

Minutes of Combs 130th Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 13th May 2024 at 7.00pm, Battisford Cricket Club, Combs

Present: T Kitson (Parish Council Chairman); H Larsen (Parish Councillor); T Betchley MBE (Parish Councillor); A Tomlinson (Parish Councillor); K Archer (Parish Councillor); T Bamber (Parish Councillor); J Matthissen (District Councillor) C Skinner; D Shelley

Attending: S Ottewell (Parish Clerk)

1. Introductions

Parish Council Chairman Tony Kitson took the chair and welcomed those present.

2. Apologies for absence

None

3. Minutes of the 129th Annual Parish Meeting held on 9th May 2023

The minutes were signed as a true and accurate copy of the meeting by Cllr Kitson (Chairman)

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Chairman's Report

The chairman referred to his report, attached as Appendix 1, and took the opportunity to welcome the two new councillors and to express his appreciation for the support and help provided by all councillors over the year. He also thanked T Bamber for all his work as parish clerk and welcomed S Ottewell into the role.

6. Report from Suffolk County Councillor

Cllr Oakes had previously circulated her report and this is attached as appendix 2.

7. Report from Mid Suffolk District Councillor

Cllr Matthissen had previously circulated his report and this is attached as appendix 3.

8. Councillor Reports

Tony Bamber reported on the cemetery and this is attached as appendix 4.

Cllr Tomlinson introduced himself as Chair for the newly formed Finance Committee. He mentioned that the committee had so far met twice, once to talk about setting the budget and Precept and the second meeting to discuss CIL receipt and expenditure. The meetings were very useful as more time could be spent discussing the issues than in the monthly Parish Council meeting.

9. Local Organisation/Club Reports

See appendices 5 and 6 for reports from Battisford & District Cricket Club and Oaks Meadow.

Oaks Meadow - Ms Shelley also talked about the vandalism at Oaks Meadow including several fires being lit, one destroying a bird box containing a nest and eggs. Some footage had been captured on a neighbouring CCTV camera and the police informed. A discussion was then held regarding security at Oaks Meadow; Ms Shelley invited all to the Oaks Meadow Trustees meeting on the 29th May.

Cllr Kitson undertook to contact the Community Police Liaison Officer to attempt to motivate further support.

10. Parishioner questions, comments and suggestions

CLlr Kitson thanked all those attending for doing so and closed the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 7.52pm

APPENDIX 1

Combs Parish Meeting, May 2024

Chairman's Annual Report

People

This year in the life of Combs Parish Council saw us operating for most of that time with just four from our nominal quota of seven councillors. This was something of a delicate situation and although we managed to achieve a quorum at all our meetings, it did mean that we were stretched thin and subsequently this was a year of thinking, planning and preparing more than it was a year of active delivery.

Nonetheless, and despite this situation, we did achieve some significant forward steps which I will highlight later.

We were thrilled when two residents – Kevin Archer and Hannah Larsen – put their hands up last Autumn and were co-opted onto the council in January. Both have already rolled up their sleeves and are actively helping with the preparations for the D-Day 80 commemorative activities taking place in June.

Our long-serving (and long suffering) Clerk, Mr Tony Bamber, indicated his desire to step down after seven years of exemplary service. I am delighted that he has elected to stay on as a councillor and he was co-opted at our April meeting.

Councillor Suzanne Ottewell stepped down in October but elected to join our Finance Subcommittee which we established shortly thereafter. This arrangement also provided Ms Ottewell with the time to drive the merger of the Barclif and Combs Parish Newsletters, more of which later. I am delighted that she has subsequently agreed to take on the role of Parish Clerk on an interim basis until such time as she is eligible to apply for the position as a salaried employee.

Councillor Terry Betchley has continued to act as our liaison point with the Oaks Meadow project and Cllr Alan Tomlinson chairs our Finance Subcommittee in which role he has significantly driven the tightening up of our financial planning processes.

My thanks to all for contributing so much in the service of the residents of Combs Parish.

Finally we have continued to enjoy ongoing active support from our County and District Councillors Kay Oakes and John Matthissen.

Financial

Our budget for the financial year 2023-24 was £19,677.90; our out-turn was £14,461.23 which meant that we were £5,216.67 underspent. This is a significant amount, largely accounted for by energy prices falling more sharply than expected and partly because low numbers of councillors meant that we were unable to undertake as many community projects as we would have liked. We will carry the surplus over into the £2024-25 budget as reserves and will examine closely the possibility of reducing the precept next year.

