

**Minutes of Combs 130th Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 12th May 2025 at 7.00pm, Battisford Cricket Club, Combs**

Present: C Radcliffe (Parish Councillor); H Larsen (Parish Councillor); T Betchley (Parish Councillor); A Tomlinson (Parish Councillor); J Matthissen (District Councillor) S Ottewell (Parish Clerk); D Shelley; J Stephens-Row; M Key; J Sansom

1. Introductions

Parish Councillor Cliff Ratcliffe took the chair and welcomed those present. Each person then introduced themselves to the other attendees.

2. Apologies for absence

Cllr T Kitson; Cllr T Bamber; County Cllr K Oakes

3. Minutes of the 130th Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2024

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

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Chairman's Report

The Cllr Ratcliffe referred to the report written by the Parish Council Chair T Kitson, attached as Appendix 1. He thanked all the Councillors for their support and hard work over the last. He also thanked S Ottewell for all her work in her 1st year as Parish Clerk.

6. Report from Suffolk County Councillor

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

7. Report from Mid Suffolk District Councillor

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

Cllr Matthissen spoke about the impact of Devolution and the re-organisation of our local government. He also spoke about the housing number for Combs Parish, currently being reported as 94 new houses to be built over the next 20 years. He was asked about the possibility of Mill Mount being targeted again for housing; he thought it unlikely as permission had been refused and appealed against several times but was unable to provide any guarantees.

As Cllr Matthissen was unable to stay for the Parish Council meeting, he reported back on the Hubbard's Close problems during the Annual Parish Meeting, advising the Cllrs that enforcements were being issued to hopefully resolve the reported issues.

He is looking into the Planning Conditions regarding the Russet Gardens / Tannery Road pond fencing and will report back as soon as he has some answers.

8. Councillor Reports

Cllr Larsen reported about the newly formed Book Swap facility in the bus shelter on Park Road, which is proving very popular and successful. It will be added to the Parish Council agenda for June to consider improvements. Cllr Larsen also spoke about the PiYP Project for which the Parish Council have received a grant of £5000 from MSDC. The project team have now arranged the planting of spring bulbs in various locations and are working on a signboard showing footpaths, places of historic interest, benches and other amenities. White

Picket "Gates" are also planned to enhance the entrances to the village and a picnic table on the Moats Tye/Tannery Road triangle. She also commented on a couple of road sign issues which had been raised with County Council but is waiting for a response – the graffiti of a sign in Tannery Road and the broken direction sign on the Moats Tye / Tannery Road triangle.

9. Local Organisation/Club Reports

See appendices 4, 5, 6 and 7 for reports from Battisford & District Cricket Club, Oaks Meadow, The Gardening Club and Battisford & Combs Fete Committee

J Stephens-Rowe (Cricket Club) and D Shelley (Oaks Meadow) read their reports and were available to answer any questions.

Concerns were raised by both regarding speeding in Moats Tye and along Bildeston Road. Cllr Ratcliffe explained about the rota for the SID devices, one of which will be moved to Moats Tye within the next few weeks.

D Shelley was also concerned about the lack of footpath just outside Oaks Meadow, stating that at least two residents had expressed safety concerns. This has been raised with County Councillor K Oaks and Highways in the past, but it was agreed that the Parish Council would raise the issue again.

10. Parishioner questions, comments and suggestions

M Key then spoke about the newly formed "Friends of St Mary's Church Combs" which has been formed to raise funds for repairs to the fabric of the church. They have arranged a "Friends" Launch Evening on the 7th June at the Church, with Cheese & wine - Coffee & Cake.

Cllr Ratcliffe thanked all those attending for doing so and closed the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 7.46pm

Appendix 1

Combs Parish Meeting, May 2025

Chairman's Annual Report

People

Having operated through most of the 2023-2024 year with only four councillors we were delighted to be joined by Kevin Archer and Hannah Larsen in late 2023 and by Cliff Ratcliffe in the summer of 2024.

Other movements saw our long standing Parish Clerk Tony Bamber step down from his role and resume a seat on the council. This was empty as Suzanne Ottewell had also stepped down but elected to join our Finance Subgroup that we established shortly thereafter. This arrangement also provided Ms Ottewell with the time to drive the merger of the Barclif and Combs Parish Newsletters, more of which later. With that accomplished to general approval I am delighted that she has subsequently agreed to take on the role of Parish Clerk as a salaried employee.

