

**Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 8 March 2021 at 7.30pm, via Zoom remote meetings**

(DRAFT UNTIL SIGNED)

Present: S Scarff (Chairman); V Whitehead (Councillor); T Chaplin (Councillor); I Walker (Councillor); S Ottewell (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); T Kitson (councillor); K Oakes (County Councillor); J Matthissen (District Councillor) (joined at 8:10); T Bamber (Clerk), and two members of the public.

1. Apologies for absence

None

2. Declarations of interest/ lobbying

Cllr S Scarff in respect of 9(a) (i), 14 and 20 (various family connections)

3. Public Forum

There were two members of public present to hear planning discussions.

4. Minutes of meeting held on Monday 8 February 2021

Minutes for 8 February 2021 were reviewed and it was agreed that they were to be signed as a true and accurate copy of the meeting by the Chairman.

Action: Clerk to arrange signature

5. Matters arising from the minutes

With regard to the mobile home in the curtilage of a local farm, the clerk had been informed that, while the degree of family connection might be relevant, it would not be considered an issue for at least a year.

Cllr Oakes reported that she was still awaiting responses from Highways on various matters. At this point an email received from a resident concerned at damage to verges in Moats Tye was discussed. The issue was a consequence of large agricultural vehicles and a prolonged period of wet weather, and while councillors were sympathetic, it was agreed there was little that could be expected in the way of help from Highways on such a matter

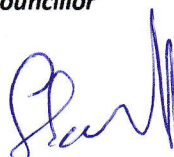
6. County Councillor's Report

The County Councillor's report had been circulated and is attached as appendix 1.

Cllr Oakes also reported on the faded speed limit sign in the slough. Apparently Highways no longer consider the sign to be mandatory as it is effectively a repeater sign, not the start of a speed limit area. Cllr Oakes has pointed out to Highways that she had, over a year ago, offered to pay for any such 'non-mandatory' signs but this one had not been included by Highways. She has been assured the matter will be addressed that week.

The chairman mentioned the flooding problem on Park Road near Mill Lane, which appears to be due to a blocked drain under the footpath. He will send photographs to Cllr Oakes.

Action: Cllr Scarff to send details to county councillor



7. District Councillor's Report

District Cllr. Matthissen had not yet arrived as he had another parish council's meeting to attend first, but this item is placed here for the sake of good order. The councillor's report (attached here as appendix 2) had been circulated and noted by councillors.

8. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chairman had nothing to report that was not covered elsewhere.

9. Planning

a. Applications received for consideration:

i. DC/21/00579 – Land Adjacent to Four Winds, Bildeston Road – for approval of reserved matters.

The chairman left the meeting at this point and Cllr Walker took the chair.

Following a discussion of the application, all councillors agreed to support the application

The chairman then rejoined the meeting and resumed the chair.

ii. DC/21/01180 – Land East of Gardener's Arms – erection of two dwellings

Councillors observed that this application was no different from that considered in November (DC/20/04631), the only difference being that it was accompanied by a report on the risk of ball strike by a cricket ball.

A resident drew attention to the fact that an application for a nearby location had been rejected for reasons that were equally relevant to this application, but it was pointed out that in this case the planning department had based their entire reason for previous rejection on the risk of ball strike, so it would not be possible to raise other arguments at this point.

Following discussion, councillors agreed to object to the application and instructed the clerk to submit the following comments:

- The only change from the previous application is a technical report that itself admits it was a desk-based opinion that should not be relied upon as more than a predictive tool. It cannot be right that such a document could be the sole reason to approve an application.
- Notwithstanding the theoretical mathematics in the report, many local residents have experience of cricket balls landing in the road and nearby gardens.
- The report describes the level of cricket played at the cricket club as 'recreational'. As some county level cricketers play there the basis on which the report is written is wrong.
- The report includes the writers' observation that, were their report to be taken as absolute, it could result in 'the closure of hundreds of cricket grounds across the country' and a proportionate approach is needed. The converse is also valid. In the unfortunate event that this application were approved, and homes were built as proposed, it is far from impossible that subsequent owners might object to the constant risk of ball strike and seek to have the cricket club closed. Unlike the applicants here, the cricket club would not be able to rely on this report to prove that there is no risk.
- Councillors wish to make the point that one solution would be for an indemnity, or some form of financial covenant, to be provided to the cricket club in the event that the application were approved, to protect the club from the consequences of claims or even closure arising from these new properties. No doubt powerful reasons would be put forward as to why this could not be done, but councillors would ask that planning officials consider how they would proceed were it possible for planners to be responsible for the consequences: it is this risk that they would be effectively telling the cricket club to take on.



