

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 10th February 2025 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

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

1) Apologies for absence

None

2) Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

Cllr Archer – item 19 Russet Gardens

3) Public Forum

Three members of the public attended the meeting – one to speak about the “Pride In Your Place” grant available through MSDC and mentioned in the District Councillors January report. The Chair brought forward item 14.

A Combs resident gave an informed speech about the grant and some ideas on how it could be used to improve several areas within our community e.g. improving the village sign area; erecting a village map showing local points of interest and amenities; planting bulbs

It was agreed by all Cllrs that this was a great idea and a fantastic opportunity to involve other residents. An Action Working Group is to be formed, Cllr Larsen, Cllr Ratcliff and Cllr Tomlinson all offered their help.

Action Point: Cllr Larsen agreed to kick-start the project with resident.

All three members of the public were invited to stay and observe the meeting, which they all agreed to.

4) Minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th September

The Minutes for Monday 13th January 2025 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. The report includes updates on several issues raised by residents of Combs since the January meeting. No questions were raised (Appendix 1).

6) Action Points review

The action points summary was reviewed and the clerk was updated on the progress on the outstanding items.

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 and talked through the National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury Pylons decision and the devolution fast-track (Appendix 3)

9) District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting, and he spoke about the Local Plan review. The Cllrs had several questions regarding how this might affect the Neighbourhood Plan project; Cllr Matthissen believes this will survive the re-organisation. An NHP Officer has been invited to talk at the Onehouse Parish meeting and it was suggested that Combs could ask to do the same (Appendix 4)

10) Planning application

AP/24/00132 – Blackberry Annexe, Wilburs View, Tannery Road (Planning Appeal)

After a conversation regarding the “exceptional reasons” all Cllrs agreed their views remain the same and have no objection to this application. No further action required

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 - Dec (Jan direct debit) – £231.77

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

(ii) Domain name renewal (USD15.00) - £12.86

Approved by all Cllrs, to be paid by BACS –

(iii) Monthly bank services charges - £6.00

Approved by all Cllrs – Local Government Act 1972, s111

(iv) Tree maintenance at the cemetery - £300.00

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

(v) Clerk's back dated salary - £312.00

Approved by all Cllrs – to be paid by BACS - Local Government Act 1972, s112

(vi) HMRC -PAYE - £78.00

Approved by all Cllrs – to be paid by BACS - Local Government Act 1972, s112

(vii) Clerk's salary - £3,801.60

Approved by all Cllrs – to be paid by BACS - Local Government Act 1972, s112

The Cllrs discussed the requests for funding including VAT and other sponsors. It was agreed that this needed more investigation.

Action Point – Clerk to investigate VAT implications with gifting/donating

12) To agree the appointment of SALC as internal auditors

It was agreed by all the Cllrs to appoint SALC again as we have done in previous years

Action Point – Clerk to book online as soon as available

13) To review and agree council Policies

(i) Internal Controls – this was agreed by all Cllrs as fit for purpose; Chair and Clerk to approve.

(ii) Risk Assessment – to be reviewed at the March meeting

(iii) Financial Regulations – a question was raised regarding the production of a 3-year plan; whilst it is not currently deemed necessary and of no benefit, it was agreed to review this again for next year. Policy was accepted by all Cllrs as fit for purpose; Chair and Clerk to approve

(iv) Asset Register – to be reviewed at the March meeting

14) To consider applying for a "Pride in Your Place" grant

Moved to item 3 – Public forum

15) To consider the quotes for additional garden maintenance at the cemetery

Two quotes have been obtained to cut back the old churchyard, including raising tree canopies, trimming shrubs, removing brambles and autumn debris. The quote for £300 was accepted by all Cllrs.

Action Point: Clerk to confirm with contractor and arrange date for work to be carried out

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

Cllr Archer has written an article for the March newsletter introducing the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan. This will be followed by a more detailed letter to Combs residents including an invitation to one of several public meetings.

Action Point – Cllr Kitson, Cllr Archer and Cllr Ratcliffe to consider structure of letter and presentations for public meetings

17) To consider Litter Pick date (national "Great British Spring Clean" 21 March – 6 April)

It was unanimously agreed to hold the Spring Litter Pick on Sunday 23rd March at 9.30am. This information would be relayed to Battisford Parish Council as they had agreed to consider arranging theirs for the same time.

Action Point – Clerk to advise Battisford PC and to arrange advert in the newsletter, on the website and notice boards



18) Commemorative bench request location

Although Cllrs were in favour of the idea of the bench, concerns were raised about the location because of previous anti-social behavior. The Clerk reached out to several residents to get their views. Although the situation has improved, it was felt that replacing the bench might encourage the situation to worsen again and therefore the residents weren't in favour of the idea. All the Cllrs were in support of this viewpoint. The applicant had already been made aware of the reasons why the original bench was removed.

