Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 12th June 2023 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (chair); S Ottewell (vice chair); T Betchley (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); T Bamber (clerk)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

K Oakes (county councillor) had tendered her apologies due to pressures of work and this was accepted by councillors

J Matthissen (district councillor) had written earlier to say he hoped to get to the various meetings being held that evening, however he was unable to do so. Councillors understood the pressures he was under.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Lobbying**

Cllr Ottewell – pecuniary interest in respect of item 10 (c) (iii) newsletter invoice
Cllr Betchley – non-pecuniary interest in respect of Oaks Meadow (item 12)

3. **Public Forum**

No members of the public were present.

4. **Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 9th May 2023**

Minutes for Tuesday 9th May 2023 were reviewed and it was agreed that they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

5. **Matters arising from the Minutes**

There were no matters arising that are not dealt with elsewhere.

6. **County Councillor's Report**

The County Councillor was not present but the clerk confirmed that he would circulate her report when received and append it to these minutes as appendix 1.

7. **District Councillor's Report**

The District Councillor was not present but had sent his report, which is attached as appendix 2.

8. **Parish Council Chairman's Report**

The chair had no matters to raise that were not dealt with elsewhere

9. **Planning**

Applications received for consideration:

i. **DC/23/01727 - Model Farm Cottage, Park Road**: *Dropped kerb & driveway*
Councillors had no objection to this application

ii. **DC/23/01808 – 15 Model Farm**: *glazed rooflight listed building consent sought*
Councillors noted that there would be no discernable impact on neighbours and agreed to support the application

Action: clerk to post councillors' views on planning portal

b. Decisions received from MSDC:

i. *DC/23/02288* - Land West of Tannery Road: Discharge of condition 8 (sustainable drainage) - noted
DC/23/01338 – Land North of Bildeston Road – *variation of conditions – granted - noted*

10. Finance

a. **Accounts review to date**

The clerk reported that the Current Account balance with Santander as of 30 May 2023 was £59,406.94 and the savings account balance was £1,927.96, while the new Unity account had £500.00 in the current account.

The Budget analysis and financial summary were reviewed, and these were accepted.

b. **Payments received**

(i) (none)

c. **Payments to hand**

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £129.96: This was approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 s.301)*

(ii) S Scarff – Litterpick Banners - £68.94. This was approved by all councillors *(Litter Act 1938. ss.5,6)* Unity Bank Cheque no 300003 was written and signed.

(iii) S Ottewell – newsletter printing - £151.80 This was approved by all councillors *(Local Government Act 1972 s 111).* Unity Bank Cheque no 300004 was written and signed.

d. **Review of Internal Audit Report**

The clerk had circulated this and councillors discussed the recommendations.
The points raised were:

(i) **Insurance review:** it was noted that due to various circumstances the decision to authorise the clerk to act in the best interest of the council had not been recorded. This will be addressed in item 11 below;

(ii) **Review External Audit Report**: Councillors agreed that this had been done – the report had consisted of a one page certificate stating nothing wrong had been found;

(iii) **Post audit report on website**: this has been done for both last year and the year just closed;

(iv) **Use of private email addresses**: Councillors considered the recommendation that they use a separate email address for council business. While they could see merit in this for a larger council it was agreed that they would continue with the system whereby all communication is via the clerk's parish council address, accepting that the clerk is then the only person to send council emails to councillors' private email addresses.

e. Approval of publication period for annual reporting

The clerk suggested that this be set as being the period from 19 June to 28 July and this was agreed.

Action: clerk to post publication notices on notice boards and the website.

f. Closure of old bank account and associated actions

(i) The clerk reported that when Unity Bank had contacted Santander to effect the account switch, Santander had responded stating that they did not recognise the account address or contact, even though they had been sending bank statements to the clerk at this address for over six years. Rather than try to reason with the bank, it was agreed that the cash in the bank be moved by way of a cheque or cheques into the new account. To avoid the risk of Santander compounding the problem it was agreed that one initial cheque be sent that did not empty the account, to ensure there were available funds in the new account before moving

the rest.

(ii) Cheque number 22323 for £20,000, drawn on the Santander account in favour of Combs Parish Council, was written and it was agreed that this be paid in by the clerk to the new Unity account. Once this was in place, further cheques could be written.

(iii) The clerk explained that because Santander had still not acknowledged the additional signatories sent by the clerk in 2022, there was a risk that the bank may be unhelpful in accepting this cheque and proposed that the surest way to avoid a problem would be to use the signatures of the two people who had most recently been signing cheques, Cllr Ottewell and ex-councillor Stuart Scarff. The clerk had spoken with Mr Scarff and explained the situation, and Mr Scarff had agreed he would be happy to help provided the council authorised this. Councillors confirmed they were in support of the proposal that the cheque be signed by Mr Scarff and the clerk was instructed to effect the transfer of £20,000.

