# Combs Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting held at Battisford Cricket Club on
Monday 14th September 2026 at 7:30pm

**Present:** Cllr C Ratcliffe; Cllr A Tomlinson; Cllr K Harding; Cllr S Penman
Clerks S Ottewell; A Maloney

**2609-01 To receive Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received and approved from Cllr T Kitson and Cllr T Bamber and apologies were received from Cllr J Matthieson

**2609-02 To receive Declarations of Interest; Declarations of Lobbying; Declarations of gifts and hospitality**
None had been received.

**2609-03 Public Forum**
No members of the public were present.

**2609-04 To approve the minutes of the last meeting**
**It was AGREED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 13th July 2026 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**2609-05 Clerk's Report**
The Clerk's Report was circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting (Appendix 1).
The Clerk summarised the report and provided an update on the **Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)** process. The process is being simplified through the introduction of a digital online portal, which has now been set up.

**2609-06 Action Points review**
The action points summary was circulated prior to the meeting; Councillors were reminded to inform the Clerk once they had completed any assigned tasks.

**2609-07 Chairman's Report**
None received as there had been little to report during the summer period.
Cllr Ratcliffe expressed thanks to local farmers for maintenance of verges/hedges.

**2609-08 County Councillor's Report**
Cllr Bentley was not present at the meeting. His report was received and circulated prior to the meeting. (Appendix 2)
Cllr Ratcliffe reported that a footpath sign requiring repair had been reported via the online reporting tool, but no response had been received. The Clerk advised that it may be appropriate to contact Public Realm directly.
It was reported that the 30mph speed sign on Bildeston Road, towards Battisford, had fallen over.
The hedge at Poplar Hill requires cutting back.
Additionally, it had been reported that Mid Suffolk Council are not maintaining the verge alongside Oakes Meadow.
Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to raise these issues with Cllr Bentley.

**2609-09 District Councillor's Report**
Cllr Matthissen was not present at the meeting. His report was received and circulated prior to the meeting. (Appendix 3)
Cllr Tomlinson advised that a quotation had been received for the proposed works, but that a further quotation was required. Funding was also being sought for a sign at the entrance to Hubbards Close. It was proposed that the funding of landscaping that had not been completed by the developer at Hubbards Close would be discussed at the next meeting pending the residents establishing a management committee. Cllr Tomlinson would contact the spokesperson for Hubbards Close to advise him the outcome of the council's discussion.

Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to write to Cllr Matthissen regarding several outstanding actions including Hubbards Close.

**2609-10 Planning applications for consideration**

a) **REF: DC/26/03649** Application for works to trees subject to a Tree Preservation Order MS45/T39 – T1 at 3 Russet Gardens.
Councillors received and discussed the application.

**It was AGREED:** That the Parish Council had no objections to this application. **Clerk to action.**

**2609-11 Finance**

**a) Accounts Review and Finance Approval**

**a. Budget Analysis and Variance Report**
Clerk reported overspend on Dog waste bin emptying of £14.80
**It was AGREED:** That the Budget Analysis and Variance Report be approved.

**b. Accounting Statement Report and Bank Reconciliation**
Clerk reported second precept payment had been received.
**It was AGREED:** That the Accounting Statement Report and Bank Reconciliation be approved.

The Clerk advised that a £90 credit had been received from HMRC in respect of National Insurance. The Clerk confirmed that the employer's National Insurance payment had been reduced accordingly this month to recover the credit.

**b) Payments to hand**

I. Clerk's salary and NI payment for September
II. Electricity for streetlights - Direct debit payment for July usage £134.96
III. Electricity for streetlights – Direct debit payment for August usage TBC
IV. Monthly bank service charge - £7.00
V. Cemetery grounds maintenance 2 x £460.00
Cllr Tomlinson questioned how many cuts have been undertaken this year due to the dry summer and would there be additional maintenance during the autumn months. **Clerk to Enquire**
VI. 4 x Long handled litter grabbers £33.96
VII. Norton anti-virus £9.99
VIII. Microsoft 365 subscription £84.99
Cllr Ratcliffe questioned whether there are discounted rates for Parish Councils? **Clerk to Enquire**

**It was AGREED:** that the Payments be approved.

**2609-12 Conclusion of External Audit update**
The Clerk reported that the External Audit Report for 2025/26 had been received from PKF Littlejohn and read the conclusion to Councillors.
The report was complimentary and contained no recommendations.
Councillors noted and approved the conclusion of the 2025/26 External Audit.
The Clerk advised that the External Audit Report was required to be published by 30 September 2026.

**2609-13 Confirmation of Appointment of New Clerk**
Cllr Ratcliffe introduced the new Clerk to the council.
The position of Clerk and Responsible Officer was offered to and accepted by Angela Maloney with a start date of 1st September 2026.
**IT was AGREED:** A hand over period of two months from the current Clerk would be provided.

