

WICKEN PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MONTHLY MEETING HELD AT 19:30 HRS ON TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 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, J Rogers,
District Councillor Vellacott and John Hughes from the National Trust.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from County Councillor Hawker-Dawson

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.

There were no declarations of interest.

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.

There was no public participation.

4. Peatland Restoration Presentation by John Hughes (National Trust)

John Hughes presented on the peatland restoration project at Hurdle Hall in Burwell. The application was with planning and it was hoped that they would start work in the Spring.

John Hughes left the meeting at 7.45pm

5. County and District Councillor Reports

County Councillor Hawker-Dawson had provided a written report. This included information on:

- Local government reorganisation
- Budget plans and the overspend by CCC.
- The budget deficit for the Arthur Rank Hospice. A petition to save the hospice was being present to the government.
- Integrated Care Boards with Cambridgeshire merging with Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

District Councillor Vellacott had submitted a written report and also reported on the following:

- Mayor Paul Bristow had visited Wicken and met with District Councillor Vellacott and Cllr Bill Pepper. They had discussed the need for a regular bus route through the village, and the Mayor had agreed to write a letter to small operators to ask for a service. They had also visited the site for the BESS and the Mayor confirmed he would be writing a letter to oppose the application.
- Tiger on Demand had seen a slight increase in people using the service and were seeing less cancellations.

- ECDC had approved the grant funding for Neighbourhood Plans, but final approval would be on 25 November 2025. This was in the form of match funding of up to £5k.
- Revised information on the BESS showed that the noise would be higher than expected.
- ECDC would not be pressing for a judicial review on the 2 applications on Chapel Lane due to the cost.
- The broadband issues had a large impact on the village. Damage was unrelated to previous issues and was caused by rodent damage with the fibre cables having been damaged.
- Internal Drainage Boards – the IDBs were considering how to merge the current 10 boards into 1 or whether there should be a north/south split based on different soils. There was no new funding for the IDBs.
- There had been some safeguarding concerns in Soham with an adult approaching Soham Village College students inviting them to be on social media. This had been reported to the police.

Local Government Reorganisation

This takes affect in April 2028 with ECDC voting on the preferred option at a meeting next week. It was noted that there were now 4 options to choose from:

- Option A – North: Fenland, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough & South: ECDC, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire
- Option B – North: ECDC, Fenland, Huntingdon and Peterborough & South: Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire
- Option C – this had been withdrawn.
- Option D – Creates 3 unities which would not be financially viable for ECDC.
- Option E – Creates 3 unities which would not be financially viable for ECDC.

Cllr Vellacott advised the following:

- Option A – there was no business case for this.
- Option B – this was supported by most councils and would see more localised working, lower Council Tax rises and would limit housing growth to a sustainable level.
- Option D and Option E would fail on size of population and financial sustainability.

6. Local Government Reorganisation

After discussion, the Parish Council voted on the preferred option. The vote was as follows:

Option A – 4 votes

Option B – 4 votes

The Chair used his casting vote and voted for Option B

The clerk would write to ECDC to confirm the choice of Option B

District Cllr Vellacott left the meeting at 8.50pm

7. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 13 October 2025

The minutes were approved as a true and correct copy and signed by the Chair.

