

# MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

OF

WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL

On Wednesday 4 May 2022

At 7:30 pm in Wicken Sports Club

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## **33/22 To elect the Chair for 2022/23**

Councillors at the meeting were formally asked if they would like to put themselves forward as Chair. All were happy for Cllr Gordon-Lee to continue as Chair. Cllr Ivens proposed the election and Cllr Howett seconded it.

## **34/22 To elect the vice Chair 2022/23**

Similarly, Cllr Allan Cartwright, vice Chair, was re-elected. Cllr Philip Ivens proposed the election and Cllr Neil Gordon-Lee seconded it.

## **35/22 To receive and accept any apologies.**

Cllr Neil Gordon-Lee – Chair  
Cllr Alan Cartwright  
Cllr Philip Ivens  
Cllr Ian Howett  
Cllr Viv Kime  
Cllr Petra Spencer-Jones  
Cllr Verity Robinson  
Cllr Ken Pritchard  
Hazel Dunphy – Temp Clerk  
Three members of the public

## **36/22 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 Audit Report indicated that the auditor did not appreciate that all the PC Cllrs knew each other and their interests well. The only Cllr who is declaring an interest is Cllr Philip Ivens who has an ongoing pecuniary interest in village maintenance, and the solar farm on his land. This served as a reminder that if any individual Cllr has any change in the disclosure of pecuniary interests, then they must report it and that the onus is on them to do so, and if not, a potential problem may arise.

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## **37/22 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 2 March 2022 were approved for signature by the Chair. They will be signed at the end of the meeting.

oOo

As the 4 May 2022 meeting is the first in the current year, the meeting must approve/adopt/readopt the policies and procedures – the financial regulations, standing orders, annual risk assessment, code of conduct and asset register. The code of conduct does not change and is published on our website. The updated asset register has been circulated to all Cllrs and features on the website. All have been reviewed by the internal auditor. However, some of the items (a-c) on the agenda which need agreement at the meeting, have not been put together yet as there was an unavoidable delay in presenting the information to the auditor and the AGAR was received yesterday. These documents need signing. Three options were given by the Chair, but the Cllrs present decided that they would approve if everyone concurred with what was stated and there are no issues of concern. All the Cllrs accepted and approved the AGAR. It was noted that there is an issue with the certificate of exemption due to a vacancy for the position of RFO and permanent clerk. It needs to be signed by the Chair and the Clerk who is usually also the RFO. As this issue couldn't be solved instantly, it was decided to approve the AGAR, awaiting the solution for the signatories. The Chair informed the meeting that he would consult with NCALC to resolve the problem.

## **38/22 Items of Standing Information**

- Road condition and overhanging trees/bushes
- Solar Farm
- Streetlighting
- Flood risk and river clearance
- Village Hall CIO
- Path Wardens
- Drainage improvement work at Wicken Park Road bridge
- Gigaclear
- Northants Asset Mapping

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As no monetary transactions had passed on the above items and there was nothing additional to report other than that supplied in the standing item report, the meeting moved on to the next item.

## **39/23 Finance – to receive and approve accounts, review actual expenditure against budget.**

Those present at the meeting received a package which included a copy of the financial spreadsheets.

It was reported that the accounting statements were presented to the internal auditor and have been approved.

A few comments were raised on the trust status of the Village Hall, nothing other than requiring an update on the transfer at next year's audit. The Fixed Asset Register includes the value of the Village Hall until it is transferred to the trust.

A reminder that the Chair's election is governed by the Local Government Act 1972 ss15(4); 34(4)

A reminder that the minutes should approve the legal powers/duties under which the council is able to make expenditure as governed by LGA 1972 s137 or the Parish Councils Act 1957. This is covered in the Wicken Parish's agreed policies.

A recommendation was made on how to present the precept background work to ensure that what is being requested is necessary and does not fall short.

The Budget approval must be finalised before the precept is approved and minuted. Budget before precept.

A reminder of what the duties of a Member's pecuniary or prejudicial interests are, and obligations to reduce the council as well as a Member's risk. Based upon risk prevention.

A report on the actual variances against budget informed those present that the new line by line budget has enabled more control over expenditure; kept Cllrs minds focused on the precept limitation, but appreciating that without the solar fund monies, replacement of deteriorating village assets, such as the streetlights would not have been possible. Although an initial costly capital outlay, the running costs of lighting up the village for many years to come, will be reduced, subject to global price fluctuations.

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The main favourable variances from budget this year represent delayed expenditures for:

- The streetlights due to outstanding items of completion
- The sport's club refurbishment
- The village signs

Totalling to £23,045. These will be delayed to next year and will be paid out of the available cash balances.