**2609-14 To agree to adopt revised NALC pay scales for 2026-27**
**IT was AGREED:** That the Pay scale be approved.

**2609-15 To Consider response to Planning Application DC/26/02307**
Councillors discussed the approval of planning application DC/26/02307 and expressed concern that the Parish Council's submission had not been sufficiently addressed.
Councillors agreed to follow up with MSDC to understand why their concerns had not been sufficiently addressed.

**2609-16 Churchyard Hedge Cutting**
The Clerk advised that £90 had been paid for the hedge to be cut back.
**It was AGREED:** that the £90 expenditure be reimbursed.

Going forward, it was agreed that the Parish Council should be advised in advance of any hedge cutting works.

**2609-17 To consider signs on footpath by Adstone regarding dog fouling**
Councillors discussed the provision of dog fouling signs. Cllr Tomlinson questioned whether permission would be required for the erection of the signs.

**It was AGREED:** that dog fouling signs would be purchased at a cost of up to £50.

**2609-18 To consider a Community Emergency Plan**
The Clerk reported that she had attended a meeting regarding the preparation of an Emergency Plan. Information relating to the plan had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting.

Cllr Harding questioned whether it would be beneficial to develop the plan jointly with Battisford.
It was noted that completed Emergency Plans are lodged with MSDC and, in the event of an emergency, the information would be made available to the emergency services.
It was suggested that a letter and questionnaire could be circulated to residents to seek their feedback and identify any relevant information.

**Action:** Cllr Penman and S Ottewell to meet to discuss the Emergency Plan and agree how to take the matter forward.

**2609-19 To consider streetlights maintenance & upgrade to LED lighting**
Councillors discussed an alternative supply and maintenance contract for our 27 street lights. Some street lights are old and not compatible with lower power consumption LED bulbs and would need to be upgraded. Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to produce a cost benefit analysis for the different options so that a decision could be taken at the next meeting.
It was **AGREED**: to defer the matter to the next meeting.

**2609-20 To consider renewal of insurance policy (current policy expires 1st October)**
Two insurance renewal options were presented to the Council:

- **Zurich:** £580.35, providing additional cover.
- **Ansvar:** £479.55.

**It was AGREED:** to accept the quotation from Zurich, Clerk to request that Zurich match the Ansvar quotation of £479.55.

**2609-21 Update on noticeboards and installation**
The notice board order had been placed and the Council was awaiting confirmation of the delivery date. Delivery was expected during the week commencing 28 September and would be made to Cllr Tomlinson's address.
Cllr Tomlinson agreed to obtain quotations for the erection of the notice board.

**2609-22 To agree Litter pick policy**
**It was AGREED:** that the Litter Pick Policy be approved.

2609-23 To agree Committees and working groups policy
**It was AGREED:** that the Committees and Working Groups Policy be approved.

**2609-24 To consider articles and additional pages for the November newsletter**
The Clerk advised that a quotation had been received to increase the newsletter to a maximum of 28 pages at a cost of £65. The additional advertising revenue being generated was expected to cover the increase in costs.
The deadline for submissions for the November edition was confirmed as 23rd October 2026.
The Clerk advised that she was willing to continue producing the newsletter for a further year.
Councillors discussed potential articles for the newsletter, including a light-hearted article relating to the recent car fire, with a possible focus on fire safety and vigilance.

**2609-25 To agree autumn litter pick on Saturday 10th October**
**It was Agreed**: that the litter pick will commence at 9.30am at the Tannery.

**2609-26 Other correspondence and items for next agenda**
The following matters were noted for further action or inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Complaint to BMSDC.
- Anglian Water
- Hubbards Close

**The Meeting Closed at 21:25**

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 12th October 2026 at Battisford Cricket Club**

# APPENDIX 1 - Clerk's Report – September 2026

**Planning Application Responses**

**(i)** **DC/26/02305** Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed: Demolition of building at Workshop At, Jockeys Lane – **GRANTED.**

**(ii)** **DC/26/02307** Full Planning Application for the erection of 6no. dwellings (fallback following prior approval DC/24/02974 at Workshop At, Jockeys Lane - **GRANTED**

**Finance**

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| **Total balance as of 30th June 2026** | **£109,295.42** |
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| **Plus July & August Receipts** | |
| Burial grounds income | £2,915.00 |
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| **Less July & August Payments** | |
| Bank charges | £14.00 |
| Streetlight electricity (June & July usage) | £257.75 |
| Clerk's salary & HMRC payment | £1,464.92 |
| Burial grounds maintenance | £920.00 |
| Audit fees | £252.00 |
| Annual fee for dog and waste bin emptying | £679.80 |
| Newsletter printing | £393.75 |
| Sign for village gates on Poplar Hill | £181.92 |
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| **Balance as of 31st August 2026** | **£108,046.25** |
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| Current account | £2,101.72 |
| General savings account | £89,532.89 |
| Cemetery savings account | £16,411.67 |
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| **Total in Bank as of 31st August 2026** | **£108,046.25** |

