

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 13th March 2023 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (chair); S Ottewell (vice chair); S Scarff (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); J Matthiessen (district councillor); T Bamber (clerk)

1. Apologies for Absence

K Oakes (county councillor); had sent her apologies for absence due to workload, and this was accepted.

2. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying

Cllr Ottewell – pecuniary interest in respect of newsletter reimbursement (item 10 (c)(iii))

Cllr Betchley – non-pecuniary interest in respect of Oaks Meadow (item 15)

3. Public Forum

No members of the public were present.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 13 February 2022

Minutes for Monday 13 February 2022 were reviewed and it was agreed that they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

5. Matters arising from the Minutes

(i) The clerk had updated the website with the latest data breach policy and the internal control report.

(ii) The clerk has sent out the new cemetery regulations and fees, to take effect from 6 April.

Other matters are covered elsewhere

6. County Councillor's Report

The County Councillor had sent her report, and this is attached as appendix 1. Cllr Oakes had also sent an update on action taken by the enforcement officer at the county council in respect of the disruption caused by the builders at the Chatsworth View site on Bildeston Road.

7. District Councillor's Report

The District Councillor went through his report, and this is attached as appendix 2.

A discussion then ensued over what could be done about the very poor quality of work at the Chatsworth View site. Cllr Scarff pointed out that in addition to the numerous contraventions of good practice, including touching electricity cables, pumping dirty water over the pavement and road and breaking the water mains pipe, the builders, in failing to provide an access road immediately, had caused Bildeston Road to be constricted by their own vehicles, forcing large vehicles to drive on the opposite verge, and this had produced significant damage to the road edge.

It was suggested that a letter be written to the developers, Chatsworth Homes, with possible involvement of the local press. The chairman proposed in the first instance that he and the clerk draw up a comprehensive dossier on the failings at the site, and this was agreed.

8. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chair had nothing further to report than what was covered elsewhere.

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9. Planning

- a. Applications received for consideration:
 - i. DC/23/00364 Glovers Building, The Tannery: *change of use from B8 to E*

Councillors agreed to support this application.
- b. Decisions received from MSDC
 - i. DC/22/05948 *Moats Tye Livery*: Vary lighting conditions - granted. Noted

10. Finance

- a. **Accounts review to date** – The clerk reported the Current Account balance as of 28 February 2023 was £47,463.43 and the savings account balance was £1,922.90.

The Budget analysis and financial summary were reviewed, noting that there had been an unexpected overspend on electricity for streetlighting and this was accepted.

- b. **Payments received**

None received

- c. **Payments to hand**

- i. Npower for streetlights (direct debit): £217.65. This was approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 S.301*)
- ii. Battisford & District Cricket Club (Donation towards extension) £8,000. This had been agreed in the December 2022 meeting, to be paid upon commencement of work. Cheque number 22312 was written and signed (paid out of CIL funds – *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s19*)
- iii. S Ottewell (newsletter costs): £145.20 Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22313 was written and signed (*Local Government Act 1972 s 111*)
- iv. Clerk pay: to A Bamber £3037.20; to HMRC £2024.80. This total is in accordance with the agreed budget and was approved by all councillors. Cheque numbers 22314 and 22315 were written and signed (*Local Government Act 1972 s 112*)
- v. Folley Electrical Services Ltd (repairs to street light) £172.20. Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22316 was written and signed (*Highways Act 1980 s301*)

- d. **Change of Bank**

Cllr Ottewell and the clerk will work together to ensure a smooth transfer to a new bank account once the precept has been received

- e. **CIL Expenditure**

The chairman has drawn up an analysis of CIL receipts – historic and expected, in order to accurately monitor developments, and he will circulate this for information to councillors.

11. Newsletter

The chairman thanked Cllr Ottewell for another excellent newsletter: several residents had also made a point of praising it. The clerk reported that an ex councillor was willing to help with future deliveries in Moats Tye and Cllr Ottewell will contact her.

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Due to personal commitments timing may be tight for the next newsletter so the chairman asked that councillors work towards having the bulk of the newsletter ready by the April meeting.

12. Design Statement

The chairman had learned of the benefits of a design statement from other parish councils: by having an agreed position on what planning would be supported and what would not, greater consistency could be achieved in dealing with the planning department, and (particularly new) councillors would have a helpful guide. All agreed this was a helpful idea and the chair will draw up a draft statement for discussion at the June meeting.

Action: chair to draft design statement.

13. Litter Pick

This will take place on 2nd April, meeting at the Tannery at 9:00 AM. Cllr Scarff is arranging for banners to be put up around the village.

