

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 16th October 2023 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (chair); T Betchley (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (county councillor); T Bamber (clerk); Ms S Ottewell; one member of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor)

2. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying

There were no issues involving councillors' interests.

3. Public Forum

A member of the public had come to the meeting to seek help in maintaining the grass verge outside his house. Large farm vehicles had taken to driving on it to avoid the overgrown hedges and trees on the other side of the road. The chair asked the clerk to try to identify the owners of the land and then to discuss the matter with them.

Action: Clerk to investigate

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 11th September 2023

Minutes for Monday 11th September 2023 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

The clerk confirmed that the insurance for the council was now in place. There were no other matters arising that are not dealt with elsewhere.

6. County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent her report previously and this is attached as appendix 1. She had nothing further to report.

7. District Councillor's Report

The district councillor had sent his apologies, together with his report (appendix 2) and invited councillors to contact him if they had any questions. Cllr Betchley mentioned that he had safety concerns over the Bildeston Road development: the pond created beside the drainage culvert was not securely fenced and if this were not addressed prior to completion of the works it could be a danger to children. The chair instructed the clerk to raise this with Cllr Matthissen.

Action: Clerk to contact Cllr Matthissen

8. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chair reported that Cllr Ottewell had tendered her resignation. He explained that she wanted to remain as active as possible in village affairs and was currently in discussions with Battisford Village Hall Committee members about taking on the publishing of the BARCLIF news, with a view to incorporating the parish council newsletter into it. Ms Ottewell had discussed this with the chair and they had agreed that because of the immediate workload, and also the 'optics' of a serving councillor from one parish publishing a newsletter for all the local villages, she would be better placed to carry out the work as an independent volunteer. They had discussed other possible roles for her if she found she had the time, and Ms Ottewell had offered to consider participating in Combs Parish Council sub-committees for



communications and finance. Given her finance and book-keeping background, and the expected departure of the clerk in the next year, her offer to help the clerk in his role as Responsible Financial Officer was welcomed.

As the council currently has no sub-committees, the chair volunteered to stand as chair of a newly formed Communications sub-committee and Cllr Tomlinson volunteered for the finance role. Both proposals were approved.

9. Planning

- a. No applications had been received for consideration:
- b. Decisions received from MSDC:

Various non-contentious decisions had previously been circulated to councillors. But of note was:

- i. DC/23/03460 – Land Adj. The Gardeners Arms – Erection of 1 self build dwelling -councillors had expressed concern that the plans could have been interpreted as permitting an annex that would later become a separate dwelling. The planning department had taken this into account and made clear in their approval that this would not be possible.

10. Finance

a. Accounts review to date

The clerk reported that the Current Account balance with Santander as of 30 September 2023 was £43,568.85 and the savings account balance was £0, while the new Unity account had £19,657.38 in the current account.

The Budget analysis and financial summary were reviewed, and these were accepted.

The District council had confirmed to the clerk that they had noted the new Unity account and so the chair instructed the clerk to arrange to transfer all remaining funds from Santander to Unity.

Action: clerk to write to Santander

b. Payments received

(i) Precept £ 4,500.00

c. Payments to hand

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £108.49: This was approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 s.301*)

(ii) Hartleys Garden Services Ltd – Cemetery and Churchyard cutting August and September: £700.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.214(2)*)

(iii) Zurich Municipal – Insurance premium £264.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.142*)

(iv) Community Action Suffolk – web hosting £42.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.142*).

(v) S Ottewell – newsletter printing costs £151.80. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.111*).

Action: clerk to process payments and inform councillors when ready for their authorisation

d. **Budget**

The chairman noted that the next year's budget should be ready for consideration at the December meeting. The clerk, in conjunction with the finance sub-committee, will draw up a draft budget and precept proposal in time for discussion at the November meeting. The chair offered to participate in the budget planning meeting as well.

Action: clerk to liaise and circulate draft budget

e. Insurance

The clerk reported that various options had been considered and had concluded that the cover provided by Zurich Insurance represented the most suitable cover for the council, in terms of both price and risks covered. As previously authorised, he had confirmed this to Zurich and the payment is noted in (c) above).

