

**Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 14th October at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club**

Present: T Kitson (chair); A Tomlinson (councillor); K Archer (councillor); T Bamber (councillor); H Larsen (councillor); C Ratcliffe (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk); K Oakes (County councillor)

1) Apologies for absence

Cllr Betchley – apology accepted

Cllr J Matthissen (District Councillor) – apology noted

2) Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

Nothing to declare

3) Public Forum

No members of the public attended

4) Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th September

The Minutes for Monday 9th September 2024 was reviewed. It was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

5) Clerk's Report

The Clerk sent out the report prior to the meeting to allow the councillors time to read, no questions were raised (Appendix 1).

6) Chairman's Report

The Chair had sent out his report prior to the meeting. He talked though the Woodlands Farm solar farm public appeal process; no other questions were raised (appendix 2)

7) County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 3)

8) District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 4) but was unable to attend the meeting. Questions were raised regarding the new waste bin process.

Action Point – Clerk to request further information from Cllr Matthiesen

9) Planning Applications received for consideration

- (a) DC/24/03980 Blackberry Annex, Wilbur View – change of use of annex to holiday let
The councillors do not object

10) Finance

(a) Accounts review to date and finance approval

All councillors agreed with both the budget analysis/ variance report and the predicted income/expenditure report

(b) Payments to hand

- (i) Electricity for streetlights - August (direct debit) – £161.42
Approved - Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301
- (ii) Replacement defibrillator battery - £267.00
Approved – Public Health Act 1936, s234
- (iii) Quarterly bank services charges £18.00
Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s111

11) Clerk role

No applications for the post of Parish Clerk had been received by the closing date and therefore it was proposed and agreed that Suzanne Ottewell be offered the position. Councillors were delighted to note that Mrs. Ottewell accepted and Cllr Kitson and she will finalise a contract of employment.

Action point: Cllr Kitson and Clerk to finalise employment contract

12) To review the external audit report

The report was reviewed and accepted by all the councillors and it was agreed that no further action was needed

13) To review the Cricket Club's application for funding for a sewage treatment plant

Battisford Cricket Club have requested £1500 towards the cost of the sewage treatment plant following the upgrading of their toilets and shower facilities. All councillors agreed to accept the request and that payment will be made on commencement of the work.

Action Point – Clerk to write letter to Battisford Cricket Club confirming the Parish Council's support

14) Call for Sites update

Cllr Bamber has drafted a report in preparation of any future action regarding Call for Sites 2024. Councillors were pleased to note that a Combs resident with experience in similar representations has offered his feedback on the most effective ways to negotiate the process

15) To agree whether or not to broach the idea of formulating a Community-led Neighbourhood Plan

This was discussed at great length with councillors weighing up the potential benefits against the significant effort required. Cllr Archer offered to arrange a discussion for councillors with an ex-colleague with direct experience of the matter

Action point – Cllr Archer to arrange talk

16) To agree fixed assets register

The register was reviewed and accepted by all the councillors and agreed it could be signed

17) To consider the purchase of a dog bin by the path running between Park Road and Webb's Close

A local resident has suggested this dog bin and all councillors were in favour.

Action Point: Clerk to investigate costs and the processes with MSDC

18) Community Newsletter – review funding and time commitment

A report breaking down income and expenditure for 2024 and a forecast for 2025 was reviewed by the councillors. They had concerns regarding the organisation of the newsletter and addition funding requested and could not approve, even in principle, that they would continue to support.

Action Point – Cllr Kitson to arrange meeting with Battisford PC, BVHMC and newsletter editor to reach agreement

19) General maintenance of assets – proposal to advertise for handyperson

It was agreed that a handyperson is required for general maintenance around the village and that an advertisement should be place in the next newsletter.

Action Point – Clerk to arrange

20) Correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

No other correspondence to report. November agenda to include replacement batteries for SIDs and the 2025-26 Budget.

Date and time of next meeting: Monday 11th November 2024 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Appendix One

Combs Parish Council Clerk's Report October 2024

Planning Decisions Approved

- a) DC/24/03675 – 14 Combs Green (part of the Little Finborough Parish), garage conversion

The other 3 planning applications discussed at the September meeting are still showing as “awaiting decision”

- a) DC/24/03555 – Walnut Tree Cottage, change thatched roof to tiles

- b) DC/24/03297 – 3 Model Farm, replace rear door c) DC/24/03649 – Fir Tree Farm, Bildeston Road, application for lawful development certificate

Finance

A new savings account was opened with Unity Bank on the 18th September for the purchase of new cemetery land as agreed at the June meeting (minute ref:12). £500 was transferred to open the account.