14. Cemetery

The clerk confirmed that the new regulations and fees had been distributed, and these will be put up on the website and cemetery notice board at the beginning of April.

Action: Clerk to publish regulations and fees on website in early April

15. Oaks Meadow

The official opening will take place on 26th March. All councillors will try to attend.

Cllr Betchley passed on a request for the dog bin to be moved to nearer the entrance and Cllr Scarff will arrange this, whereupon the clerk will inform the bin emptying service of its move.

Cllr Betchley reported that the next project was to arrange parking on the field, and that to achieve all-weather parking, matting would need to be put down and this would cost in the region of £10,000. Furthermore, there will be a future requirement for the toilets to be cleaned regularly. Cllrs agreed that the committee be invited to submit a formal request for support.

Action: Dog bin to be moved and Clerk to inform MSDC

16. Correspondence/Any Other Business

- The clerk will co-ordinate the action needed for councillors willing to stand at the next election.
- The clerk reported that the internal audit is scheduled for the week commencing 2 May. At present it seems likely that there will be no need for an external audit this year.
- Cllr Scarff apologised for not being able to attend the next meeting as he would be away..

17. Date and time of next meeting –Monday 17th April 2023 at 7.30pm in Battisford and District Cricket Club.

The Meeting closed at 8.49 pm

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Appendix 1

County Council report, March 2023

More funds confirmed for children's services, adult care, and the environment

The £687.6m package was approved at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 9 February 2023, with a focus on children's services, adult care, and the environment.

In an online survey, Suffolk residents said that they would like to see more spent on adult services and children's services, and these areas will receive an additional £35.7m and £13.5m, respectively.

In addition, the council's net zero carbon budget, which had previously been approved by Cabinet, sits alongside the financial budget. It is a report on how the organisation is progressing to its ambitious target of being net zero by 2030, enabling the council to measure its carbon emissions, monitor its environmental impact, and identify actions and costs needed to reduce those emissions.

Your money, invested well

Column by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment

Probably one of the least welcome bits of paper to land on doormats up and down the country is the annual Council Tax bill. A quick glance at social media around the time bills arrive is all the reminder we as Councillors need.

At Suffolk County Council, the Conservative administration only increases Council Tax when it's necessary.

This year, setting our budget was much more difficult. Like everyone at home, and businesses and organisations across Suffolk, we are having to pay more for the goods and services we use. We are not immune to the huge inflationary pressures that followed the pandemic and were made even worse by Vladimir Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

In the Summer of last year, we feared a 'budget gap', this the difference between what we have and what we need, upwards of £50 million. Fortunately, in no small part due to the lobbying efforts of Suffolk's Conservative MPs, the money we received from the Government is more than expected. We still faced a gap, but it was not as large.

In our budget approved on Thursday 9th February, we made savings of £15 million. Many of these relate to changing the way we work, what we call transformation, while some related to staffing,

including reducing the contribution we make to council staff's pensions. They won't see a reduction in pension but because our fund is well managed, we can pay in less. Importantly, none of these savings will reduce any of the services we provide.

In fact, we allocated more money to key services; an additional £36 million for Adult Social Care and another £13.5 million for Children's Services. Alongside this, was another £500,000 for Highways Maintenance, £110,000 for Tree Management, and £45,000 more per year for Suffolk's Citizen's Advice Bureaux. All of this, despite the challenges we face, contributed to a net increase of £62 million being spent on our services, taking our total budget to £688 million.

To achieve this, without reducing services, we needed to increase Council Tax. As Conservatives this is something we never do lightly. Our Budget Consultation, to which over 2,600 residents responded, told us how important Adult and Children's Care is to local people. It also told us that given the challenges we face - namely more people needing our help and rising costs - that many of you accepted Council Tax would need to increase.

Therefore, we took the difficult decision to increase the general part of Council Tax by 1.99% and the Adult Social Care element by 2%. This is below the maximum increase open to us and means that a Band B property, the most common type of property in Suffolk, will pay an extra 86p per week from April.

As Conservatives, we never forget that the money we collect in Council Tax is your money and we always ensure it is invested well. We know that Adult Care and Children's Care, particularly Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, are your priorities. They are ours too. Such is the need for these two areas that 75p in every £1 we spend now goes on people's services.

Everything else, from roads and pavements to Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service, Trading Standards, and our work to protect the environment comes out of the remaining 25p.

We know value for money is important too. We work hard to keep the amount of money we spend on staffing and administration down, in fact Suffolk is nearly the lowest spending County Council in this respect, so that we can ensure more money goes directly on the services we all use.

This year, for the third year in a row, the Green Party and Liberal Democrats tried to increase Council Tax bills by even more. However, for the third year in a row your Conservative led County Council rejected their attempts to hike bills even further. We know that many people are struggling with rising bills and Council Tax is just another bill on that pile.