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

Councillor Hannah Larsen has taken on the role of chairing a newly formed subcommittee despite being employed full-time and it is fair to say that her relatively youthful outlook has brought a fresh and very welcome dimension to our decision making.

Councillor Cliff Ratcliffe has proved to be an assiduous and highly effective active councillor, able to write papers for Public Enquiries as well as install a dog waste bin and single handedly move speed indicator devices.

Regrettably, we do find ourselves one councillor short at the end of this year. Councillor Archer stepped down in April for personal reasons. I should like to record my thanks to him for his enthusiasm and notable contributions for the D-Day 80 commemoration and in our drive to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.

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

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

Financial

Our budget for the financial year 2024-25 was £17,131; our out-turn was £15,466.60 which meant that we were £1664.40 underspent. This is largely accounted for by savings on our clerk's salary as Ms Ottewell undertook the role on an unpaid, voluntary basis for part of the year. We will carry the surplus over into the £2025-26 budget as reserves.

Our total income this year was £44,602.73, the bulk of which was precept, burial ground income and Community Infrastructure Levy and is made up as follows:

Category	Amount
Deposit Account Interest	£2,209.15
Burial Ground Income	£8,367.00
Precept	£10,106.00
Other income (e.g. VAT, grants)	£6,208.01
Total before CIL	£26,890.16
CIL	£17,712.57
Total Income	£44,602.73

The bank balance at the start of the financial year was £73,569; the end of year balance was £86,792.

Our decision in 2022-23 to change our banking arrangements because of poor service and low rates of interest has proved to be a prudent one. We earned £2209.15 in deposit account interest last year; previously we were earning literally pennies per annum.

Donations and Support

We were again pleased to be able to provide financial support to several local causes. This year the Council was able to fund equipment maintenance and insurance for Oaks Meadow as well as a capital donation of £8,356 for new playground equipment.

We also made a capital donation of £4,000 to The Cricket Club at Moats Tye for the installation of solar panels which are already allowing the club to make substantial savings on electricity costs. We understand that our support helped to secure donations from other funding streams.

Newsletter

Suzanne Ottewell has driven the merger of the Parish Newsletter with the Barclif magazine that was produced under the Battisford Village Hall management team. A number of us felt that there was significant overlap and as the previous editor of Barclif was stepping down it made sense to amalgamate the two publications. Feedback for the new 'Community Newsletter' has been very positive.

Cemetery

Councillor Tony Bamber and Parish Clerk Suzanne Ottewell have administered dealings with the cemetery with customary sensitivity.

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

Councillors are also mindful of the eventual need to extend the cemetery's overall area and although we calculate that there are some 30-40 years before full capacity is reached we have established a fund so that any future purchase of land would be less problematic for the council in place at that time. We intend to place £500 per annum into a separate deposit account and we'll also transfer cemetery receipts above our projected £4,000 into that account annually.

Planning Applications and Development

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

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

D-Day 80

We organised an event to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Normandy Landings in WW-II on June 6th. We were delighted to see 95 people turn out to witness the lighting of the parish Beacon at the cemetery. Our thanks go to Combs stalwarts Stuart Scarff and David Thorpe for fuelling and lighting the beacon for us. All councillors put in a shift but special mentions go to relatively new arrivals Kevin Archer and Hannah Larsen who set up an online quiz and to our very own veteran Terry Betchley MBE for his poignant reading of the National Tribute.

Badley Solar Farm

The PC was invited to comment on a proposal to install a solar panel array on farmland at Badley given that the development was close to the border between the parishes. The initial application was rejected but later accepted on appeal after a Public Enquiry which Councillor Bamber and I attended to present and defend a representation written by Councillor Ratcliffe. Our broad stance is that solar panels should be placed on roof structures in preference to arable land and we were concerned that the proximity of the site to Combs Wood might disrupt wildlife. These objections were overridden but the exercise was useful in positioning ourselves in case of further similar applications.

Neighbourhood Plan

We were perturbed to see a large swathe of land to the west of the slough in Poplar Hill nominated in MSDC's Call for Sites process and are wary of increasing coalescence between our Parish and Stowmarket Town.

To this end, we have embarked on a consultation exercise to gauge the level of community support for developing a Neighbourhood Plan. Such a plan would empower residents to work together to identify their collective preferences for Combs' future growth and development and, if accepted by MSDC, would carry with it real legal force.

Litter Picks

The PC organised two Litter Picks this year, in October and in March. Excellently organised by Tony Bamber, teams of 20-30 volunteers salvaged nearly 50 bags of rubbish from our road verges.