Action: Clerk to post Councillors' views on planning website

b. Decisions received from MSDC

- i. DC/20/05746 – Meadow adjacent to Fenns Farm, Bildeston Road – siting of eco toilet etc - *Granted. Noted*
- ii. DC/20/05744 – 12 Model Farm – removal of internal wall – *listed building consent granted. Noted*

10. Finance

- a. **Accounts review to date** – Current Account balance as of 26 February 2021 was £34,298.93 and the savings account balance as of 30 February 2021 was £1,920.79.

The budget analysis and financial summary were reviewed and accepted.

b. **Payments received**

- i. Grant for SID through Cllr Oakes £2,500.00

The Chairman, on behalf of the Council, thanked Cllr Oakes for her help and support.

c. **Payments to hand**

- i. EON Electricity for streetlights (direct debit) -£ 76.39). Approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 S.301*)
- ii. SALC – training: New Councillor (Cllr Walker) £120.00 and planning webinar £60.00, total £180.00. Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22250 was written, and the clerk will arrange for it to be signed (*Local Government Act 1972, s 111*)
- iii. Clerk pay. The HMRC website provided the calculation showing that as employer the council should pay the clerk £3077.95 by way of net pay for the year and HMRC the sum of £769.40 being the PAYE due. Approved by all councillors and cheque numbers 22252 and 22253 were written and the clerk will arrange for them to be signed. (*Local Government Act 1972, s 142*)

Action: Clerk to arrange signatures and send

- d. Data Protection Act registration – Direct debit £35.00
Approved by all councillors (*Local Government Act 1972, s 142*)

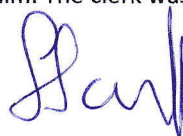
11. Newsletter

Cllr Chaplin confirmed that the intended printing date would be the 26th March, which would then permit delivery to be made in compliance with the eased lockdown rules.

12. Combs Litter pick

It was agreed that the Council should plan a litter pick, compliant with prevailing social distancing rules, for Sunday 18 April, starting at 9 AM. While no more than six people can meet together, all could possibly arrive at the Tannery car park and remain in their cars to receive the bags and picks and to be given their area to work on.

The chairman recalled that Mr Crooks, before leaving the council, had confirmed he would be happy to co-ordinate any future litter picks so Cllr Scarff will speak with him. The clerk was asked to enquire if the council might use the car park at the Tannery for meeting prior to the pick.



Action: *Chairman to speak with Mr Crooks.
Clerk to speak with Mr Portway regarding use of the Tannery car park;*

13. SID Data

The clerk will liaise with Cllr Kitson once restrictions are eased

Action: *Clerk to liaise with Cllr Kitson once lockdown is over*

14. Notice Board refurbishment

The chairman shared prices for noticeboards as advertised by a manufacturer, and then explained that his daughter's partner, a carpenter, would be willing to produce notice boards, in oak, and of the same dimensions, for much less, namely £483 each (the commercial price for an equivalent was over £1,100).

It was agreed that the Chairman be authorised to order two noticeboards this year, with a view to considering further orders in the future. The clerk was asked to recommend the most appropriate source of funds for this.

Action: *Chair to order two noticeboards;
Clerk to recommend budget allocation for the boards*

15. PIIP (Infrastructure Plan)

Cllr Walker had circulated discussion papers and will convene a Teams meeting to discuss action during the next week.

Action: *Cllr Walker & clerk to convene Teams meeting.*

16. Parish Walks

Cllr Kitson reported that he, Cllr Chaplin and Cllr Ottewell had drawn up an outline plan for promoting walks around the village, which had been circulated earlier, and invited all councillors to respond with their comments.

The chairman thanked the councillors for their initiative and mentioned that he has some information boards that may be of use. It was observed that many walkers came from outside the village so there may be little benefit in detailing the walks in a future newsletter and information boards may be the best way to publicise the walks.

17. Battisford Play Area

Cllr Whitehead had spoken with Battisford Parish Council and learned that the cost of making the play slide safe would be in the region of £5,000. As the play area is popular with many Combs children, Cllr Walker proposed that Battisford Parish Council be invited to submit a CIL funds application form for £1,500 and all agreed this would be supported.

Cllr Whitehead confirmed she would convey this to the council.