We will always invest where it's needed but our first instinct is never to reach for your pockets. We will continue to innovate, work differently, reduce overheads, and cut administrative costs so that the bills you pay are the best value possible.

[New highways services arriving in Suffolk as multi-million-pound contract awarded](#)

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, has been awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract, which will begin on 1 October 2023.

Following an extensive procurement exercise, Suffolk County Council has confirmed Milestone will be its new contract partner for up to 20 years. The new partnership, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will be delivering highway projects and improvements across Suffolk, including but not limited to maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing, and gritting.

When searching for its new highways partner, the county council worked with leading industry analysts to understand the different types of arrangements that other local authorities have in place, to look at which specialist providers are in the marketplace, and to find out what aspects of contract agreement may work best for Suffolk.

The council wanted the new contract to focus on delivering greater social value, utilising local skills and talent, giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector as well as building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment.

A rigorous procurement exercise was carried out over many months, with various stages of discussions with service providers, to evolve their solutions to meet the various contractual requirements and deliver an effective and efficient highway service for Suffolk. Final submissions were evaluated and extensively moderated before the final winning contract was awarded.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor’s Report

District Councillor’s Report - Onehouse Ward - March 2023

Council Meeting 23 February	<p>Mid Suffolk District Council will not be raising Council Tax for 2023/24. Within the 2023/24 budget, the Conservative Administration is proposing a £3.5 million surplus, most of which will be put into a “strategic transformation infrastructure fund”. This may be put towards the Stowmarket sports and leisure project and an innovation centre at Gateway 14 if plans are agreed. Total reserves are just under £21 million.</p> <p>Our Group’s proposal that £2 million of this is allocated towards energy efficiency measures was agreed and will be used to provide better insulation to housing across the district to help with the energy and cost of living crises as well as climate change.</p> <p>A 7% increase in council house rents is being proposed – just over £6 for social rents and £9 for affordable rents. Also, a 10% increase in garage rents – in line with the increase in CPI – and increases in sheltered housing service and utility charges.</p> <p>A reminder that of your Council Tax bill, approximately 77% goes to Suffolk County Council, 13% to the Police and 9% to Mid Suffolk District Council (as well as the precept for each Parish).</p> <p>Council also approved funding for the development of a detailed design and planning application for the Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) project. A full business case will then be prepared and bids made for external funding.</p>
New Depot	<p>Members approved a capital expenditure of £6 million to deliver improved depot facilities, primarily for the waste collection service. This could result in a new depot for Mid Suffolk to replace the Creting Road, Stowmarket depot or a new site to serve both districts.</p>
Cabinet meeting 6 March	<p>Cabinet approved a Private Sector Housing and Civil Penalties Policy which empowers the council to use civil penalties as an alternative to prosecution in cases of unsatisfactory conditions in private sector housing. Civil penalties would be a last resort if all attempts to persuade the landlord to make good deficiencies within the rented property had failed.</p> <p>Cabinet also received an update on recent changes to the regulation of social housing and the outcome of the Council’s recent referral to the Regulator of Social Housing.</p> <p>Cabinet adopted a new Culture, Heritage and Visitor Strategy; one of its aims is to encourage development of the Visitor and Tourism Sector and to encourage residents to enjoy what Mid Suffolk has to offer, as well as encouraging tourism.</p> <p>Cabinet will receive an update on progress towards developing proposals for a Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14. The Centre could include a space for high-tech start-up businesses, opportunities for training and advice, meeting rooms and flexible working spaces.</p>
Taxi fares consultation	<p>Cabinet agreed to consult on revised taxi fares: an overall increase of just over 10% is proposed. All parish councils are on the list of consultees.</p>
Planning Enforcement	<p>Further to my discussion with the Enforcement manager, I have now also seen the Chief Planning Officer. His position is that not all problems can be addressed through the planning system, and with the resources (people) he has, going beyond their remit takes time from the basics. Of course, our group has asked, many times, that we employ more people, but recruitment is difficult and the private sector often tempt them away. Of the organisations around the periphery of planning, I do know that the Environment Agency have only a third of the staffing compared to a few years ago, and that Health & Safety Executive have also suffered cuts.</p> <p>Reporting links: Health & Safety https://notifications.hse.gov.uk/riddorforms/DangerousOccurrence Environment Agency https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident</p> <p>That said, pressure from councillors and parishes is part of prioritising enforcement work, so please all continue to raise issues with</p>

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/enforcement/report-it/> and copy me in. And evidence such as photos is often helpful, along with planning references.

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