Pride-in-Your-Place

Resident Anna James of Mill Lane has driven the awarding of an MSDC grant of £5,000 for improving the look and feel of the Parish. We established a subcommittee under the chairing of Councillor Hannah Larsen to help streamline the administration of the application. Councillors Tomlinson and Ratcliffe have also rolled up their sleeves and are actively involved. Huge thanks to Anna whose diligence, commitment and drive were the key factors in securing the grant.

Anthony (Tony) Kitson

Chairman, Combs Parish Council for 2024-2025

Appendix 2

County Council Annual Report 2024/2025

March 2024

Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk

The Roadmender has arrived in Suffolk, as the county sees a 34% increase in pothole repairs through extra investment, more resource, and new ways of working.

The county council has been working to repair the increasing number of potholes which have been breaking out following very wet and cold weather recently. One way in which the council is increasing its repair rate is by trialling new methods of fixing potholes.

Suffolk Highways welcomed 'Highway Workforce' with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs, which are quicker to carry out. The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county's roads.

The 'Roadmender' works on both asphalt and concrete roads and is designed for repairs to all types of road defects and is capable of overlaying areas with multiple defects in a single visit. The process is more efficient, reducing material and waste by 90% and avoiding unnecessary disruption on roads.

April 2024

Highways Report and Statistics

Since Storm Babet in October 2023 (which generally coincided with the commencement of the new highways contract with Milestone) there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways.

Annual data from 2022/23 (40,003 customer reports) and 2023/24 (60,043 customer reports to 23 February) shows there has been an increase of over 20,000 reports so far in 2023/24.

If this continues at the same rate, it is expected that the volume of customer reports could top 65,000 representing a 63% increase on last year.

Between October and February, Suffolk Highway completed in total **10,533 safety defect repairs**, a 45% increase on the last 2 years. **7,328 road defect repairs** have been completed since October.

During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs provided is 20.2 per day (excluding Dragon Patcher).

For the same period during 2022/23, the old contract provided an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.

May 2024

East of England local authorities collaborate to appeal for more foster families to work with their council

Eleven local authorities across the East of England have joined forces in a bid to collectively recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Suffolk is taking part in a new initiative for fostering under the banner Foster East. There is an urgent need for foster carers in the East of England with more than 7,000 vulnerable children already in the care of their local authority, and a further 150 children coming into care every month.

The Foster East initiative which is funded by the Department of Education and launched today Wednesday 29 May 2024, is a new, collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support. Councils will work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. Each applicant will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council and via a buddy network. Foster East advisors will help people find out how fostering can become part of their life.

In Suffolk there are more than 900 children and young people ranging from babies to 18-year-olds who need safe, loving and nurturing homes where they can thrive and develop. Every local authority aims to keep children and young people local to their support networks, but a shortage of foster families in our area means this is not always possible.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children.

June 2024

Residents advised - don't do business with cold callers

Suffolk Trading Standards is reminding people to stay alert to the risk of being ripped off by cold callers knocking on their doors.

The warning comes after recent incidents of people approaching householders on the doorstep and touting for business.

Suffolk Trading Standards advises people to only use businesses registered with the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Trading Standards urged anyone thinking of having home improvement work done to use a business that has been vetted and approved under the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Residents can also protect themselves and their neighbours by nominating their area to become a No Cold Calling Zone, of which there are now more than 200 across Suffolk.

July 2024

Councillors recommended to approve an extra £9.1 million for SEND services

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet will discuss a further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting next Wednesday 24 July.

- Funding would pay for new permanent SEND staff to support children and young people
- If approved, this year more than £20 million would have been committed to expanding the service
- Investment to be discussed at Cabinet next week

The additional investment would mean that more than 30 new permanent members of staff could be recruited to help the council keep up with expected need for SEND services and deliver its important improvement plans. It would also pay for contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity – key to helping children and young people access the help they need.

This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff.

In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services.

Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000 will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years.

This investment follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership. As a result of this, the partnership, which delivers SEND services and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, published a Priority Action Plan. One of the actions in the plan includes increasing the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and Annual Reviews. The proposed new staff would, in part, support the delivery of this work.

August 2024

Small improvements needed as children's services' Ofsted report published

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes or are in progress.

September 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.

October 2024

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.

- [Read the council's letter to DEFRA](#)

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.

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
- Rolled out the [DEFRA-funded Recovery Scheme](#) which meant that flooded property owners could apply for up to £5,000 to make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is administering the scheme on behalf of government. [Applications are open until April 2025.](#)

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

November 2024

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.