Action Point – Clerk to liaise with applicant for other location suggestions

19) To consider the fencing request at Russet Gardens

The area around the pond at Russet Garden is not fenced and is causing concern especially for those with young families. It was agreed that as a first point of call Cllr Bamber would speak to the owner/manager of the Tannery to ascertain who is responsible for this area of land and the pond.

Action Point – Cllr Bamber to speak to manager of the Tannery.

20) Correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

The clerk reported that she had received email correspondence from a resident interested in setting up a book swap in the bus shelter. All Cllrs were in favour of the idea. The clerk agreed to contact the resident showing support and asking for ideas on how they envisaged it working.

Action Point – Clerk to follow up on book swap idea suggested by resident.

March agenda to include Risk Assessment Policy; Asset Register; Litter Pick; Clerk's training requirements; Hubbard's Close builder's rubbish

Date and time of next meeting: Monday 10th March 2025 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Meeting closed at 21:09



APPENDIX 1

Combs Parish Council
Clerk's Report February 2025

Planning Decisions Approved

DC/24/04669 – 2 Combs Green, erection of first floor rear extension, front porch and front dormers

Finance

Total balance as at 31st December 2024 £98,306.57

Plus Receipts January 2025

Cemetery	£750.00
Newsletter advertising	£381.00
Interest Income	£3.46

Less Payments January 2025

Burial Grounds Maintenance	£225.00
Dog bin, post and fittings	£286.92
Streetlights - energy	£231.77
Laminator & Pouches	£39.98
Bank service charge	£6.00
Battisford Cricket Club – funding	£4,000.00
Oaks Meadow – funding	£6,620.00

Balance as at 31st January 2025 £88,031.36

Current account	£4,630.45
General savings account	£82,896.96
Cemetery savings account	£503.95
Total in Bank	£88,031.36

The new dog bin approved at the December meeting has now been purchased and fitted on Park Road at the entrance to the footpath leading to Webbs Close / Tannery Road. Many thanks to Cllr Ratcliffe.

Several residents contacted the parish council concerned about the state of the pavement on Park Road between Jacks Lane and Mill Lane which was covered in mud, leaves and debris making it very slippery to walk along. I am pleased to report that the pavement and road on Park Road has now been cleared by MSDC and the pavement is now totally accessible. It has made a huge difference.

The road name sign on Park Road outside Reed Cottage was reported as damaged and looking as if it was about to topple over. This has been reported to MSDC and I've received confirmation that it will be replaced but this can take up to 2 months.

Appendix 2

Chairman's Report February 2025

The joint bid by Suffolk and Norfolk CCs considered as fast-track candidates to become unitary authorities was approved by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on Wednesday 5th February.

Two weeks prior to the announcement, on the morning of 22nd January, MSDC held a Teams online meeting updating us on Devolution and Local Government Reform and Planning Matters (including the revised National Planning Policy Framework). There wasn't a great deal of substance in terms of the impact on parish councils although there will certainly be indirect effects. Some of the content we've covered in parish briefings and Councillors Oakes and Matthissen gave us their takes on it at the last meeting.

Key points were:

- The unitary authorities are likely to be combined under one strategic regional body with an elected mayor.
- The mayor will have considerable powers – and will therefore require a considerable organisation to help administer them
- There are two timelines under consideration:
 - a shadow council in 2026 and a new authority in 2027; or
 - a shadow council in 2027 and a new authority in 2028.
- SALC have been proactive in consulting other established unitary authorities to learn from their experiences
- It is unlikely that any powers will be devolved down into Towns and Parishes
- Any existing plan remains in force until it isn't (!)
- The new National Planning Policy Framework does impact Neighbourhood Plans that come into force after March 2025: we will need to check this.

I see no reason why we shouldn't continue with our work on progressing the Neighbourhood Plan.

APPENDIX 3

County Council report – February 2025

Council's budget prioritises vulnerable residents and essential services

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposed budget for 2025/26, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable residents across the county.

Under the proposals, the council's net budget would rise by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Key allocations include:

- £18.1 million extra for children's services, ensuring continued support for young people and families in need
- £35.2 million extra for adult care, aimed at addressing the growing demand for social care services.

To help fund these essential services, the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax. This would consist of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and an additional 2% specifically for adult care services.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- **Band B property:** £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25 (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property:** £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

The council will also receive £12.1 million of the additional £880 million allocated by the government for adult and children's social care. It also expects to receive £2.2 million of the £263 million earmarked for a new Children's Services Prevention Grant.

