

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 26 April 2023 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall, Witcham

Present: K Mackender – Chairman of Meeting (Vice-Chairman Parish Council)
S J Bell – Clerk

L Dupré – County Councillor
M Inskip – District Councillor
J Bibby, J Lucas, L Holdaway, S Wilkin – Parish Councillors
2 representatives from the Community First Responders Group covering Mepal, Witcham and Sutton
Representatives from Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, Witcham Village Hall, Witcham Cricket Club, Witcham Bowls, Archive Group, Village Speedwatch and What's On monthly parish magazine. (6)
2 Members of the electorate

Chairman, K Mackender, welcomed everyone and thanked them for their support for the village. The Parish Council welcomed feedback from everyone in the village; to share views and improve the village. He would be Chairing the meeting in the absence of the Chairman of the Parish Council.

Apologies for absence were received from M Housden (Chairman Parish Council) and L Clark

COMMUNITY FIRST RESPONDERS TEAM – COVERING MEPAL WITCHAM SUTTON

Chairman welcomed the local Community First Responder Co-ordinator and a new member of the team. There were now 3 Responders from Sutton and 2 from Mepal in the group. He thanked the Council for the donation and confirmed that a new kit had been purchased. A volunteer or two from Witcham would be welcome – no experience required as full training was given, with regular updates to enable Responders to attend calls, normally within a 5 mile radius. Response times had improved in recent months in respect of the period taken for ambulances to get to the patient to take over from the First Responder and indeed First Responders on some occasions were able to assist a patient without the need for an ambulance to take them to hospital, which again improved ambulance response times for more critical cases. The new member of the team explained about the training of new recruits and encouraged people to come forward as volunteers.

7.40pm the Chairman thanked the First Responders for giving their time to come to the meeting to give an update. Their service to the community was very much appreciated. The two Responders left the meeting.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 27 April 2022, previously circulated, were confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chairman. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded J Bibby and agreed.

Matters Arising: There were none.

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

A copy of the Reports for County and District Councils were available at the meeting and links provided on the Parish Council's website. County Councillor L Dupré provided a resume of the County Council's work over the year and District Councillor M Inskip provided a resume of the District Council's work. There was discussion about provision of GP services at Sutton following withdrawal of services by the Fenland Group at Priors Field Surgery in March, which due to public pressure, services had been reinstated, a contract being undertaken by Malling Health from 1 April 2023; initially on a 12 month contract while a more permanent arrangement – including provision of a new building – was investigated. M Inskip advised that as part of the review of the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan, the Parish Council was looking at including provision

that would allow a new doctors surgery to be built on space not actually in the village development area – effectively there was no space within the centre of the village big enough to provide surgery facilities and the 173 dwelling development on the old Mepal airfield, north of Sutton village, had been approved so there was no opportunity to include a site for a surgery there. The existing District Local Plan, adopted 8 years ago, required updating.

A member of the public asked about how the Government and County Council would administer the new free childcare provisions and County Councillor L Dupre said she would be looking into this.

Please see the full reports, available at www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports

8.35pm The Chairman thanked the County and District Councillors for their reports and they stayed on for the rest of the meeting.

2022/23 ANNUAL REPORT OF PARISH COUNCIL, including 2022/23 Annual Accounts (unaudited) and the 2023/24 Precept

A copy of the Council's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23 had been circulated at the meeting and a copy would be delivered to each household soon. K Mackender, Chairman of the meeting, gave a resume of the Annual Report and he thanked the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group for their work and the What's On editor for producing the monthly parish magazine. He also thanked the litterpick volunteers, the County and District Councillors, fellow Parish Councillors and the Clerk. He advised that Julia Bibby was not standing for re-election this time and warmly thanked her for all her work for the Council and village. She had served as Parish Clerk for nearly 10 years during the 1980s and had been a Parish Councillor since 2008 making thereabouts 25 years of service to the community. She would be much missed. At this point the Clerk left the room. Upon her return the Chairman made the presentation of flowers and a bottle of drink from the members of the Parish Council, and the meeting applauded Julia for all her work and dedication to the community. She gave her thanks and the meeting continued with the Chairman inviting the Speedwatch co-ordinator to address the meeting.

SPEEDWATCH

The Co-ordinator said there was still not enough volunteers. Sufficient volunteers had come forward from the Mepal Road end of the village and therefore training and speedwatch sessions would be set up for this area. According to the data being collected on the MVAS equipment, sessions were required for 8-9am and 4-6pm. At least two more volunteers would be required in order to do checks for the rest of the village. People should contact the Clerk in the first instance. The Lead for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group advised that questions about how to deal with speeding in the village had been included in the survey questionnaire.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Lead of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group reported that the group was coming up for its first anniversary, having had the inaugural meeting on 7 June 2022 and had met monthly ever since although there had been some delays with not being able to meet over Xmas and New Year and the break following the passing of the late Queen.

