

## **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 30 April 2025 at 7.31pm in the Village Hall, Witcham**

**Present:** M Housden – Chairman of Witcham Parish Council  
S J Bell – Parish Clerk  
M Inskip - District Councillor  
G Byrne, L Holdaway, K Mackender, S Wilkin – Parish Councillors  
Representatives from Witcham Village Hall, Witcham Events Committee, Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group and Witcham Conservation Group (4)  
3 Members of the electorate (also members of the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Group)

Chairman, M Housden, welcomed everyone and thanked them for their support for the village.

**Apologies** for absence were received from J Lucas, (Parish Councillor - sick), L Dupré (County and District Councillor), and the Witcham Bowls Club representative.  
7.34pm Village Hall representative arrived and gave apologies for being few minutes late.

**Minutes** of the Annual Parish Meeting of 16 May 2024, previously circulated, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposed G Byrne, seconded M Housden, and agreed.

**Matters Arising:** There were none.

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

In the absence of the County Councillor, M Inskip gave a summary of the Annual Reports and undertook to answer any questions.

Of particular reference to Witcham was:

County Council - the 4-year term of office had reached the end, (elections taking place May). The County Councillor had continued her role on many of the committees and infrastructure developments, and Combined Authority. The County Council faced numerous challenges for services, increasing complexity of need, inflation etc in balancing and closing gaps in the budget where 73% of the Council's net spend is funded by Council Tax, which is capped. Children and adult social care and highway maintenance were key priorities. St Mary's Surgery in Ely had taken on the NHS contract for Priors Field Surgery at Sutton. The sale of the old Shire Hall in Cambridge following the move to Alconbury had still not been completed. At the Combined Authority, the outgoing Mayor had decided to proceed with franchising of bus routes, which should provide a more reliable and integrated service for residents. It was also co-ordinating Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Following the Government's English Devolution White Paper there would be a re-organisation of local government, abolishing the two-tier (County and District Councils) to create new larger all-purpose unitary councils. Work was ongoing to meet the Government deadlines for the current county and district councils to work out a single proposal for new boundaries by November. The Government proposals included more powers for directly elected Mayors.

The District Council was pushing ahead with plans for the crematorium at the former Mepal Outdoor Centre. Neighbourhood Plans had been prepared/being prepared in local villages but a new East Cambs Local Plan had now been shelved because of the upcoming local government re-organisation, which would change the area to be covered by Local Plans. There had been concern about Sanctuary Housing's management of empty homes across the district; at one time 200 properties stood empty but this had now been much improved. Some tenants were also having problems getting maintenance work completed and this too was being addressed. As reported last year the weekly black bag waste collection service would soon be switched to a fortnightly black bin collection and the introduction of weekly food bin

collection. To encourage more recycling, households would be able to get an extra green and blue bin free of charge.

Questions from the public:

What problems were envisaged with the new Local Plan being held up?

The existing Plan was old and out of date, eg National Planning Framework and development pressures changed. ECDC had started the process for the new one just before the Government's announcement for re-organisation.

How have the costs for the proposed crematorium risen from £7m to £11m?

Original costs were based on figures arrived at by officers and consultants. £9m appeared when CIL monies were allocated. The tendering process for construction was underway. It was confirmed that the intention was for the Council to run the site.

What are the timescales for the new reservoirs?

This would be a long process involving a great deal of consultation and a long period for construction. Decades.

Why is road maintenance so slow. Little progress in two years?

Roads had not been kept properly maintained for the last two decades, creating a backlog of problems that required massively bigger sums of money than the County Council was able to include in budgets. Eg capping budgets at 3%. The Government needed to come forward to provide substantial sums.

Shire Hall, Cambridge – understand there is an issue on who wants to buy it?

It was understood the original bidder the County Council was working with had pulled out.

Where will the new unitary authority be based?

Not known. The County and District Councils are to work together to put up proposals for new unitary authority and therefore the administrative base was not yet known.