December 2024

Suffolk and East of England councils seek fairness in the face of energy projects

Suffolk County Council is joining with other local authorities in the region to challenge National Grid and the government on energy projects, demanding fairness for their communities and environment.

The county councils from Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire all face similar challenges with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being planned for their counties.

These are typically related to energy projects, including solar farms, wind turbines, pylons and the infrastructure associated offshore wind farms, such as substations and cabling.

Two of Suffolk County Council's main concerns, shared with the other counties, are:

- The uncoordinated approach to NSIPs - this is creating significant challenges for Suffolk's rural communities under the current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate and Secretary of State
- The government's 2030 target for decarbonising the electricity grid – this is too hasty, making it impossible to deliver alternative solutions to pylon projects like Norwich to Tilbury

January 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 [Valued Landscape Assessment](#), a 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 considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy.”

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

February 2025

Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal

Suffolk County Council is preparing to respond to another large solar farm proposal, set to cover around 1,500 acres, near Eye.

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley.

The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority.

Several consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application.

The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology.

EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030.

More information can be found at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said.

Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk’s County, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that

consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform.

The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services.

The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level.

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

The government will then undertake a public consultation.

The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

March 2025

Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- Keep all 45 libraries open
- Maintain opening hours
- Create job security for all frontline staff
- Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries' role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement.

The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on 1 June 2025.

Appendix 3

Mid Suffolk District Councillor Annual Report 2024/25 – Onehouse Ward

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation:

Government's large-scale proposals for reorganisation in recent months are basically bringing an end to our district and county councils in a couple of years, to be replaced with unitary councils covering all services, very probably with fewer councillors to do the work. There is some expectation that parish and town councils will fill the gaps in local community support, but there isn't any Government guidance on this currently. Alongside this, the establishment of an elected mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk combined, with their own offices and staff, may hopefully raise the profile of our county in terms of grants etc., so the character and priorities of that elected mayor will be crucial.

The priority of Mid Suffolk council is to ensure a seamless transfer of our services to the new Unitary system, whatever that may be, and a smooth continuation of those services into the future.

Alongside this, we are advocating for retaining transparency and democratic process for residents and local communities.

Budgets:

Housing Revenue Account – funding is mainly spent on managing and improving our housing, including a backlog of repair work from previous years which we've now just about caught up with. We are actively challenging Government's requirement that the HRA is self-funding, as this means the housing budget for all councils is very tight and therefore building or buying more social housing is very difficult, although we're very aware of the urgent need for it.

Our **General Fund** is comparatively healthy. The council has reserves for ongoing costs such as standard grants, running elections, legal contingency funds, and public emergencies – standing at £28m at the end of the financial year. We are better off than a lot of councils and not raising our council tax for the coming year is a reflection of that. For 25/26, we are committed to a **capital programme** of £36m across the district. The principal items are the Innovation Centre and the Sports development in Stowmarket. A particular feature of this green-led Administration has been increasing grants to meet local community needs and initiatives across Mid Suffolk, and the application process for many grants has also been simplified so that they're more accessible.

Rural Transport:

The new taxi bus scheme is now established, with journey fees recently reduced from £6 to £4.

Nature Recovery and Flood Alleviation

Our council has continued to take opportunities to buy and protect land of high biodiversity value, and to support projects to encourage sustainable land management and lessen flooding. As Onehouse ward approximates to the catchment of the River Ratt, it is especially good to report some practical progress locally.

Energy Efficiency and Environmental Sustainability:

The Cosy Homes scheme helps with insulation and energy efficiency in private homes and has made quite a significant difference. Increasing council tax on long-term empty properties and making the process of gaining approval for energy efficiency measures for listed buildings more straightforward have also been welcomed.

Planning and Housing:

Our Joint Local Plan Part 1 has been *up to date* since 2023 and we've been meeting Government targets and using the Plan to have some control over where and how housing development can happen.

Government have now shifted the goalposts in terms of the number of homes across the district and tilting the policy balance to further favour developers. Our decisions, both by officers and at planning committee are constrained by this legislation of course, and our local plan is being revised to take Government's new numbers and other changes into account. And Government requires that planning officers strive to *approve* proposals by negotiating changes to make them *sustainable*.

The struggle to ensure development complies with all the plans and conditions continues in every parish, and ours are no exception. **Enforcement action** starts with asking nicely and occasionally leads to stopping work on site and to prosecution. Delays and appeals are built into the legislation, so it can be slow and time-consuming.

