

**WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE MONTHLY MEETING HELD AT 19:30 HRS ON TUESDAY 8 APRIL 2025**  
**WICKEN MISSION HALL**

In Attendance (a minimum of 3 Councillors must be present for business to be conducted):

Cllrs R Barnes, A Cogan, M Hawes, S Hill, L Houghton, B Pepper, P Rash, C Robinson and J Rogers, District Councillor Vellacott, County Councillor Hunt, Charlotte Cane MP and 12 parishioners and assistant to Charlotte Cane.

**1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. To Receive Declarations of Interest**

- a) Councillors to declare any personal interest in any items on the agenda.
- b) Councillors to declare any prejudicial interest in any items on the agenda and to inform the Chairman if they wish to speak on the matter during public participation.
- c) Councillors to declare any pecuniary interest in any items on the agenda.

Cllr Cogan declared an interest in Item 15.

**3. Public Participation.**

**The meeting will be adjourned for up to 10 minutes to allow any members of the public and Councillors declaring a prejudicial interest to address the meeting in relation to the business to be transacted at that meeting.**

A Parishioner raised the following concerns about the proposed battery energy storage system:

- Location – the energy would be generated by Burwell substation and transferred to Wicken for storage. A location closer to Burwell substation would be more beneficial.
- Noise – the noise at Drury Lane would be 30 decibels creating a constant hum.
- Carbon footprint and disposal of the batteries after 10 years
- Cambridge Fire Service does not have the ability to provide the flow rate required if there was a fire.

A second resident pointed out that there were no barriers for the noise as the landscaping did not provide much cover.

A third resident asked if this was a backdoor approach to obtaining the planning permission as the solar panels were already in place.

Andrew Cogan had declared an interest in agenda item 15 and advised (as a member of the public) that his property had a covenant from 1879 to maintain the wall on the boundary of his property and the Open Space. Permission was requested to coppice the self-set saplings to gain access to the wall to remove the ivy. The work would be carried out after the nesting season.

Item 9 was brought forward.

**9. Installation of up to 400MW of Battery Energy Storage Systems and associated infrastructure for a temporary 15 years.**

Wicken Parish Council objects strongly to the above planning application which is on the border of Wicken parish but falls just within the Soham boundary. We would like to point out that

although we are the neighbouring Parish Council we have not been included in the neighbours list.

We recognise that BESS installations make a useful contribution to providing long term, sustainable, local energy production that has a lower carbon footprint than other energy sources such as fossil fuels. However, we have serious concerns regarding the location of this particular proposed installation and disruption to our residents. These concerns are:

### **Noise**

The model used to calculate noise pollution is incomprehensible and it is impossible to replicate the calculation and, therefore understand the noise impact and spread. The noise pollution will affect a large number of residents in our village, especially along Church Road and Drury Lane but will be more widespread. Research has been undertaken with local residents close to the smaller unit at Weirs Drove in Burwell who are all aware of the constant hum from the battery storage unit which causes noise pollution similar to that of having tinnitus.

### **Biodiversity**

The biodiversity net figure gain is quoted at 130%. Although we understand that agricultural land has a small net value this particular area is home to a large number of animals including deer, hares and at least one barn owl. The planning application identifies that barn owls, little owls and bats are likely to be making use of the site. Although the planning application correctly identifies that nesting sites would not be adversely impacted by the proposed development, the site is an important foraging ground for barn owls who have foraged within the field for many years, and the loss of suitable foraging ground for them, together with the disturbance created by noise and lights, would be significant. It is further noted that the habitat creation plan replaces suitable foraging ground with unsuitable (arable field replaced by wetland). Hares are not included in the ecological survey although they are frequently seen within the development site. This therefore contravenes Policy ENV7

### **Fire Risk and Health and Safety**

Our local fire stations are Soham (retained firefighters), Ely and Cambridge. All of these are at least 20 minutes away from the site and are not currently geared up to tackle any potential BESS fire which can present toxic exposure risks. With a government consultation taking place in June 2025 to try to offer clearer guidance. There is also a need to understand how the batteries will be disposed of safely after use and how the land will be used after the 'temporary' 35 years. Clear safety regulations are needed.

### **Infrastructure and Location**

The electricity will be generated at Burwell substation and then stored at Wicken and used again by Burwell when the national grid needs it. Government guidance advises that BESS should be located as close to the Grid as possible. We suggest an area near to the Burwell substation would be a more beneficial location as there would be less infrastructure, less disruption and less noise impact to local residents as Weirs Drove is less populated than Wicken.