Action: *Cllr Whitehead to contact Battisford PC.*

18. Grit Bins

Cllr Oakes had procured details regarding the provision of grit bins and it would seem there is no longer an issue preventing the parish council from requesting these, though it would be the responsibility of the council to monitor the levels of grit in them. The chairman will liaise with the clerk to identify suitable locations and the clerk will then apply to the county council for permission to purchase them.

Action: *Chairman to identify locations to clerk
Clerk to apply for permission to procure grit bins*



19. Cycle Paths

The Chairman reported he had no update yet.

20. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Whitehead had circulated prior to the meeting copies of insurance quotations for liability cover for Oaks Meadow and the cover preferred by the committee was approved by the council. Councillors had previously agreed to support the cost this year and voted unanimously to authorise the payment. Accordingly cheque no 22251 in the sum of £100.80 was written and the clerk will arrange signatures (*Open Spaces Act 1906 ss9-10*)

21. Correspondence/Any Other Business

- Cllr Walker enquired if work was due to be carried out on the diseased lime tree at the beginning of Webb's Close. The clerk will contact the tree surgeon, who had been asked prior to lockdown to confirm that the tree presented a danger to the public before starting the work.
Action: Clerk to contact Mr Wasp.
- A resident had written to ask if the parish council could arrange for a road sign to be erected at the Bildeston Road end of Jockeys Lane, as they found delivery drivers were having trouble finding their house, which is on the corner of Jockeys Lane, with its entrance a little way into the lane. Councillors noted that the postcode for the house was inconsistent with those for other nearby properties but that the Post Office employees had no trouble finding it. As with similar requests in the past, councillors agreed that it was not appropriate to spend taxpayers' money solely for the purpose of commercial deliveries to one address.
Action: Clerk to contact residents

While on this subject it had been noted that some vehicles, including a recycling lorry, had made the mistake of trying to drive through Jockey's Lane over the Winter, resulting in the need for rescue, and the suggestion was made that a sign warning drivers that the lane was not suitable for motor vehicles may help discourage people from attempting the route. It was observed however that no amount of signs would stop some people blindly following their navigation devices. In any event, for the warning sign to be effective, it would require that the people who might consider the route feasible would be capable of both understanding and accepting the recommendation of any sign that sought to discourage them from doing what they wanted. Accordingly it was decided not to pursue this idea.

22. Date and time of next meeting – Monday 12 April 2021 at 7.30pm

The Meeting closed at 9.39 pm



Appendix 1 – County Councillor's Report



March 2021 Monthly Parish Newsletter



Visit suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus for health advice, service changes, business support and schools' guidance.

Keep up to date on the latest guidance on Covid-19 from central government here:

www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Automatic Number Plate Recognition to help improve visits to Suffolk's recycling centres

On 29 January Suffolk County Council announced it will install Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at its recycling centres.

Alongside the installation of an automatic entry system at its recycling centres, these measures are intended to improve customer experience and plan for future demand.

Suffolk has long held ambitions to Create the Greenest County and the Suffolk 2020 fund, which is a programme of work all about investing in community projects, aims to support the council's climate emergency declaration and improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come.

A booking system was introduced at Suffolk's recycling centres in May 2020 when sites reopened following closure at the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown and saw 14,000 visits per week during the summer. This can rise up to 27,000 per week in normal times, without current social distancing rules.

The project is part of the Suffolk 2020 programme and aims to improve the efficiency at the recycling centres by linking the online booking system with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology and automated entry barriers.

Each of Suffolk County Council's 11 recycling centres had the ANPR technology installed as part of its contract with FCC, who manage and run the sites in Suffolk. The council is now looking to use the technology to further improve the current booking system for residents wishing to visit the centres and make the most of the technological opportunities.

The cameras give an accurate count of vehicle numbers and also record how much time each vehicle is on site. This will allow Suffolk County Council to maximise site availability and to develop new and existing sites to better meet the needs of the increasing population of Suffolk.

Data from the system could also assist in identifying rogue traders fraudulently using the free household waste service to dispose of trade waste. The system also has the facility to link to the DVLA database and identify the type of vehicle and registered keeper details if necessary.

The council will also be working on upgrades to the booking system software to improve the customer experience by making it quicker and easier to make and amend bookings.