Supporting the Community:

Our Community Team is friendly, approachable, and happy to help parishes and community groups to access grants within Mid Suffolk and externally. Our Locality Budget has increased to £10,000 per district councillor, so I am always pleased to be approached about possible grant applications.

I also wish to express thanks to the Parish Councils for all their work this year.

Cllr John Matthissen

27.04.25

Appendix 4

Battisford & District Cricket Club - May 25

I am really pleased to be attending the meeting this evening particularly as you are continuing to hold your meetings here.

We have been exceptionally fortunate to obtain grants from Combs Parish council, the ECB, and Suffolk Climate Change Partnership to install Photovoltaic panels on the roof of the pavilion and two EV chargers. Your grant of £4,000 was absolutely vital to the success of this project. We are already seeing the benefits in the reduced cost of our energy bills. Thank you to those from the council who came along to the event which we held to provide information to residents and businesses in April.

In addition a grant has been awarded from Mid Suffolk District Council using Community Infrastructure Levy funding towards a new treatment plant. Both the County Councillor and a district councillor and Battisford Parish Council have also contributed towards this project and installation will take place in the Autumn.

The cricket club continues to punch above its weight in that our groundskeeper David Stephens-row was listed as one of three finalists in the volunteer groundskeeper section of the grounds management Association awards held in at Anfield in March. Sadly he didn't win but it's great that he that his work been recognised.

Cricket

We have two senior teams and T20 side, a ladies team and has this year we are running 5 junior teams. We hold coaching for juniors on a Friday night.

We were fortunate and that the Saturday team and the Sunday team were both promoted last year and we are getting very good feedback about our facilities and the hospitality that we provide. The weather has certainly helped in ensuring that the ground is looking exceptionally good. here each year. We hold approx. 60 senior fixtures here each year.

Social

We have a number of social members and a Vice Presidents scheme for individuals who are non playing, who want to support the cricket club financially and they come along to a lunch as a thank you. This year the lunch is actually going to take place when there is a game taking place. We also have a number of sponsors boards around the ground and again we hold a specific game for sponsors this year which will be in August. We've already held hold a couple of well supported social events, including a quiz, a pie and pint night, and a beer tasting and fish and chips. More are planned.

The club is also available for hire and so far this year we have held a diamond wedding, two funeral wakes and a 60th birthday party.

The club is all run by volunteers. Our current membership is approx 150. We are at heart, a family friendly club and we want to inspire youngsters to take up the game. Last week at junior coaching we had over 35 youngsters and their parents which shows we are certainly focused on the future of the club.

Julia Stephens-Row
BDCC cricket administrator

Appendix 5

Oaks Meadow Project Report for Combs PC AGM May 12th 2025

Oaks Meadow Project will be 5 years old this coming November. When we set out with a steering group, which included members from the Parish Council, District Council and Suffolk County Council, we agreed on forming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and registered as such with the Charities Commission. Our Mission Statement is “to provide facilities for recreation, leisure and education in the interests of social welfare and improving life for local residents and neighbouring rural settlements. To promote sustainable eco systems with a view to provide education and conservation of local flora, fauna and the environment.” Then we set out an ambitious 5 year plan to provide a community space second to none.

Phase 1 was half the meadow to be turned into a green space for flora, fauna and humans. Most of the work has been completed and now it is a case of watching it grow. We were designated a Healing Wood by SCC in respect of the 500 trees and hundreds of hedges that we have planted. The Reflective Garden is enjoyed by many some for peace and quiet and children to play with the water fountain. The Medicine Wheel Garden has been landscaped professionally and we have added topsoil ready for planting. We are pleased to welcome Wild Heritage Suffolk this year to take over the vegetable plots. Once established they will restart their ‘Let It Grow’ project which takes GP referrals for local patients.

Phase 2 was to provide a play area for our younger visitors, and to offer space to socialise with other adults for their carer’s, as there is no common ground in the village for meeting with others. This year we have added a football goal and net, thanks to John Matthissen. David Thorpe has kindly rolled the area in front of the goal, but the ground is rock hard due to the lack of rain so this will be a work in progress. The new swings, funded by the PC, will be installed in June. This completes phase 2. Volunteers maintain the area and Sovereign, the installers, send ROSPA inspectors to check the equipment and replace anything that is faulty. We have a ROSPA trained Trustee who does weekly checks and keeps a log of all the equipment.

