

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL

at 7.00pm on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2023  
in Wicken Sports Club

---

## Attendance

---

Cllr. Neil Gordon-Lee  
Cllr. Philip Ivens  
Cllr. Petra Spencer-Jones  
Cllr. Ian Howett  
Clerk: John Westlake

---

## 77/23 To receive and accept any apologies for absence.

---

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr. Rachel Sithole

---

## 78/23 To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

---

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved and signed by the Chair.

---

## 79/23 Members' interests: Councillors are invited to declare disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests in items on the agenda as required by the Wicken Parish Council Code of Conduct for Members and by the Localism Act 2011

---

The Chair encouraged those relevant Councillors to make the necessary declarations.

---

## 80/23 To hear a report from WNC Councillor Ken Pritchard

---

In the absence of Cllr. Pritchard there was no report.

---

## 81/23 Public Forum

---

- A member of the public, Mrs. Celina Francklin, queried if there been any progress on resolving the problem of cars parking on the Cross Tree Triangle. The Chair informed the meeting that the Solar Farm Committee were formulating a solution which should result in a costed proposal for which quotations could be obtained.
- A member of the public, Mr. John Folker raised the issue of ingress of water affecting his garden, especially during periods of heavy rainfall. He had approached West Northamptonshire Council which had asserted that it had no responsibility because the flooding occurred on his property. However he maintains that the water originates from the road outside his house where it goes into a drain through which it flows under his property and emerges through a manhole in his garden. The Chair suggested that the problem was the responsibility of Highways, and that it should consider extending the drain to enable the water to flow into the brook at the bottom of the garden. He undertook to explore a solution.

---

## 82/23 To note updates on standing items

---

- Cllr. Howett raised the following points on overhanging trees/hedges which are obstructing footpaths at:
  - No. 2 Quarry Green Close.
  - No. 29 White Gables.
  - Cross Tree Cottage, 9 Cross Tree Road.

Chairman's initials ....

The Chair undertook to write to the householders concerned asking that in each case the trees are cut back to expose the full width of the pavement, and speak to the occupants at No 9

- The Chair reminded the meeting that work on the Gospel Elm is scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> October.

---

### 83/23 Finance

---

The financial position was noted and is in line with the forecast.

---

### 84/23 To consider Wicken Parish Council's insurance policy due for renewal on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023

---

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council's insurance policy with BHIB is due for renewal on 5th September. He has requested that sums insured for the council's property are revised to take account of inflation and the up to date list on the asset register. The renewal premium based on these is £679.45, including Insurance Premium Tax. (The premium in 2022 was £615.93 based on sums insured at that time). Two other providers of parish council insurance were considered:

- Zurich Municipal. The premium was lower than BHIB. However the package did not provide a sufficient level of cover for Wicken Parish Council with respect to the values at risk. This offering is designed for councils with a precept of less than £10,000 which may be exceeded by Wicken Parish Council in the foreseeable future.
- A J Gallagher. Despite several attempts to contact Gallaghers it was not possible to obtain a response. The Clerk therefore recommended that the policy with BHIB is renewed from 5th September. This was unanimously agreed by all councillors present.

---

### 85/23 To consider external audit

---

The Chair pointed out that until the past financial year the audit requirements for Wicken Parish Council were fairly light. However during 2022/23 the council's income exceeded £25000 which is the threshold for a more demanding external audit. The audit identified one area to be addressed; that the asset register had not been updated to account for disposals and acquisitions; this has been rectified. He stated that the cost of the audit had increased because of its more detailed nature and the council's compliance with regulations will be more closely scrutinised in the future.

---

### 86/23 To consider the level of reserves and how these are "earmarked" for future commitments

---

The Chair reported that the auditor had commented that specific reserves should be allocated to projects to which the council was committed, rather than a general reserve for all future expenditure. This will become clear in the financial information in the future.

---

### 87/23 To consider tree planting

---

The Chair summarised the current position to the proposal to plant an avenue of lime trees on Whittlebury Road as follows:

- Written permission had been received from Merchant Venturers (15/8/2023 )and Paul Ward (16/8/2023) for the planting of the trees.
- He had a telephone conversation with Jack Lawson from Nicholsons on 22<sup>nd</sup> August to seek clarification on several topics which had been raised with him, i.e.:
  - The rationale for the choice of lime trees. Nicholsons use a climate forecasting tool which takes account of soil type, geographic location of the trees e.g. degree of shelter and climate models that aim to predict temperatures over the next 80 years. This indicated that lime trees are the optimal choice. Although there is no guarantee for the future there are no known threats to lime trees.

- The size of the trees. There is the risk that small trees may be hacked during hedge trimming. The Chair has written to Cllr. Pritchard asking him to put him in touch with a person at WDC with a view to requesting that trimming of the hedge is suspended for three years. In any event it would be necessary to ensure that hedge trimming is managed to ensure that any newly planted trees are not damaged. Cllr Ivens suggested that only Paul Ward would be cutting these hedges and there was no risk that a third party might cause damage.
- Maintenance. Jack Lawson expressed the view that past assumptions about planting trees may be wrong and that future conditions, due to climate change, make the risks to the survival less certain than in the past. Additionally, he advised that planting should not proceed unless a suitable maintenance budget can be met. Cllr. Howett, referring to comments made at the previous meeting, asked Mrs. Francklin if she had taken up the idea of asking individual residents to adopt a tree e.g. dealing with its maintenance for three years. Mrs. Francklin, on reflection, said that this idea was unrealistic.
- The advice on when planting should take place was that this should occur before Christmas. This will enable the roots to become established before anticipated drought conditions from April onwards.