8. Progress Report on Matters Arising from the Minutes 13 October 2025

8.1 Painting of the Parish Benches – This would be completed in the Spring.

- 8.2** Lode Lane 20mph Signs –The clerk had contacted CCC asking for suggestions to stop the increased overtaking in the village since the 20mph limit was implemented. CCC had advised that this should be monitored and if there was no improvement the Parish Council could apply for an LHI bid for highway improvements for speeding. It was noted that the data showed that the average speed limit had reduced. The clerk would liaise with highways as to the best location for the speed signs.
- 8.3** Trees on the allotment – The clerk would arrange an Allotments Committee meeting.
- 8.4** NLOW small pond on the Recreation Ground – Cllr Hill and Cllr Robinson would be leading a working group to clear the pond behind the changing rooms on Sunday 16 November 2025. There were concerns about the number of brambles and vegetation in the ditch leading to the pond and the area behind the changing rooms. The clerk would talk to RH Landscapes.
- 8.5** War Memorial – this was ongoing.
- 8.6** Changing Rooms Project – The planning permission had been approved. This was now at tendering stage and would be sent out to the nominated builders at the end of the week.
- 8.7** Painting of the Cemetery Railings – Cllr Pepper would meet with James Peterson in November to discuss the project further.
- 8.8** Land rear of 28 Stretham Road – this was ongoing. Further information had come to light which the Clerk would pass on to Planning Enforcement.
- 8.9** Kingsway Solar – Cllr Houghton and the clerk had viewed the consultation documents. The Parish Council land at Burwell was in the communication corridor but not affected by any proposed infrastructure work. The clerk had replied to the survey to advise that there were no concerns but to keep the Parish Council and the tenant aware of the process and for any future wayleave payment to be made to the Parish Council.
- 8.10** No parking signs – These had been cleaned, and the clerk would purchase the materials needed to maintain the signs.
- 8.11** Erosion of the bank on the lode at the Malltings – the clerk would contact the EA.
- 8.12** Upware hedge – this was ongoing.
- 8.13** Wicken to Soham cycle path – Cllr Hawker-Dawson was looking into the early opening of the Wicken stretch of the cycle path.
- 8.14** Cycle bridge over Burwell Lode – Cllr Houghton had attended the open meeting at Wicken Fen and reviewed the plans for the cycle bridge.
- 8.15** Rolling of the Recreation Ground – The football pitch had been rolled. The Parish Council thanked Charlie Chatfield for completing this on behalf of Wicken Amateurs.

9. Planning Matters

There were no applications this month.

9.1 Update on Planning Applications Approve/Refused by ECDC

Approved

- Varying of condition on the approved plans for the land Southeast of 9 Stretham Road, Wicken. Ref 25/00936/VAR
- Reduction of branches from the tree above the village hall roof. 52 High Street, Wicken. Reg 25/00905/TPO

10. Neighbourhood Plan Update

The Neighbourhood Plan results had been received 14 October 2025 and there had been a return rate of 34% which was good for a neighbourhood plan survey. The Working Group had met and presented the following to the Parish Council:

Natural environment and residential development had both scored highly and would be a focus for the plan. Building design would be brought into residential development.

Amenities and services would be included in the plan and would incorporate transport and communication.

The working Group proposed that a call for sites took place.

Traffic scored highly but it had been included in the survey stating that the information was being collected by the Parish Council to help guide potential initiatives in the future.

The open-ended questions raised some comments which could be dealt with by the Parish Council:

- Trees – crown lifts needed near the paths.
- Willow trees near the pond taking the water.
- Verges and grass cutting in general.
- Battery storage

Quotes had been received from Places4People and had put the cost of the Neighbourhood Plan at circa. £20k

The Working Group proposed that to move forward the following was required:

A meeting with Places4 People to discuss next steps which would include discussing the topics and the technical surveys.

Commitment from the Parish Council to move forward with the project.

This action was proposed by Cllr Rogers and seconded by Cllr Cogan. All were in favour with the exception of Cllr Rash.

11. Review of the Grass Cutting Schedule

The grass cutting schedule had been revised for 2025 to trial different areas of the village to be left for biodiversity. Some areas had worked well but there had been some concerns raised by parishioners.

The following amendments were agreed for the 2026 schedule:

All verges along the A1123 would now be intensively mowed with the exception of the verge along Stretham Road which would be cut in March and October. The verges would be subject to No Mow May, but the clerk would ensure the cutting schedule with RH Landscapes did not mean an early cut in April.

The verges along Lower Road would remain as less intensive cutting but a strip mowed each side so people could step off on to the verge without difficulty if required.

