

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

On Wednesday 3 March 2021

at 7.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Action

21/21 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 32/21
District Cllr Dennis Loveland – apologies received
Valda Clapham - Clerk
Six members of the public

22/21 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 34/21 (proposed Solar Farm) and in the provision of village maintenance.

23/21 Report from District and County Councillor

Cllr Walker's brief written report had been circulated to Cllrs prior to the meeting. He noted that elections on 6 May were expected to go ahead including in person voting. He would be standing down as Councillor and under the new West Northants unitary authority there would be three councillors covering Wicken.

Cllr Rixon queried why the Towcester Waste Centre was open only two days per week but this was not thought to be Covid related.

Cllr Ivens thanked Cllr Walker for all the help and advice he had given to Wicken over many years and wished him good luck for the future. This was unanimously supported by the whole Council.

For his part Cllr Walker acknowledged the good work of the Parish Council and the respectful way he had always been treated.

24/21 Public forum

The Chairman explained that the report from the streetlighting survey (Item 26/21) had not yet been received and consequently that item would not be discussed. He asked that members of the public also refrain from commenting on the issue.

There were no other points raised by members of the public.

25/21 Minutes

Chairman's initials

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 were approved for signature by the Chairman.

Resolved

26/21 Streetlighting

Carried forward to the next meeting.

Cllrs would be informed as soon as the report was available. After circulation to Cllrs the report would be placed on the village website.

Cllr Howett queried whether the decision on streetlights should be taken by this Council or its successor, given the imminent election, but it was thought that question was better answered when the report was actually available.

27/21 Finance

To receive and approve accounts.

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

Resolved

		Amount
Play Inspection Co	Online	126.00
DNH Contracts (Dec)	Online	64.80
E.ON (to Dec 2020)	Online	73.15
E.ON (to Dec 2020)	Online	248.70
J Robson (taxi Nov/Dec)	Online	96.00
DNH Contracts (Jan)	Online	76.98

The clerk reported a difficulty in using online banking in that the system seemed to authorise payments automatically when she set them up, meaning that only one Cllr authorisation was needed – to be taken offline with the Chairman.

**Clerk
Chairman**

The clerk advised Cllrs that she would shortly be claiming reimbursement (£70+) for the cost of questionnaire printing and postage.

The clerk reminded Cllrs that the Community Infrastructure Levy received the previous year had still to be allocated to appropriate capital projects. Cllr Edmondson observed that some work was needed to improve the playground access for disabled users. He had explored whether any of the New Homes Bonus used to fund the playground equipment was still available but had drawn a blank. Hence Cllrs agreed that £1000 of the approx £3800 CIL received should be retained to cover the playground entrance work (for which an estimate had yet to be obtained) and the balance allocated to the lighting project, the first phase of which had been completed earlier in the year.

Resolved

The clerk noted that E.ON had yet to reflect the reduced cost of streetlight maintenance in bills and Cllr Cartwright agreed to follow this up.

Cllr Cartwright

To agree budget for 2021/22.

Cllrs considered the proposed budget for 2021/22. The new format was intended to show more clearly the limitations on the amount of cash available for expenditure.

The clerk reminded Cllrs that the current precept was insufficient to cover normal expenditure once the clerk's salary was taken into account. The ambition should be for the precept to cover all essential expenditure.

Cllr Howett queried whether the amount set aside as General Reserve was sufficient given the most likely use was probably legal fees, and it was agreed to relook at this for the following year. The Reserve was within the guidelines from NCALC and, according to Cllr Walker, a much greater percentage of the precept than for many councils.

Clerk

The clerk agreed to research the extent of legal fees protection afforded by the Council's insurance policy.

Resolved

After a brief discussion the budget for 2021/22 as set out in the budget paper was agreed.

28/21 Transparency working party

To receive an update from the Transparency working party.

The Chairman explained that the working party (the Chairman and Cllrs Rixon and Cartwright) had been set up to compare the documentation and information parish councils were expected to publish against what Wicken Parish Council already published, and to fill in any obvious gaps. He anticipated that any major additions would be brought to the next meeting. In most cases a model document or template was available to provide a good basis.

The objective of such transparency was to enable members of the public to hold councils to account, for example to see whether the council was following proper procedures. The annual audit also provided a number of checks.

29/21 Planning

To discuss current planning issues and agree any action.

41 Leckhampstead Road – the Chairman reported that correspondence with the SNC Chief Executive had so far failed to result in the one on one meeting sought. His position appeared to be that a consultation with parish councils had taken place, albeit that in Wicken's case at least there had been no transparency over the extensive changes to village confines proposed.

Whilst accepting that the planning permission granted was unlikely to be rescinded Cllrs remained concerned regarding further opportunities for development afforded by the boundary changes, and were reluctant to let the matter drop. The Chairman would consider further action, such as requesting the meeting again, this time with support from Cllr Walker, or referring the matter to the relevant Ombudsman.

Chairman

Proposed Solar Farm (Cllr Ivens absented himself for this item) – Cllrs were concerned that there was appropriate provision to ensure the site was cleaned up and returned to agricultural use if/when the Solar Farm was decommissioned, but otherwise were content.

