

WITCHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Wednesday 9 October 2024 at 7.34pm in the Village Hall, Witcham

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

In attendance Parish Clerk/RFO
County and District Councillor L Dupré

24/155 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from District Councillor M Inskip. It was also noted that he had sent his apologies for the September meeting, later that evening. (work commitments).

24/156 **To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on any items on the agenda**

Pecuniary interests - none

Personal interests – M Housden – member of Witcham Events Committee (Minute 24/164b))

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

24/157 **Dispensations**

To note any new Dispensations granted: Nil

24/158 **Reports from District and County Councillors**

Chairman opened the meeting to welcome Councillor Dupré and invited her to update Council on County and District Council reports which had been previously circulated.

School Place Appeal Panel volunteers urgently needed to hear appeals when children are not offered a place at their preferred school. The go ahead had been given to expand Witchford Village College to 975 places.

Two former farmhouses in Soham, owned by the County Council, were to be used as a pilot project to increase the number of local places available for children and young people with complex needs.

7.37pm K Mackender arrived.

The Environment & Green Investment Committee received a progress report on its Climate Change and Environment Strategy, and the Annual Carbon Footprint Report, on 3 October. The risk of not reaching their carbon targets had reduced but still remained considerable. Delivery of these targets relied on collaborating with their partner organisations.

The Local Highways Improvement (LHI) scheme was vastly oversubscribed with bids. They are now divided into complex and non-complex schemes. Only 10 were successful. Some schemes that have remained previously unselected have been moved to the Delivering Transport Strategy Aims programme, eg Sutton's weight limit scheme. The 20mph schemes were hugely popular with 91 applications plus a further 11 that were withdrawn. Only 8 were approved, again due to lack of availability of funding.

She had approached officers about the request from Witcham Parish Council to reinstate the pedestrian route between Witcham and Mepal. Now that the nesting season was over, the officer would arrange for cutting back the overgrowth on the verge to help create a safer walking environment for pedestrians.

24/158 **Reports from District and County Councillors (cont)**

The Local Highways Officer was doing a lot of work to address issues on Headleys Lane. Councillors reported the new hedge had been planted out of line with the existing and the encroachment would cause obstruction issues in the lane once the new hedge got established so needed dealing with before that happened.

Councillor Dupré advised that an order had been placed for a trial hole to be dug in the verge outside the cemetery where the ditch between the cemetery and the farmer's land enters the verge. The jetting crew would attend to establish where the ditch water runs and connects to. This was being done as a gesture of goodwill. She was asking for dates when this would be done. (originally promised at the February site meeting with Highways/Drainage depts).

Turning to the District Councillors' report, she advised that by early 2026 the following changes to waste collections services would be effected:

- Weekly food waste collection in a separate container.
- Black sacks to be replaced by a 180 litre wheeled bin collected fortnightly
- Ending the annual subscription charge for a second green bin.
- Removing the one-off charge for an extra blue bin.

The proposed crematorium costs at the old play and leisure centre on the Mepal to Chatteris road were still soaring. £167,737 had been received from the Combined Authority under its Net Zero Villages programme for grants (£5k - £30k) to local communities to tackle energy use and/or support energy efficiency or generation retrofit to a community building; enable access to public transport or access to local services through low carbon transport; offer nature based solutions to tackle overheating of community buildings. With regard to transport, Chairman said he had attended the Sustrans online seminar about proposals for projects for cycling and walking routes. There were many very good ideas, if feasible, but funding was very limited.

7.52pm Chairman closed the open session for Councillor's reports. He thanked Councillor Dupré, who then left the meeting.

24/159 **Public Participation**

There were no members of the public present. The Chairman said the Chair of the Village Hall was intending to attend.

Resolved to move item further down agenda until Village Hall Chair arrived. Proposed Chairman and agreed by all.

Resolved to move to 24/162i) Proposed L Holdaway, seconded Chairman and agreed.

24/162 **Village Hall Right of Way and Parking Deed – Item 24/162i) (Closed to public)**

Heads of Terms document tweaked to cover points raised at recent meetings, discussed and agreed. (Meeting re-opened to the public – No members of public present)

24/160 **Minutes**

Minutes of the Meeting of 11 September 2024 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman, and the agenda of the same date was also signed as confirmation of the business transacted at that meeting. Proposed Chairman, seconded J Lucas.

24/161 **Matters Arising**

None, other than those issues listed as agenda items.

Noted that the Notice for completion of External Audit had been posted up and replacement dog fouling signs for lamp-posts and contact labels for dog bins had been requested from ECDC.

