

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

On Wednesday 13 January 2021

at 7.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Action

1/21 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 – until item 9/21
District Cllr Dennis Loveland – apologies received
Valda Clapham - Clerk
Four members of the public

2/21 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 15/21 (proposed Solar Farm) and in the provision of village maintenance.

3/21 Report from District and County Councillor

Cllr Walker gave a brief report, noting:

- the two new unitary authorities (West Northamptonshire covering Wicken) will begin operation on 1 April;
- elections are planned for May although it is not certain that these will go ahead;
- the main topic recently has been the Covid pandemic; and
- prior to his standing down he is identifying key contacts within the new administration.

He confirmed that nothing had been decided about delegating responsibilities down to parish councils but noted that if that happened the associated budget would also be transferred.

4/21 Public forum

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

- a plea from one resident for the Council to choose heritage lights which he saw as improving the look of the village;
- a suggestion that the streetlighting questionnaire include an 'undecided' box to encourage more responses;
- a recommendation for a more central location for delivery of completed questionnaires;

- a suggestion that the Council issue a prior communication to alert residents to the coming questionnaire and how the results will be used; and
- noting that the budget paper to be discussed later included the cost for contemporary lighting, but as a placeholder only.

The Chairman thanked members of the public for their contributions and expressed his regret that not all present had been able to contribute as they wished. The points raised on the proposed street lighting questionnaire would be considered under the relevant agenda item.

5/21 Minutes

To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 2 September and 4 November 2020.

Cllr Francklin indicated her disagreement with the 4 November minutes but the points she had raised in response to circulation of the draft minutes had not been supported by other Cllrs.

The minutes of the meetings held on 2 September and 4 November 2020 were approved for signature by the Chairman.

Resolved

6/21 Communication

To consider Cllrs' concerns on communication.

Cllr Francklin requested that Cllrs refrain from sending emails at weekends which she thought had been agreed previously. Other Cllrs recalled that the earlier debate had only concerned contentious emails and observed that working Cllrs needed to deal with Council business at the weekend.

Cllr Cartwright expressed concern at an over-reaction to one non-contentious email he had sent.

Concluding a heated discussion, the Chairman indicated that weekend emails were acceptable but Cllrs would not be expected to reply until the Monday and he further observed that Cllrs should not in any event be sending each other contentious emails concerning behaviour.

7/21 Streetlighting

To approve final version of the questionnaire to be used.

Several points had been raised during the public forum which Cllrs considered in turn:

- inclusion of an 'undecided' box – whilst acknowledging that this might improve the response rate Cllrs preferred to leave it as a binary choice;
- a prior communication to explain the survey – Cllrs were broadly in favour but rather than introducing further delay suggested placing an explanatory article on the village website and Facebook page and/or including a covering note with each questionnaire instead (the Chairman indicated he would circulate draft wording to Cllrs before finalising); and
- location of the drop-box for completed questionnaires – Cllrs agreed that the pub would be suitably central and easily accessible, and the Chairman offered to speak with the landlord.

Chairman

Chairman

To ratify Cllrs' view of the status of the questionnaire output.

Whether or not the results of the survey should be binding on the Council had been discussed at the previous meeting, but not recorded, and hence the Council needed to reach a final decision. The Chairman called a vote – 2 Cllrs were in favour of the survey results being binding and 4 Cllrs against with 1 abstention. Therefore, whilst the questionnaire output would clearly be very influential the Council would not be bound by it.

Resolved

To agree a timetable for the issue of the questionnaire.

It had already been agreed that each person on the electoral roll would receive a personally addressed questionnaire and Cllrs confirmed that the proposed 2 week response time remained appropriate, especially as the Covid restrictions meant that most residents were at home. Responses could either be hard copy (delivered to the pub) or via email to the clerk.

Cllr Walker advised Cllrs to be alert to the risk that Covid restrictions might necessitate some delay.

8/21 Finance

To receive and approve accounts and to agree precept for 2021/22.

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

Resolved

		Amount
V M Clapham (Zoom, Heart Internet and N'hood Watch subs)	Online	120.63
DNH Contracts (Oct)	Online	43.20
Concept Clean	Online	120.00
J Robson (taxi Sept/Oct)	Online	108.00
E.ON (to Sept 2020)	Online	315.44
Wicken Village Community	Online	800.00
W H Ivens & Son	Online	300.00
DNH Contracts (Nov)	Online	43.20
Pixel Creation	Online	300.00

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

The Chairman went on to refer to the budget paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting. This was designed to help Cllrs reach a decision on the precept for 2021/22 and to facilitate the division of expenditure between the precept and the solar farm monies, the latter ideally being for extras rather than essential spending. The paper reflected advice from NCALC that parishes should hold between 3 and 12 months expenses as a reserve and the auditor's recommendation for setting up a specific reserve for the clerk's unclaimed salary.

Cllr Walker advised that councils typically kept 2 -5% of the precept in reserve. For Wicken this would be only £150 which Cllrs agreed was too low. Instead Cllrs preferred a reserve of 6 months which would be reviewed the following year.

Resolved

It was acknowledged that the precept had historically been on the low side and therefore the ambition of paying all essential expenditure from the precept was not achievable immediately. Nevertheless, once Cllrs had agreed the division the intention was to publish the policy on the website.

