

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 12th May 2025 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: A Tomlinson (councillor); H Larsen (councillor); C Ratcliffe (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk)

This meeting followed directly after the Annual Parish Meeting and started at 7.49 pm

As the Chairman Cllr T Kitson was unable to attend either meeting the Clerk nominated Cllr Ratcliff to stand as Chairman for this meeting as he had successfully chaired the Annual Parish Meeting. This was accepted and approved by all the Councillors

2505 – 01 Election of Chairperson and declaration of office a Chairperson

Cllr Tomlinson nominated Cllr Kitson to stand as Chair and no other nominations were received. This was seconded by Cllr Betchley. As Cllr Kitson had stated prior to the meeting that he was happy to stand again as Chair, this decision was accepted.

Action Point: Declaration of Office to be completed.

2505 – 02 Election of Vice-Chairperson

In his absence Cllr Bamber had asked the Clerk to nominate Cllr Ratcliffe as vice-chairperson. This was seconded by Cllr Betchley. Cllr Ratcliffe accepted the role.

2505-03 Apologies for absence

Cllr T Kitson (Chair)– due to family emergency and accepted by all councillors

Cllr T Bamber – due to mix up in dates with booking family holiday

District Cllr J Matthissen left after the Annual Parish Meeting to attend other meetings in his ward
County Cllr K Oakes sent her apologies prior to the meeting

Cllr Archer submitted his resignation from the Parish Council in April 2025 due to personal reasons. We would like to thank him for his contribution to the Parish Council over the last 16 months, especially for his contribution to the Neighbourhood Plan project. MSDC has been notified, and the Notice of Vacancy has been issued.

2505 - 04 Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

None

2505 - 05 Public Forum

D Shelly (Oaks Meadow)

Item 2505 - 14 was b/fwd to allow Ms. Shelly chance to leave the meeting early if she wished.

Oaks Meadow have requested funding of £145.60 to cover their insurance costs and a further £431.88 to cover the annual maintenance costs for the playground equipment. This had been discussed at the April meeting, with the Cllrs having different views as to whether the Parish Council should be contributing towards running costs. No decision had been reached in April. although Cllr Ratcliffe proposed funding both requests on this occasion with further funding requests subject to understanding Oaks Meadow 5-year capital expenditure plan Not all the Cllrs supported this. While wholeheartedly supporting the Oaks Meadow Project and happy to consider funding requests towards projects, it was felt that Oaks Meadow should have enough funds to cover their day-to-day running costs. After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed to take it to a vote and the funding was agreed on the condition that this issue be discussed again with Oaks Meadow sharing an on-going business plan, especially as they were considering a meeting room/kitchen onsite.

Action Point: Clerk to arrange payment of funds to Oaks Meadow

Ms. Shelly decided to stay on for the remainder of the meeting

2505 - 06 To agree and sign minutes of meeting held on Monday 14 April 2025

The Minutes for Monday 14th April were reviewed. It was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

2505 - 07 Clerk's Report

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

2505 - 08 Action Points review

The action points summary was reviewed, and no questions were raised

 9/6/25

2505 - 09 Chairman's Report

No report was issued

2505 - 10 County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent in the report prior to the meeting. (Appendix 2)

2505 - 11 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 3)

Although Cllr Matthissen was not present at the meeting, he did report 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 problems. 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.

2505-12 Planning applications

i) DC/25/00422 – Full Planning Consent

Yew Tree Cottage, Mill Lane, Combs IP14 2NF – Erection of 1no two-storey rear extension, single storey side extension, replacement of conservatory, erection of a triple bay detached garage.

The Parish Council has no objection to the planning application on the basis that Yew Tree Cottage is in a highly secluded area and not visible to passersby. If the property was set in a different position and/or more visible to the public eye, then the council would have objected on the grounds that the modern design clashed with the existing period design of the cottage. By not objecting to this application, the council does not want to set precedence for any future applications of a similar design juxtaposition in a more visible setting.

Concern was also raised that groundwork appears to have started prior to approval of the application; however, it is not known if the groundworks are linked to this planning application.

Action Point: Clerk to submit response

2505-13

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) CIL Expenditure Report

Last month the Clerk reported that on reviewing the CIL Expenditure Report, it was noticed that in July 2024, the purchase of a new laptop had been allocated against CIL receipts and not reported against the budget. This has been confirmed as an error. The expenditure has been removed from the CIL report and allocated against Miscellaneous Expenditure in the 2024-2025 financial year. The report can now be signed and sent to MSDC.

Action Point: The Clerk to submit report

c) Payments to hand

(i) Electricity for streetlights – Invoice not yet received.

(ii) Monthly bank service charge - £6.00

Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s111

(iii) Cemetery grounds maintenance – Invoice not yet received

d) Audit Update

The Clerk reported that the audit was due to commence today and that all pre-requested paperwork had been provided within the deadline.