To balance the books, the council has also identified £10.9 million in additional savings, building on the £17.5 million approved last year. This brings the total savings to £28.4 million for the 2025/26 financial year.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:

"We remain committed to supporting vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk. Despite the financial challenges posed by increasing demand and broader economic pressures, we are proposing a balanced budget without drawing on unallocated reserves.

"It is deeply disappointing that, despite our significant deprivation levels, Suffolk will receive nothing from the government's new £600 million Recovery Grant. Further, the scrapping of the Services Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant will see £3.7 million struck from our budget.

"Nevertheless, we understand the pressures facing families and businesses in Suffolk, and that is why we will continue to ensure every pound we spend delivers the best value for our residents."

The final budget will be debated and voted on at a Full Council meeting on Thursday, 13 February 2025.

Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that "the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy."

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

"This decision not to underground any of the proposed pylons through the Waveney Valley, is nothing short of contemptible. The study we commissioned saw the area recognised as a valued landscape and National Grid's plans will wreak untold damage on it. There was a clear alternative to this, and they've chosen not to take it.

"What I find particularly flagrant - if this what National Grid will press ahead with - is a lack of any suggestion of mitigation or compensation package for the local area.

"This council has engaged fully with discussions and consultations on Norwich to Tilbury, providing additional evidence to help protect the affected communities and environment in the Waveney Valley. We have worked closely and in good faith with National Grid, and yet they have not delivered a fair deal for the local area. There is nothing on the table from them, or Ofgem, to soften this blow.

"Yet again, I see this as more evidence of the government's short-sighted and rushed mission to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Their influence is pushing through the cheapest and fastest options, with no consideration for residents, businesses or the environment – we are still to see any progress from them on community benefit schemes, to support situations just like this.

"As a council, we still maintain that the opportunity to underground the whole pylon run between Norwich and Tilbury, using HVDC cables, has not been properly explored. Revisiting the 2030 decarbonisation target and pausing the project would allow that to happen."

The council will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

Suffolk commits to devolution fast track

Following an invitation from ministers, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed to recommend Suffolk for inclusion in the government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which would see the creation of a directly elected Mayor (likely covering Suffolk and Norfolk) and the replacement of existing council structures with a streamlined unitary council being set up.

The decision followed a debate and vote at a meeting of all county councillors.

Speaking following the debate, Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"Today marks the start of arguably one of the biggest decisions this council will take in its 50 plus-year history.

"We need to think what is best for the people and businesses of Suffolk to whom we have a duty to make the difficult decisions – even if that decision means the end of the council or councils on which we sit."

The government's English Devolution White Paper outlines a plan for broader and deeper devolution, coupled with a programme of coordinated local government reorganisation.

Key to these proposals is the restructuring of councils in two-tier areas like Suffolk, shifting from district, borough, and county councils to unitary councils. The government argues that unitary councils can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested in public services.

Alongside reorganisation, the government is also proposing to create new Mayoral Authorities – with a single directly elected Mayor covering larger geographies (such as Norfolk and Suffolk) and with powers over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, health improvement and blue light services.

Cllr Hicks continued:

"Changes of this scale create an opportunity to streamline local government, empower joined-up decision making, save taxpayers money and ensure councils are resistant to economic challenges.

"These are not 'nice to haves' or 'aspirations', they are fundamental pillars of the system delivering the best possible public services, with clarity, accountability and delivered in a financially sustainable way.

"These are the goals on which we must focus if we are to do the right thing for Suffolk."

Suffolk County Council has now written to the government expressing its desire to be at the front of the queue for devolution and local government reorganisation.

If Suffolk is approved as part of the DPP, more detailed proposals, engagement and Government-led consultation would follow.

Cllr Hicks continued:

"To achieve remarkable things and seize significant opportunities, you must be willing to take on potential uncertainties. I want Suffolk to be at the front of the queue, setting the agenda on devolution – not following everyone else when identikit solutions are imposed.

"The proposal to join the DPP is not just a step forward; it is a leap towards a brighter, more prosperous future for Suffolk."

Latest changes to Sea Link plans are not enough

Suffolk County Council continues to object to proposed plans for National Grid's Sea Link project, despite recent changes to the scheme.

The council still has concerns regarding significant issues, including:

- Permanent access to the converter station site, resulting in the potential for construction traffic seven days a week
- Core working hours at the site of 7am to 5pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays, giving no respite to residents and businesses
- The unsuitability of Benhall Railway Bridge as an access route, including the potential for dangerous queuing of traffic on the A12 during construction
- A survey of the Benhall Railway Bridge, commissioned by Suffolk Highways has highlighted significant concerns regarding its capacity to accommodate abnormal loads
- Plans to relocate of the Fromus Crossing bridge further north, with a still-expected height of up to 6 metres, are likely to result in notable impacts to heritage assets

The council believes that a coordinated and integrated access solution between the major energy infrastructure projects affecting the county, including Sizewell C and National Grid, would considerably reduce many of these specific issues and community impacts.

