

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 11th November at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

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

1) Apologies for absence

Cllr Archer – apology accepted

2) Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

Cllr Kitson – item 10.b.iv (reimbursement of poppy wreath payment)

3) Public Forum

No members of the public attended

4) Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th September

The Minutes for Monday 14th October 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) Action Points review

The Clerk reported that she was not receiving any response regarding evidence of the three streetlights in Tannery Road no longer working but will chase up again this week.

Action Point – Clerk to contact Npower and electric contractors

7) Chairman's Report

The Chair had sent out his report prior to the meeting. No questions were raised (Appendix 2).

8) County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent in the report prior to the meeting. It was emphasized that the interest free loan to improve household energy efficiency was available to all residents and is not means tested. (Appendix 3)

Although not part of the report, Cllr Oakes was asked about the reporting of broken footpath signs and graffiti on a road sign. All have been reported to highways but there has been no response to date. County Cllr Oakes to investigate current status

Action point - Cllr Bamber to provide Cllr Oakes with the reporting references for the broken footpath signs

Action point - Cllr Larsen to provide Cllr Oakes with the reporting reference for the graffiti on the road sign

9) District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 4)

Cllr Matthissen was asked if he had any further clarity information regarding the new waste bin process due to commence in April 2026 but at present no further information is available.

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.

A discussion followed regarding using some of the available funds to improve facilities including the cemetery, various benches, signage and the triangle at Park Road, Bildeston Road, Mill Lane. This will be discussed further in the December meeting.

Abderson

Action Point – Cllr Betchley to check condition of benches; to send photo of triangle to Cllr Oakes to ascertain whether this is Highways responsibility; send photo of concealed road name sign in Park Road at Tannery Corner to Cllr Oakes to inquire about maintenance.

Action Point – Cllr Kitson to speak to the Gardening Club about potentially improving the area by the village sign

(b) Payments to hand

(i) Electricity for streetlights – September (direct debit) – £173.69
Approved – Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301

(ii) Grass cutting at cemetery & wildlife area Sept & Oct - £925.00
Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s.24

(iii) Monthly bank services charges - £6.00
Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s.111

iv) Remembrance Day poppy wreath - £29.49
Approved – War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923 s.1).

11) To agree 2025 meeting dates

The Clerk produced a list of all the dates for the 2025 Parish Council meetings, including the Annual Parish meeting in May 2025. None of the dates coincided with any bank holiday so it was agreed by all the councillors.

Action point: Clerk to advise Battisford Cricket of the dates to confirm availability to hold meetings there.

12) To agree how to proceed with 2025 – 2026 budget

The Clerk confirmed that work has already commenced on reviewing the budget. It was agreed that she would continue with the draft, it would be reviewed by the Finance Committee on the 25th November and presented to all councillors at the December meeting to consider approval.

Action Point – Clerk to prepare draft budget

Action Point – Finance Committee to meet to review draft budget

13) To consider the purchase of replacement batteries for SIDs

It was agreed to purchase two new batteries for the SIDs and an additional battery charger, with an agreed total value of £200.

Action Point – Clerk to check prices and purchase

14) Community Newsletter – review funding

It was agreed by all the councillors that the Community Newsletter should continue being produced through 2025 under the management of the editor. A meeting is being arranged to discuss after Battisford PC's November meeting.

Action Point – Cllr Kitson to agree meeting date between Combs PC, Battisford PC, BVHMC and newsletter editor

15) Correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

No other correspondence to report. December agenda to include Oaks Meadow, CIL expenditure and 2025-26 budget review.

Meeting closed at 20:46

Date and time of next meeting: Monday 9th December at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club



APPENDIX ONE

Clerk’s Report November 2024

Planning Decisions Approved

- a) DC/24/03297 – 3 Model Farm, replace rear door

The other 2 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/24/03649 – Fir Tree Farm, Bildeston Road, application for lawful development certificate

Finance

Balances as at 31 st October	
Current account	£4,310.14
General savings account	£94,979.07
Cemetery savings account	£500.49

Receipts during September

Mid Suffolk payments – CIL	£11,290.47
----------------------------	------------

Cemetery

0 burials took place in October 2024, 1 has so far been booked for November 2024

Newsletter

The November issue of the newsletter has now been finished and hopefully now all have been distributed. The next one is hopefully due out in March 2025, depending on agreement by all involved. To be discussed at meeting.