**External Audit Update for March 2027**

I received an email message from Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd (SAAA), the body responsible for appointing external auditors to smaller authorities in England. To better support these authorities, they are enhancing their communication methods and keeping us updated on key developments, regulatory changes, training options, and important deadlines throughout the year. They plan to launch a new Digital AGAR Portal, which will streamline the submission and management of Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGARs), making the process simpler, more secure, and more efficient. This portal is expected to be operational for the 2027 AGAR submissions. I followed the instructions in this email to log into the specified account and review and update contact details.

**New Clerk**

After deciding to resign from my role as Clerk and RFO, we have appointed a new clerk, Ange Maloney. I have been collaborating with her over recent weeks on the handover, which has gone very smoothly so far. I believe Ange will be a valuable addition to the PC and wish her all the best for the future.

## APPENDIX 2 - Cllr Matt Bentley

**Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX**

**07889036492 Matt.Bentley@suffolk.gov.uk**

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**Wildfire on Dunwich Heath**

Only a week after the Reform UK administration at the council made the decision to scrap its Climate Emergency Declaration, a wildfire broke out on Dunwich Heath in east Suffolk which took several days to get under control and has caused an enormous amount of damage to rare heathland habitat in one of the most beautiful and much-loved parts of the county. Suffolk Fire and Rescue worked with firefighters from all over the country to get it under control, at the height of the fire there were 120 firefighters tackling this blaze, with displaced residents needing shelter and support. The local community rallied to open up village halls to help, and local farmers helped to bring in water by tractor to terrain that could not be reached by fire engines. This is only one of many climate change-related incidents attended by blue light services over the summer, where intense heat and lack of rain have made the Suffolk countryside a tinder box for fires. Whatever the cause of the fire, it is climate change that created the conditions for this fire and others to burn so quickly and for so long, and to be so difficult to get under control. There have also been claims in the press and online that rewilding causes wildfires, but the evidence shows the opposite – rewilded areas retain water better and remain green during hot weather. In any case, Dunwich Heath is a traditionally managed nature reserve and is not a rewilding site. The area that has been destroyed is the size of 210 football pitches.

Following the fire, the Suffolk Fire Brigade Union wrote to the Prime Minister to explain that fire services need more investment in equipment in order to fight wildfires: systems to collect water and clothing that was less heavy and boots for outdoor terrain for when crews were required to walk for miles. He also highlighted the need to increase firefighter capacity in the light of the number of fires and that more 4x4 vehicles would be useful. Suffolk currently receives less than average funding from the government for its fire service, although it is one of the driest areas in the country and is therefore more likely to be hit by wildfires in our increasing hot, dry summers.

**Changes to Councillor Policies**

The new Reform UK administration at the council have decided to spend around £18k to remodel the Leader's office at Endeavour House, claiming these works were needed as there was not enough room in the current Leader's office. The rationale given for this work is that there was not enough room for the group to work in the existing suite of rooms. Reform UK have 41 councillors, but the previous Conservative administration had 54 councillors and found the rooms adequate. The money is being spent to enlarge the Leader's office into the meeting room next door. Only two people will have keycard access to this new large room, so it is not likely to be used by the rest of the Reform group. Other changes prioritized by the new Reform administration include a new policy on Pets in the Workplace, which enables the Leader to bring in his dog while making it clear employees of the council are not to do this, and a new dedicated carparking space for the Leader (since removed). We also hear rumours that the recent change from Pepsi to Coca Cola being stocked in the canteen is because the Leader prefers it.

**Help to Replace Ageing Heating Systems**

Suffolk public sector organisations (including all Suffolk councils) are partnering with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme, to make it easier for Suffolk residents to replace ageing gas, oil or LPG boilers with heat pumps. Through the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. The grant is applied for upfront by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it. The scheme is open to homeowners and small business owners in England who are replacing a fossil fuel heating system and hold a valid Energy Performance Certificate with no outstanding major insulation recommendations. It is not means-tested, so there is no income threshold to qualify, and the scheme is currently scheduled to run until 31 December 2027. Switch Together works by bringing residents together so that installers compete to win their business which secures better prices than homeowners could negotiate individually. Once registered, residents receive a free, no-obligation personal offer, and their installer then handles the grant application on their behalf. Switch Together's group-buying savings apply on top of the government grant. Every installation is carried out by a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installer.