Our total income this year was £56,199.70, the bulk of which was precept (£9,000), burial ground income (£5,560) and Community Infrastructure Levy (£37,271.21) and is made up as follows:

Category	Amount
Deposit Account Interest	£493.49
Burial Ground Income	£9,435.00
Precept	£9,000.00
Total before CIL	£18,928.49
CIL	£37,271.21
Total Income	£56,199.70

The bank balance at the start of the financial year was £49,386.33; the end of year balance was £73,568.76.

During the year 2022-23 we took the decision to change our banking arrangements because of poor service and low rates of interest. Tony Bamber and Cllr Ottewell undertook most of the work and – despite the incumbent bank’s obstructive attitude – in time transferred our assets across to Unity Bank. We are now earning £000’s in interest annually (as opposed to pennies previously) and councillors are able to transfer and make payments very easily.

Donations and Support

We were pleased to be able to provide financial support to several local causes. Oaks Meadow has grown from a glint in Desiree Shelley’s eye to a highly impressive village amenity which has attracted attention far and wide. This year the Council was again pleased to offer, funding Health and Safety training and insurance as well as a capital donation £4,500 for the car park drainage scheme. Councillor Betchley has provided excellent liaison between Oaks Meadow and the Council and we intend to continue to support this project.

Having supported the installation of new toilet facilities and a veranda last year, we were pleased to commit a capital donation of £2,500 to The Cricket Club at Moats Tye for car park resurfacing. We understand that our support helped to secure donations from other funding streams and we look forward to working with Julia Stephens-Rowe and her team as they grow the club facilities further.

We were also pleased to donate £1,500 to Battisford Village Hall for energy efficiency improvements. As well as the capital outlay, we understand that as with the Cricket Club our support helped to secure donations from other funding streams.

Finally, we donated £250 to Stowmarket Citizens Advice Bureau.

Newsletter

Suzanne Ottewell has once again driven the thrice-yearly publication of the Parish Newsletter which has proven to be popular with residents. This year she has also taken on the additional responsibility of merging the publication with the Barclif magazine that was produced under the Battisford Village Hall management team. It was felt that there was significant overlap and as the previous editor of Barclif was stepping down it made sense to amalgamate the two publications. Early feedback has been very positive.

Cemetery

Councillor Betchley and Parish Clerk Tony Bamber have administered dealings with the cemetery with customary sensitivity. There have been 14 burials this past year (including for one resident of Combs) compared to 16 last year (including for two resident of Combs). A new pricing structure was

introduced last year intended to reduce the number of applications from outwith the Parish but it is too early to determine the extent to which has been effective.

The cemetery is kept neat and tidy and we thank Hartley's Garden Services for their services.

Councillors are also mindful of the eventual need to extend the cemetery's overall area and although we calculate that there are some 30-40 years before full capacity is reached we have established a fund to enable purchase of land less problematic for the council in place at that time.

Parish Boundaries

There was a Communities Governance Review in which Parish Councils were invited to submit proposals for boundary changes. Our neighbours in Battisford PC requested that Bowl Meadow be moved into their Parish along with a section of Bowl Road. We agreed to the former and objected to the latter and that was indeed how it was resolved. However, we also asked for the inconsistency in Combs Green to be considered as some houses in the road are within the boundary of Combs while others are in Little Finborough: we're unsure whether this request was either rejected or ignored but the status quo prevails.

Planning Applications and Development

Councillors considered 11 Planning Applications over the course of the year, down from 19 in the previous period, supporting those where due consideration to the built and natural environments and neighbourliness had been evidenced.

There has however been continuing disruption resulting from the development on land north of Bildeston Road. Both our County and District Councillors, Kay Oakes and John Matthissen, have supported us by engaging with their own council officers during this sorry period.

Speed Indicators

We have installed a post for a Speed Indicator Device at Moats Tye and will be moving one of the Combs devices shortly.

Street Lighting

Residents in Tannery Road reported a faulty streetlamp and, on consultation with them and others, there was a consensus that three of the lamps should be switched off completely. A contractor was hired to do this and to isolate the mains supply.

Litter Pick

The PC organised its annual Litter Pick on March 24th. Excellently organised by Tony Bamber, a team of nearly 20 volunteers salvaged nearly 30 bags of rubbish from our road verges.