(iv) Because of the above problems, the cheques approved in the May meeting for MSDC (bin emptying) and Oaks Meadow (CIL grant) had not been sent (due to the risk that the signatories may not be accepted by Santander) and so these were re-written, on Unity cheques numbered 300001 and 300002 respectively. They were signed by valid councillors on the Unity account but the clerk was to hold them and the other cheques agreed this evening until confirmation was received that there were sufficient funds in the Unity account.

(v) As Santander were not helping, the direct debit arrangement with Npower would need to be switched manually. The clerk was authorised to arrange this.

(vi) The ability to pay using BACS was not within the authority granted by the current financial regulations, hence the current use of cheques. The clerk has downloaded the newest NALC model financial regulations and after noting proposed changes will circulate this to councillors for consideration and/or approval at the next meeting.

11. Insurance

During the internal audit it was noticed that, because of a combination of factors, including the sudden short notice increase in the cost of insurance and the requirement to defer meetings during the period of mourning for Her Majesty, the decision to change insurance companies, whilst authorised by councillors, had not been minuted. Councillors agreed to retroactively approve the clerk's actions and to authorise him to review the upcoming renewals, in order to obtain the best cover in terms of cost and quality.

12. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Betchley had no news to report

13. PIIP

The Chair had drawn up and circulated an updated project list for discussion. After noting the accidental omission of items for the cricket club the Chair will post this to the website.

14. Parish Design Statement

Drawing on his own experiences as a new councillor, the Chair had drawn up a 'thought map' listing many of the various issues that might be taken into consideration when assessing a planning application and councillors appreciated this as a helpful guide.

15. Correspondence /Any other business/ items for inclusion on the next agenda

- The clerk reported that HMRC had sent a late filing penalty notice but that after appeal, this has been withdrawn

- A resident working for a local charity had asked if he could place an advertisement in the next newsletter, Councillors agreed that Cllr Ottwell should invite him to supply an article for consideration. There would be no charge but if space were short priority would have to be given to matters directly affecting the village.
- Cllr Ottwell will produce posters to publicise the 'meet and greet' morning on 24th June.
- Cllr Ottewell also noted with gratitude the help given by Tori Whitehead and Julia Stephens-Row in delivering the newsletters

16. Date and time of next meeting – Monday 10th July 2023 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

The Meeting closed at 8.27 pm

Appendix 1

County Councillor Report

Revised policy agreed to protect Suffolk's water supplies

Suffolk County Council Cabinet has today (16th May) agreed to a revised infrastructure policy to support water security in the region.

As part of its focus on adapting to a changing climate, Cabinet members agreed a revision to the Energy Infrastructure Policy to cover future projects needed to protect and maintain water resources, including reservoirs, pipelines, and water recycling plants.

This new policy addition lays out how future water infrastructure projects will be managed and the council's role with stakeholders, such as the water companies, Ofwat and the Environment Agency. It also sets out how the council will recover the money it has to spend in the planning process for infrastructure projects.

To reflect the changes, the policy has been renamed the Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy.

In February 2021, the Cabinet of Suffolk County Council adopted an Energy Infrastructure Policy, that set out the Council's approach to major infrastructure projects for energy generation and transmission, with a particular focus on those consented under the Planning Act 2008, known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

As part of that decision, it was agreed that the policy would be revised after two years.

Library services protected as Suffolk County Council approves additional funding

Suffolk County Council has underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk, as it approved plans to increase its funding to Suffolk Libraries, to enable the service to continue operating at its current level, until the end of the contract in July 2024.

Suffolk Libraries currently receives £5.9m per year from Suffolk County Council, however the service is forecasting a deficit of £60k per month from April 2023. The service has cited increases in service costs, a reduction in income opportunities following the Coronavirus Pandemic and rising inflation, as causes of the deficit.

This means it is no longer possible for the service to continue operating at its current level of service, within its current contract value.

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting, the council has approved plans to absorb this cost pressure, funding Suffolk Libraries an additional £720k per year, through to the end of the current contract in July 2024. This additional funding will support Suffolk Libraries to continue delivering its highly valued services to Suffolk Residents.

The council has previously made a commitment to continue to support Suffolk Libraries. At Suffolk County Council's full council meeting in February, the council agreed to fund an additional £250k in the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year to help with the increased costs Highlighted by Suffolk Libraries. This £250k for the first quarter of the year is included within the overall figure agreed by Cabinet, of an additional £720k for the 2023/24 financial year.

The council also supported Suffolk Libraries with £155,000 for initiatives to support residents with Cost of Living and support for Digital Inclusion in the 2022/23 financial year.

Suffolk residents urged to #ShakeItOut when recycling

A new campaign by Suffolk Waste Partnership is encouraging people to empty plastic bags and not throw them in recycling.

The #ShakeItOut campaign has been launched by the Suffolk Waste Partnership to encourage households in Suffolk to help improve recycling rates across the county by making sure black bin bags and other plastic sacks are not thrown in with recyclable materials.

#ShakeItOut is encouraging people to shake out plastic bags and keep recycling clean, dry, and loose.

The Partnership, which comprises Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council, and West Suffolk Council, says more than a quarter (26%) of the materials in Suffolk's recycling bins in 2022/23 were not able to be processed as they were spoiled.