11. Newsletter

Ms Ottewell informed councillors that the newsletter delivery had gone well, again with the helpful support of other villagers, and that she had received several appreciative comments about the newsletter. With the new houses becoming occupied there will be a need to review the printing quantity but this would best be addressed once there is a firm decision on the future of Barclif.

12. Battisford Village Hall donation request

Following the council's offer of £1,500 towards the costs of updating and insulating Battisford Village Hall, the chairman reported that this had been accepted with gratitude by the committee. Payment will be made when work is started.

13. Battisford and District Cricket Club donation request

The clerk had received a message from the cricket club withdrawing their earlier application, pending further information.

14. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Betchley provided an update on the meadow.

Planning approval had been granted for the car park, but work on this would not start until the spring.

15. D Day commemorations

The chair reported that there were discussions at a national level to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D Day landings next year, and invited councillors to consider budgeting for this.

16. Correspondence /Any other business/ items for inclusion on the next agenda

- The clerk had received a donation request from Suffolk Accident and Rescue. Councillors considered this and, noting that the organisation was reasonably well funded, instructed the clerk to decline.

17. Date and time of next meeting - Monday 13th November 2023 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club.

The Meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Abrikosov

Appendix 1 – County Councillor Report October

New and independent fire control centre gives the best deal for Suffolk

A new fire control centre fitted with state-of-the-art communications for mobilising and managing Suffolk's firefighters would be in the best interests of the county, a report to councillors says.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) announced in June it would be withdrawing from the shared control room arrangement in place since 2011 with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service, based in Huntingdon.

The report recommending approval to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, due to sit on Tuesday September 12, says fire control would now be brought back into the county by the end of 2024.

The report says the move is necessary because a project to replace the current mobilising technology agreed by both services in 2019, is currently two years overdue.

In addition, the French company providing the new technology entered "Redressment Judiciaire" a form of financial administration which resulted in the freezing of its assets and liabilities. If the company comes out of administration, it will remain with its liabilities to pay.

SFRS concluded the non-delivery and missed milestones by the new technology provider, together with its financial predicament, means continuing with the current IT mobilising project presents an unacceptable risk to firefighters and the public.

This risk should be mitigated as soon as possible by Suffolk having its own control room using tried and tested systems.

However, the current system continues to mobilise the emergency response effectively, keeping Suffolk safe.

An initial capital investment of £1.588m would be required for project delivery over three years. Additional revenue service of £1.615m annually will need to be provided to support the operating cost of the control room.

Public views sought over improvements to A140

Suffolk County Council has identified three junctions on the A140 – the Thornham Magna junction, the A1120 Earl Stonham junction, and the A140/B1078 junction, which also connects to the A14 – as pinch-point areas that may benefit from improvement.

The assessments show that these junctions are likely to suffer from increasing traffic congestion and associated road safety problems in the future.

Analysis has also shown that they lack sufficient infrastructure for active travel and passenger transport.

With these concerns in mind, the county council is seeking the public's feedback to inform future bids for funding from the Department of Transport to improve the junctions.

A public survey has launched, closing on Sunday 15 October. More information can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/a140

Take part in the survey: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/A140MRNsurvey

Inflation, SEND school transport and care costs contribute to council's predicted overspend

Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year.

This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

[Recent research by the County Councils Network](#) suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"Despite being able to publish a balanced budget in February, we are already having to spend more than we anticipated this year.

"We set this year's budget during a period of highly uncertain economic conditions. Even although the country is now starting to see price rises slowing and energy costs beginning to drop we are still suffering the cost impacts of various global shocks - in particular COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

"We are experiencing unexpectedly high demands on certain services, meaning some are spending disproportionately more than others. For example, costs for school transport and children in care make up two-thirds of the total overspend."

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

- **School transport** - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.
- **Children in care** - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.

- **Adult care services** - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.
- **Inflation** - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding.

Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

Councillor Richard Rout continues:

"Our officers continue to do great work for Suffolk residents, including providing complex levels of support to those most in need, whilst making savings.

