

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 9th December 2024 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) J Matthissen (District councillor)

1) Apologies for absence

Cllr Betchley – apology accepted

2) Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

None

3) Public Forum

No members of the public attended

4) Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th September

The Minutes for Monday 11th November 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. It was agreed by the councillors that both defibrillators be marked with their location postcode as suggested. No other questions were raised (Appendix 1).

Action Point – Clerk to arrange for both defibrillators to be marked with location postcode

6) Action Points review

The Clerk reported that she had contacted the electrical contractors again regarding the streetlight in Tannery Road.

Cllr Betchley had checked all the benches, and it was agreed that two required more urgent repairs/maintenance.

It was noted that a meeting had been arranged for the 17th December to discuss continuing the publication of the newsletter

Action Point – Clerk to chase NPower and electric contractors

Action Point – Clerk to find person to refurbish the two benches

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. (Appendix 3)

9) District Councillor's Report

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

10) Planning application

DC/24/05078 The Maples, Little London, Combs, Stowmarket - erection of single storey rear extension

Councillors have no objection to this application

11) 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 - October (Nov direct debit) – £188.61

Approved, paid by direct debit - Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301

(ii) Grass cutting at cemetery & clipping of hedges Nov 24 - £600.00



Approved, to be paid by BACS – Local Government Act 1972, s.24

(iii) Replacement Defibrillator pads - £285.84

Approved, to be paid by BACS – Public Health Act 1936 s.234

(iv) SID batteries and charger – 294.00

Approved, already paid 15th November 2024 – Highways Act 1980 s.274a

(v) Web hosting annual fee - £42.00

Approved, to be paid by BACS - Local Government Act 1972, s142

(vi) Monthly bank services charges - £6.00

Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s111

12) To consider how to proceed with the Neighbourhood Plan project

A discussion was held regarding if and how to proceed with the neighbourhood plan project. All councillors were in favor of exploring this further and it was agreed that everyone would look at Beyton's plan, being of a comparable size to Combs, and share their thoughts and views. A report outlining the plan is to be included with the March newsletter introducing the idea to Combs' residents and asking for feedback. A public meeting would be arranged for March or April to present the idea to residents, allowing them to ask further questions.

Action Point – All Cllrs to read Beyton's neighbourhood plan

13) To consider the make-up of the Council from May 2025

Cllr Kitson announced that he planned to step down as Chairman in May 2025. He suggested the other Cllr's consider the role to decide whether they would be interested in being nominated in May. They could speak to either the clerk, the chairman or the vice-chair for more information if needed.

Cllr Bamber confirmed he would be happy to stand again as vice-chair but didn't want to be considered for the chairman role.

14) To review and agree the 2025 – 2026 draft budget

Cllr Tomlinson reported that the finance committee had met to agree a draft budget and precept for the year commencing April 2025. The meeting had been very productive, and it had been agreed that the draft budget (attached as appendix 5), showing a total expenditure of £23,512 be proposed to the formal meeting. The additional expenditure covering cemetery grounds maintenance and Neighbourhood Plan set-up costs would reduce the surplus in the current year finances as there is no plan to increase the precept.

The district council has provided provisional details of the tax base for the year, and on this basis the precept was proposed to be £10,106, the same as for the current year for a band D property. Tax base to be confirmed by MSDC in January 2025.

The draft budget was circulated to all councillors prior to the meeting for their review and it was approved by all.

Action Point – Clerk to add to January's agenda for Cllrs to agree precept level

15) To agree to transfer any burial ground income exceeding the budgeted figure into the land purchase reserves account at the end of each financial year

This was agreed by all councillors

16) To consider the possibility of installing a cemetery tap and agree the next steps

Cllr Bamber reported that he had received costings back from Anglian Water regarding the suggested tap in the cemetery.

There will be additional costs including that of a tradesperson to supply and install the appropriate tap and pipework to join the mains. Cllr Bamber agreed to investigate further

Action Point – Cllr Bamber to seek quotes on additional work required

17) To consider purchase of new dog bin (prices now obtained)



The clerk had obtained permission from Mid-Suffolk Council to install a new dog waste bin on Park Road at the entrance to the footpath opposite Model Farm. She also received prices for purchasing the bin and fixings. The councillors all agreed to the purchases and Cllr Ratcliffe offered his help with the fitting.

Action Point – The Clerk to purchase bin and fixings. Clerk and Cllr Ratcliffe to arrange installation.

