

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL

at 7.00pm on Tuesday 5th March 2024
in Wicken Sports Club

Attendance

Chair: Cllr. Neil Gordon-Lee
Cllr. Philip Ivens
Cllr. Petra Spencer-Jones
Cllr. Vivienne Kime
Cllr. Christopher Martindale
Clerk: John Westlake

19/24 To receive and accept any apologies for absence.

An apology for absence had been received from Cllr. Ian Howett.

20/24 To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 3rd January 2024

Corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting were made as follows:

Item 06/24 - 3rd bullet point: Pot holes to be reported when they reach a depth of 4-5 cm.

Item 11/24 – 2nd bullet point: Incorrect spelling; name amended to Annie Nicholas.

They were then signed by the Chair.

21/24 To consider and vote for co-option to the Parish Council Vivienne Kime and Christopher Martindale

The Chair proposed that Vivienne Kime and Christopher Martindale be co-opted as Councillors to Wicken Parish Council, subject to completion of the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and the Members Register of Interests. This was approved unanimously.

22/24 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.

23/24 To consider online security

Cllr. Howett has raised concerns about online security, specifically spoof emails appearing to be from the Chair. The Chair commented that his emails will be clearly flagged and his "sign off" should indicate authenticity.

Chairman's initials

24/24 To hear a report from WNC Councillor Ken Pritchard

Cllr. Pritchard reported as follows:

- The West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) budget for 2023/24 is expected to be overspent by approximately £3m. He viewed this as a reasonable result being less than 1% of the budgeted spend. The deficit was largely due to a £14m overspend by the Northamptonshire Children's Trust, which is responsible for social care for children in both Northamptonshire councils, the expenditure of which is not directly controlled by those authorities.
- Council Tax will increase by 4.99%. A referendum would be required to approve a higher increase. Consultation will take place on the possibility of making the road through Passenham partially "one-way". He referred to the Spatial Strategy formulated two years before which included the building of approximately 6000 houses on land adjacent to the Stony Stratford roundabout. This has been reviewed as part of the Local Plan following the disbandment of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. The plan requires forecasts for required housing development until 2041; not 2050 as required under the former strategy. This shows there is not the requirement for the number of houses originally estimated. The draft plan will be released for consultation the following day, and will appear on the WNC website: <https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=392&Mid=1174&Ver=4>
- Following approximately 11,000 responses to the consultation on the now defunct Spatial Strategy it is expected that approximately 4000 houses will be required before 2041; mostly in and around Northampton, Daventry and, to some extent, Towcester. Cllr. Pritchard requested that positive responses to the Local Plan are encouraged. The change of emphasis of development to urban areas is due to the volume of objections to rural development.
- Consideration of the proposed warehouse development at Furtho Pit is subject to a review of traffic volumes, and may be impacted by the discovery of a rare species of invertebrate in the area. The planning committee is not expected to discuss this until October/November later in 2024. The Chair commented that to his knowledge the project was also being considered by the Environment Agency because of the risk of flooding. Cllr. Pritchard added that this would require the construction of reservoir to hold the large volume of water produced by a flooding incident.

The Chair commented that the Parish Council will be responding to the review of Village Confines and the Settlement Hierarchy. He will be drafting a response to be circulated to councillors. He added that he was uncomfortable about some of the discussions about the peripheries of villages, the map defining the village confines and the definition of open country.

25/24 Public Forum

No items or issues were raised by the two members of the public who were present.

26/24 To note updates on standing items

- The Chair referred to the statistics produced by the speed camera. In the absence of Cllr. Howett it had not been possible to provide an analysis to show a trend over time. Cllr. Martindale commented that it would be instructive to show this for each of the four cameras. The Chair agreed that efforts should be made to improve the software to achieve this. He added that a number of residents had voiced the view that the speed limit in the village should be reduced to 20mph, however central government had ruled that no further limits of 20mph should be introduced. He commented that the speed limit on the road between Deanshanger and Wicken is 60mph. A vehicle travelling at his speed may not be able to slow to 30mph before passing the speed camera and the 30mph sign. He asked Cllr. Pritchard if consideration could be given to reducing the limit to 40mph. Cllr. Pritchard agreed to investigate.
- The Chair referred to the information provided on the work undertaken by Andrew Stockbridge on the willow trees on Wicken Park Road. Photographs show the "before and after" the work have been included in the update. He commented that since the completion of the work the road appeared significantly less flooded in spite of recent heavy rainfall.