APPENDIX TWO

Chairman’s Report November 2024

- We were sent further documents pertaining to the Woodlands Farm solar panel array application in Badley. These covered clarifications pertaining to Historic Landscape Characterisation and Heritage Mitigation Enhancement in the development footprint. Councillors Bamber and Ratcliffe and I decided not to pursue further representations given that our primary focus was the impact to Combs Wood and this was not covered by the clarifications.
- The Clerk and I attended an MSDC Town and Parish Council Liaison Meeting on 17th October at Elmswell. Highlights were as follows:
 - Devolution

- The new government doesn't think that a single county is a large enough economic unit for devolution
- It requires separation of the role of Mayor from local government
- Whilst the situation is vague a 'Devolution Framework' is being written
- The thinking is that a Suffolk/Norfolk model would be acceptable
- 2025/2026 Budgets
 - The 2025/26 budget predicts a £3.3m surplus
 - 2026/27 and 2027/28 budgets predict deficits of £870k and £1.7m respectively – but this is without figures for central government grants
 - MSDC has £1.5m in financial resilience reserves
 - They are forecasting £43m earmarked reserves, including a £20m dividend from Gateway 14
 - Risks and Assumptions
 - Pay award of 3% in 25/26
 - Rollover of government grants
 - No increase in council tax
 - Loss of grants and business rates income of £2.2m (but again only because these have not been declared/settled)
- Planning
 - There are various reforms of the planning system under way, including revisions to the NPPF
 - The focuses are on affordable housing and infrastructure delivery
 - This includes electricity grid connections
 - Housing targets are increasing from 535 to 753 per annum in the MSDC footprint
 - Priority is brownfield over greenfield (although there is very little brownfield and no green- or greyfield in Suffolk) and the definition will now include glasshouses and hardstanding
 - The 'tilted balance' has swung towards supply of land over other considerations and there is a presumption in favour of development
 - Infrastructure Levy has been removed from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act
 - But CIL remains
 - Arguments against traffic congestion will carry less weight – objections would need to demonstrate that the impact would be 'severe' . . .
 - The focus will be on affordable, well-designed homes
 - Maximising support from social rent
 - 'Right to Buy' will be reviewed
 - Attendees were highly skeptical that the market will provide the extra housing as increasing supply lowers cost which is against developers' interests
- Neighbourhood Plans
 - Brief advice
 - Must be realistic
 - They must not be defensive or they will be overruled
 - For example, saying '100 houses in these locations . . .' will carry force; '10 houses and that's that' does not.
 - People and Place Plans
 - Light touch approach being piloted
 - Also referred to as Neighbourhood Priorities
 - Not fully formalised yet by government

- Planning Authorities must take them into account but they don't carry the same weight as Neighbourhood Plans
- A toolkit is available
- I wrote out to members of the Newsletter Committee and to the Battisford PC Chairman to (a) make sure the 'Christmas' version would be published and (b) to explore a future management and funding model. The replies were positive and we can discuss options in our monthly meeting.
- I have received permission (and thanks) for councillors to attend the Service of Remembrance at St Mary's on 10th November and to lay a wreath on behalf of residents.

APPENDIX THREE

County Council report – November 2024

Government's new housing targets must put infrastructure first

Suffolk County Council has raised concerns in its response to the government's proposed reforms for planning policies for England.

It expresses fears about the lack of clarity around infrastructure, such as schools, transport, waste and community facilities when new housing developments are approved.

The proposals include a significant increase in the number of new homes to be built across Suffolk – the government's own figures suggest that East Suffolk alone would see an 87% increase in the number new homes, compared to those currently planned.

Suffolk County Council is already very active in securing developer contributions and delivering infrastructure. It secures Section 106 contributions as well as funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy from district councils - but this is to maintain a baseline level of service rather than make a positive overall improvement to infrastructure.

In its response to government, the council said that the simple question of "who pays" for the infrastructure needs to be answered when permissions are being granted. Local planning authorities should not be allowed to assume that other authorities and agencies will make up any difference.

Suffolk launches pothole prevention programme ahead of winter weather

Suffolk County Council has launched a pothole prevention programme to target areas of Suffolk's Road network that could worsen when the winter weather hits.

