

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
OF
WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL**

On Wednesday 4 March 2020

at Wicken Sports Club, Wicken at 7.00 pm

Action

21/20 Attendance and apologies

To receive and accept any apologies.

Cllr Philip Ivens – Chairman
Cllr Celina Francklin- apologies received
Cllr Neil Gordon-Lee
Cllr Alan Cartwright
Cllr Andrew Edmondson
Cllr Marcus Rixon
Cllr Ian Howett – apologies received
County & District Cllr Allen Walker – apologies received
District Cllr Dennis Loveland – apologies received
Valda Clapham - Clerk
5 members of the public

22/20 Members' interests

Members are invited to declare disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests in items on the agenda as required by the Wicken PC Code of Conduct for Members and by the Localism Act 2011.

The Chairman declared an interest in item 27/20 (proposed Solar Farm) and in the provision of village maintenance.

23/20 Report from District and County Councillor

No report received.

24/20 Public forum

No points raised.

25/20 Minutes

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2020 – approved and signed by the Chairman.

Resolved

26/20 Wicken streetlighting

To receive an update on streetlighting renewal and agree trial assessment procedure.

Cllr Cartwright explained that the changed specification had delayed the arrival of the new contemporary lights. He now anticipated installation in early April. He was still waiting for DW Windsor to indicate whether the trial heritage lamp could be 2200k rather than the 2700k originally planned.

Cllrs could best determine what was necessary to assess the trial when the new lights were in place.

27/20 Proposed Solar Farm

(Cllr Cartwright took the chair for this item.)

To receive an update on proposed Solar Farm.

Cllr Cartwright reported that the legal review of the proposed voluntary undertaking had identified two possible concerns which had been reported back to Elgin. However, it was for debate how far the Parish Council should push matters given that the undertaking was purely voluntary. Cllr Cartwright offered to take Richard Forman's counsel on this.

Cllr Cartwright

It was noted that the Planning Committee had not yet met to discuss the application.

28/20 Planning

To discuss current planning issues including the Local Plan and St John's Lane.

Local Plan – Cllrs noted that a square of field had been marked out near the new house on Deanshanger Road, and reiterated the need for vigilance to maintain the village confines boundary. This should be regarded as definitive.

Land at the rear of St John's Lane – residents had received a second letter from the putative developer but no action was appropriate unless and until an actual planning application materialised. Any application would depend upon access being granted by the Merchant Venturers who owned the bridleway.

29/20 Speed monitor

To receive data from speed monitor – no data available.

30/20 Playground inspection

To receive update on playground inspection and maintenance.

Cllr Edmondson will implement the minor maintenance needed following the recent inspection, including the installation of signage to indicate how future issues should be reported. He will also provide a simple template for informal visual inspections, the first to take place in advance of the May meeting. Cllr Rixon offered his support as necessary.

Cllr Edmondson

Fenlon Dunphy reported that the benches adjacent to the play area had been removed because they were rotten. Cllr Edmondson suggested that new seating was desirable in the play area and he would consider putting forward a proposal to the Solar Fund Committee in due course.

Cllr Edmondson

31/20 Village Hall

To receive an update on Village Hall and agree next steps.

Cllr Rixon circulated accounts to date showing funds in hand of over £10k, with payments for the recent ceiling repair and repainting at the rear outstanding. All monies due had been received from the previous tenants.

The Chairman indicated that work on the hedge would begin soon, including the possible removal of leylandii provided adjacent landowners had no objection.

Cllr Cartwright reported on marketing of the Village Hall for rent. Our advisers had recommended an increase in rent from £12k to £15k pa to reflect the current market, but although there had been some initial interest there had been no takers so far and the rental market was now subdued, purportedly on account of the coronavirus threat.

Meanwhile a village resident was potentially interested in using the Hall for storage for a rent of £7k.

Cllrs debated whether reducing the rent to £12k might attract more interest but agreed to wait until the next meeting before deciding on action.

An application for planning permission would most likely be necessary once a tenant had been found.

Cllr Gordon-Lee observed that the online listing showed only an external photograph, which Cllr Cartwright would follow up on.