18) To consider the purchase of new battery charger for SIDs

At the November meeting it had been agreed to purchase 2 new batteries for the SIDs. When placing the order, it was also noted that a new charger would also be beneficial. After speaking to the Chairman, the clerk included in the order to save on the additional postage and packaging. This was decision was supported and agreed by all the councillors.

19) To consider the purchase of a laminator

It was proposed by Cllr Kitson that a laminator be purchased as the parish council have also relied on borrowing one in the past. This was supported by all the Cllrs

Action Point – Clerk to purchase laminator and sleeves (top spend £100)

20) To consider replacing the lock in the bus shelter noticeboard

It had been noted that the notice board in the bus shelter had a faulty lock, Cllr Ratcliffe offered to have a look at it and either repair or replace it.

Action Point - Cllr Ratcliff to repair/replace lock

21) Correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

The clerk reported that she had received email correspondence regarding the maintenance of the old cemetery which needed tidying – this is being suggested to the garden maintenance contractors.

Correspondence has also been received from Oaks Meadow regarding AGM and possibility the upgrading of playground area. January agenda to include Oaks Meadow, Neighbourhood Plan, Precept/Budget and Newsletter update

Date and time of next meeting: Monday 13th January 2025 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Meeting closed at 21:05



APPENDIX 1

Clerk’s Report December 2024

Planning Decisions Approved

None

Planning Decisions Awaiting Decision

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

Finance

Balances as at 30th November 2024

Current account	£3,697.04
General savings account	£94,179.07
Cemetery savings account	£500.49

Receipts during September

Donation for old cemetery gate	£30.00
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Cemetery

1 burial took place in November 2024, and 1 has so far been booked for December 2024

Defibrillators

It came to our attention that the pads in both defibrillators expired at the end of November 2024. Replacements were ordered on the 18th November and have since been fitted. The invoice for £294.00 needs to be approved by the councillors for payment.

I attended an online training course on the 26th November (FOC!) It was quite informative but mainly concerned with purchasing defibrillators. It did cover checking and maintaining which was useful as apparently 30% are not "rescue ready".

One interesting suggestion I picked up was to mark the defibrillator with the Parish name and/or postcode in case the paramedics ever take it away with the patient. It can then easily be identified and returned by the hospital.

APPENDIX 2

Chairman's Report December 2024

- Councillors Bamber, Tomlinson, Ratcliffe, Archer and Kitson and the Clerk attended an interesting and informative presentation on Neighbourhood Planning by Mr Rod Gibson of Kesgrave Town Council. Thank you to Councillor Archer for arranging and hosting.
- The chairman subsequently prepared a brief including suggested next steps in helping the council to decide whether to proceed further. This will be discussed at our meeting on 9th December.
- The finance subcommittee (Councillors Bamber, Tomlinson, Kitson and the Clerk) met on Monday 25th November to fine tune a draft of the budget for FY 2025-26 prepared by the Clerk. Thank you to Councillor Tomlinson for hosting us.
- A meeting to discuss the ongoing management and funding of the Newsletter has been arranged for 17th December. Councillor Kitson will attend to represent the Council. The Clerk will also attend in her capacity as Editor.

APPENDIX 3

County Council report – December 2024

Have your say on council budget

The council has launched an online consultation to explain its current financial position and give Suffolk residents an opportunity to share their views on proposed Council Tax changes and spending priorities.

The consultation offers an opportunity to understand how the council manages its finances, the cost-saving measures already in place, and how the council might generate more money to support essential services.

The council can increase its budget in two main ways: by receiving more funding from the government or by increasing Council Tax.

The consultation asks residents for feedback on which council services they have used recently, whether they support increasing Council Tax contributions, and which areas they would like to see prioritised in the council's budget-setting process.

Responses to the consultation will be considered alongside feedback from businesses, public sector partners and elected members, as well as advice from council officers, as it prepares next year's budget.

The consultation closes on Monday 16th December 2024. To participate, visit www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/2025_26_budget

The results of the consultation will be included in a final report when the budget is set in February 2025.

Council's Warm Homes Suffolk Loans now available

Suffolk County Council is offering 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 are possible with loans from £2,000 to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of seven years – at 0% interest.

The £3 million project fully opened to homeowners across Suffolk on **1 November 2024**, and applications can now be made at <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-homes-suffolk-loan/>

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 apply for in an interest-free loan, visit <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-homes-suffolk-loan/>

Council making net zero gains, but still work to do

Suffolk County Council continues to bring down its carbon emissions, with significant reductions from council-owned street lighting, vehicles and buildings, but there is still work to do to reach its ambitious target of net zero by 2030.