The only vehicle access for the proposed site is down a single-track road which runs between Wicken cemetery and 73 Church Road. This entrance is on the Wicken Church bend which has limited visibility and limited turning for large vehicles. Due to the location of the cemetery the

visibility splay cannot be made larger, and we therefore consider this a Highways safety issue. The entrance is also opposite St Laurence, Church Wicken which is a grade 2 listed building and the farm vehicles which currently use the track have to go over the kerb and on to the verge adjacent to the church wall to make the turn.

### **Soham Neighbourhood Plan**

The application contravenes policy SBNP19- Renewable Energy in the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan agreed in October 2024.

This policy states that renewable energy schemes will be supported unless there is a 'wider environmental, social and economic benefits would be outweighed by significant adverse effects...' and states:

- i. Safeguarding the best and most versatile agricultural land
- ii. Safeguarding agricultural land used for food production.

### **ECDC Local Plan**

The application contravenes the following policies:

EMP1: Retention of existing employment sites and allocations

EMP2: Extension to existing businesses in the countryside

EMP3 New employment development in the countryside

EMP4: Landscape and settlement character

ENV2: Design

### **5.2 Retention of existing employment sites and allocations**

This land is currently arable land and is therefore an existing employment site. This continues to be viable and therefore contravenes paragraph 5.2.2.

### **5.3 Extensions to existing businesses in the countryside**

This cannot be classed as an existing business due to the change of use from arable to battery storage.

Furthermore, the land is not designated for industrial or energy related infrastructure therefore this proposal is in contravention of local zoning policies.

### **5.4 New employment development in the countryside**

The site is outside the building envelope of the village. 'Developments will only be permitted where it would not adversely affect its surroundings'. This is an open field providing views to Ely Cathedral as you travel along the A1123 and from the surrounding footpaths. The main access runs adjacent to the village church and cemetery which will have a detrimental effect to families visiting their deceased friends/relatives due to the increase in traffic as the site is constructed. The site is also adjacent to the new cycle path which is being built between Soham and Wicken. This will therefore have an adverse impact on the character, amenity and appearance of the surrounding area.

### **5.5 Re-use and replacement of existing buildings in the countryside**

This application contravenes this section of the Local Plan as this is a new development.

## **6.2 Landscape and settlement character**

And in particular 6.2.2 Fens

This area is open fields with views across to Soham and to Ely Cathedral. The development will totally change the character of the area. It will provide a man-made skyline and will destroy the unspoilt nature and tranquillity of the area. It will also change the nocturnal character of the rural area due to light pollution with the security lights.

## **6.3 Design**

And in particular 6.3.2 'All new buildings and spaces must enhance and respect their surroundings and contribute towards local identity'.

This installation of 168 batteries and 84 transmitters will not contribute towards the local identity. The design, scale and height are not in keeping with anything in the area.

## **6.7 Renewable Energy Development**

And in particular 6.7.3.

Consideration must be given to the significant "impacts on the local environment and amenity, including key views (in particular of Ely Cathedral)" as laid down in this section of the Local Plan. The views across to Ely Cathedral and the surrounding landscape will be severely impacted by this development.

For the reasons stated above, we oppose the proposed development. In the unlikely event that the application be passed, we would like a condition applied that, due to the disruption to the residents of Wicken, any development money (CIL) is provided to Wicken Parish Council.

## ***8 Parishioners left the meeting.***

## **4. Address by Charlotte Cane MP**

The Chair advised that due to purdah the address would not be political.

Charlotte Cane MP advised the following:

- Due to the Sunnica development there was a great deal of concern around battery energy storage sites and understanding the safety and disposal of batteries. There would be a consultation starting in June around the safety of the sites and regulations needed.
- Postal votes had been an issue during the last general election. The system and administration of elections was being reviewed.
- Sat on an all-party committee for sustainable flood and drought management working with the Internal Drainage Boards.
- Held regular surgeries which were open for anyone in attend.
- Would be holding a community meeting inviting Parish Councils to attend.
- Funding for police was low and rural crime units were important as hare coursing was a real issue in the area.
- Funding for Cambridgeshire was low due to the funding being on a census from 10 years ago and not allowing for the growth.
- Roads continued to be an issue due to fen soil
- Transport in rural areas continued to be a priority

- DEMAT had accepted that the consultation for the change in admission criteria had been competed incorrectly and the decision to remove the Wicken Parish children as a priority had been reversed.

Cllr Hawes asked about family farm tax – it was hoped that this would be addressed in the Spring Statement.