## **2024/25 PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS**

A copy of the Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2024/5 had been circulated at the meeting and a copy would 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 was pleased that lots of people were enjoying the new play and fitness equipment and it was regularly busy, especially after school and weekends. Income for the year, including grants for Neighbourhood Plan and Phase II Play projects was £64907, Payments £55996 including £20333 play project and £9470 Neighbourhood Plan, giving a balance of £60502 which included all earmarked reserves.

Question from public:

What is in reserves?

Chairman advised that the main earmarked reserve was for provision of cemetery. The Neighbourhood Plan survey had revealed that people still wanted a cemetery in the village. The Parish Council was still looking for suitable land and urged anyone who would be interested in selling land for this purpose to contact the Council.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

The lead for the Group gave an update and it was noted the draft Plan had been sent to East Cambs District Council for them to conduct the stages they were statutorily required to carry out. If all was well, ECDC would carry out the procedures for referendum which required a majority of those voting to answer 'Yes' to the Plan before it would finally be made and included in the planning process for determination of planning applications in Witcham.

K Mackender, Parish Councillor, asked how long it would be before this process was complete and the Plan finally made. It was confirmed that the timeframe included a 6 week period for ECDC to receive any comments on the Draft Plan before appointing an Independent Examiner to examine the Plan. The Group would have the opportunity to accept the Examiner's findings and then all being well ECDC would organise the Referendum. This could take 4-5 months.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH**

Chairman advised that J Lucas was stepping down as Village Co-ordinator but would still continue as a street co-ordinator. It was noted that the Area Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator/Police now emailed street co-ordinators direct. Chairman asked if the village needed to revamp the arrangements for Neighbourhood Watch and asked for a volunteer to be Village Co-ordinator. There were no offers from anyone at the meeting.

## **SPEEDWATCH AND PROPOSED SPEED REDUCTION MEASURES TO EXTEND 40MPH SPEED LIMIT ON MEPAL ROAD**

Chairman advised that G Byrne, Parish Councillor, had kindly taken on the role as the village Speedwatch Co-ordinator last year.

G Byrne advised that the bi-monthly speed checks undertaken by the 9 volunteers had been successful; fewer people had been caught. This had also been reflected in the data gathered from the MVAS located within the 30mph zone at the 5 points on Martins Lane and The Slade.

In addition to reducing the speed limits on the road between Mepal and Witcham, the Council hoped to open up access between Mepal and Witcham. To achieve this, representatives from Mepal and Witcham Parish Councils had formed a working group to collaborate and investigate further, reporting back to respective Councils for decisions. Mepal had a number of areas to consider for speed reduction measures and would be conducting a survey within their parish.

Question from the public:

There was talk of locating MVAS on other streets in the village – what is happening?

Chairman advised that he had looked into acquiring basic equipment but it wouldn't fit on the brackets. The member of the public suggested this equipment could also be used on Mepal Road.

## **REFURBISHMENT OF BUS SHELTER**

Chairman reported that the cost of removing moss and cleaning roof tiles, including some replacement tiles, re-lining the roof inside and painting inside and out had been investigated. A box placed in the bus shelter by a volunteer collecting items for dog homes/shelters had had to be withdrawn because someone had taken the items donated. It had also been observed that someone in a car was coming into the village and taking away quantities of books etc. Please let him know if anyone sees such activities. What can be done? S Wilkin reported that the lady who was responsible for keeping the book area tidy and books swapped etc was happy to continue.

Installation of a further noticeboard was discussed. In particular the Events Committee would find this helpful. The Conservation Group leader said he had put something in the bus shelter to display notices about their work and events. A member of the public also asked if the Council would consider rendering the walls of the bus shelter. Regarding a 'community paint' it was noted the Council had already resolved that Councillors would volunteer to paint. K Mackender advised that the last time it was painted he and another Councillor had undertaken the task. Materials for refurbishing the inside of the roof were also discussed.

## **COMMUNITY CONSERVATION GROUP**

The Group had been formed as a result of data collected from the Neighbourhood Plan Group parish survey. People were keen to protect the natural environment. New developments should enhance and protect green spaces, hedgerows etc. The group comprised 15 residents. There had been an organised walk around the village to observe birds, trees wildlife. Projects included erection of bird boxes in village; rewilding of the Churchyard; survey to establish hedgehog population; designing of a template for a village survey. Noted that there had been more sightings of the Brimstone butterfly and a bird walk was planned for this weekend. The volunteers would like to take stewardship of a piece of land to develop as a habitat for wildlife.