Meanwhile Cllrs needed to agree upon the precept for 2021/22. Given the uncertainty over further delegation of responsibilities from the new unitary authority and the desire to work towards reducing reliance on the solar farm monies the Council agreed a precept for 2021/22 of £8000.

Resolved

Looking at the detail in the budget paper it was noted that reclaimable VAT had a significant cashflow impact (a claim covering recent expenditure had just been submitted, with a little over £4k due back). It was confirmed that the paper included

VAT on the proposed new streetlighting either within the figures or by way of note. Finally, the Chairman hoped that the draft spreadsheet attached to the budget paper would in future provide Cllrs with a clearer idea of expenditure against budget and the impact on funds available.

9/21 Planning

To discuss current planning issues and agree any action.

41 Leckhampstead Road – Cllrs remained concerned that the village confines had been revised without consultation and invited Cllr Walker to comment.

Cllr Walker observed that Wicken Parish Council had been consulted on the most recent Local Plan and had commented during the process, but there had been no contact in relation to the changes to confines which were incorporated into the Plan when it was approved by SNC. The Freedom of Information request made by the Council had not yielded any evidence of such contact. His suggested course of action would be for the Council to raise their concern directly with the SNC Chief Executive by requesting a personal interview. He offered to support such a request if necessary.

Cllrs supported this course of action and the Chairman and clerk undertook to follow up and to keep colleagues informed.

**Chairman
Clerk**

Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that the planning permission already granted was unlikely to be rescinded. A discussion with the Chief Executive might, though, offer an opportunity to prevent any further development on that site and to review the other changes to the village confines.

Finally, it was agreed to communicate with the residents concerned only after the issue had been discussed with the Chief Executive.

10/21 Road condition and overhanging trees

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

Cllr Cartwright reported that Anglian Water had carried out a temporary repair to the raised manhole cover near Brook House. However, the nearby resident remained concerned at the state of the road and proposed to take the matter up directly with the Highways Authority and the local MP. He also planned to contact the Environment Agency in relation to the brook.

Cllr Ivens had previously obtained a quote of £1000 for a longer-term repair at Willow Bridge but this had not been progressed. Meanwhile Cllr Howett's efforts had been successful in reducing flooding on the road.

11/21 Flood risk and river clearance

To discuss flood risk and river clearance and agree any action.

Brook House – as stated above the new resident was concerned that the state of the brook represented a flood risk, although as Cllr Ivens pointed out the property had not in fact been flooded during the recent flash flooding. The Chairman noted that there had been some flooding in his garden. Given the concerns Cllrs Ivens and Edmondson agreed to look at clearing out the brook as had been done some years ago.

**Cllr Ivens
Cllr
Edmondson**

Ditch opposite church – this seemed in poor repair which had led to flooding at the entrance to the Sports Club. Cllr Ivens offered to find out whether an underground culvert existed.

Cllr Ivens

Herriot House – the flash flooding had left a lot of debris in the nearby brook. Again Cllr Ivens agreed to check if remedial action was planned.

Cllr Ivens

12/21 Police Liaison Representative

To appoint a Police Liaison Representative.

This role was separate from that of Neighbourhood Watch coordinator, but could be fulfilled by the same individual and accordingly Cllr Cartwright agreed to approach Caroline Butterfield [since confirmed as Police Liaison Representative].

13/21 War Memorial

To receive an update on War Memorial and confirm order placement.

The Chairman reported that all necessary permissions had been received and requested approval to confirm the order for the lowest quote of £4700 – Cllrs unanimously approved.

Resolved

The work would not start immediately as six weeks or so was needed to obtain the stone.

14/21 Playground

To receive update on playground inspection and maintenance.

Cllr Edmondson reported that the recent annual inspection had again recommended more plastic caps which he would try to obtain. He had also received a quote of £90 for an appropriate sign and was looking into providing a contact form on the village website. Cllrs thought the quote of £90 looked high and Cllr Edmondson agreed to explore alternative suppliers.

Cllr Edmondson

15/21 Proposed Solar Farm

To receive an update on proposed Solar Farm.

Cllr Cartwright reported that the private traffic survey had been accepted by Northamptonshire Highways as resolving their concern. Meanwhile SNC had yet to respond regarding the further landscape survey, despite the developer's prompting.

16/21 School traffic

To discuss speeding school traffic on Wicken Park Road.

Item to be carried forward to next meeting as the school is temporarily closed because of Covid.

Clerk

17/21 Complaints re agricultural and animal noise

To discuss response to complaints regarding agricultural and animal sounds.

Cllrs expressed differing views, but no further action was needed.

18/21 Grasscutting

To discuss grasscutting pile outside Pound Close.

Cllrs recognised the significant efforts of individual Cllrs in keeping communal grassland tidy.

The Chairman requested that in future agenda suggestions be accompanied by a clear proposal.

All

19/21 Future meeting dates

Future meeting dates - 3 March, 19 May, 7 July, 1 September and 3 November 2021, and 12 January, 2 March and 4 May 2022.

20/21 Items for the next meeting

Nothing additional noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their patience and support and closed the meeting at 8.57pm.

Chairman's Signature

Date

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