A new report reviews progress since the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019. The reports finds that emissions across the areas within the council's direct control, such as energy consumption in council buildings and vehicles (categorised as Scope 1 & 2 emissions), have fallen by a further 8% over the past year, contributing to a 43% drop since 2019. When taking account of the council's switch to a renewable electricity tariff, this becomes a 75% reduction.

However, when calculating its overall net zero progress, the council also reports on many emissions where it has influence but less direct control. These are known as Scope 3 emissions. These include things like home to school transport, home-working, and staff commuting and travel for work in their own vehicles.

These make up 65% of the council's reported emissions, which the council is currently projecting will reduce by 48% by 2030m showing the scale of the remaining challenge.

Since 2019, when it declared a climate emergency, the council's carbon reduction successes include:

- Street and traffic lights down by 57%
- Diesel and petrol vehicles down by 50%
- Gas and oil use in buildings down by 37%
- Staff commuting down by 30%
- Electricity use in buildings down by 25%

Nationally, the council is making impressive strides with its own estate, standing out as one of the three leading county councils in England for reductions on Scope 1 & 2 emissions, according to analysis of published reports.

Suffolk's new gritting fleet to keep county safe and moving during the colder weather
With temperatures forecast to drop, Suffolk's new gritting fleet will commence its winter season shortly, treating thousands of miles of roads to help minimise risk for highways users.

During the warmer autumn months, highway teams have been carefully planning for the winter gritting operations, preparing for the potential snow and ice that winter will bring.

In total, there are 36 gritters ready for action, with two additional spare vehicles available to be deployed to any location, if needed.

The new fleet is equipped with advanced digital systems and the latest route planning software to support winter maintenance drivers and enable them to grit their routes efficiently and effectively.

All gritters in the fleet use hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which reduces carbon dioxide emissions by around 90%, supporting Suffolk County Council's continued commitment to protect and enhance our environment.

During the last winter season, Suffolk used around 7,822 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 198,594km/123,400 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth five times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 21,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any drop in temperature.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations.

There are also 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network. This includes other bus routes where the service level is 5 days a week in the school term, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools.

P1 treatments are considered when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C, whilst P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions.

Further details of which roads are gritted can be found on [one.network](#), by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

All gritting decisions are based on forecast road surface temperatures, not air temperature, as the road surface temperature is often cooler and reflects the true risk to highway users. The timing and amount of salt we use considers factors such as traffic levels, wind and rain.

During the lead up to the winter season, our teams also dedicate their time to refilling grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. To date, we have filled over 50% of the total grit bins and will conclude the remaining refills over the next few weeks ahead of the commencement of the core winter season.

Suffolk Highways fills grit bins that are approved and owned by [parish and town councils](#), however, to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and request grit refills via [the reporting tool](#). Suffolk Highways do not fill private grit bins.

Suffolk's residents are requested to support us, as well as emergency services throughout the year, by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Drivers are reminded to always drive to the conditions; although the gritting teams have treated the roads, this doesn't mean they are completely risk-free.

Those wishing to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, should follow Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook, to keep updated of our teams' movements this winter season. Safety messages will also be issued during spells of cold and wet weather.

More information on gritting can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/check-which-roads-are-gritted.

Department for Education welcomes SEND improvements and evidence of impact, but recognises challenges

The Department for Education (DfE) met with senior leaders from Suffolk County Council and the NHS to review the impact of wide-ranging improvement plans for special educational needs and disabilities services (SEND).

Following the meeting, a letter was sent from the DfE outlining the extent of progress made within SEND services across Suffolk over the past six months.

In summary, it 'welcomes the improvements and the evidence of impact' and recognises 'the considerable challenges that remain to reach the required targets'.

Home Energy Efficiency Assessment Voucher Scheme in Suffolk

The Suffolk Retrofit Assessment Voucher Scheme launches, a pioneering initiative aimed at promoting energy efficiency and sustainability in homes across the county.

Homeowners in Suffolk will be able to apply for a voucher that covers the cost of a professional retrofit assessment on their home property. These assessments are the first step towards making their home more energy-efficient, lowering their energy bills and reducing their carbon footprints.

The retrofitting of all homes to EPC band C (or above) by 2035 is a stepping stone on the journey to achieving national net zero targets by 2050. Retrofit refers to any improvement work on an existing building to improve its energy efficiency.