For more information about the scheme, please visit the Sustainable Suffolk website: https://sustainablesuffolk.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/switch-together-suffolk/

**Energy Efficiency Loans**

Homeowners across Suffolk can now apply for a loan to help fund energy efficiency improvements to their homes, thanks to a partnership between Suffolk County Council and Lendology. The Warm Homes Suffolk Loan scheme offers eligible homeowners access to loans from £2k to £15k at a fixed interest rate of 2.2% Annual Percentage Rate (APR), with repayment terms of up to seven years. Borrowers may also repay their loan early without penalty, subject to eligibility and loan terms. The funding is designed to support residents

who want to improve the energy performance of their homes while spreading the cost of installation over a manageable period.

The loan can be used for a range of energy efficiency measures, including:

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems
- Solar battery storage
- Solar thermal systems
- Ground source heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- Double and triple glazed windows and doors
- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Ventilation systems when installed alongside insulation measures

The scheme aims to help residents reduce their energy bills and make their homes better insulated. For more information about the Warm Homes Suffolk Loan Scheme, please visit the Lendology website: https://www.lendology.org.uk/partner/suffolk-council/

**High Streets Matter: Support for Market Towns**

Suffolk County Council is offering extra support to small independent and hospitality businesses across the county via its new High Street Matter programme. This will offer 75 businesses a package of one-to-one advice, funding opportunities and peer networking, with a view to help them become more resilient so high streets can thrive. Interested businesses can find out more and register here:
https://www.newangliagrowthhub.co.uk/suffolks-high-streets-matter/

**Public Consultation on Cuts to Healthy Child Service**

Finally, Suffolk County Council's public consultation on proposed changes to its Healthy Child Service has been extended for an extra month. The proposed changes include cessation of the Young Person Pathway and Family Nurse Partnership, which provides specialist support to parents under the age of 21 after they have a baby. The proposals also include removal of the Community Staff Nurse role from Health Visiting teams, and the School Nursing service becoming term-time only. The consultation now runs until 18 October, with a decision likely to be made at Cabinet in November.

You can read through the proposals and respond to the consultation here if you have not already done so: https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/healthy-child-services-consultations

## APPENDIX 3 - September 2026 District Councillor Report: Onehouse

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| **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** | At the time of writing, the Secretary of State has very recently announced that the process of reorganising Suffolk's four districts, one borough & one county council into three Unitary councils is on indefinite 'hold' and will now be subject to further review. Huge amounts of work and investment have been involved in meeting Government's detailed requirements and tight deadlines in preparing for these changes. The result is a period of uncertainty ahead for all of us as residents, and disappointment and frustration for council staff and elected councillors. Unitary elections, due in May '27, are now on hold, but district elections (which Govt had delayed to May '28) are now brought forward, once again, to next year. As far as we know, parish elections will go ahead as planned. There may well be further changes we are not yet aware of, but as always Mid Suffolk District Council will remain focused on service delivery, and on support to communities and businesses across the district. |
| **Pride in your place grants** | Applications for Mid Suffolk District Council's Pride in Your Place grant have reopened, offering funding to projects that bolster community pride and celebrate the heritage of towns and villages across the district. |
| **Progress with SHELF project at Chilton Fields** | The new 3G sports pitch and athletic track at Stowmarket High School were completed recently as part of the SHELF project. This received funding from the FA, Premier League and Football Foundation as well as MSDC. |
| **Waste collections** | If anyone has any remaining issues with the new system of collections, please let me know. |
| **Gateway 14 news** | If you want to have a look in the Innovation Centre, the café is now open to the public from 9am - 4pm https://stowmarketinnovationgateway.com/cafe/<br>This in addition to short and long term room hire and hot desking. |
| **Locality budget** | The 2026-27 Locality budgets remains open and I would love to receive applications for funding from any community group in the ward.<br>Details can be found on the website https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards<br>It is usually a good idea to contact me to discuss your application before submission. |
| **Sports facilities in Stowmarket** | A state-of-the-art 3G community football pitch and new athletics track have been completed in Stowmarket – opening up new sporting opportunities for the district's residents. Built in the grounds of Stowmarket High School, the 3G pitch and mini athletics track will be managed by Everyone Active and available for community use outside school hours through a booking system. The 3G pitch project was funded by the Government's Football Foundation with contributions from Mid Suffolk District |
| **A14 clean up on-going** | The team from contractor Triplex conducted the clean-up operation over four nights, taking advantage of planned National Highways road closures to minimise disruption and avoid additional lane closure costs. |
| **Financial assistance for heat pumps** | Grants of up £9,000 are now available for households to convert older oil or gas heating systems to Heat Pumps. Residents of Suffolk can check their eligibility and register their interest on the Switch Together website. |

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| **New Council Housing** | The keys have been handed over for a batch of new affordable homes in a Suffolk village. The 67 properties have been built by Bellway in Bramford. The homes include a mix of one and two -bedroom flats , two - bedroom bungalows , and three - bedroom family houses , available for both rent and shared ownership. |

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