2505 - 14 To consider funding requests from Oak Meadow

This item was moved to 2505 – 05 Public Forum

2505 -15 To consider Battsford Cricket Club Funding request

The Clerk received an email from Battsford Cricket Club regarding the possibility of a funding request for £800 towards a wicket green cover. Cllrs agreed that a CIL funding request application form should be completed for their review.

Action Point: Clerk to advise cricket club

2505 - 16 To Update progress on “Pride in your Place” project.

It was reported that the project is still on course but there have been issues with finding the correct contractors to fit the village gates and other street furniture as required the license rules. An update should hopefully be available within the next week.

Cllr Tomlinson is looking at the budget and information required by MSDC to set up a reporting structure.

2505 - 17 To review cemetery fee proposal

Stowmarket Cemetery increased their prices in April 2025 and are now much more expensive than Combs Cemetery. At the April meeting the Clerk was tasked with comparing the charges and a report was sent to all the Cllrs to review prior to the meeting. The Clerk was asked to expand the spreadsheet to show Stowmarket’s price increases as a % and then the effect this would have if Combs increased theirs by the same %

Action Point – Clerk to expand spreadsheet and report back to councillors

2505 – 18 To review Russet Gardens / Tannery Road pond issue

It has been brought to the Parish Council’s attention that the original plans for Russet Gardens included a play area at the front of the development. It was deemed a risk factor in having a play area so close to the pond and therefore rejected. The plan was changed and a couple of houses built on the plot. Cllr Matthissen has been asked to investigate if any conditions were included regarding fencing around the pond.

Action Point – Clerk to chase Cllr Matthissen

2505 -19 To agree next steps for the Neighbourhood Plan project

Cllr Ratcliffe to speak to Cllr Kitson regarding presentations.

2505 – 20 Other correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

The Clerk reported that she had received correspondence from a resident regarding the heavy lorries on Tannery Road going onto the pavement. Email has been forwarded to Cllr Oaks for advice.

June agenda to include Cricket Club funding; Book Swap; Npower invoicing update; Tannery Road’s pond issue; cemetery fees; PiYP update, Neighbourhood Plan, Audit update.

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 9th June 2025 at 7.30pm
@ Battsford Cricket Club**

Meeting closed at 21:17



APPENDIX 1

Clerk's Report – May 2025

Planning Decisions Approved

None

DC/25/01202 Moat Farm Bildeston Road – Listed Building consent has been withdrawn “the existing barn to be demolished is not considered curtilage listed to Moat Hall and is likely of mid C20 construction.

Therefore, listed building consent is not required.”

DC/25/01201 Moat Farm Bildeston Road – Awaiting decision

Finance

Total balance as at 31st March 2025 £86,792.47

Plus Receipts April 2025

Cemetery Income	£1,080.00
Precept	£5,053.00
CIL	£16,744.15

Less Payments April 2025

Newsletter printing costs	£390.00
Cemetery grounds maintenance	£300.00
SALC annual membership	£352.02
Replacement dog bin post	£11.14
Street furniture licence (PiYP project)	£160.00
Bank charges	£6.00

Balance as at 30th April 2025 £108,450.46

Current account	£5,463.88
General savings account	£102,479.35
Cemetery savings account	£507.23

Total in Bank as at 30th April 2025 £108,450.46

Audit

The internal audit has been booked for w/c 12th May with SALC, and the deadline was the 5th May to upload all requested backup. I should hear back from them again this week as they will request further samples of paid invoices etc.

Newsletter

The next edition of the newsletter is due out in early July, with a deadline of the 20th June for articles. I will be chasing up on any advertisement enquiries over the coming weeks.

Npower – streetlights

We have not received an invoice from Npower since March 2025 and have therefore not paid anything by direct debit either. This is due to some changes they have made as part of the industry programme P434, which aims to modernise all unmetered supply meters. I'm still not aware of when we will receive our next invoice and when Npower will expect payment. As I now have access to our account online through their Hub, I will log in frequently to monitor any progress.

Cemetery

Cllr Bamber received a call from a concerned villager that there had been reports of a "rave" going on in the cemetery grounds.

On inspection, he noted there was no obvious signs of any damage in the cemetery itself, just litter in the car park due to a food truck and overnight campers.

We have no legal power to evict anyone using the car but may wish to consider at a future meeting the merits of 'no overnight camping' signs and possibly the reinstatement of a gate or security camera.

County Council report – May 2025

Flood schemes cash from government welcomed by council

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Operational Highways and Flooding, has welcomed confirmation by the Environment Agency of funding for flood relief schemes in Suffolk.

The agency has announced that it will be spending £68 million on projects across East Anglia, of which flood schemes in Suffolk have been allocated more than £14 million.

Flood relief schemes across Suffolk will receive a share of the money from the Environment Agency.

Flood resilience schemes in Needham Market and Debenham as a result of Storm Babet also get funding - £560,000 in Needham Market and £81,000.

