previously circulated with comments. Amendments were discussed.

Resolved that letter be sent to solicitors confirming amendments as discussed. Proposed Chairman, seconded K Mackender

Clerk

- i) **Clerk's Hours** Clerk reported on hours worked in July and August.

Chairman re-opened meeting to the public – none present

23/139 **Consultations**

- a) **NALC Review of Model Financial Regulations** Questionnaire and existing Financial Regulations previously circulated for feedback. None offered.
- b) **Cheveley Neighbourhood Plan** - noted
- c) **PR0962 (Various roads, Ely) (Speed Limit 20mph, City-wide 20mph zone) Order 20**. No comment

23/140 **Correspondence**

The following items of information/interest and invitations to events had been circulated and unless recorded below as otherwise, were noted.
 CAPALC Bulletins, Training courses for Councillors, and Conference 15 September 2023 – no one attended
 NALC Newsletters incl Consultation Model Financial Regulations
 CAPALC Worknest – HR Support
 CAPALC Flood Groups Conference 21 September 2023 - no one attended
 East Cambs Parish Council Conference 2 November 2023 – no one nominated

23/140 **Correspondence** (cont)

SLCC Cyber Awareness training 31 October 2023 – no one nominated
 SLCC Annual General Meeting 10 October 2023 Conference Venue Hinckley Island, Leicestershire
 SLCC Guidance Climate Action for smaller Councils
 Cambs ACRE PECT – Climate Action Fund
 Cambs ACRE Conserving nature and boosting biodiversity by greening your community spaces
 ECDC Halt Cambridge Congestion Charge (news from A Bailey)
 Cambs Police – Remembrance Events
 ECDC Newsletters – youth, lifestyle events, green flag parks etc
 Cambs Community Foundation – fund availability
 ECDC residents e-newsletter
 ECDC Single Issue Review Modification Consultation
 ECDC Minutes of meetings – planning, finance and assets etc
 ECDC Explore East Cambs website (tourist information) updated
 ECDC Safer Communities funding
 CCC LHI Winter Gritting Schemes
 CCC Highway Events
 CCC The Library Presents
 TMC Incident Report

23/141 Date of next meeting: 11 October 2023

Items for next agenda:

Clerk requested details from Councillors to put into report for budget/Precept 2024/5 for consideration at next meeting

*All
Cllrs*

To Review Actions – not done. Chairman closed meeting 9.50pm

Schedule of Receipts and Payments

		£	£	£
Receipts:	Dignity Gdn Remembrance plot & marker	100.00		100.00
	To confirm payments made during August			
	002083/4Salary expenses	875.53		875.53
Payments	002085 M Housden Reimburse path materials	51.00		51.00
	002086 What's On printing (reimbursement to editor Aug)	49.95		49.95
	002087/9Salary expenses	1360.19		1360.39
	002090 Truelink Ltd Jul	522.00	104.40)	
	Truelink Ltd Aug	272.40	54.48)	953.28
	002091 M Housden Reimburse tap	11.18	2.24	13.42
	002092 PKF External Auditors fees	210.00	42.00	252.00
	002093 Dignity Funerals (repayment)	100.00		100.00
d/d	IONOS	29.06	5.81	34.87
c/p	MS online services – 7 licences emails			
	19.6.23	31.50	6.30	37.80

Signed..... Dated