

WITCHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 16 April 2025 at 7.33pm in the Village Hall, Witcham

Present: M Housden (Chairman,) L Holdaway, J Lucas, S Wilkin

In attendance Parish Clerk/RFO

25/057 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from G Byrne (personal commitment), and K Mackender (work commitment).

Apologies also received from County and District Councillor L Dupré, and District Councillor M Inskip.

25/058 To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on any items on the agenda

Pecuniary interests - none

Personal interests – none

Prejudicial interests – none

25/059 Dispensations

To note any new Dispensations granted: Nil

25/060 Reports from District and County Councillors

Monthly report had been circulated and was noted.

The Annual report had been circulated.

Responses to queries raised with the County Councillor regarding update on progress with the boundary at northern end of Headleys Lane, (see Minute 25/070); progress with starting work on cutting back verge on Mepal-Witcham Road to facilitate safe area for walkers and riders, (see Minute 25/070).

Clarification on engagement with parish councils for the Government's current local government re-organisation – Cllr Dupré had been told there would be a process of public engagement from June and she had advised ECDC to be aware of the notice required for items for parish council agendas, the space between meetings, and also that many parishes do not meet in August.

Clerk

25/061 Public Participation There were no members of the public present.

25/062 Minutes

Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting of 12 March 2025 had to be deferred to the next meeting as there were insufficient Councillors present who were also present on 12 March to be able to carry a vote. Minutes and agenda not signed.

Minutes of the Meeting of 19 March 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 Chairman, seconded J Lucas and agreed. S Wilkin abstained as she had not been present at the meeting.

25/063 Matters Arising

25/050 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 organiser had removed the tub from the bus shelter as unfortunately items placed in the tub had been taken by unauthorised personnel. It had also been reported that someone had been observed removing and driving off with a number of books and items from the book area of the bus shelter.

25/064 **Finance and Administration Matters**

- a) **Receipts and payments schedule** - April 2025, including Truelink (March) and Lloyds fees (March). Documentation had been checked by Chairman and J Lucas.

Resolved to approve the receipts and payments for April 2025, which included renewal of CAPALC and SLCC memberships, and payments for end of March invoices - grounds & grasscutting and bank charges. (Listed at foot of Minutes). Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin.

Clerk

- b) Changes to energy charges (unmetered supplies (UMS) for the council's 5 street lights from Non-Half Hourly to Half Hourly Rate (Industry wide P434 Programme - extension for migration of MPANs to September 2025) was noted. Exact date for Witcham to be confirmed.
- c) Renewal of subscription to Cambridgeshire Community Archive Network, £100 pa.

Resolved that the Council in accordance with its powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, should incur the following expenditure which, in the opinion of the Council is in the interests of the area or its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure. To contribute £100 for annual subscription – Cambridgeshire Community Archive Network/website for Witcham items [Cambridgeshire Community Archive Network](#) Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway

Clerk

- d) Approval of year-end accounts including reconciliations and associated documents, and discuss completion of 2024/5 Annual Governance and Accounts Return.

Copies of receipts and payments records for the year with bank reconciliation to 31 March 2025, together with summary had been prepared and circulated with the agenda for Councillors to examine and review. Original bank statements were presented for verification. Receipts, including £18,500 Precept, CIL monies, Locality grant for Neighbourhood Plan, and Community Fund Grant for phase 2 play project totalled £64,906.97. Payments £55,995.62. The balance carried over from last year was £51,590.18 giving a balance at 31 March 2025 of £60,501.53 including general reserves, earmarked reserves and earmarked CIL monies.

Resolved that the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2025 together with bank and cash book reconciliations, and the Summary be approved. Proposed J Lucas, seconded Chairman.

Resolved to approve the summary of receipts and payments and reconciliations for publication in the Council's 2024/5 Annual Report. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin.

Resolved to approve the list of payments over £100 for publication on the website together with the listing of Parish Council owned land and buildings. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded J Lucas.

The budget report explaining under and overspends for the year was discussed and adjustments made for carrying over into the new year.

Resolved that the Clerk to update budget headings accordingly for 2025/6 for review at next meeting. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded Chairman.

Clerk

The AGAR section 1 form had been drafted and a copy of section 2 of the return had also been circulated to Councillors together with the **JPEG Practitioners Guidance** for 2024/5 financial year. These would be reviewed for completion and approval at the May meeting.