Funds (£10k available plus £1500 from Precept) had been acquired to support the work and appoint a Consultant, which had included help with preparing the survey questionnaire. Funding (£8k) also to be obtained for Design Code by AECOM which would be attached with the made Neighbourhood Plan. This covered character of the areas – beauty, greenspaces, style buildings etc. AECOM and some people from the Group had done the village walkabout earlier in the week and a report was expected in 3-4 months.

The next stages included further periods of public consultation; preparation of draft document; adherence to Statutory consultation periods - both within the village and at District Council level; examination by the Examiner to ensure legal; village Referendum.

Chairman asked how much longer these next stages would take and was advised at least 12 months.

Residents were invited to submit photos from which a selection would be included in the Neighbourhood Plan as evidence. Two more drop-in sessions had been set up and an appearance at the Peashoot.

9.00pm Chairman thanked the Working Group for their work and invited the What's On editor to give an update

WHAT'S ON IN WITCHAM – Monthly Parish Newsletter

The Editor said she hoped everyone was happy with the newsletter over the past year. She had received some nice feedback. Unfortunately the edition for release 1st April had been damaged on its way back to her from the printers so copy not circulated.

Items from residents required by 20th of the month to meet publishing dates. Due to personal circumstances she said it was likely that the September issue might need to be prepared earlier and October might not be on schedule. She sought assistance to help with deliveries at Martins Lane and Silver Street. J Lucas offered to help. Chairman thanked her for all her work.

RECREATION GROUND

Update on the Council's Working Party dealing with replacement of children's play equipment at play area and new fitness equipment, with associated works at the Recreation Ground (£60k) was received. First application to Amey had been unsuccessful and so project now split in two and a second application submitted to Amey (for £39800). It was now at the second stage of the process of submitting a more detailed application and delivering a presentation. Further funding from other grant bodies would be sought to complete the fitness equipment and older children's play facilities on the High Street side of the recreation ground.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH CO-ORDINATOR

J Lucas said Witcham was a safe and pretty well crime free village so not much to report. The scheme was functioning well with co-ordinators for all streets. Not everyone was a member and more people were most welcome to join. She asked people to pass on an invite to new people joining the village.

A member of the public asked if Neighbourhood Watch was aware of illicit activities at the northern edge of the village. J Lucas said the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme/Police advice was that any concerns should be reported to the Police on 111 or in the event of emergency situations to dial 999.

Chairman said he would bring to the attention of the Parish Council on the next agenda.

REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS/CLUBS

Village Hall Committee:

Chair of Village Hall Committee reported that three people had resigned during the year and two more would be leaving in the current year. She would be serving her last year as Chair this year. New people were needed to ensure the future of the facility and it would be useful if volunteers could come forward now so as to be able to shadow current members for ease of handover. Hallmark Level 2 had been successfully achieved and she thanked members and staff for all their hard work and commitment in achieving this. Hall hire to regular users on a weekly basis was very very good and it was also used on average around 2 weekends a month for parties, family occasions etc. There had been no increase in fees – nor for reflecting increase in heating and lighting expenses. The 50th Peashoot would take place in July. This had been under the auspices of the Village Hall since inception as a means of raising funds to run the Village Hall. Going forward the Committee would need to review and discuss who could take it on if the future Committee was not strong and robust enough. An item about the

Village Hall would be appearing in Fenscene (free local villages magazine). The website was doing well. Some new kitchen cupboards had been installed and new ceiling lights installed. Following closure of one of the user organisations, the Village Hall had received a donation which the Committee had, after engaging with the Parish Council, purchased a new bench and was being sited on the recreation ground near the roadway to benefit hall users and residents in general. It would be dedicated to commemorating the Coronation of King Charles III. She said people using the Hall have high regard for the facilities and felt it to be a very useful asset to the village. She gave her thanks to people who supported the hall, both users and people engaged in running the facility.

A member of the public suggested the resident discount for use of the hall should be publicised more. The Chair advised that there was mention on the website and people were certainly advised at the point of booking.

Cricket Club:

Chairman of Cricket Club reported that there was no Saturday side again this year but members would be having some weekday evening matches which were shorter matches than the 5 hour matches on weekends. He appealed for more players to join the teams. He said that the Ely City 3rd team would be using the recreation ground for some of their weekend matches as their new facilities being provided on the new development on Chettisham Road would not be ready until 2024. He hoped Witcham would have a team to come back to playing at the recreation ground at weekends next year.

Bowls Club:

The Club's representatives advised that at the AGM the existing Chairman had retired and a member from Haddenham had now been elected. The Club would be meeting alternate Tuesdays for the next 4 months for internal competitions. 19 members but could do with more people joining, just £2.50 per evening with refreshments. The A team had done well in the Division and the B team enjoyed the games they played.

Archive Group

Nil of note to report.

ANY OTHER PARISH BUSINESS

There was none put forward.

9.30pm The Chairman thanked everyone for their support and attending and closed the meeting.

Signed

Dated