Unique Suffolk project to save up to 600,000 tonnes of water each year

On February 2, a new project was announced that would see water normally pumped into Suffolk's River Deben, now being used in a new scheme near Felixstowe.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of drainage water which fills land near the river's estuary is pumped away. This pumping process can also damage precious saltmarsh and mudflats, which are important habitats and part of the local ecosystem.

But now, the majority of this water is being carefully pumped inland thanks to an innovative project being led locally by Suffolk County Council, Felixstowe Hydrocycle Ltd, the Environment Agency and University of East Anglia.

The water is being reused by local farmers to irrigate food growing on their land and, in the future, can potentially be used in the public water supply.

In the East of England, new ways to source water are necessary because there is a growing demand for more and more water. This is due to future pressures from climate change, the need to supply demand from housing growth, industrial use and agriculture. But with this growing demand, our natural habitats must remain respected and protected.

Suffolk County Council increases budget to support most vulnerable residents and county's recovery from Covid-19

On February 11, Suffolk County Council agreed its budget for 2021/22.

Following approval of its annual budget, Suffolk County Council is increasing its planned spending once again in 2021/22 to £597.9million, some £41million (7.4%) more than 2020/21.

As part of this, the council will be spending £15.3million to address its ongoing Covid-19 costs, arising from the continuing local response to the pandemic. There are no proposed reductions in council services or personnel in 2021/22.

This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 11 months or so, the Government has continued to support local authorities as they adapt to serve communities, redeploy staff into alternative specialist roles and see income streams such as business rates and council tax reduce significantly. Suffolk County Council has received around £82.2 million in financial support during 2020 to meet Covid-19 related costs and whilst the challenges of continuing to respond, and in time recover, from Covid-19 remain, significant financial pressures will continue.

The council's income from council tax is going to be £7.9 million less than expected in 2021/22 and this shortfall will be met by using council reserves. Reserves can only be spent once and do not represent a viable long term financial solution. This effective use of reserves is made possible because Suffolk County Council has maintained a consistent approach to managing its finances effectively for a number of years, holding a proportionate level of reserves for this exact situation.

In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99 per cent, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a two per cent rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council's element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has also significantly impacted the expected progress of the council's recognised transformation programmes, as it has been absolutely necessary to focus on community resilience. This has included redeploying staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk's care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. As a result, the council is expecting a shortfall of around £7.8 million in projected savings for 2021. Whilst this means that further work is needed to identify potential future programmes of work, many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

As part of the meeting, the council's Business Plan for 2021/22 was approved which draws attention to the ambitions for the authority over the next 12 months and its commitment to four key priorities:

Living with Covid-19 and Suffolk's recovery
Inclusive Growth
Health, Care and Wellbeing
Efficient and Effective Public Services

Throughout the business plan the Council presents its environmental thread demonstrating the range of projects and commitments in place as part of addressing the climate emergency that was declared in 2019. This includes details of the Council setting its Carbon Budget and the related work involved in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Highways doubles drainage budget following £27.2m announcement

On February 17 it was announced that Suffolk Highways allocated an extra £2m to support the fight against flooding.

Drainage and flooding, Rights of Way bridges and resurfacing of roads in Suffolk have been allocated extra funds for the 2021/22 financial year following Department for Transport's funding announcement.

Keen to progress more drainage schemes across Suffolk to support the fight against flooding, Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m – double its current budget allocation – in order to help tackle the worsening flood problems being experienced across the county.

Suffolk Highways also looks set to bolster its resource to support in the repairing or replacement of seven Rights of Way bridges across the county with an additional £800k, whilst committing a further £3.4m to the county's surface dressing programme.

Although the budget is less than the 2020/21 allocation, Suffolk Highways prudently prepared for a decrease and allocated a tentative £21m for the 2021/22 financial year.

16 new COVID-19 rapid testing centres to open in Suffolk

On 19 January it was announced that a further 16 rapid testing centres for COVID-19 were to open in Suffolk, bringing the total number of centres to 28.

The sites are planned to open over the next two weeks in Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth, Southwold, Aldeburgh, Saxmundham, Debenham, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Eye, Holbrook, Needham Market, Elmswell, Hadleigh, Nayland and Brandon - serving more rural communities across the county.

The 28 centres use 'lateral flow' testing to identify people who may have coronavirus but who do not have symptoms. The tests are for people who do not have symptoms of coronavirus and cannot work from home.

It's because one in three people with coronavirus do not have symptoms so regular testing is vital in breaking the chain of infection and keeping Suffolk safe.