Clerk

The variances between 2023/4 and 2024/5 figures were also checked and accepted as part of the AGAR section 1.

25/064 **Finance and Administration Matters (cont)**

- e) The latest Town and Parish Council **Financial Regulations** template provided by NALC, which had been amended to reflect provisions under the recent Procurement Act and Regulations, had been updated for Witcham and circulated to Councillors for examination and discussion with the agenda.

Resolved to approve the amended Financial Regulations. Proposed Chairman, seconded S Wilkin.

All

- f) The final draft 2024/5 Annual Report and Accounts had been circulated. Quote for printing 220 copies examined.

Resolved to approve the 2024/5 Annual Report and Accounts and Clerk to arrange for printing as per quote. Payment to be made by cheque if possible but otherwise if payment required on collection Clerk authorised to use card, max £130. Proposed J Lucas, seconded S Wilkin.

Clerk

- g) Arrangements for Annual Parish Meeting on 30 April 2025. Regarding item on Neighbourhood Watch, J Lucas said she would now like to relinquish responsibilities as village co-ordinator. It was noted the area co-ordinator now distributed messages direct to street co-ordinators.

Resolved to confirm agenda for signature by Chairman and display on noticeboards in the village and website. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin

Clerk

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 25/064h) – 25/064i)), namely RSPB lease, and deed of public rights of way & car park, 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.

- h) **RSPB Lease.** Council's solicitor had been chasing other party but no response since letter sent in February. Details given to Clerk for email to go to solicitor and the contact at the RSPB to be cc'd. The Lease must be available for signing at the Annual Meeting of the Council.

Clerk

- i) **Deed of Right of Way and Parking for Village Hall**

Chairman gave update which was fully discussed.

Resolved that the Clerk should write to the Village Hall as per comments and guidance provided in the meeting. Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway.

Clerk

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

25/065 **Planning Matters**

25/00286/FUL Land South West of Ely Model Aircraft Club, Hive Road. Retrospective change of use to mixed agricultural and straw thatching yard.

Resolved that as was the Council's comments on the previous application (24/00137/FUL) there were concerns and so Conditions should be included that no burning of old thatch should take place on the site and indeed old materials should not be taken back to the site. The Council is concerned that old materials are regularly burnt, usually early mornings, and sometimes evenings. The fires, which are close to the hedge, are left unattended.

Clerk

Proposed S Wilkin, seconded L Holdaway.

25/00285/CLP Magnolia Place 9 Silver Street Loft conversion within permitted development rights.

Resolved that the Council had no concerns. Proposed Chairman, seconded S Wilkin.

Clerk

25/066 Neighbourhood Plan

Update received from Chairman, and WHM10 and WHM14 reviewed following feedback from ECDC.

Clerk

Resolved that Clerk to respond in accordance with discussion and to copy in members of the Working Group. Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway.

25/067 MVAS, Speed Watch & Speed Reduction Measures Mepal-Witcham

- a) Two readings of the MVAS results for March had been previously circulated and were noted.
- b) Joint Working for Application under Local Highways Initiative Programme (Witcham and Mepal Parish Councils).
Following on-line meeting on 2 April 2025 with CCC, the notes regarding extending 40mph speed limit on the Mepal-Witcham road and opening up non-motorised user access between the two villages had been circulated.

S Wilkin gave apologies for not being able to attend the next joint meeting with Mepal Parish Council due to work commitments.

Resolved that the Parish Council would be represented by G Byrne and M Housden for the meeting with the Mepal Parish Council representatives on 22 April 2025. The purpose was to share CCC information and clarify the position for Mepal Parish Council/gain support for moving forward. The Clerk would also be in attendance. Proposed Chairman, seconded L Holdaway.

All

25/068 Recreation Ground and Cemetery Matters

- a) Weekly inspections of play equipment and recreation ground had been completed by the Chairman. The cricket mats had been removed leaving the tarmac base. Chairman had filled holes where old trees had been removed.

Noted that the newly planted bulbs around the recreation ground and also by noticeboards etc were looking very good.

Resolved to write to the Witcham Events Committee to thank them for all their work with providing and planting the bulbs. Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway.

Clerk

Chairman asked members to consider what could be done with the area where the cricket mats had been removed. He also asked if the Council could find out why the independent inspector at the annual inspection had highlighted the need for removal of the Christmas lights from around the play area. Those Councillors present at the February meeting (Minute 25/027) explained why the Council had informed the Witcham Events Committee that erection of lights around the infant play area could not be allowed in future.

