

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL

at 7.00pm on Wednesday 2nd November, 2023
in Wicken Sports Club

Attendance

Cllr. Neil Gordon-Lee
Cllr. Philip Ivens
Cllr. Petra Spencer-Jones
Cllr. Ian Howett
Clerk: John Westlake

94/23 To receive and accept any apologies for absence.

An apology for absence had been received from WNC Cllr. Ken Pritchard. The Chair also announced that notice of resignation from the council had been received from Rachel Sithole.

95/23 To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 30th August, 2023

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved and signed by the Chair.

96/23 Members' interests: Councillors are invited to declare disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests in items on the agenda as required by the Wicken Parish Council Code of Conduct for Members and by the Localism Act 2011

The Chair encouraged those relevant Councillors to make the necessary declarations. He pointed out that West Northamptonshire District Council had not updated the information provided to them.

97/23 To hear a report from WNC Councillor Ken Pritchard

In the absence of Cllr. Pritchard there was no report.

98/23 Public Forum

A member of the public referred to the possibility that the existing wooden planters placed at the entrances to the village may be replaced with metal planters. These would be more expensive and thus more attractive to thieves. The Chair responded by recognising the risk of theft, bearing in mind that there had been a recent substantial theft in the village. He stated that metal planters were being considered by the Solar Farm Committee for reason of sustainability, but wider views are being sought and a decision has yet to be made. This will take account of the risks and costs of various options. A query was also raised about maintenance of the planters.

The Chair responded by stating that to reduce maintenance and because of possible climate change drought resistant planting may be an option. Information from the Royal Horticultural Society would be considered by the Solar Farm Committee to enable it to make an informed decision. He thanked Pat Martindale and Sally Miller for their past work in maintaining the planters and invited them to attend a meeting of the committee to express their views and take part in the debate on the way forward.

Chairman's initials

99/23 To note updates on standing items

- The Chair reported that the work on the Gospel Elm had been carried out.
- Cllr. Howett reported that the warning sign on the Deanshanger Road indicating narrowing of the road was obscured by trees. He will post details on "Fix my Street".
- The Chair reported that he had no response to his letter on the overhanging trees bordering Quarry Green Close so will follow up. The residents at Cross Tree Cottage are planning to remove the trees.

100/23 Finance

The financial position was noted, with no questions. The Chair reported out that he had purchased a wreath, on behalf of the council, for Remembrance Day. The invoice of £40 including a donation of £20 had been paid by the council. However the donation was personally made by the Chair which he had refunded to the council.

101/23 To consider tree planting

The Chair summarised the position with respect to the planting an avenue of ten lime trees on the Whittlebury Road. Permission has been received from the landowner, following which the Parish Council had attempted to obtain quotations for planting and maintenance. It has been made very clear from informed sources that regular watering is essential to the survival of newly planted trees, particularly with the possible effects of climate change. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the budget allows for regular watering for three years after planting. Under the financial regulations governing parish councils it is necessary to endeavour to obtain three alternative quotations. This, however, has proved difficult, either because requests had met with no response or a firm could not meet the stated requirements. (e.g. a firm based in Oxfordshire had quoted for planting, but would not undertake the necessary regular maintenance). The request for quotations has resulted in two alternative quotations, details of which had previously been circulated to all councillors, as follows:

- Nicholsons: £23785
- Wessex Woodland: £9,459

(Both figures are exclusive of VAT, which can be recovered by the council.)

In response to a question from Cllr. Howett the Chair confirmed that both quotations were for the planting of trees of the same height. He also clarified the position on watering, and added that Wessex Woodland were undertaking other planting in Wicken in December and the lime trees would be planted during that month.

The Chair proposed that the quotation from Wessex Woodland is accepted. This was accepted unanimously by the council.

102/23 To consider repairs to Wicken Sports Club roof

Cllr. Gordon-Lee disclosed a potential conflict of interest as he is a Director of Wicken Sports Club Ltd. He therefore vacated the Chair, and withdrew from the room. The Chair was assumed for this item by Cllr. Ivens.

A paper detailing a funding request to the Solar Farm Fund for repairs to the roof had previously been circulated to all councillors. A representative of the club, Fenlon Dunphy, informed the meeting that several unsuccessful attempts had been made to obtain quotations for the roof repairs for reasons described in the funding request. However, a detailed Scope of Works had been obtained from Frank Nicholls Ltd detailing a total cost of works as £5,820 (Inc. VAT). . Cllr. Ivens proposed that a sum of up £6000 is donated to Wicken Sports Club Ltd, as requested. This was accepted unanimously by the council.

103/23 To consider planning issues

Cllr. Gordon-Lee reassumed the Chair.

- The Chair drew the attention of the meeting to the allowing of an appeal against a decision of West Northamptonshire Council not to grant permission to erect a front porch extension to 11 Church Close, Wicken. The Parish Council had not objected to the original application, and it was surprising that permission had not been granted. The Chair had advised the applicant on the appeal process, which had now proved successful.
- A member of the public asked for advice on replacing windows in her property, bearing in mind that this is in the Wicken Conservation Area. After some discussion the Chair suggested that if there were problems after seeking permission from WNC to refer back to the council which would to ask Cllr. Ken Pritchard for guidance.

104/23 To consider action on playground maintenance

Cllr. Spencer-Jones reported that it had not been possible to access a steam cleaner to remove algae from the floor tiles of the play area. The Chair suggested that the telephone exchange may be willing to assist; Cllr. Spencer-Jones will explore this avenue. She is also in the process of formulating the wording for the required sign.

105/23 To consider residents' complaints

The Chair had received complaints about speeding from a resident who was concerned about vehicles exceeding the 30 mph limit, and suggested that this should be reduced to 20 mph. He also suggested the speed limit signs on the Deanshanger Road be moved back towards Deanshanger. The Chair suggested this possibility be raised with Cllr. Pritchard.

He was also concerned about dogs not on leads, in particular because some people are nervous about dogs. The Chair stated that there was little the council could do in this respect, apart from reminding dog owners of their responsibilities

106/23 To note future meeting dates: 3rd January 2024, 6th March 2024, 1st May

107/23 To note/consider items for next meeting

Cllr. Ivens raised his concern about the number of remaining parish councillors. (Following the recent resignation there are currently four councillors, whereas a full quota would be seven.) The Chair invited members of the public present to consider being co-opted to the council. He has been actively endeavouring to generate interest among residents by personal contact and through the pages of Wicken News.

If any resident wishes to see supporting documentation from the meeting then please contact the Parish Clerk. Hard copies will be charged in accordance with the published tariff.

Councillor Neil Gordon-Lee
Chair, Wicken Parish Council