

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

On Wednesday 4 November 2020

at 7.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Action

105/20 Attendance and apologies

To receive and accept any apologies.

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

106/20 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.

Cllr Ivens declared an interest in item 111/20 (proposed Solar Farm) and in the provision of village maintenance.

107/20 Report from District and County Councillor

No report available.

108/20 Public forum

Members of the public raised a number of points, in particular:

- the desire for more communication from the Parish Council, for example when projects were delayed (it was noted that the Council did have a regular slot in Wicken News which was published 4 times a year);
- a request that the public forum be scheduled later in the meeting so that issues could be commented upon more timeously;
- appreciation of the hard work councillors put into their roles and the courtesy and patience with which resident concerns over the new lighting had been dealt with;
- a request from one resident that the Council learn from the criticisms alluded to in the auditor report and minutes in delivering the second part of the project by ensuring that the new lighting was an enhancement to the village and, in particular, not orange;
- a plea for all opinions in the village to be accorded equal weight in the debate and for a more expensive option not to be discounted because the funds were not immediately available;
- that the Sports Club was again closed due to the latest lockdown;
- a request that the Parish Council consider restarting the funding of lunches for vulnerable residents during lockdown (to be considered later in the

meeting); and

- a request for further grasscutting adjacent to the sports field to allow for bulb planting (Cllr Ivens indicated this would be done, weather permitting).

The Chairman thanked members of the public for their contributions and particularly applauded Annie Nicholas and the other Wicken volunteers for their hard work during the Covid 19 pandemic. He also pointed out that the auditor's criticism was made without knowledge of earlier work involving a full review of possible lighting suppliers.

109/20 Minutes

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2020.

Cllr Francklin raised a further concern with minute 90/20 which would be dealt with outside the meeting before the minutes were approved.

**Chairman
Cllr Francklin
Clerk**

110/20 Village Hall

To approve resolutions re the Village Hall charity (801643) as follows:

1. that the charity's assets including the Village Hall be transferred to, and received by, charity number 119816 – Wicken Village CIO;
2. that the charity is satisfied that there is no longer any local need for a Village Hall facility and the Village Hall has not been used as such for several years;
3. that the charity would like the Village Hall building to continue to be available as a community asset by transferring legal title to charity number 119816. The legal transfer of the title will take place as soon as the Charity Commission grants approval for this;
4. that the Village Hall building will be used as an asset of the new CIO to further the stated charitable purposes of the CIO;
5. that the charity is relying on the transfer power in the Charities Act provisions to effect this transfer.

The Chairman explained that the resolutions were necessary to transfer responsibility for the Village Hall from the Parish Council to the Trustees of the new CIO. All Cllrs were in favour and each of the resolutions was duly approved.

Resolved

111/20 Proposed Solar Farm

To receive an update on proposed Solar Farm.

Cllr Cartwright reported that Elgin had completed a private speed survey which would be submitted to Northamptonshire Highways with a view to resolving their concern. Meanwhile it was thought that SNC had requested a further landscape survey to assess the visual impact.

Cllr Ivens reported impatience on the part of the landowners.

112/20 Planning

To discuss current planning issues and agree response.

Landscape study – Cllrs Cartwright, Edmondson and the Chairman had worked hard to provide the Council's input on the landscape character around Wicken within the tight timescale. The Council's response would be made available to other Cllrs if required.

Neighbourhood plan – the experience of other Parish Councils suggested that creating neighbourhood plans could provoke serious arguments amongst residents given that one of their key purposes was to identify possible development sites. SNC's current policy was to maintain green space between villages and to allow only infill development in a small village like Wicken, so there would likely be little benefit in such a plan. On the other hand, it was unclear whether the current local

plan would be superseded when the new unitary authority took over. It might, therefore, be helpful to have a neighbourhood plan in place if any development were to be proposed by the new authority in future. Cllr Cartwright was asked to keep a watching brief on planning policy under the new unitary authority.