"But with these increasing demands and costs, we are seeing councils around the country having to reduce services and put spending freezes in place, so that they can balance their budgets for this year. Unfortunately, we must now have these discussions too.

"For many years, we have made savings through our transformation programmes – essentially ways of working smarter and leaner whilst still delivering services. We have also built up an appropriate level of reserves, meaning we have savings which we are able to call upon now.

"But this is not sustainable and now that Cabinet has been presented with the council's first financial report for this year, we will work with directors to help reduce this predicted overspend."

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a [joint letter to National Grid](#), the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils

also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said:

We have taken to writing at this time, as there is still the opportunity to explore all options and solutions for a development of this scale. We all support the collective effort to tackle climate change, work towards net zero and to create a secure future for the country's energy. But there are so many elements of this proposal which just do not go far enough.

Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:


The impact that this scheme would have should not be underestimated, particularly on the region's unique, designated landscapes and the many communities that will be affected. We all agree that studies into an offshore solution have not been appropriately explored, this is a viable option which we feel has been dismissed too readily.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

Should proposals for the project progress, and further consultations take place, we would expect National Grid to invest a lot more time and effort in working with our local communities. These large schemes can be guilty of doing the minimum necessary when they should be working with local people and businesses as much as possible, who know the area and can help find the best solutions, should the project go ahead.

National Grid held a second, non-statutory consultation, which closed on 21 August 2023. It is expected that a statutory consultation will take place in 2024.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor Report October

State of the District Report	<p>This is the first State of the District report produced by Mid Suffolk District Council. It tells the story of our district through data and insight across a range of themes spanning the economy, the environment, resident health and wellbeing, community issues and housing.</p>
	<p>Mid Suffolk District Council has launched a consultation process to get residents' feedback on the planned priorities for the District. We are hoping to engage with as wide a section of the district as possible, including some groups which seldom get involved, as well as businesses and Town and Parish Councils. There is an online survey gives you the opportunity to have your say about our initial ideas - see PDF document and link below.</p> <p>https://baberghandmidsuffolk.citizenlab.co/en-GB/projects/setting-the-future-direction-of-your-councils</p>
BMSDC Joint Local Plan	<p>The Planning Inspectorate have finished the inspection of the Joint Local Plan part 1 and reported that it is sound, so it now needs to be formally adopted by Full Council. Planning policy officers are now able to focus on Part 2 of the plan which will include the housing allocations. All the documentation is available on the website. The details of this may all appear on the surface to be a bit dull but they are vital for our ability to better control the planning process.</p> <p>http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan</p>
Review of polling Stations etc	<p>MSDC must do this every 5 years. Do we have any suggestions to change where people vote? Each village is a polling district and I see no reason for that to change. You can respond :</p> <p>By completing - the online feedback form</p> <p>By Email - elections@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>All representations must be made by no later than Thursday 30 November</p>
Help for older residents	<p>MSDC is supporting Silver Sunday Campaigns to help tackle loneliness for older residents. Events are being held in Eye, Stowmarket and Needham Market over the next few weeks to bring young people into care homes for sing-alongs, games and fun.</p>
Ready Steady Rent	<p>Dozens of people in temporary accommodation in Mid Suffolk will be helped to break the cycle of homelessness thanks to a new training scheme. This will involve interactive learning sessions to potential tenants, helping to build their confidence and skills around basic domestic maintenance, budgeting and the everyday responsibilities of a home.</p>
Rural transport	<p>MSDC has released a ringfenced £820k budget for rural bus services. The plan is to implement a 'grant' scheme for existing transport operators to enhance existing rural transport provision with set</p>

	routes and use more sustainable transport options where appropriate.
Climate Roadshows	MSDC are staging Community Climate Action Roadshows, which will give residents the chance to speak to local groups and organisations regarding climate action. A roadshow will be part of Stowmarket Town Council's Go Green Go Wild event on Tues 24 th October, from 10.30 – 2.30. at the Scout Hut and in the grounds of Milton House.

Councillor John Matthissen

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