24/162 **Finance and Administration Matters**

- a) **Approve Receipts and Payments for October 2024** (previously circulated) Documentation had been checked by J Lucas and G Byrne.

Resolved to approve the receipts and payments schedule for October, including BACS and to release cheques. Proposed Chairman, seconded J Lucas.

Clerk

Invoices for reimbursement for printing of recent editions of "What's On" had been chased but not yet received. Invoice for works by Truelink had also not yet been received.

- b) **Finance Report** (previously circulated)

Receipts and payments to date with forecast for next 6 months and proposals for 2025/6 budget had been drafted by the Clerk and she asked for input for any other expenditure the Councillors wanted to undertake during that financial year. Replacement/repairs to path across green and solar lighting along the pathway was noted as a project to be funded with grants in some years ahead. This part of the report was noted and agreed, and would be further discussed at the meeting in November in order the 2025 Precept could be set.

Fixed Rate Deposit Account

Clerk gave update.

Resolved that on maturity of the existing account, £25,000 would be reinvested for a further 12 months. Noted currently this was being offered at 2.75%. Proposed K Mackender, seconded Chairman.

Other accounts to be reviewed at the November meeting as part of budget and Precept setting exercise.

Clerk

- c) **Grass and Grounds Maintenance Contract** (renewal) (previously circulated)

Clerk sought details of any changes that Councillors wanted to make to the contract so quotes could be obtained for further two year contract.

Amendments: To include maintenance of new garden at the entrance to the Village Hall drive and to include requirement to be compliant with the Biodiversity Policy - Land and Property Management section.

Resolved Clerk to obtain quotes for new contract based on previous contract subject to changes as discussed. Proposed G Byrne, seconded K Mackender.

Clerk

8.25pm Chair of Village Hall arrived.

Resolved to move to item 24/159 Public Participation and to open the meeting and invite Chair of Witcham Village Hall to speak. Proposed Chairman and agreed.

24/159 **Public Participation**

Chairman welcomed Chair of Witcham Village Hall and there was discussion about details for the Deed, including proposals for Village Hall to help facilitate in providing electrical points running from Village Hall to provide access to power for Christmas tree lights, Christmas lights and Peashoot electrical equipment. The application for this had come from the members of the newly formed Witcham Events Committee. Clarification regarding future responsibility for management and maintenance of the cables and equipment needed to be firmly established and an agreement drawn up. M Housden and Chair of Witcham Village Hall would attend the Events Committee meeting

next Wednesday night and L Holdaway would speak to the Chair of the Events Committee.

8.50pm Chair of Village Hall was thanked for attending and left the meeting.

Chairman closed the meeting to the public and resumed the agenda.

24/162 **Finance and Administration Matters** (cont)

d) **Review of Policies**

Biodiversity Policy (previously circulated). Document reviewed and amendments made for adoption.

Resolved that Clerk to amend the Policy as discussed. Proposed J Lucas, seconded L Holdaway.

Clerk

e) **Annual Village Inspections.** Reports, presented by J Lucas, Chairman and G Byrne, were received and discussed.

*Cllrs
Clerk*

f) **Financial Regulations.** Confirmed that the final copy had been circulated to Councillors

All Cllrs

Exclusion of Press and Public (9.16pm)

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 24/162g) and 24/162/i) 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.

g) **Bus Shelter Repairs and Signage Village Hall**

Clerk reported she was still awaiting information regarding bus shelter repairs, and Chairman had not yet received an update for new signs.

h) **RSPB Lease**

Clerk was still awaiting response from solicitors and confirmed she had chased twice since last meeting.

i) **Deed of Public Right of Way and Parking**

Following discussion with Chair of Village Hall, see Minute 24/159 Clerk to forward amended Heads of Terms for Chair of Village Hall to discuss with their legal team and take to committee. Discussion regarding electric cable, which will be further discussed by Village Hall Committee, and responses awaited.

24/163 **Planning Matters**

24/00898/FUL Park House, The Slade First floor extension over existing flat roof.

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

Clerk

The following ECDC decision was noted:

24/00826/FUL 14 Martins Lane Internal and external alterations including proposed bay window. Garage conversion (retrospective). Approved

24/164 **Recreation Ground and Cemetery Matters**

a) **Weekly inspections** of play equipment and recreation ground had been completed by the Chairman and he advised there were no issues to raise. Concerns raised by resident that seats were missing on the chest and shoulder press fitness equipment was reported. This piece of kit was specifically for wheelchair users and the instructions were on the apparatus. Inclusive equipment had been included in the project and indeed formed part of the requirements for being able to obtain grant funding to cover the whole project.