Resolved that the Clerk contact the annual inspection company to ask what their specific concerns were and how those concerns could be mitigated. Proposed L Holdaway, seconded S Wilkin.

Clerk

- b) Noted that City of Ely Cricket Club's 3rd X1 team would not be requiring use of the recreation ground this season.

25/069 Agricultural Reservoirs in East Cambridgeshire

Noted.

JL/MH

25/070 Highways and Street Lighting Matters

- a) CCC Response for Highway Investment 2025/6 bid, previously circulated. The bid for maintenance to reopen footway Mepal Road-Witcham Road had been refused and it was noted this would potentially be a LHI scheme.
- b) CCC progress with removal posts/hedges – boundary at northern end of Headley's Lane – County Councillor was continuing to pursue. Cutting back verge on Mepal-Witcham Road to facilitate safe area for walkers and riders – County Councillor had raised again and would chase again.

25/070 Highways and Street Lighting Matters (cont)

- c) Sapling trees planted on verge (PROW) at Witcham Gravel.
Resolved that this should be reported to CCC Rights of Way as this area should not be planted up. Proposed J Lucas, seconded Chairman.
- d) There were no other items to reported to the Highways Authority.

*Clerk***25/071 Correspondence**

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

J Lucas had notes to present, for information, in respect of a meeting she had attended. Chairman proposed inserting this at this point, which was agreed:

Report of meeting 4 April 2025 – Charlotte Cane, MP

6 representatives from 5 Parish Councils had attended, covering range of issues. Of particular interest to Witcham was her efforts with Sanctuary Housing in respect of longstanding issue of properties standing empty. She had been having quarterly meetings with Sanctuary and confirmed that properties empty for more than a year were all now let. Arrangements in hand to speed up preparing homes for new tenants and neighbouring tenants of empty houses were welcome to contact her about any concerns. With regard to the County and District Council reorganisation she encouraged Parish Councils to get involved in the discussions. If Area Committees were formed this would bring decisions closer to parish councils. NALC may be able to negotiate a clearer role for parish councils re unitary councils. She preferred split Ely and East Cambs with South Cambs and Cambridge.

Mayor and County Council Elections 1 May 2025 – posted on noticeboard 10.4.25

NALC/CAPALC LGA72 – S.137 £11.10 per elector wef 1.4.25 (from £10.81)

House of Commons Transport Select Committee Survey (extended to 6.4.25)

Cambs Constabulary – Pegasus Scheme – posted on noticeboard.

CCC Asset Data Strategy Capital Highways Maintenance Programme

CCC TMC Incident Report

CCC Highway Events

ECDC Agendas, Decisions/Minutes – Planning, Operational Services, Audit Committee, Finance and Assets, Licensing, Special Council meeting,

ECDC press releases: Community and Public transport, Safe Space offered to report hate crimes, Local Government Re-organisation.

Cambs Community Foundation – Learning and Skills Fund

Parish and Community Forum notes March 2025. Next meeting 21.5.25

CAPALC - Undergraduate Empirical Research Project – survey request

CAPALC 80th Anniversary of Victory in Europe (8.5.25)

NALC and CAPALC Bulletins and newsletters

East Cambs Climate Action Network – reducing home emissions

HMRC Spring Statement

Arthurs Shed

Cambs ACRE – Help Shape the Future of Nature Recovery in your Parish

'New Life on the Old West (NLOW) project had also been received and it was suggested this be passed to the lead of the Witcham Conservation Group volunteers.

24/072 Date of next meeting: 14 May 2025 – Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Schedule of Receipts and Payments

		£	£	£
Receipts:	RSPB	1020.15		1020.15
Payments	002201 Truelink (March)	312.00	62.40	374.40
	b/c Lloyds (Jan-Feb) debited 18.3.25	8.75		8.75

	002202 Npower Street light (5) energy Jan/Mar	45.97	2.30	48.27
	002203/BACS Salary Expenses	551.24		551.24
	002204 Geosphere Ltd - Parish Online	45.00	9.00	54.00
	002205 CCC Cambridgeshire Community			
	Archive Network (Minute 25/064c)	100.00		100.00
	002206 SLCC membership fees	150.00		150.00
	002207 CAPALC membership fees	340.63		340.63
	c/p MS online services – 7 licences emails	34.30	6.86	41.16

Signed..... Dated