Cllr Cartwright

The clerk reported on the informal legal advice received in relation to the Village Hall. This had proposed updating the original trust deed to reflect that the Hall was to be let commercially, providing for the Parish Council to act in place of the non-existent Management Committee and, if appropriate, consulting with village residents on future use. An approximate cost of £1000 was suggested.

Alternatively, the solicitor was happy to provide an advice letter for a lower cost to enable Cllrs to better understand the position. The clerk was invited to investigate how much this would cost.

Clerk

Cllrs were initially concerned that responsibility for business rates would fall to the trust during future unlet periods, but it was thought that charitable or small business reliefs should be available.

32/20 Elections [Note election since postponed until 2021]

To consider the need to promote candidacy at the May 2020 local elections.

The clerk had circulated details of the nomination process to current Cllrs, with the last time for delivering nomination papers being 4pm on 8 April.

An article encouraging nominations appeared in the current edition of Wicken News and also on the village website. Additionally, the clerk agreed to place an advertisement on the village notice boards.

Clerk

33/20 Dangerous dogs

To consider any further actions required in relation to dangerous dogs.

There had been another incident in which a small dog sustained significant injuries. The attacking dog had not been muzzled and, although on a lead, had managed to break free.

Cllrs debated possible action. The dog warden had been informed but was not able to take the matter further at this stage. Hence it was very important that residents reported all future incidents.

Cllrs were aware of a number of historic incidents including one in which a resident had been threatened. Cllr Gordon-Lee suggested these should now be reported to the dog warden to support further action, and he offered to facilitate this.

Cllr Gordon-Lee

Meanwhile, it was proposed that the Chairman visit the dog owner to discuss the situation.

Chairman

34/20 Road condition and overhanging trees

To agree any actions required re road condition and overhanging trees.

A response had been received from one resident receiving a letter regarding overhanging trees, indicating that action would be taken when the weather was suitable.

Nothing will happen on road markings until new funding is available in April.

Cllrs noted that both Deanshanger and Wicken Park roads were being gritted.

35/20 War Memorial

Cllr Gordon-Lee reported that the second estimate had been received which at £7500 was similar to the first.

A key part of the planned work was the provision of a new plinth ideally using the same stone as the original, thought to be Wicken stone. Cllrs Gordon-Lee and Francklin had identified a local quarry and were attempting to gain access to establish the suitability of the stone.

Meanwhile Cllr Gordon-Lee had confirmed with local wildlife experts that there were no protected species present to prevent the restoration going ahead. Once the stone issue was resolved a pre-application request for advice would be made in the name of the Parish Council to confirm there were no other issues.

It was unlikely that funds would be forthcoming from the War Memorials Trust. Consequently, it was hoped that the Solar Farm Committee would agree to fund the work.

36/20 Wicken website

Some data on usage had been circulated to Cllrs. This was not easy to interpret but it was noted that overseas use was likely to be the result of automated systems, and that the scarecrow festival had prompted a large spike in site visits.

37/20 Finance

To receive and approve accounts.

The clerk provided a schedule showing current bank balances and payments since the previous meeting against budget and the Council approved the payments, as follows:

Resolved

DNH Contracts	844	64.80
Neil Gordon-Lee re Heart	845	131.88
EMW re proposed solar farm	846	600.00

The clerk noted that two cheque signatories now had online access which meant future payments could be made electronically.

Cllr Gordon-Lee reported that he had reviewed the bank reconciliation against the underlying records and confirmed everything was in order.

The clerk explained the purposes for which the Community Infrastructure Levy money could be used, and suggested the streetlighting renewal would be an appropriate project.

Overall the Council's finances were in good shape.

38/20 Future meeting dates

The next meeting will be on 13 May 2020.

39/20 Any other business

To receive updates on outstanding items and to consider items for next meeting.

There has been no interest yet in the Neighbourhood Watch role, but it was hoped the Wicken News article would generate some interest.

Cllr Gordon-Lee suggested a small group be convened to coordinate any necessary support for older or vulnerable village residents if the expected coronavirus epidemic materialised. Cllrs were supportive and Cllr Rixon

Cllr Gordon-Lee

additionally volunteered his services.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

Chairman's Signature

Date

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