Resolved that Clerk respond to resident as discussed. Proposed Chairman, seconded J Lucas.

Clerk

24/164 **Recreation Ground and Cemetery Matters (cont)**

- b) **Witcham Events Committee** request to use recreation ground for Christmas events, laying of power supplies for Christmas tree and Christmas lights, and Peashoot events, bulb planting and use of telephone box – including internal works for displaying village history/peashoot information.

Resolved that the Council welcomed the proposal for the Witcham Events Committee's volunteers to plant bulbs as indicated in their request. The decision on use of phone box required further investigation regarding use and internal alterations to phone box in the conservation area (Listed) – Clerk to contact ECDC. The decision regarding laying of cables on Parish Council owned land required further investigation and clarification – response awaited after further discussions between Village Hall and Events Committee.

*Clerk*24/165 **Report of Meetings attended by Councillors**

Chairman had attended the Sustrans on-line seminar on 16 September, 2024 on Sustrans route feasibility studies. This had been very interesting and reports from ECDC Director of Community had been circulated. Councillors had no comments to make.

24/166 **Neighbourhood Plan**

Notes of recent meetings and reports had been circulated by the Group. The first draft of the Plan had been received earlier in the afternoon from the Consultant and this had been forwarded to the Councillors immediately. This timescale had not given time for them to examine and respond. They were asked to contact the Chairman (MH) with any comments before the meeting with the consultant on Thursday 17 October, 6.15 pm to 7.30pm.

All Cllrs

The next draft must be received at least the week before the Council meeting so that Councillors could prepare themselves to discuss and make any decisions in their Council meeting.

K Mackender and M Housden confirmed they would be attending the meeting on 17 October.

*Chairman
KM*

The next meeting with the consultant was scheduled for 7 November. This would be for the final proof-read copy which the Council would be asked to approve at the 13 November meeting.

More information ought to be added on biodiversity and conservation on the Doves and other part of the village as there were many areas which were an important rich habitat source for plants and wildlife. Clerk asked everyone to examine the document carefully as this will form policy for the Council for many years to come on a wide range of subjects.

*All Cllrs*24/167 **Highways and Street Lighting Matters**

- a) There were no items reported to the Highways Authority since the last meeting.
- b) Witcham to Mepal Road. Joint working with Mepal Parish Council for speed reduction measures and verge improvements for pedestrians. G Byrne and S Wilkin were thanked for offering to attend this exploratory meeting, and to report back to Council on options and funding available.

*GB/SW*24/168 **Speedwatch and MVAS Monitoring**

- a) G Byrne advised that speedwatch sessions had recommenced. If two more volunteers would come forward they could arrange for two sessions a month.
- b) The latest MVAS speed data had been circulated by the Chairman. Noted that cars parked in The Slade had resulted in a reduction of cars speeding through.

24/169 **Correspondence**

The following items of information/interest, and invitations to events had been circulated and unless recorded below as otherwise, were noted:
 Highways and Streetlighting Contracts - Stakeholder surveys – 2024
 Cambs Police meeting 9 October 2024
 Elean Power Station - Community Liaison meeting 25 October 2024: G Byrne gave his apologies as he would be unable to make this new date.
 ECDC and Cambs Police - Hate crime awareness & 3rd Party reporting centre
 CCC Library events
 ECDC Nature, Climate and Planning Policy Update, Meeting agendas and decisions, press releases
 East Cambs Parish and Community Forum meeting
 NALC Bulletins, Newsletters, Events and website.

The Clerk had also been informed that a resident working with the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group had been trying to track down the old **Witcham Fire Engine Pump** that had been deposited with the Ely Museum very many years ago. Further details as to its whereabouts were awaited. Ideally it should be returned to the Ely area, possibly the village if a home could be found.

24/170 **Date of next meeting:** Wednesday 13 November 2024
 Meeting closed at 9.40pm

Schedule of Receipts and Payments

		£	£	£
Receipts:	Precept	9250.00		9250.00
	RS Memorials	50.00		50.00
Payments	002169 Npower	33.68	1.68	35.36
	002170/BACS Salary Expenses	536.66	-	536.66
	002171 RBL Poppy Wreath	40.00	-	40.00
	002172 Reimbursement admin expenses	161.13	-	161.13
	c/p MS online services – 7 licences emails	34.30	6.86	41.16

Signed..... Dated