Funded by Suffolk's Public Sector Organisations and delivered by public services provider Reed in Partnership in support of Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan, the scheme will play a significant role in providing support, direction, and incentives for private homeowners to decarbonise their homes.

Residents who own a home with an EPC band of below C can take up the offer of a voucher to claim an assessment from a PAS 2035 Retrofit Assessor who will identify the best measures that could be deployed in their home to improve energy efficiency.

Such measures may include, for example, insulation, draft proofing, ventilation repairs, low carbon heating and energy generation (solar panels). The report will also incorporate analysis of the cost vs benefit of implementing the suggested improvements.

The voucher will entitle them to a cost-free assessment if the size of their property is smaller than 98m², with a maximum additional charge of just £30 for properties bigger than this.

Homeowners can check to see if their property has an existing Energy Certificate with an EPC band and record of their property size at gov.uk/find-energy-certificate.

There is no obligation to take up the recommendations of the retrofit assessment report, but a new Council loan will provide up to £15,000 at 0% interest to those interested in making efficiency upgrades.

The scheme will make available 637 assessments over an 18-month period, on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Key Features of the Scheme:

- **No/low cost:** No cost for homes under 98m². The scheme is funded by Suffolk councils – the most you will pay for a home bigger than 98m² is £30 for an assessment typically valued at over £250
- **No obligations:** There is no requirement to take forward any recommended work. However, an [interest free loan scheme](#) is available to help with energy efficient upgrades, for example insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing or heat pumps
- **Expert insights:** Detailed recommendations tailored specifically to the property being assessed
- **Trustworthy:** Funded by Suffolk councils and in partnership with Retrofit Coordination, a PAS 2035 accredited retrofit assessor and coordinator

Energy Savings Statistics:

- **Insulation:** Proper insulation can reduce heating costs by up to 40%
- **Efficient Appliances:** Switching to energy-efficient appliances can save households up to 30% on their energy bills
- **Overall Savings:** Households implementing comprehensive energy-saving measures can reduce their energy consumption by up to 50%

How to Apply: Residents can apply for the vouchers by visiting suffolkenergyassessment.co.uk. Applications will be open from 22 November 2024, and vouchers will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

APPENDIX 4

District Councillor Report: Onehouse ward December 2024

Council meeting	A full council meeting took place on the 21 st November, which included discussion of the council’s treasury management. The Green administration also introduced a motion urging the government to rethink the decision to cut the Winter Fuel Allowance for most pensioners. After debate, this was agreed and a letter will be written to the chancellor.
Innovation Centre	The three-storey, state-of-the-art centre will sit at the heart of Gateway 14 – the business, innovation and logistics park that forms part of Freeport East, adjacent to Junction 50 of the A14. Planning permission has just been granted, meaning work can now begin on the delivery stage of the 35,000 sq ft building, which will include office space for high growth start-ups, collaboration and innovation spaces, training and meeting rooms, and a café.

Community Funding	Mid Suffolk's website now has a new community funding page, which aims to make it much easier for local community groups to understand and apply for grants and funding. So if you are in need of some funding for a project, it's worth going to the www.midsuffolk.gov.uk home page and clicking the 'Access community funding' button.
Waste Recycling over Christmas & New Year	There are a few alterations to the recycling schedule over Christmas, including the scheme to recycle Christmas Trees. The information can be found on Mid Suffolk's website, using the following link: https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/christmas-waste-collections
Potential Local Government reform	There has been national press speculation over a change in local government structure across Suffolk and other areas. The White Paper has yet to be published, being scheduled for December. Government wants district and county councils abolished and replaced with unitary councils (with combined powers of district and county council). More information will be available in the future.
Tackling Social Housing Stigma	Mid Suffolk council, along with their partners in Babergh council, signed up to a new campaign to stop social housing stigma. This was done in the form of a council workshop, which looked at the best methods to tackle social housing inequality and negative stereotypes associated with it across the district.
Fees and Charges updates	Updates to Fees and Charges across the district were approved in this month's cabinet meeting and will take effect on 1 st April 2025. A full list of alterations are available on the council's website – most charges are being raised by only 1.7% and some fees are coming down.
Locality Budgets 2024/25	Reminder that I am still welcoming Locality Budget applications from local community groups. Do get in touch to discuss options. Apply on-line at https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards

Councillor John Matthissen

07976 308128

councillor@matthissen.net