Pond Green Meadow

The Pond Green Meadow project has now been running for 5 years. The latest survey showed that there were 31 different types of plants, 70 species of insects and vertebrates, voles, bats, bumble bees and ant nests. It was decided that the project would now move to an area on the Recreation Ground next to the Millenium Wood to enhance the wildlife in that area. The area on Pond Green would return to the normal cutting cycle after the daffodils which were planted earlier this year had flowered.

The clerk would let RH Landscapes know the changes.

12. Village and Climate Strategy Plan

This would be on the December agenda.

13. Christmas Tree on the Maids Head Green. Cost and Decision on Whether to Purchase

The quotes for the tree were deemed too expensive. Cllr Hill would look into the cost of lights to put up on the existing trees.

14. Accounts to the End of September 2025

These were noted.

15. Multi Use Games Area Surface

Cllr Robinson had met with a consultant to discuss the surface of the MUGA. Some areas of the surface had deteriorated and require a patching repair. This would cost £2-3k. The full surface would also need to be cleaned, sprayed and finished to bind the surface. The lines could then be repainted. The cost for this was around £20k.

Grants would be needed for the work if the Parish Council and Recreation Committee went ahead with the project. Cllr Robinson would obtain a written quote, and this would be discussed further with the involvement of the Rec Committee.

16. Afterway Allotments Access

The track between the allotments had eroded over time and it was now difficult to drive along the track. This was discussed and it was noted that the track was not a right of way and was kept as a rough track to stop vehicles using it as short cut from Stretham Road to Lower Road. It was therefore deemed not necessary for any further action.

17. Openreach Internet Issues

The issues with the broadband had been very disruptive to the village and the high number of people who work from home. The length of time to repair the issues was unacceptable. The Parish Council thanked District Councillor Vellacott for his work in trying to resolve the issue. It was noted that parishioners should complain via their providers. It had also been taken up with our local MP.

18. Financial Matters

18.1 Bill payments

Rachel James	Clerk wages November 2025	£703.08
HMRC	Employers PAYE	£179.60
Nest Pension	Employees Contribution	£15.11
Nest Pension	Employers Contribution	£11.33
HMRC NI	Employers NI for November 2025	£72.12
RH Landscapes	October cuts	£744.00
Burwell Print Centre	June to August Around and About	£305.81
SLCC	Cemetery and Churchyard safety course	£36.00
Shane White Plant Hire	Hire of roller	£72.00

18.2 Consideration to increase the Section 137 Payment

This would be on the December agenda.

18.3 Donation to the Royal British Legion

It was agreed that a donation of £100 should be made to the Royal British Legion. This included the cost of the poppy wreath.

18.4 Monthly Finance update

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

18.5 Bank Reconciliation to 30 October 2025

This had been circulated and noted.

19. Items for Information

Cllr Houghton raised the number of hedges which were growing over paths. The clerk would contact the homeowners.

Cllr Rash advised that Joan Bullman had died. Although Joan lived in Soham, she was part of the Wicken community having been the leader for the village Brownies and Guides, involved in both Wicken Coronation Band and Wicken Youth Band and Churchwarden of Wicken Church. Joan would be greatly missed by residents of Wicken.

Cllr Barnes asked for the use of the gazebos and BBQ for the Christmas Fayre. This was approved. Cllr Barnes had been contacted by a pizza van asking to use the hall car park twice a month to sell pizzas. This would be on the December agenda. It was noted that permission would be needed from ECDC.

Cllr Pepper reported that there was damage to the path near the old vicarage. The clerk would report.

The use of the thermal camera from ECDC was very popular last year. Cllr Robinson would look into borrowing the camera again this year.

The Parish Council thanked Martin Hopkins for another successful remembrance service and Nigel Houghton for cutting the grass around the war memorial.

There were no further business and the meeting closed at 10.30pm