Phase 3 was to provide a village hall and car park. A survey was sent out to everyone in the Barclif circulation area in November 2021 asking if a village hall was wanted and if so what would it be used for. The response was an overwhelming yes, and a list of possible uses was encouraging, but at our last AGM it was decided that a village hall was too much for us to take on now.

The car park and drainage were completed at the beginning of this year and has proved to be an invaluable asset to the meadow and much appreciated by those who use it. To keep the cost down the spoil was kept on site and used to form a mound running along the hedge. The top of the mound has now been sown with native wildflower seeds and the bank is growing grass.

A Focus/User Group has been set up and is meeting regularly. It was this group that organised the Easter Party recently which was very well attended and enjoyed by all. The purpose of this group is

to inform the Trustees what is needed on the meadow and assist where possible. At the first meeting they all asked if the Trustees would revisit the idea of a village hall or meeting room to be established on site. The Trustees have taken this onboard and are exploring the possibilities of a community room to be constructed inside the gate to the left of the meadow which is the wild area at the moment. The Let It Grow programme would like a kitchen to include cooking fresh produce with their users. A steering group is being formed and will look at possibilities to address this need.

As always, finances are top of our agenda. To date we have raised £164,500 of which 11% was funded by the PC for which we are very grateful. As with the initial set up of the green space and the play area we will be looking for major funders to finance the ongoing project.

We look forward to welcoming you all to Oaks Meadow on Sunday June 29th at 4:00pm when we can show you all the features that we have achieved so far and what we have planned for the future.

Appendix 6

Gardening Club Report 2025

The Gardening Club continues to flourish with membership stable at around 50, returning to our pre-COVID levels when we suspended meetings and fee collection.

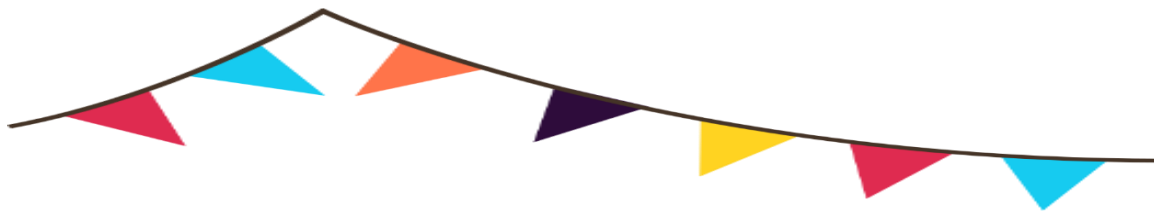
Over the last year we have had 7 meetings with speakers, the Xmas quiz run by George Bethell, and made Xmas wreathes. We organised a Show at the Fete which attracted 350 entries from 48 individuals (including 6 children). This is lower than our pre -COVID peak but reflects the weather conditions that disrupted fruit and veg sentries.

We are very grateful for the grant from Battisford Parish Council supporting the broader community interest in the Show especially the Children's, Craft, Food and Drink classes.

We had three trips out, to RHS Hyde Hall, Holm House (National Garden Scheme), and Beth Chatto's Garden.

No big show being planned for this year but we are ready to support future Fetes or community events

Appendix 7



COMBS AND BATTISFORD FETE REPORT 2025

We held last year's fete on the 28th and 29th June. Friday evening, we saw the pig race which as always was hugely popular. Saturday, we had the fete where the gardening club had there show which wasn't as popular as previous years due to less entries. We had more stalls attend than previous years but struggled with the arena.

Saturday night we had a free 80s Disco. It was a good night but poorly attended, which is very disheartening after all the work put in. We ended the weekend on a small profit leaving the account with just over £10,000 in.

I myself found the fete extremely hard work due to the lack of committee. The volunteers who came to help set up/ down were absolute super stars and we really couldn't have done it without them. We had Trudy Mudd and co do the bar for us which helped massively.

I have made the decision to step down from the fete as I feel I cannot give it the time or work it needs. Jess Thorpe (Secretary) Steve Green (Site manager) Sue Green (committee member) Sara Mcray (committee Member) have also all stepped away. Leaving the treasurer and 1 committee member.

Ideally, we would like someone to take the fete on but are struggling to find someone with the time and commitment. We are looking into potenally giving some of the money to local groups who require money for ongoing projects but this is still under discussion.

I enjoyed my 8 years on the committee (6 years as chair) but felt it was a good time to step away. Sadly, it always seems the same people trying to pull the villages together so would be lovely to have some fresh blood to take over.

Kind regards

Rachel Williams