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

### **Village Hall Committee**

The Chair said the Village Hall was doing well; plenty of bookings and currently undergoing redecoration. After 17 years as the Chair, she would be retiring at the Annual General Meeting later this month. During her time, £30k had been raised for the major refurbishment, together with associated grants, the annual Peashooting Championships, Big Breakfasts, Balls, etc. In the future, the Trustees hoped the car park could be expanded and were looking at installation of air-conditioning. She thanked the Trustees, the Parish Clerk and Chairman and the community, friends and family for all their support during her time serving the Village Hall. She wished the Witcham Events Committee much success for the future.

The Chairman thanked her for all her work and the legacy she left, with the Village Hall in a good position for the future; a benefit for all users of the hall and its excellent facilities. He said visitors from outside of the village were always complimentary of the facilities and wished that their halls were as well equipped.

### **Witcham Events Committee**

The Chair reported that there were now 11 volunteers on the Committee. The main event each year was the Peashooting Championships. People welcomed the changes last year. At the moment they remained a not-for-profit community group and had not yet completed registration with the Charity Commission. Monies raised would be spent on low/nil cost events including Xmas and craft events, bulb planting, to bring people together. They would be suggesting to the Parish Council that they might fund a table-tennis table for siting on the tarmac which was once used for cricket practice on the High Street side of the field and they hoped to be able to use the telephone kiosk in High Street as a mini museum for Peashooting Championships. She thanked the community and Parish Council for their support. She said more help was needed for the Peashooting Championships on 12 July.

The Chairman thanked her for all the work the Group were undertaking and noted that engaging with different people and more interests was working well.

### **Bowls Club**

The Chairman gave a report on behalf of the secretary of the Bowls Club. It was well attended, with two teams. The 1<sup>st</sup> team came 2<sup>nd</sup> in the league and runners-up in final cup competition and the 2<sup>nd</sup> team had come 3<sup>rd</sup> in the league.

There were no other clubs in the village to give reports.

## **ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS**

Village litterpick 10 May 2025, 10am, meet at bus stop. Thanks were given to those walkers and dog-walkers who regularly pick up after other people's dogs and collect up all sorts of litter all over the village.

The Chairman said the Parish Council would be looking at allowing the erection of a table-tennis table on the tarmac pad – originally laid for basketball which had proved an unsuitable site and then cricket nets for practice. No cricket matches would be played on the recreation ground as there were no teams. Regarding public rights of way and waymarking, he asked that residents let the Council know of any missing signage so that the public could keep to the proper routes and not wander on to private areas. The public were encouraged to report any concerns in respect of highways, footpaths etc on the County Council's website or contact a councillor. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/roadworks-and-faults>

The Council was now paying £100 per annum to keep the Witcham Archive website live but a volunteer co-ordinator was urgently required. Anyone interested, let him know. He said there was a lot of history items on the site but new items need to be added regularly to keep up with what's going on in the village. Member of the public asked if it was publicised. Visit

[www.witchamparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.witchamparishcouncil.gov.uk) for a link on the home page to the Cambridgeshire Community Archive website. It was also noted that an event was being arranged at the Church to display historic events and information.

G Byrne, Parish Councillor, referred back to the bus shelter and suggested a 'community wall' be considered.

9.17pm A member of the public apologised as she had to leave the meeting. (personal commitment)

Questions from the public:

Lights set in footway across village green – Chairman confirmed the existing footway needed repairs as recent weather had caused a bit of cracking on some of the edges. Costs had been preliminarily examined but had not been included in the current budget for completion this year as it would be a costly exercise.

Could more litter bins be put up as currently only have ones at the village centre. eg Headleys Lane and on the Drovers? Chairman said this could be explored.

A member of the Neighbourhood Plan Group said there was still some money being held from donations received. Others present who were on the Group thought this should be held until the project was finished. It would be for the Group to decide where to donate any remaining monies in due course.

9.25pm The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Signed .....

Dated .....