Teams with additional resources and the latest technology have already started visiting and treating locations susceptible to deterioration or where there are smaller defects that could grow as the colder and wetter weather strikes.

Building on the success of earlier trials with the Roadmender Elastomac and Dragon Patcher machines, teams will be deployed across Suffolk to use this equipment in addition to our usual Safety Defect Service that deals with larger defects as they occur.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Cold and wet weather often wreaks havoc with our roads, which is why we have taken proactive steps and developed a targeted campaign to tackle and provide resilience to our road network ahead of this winter.

"This week we launched an additional programme of repairs in areas which pose a higher risk of potholes forming during the winter months. The aim of the programme is to treat areas of Suffolk's roads earlier with the goal of reducing the number of more substantial defects that may cause safety concerns to road users throughout the winter.

"These plans have been carefully worked up over recent months to ensure we can get ahead of pothole repairs between now and December prior to the drop in temperatures, mostly in January, February and March, where the largest number of potholes form. I look forward to sharing progress with residents."

Highways workers using the Roadmender Elastomac system will target urban roads that are at higher risk of damage to locate cracks and smaller potholes and carry out repairs. Unlike traditional methods, which require potholes to be saw-cut, excavated and asphalt to be compacted on top, Elastomac is a flowable material used to seal the repaired area.

Once applied, this adhesive, flexible material bonds with the existing road surface, preventing water getting in the cracks and extending the road's lifespan. The process is more sustainable and efficient, reducing material movement and waste by 90%, lowering costs and minimising disruption.

The Dragon Patcher machines clean the surface of the road using compressed air, preparing it for repair with an application of aggregate and hot bitumen material, and will target rural roads.

Fuelled by biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use, generates zero waste, and has demonstrated significant carbon savings compared to traditional patching techniques.

The locations have been carefully chosen, focusing on areas with a higher risk of potholes forming during winter. Highways teams will be working when weather conditions allow, from 7am to 5pm, moving across the county to treat the more vulnerable areas. Whilst the repairs are underway, traffic will be managed temporarily by staff on site, and there may be waiting times of up to 15 minutes.

Council to offer interest-free loans to make homes more energy efficient

Suffolk County Council will offer interest-free loans to help make residents' homes warmer, safer and cheaper to run.

Energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps will all be possible with loans of up to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of 7 years at 0% interest.

Making homes more energy-efficient helps retain their heat and use less energy, meaning homeowners can save on their energy bills and reduce their carbon emissions. A warm home also has a positive impact on health and well-being.

Money for the loans comes from £3 million of funding received as part of the council's negotiations with the previous government to secure a County Deal.

It was allocated from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support an energy efficiency and energy generation 0% loan fund for people that cannot access grants currently available to low-income households.

The scheme supports Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan, by increasing the number of properties which have energy-efficient and low carbon energy measures installed.

An increase in demand for energy efficiency measures will also help support businesses providing those services, meaning jobs, skills development and investment in the green economy.

Suffolk County Council is partnering with Lendology CIC to deliver the interest-free loan scheme. Lendology CIC is an experienced Social Enterprise Lender, managing similar schemes with councils across the country.

For more information and to register your interest in an interest-free loan, visit:www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan

Suffolk County Council set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work.

- Council set to agree £1.5 million to deliver first phase of works identified in initial flood investigation reports
- Authority calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed
- Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs.

The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap.

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

1. Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
2. Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.

3. Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
4. Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Since Storm Babet, our teams have been working hard to repair the damage it caused, investigate what happened and to help reduce the flood risk in future. This preventative work is complex, costly and requires lots of agencies to work together.

"Despite limited resources and budgetary challenges facing all county councils, we have managed to find extra money to tackle flooding and propose investing a further £1.5 million to deliver work identified in our investigations. However, this isn't enough and - so steep is the challenge facing areas like Suffolk, who were hit hard by Storm Babet - the government must act and provide extra funding. This is why we've written to the flooding minister asking for additional money. The government needs to step up to the plate and help us ensure Suffolk's residents don't face uncertainty when these extreme weather events occur.

"I saw firsthand how devastating the impact of Storm Babet was for many families and businesses across Suffolk. The finished flood investigation reports give us a clear understanding of what work needs to be done and at what cost. It is right that we continue to increase our resources appropriately, but unless the government acts too we will not be able to go as far as our residents deserve."

Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month's worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response.