Anthony (Tony) Kitson

Chairman, Combs Parish Council for 2023-2024

APPENDIX 2

County Councillor's Report May 2024

April 2023

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place on National Offer Day

99.18% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 95.78% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7,056 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2023.

May 2023

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.

June 2023

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024.

July 2023

Councils set out concerns as public consultation opens for Norwich to Tilbury proposals

National Grid has opened its consultation to anyone wishing to comment on its Norwich to Tilbury proposal, previously known as East Anglia Green. This is an eight-week non-statutory consultation period which closes on 21 August 2023.

The project will see a new 400kV electricity transmission line built between Norwich and Tilbury, running 111 miles. It will be made up mostly of overhead lines and pylons, along with some underground cables and a new substation.

The new consultation reveals the route for the pylons, passing through Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. It shows the line will run underground through the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Essex-Suffolk border.

August 2023

Council fears new energy proposals will harm Suffolk's coastline

Suffolk County Council is disappointed to learn that the LionLink interconnector project from National Grid Ventures has identified an alternative landfall at Walberswick, with cable routing making its way to the north of Southwold.

The Council will study the details of the new proposals, and will prepare its response to the National Grid's second public consultation, which opens on 8 September.

The non-statutory consultation on [National Grid Venture's LionLink project](#) will commence on the 8 September 2023, and will remain open until 3 November 2023.

September 2023

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a [joint letter to National Grid](#), the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

October 2023

New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

November 2023

Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7th November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

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

December 2023

More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

January 2024

Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is today (26th January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

- Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
- New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
- Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

February 2024

Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal starts on 18th March

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

March 2024

Funding boost for new and existing bus services across Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is to spend £3.6 million of Government funding over the next two years on strengthening and expanding Suffolk's bus network.

The council has been awarded £1.8 million per year for two years – a total of £3.6 million – from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Fund Phase 2 (BSIP 2, renamed from BSIP+) to deliver improvements to public transport in Suffolk.

April 2024

Over 400 Suffolk roads set for upgrade as largest ever surfacing project gets underway

Residents across Suffolk are set to benefit from 421 newly surfaced roads this year - almost doubling the number of roads completed last year, as Suffolk Highways' largest ever resurfacing programmes get underway.

With the start of the surface dressing programme beginning this week, 102 roads will be surface dressed, whilst a further 319 sites will benefit from a full machine resurfacing during the year.

APPENDIX 3

Annual Report - Cllr John Matthissen - Onehouse Ward 2023/24

Becoming the MSDC Administration

The year 2023-2024 has been quite unlike any since I was first elected in 2007. After 16 years being a member of the opposition at Mid Suffolk, with limited influence beyond advocating for the villages I represent, I am now a member of the group running the District Council, known as the administration. This has brought new responsibilities as well as playing a part in shaping the priorities for the years up to 2027. Your councillor now chairs the Audit and Standards committee, and is a director of two of the companies owned by the District Council. I also continue as a member of the Planning Committee although I hope to step back from that now our many new councillors have gained knowledge and confidence in their roles.

The new administration has moved ahead with a range of big projects, of which the sports health and leisure complex at Chilton Fields is closest to our villages, while Gateway 14 and The Range building have the highest visibility for the town. Two of the smaller projects worthy of particular note, are the Cosy Homes initiative to insulate leaky houses across the owner occupier and private rental sectors, and the Rural Community Transport grants which I hope will soon bring some improvement to the skeletal public transport services in our rural areas.

Of significance to every village will be the adoption last year of the Joint Local Plan after a painfully long period of preparation and examination. We have greater control over development, and in fact very few additional houses have been granted since last May. Those already permitted or allocated will however be under construction for the rest of the term to 2027 and beyond.

Inevitably it is not all good news however and after spending £670,000 to tackle a council housing repair backlog we have found that the longer term finances of the 3500+ homes we own are not as strong as we had been led to believe over recent years. Known as the Housing Revenue Account the rents must pay for all the associated costs of repairs, management and new buildings. Government rules dictate that it cannot be supported from our stronger General Fund. Hence rents were increased by 7% as an unwelcome part of our first budget.

John Matthissen 3/4/2024 councillor@matthissen.net 07976 308128

APPENDIX 4

Cemetery Report 2024

Combs Cemetery opened in 2001, following closure of the now full churchyard at St Mary's.