Cllr Hawes asked about drought management – AWA was not a statutory consultee for fresh water but were for waste water and this did have influence on a development on South Cambs.

Cllr Rash asked about police not responding to certain types of crime – police were underfunded as was the fire service and Special Education Needs.

Cllr Pepper asked about the removal of the Sustainable Farming Incentive Payment – a large number of MPs were pressing for further incentives as the Basic Payment Scheme had also been removed via a reducing payment.

The Parish Council thanked Charlotte Cane for her assistance with the admissions for St Andrews and for contacting the Secretary of State for Education on behalf of the Parish Council.

Charlotte Cane left the meeting at 8.50am

***7 Parishioners left the meeting.***

## **8. County and District Councillor Reports**

The Chair advised that due to purdah the address would not be political.

### **County Councillor Hunt:**

- Work on the cycle path would be starting soon.
- The 20mph speed limit was beneficial for safety and with Wilburton also being approved for a 20mph zone this would hopefully mean that the A1123 was less attractive for large vehicles and being used as a 'rat run'.
- The Upware corner had been resurfaced and the potholes to Kingfisher Bridge had been repaired. There had been a request for passing places along the road to Kingfisher Bridge. Cllr Hunt would request passing places, but these were expensive.
- The road near Upware lock had been repaired and would be monitored.

***County Councillor Hunt let the meeting at 9pm***

District Council Vellacott advised the following:

- The Neighbourhood Plan continued to be important.
- Some potholes along Lower Road had been repaired but further work was due to take place.
- Would continue to push for signs on Redit Lane.
- There would be 2 Youth Fusion events in the area. Unfortunately, not at Wicken but Wicken youths would be able to attend the local events.
- Antisocial behaviour was on the rise but was still low.

***District Councillor Vellacott and the remaining parishioner left the meeting at 9.10pm***

## **5. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11 March 2025**

One amendment was required with the spelling of Cllr Cogan's name under item 11. With this amendment the minutes were agreed as a true and correct copy and signed by the Chair.

## **6. Progress Report on Matters Arising from the Minutes 11 March 2025**

**6.1** Painting of the Parish Benches – Now the weather had improved the clerk would arrange a date for the work to be completed by the councillors.

**6.2** Highways work on the Upware Corner – Work had been completed but the anti-slip surface had not been replaced. The clerk would enquire if this should have been included in the work.

**6.3** Church paths – This was ongoing.

**6.4** Non-payment of the marquee invoice of £300 by the previous landlord of the Maids Head – Cllr Pepper would speak to the previous landlord before the small claims court papers were submitted.

## **7. Planning Matters**

**7.1 T1 – Silver Birch – Reduce height by 4m. T2b- silver birch – Reduce height by 2.5m. 41 High Street, Wicken. Ref 25/00374/TRE**

The Parish Council approved the application.

## **7.2 Update on Planning Applications Approved/Refused by ECDC**

The installation of solar panels on the garage roof at High Fen Farm, 38 Stretham Road, Wicken had been approved. Ref 24/00656/FUL.

## **10. Neighbourhood Plan Update**

The drop in event for the Neighbourhood Plan had taken place on Saturday 15 March 2025 and around 45 parishioners had attended. The next meeting Working Group was scheduled for 16 April 2025.

## **11. Recreation Ground Changing Rooms Work Specification**

Unfortunately, the specification was not available. Cllr Pepper would meet with Dan Hardingham.

## **12. Combined Parish Council Net Zero Meeting Report by Cllrs Robinson and Barnes**

This meeting had been hosted by Soham Town Council. The following was discussed:

- Challenges faced by Parish/Town Councils
- What the councils were already doing
- Action which could be taken going forwards as a collective body

Ideas from other local Parish Councils:

- Fitting solar panels on parish properties. This could be considered by the Trustees of the Mission Hall.
- Closing blinds and curtains in parish properties to conserve heat
- Scrutiny of biodiversity on planning applications – this would be discussed by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group
- Reducing pesticide use
- Leaving deadwood for bugs etc.
- Repair cafes

The Chair thanked Cllrs Barnes and Robinson for attending on behalf of the Parish Council.

### **13. Report by Cllr Rogers on the ECDC Parish Council Conference**

- Haddenham had a money box camera scheme – this would be followed up by Cllr Rogers
- CCC Community Service – Cllr Rogers would ask the co-ordinator to present at a Parish Council meeting.
- Rural Community Business provided support, advice and contacts for local businesses – this would be looked into as part of the Neighbourhood Plan
- Inequalities in East Cambridgeshire – 10% older people were in poverty.
- Littleport held a Wellbeing Week – a week would not be possible for Wicken but a day event could be held.