The Chair stated that at least three quotations for planting and maintenance must be obtained by the Parish Council. It is especially important that this is properly documented to meet regulatory and audit requirements. He suggested that the Parish Council consider proceeding on the basis of planting smaller trees. This would reduce the cost and potentially release funds to pay for maintenance. Mrs. Francklin re-emphasised the benefits to the village of the proposed project, and that the cost although high would be a legacy for the future. The Chair agreed and added that the council is very positive about the planting of trees. Cllr. Ivens expressed support for the project but suggested that planting ten trees (as opposed to fourteen as originally proposed) may enable the costs to be reduced. Cllr. Howett stressed the importance, when obtaining quotations for maintenance of understanding how cost is structured (e.g. cost per visit or cost per tree).

The Chair proposed that the way forward should be for the Parish Council to obtain quotations based on ten trees to be considered at an Extraordinary Meeting at the end of September. This was approved by all councillors.

---

### **88/23 To consider repairs to Wicken Sports Club roof**

---

The Chair disclosed a potential conflict of interest as he is a Director of Wicken Sports Club Ltd.

The Chair informed the meeting that the roof of the Wicken Sports Club had been constructed with timbers with insufficient strength to bear the weight of the concrete tiles. The result is a bowing of the roof and leakage. A quotation of £2500 to repair the roof was received but this has since been withdrawn. A second quotation of £7000 was received and efforts are being made to obtain further quotations. He pointed out that the difficulty was obtaining quotations, describing the work to be carried out, with a clear cost within a reasonable time. The work would require a carpenter to replace the timbers and a roofer to retile the roof. The Parish Council and the Sports Club would each bear 50% of the cost. The Chair warned the meeting that the total cost of repairing the roof may be in the region of £7000/£10000. Cllr. Ivens asserted that the work, which is necessary to avoid the roof collapsing, is a priority.

---

### **89/23 To consider planning issues including the proposed development at Furtho Pits, Old Cosgrove Road, Old Stratford**

---

The Chair informed the meeting that a revised application had been submitted to support a proposed warehouse development at Furtho Pits. This does not recognise any concerns that were raised at a recent public meeting. Mrs. Justine Rutledge, a member of the objection group opposing this development who was present had written to the Chair suggesting that residents of Wicken should be encouraged to write to WNC and/or the MP pointing out that WNC had not following its own rules in this process, and outlining the reasons why this revised application should not be approved; this had been copied to all councillors. The Chair expressed the view that many residents of Wicken are probably unaware of the impact that the development will have (e.g. traffic congestion, pollution, flooding risk).

Mrs. Rutledge informed the meeting that the revised application, if approved, would generate an additional 3000 lorries a day on local roads, with attendant extreme increased congestion, increased cost of road repairs and risk of accidents. The objection group is endeavouring to raise funds to pay for expert legal advice. She asked for support from individuals for the fund raising activities of the objection group. She expressed the view that residents of Wicken, who will be affected by this development, need to be more involved, e.g. by writing letters of objection based on a template provided. Mrs. Rutledge pointed out that the original plan, which was for the construction of small business units, may be acceptable. She reported that all councils of parishes within the vicinity of the proposed development have written letters of objection, and she requested that Wicken Parish Council does the same.

Councillors agreed that the Chair will write a further letter of objection (following that written by Andrew Stockbridge) highlighting additional points (e.g. toxic land) that have since come to light, by the deadline for objections of 16<sup>th</sup> September.

---

#### 90/23 To consider action on playground maintenance

---

Cllr. Spencer-Jones confirmed that the recent maintenance programme was now complete, after she had reminded the contractor to finish the work which had initially been left unfinished. Work still remaining:

- Cllr. Ivens will arrange for pressure washing of tiles to remove algae.
- Cllr. Spencer-Jones will arrange for a sign displaying names to contact in the event of a problem to be erected

---

#### 91/23 To consider responsibilities for mowing grass verges

---

Cllr. Ivens stated that he is responsible for mowing the grass verges on Wicken Park Road leading up to the A422. He is concerned about signs being left on verges and in the road after the completion of roadworks. The Chair suggested that registering these issues on "Fix my Street" may be a productive way of dealing with this problem. If this proves ineffective then pursuing the matter with Cllr. Ken Pritchard may be more fruitful.

---

#### 92/23 To note future meeting dates: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024

---

In addition to regularly scheduled meetings an Extraordinary Meeting will be arranged for late September/early October to further consider tree planting.

---

#### 93/23 To note/consider items for next meeting

---

None were raised.

-----  
Councillor Neil Gordon-Lee  
Chair, Wicken Parish Council