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

"We have no option but to continue to object to National Grid's plans which would not only have stark environmental impact but remain wholly unacceptable to residents and businesses.

"The lack of any movement from National Grid is frustrating as we continue to press the case for a coordinated access solution between the major energy infrastructure projects in the area, should they go ahead.

"As an example on the Sea Link project, we have repeatedly engaged with National Grid to propose alternatives to the Fromus Crossing – the plans to move the crossing, 40m to the north, will result in a greater visual impact on the key views from the south of the conservation area, the Grade II Church of St John the Baptist, and the Grade II listed Hurts Hall.

"The council also has significant concerns regarding the capacity of Benhall Bridge to accommodate the huge abnormal loads that National Grid propose. Taking this route not only risks huge delays to other traffic but the required improvements, if indeed they are possible to deliver, risk disruption on a key rail route that, as well as serving residents, will play an important role in the construction of Sizewell C.

"We have always acknowledged the need to increase domestic energy generation and deliver energy security to the UK. But this must not happen without due consideration for our local communities."

The council has also noted significant public interest in the design process of the converter station site. It urges National Grid to publish the findings of the Design Review Panel to help all concerned to understand the design approach to the converter station site.

National Grid expects to submit its application for development consent in early 2025.

Detailed report provides blueprint for changes to Suffolk's SEND services

A report has been published that provides the most detailed assessment of need for SEND services in Suffolk and will be used as a blueprint for immediate change.

The forensic 177-page document delves into current arrangements, future anticipated need and looks at gaps and challenges in SEND provision. This assessment highlights the increasing demand for SEND services, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and the importance of improving service provision to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

As a result of this analysis, a series of recommendations have been made to further shape improvements to SEND services. Known as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Needs Assessment, the report will be discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board on Thursday 16 January.

Some of the key findings and recommendations in the report include:

- A significant rise in demand for SEND services, with projections suggesting further increases in the coming years
- The importance of early intervention, timely diagnoses, and accessible services to address complex and multiple needs
- Strategic priorities emphasising communication, transition support, and whole system improvements to meet evolving demands.

The report also captures the voices of children and young people, parents, and practitioners to ensure lived experiences inform future strategies. The Suffolk Parent Carer Forum was involved in collating the report.

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 report reviews progress since the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019. The report 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, homeworking, 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 2030 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.

APPENDIX 4

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward - February 2025

Extraordinary Council meeting to discuss the Devolution white paper	A simultaneous extraordinary council meeting of both Mid Suffolk and Babergh, arranged for Monday 10th February, has been postponed due to Government's delay in announcing that Suffolk will be on the fast track for devolution and that our County Council elections, scheduled for 1st May, have been cancelled. It is looking increasingly likely that the term of current county councillors will be extended for 2 or 3 further years (i.e. serving a 6 or 7-year period in total). Furthermore, it is not clear that significant powers and responsibilities will be devolved from Government, whereas some powers seem likely to pass upwards from councils to mayors. A new date for the extraordinary meeting is awaited, at which each local authority will consider the same reports and undertake a common debate, but each Council will vote separately. The meeting will be available to view on YouTube, as is the County Council debate of 9th January.
Local Plan review	With the new NPPF published alongside new increased housing targets, MSDC and Babergh have no real option other than to review the Joint Local plan part 1 which was adopted in November 2023. The existing plan may become superseded by new national policies if they are not updated. The councils will now build on the work already done on part 2 of the plan alongside reviewing part 1. The Government has recently clarified that the timetable for reviewing our local plans must be sent to them by 17th March.
Support with cost of living especially during colder weather	The District Council is keen for any resident experiencing hardship this winter to check the Mid Suffolk website for a range of support that might be available. Anyone in receipt of state retirement pension should visit the 'pension credit' section to check their entitlement as this support is worth, on average, £3,900 per year. There is also a dedicated cost-of-living page which contains plenty of resources ranging from advice about boosting income to help with housing costs, energy, fuel and utilities - www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/cost-of-living
Local issues	As always, I am pleased to be contacted should local issues arise regarding district council matters, including planning, street cleaning, bin emptying, licensing, and leisure centres. If you have concerns about local

	development being unauthorised or failing to work to agreed planning conditions, it can be quicker and easier to go direct to Mid Suffolk's Planning Enforcement team by emailing planningenforcement@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk . The identity of anyone contacting Enforcement is always kept confidential.
Locality Budgets 2024/25	My Locality Budget is now spent for this year's grant period. However, it is due to re-open in June so contact me should you wish to discuss options for the 25/26 budget period. Information and application forms are available on the website: https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards

Councillor John Matthissen

07976 308128

councillor@matthissen.net