From September, Unity Bank have changed the service charge fees to be charged at £6 per month instead of £18 per quarter. Under the 1/4ly system, charges were calculated from the 4th of each month but are now being charged per calendar month, therefore September was a short month, and we incurred £5.40 charges. It will be £6 per month from October.

Balance in current account 20478191 as at 30th Sept 2024 - £8,265.76

Balance in savings account 20478201 as at 30th Sept 2024 - £80,179.07 (Inc £549.53 interest rec)

Balance in savings account 20515588 as at 30th Sept 2024 - £500.49 (Incl 0.49p interest rec)

Receipts during September

Mid Suffolk payments – 2nd precept payment £5053.00

Unity Bank Interest on savings accounts £500.49

Cemetery

0 burials took place in September 2024

Appendix Two

Combs Parish Council Chairman's Report October 2024

We were invited to contribute to a Planning Authority survey. The deadline was before our next meeting so I took the decision to complete it myself. It was mostly logistical – what's your process for dealing with planning applications, how many residents attend your meetings, what are your communication channels etc – but I offered the following feedback too:

- Assent to applications seems to rely on the assumption that supporting infrastructure and services will follow increases in residential housing. Said assumption has now been proved to be faulty and attendant policy should be amended to reflect reality.

- It is our experience where developments contain the condition to provide a proportion of affordable housing, said condition is often not subject to enforcement.

The vice chairman and I have been refreshing the positioning of SIDs but have been hampered by one of our three batteries becoming unchargeable. We'll be seeking authorisation to purchase a replacement.

The Clerk and I have accepted invitations to attend a MSDC Town and Parish Liaison meeting on 17th October covering

- An Update on the Devolution Deal
- 2025/26 budgets
- Planning Reform and Neighbourhood Plans
- People and Place / Community Engagement

Councillor Ratcliffe produced an excellent document in support of the Council's representation to the Public Enquiry for the Elgin Energy Solar Farm application. The Clerk submitted said document electronically on Friday 4th October but this transpired to be too late. However, Councillor Bamber and I attended the start of the meeting to plead our case, and the Inspector allowed us to make our representation and answer questions verbally on the proviso that both parties agreed. Our document was formally accepted and officially numbered.

Appendix Three

County Council report – October 2024

Uncertainty looms for 177,000 Suffolk residents currently eligible for winter fuel payments

As many as 177,000 Suffolk residents are currently eligible for winter fuel payments and should be protected from Government plans to cut the allowance, Suffolk County Council has warned.

According to 2023 mid-year population estimates from the ONS, around 177,000 people over the age of 66 in Suffolk are eligible for these crucial payments, leaving them potentially vulnerable if they are withdrawn.

In response, Suffolk County Council's leader, Councillor Matthew Hicks, has written to all the county's MPs - urging them to vote against the proposed changes. The council is particularly concerned that rural areas, like much of Suffolk, will be disproportionately affected due to reliance on expensive oil heating and the added burden of rural deprivation.

Rural homes are statistically less energy efficient compared to urban homes, meaning they require more energy to maintain a healthy temperature. Furthermore, many rural homes are not connected to mains gas, forcing households to rely on more costly heating sources like wood, canister gas, or oil. The price of heating oil has now risen to 66p per litre, a 12p increase since 2020.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“The removal of winter fuel payments will have a devastating impact on many of our residents, particularly those living in rural areas. With homes in these locations often being less energy efficient and lacking access to mains gas, they rely on expensive alternatives like oil and wood. This, combined with the rising cost of heating oil, is putting increased financial pressure on households.

“Winter fuel payments provide a lifeline for many, and we urge Suffolk MPs to vote against any changes that would leave our most vulnerable without this crucial support.”

Energy projects and the wellbeing of communities

Suffolk County Council has produced guidance to help protect the wellbeing of local communities impacted by large Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

The new document - [Community Engagement and Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance](#) - complements the council’s Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy, and is aimed at project promoters, parish councils and local communities.

Research by Suffolk Mind, and the experiences of the county council, show that the wellbeing of residents and communities suffers when NSIPs are proposed in a local area, especially when multiple projects are on the table.

Feelings of fear, mistrust, anger, and frustration are all reported, along with impacted sleep, and inability to plan, due to the uncertainty created by the proposed development.

The new guidance stresses the importance and value for project promoters of an NSIP to collaborate with local communities from the early proposal stages, through to life after construction, to protect the wellbeing of those local communities.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

“So often we see project promoters doing the bare statutory minimum to engage with local communities, through a few local events and consultations.

“This is never enough, and in fact doesn’t do the promoter any favours in the long run. I believe they could often do a far better job working with residents, parish councils and community leaders, throughout the process but particularly following approval if a project is given the go ahead by government.

“An NSIP can cause stress, insecurity and anxiety amongst communities, particular for local community leaders who bear a burden of responsibility, often with little experience of the technicalities and enormity of such complex planning applications.