Since opening, the cemetery has seen 296 burials, giving an average annual figure of 14.8 burials. Of those 296 burials, only 14 were of Combs village residents. As a local funeral director was heard to observe, people are dying to get into the Combs cemetery.

There are two main reasons for the preponderance of non-resident graves: firstly the cemetery is in a pleasant location and very well maintained and secondly, because of economics. Sadly even in death the sordid topic of coin raises its head. Every so often the councillors become aware that other local cemeteries have raised their fees, perhaps to meet costs or otherwise to discourage oversubscription to their own land, and Combs then becomes by default the bargain cemetery. Councillors, while reluctant to engage in such tawdry issues, owe it to the village to preserve its own cemetery and are compelled to raise their fees. Of late, we have introduced a substantially greater charge for non-residents and are waiting to see if the change is sufficient to discourage economic interees.

It is interesting to note that in the twenty odd years of operation, the cemetery has seen just two exhumations, but that both involved the same grave. Firstly, a family applied to the Home Office (now MOJ) for permission to move the ashes of their father for re-interment with the coffin of their mother. After this was done, the newly empty grave was allocated to another family and just recently that family has applied for an exhumation order, so that some of their loved one's ashes may be retrieved for inclusion in a piece of jewellery. Exhumations are often associated with criminal investigations so it is nice to see that the authorities are able and willing to assist in matters of human affection.

The cemetery is kept in a very pleasant state by the good work of Hartley's Garden Services and also the kind voluntary work done by councillors and residents, who take it upon themselves to tidy away old and dead wreaths and flowers. Many visitors to the cemetery bring flowers but sadly few clear the old ones away. It may be worth recording that other cemeteries make an annual charge to grave owners to cover the cost of rubbish removal and lawn maintenance, and future councillors may wish to consider this as an option.

APPENDIX 5

Combs parish council report from BDCC May 24

I am sorry that I can't join you this evening as I am on holiday, however I am sure that Craig Skinner our vice chair will be able to answer any questions.

As a club we are really pleased that you are continuing to hold your meetings here.

I would like to take this opportunity again to thank you for your grant of £2,500 which I hope you see has been put to excellent use with regards to the new entrance to the car park and the car park surface and the car park has been slightly increased in size.

We hope that you agree that the club house, since it was extended last year, continues to be an excellent community asset that you can promote to the residents of Combs. We have bookings ahead for a wedding, christening and a Diamond wedding anniversary.

Cricket

As a relatively small club run by volunteers, we punch significantly above our weight both in terms of our cricket, our facilities and our place in Suffolk cricket. We are at heart a family friendly club we want to inspire youngsters to take up the game.

We have two senior teams and T20 side, a ladies team and this year we are running 4 junior teams. We hold coaching for juniors and seniors during the season and we also run Allstars which is an ECB initiative to introduce youngsters to the game. For the first time we have also formed an over 50s side.

The Saturday team won 8 of their 17 games played. Sitting in 3rd for a while and then dropping off and finishing in ninth due to bad availability and inconsistency in the last third of the season.

The Sunday side had a mixed season with some standout performances from our juniors who have moved up to play for the seniors. After 5 seasons of success the T20 team failed to make the final this season, playing 3 league games and 2 friendlies winning 3 and losing 2. The ladies season was somewhat mixed although the games they did play were full of team spirit and showed some fantastic displays of talent.

We always have lots of junior fixtures and festivals which are great fun and it's so encouraging to see so many youngsters keen on developing their cricket skills. Last week we had 48 juniors attending the coaching session.

We have been able to erect a new electronic scoreboard with a grant from Valencia Community Fund.

We are always looking for new players for all the teams so please do promote the club to your friends and family.

Social

We have a Vice Presidents scheme for individuals who are non playing, who want to support the cricket club financially and as a thank you, we have an annual lunch in a marquee at the end of August. The theme for 2023 was Golden as we were celebrating 50 years of the Cricket club. We also held a celebration event at the start of the season and it was great to see so many former members in attendance. Social events are also important and we held a successful Curry and Quiz in January and a pie and pint night when the 6 nations were taking place. We hope to hold an Olympic themed event in July.

Financial information and plans for the future

Again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank yourselves and Battsford Parish Council and the district councillor for the grants towards the car park. Our next focus is to try and raise funds for solar panels and EV chargers particularly as our electric costs have gone through the roof. We also hope to replace our existing sewage treatment system to make it more environmentally sustainable.

Julia Stephens-Row
BDCC secretary
May 2024