Items that contributed to spoiled recycling collections included:

- Materials that were not clean and dry, or contained food and drink residue
- Rubbish sacks or plastic bags containing recycling
- Non-recyclable items, such as nappies and food waste

Plastic bags and rubbish sacks are a particular problem – recycling handlers can't see what's inside them and they are often full of rubbish or other non-recyclable items.

This means bags are removed during the sorting process to avoid spoiling other good recycling. Any removed bags are then sent for disposal.

To find out more about the #ShakeItOut campaign and for more information on recycling in Suffolk, visit www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/shake-it-out

Spotlight on improving air quality as county-wide strategy launched

Suffolk County Council has set out its plan for improving air quality in Suffolk following results from a recent air quality survey, as its county-wide Air Quality Strategy is published.

Air quality continues to be an important public health issue and a driver of health inequalities which disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable residents in Suffolk.

The county council recently engaged with Suffolk's residents about their thoughts on the impact poor air quality has on their quality of life. The survey received 338 responses and had a particular focus on Ipswich residents, because Ipswich makes up four of Suffolk's eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). AQMAs are areas where national target levels of Nitrogen Dioxide are being exceeded.

Some of the results of the survey showed that there is a need to increase awareness about how residents can reduce pollution by reducing indoor burning of wood and coal, encouraging businesses to replace their fleet with low-emission or electric vehicles, reducing short journeys by car and considering more sustainable forms of transport such as walking, bike or bus. Vehicle idling when stationary is also a contributor to high levels of air pollution, an area the strategy will focus on going forward.

A key element of the Air Quality Strategy is a public engagement plan which is being developed to increase public awareness of the health impacts of air quality in Suffolk, enabling individuals to make choices that protect both their health and the health of others from the harmful effects of pollution.

The delivery of the strategy will be closely monitored by the council to ensure it is accomplishing what it has set out to do. The strategy will also feed into the collective work of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

£10 million new funding to fix residential roads

Local road surfaces in villages and residential areas in Suffolk should be blitzed as part of a new £10 million programme, Suffolk County Council has announced today (25th May).

The extra funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways' £11 million annual roads maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

The announcement was made by Suffolk County Council's leader, Cllr Matthew Hicks, at the authority's annual general meeting.

Speaking about the funding, Cllr Hicks said:

"Let me be clear, the state of some of our roads is not good enough. That is why today I am announcing a major investment to improve roads across the county where people live. Those smaller roads often in estates or off the beaten track in our villages that are rutted and in need of some love and attention. To do this we will set aside a further £10 million to be spent over the next 20 months reaching these locations across our county and I look forward to this being delivered with our new partner Milestone."

The funding is subject to a formal Cabinet decision which will follow later this year.
There was also reaffirmed commitments to deliver:

- The Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft
- New homes on SCC land
- Further help for Ukrainian refugees
- A new highways contractor Milestone
- Hundreds more EV charging points
- A £20 million flood prevention and footpath improvement programme.

Cllr Kay Oakes

Appendix 2

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward

June 2023

Annual Council meeting	At the Annual Council Meeting held on 22nd May, the 24 Green Party councillors officially became the Administration at Mid Suffolk. Andy Mellen, as leader outlined our initial priorities to lead and work with other bodies to address the challenges faced by our communities, cost of living, affordable homes, local services, public transport and climate change. The cabinet will be made up of six portfolios: • Cllr Andy Mellen (leader) – performance and resilience • Cllr Rachel Eburne (deputy leader) – finance and resources • Cllr Andrew Stringer – heritage, planning and infrastructure • Cllr Tim Weller – environment, culture and wellbeing • Cllr Richard Winch – housing and property • Cllr Teresa Davis – thriving towns and rural communities Cllr Rowland Warboys was elected as Chair of the Council, with Cllr Dan Pratt as Vice-chair.
Charity support	The outgoing Chair, Cllr James Caston raised over £4k for his chosen charity – Stowmarket ASD Saturday clubs. Cllr Warboys' chosen charities for this year will be The Forge Workshops in Thornham Magna and 'Beyond the Wall', a charity based in the Walled Garden at Thornham Estates.
New roles	I have been elected to chair the Audit and Standards committee alongside a Babergh councillor as it is a joint committee. In addition I will be a councillor director of the Council's housing company, Mid Suffolk Growth Limited.
Planning committee	Cllr Sarah Mansel is to be the Chair of Planning Committee and there is to be a change to the schedule of planning committees. The first daytime planning committee will be held on Wed 21st June and then every 4 weeks. In between those main meetings provisional meetings will be scheduled for 17:30 on the intermediate fortnightly Wednesdays. I will continue to be a member.
Half Term activities	A number of activities for children and young people were organised for half term. These include family cooking sessions, fencing and dance classes, kids clubs. Children who receive free school meals will be able to swim for free at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre. Details of all the activities are available on the website https://www.babergh.gov.uk/communities/whats-on/holiday-activities-fund/

John Matthissen councillor@matthissen.net 01449 258894 07976 308128