Suffolk County Council's cabinet confirms its support for Freeport East

On February 23, the cabinet of the county council confirmed its support for the creation of a new Freeport (Freeport East).

The Freeport would cover both the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich as part of the Government's aim to create a number of Freeports across the country to drive job creation, investment and international trade post Brexit.

A Freeport includes secure customs zones and tax sites where business can be carried out inside a country's land border, but where different tax and customs rules apply. These rules mean Freeports can potentially reduce administrative burdens and tariff controls, provide relief from duties, import taxes, and ease tax and planning regulations.

Freeport East has several unique aspects which make its bid for Freeport status particularly strong. This includes global and regional connectivity, with 36% of all the UK's container traffic passing through the Port of Felixstowe, unrivalled international connections, particularly with Asia, strong connectivity to the Midlands and the North, thereby supporting the government's "levelling up agenda" in these areas. The bid also stands out as supporting other national objectives such as the development of new technology and the push for clean energy. The Port of Felixstowe has recently won funding to trial a pilot 5G network and has strong research and development links with

Cambridge and Essex Universities. There are also strong links with the energy sector and the emerging hydrogen economy.

The Government is due to make its final decision about Freeport status later this year after assessment of all bids received nationwide in March.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor's Report

District Councillor's Report for Onehouse Ward – March 2021

Union Road Development	The outline planning application by Endurance Estates for 146 houses was controversially approved on the casting vote of the Chair, after the vote to approve was tied 4/4. The company will now be trying to sell the land with permission to a house-builder. We did get a modest range of improvements after the previous deferral in January, but the local area has no need of more houses with 2 huge estates under development. It will eventually provide a welcome safe alternative to Starhouse Lane for walkers and cyclists between Union Road and Finborough Road. As an aside to the consideration, the chair did instruct council officers to look again at the existing flooding problems.
2021/2022 Budget	At the Council meeting on 23 February, the administration put forward budget proposals which they had amended in the run-up to the meeting. In response to the Green and Liberal Democrat alternative budget proposals, the portfolio holder put forward an amendment to his recommendations. The result is that cross-party working groups will be set up to advise on projects to be funded from the additional £4 million allocated for investment in the local economy, housing, communities and wellbeing of residents. The proposal that Council Tax be increased by 1.66% was carried by one vote; this is equivalent to 23p per month for a Band D property. I voted against the increase.
Council House Rents	An increase of £1.25 in Council House rents was agreed by one vote; I voted against this increase.
MSDC Financial Report	The latest financial report shows that MSDC incurred additional costs due to Covid of £1.1m and a reduction in income of £950k. All but £138 of these losses has been reimbursed via central government grants. The anticipated total underspend for the current year to the end of March 2021 is £1.8m. The underspend on staff due to unfilled vacancies is £450k. Many key areas of provision of much needed services to our residents are underspent. However, the target for investment in commercial properties across the country (Cifco Ltd) is likely to be met despite a huge loss in the value of properties already purchased. The medium-term forecast is that by the end of March 2021 MSDC will have built up a cash surplus of £8m, excluding New Homes Bonus which is expected to be £1.6m in 2020/21.
Housing Revenue Account	The Housing Revenue Account is heading for an underspend of £2.7m in 2020/21. This is almost entirely due to delays in developing new council homes. To keep the underspend as low as possible, a substantial programme of acquisition of homes for rent is being undertake in the last 3 months of the current financial year.
Food for Families in need	To help avoid our most in-need families going hungry over school half-term, Mid Suffolk District Council have funded 'food and activities', including a kit to build a bird box. Help will also be given over the Easter school holidays
Disabled Facilities Grants	The new Independent Living Service started in December 2020 and the whole process of assessment and funding of adaptations to privately owned homes has become much more efficient. If you know of anyone who is finding living at home difficult and might benefit from adaptations to their home, please let me know. Adaptions to council owned properties are dealt with by the MSDC Housing Management Team.
Solar Carports	MSDC is planning a project to generate electricity from solar panels on car ports constructed over existing car parking spaces on council owned land. The electricity generated could then be used in adjacent council owned buildings. A business case for the project will be considered by Cabinet on 8 March.
Community Infrastructure	Today the MSDC Cabinet approved a number of bids for CIL funding, including a couple of 5 figure sums for villages. These were village hall improvements and a school running track with

Levy (CIL)

community use. It is time to consider what benefits might be gained for our villages in the next CIL decision round in 6 months time.

Councillor John Matthissen

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