Cllr Cartwright

41 Leckhampstead Road – all Cllrs were against the proposed development which envisaged a large dwelling, arguably comparable with some nearby houses, but clearly outside the village confines. The development site was part of a 3 acre plot which had been sold to a previous owner. There was a stable block in another part of the site and there had previously been permission granted (but not followed through) to convert this into a dwelling. However, the new development was on a different part of the site further outside the village confines and to allow such development risked opening up the remainder of the 3 acre site. It was noted also that a dwelling opposite had been refused permission for a new garage, although this property was within the conservation area. Given the concerns raised the Chairman agreed to research previous planning decisions and SNC policies with a view to drafting an appropriate objection letter for Cllrs' approval.

Chairman

113/20 Road condition and overhanging trees

To receive an update re road condition and overhanging trees and agree next steps.

Cllrs noted that repairs to the Deanshanger Road footpath had been carried out earlier that day.

Other outstanding road repairs were:

- broken water main on Whittlebury Road – Cllr Howett had reported this in early October and would chase up [Anglian Water have since been on site]; and
- Willow Bridge – the nearby resident had complained about traffic driving over the edge of his property in order to avoid a build-up of mud on the bridge. Cllr Ivens had spoken to the resident and agreed a plan to scrape up the mud but in light of the exposed live BT cable (which had been reported) nothing could be done re the drain. Cllrs were sympathetic to the problem but it was a function of the narrowness of the road and the need for two vehicles to pass from time to time. Blocking use of the verge would simply move the problem higher up the road. The resident had also raised a concern on the flood risk from the culvert which ran under the road. Cllr Ivens explained that work done several years ago to dig out a channel had proved successful in preventing any flooding. Cllr Cartwright agreed to check with Northamptonshire Highways whether anything further could be done. Meanwhile Cllr Ivens would update the resident on the Council's discussion.

Cllr Howett

Cllr Cartwright

Cllr Ivens

114/20 War Memorial

To receive an update on War Memorial.

Diocesan Committee approval having been received a further approval was required from the Chancellor of the Peterborough Diocesan Registry before the work could commence. Meanwhile a third and cheaper quote had been obtained, £4700, which the Council agreed to accept.

Resolved

115/20 Speed monitor

To receive any data from speed monitor.

Cllr Howett observed that the data showed traffic and speed had been significantly lower during lockdown, but was now coming back. He planned to leave the monitor in position until the pole in Wicken Park Road had been reinstated (expected by end November).

Cllr Howett

Meanwhile the battery life appeared to be declining and if necessary he would

move to 4 weekly replacement.

116/20 Playground

To receive update on playground inspection and maintenance.

Cllr Edmondson reported that cleaning of the tiles had been done but he still had some minor maintenance to complete. Meanwhile the next annual inspection was being arranged.

**Cllr
Edmondson**

The clerk confirmed that the playground could remain open during the current lockdown.

117/20 Covid – 19 Committee

To receive an update from the Covid – 19 Committee.

Requests for support were ongoing and the Council was appreciative of the significant efforts of the volunteers. The question to be debated was whether additional support was appropriate in the current lockdown. After some debate Cllrs agreed to reinstate subsidised lunches for vulnerable residents on a similar basis to previously until the current lockdown ended or until Xmas if this came first. The position would be reviewed at the January meeting.

Resolved

It was noted that the subsidised taxi service had recommenced and this would continue during lockdown.

118/20 Website

To discuss and agree updates to Wicken website.

The option of having separate email addresses for their councillor role was preferred – the Chairman and clerk to pursue this option.

**Chairman
Clerk**

Any views on whether phone numbers should be available as well should be passed to the clerk.

119/20 Telephone book box

To discuss monitoring of the telephone book box.

Cllrs recognised that use of the telephone box as a book exchange needed better monitoring and two non-residents had offered to take this on. The telephone box actually fell under Wicken Village Community rather than the Parish Council. Hence Cllr Cartwright offered to put the non-residents in touch with Fenlon Dunphy as chair of WVC.

Cllr Cartwright

120/20 Finance

To receive and approve accounts and consider budget process for 2021/22.