A VAT reclaim has not been made as the claim was delayed, awaiting the completion of the streetlights, however, in future it would be appropriate that a VAT reclaim is made at the end of each financial year irrespective of what is due to the parish. It may also be more appropriate to show VAT as a receipt when claimed and an expense when bills are paid. It provides a more transparent accounting of the process.

The higher audit costs did not materialise because our expenditure did not exceed £25,000, which was budgeted to do so in the current year.

The expected PC election did not take place because it was uncontested, and the cost was based on a fixed cost per adult electorate. The £75 charge was an admin cost, a consequence of the non-event.

E.ON's charge for power has increased over the year, as have all other suppliers.

Even though energy saving lights were fitted during the year, our costs have increased against budget. This cost is expected to increase further next year.

The village maintenance includes an unbudgeted expense of £1,100 for tree pollarding, strimming, chipping all cuttings and clearing the site on Wicken Park Road by the bridge to alleviate the flash flooding issue.

Overall, the Parish Council has kept the precept expenditure broadly to budget.

Finally, the GDPR security compliance rules were read out to the Cllrs to remind them of their duties. All Cllrs confirmed that they still comply.

The Chair confirmed that the budget for 2022-2023 will be circulated shortly as soon as it is finalised.

The Chair asked if there were any questions raised as a result of the financial report. As none were forthcoming, the agenda's next topic was introduced.

## **40/22 Policy Review**

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The published policies need to be reviewed from time to time for transparency reasons. However, the chair advised that on the review schedule there wasn't anything that needed to be reviewed at this point, and nothing that needed updating.

## **41/22 Current Planning Issues**

One planning item that was circulated. This relates to the Solar Farm in Leckhampstead and access to it from Wicken. This was discussed before. Concern was raised about the permanence of a large caravan on Whittlebury Road, but assurance was given that the situation is only temporary, until the house refurbishment is complete.

## **42/22 Playground maintenance**

Questions were raised as to the procedures required to seek estimates as well as the significance of the annual report and how much of it is able to be done in-house and how much of it is significant and if any, take priority. It was felt that common sense should guide but as the cost of the suggested maintenance was thought to exceed £1,000, then 3 quotes would be necessary. After establishing and recommending the best price for the job, then the PC would give the go ahead for the expenditure. The annual inspection is a necessary procedure to ensure that the playground is safe and remains safe throughout its use. A reminder was made to keep a record of rolling local inspections of the site every fortnight, and the way problems should be dealt with. Questions were raised as to whether training was necessary to identify potential problems, but it was thought sufficient to view the play area with a keen eye for any wear and tear and potential hazards at and around the site that could cause potential accidents. A recommendation was also made to annually supply the clerk with an e-record of the checks carried out – date – time – and name of the Cllr viewing. A decision was made to set up a check list of things to view, and to acquire 3 estimates/quotes for maintenance and repair. The estimates/quotes will then be presented to the meeting in July. A query was raised about an observation of a metal stump sticking out of the ground near the basketball area which looked like an old bit of some play equipment which needs grinding down or extracting. This will be investigated.

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## **43/22 Summer Fete 25/06/2022**

Planning for the summer fete to be held at the sports club, The White Lion, the church, and the village green is progressing and almost complete. Road closures and public liability insurance is being organised by the Parish Council.

## **44/22 New Clerk**

No update views are currently available. The position of a qualified clerk or someone willing to do the course to get qualified is needed. A qualified clerk holding the position of both the clerk and RFO will offer a general level of competence. Consequently, it will be easier to have the documentation of how decisions are made with the legal power to do that. The position is a paid one, at about £3,000 a year for about 20 hours a month. The Chair reminded the Cllrs to see if they could persuade someone in the village to accept the position.

## **45/22 Trees**

No further updates to report. Will try to contact and talk to Jonathan Gurney before the next meeting about a tree at risk on his land.

**Cllr Ivens to talk to Jonathan Gurney and report back.**

## **47/22 Dog Fouling**

Still a problem but there has been some improvement. Young children walking dogs may be the main culprits, but it was felt that it is too soon to strengthen the warnings about the consequence of Dog Fouling. Dog bins were still being used to dispose of owners' home dog-poops. These bins are meant for poop disposals whilst out walking. Research was suggested – to learn from others how they handle this delicate problem.

## **48/22 Notice of future meetings - 2022**

July 6

Sept 7

Nov 2

Jan 4, 2023

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Cllr Neil Gordon-Lee excused himself from the next meeting as he will be on holiday. Cllr Alan Cartwright will be taking the chair.

**49/22        Items for next meeting**

None were offered, so the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8:30 pm

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