“A promoter simply informing communities is one thing, but there is a real opportunity to empower them – but promoters need to show a commitment to healthy, continuous engagement, and help local communities to understand their project, feel listened to and feel included in its progress.

“This new guidance won’t stop us standing up to project promoters, fighting for a fair deal for Suffolk and, where necessary, objecting to a scheme. However, if promoters listen to our recommendations, it should markedly improve the experience, and wellbeing, of local communities whether a scheme is approved or refused.”

The cumulative effect of NSIPs has resulted in considerable impacts on the wellbeing of individuals, the overall wellbeing of the community, and has also led to feelings of lost identity.

The document provides a framework for promoters to follow, to help them understand their project’s impact on the wellbeing of local communities, and what they can actively do to mitigate it.

£500 million investment in Suffolk scrapped by Government

Suffolk’s proposed in principle devolution deal, which would bring more than £500 million to the county over 30 years, has been scrapped by the Government.

The additional funding – which would come with new local decision-making powers over areas including housing, transport, adult education and regeneration – is no longer being offered to Suffolk. The deal would mean local people who know, and love Suffolk would be empowered to make more decisions about the county’s future, rather than people in Whitehall.

Key aspects of the deal included:

- Control of a new investment fund worth £480m over the next thirty years
- Local control of the Adult Education Budget each year (worth £9.4m in 2025/26)
- £5.8m one-off funding to prepare brownfield sites for development
- Multi-year transport funding plus an additional £500,000 over two years to finalise Suffolk’s Local Transport Plan
- The leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk – rather than by county councillors.

Most people who responded to an independent survey, run by Ipsos, were in favour of the proposed deal. 63% of people supported or strongly supported it while 7% disagreed. 21% of people were unsure. In a separate but linked poll run by Suffolk County Council, 49% of people who responded supported or strongly supported the deal, whilst 40% did not and 11% were unsure.

Suffolk County Councillors were expected to vote on the deal after the General Election in July.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“This feels like a real slap in the face for Suffolk from a Government that won’t listen to what local people are saying. First, they waved through the Sunnica application, showing little regard for the communities affected. Then, they scrapped the winter fuel payments, which will adversely affect older people living in rural areas. Now, our proposed devolution deal – which has widespread public support – is in the bin.

“Governments of any colour should be pro devolution because councils know how best to serve local people. Local councillors have now been stripped of the opportunity to support or reject the proposed deal which is a sad day for democracy by any measure.”

Council's actions bring hope to local communities despite pylon project approval

Suffolk County Council is confident that details announced in the approval of National Grid's Bramford to Twinstead pylon project, will have significant implications on other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) across the country.

The application was approved on 12 September 2024 by the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Despite objecting to the Bramford to Twinstead pylon application, the county council's influence throughout the process has led to the Secretary of State acknowledging the importance of the role of local authorities - by requiring their approval of National Grid's detailed construction and environmental management plans as part of the process prior to work starting.

Following points made by the county council during the examination process, the Secretary of State has agreed that National Grid should not wield so much control over the delivery of the project, recognising instead that local authorities are integral to the proper and fair delivery of NSIPs.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"Whilst not a perfect proposal, and one which the council did feel the need object to, I'm pleased with this council's influence in setting some precedents for future infrastructure projects.

"The recognition of the role of this council, and others like us, sends a strong message to National Grid and other project promoters, that they cannot just do as they wish.

"My hope is that other projects sit up and take note – protecting local communities is of paramount importance, something we continually fight for."

The county council had formally objected to the application, concluding that National Grid had failed to adequately safeguard Suffolk's environment and communities affected by the scheme. It felt that proposals did not go far enough to mitigate the impact of the scheme, and that supervision of construction would be inadequate.

There were disappointments in the approval decision, such as working hours to include weekends and bank holidays. However, certain locations will be exempt from these hours, which is encouraging for other communities where NSIPs are yet to be approved.

Cllr Rout continues:

"Although we would still prefer to see better mitigations with this project, I feel this is a step in the right direction and hopefully sees an end to project promoters thinking they can have a free-for-all approach and ignore local authorities.

"With such a barrage of projects from solar farms to pylons, substations to interconnectors, all wanting a piece of Suffolk, it is our duty to stand with our communities to protect our residents, businesses and our historic, beautiful and environmentally rich county."

The project will see 18 km of overhead lines and around 11 km of underground cable through the Dedham Vale National Landscape and in the Stour Valley.

Suffolk County Council launches £500,000 Culture Project Fund to Boost cultural activity across the county

Suffolk County Council is pleased to announce the launch of its new £500,000 Culture Project Fund. This initiative is aimed at strengthening and supporting local arts and museum projects in our local communities across the county.