Wicken Wood Cottage – no objections.

30/21 Road condition and overhanging trees

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

Cllr Howett indicated that he had recently reported a pothole on Whittlebury Road.

31/21 Flood risk and river clearance

To receive an update on flood risk and river clearance and agree any action.

Following recent flooding and discussion at the previous meeting a letter had been sent on behalf of the Parish Council to all residents whose gardens adjoined the brook explaining the landowner's responsibility for managing flood risk. The Parish Council had no direct responsibility but was willing to ensure the culverts under the bridges remained clear (which were a particular concern because of the reduction in capacity) and, if requested, to assist residents.

There had been no response to the letter other than one tenant had pointed out that in some cases the landowner was the Housing Association, to whom the letter would be passed on. **Chairman**

Cllr Ivens reported that he had spoken to the farmer responsible for the north side of Leckhampstead Road, who had agreed to ensure that part of the brook was maintained.

Cllr Edmondson offered to examine the ditch bed on his section when conditions allowed. It was suggested that affected residents should be contacted at this time to see if they had any particular concerns and Cllr Francklin offered to help with this. If significant work was required a quote would be obtained and landowners asked to contribute to the cost. **Cllr Edmondson
Cllr Francklin**

Cllr Walker referred to the recent appointment of a Flood Warden in Deanshanger. The Chairman suggested advertising a similar role for Wicken in the next edition of Wicken News. If there were no volunteers then the possibility of the Deanshanger Warden also covering Wicken could be explored. **Chairman**

32/21 War Memorial

To receive an update on War Memorial.

The order for restoration of the plinth had been placed.

Once this work had been completed the Chairman suggested placing gravel on the immediate surround to prevent weeds from growing. He was happy to use funds from his book sales to purchase the gravel but would need volunteers to help with spreading.

33/21 Playground

To receive an update on playground inspection and maintenance.

No further progress with Cllr Edmondson still having some minor works to complete. **Cllr Edmondson**

34/21 Proposed Solar Farm

To receive an update on proposed Solar Farm.

Dealt with under Planning above.

35/21 Election

To discuss election planning.

The clerk reminded Cllrs of the nomination process:

- nominations close on 8 April;
- provision for completed forms to be checked informally online; and
- completed forms still require to be hand delivered by candidate or other trusted person, for which a pre-booked appointment is needed.

It was understood that the Sports Club had been booked for in person voting.

Cllr Edmondson advised that he would not be seeking re-election in May. He was

warmly thanked by other Cllrs for all his hard work in the past and his very valuable input on farming matters.

36/21 Covid – 19 committee

To receive an update from Covid – 19 committee and to consider a post Covid event.

The Chairman reported no uptick in need for the committee's services. He floated the idea of a village event organised by the Parish Council to celebrate the return of something approaching normality, but there was no support from other Cllrs.

37/21 Taxi

To decide if/how to continue the village taxi service.

This was being provided weekly from Solar Farm funds at a total cost of some £600 per year. There was now only one user and it was not thought that any other of the previous users would wish to resume even when the Covid restrictions eased. However, the one user relied upon the service.

Cllrs considered the options – continuing as now, reducing the frequency, replacing with lifts from other residents (when Covid restrictions allowed). After some debate Cllrs agreed to continue with a reduced frequency (twice per month), which was known to be acceptable to the service user. Additionally, although the service would not be publicised, it could be offered to other residents in future where this seemed appropriate.

Resolved

38/21 Village Hall

To receive an update on the Village Hall.

The Chairman noted that Cllrs remained as Managing Trustees until the transfer to the new CIO had taken place. After that it would be up to the new CIO Trustees to keep Cllrs informed as they saw fit.

Cllr Rixon planned to hold a meeting of the CIO Trustees when Covid restrictions allowed. Meanwhile the accounts showed a healthy financial position and Cllr Edmondson acknowledged Council's success in getting a good tenancy in place to provide funds for maintaining and improving the Village Hall.

Cllr Francklin observed that a couple of windows still needed painting and suggested getting a quote for this. Sufficient paint from earlier work was available. Cllr Rixon agreed to follow up at the proposed Trustees' meeting.

Cllr Rixon

Cllr Rixon went on to inform Cllrs of a recent issue which had arisen. The tenancy provided for Musication to have exclusive use of the Village Hall car park save for the two spaces reserved for the tenants of the school house, and the signage made this clear. Nevertheless, attendees at a recent funeral in the church had wrongly used the car park and this had caused significant distress.

Cllrs considered possible ways of further reinforcing that the car park was not available for public use at any time, such as the installation of electric or sliding gates, possibly set back to allow the school house tenants to park in front, or more obvious signage.

Cllr Rixon agreed to discuss such suggestions at his forthcoming meeting with the tenants, Musication, and would then report back. The Council was keen to accommodate Musication's very specific needs.

Cllr Rixon

39/21 Future meeting dates

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

40/21 Items for the next meeting

Nothing additional noted.

Silent vehicles and bikes were suggested as a particular concern in relation to the speed monitor discussion by a member of the public.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their patience and support and closed the meeting at 8.58pm.

Chairman's Signature

Date

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