So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet.

Suffolk County Council has made several achievements as part of our continued commitment to reduce flood risk.

The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk's highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.

The council has completed seven location-based flood investigations, with an estimated 50 to complete. This compares to an average of three or four investigations in an average year. These reports provide a detailed account of events for each flooding location and recommendations for other organisations, landowners, businesses and residents.

Carried out extensive works on Suffolk's highways. Specifically:

- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees

The new money is set to be agreed by the council's Cabinet on 5 November.

Loft Insulation Offer gives Suffolk residents 50% off eco-friendly insulation

According to The Energy Saving Trust, an uninsulated home loses up to a quarter of its heat through its roof.

An effective way to reduce this heat loss, and your heating bills, is to insulate your loft.

For the second year running, Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders have provided funding to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills.

The Suffolk Loft Insulation Offer enables homeowners in Suffolk to receive a 50% discount (up to £200) and free delivery on orders of 200mm or 370mm wide eco-friendly, itch free thermal insulation rolls from High Loft, the UK's leading eco loft insulation brand.

Last year, the project enabled over 5,000m² of roofs in Suffolk to be insulated. This year, the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership want to double that figure. The offer is open to anyone in Suffolk and will only close once the allocated funding has been spent. Simply go to highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolk-council-200-loft-insulation-contribution and fill in the form to receive your discount code.

The Loft Insulation Offer is being funded by Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders and High Loft and will help contribute to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan and our vision for a net zero Suffolk. To find out more visit <http://www.greensuffolk.org/>

APPENDIX FOUR

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward - November 2024

New bus service	This innovative new transport service, 'The Mid Suffolk Taxi Bus', has now launched and is being delivered by Swift Taxi Cabs, with funding from a Mid Suffolk District Council Rural Transport Grant. The 'Stowmarket Circular services via Thurston' runs on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, three times a day, calling at Finborough Chestnut Horse, as well as several other local villages including Elmswell, Rattlesden, and Haughley. The 'Stowmarket Circular services via Bacton runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday, three times a day, calling at Onehouse and Harleston. These two routes have launched on November 1st and will be followed by a route serving Combs And little Finborough. Routes and times will be modified in light of demand, so checking ahead is essential. More information on times,
-----------------	--

	routes, prices, and pick-up points, can be found online at suffolktaxibus.com. Seats are bookable via the website or call 01449 866 866.
Council meeting	A full council meeting was due to take place on the 31st October, however it was cancelled due to agenda items being deferred to later meetings. The next meeting is due to take place on the 21st November. The Green group pressed a couple of years ago for additional meetings to be put in the diary in case of urgent business, and this has sometimes proved useful. As with planning meetings, cancellations are a normal part of this approach.
Living Well in Winter Grant	The annual Living Well in Winter grant application window closes 8th November. One grant of up to £2000 is allowed per parish. Eligible projects include after school clubs, provision of warm or social spaces, lunch/supper clubs etc. More information via the MSDC website.
Empty Homes Renovation Loan	Mid Suffolk's 'Empty Homes Renovation Loan' scheme remains open for applications via the website. It can provide an interest free loan of up to £20,000 to bring homes back into use. Applications can be made by the owner of a property that must have been empty for more than six months and is in need of renovation work to return it to a habitable state. Repairs include, for example, damp proofing, provision of sanitary facilities, re-roofing, and repair or replacement of windows and doors. The scheme is designed to help owners of empty properties return them to use and make them available for renting – thereby helping to reduce the level of empty homes in the area and provide more, much-needed affordable homes for rent.
Stowmarket Town Centre revitalisation	At October's cabinet meeting, funding was agreed for a list of new measures to help revitalise Stowmarket Town Centre, funded from profits from Gateway 14. Measures discussed included a £400k grant scheme to assist with existing retailers, £100k to increase sustainability from the Wayfinding project, and £16k for investigating overnight accommodation within the town.
Locality Budgets 2024/25	Reminder that I am still welcoming Locality Budget applications from local community groups. Do get in touch to discuss options. Information and application forms are available on the website: https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards
Fees and Charges updates	Updates to Fees and Charges across the district were approved at the November cabinet meeting and will take effect on 1st April 2025. A full list of alterations is available on the council's website.

Councillor John Matthissen

07976 308128

councillor@matthissen.net