This fund's goal is to improve the cultural landscape in Suffolk, benefiting communities through diverse and impactful initiatives that align with the council's key priorities: health and wellbeing, economic development, environmental protection, and value for money.

The fund offers three tiers of grants:

Small grants up to £1,500

Medium grants up to £15,000

Large grants up to £50,000

This inclusive approach ensures that both grassroots ventures and larger, more established organisations have equal opportunities to access funding. Eligible applicants include Arts and Museum organisations, skilled freelancers, registered charities, community interest companies, non-profits, and social enterprises based in Suffolk.

The fund supports both capital and revenue projects, with a maximum of £25,000 available for capital expenditure.

The culture project fund will support projects that have been designed to reach, engage and inspire people and communities to take part in and enjoy arts and museums. The fund is particularly to support projects that reach some of our most vulnerable people and communities with an application process that is streamlined and accessible. This includes activities designed for those on low incomes, isolated individuals, and marginalised groups, the fund aims to support projects that enhance both mental and physical health, creating resilience and improving overall wellbeing through inclusive and accessible activities.

Furthermore, the fund aims to strengthen Suffolk's economy by supporting projects that enhance skills development, promote social enterprises, and attract visitors. By focusing on these areas, the Council seeks to foster a thriving cultural sector that contributes to the county's growth.

Key Dates:

Fund opens for applications: Monday 23 September 2024

Medium and Large grant applications deadline: Friday 29 November 2024

Medium and Large grants awarded by: Friday 14 February 2025

Small grant presentations: Monday 17 March, Monday 14 July, and Monday 15 September 2025.

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward - October 24

Comprehensive Recycling	The scheme required by government is moving forward with decisions on how it will be structured and developed in Suffolk towards a launch date of April 2026. Key point is that food waste will be collected every week. Each household will receive a food waste bin for collection as well as a caddy to use in the kitchen. Also twin-stream recycling so each household will have 2 recycling bins (one for card and paper, the other for plastic, glass and cartons. This will reduce the residual waste for the black bins which will be emptied every three weeks. This approach has been successful in raising recycling rates in other parts of the country. Issues such as nappies, exceptional medical needs and dog waste are being addressed.
Housing Target Numbers	Although the new target housing numbers are yet to be finalized, they should not present an immediate problem for the district council. This is because we already had a 10-year housing land supply which would be reduced to roughly 7 years if the new target is applied. In addition we are currently seeing more than the new target being built so our delivery is also adequate.
New Bus Services	The supplementary public transport options from the District Council are already beginning to operate and there will be a formal launch of the Taxibus service on October 29th at the John Peel Centre in Stowmarket. This is a drop-in session between 1pm and 6pm. The number for booking and inquiries is 01449 866 866 . The scheduled services will operate circular routes from Stowmarket station, hourly in alternate directions between 7am and 7pm. Fuller information should be available shortly at https://www.suffolktaxibus.com Our communities will also be able to use the Rural Connect service which will be launching on November 2 nd . bookings@communitiestogether-ea.org 01449 614271
Respond, Enforce and Clean Team	Stowmarket is benefitting from additional funds for capital projects and a Ranger scheme to make the town cleaner, tidier and smarter. Alongside this there will be a new 'React' team to tackle local problems across the rural areas.
Annual Governance Statement	This describes in considerable detail how the council is run and the version for 2023/2024 has just been approved. It should shortly be on the council website and I will circulate a link when available.
Shaping our Economic Strategy	BMSDC officers have been hosting a series of economic development workshops across the district. They are seeking the expertise and insights of key local stakeholders including business leaders, council partners, voluntary services, policymakers, academics and beyond to help develop our forward-thinking economic strategy. Contributions via a survey can still be made via : Complete the survey online.

Locality Budget	The application process is open, so I would welcome applications from any community group. Do get in touch with me to discuss options. Information and application forms are available on the website. https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards
Landline Phones are changing next year	You may need to change your care alarm, security alarm or fax machine Certain devices people use at home, such as care alarms, security alarms and fax machines may also be connected you your landline. If you have a device like this, it might need to be replaced or reconfigured to continue working once you move to a digital (VoIP) service. When you migrate to a VoIP service, your provider should tell you what you need to do if you have one of these devices. This will include informing your alarm provider so they can make the necessary changes or tell you if your alarm will work with your new VoIP service. Information: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/landline-phones/future-of-landline-calls/ or Ofcom 0300 123 3333
Stowmarket Cycle Map	Newer residents may be unaware of how best to get around Stowmarket and its nearby villages by bicycle. There is a map to download at https://www.suffolkonboard.com/ways-to-travel/cycle/cycle-town-maps/stowmarket/ and I also have some paper copies available on request. Both District and Government are making funds available to improve and extend cycling and walking routes.

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