These projects, led by the Environment Agency, will fund flood doors and other measures to prevent flood water entering individual properties.

Suffolk County Council supported the EA to identify affected homes and promote the availability of this funding.

The council's Flood Investigations and Grants Team also administers a separate grant fund specifically to support those properties flooded during Storm Babet. This grant closes for new applications in May.

Suffolk Highways launches weeds and grass management programme for 2025

Spring has sprung and Suffolk Highways has commenced its summer maintenance works, which will see teams cut thousands of miles of grass verges and treat 2,300 miles of weeds.

Grass cutting is scheduled to start in May, with the grass verges alongside A and B roads across Suffolk being cut first and receiving two cuts each summer.

Verges alongside smaller roads, such as the county's C and U class roads, will be cut once during the summer season.

Cutting is typically undertaken by tractors with a flail as this is the most efficient and effective way to undertake the vegetation works and dry weather is required as, similarly to household mowers, wet grass can clog the machinery.

These cuts are solely for safety purposes and district and borough councils will usually supplement these with amenity cuts throughout the year.

Suffolk Highways does not cut village greens, parks and open spaces, or rural verges that are not adjacent to the road.

Weed treatments have already commenced across the county.

Two treatments are applied to weeds in urban areas across Suffolk annually if it is deemed that the weeds may pose a safety risk due to obscuring visibility for road users or causing damage to pavements, kerbs, or surrounding walls.

Weeds in rural areas are not included in the annual weed treatment programme but will be treated on a site-specific basis if they are identified as being harmful or noxious.

All weed treatments are weather dependent and cannot be applied in high winds or if rain is forecast due to this reducing the effectiveness of the treatment.

Glyphosate is currently used for the treatment as this is not harmful to people or pets and has proved to be more effective than alternatives previously trialled in Suffolk.

However, a substitute for this is still being sought to support Suffolk County Council's continued ambition to protect and enhance the environment.

Further information on the [grass cutting programme](#) and [weed treatment programme](#), including the planned dates for this to take place in local areas, can be viewed on the council's website.

Nature recovery plan aims to revive Suffolk's wildlife

A new strategy has been drafted to help restore and enhance nature across Suffolk, and a consultation has been launched (Wednesday 16 April) for you to share your views.

Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy is one of 48 across the country, aimed at addressing the decline in nature and identifying a network of areas to help it recover.

Together these strategies will form a national 'nature network', proposing actions such as the creation of wetlands, restoration of peatlands, planting of trees and hedgerows, and more sustainable management of existing woodlands and other habitats like grasslands.

Suffolk County Council has been leading on a strategy for the county, working closely with other local authorities, nature experts, and a wide range of interested organisations.

This has been coordination with Norfolk, through the [Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership](#). The two counties are working together to connect and expand existing areas that are important for wildlife and connect across the landscape.

The consultation on the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy is open to everyone in Suffolk - residents, landowners, land managers, farmers, businesses and the wider community.

There is also the opportunity to view and respond to maps of local areas, where specific measures to help nature could be taken.

Both opportunities to provide feedback will close on 11 June 2025 and can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/consultations.

APPENDIX 3 Onehouse Ward – Parish Report - May 2025

Devolution – Mayoral Combined Authority	At last month's extraordinary council meeting, the response to the consultation for the council on the Norfolk and Suffolk devolved authority from Mid Suffolk Council was discussed. The response, which included some positive aspects and some negative comments, was unanimously approved.
Local Government Reorganisation	An early example of problems caused by the uncertainty is cancellation of a project to create a combined new depot for waste services, housing and other activities. The location and scope now need to align with the changed geography of the county which is yet to be settled. Meanwhile Mid Suffolk and Babergh have each committed £250,000 to refurbish existing depots such as at Creting Road, Stowmarket.
River Ratt Catchment – Flood alleviation & nature recovery	An initial 'leaky dam' has been agreed, and local landowners will be invited to join the 'Upper Gipping Farm Cluster' which was established last year, led by Green councillors, and supported by a part-time worker from Suffolk Wildlife Trust, funded by MSDC.
Land for wildlife and public access	Cabinet has agreed another purchase of land which is suitable for public access as well as nature enhancement. Location confidential at present.
New grant offers for Mid Suffolk sports facilities	Over £750,000 of the Community Sports Infrastructure Grant has been set aside for new sporting facilities across Mid Suffolk, including either building new or upgrading existing infrastructure. More information can be found in Mid Suffolk's article: New grant offers significant funding for sporting opportunities across Mid Suffolk - Mid Suffolk District Council - <u>babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk</u>
£100k for new Mid Suffolk culture fund	A funding grant of over £100k has been approved to promote Mid Suffolk's culture, including support for children in arts and theatre. This also includes support for both the Food Museum and the John Peel Centre in Stowmarket, which are closely linked with the council.
Locality budget 2025/26	The next round of locality funding is now live so I am able to accept applications for grants. The total amount per councillor has increased to £10,000. Full details available https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards

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