The Chair thanked Cllr Rogers for attending on behalf of the Parish Council

### **14. Neighbourhood Plan Website and Parish Council Website**

Cllr Hill advised that she had researched websites for neighbourhood plans and these could either be part of the Parish Council website or separate. A free .gov.uk domain could be applied for. It was agreed that a separate website should be used and a .gov.uk domain should be applied for.

Cllr Hawes suggested a review of the current website. The clerk would arrange a meeting with Matt Cannon.

### **15. Request from the Resident of 5 Old School Lane, Upware to complete work on the Upware Open Space.**

***Cllr Cogan left the meeting at 9.50pm***

A copy of the covenant had been provided and details of the work needed had been circulated. Permission for the work was agreed.

***Cllr Cogan rejoined the meeting at 9.52pm***

### **16. Parking on the Village Greens**

It had been noted that some cars had started to park on Cross Green and delivery vehicles were driving over Cross Green rather than waiting for the traffic at the junction. It was agreed that posts should be installed. The clerk would contact Les Yardy.

Cars were also parking outside the houses on the Maids Head Green. This would be addressed by the clerk.

## **17. Planning Community Events Training Report form Cllr Barnes**

Cllr Barnes had attended the training on behalf of the Parish Council, Trustees of the Mission Hall and the Fete Committee.

Cllr Barnes advised that village events were compliant.

Due to the number of attendees at the village hall events they were compliant with Martyn's law as long as a risk assessment was completed.

The course had discussed promoting events and a stall at the village fete was discussed for the Neighbourhood Plan; this was agreed.

## **18. Request for a Donation from the Ely Food Bank and Option of becoming a Referral Agency.**

The clerk had obtained information from the Food Bank who had confirmed that families in the parish were accessing the Food Bank. An initial donation of £100 was proposed by Cllr Hill and seconded by Cllr Hawes. A poll would be arranged at the village fete to gauge opinion on where donations from the Parish Council should be made (£200 was included in the budget).

## **19. Policies for Approval**

### **19.1 Equality and Diversity Policy**

This was approved.

## **20. Financial Matters**

### **20.1 Bill payments**

Rachel James	Clerk wages April 2025	£680.03
HMRC	Employers PAYE	£173.60
Nest Pension	Employees Contribution	£13.90
Nest Pension	Employers Contribution	£10.42
HMRC NI	Employers NI for April 2025	£67.58
British Gas	Electric for changing rooms 12 Feb 2025 to 12 March 2025	£22.78
British Gas	Credit note	£54.26
British Gas	Electric for changing rooms 6 January 2025 to 7 April 2025	£59.68
Cambs County Council	Contribution to LHI scheme for give way on Hawes Lane junction	£206.78
Cambs County Council	Half year rent for allotments	£1068.00
CAPALC	Planning community events training	£45.00
CAPALC	Affiliation fee for 1/4/25-31/3/25	£403.89
RH Landscapes	March cut	£504.00
ICO	Annual renewal (card payment)	£52.00
PWLB	Loan repayment	£2640.77
Wicken Mission Hall	Hire of Hall January, February, March	£120.00
Wicken Mission Hall	Hire of Hall 15 March 2025	£30.00



## **20.2 Monthly Finance update**

The monthly finance report showed the Parish Council was in a stable position.

## **20.3 Bank Reconciliation to 31 March 2025**

This had been circulated and noted.

The clerk requested authorisation to transfer £10k from the savings account to the current account. This was approved.

It was agreed that the balance for 2024/25 would be transferred to the ring-fenced funds for the Neighbourhood Plan.

## **14. Items for Information**

- Cllr Rash suggested that areas of the Upware Open Space should be excavated and preserved showing the Roman infrastructure. This would be suggested to the URA.
- Cllr Rash and Cllr Pepper would be attending the Wicken Fen Forum on Thursday 13 April 2025. Cllr Rash would raise issue of Burwell Lode bridge following research into the accessibility of the bridge.
- The clerk would arrange a date with Wicken Fen for a meeting with the Parish Council.
- Cllr Houghton advised that she had been contacted by Wicken Fen regarding the lack of 20mph signage down Lode Lane. The clerk would follow this up.
- Cllr Robinson advised that she had been contacted by a resident offering to arrange a volunteer litter pick. This offer would be taken up.
- Cllr Robinson thanked Cllr Pepper for installing the bat and owl boxes.

There were no further items for information and the meeting closed at 10.30pm

Minutes accepted as a true and correct copy.....