27/24 Finance

The financial position summarised on the agenda was noted, with no questions. The Clerk reported that since the publication of the items of expenditure a bill of £3090.00 (Inc. VAT) for the planting of trees on the Whittlebury Road had been paid to Wessex Woodland. The Chair added that this was lower than the budgeted cost.

28/24 To approve a grant of £500 to Wicken Sports Club for grass cutting around playground

The Chair, as a director of the sports club, declared an interest, and was unable to vote on this item. Cllr. Ivens proposed that the grant be paid; this was seconded by Cllr. Martindale and approved unanimously. The Chair commented that the increased cost of grass cutting at the Sports Club may necessitate an increase in the grant in future years.

29/24 To approve the increased cost of £1854.62 for purchase of a village defibrillator

The Chair referred to the meeting of the Parish Council in January when it was agreed to pay for the cost of a village defibrillator up to the sum of £1500 from the Solar Farm Fund. The actual cost was £1854.62 (inc. VAT) and this was approved unanimously. The Chair advocated training on the use of the equipment and will investigate this.

30/24 To consider planning issues

The Chair reported that the only planning issue is a proposal for work, including the erection of pergola, at The Old School House, 12 Cross Tree Road. His concern, which had also been voiced by Cllr. Howlett, is that it is intended that the roof is constructed of polycarbonate panels, and queries if this is appropriate for a listed building in a conservation area. After discussion it was agreed that the Clerk would respond to WDC, expressing this reservation on behalf of the Parish Council.

31/24 To consider action on playground maintenance

Cllr. Spencer-Jones confirmed that agreement has been obtained to use power and water from the "Telephone Exchange" to enable the jet washing of the playground floor. The Chair is now endeavouring to arrange the necessary manpower. Cllr. Spencer-Jones has booked an inspection for the spring, and will seek advice on compliance with regulation. The outstanding items are to arrange for the erection of a sign to advise the public of contacts in the event of problems and to improve access for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

32/24 To consider tree planting

The Chair confirmed that the planned planting of trees on the Whittlebury Road had been completed and that there was an agreement with foresters from Whittlebury for their maintenance. A meeting will be arranged to agree on details. He had forwarded a note from Mrs. Celina Francklin thanking the Parish Council for facilitating the planting. He has written a short article in the Wicken News describing how the planting was in support of the late Queen's "Green Canopy".

33/24 To consider participation in the grass cutting scheme under the provisions of Section 136 of the Local Government Act

The Chair reported that an email had been received from WNC asking if the Parish Council would be interested in assuming responsibility for grass cutting in the village. Further details had been sought, in particular the financial arrangements, but none had been forthcoming. Cllr. Ivens advised that the Parish Council should not be involved because of the significant cost involved. Cllr. Pritchard had been asked to elicit more information. To date he had not heard more, but will "chase". In the meantime the Parish Council will not respond further.

34/24 To consider repair of the wall adjacent to Pound Close

The Chair reported the partial collapse of the wall. An estimate of £2,200 has been received from the stone masons who had carried out work on the plinth on the war memorial. In view of the cost it will be necessary to obtain two more quotes. He asked councillors to suggest the names of stonemasons who may be able to provide an estimate.

35/24 review policies

The Chair described the policies which the council has a statutory duty to publish and review at prescribed intervals. The following policies (listed on the agenda) are due for review:

- Freedom of Information Policy
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy
- E-mail Policy
- Schedule of Charges

He invited councillors to express any concerns they have with these policies and stated that the options are to:

- Readopt the policies
- Require that a policy, or policies, is reviewed and submitted to the next meeting

The Chair expressed the view that after scrutinising the policies no changes were necessary. This was proposed by Cllr Kime, seconded by Cllr Martindale and approved by the council unanimously.

36/24 To note future meeting dates in 2024: 1st May, 3rd July, 4th September

37/24 To note/consider items for next meeting

Cllr. Ivens raised the following:

- The poor state of notice boards.
- The treacherous state of the footpath running along the brook between Herriot House and Tall Cedars.
- Plans for removal of planters adjacent to village entry signs

Councillor Neil Gordon-Lee
Chair, Wicken Parish Council