The Council approved payments since the previous meeting, as follows:

		Amount
DNH Contracts (Aug)	Online	43.20
Boden & Ward	Online	600.00
DNH Contracts (Sep)	Online	43.20
E.ON (to Sept 2020)	Online	73.15

Village Hall - refund of electricity	Online	144.42	Resolved
Sports Club (50% of heating bill)	Online	3252.00	

The clerk explained the need to report how the Community Infrastructure Levy money received in the previous financial year had been spent, one possibility being the streetlighting project.

The clerk noted that she had several further payments to make including:

- the annual contribution to Wicken Village Community which the Solar Fund committee had now confirmed;
- approx. £120 to herself repaying subscriptions which had to be paid by card; and
- the recent bill for lighting power which showed a significant reduction from late July as a result of the new lights.

The Chairman reported that he had reviewed the bank reconciliation against the underlying records and confirmed everything was in order.

The Chairman also spoke briefly about the process for setting a budget and precept for the next financial year. The budget paper from NCALC, which had been circulated, suggested that councils should seek to build up a reserve of between 3 and 12 months of regular expenses and the auditor had previously advised setting aside a reserve to cover the (currently unpaid) clerk's salary. In addition, it was likely that the new unitary authority would seek to transfer responsibility for some expenditures to parish councils, for example some grass-cutting. These new items would need to be accommodated in setting a precept sufficient to cover regular expenditure.

The Chairman proposed to bring a budget paper to the January meeting and Cllr Cartwright agreed check the extent of grass-cutting undertaken by Northamptonshire Highways.

**Chairman
Cllr Cartwright**

121/20 Wicken streetlighting

To discuss and approve trial light feedback form.

[Technical issues prevented the clerk from hearing the debate on this item. The minutes are based on partial hearing and subsequent conversations with each councillor.]

Cllrs Francklin and Edmondson had provided a draft and other Cllrs had proposed amendments, each of which was discussed in turn.

Title – was the survey was to collect feedback on the trial light (as was proposed at the October EGM) or a questionnaire to allow residents to indicate which type of light they preferred for the remaining 9 sites? On balance it was felt that whatever the intention residents would see the survey as their opportunity to express a view.

Map – all Cllrs were in favour of including a map to show the location of the 9 sites.

Funding – the draft questionnaire gave the cost of each option and indicated that funding would come from the Parish Council. There were mixed views on whether it was sensible to add the words 'as and when funds are available' to reflect that it would not be possible to implement the more expensive option immediately (4 Cllrs in favour, 3 against), and one Cllr thought it sensible to provide the playground cost as a comparison.

Campaigning – there was general agreement that Cllrs should not promote their own preferences nor seek to persuade residents to choose a particular option. However, it was accepted that residents might wish to discuss the issue with a Cllr and that Cllrs could respond but should remain impartial and allow people to make

up their own mind. The Council was split (3 Cllrs for, 3 against with 1 abstention) on whether the questionnaire should make it clear that Cllrs would not be initiating such contact, but all agreed with identifying the clerk as a reference point for questions.

Recipients – after some discussion Cllrs were agreed that a copy of the questionnaire should go to each person on the electoral roll.

Respondent name – most Cllrs (6 out of 7) thought the questionnaire should ask for the respondent's name but there was no consensus on the need for a signature.

Delivery mechanism – after considerable debate Cllrs agreed that the questionnaires should be put into individually addressed envelopes and, should the timing work, then be distributed with (but not as part of) the next edition of Wicken News which was expected at the beginning of December. It was hoped that using individually addressed envelopes would encourage a good response.

Timing – a 2 weeks response time was agreed (any longer and the questionnaire would likely be forgotten about).

Next step – there will be a further virtual meeting to fine tune the questionnaire in the next couple of weeks prior to circulation to all Cllrs.

During the course of the discussion the option of providing a stronger light in certain key locations was mooted but any further discussion was deferred.

Chairman
Cllr Francklin
Cllr
Edmondson
Clerk

122/20 Future meeting dates

Future meeting dates - 13 January, 3 March and 19 May 2021.

The Chairman understood there was a preference for in person meetings and undertook to see if this was feasible for the next meeting.

Chairman

123/20 Items for the next meeting

Nothing noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their patience and support and closed the meeting at 9.30pm.

Chairman's Signature

Date

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