

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 18th December 2023 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (chair); T Betchley (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (county councillor); Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor), T Bamber (clerk); three members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

All councillors were present.

2. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying

There were no issues involving councillors' interests.

3. Public Forum

The chairman welcomed two residents who were interested in the possibility of being co-opted to the council.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 13th November 2023

Minutes for Monday 13th November 2023 were reviewed and it was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

5. Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no 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.

7. District Councillor's Report

The district councillor referred to his previously distributed report (appendix 2). He drew attention to the application for the solar farm at Badley: during the planning deliberations it was noticed that a small corner of the proposed plot was within the parish of Combs. When further discussion takes place on the matter, which was refused at that meeting, Combs will be included as a consultee.

8. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chair reported that there were no matters arising that are not dealt with elsewhere

9. Planning

Applications:

DC/23/05275 Annaire, Moats Tye – side and rear extension. Councillors had no objection to this application provided all neighbours to the property were content.

Decisions

DC/22/01019 Land North of Bildeston Road – minor changes approved. Noted.

T Kitson

10. Finance

a. Sub-committee report

Cllr Tomlinson reported that the committee had met again to finalise the proposals for budget and precept for y/c April 2024. The meeting had been very productive, and it had been agreed that the draft budget (attached as appendix 3), showing a total expenditure of £17,203 be proposed to the formal meeting.

The district council has provided provisional details of the tax base for the year, and on this basis the precept was proposed to be £10,106, being an increase of 7.5% for a band D property.

b. Accounts review to date

The clerk reported that the Current Account balance with Santander as of 30 November 2023 was £60,599.09 and the savings account balance was £0, while the new Unity account had £17,643.67 in the current account.

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

No statement has been received so far from Santander this month but as no funds have been transferred to the Unity account it is to be hoped that the balance is unchanged. As the formal letter to Santander appears to have produced no response, councillors authorised the clerk to write a cheque against the Santander account, payable to the parish council, for the full amount remaining in the Santander account, so that it might be paid into the Unity bank account.

Action: clerk to issue cheque to empty the Santander account.

c. Payments received

Nothing received

d. Payments to hand

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £185.40: 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 November: £350.00. 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) A Bamber - cost of wreath for Remembrance Sunday £28.98. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment (*War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923 s.1*).

(iv) Suffolk County Council – post for SID in Moats Tye £275.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment (*Highways Act 1980 s.274a*). The clerk was also authorised to order the requisite fitting to accommodate the device.

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

e. Budget and precept

As mentioned under (a) above, the finance committee proposed a budget totaling £17,203, and a precept of £10,106 (attached as appendix 3). Councillors had considered these proposals and agreed to approve them.

Action: clerk to post new budget and submit precept demand

ABTson

11. Communications sub-committee report

Ms Ottewell informed councillors that she will be meeting with the current editors of Barclif magazine on 10th January. As this is after the January council meeting, there will be no further news until February.

12. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Betchley reported that the Oaks Meadow Committee had enquired if the parish council might be willing to cover the cost of next year's liability insurance, and also two traffic signs warning motorists that they were passing a children's play area. Councillors agreed that they would consider a request for contribution towards the insurance, and Cllr Mattissen would look into the possibility of support for the street signs once the committee were able to establish the requirements.

13. Street Lights, Russet Close Gardens ABK

The chairman had received a request from a resident of Russet Close Gardens for street lighting as the entrance from Tannery Road was very dark and the kerb hard to see at night. Cllr Oakes kindly offered to investigate this with Highways and the chairman will send her photos and details.

14. Battisford Village Hall donation request

The chairman had learned that work on the village hall was due to begin imminently. Rather than wait for the next meeting to approve payment, he invited councillors to authorise the clerk to arrange payment of the agreed donation (£1,500 – approved September meeting) once confirmation was received that work had started, and this was agreed by all councillors.

15. Donation Request CAB

The clerk had circulated a donation request received from Citizens' Advice Bureau. Following discussion, and a review of the local impact of the charity's work, councillors agreed to donate £250. The clerk was authorised to inform them of this decision and arrange payment by BACS (*Local Government Act 1972, s 137*).

16. Donation Request Headway

The Clerk had circulated a donation request from Headway. Following discussion, councillors elected not to support this charity.

17. Next year meeting calendar

The clerk had received no objections to the proposed meeting calendar for 2024 and this was therefore made formal. Details will be posted on the web site and circulated to councillors and committee members.

It was recognised by the chair that as the council is only just quorate, meeting dates may have to be changed if even one councillor found themselves unable to attend.

Action: Clerk to post calendar on website.

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

- The clerk reported that the builders at the development in Bildeston Road had put a boundary fence around the site that blocked access to the council notice board. There were no documents readily available to verify ownership of the land on which the notice board stood, but as it had been there for at least 20 years there was a strong presumption that its presence there was established. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, the clerk was authorised to invite the builders to move the notice board to the road side of the fence, reserving the right to seek alternative remedies in the event of non-co-operation.

ABK

- The clerk had received an email from a resident that a recent 999 call had resulted in the caller in Combs Green being directed to the defibrillator in Battisford. On investigation it was discovered that the defibrillator at Fenns Farm was no longer on the ambulance service list. This has now been reinstated.

19. Date and time of next meeting : Monday 8th January 2024 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club.

The Meeting closed at 8.54 pm

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Appendix 1 – County Councillor Report October

County Council report – December 2023

Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7 November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads.

The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use, resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment.

County Councils remain united against Norwich to Tilbury onshore option

Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Council leaders are urging National Grid to reconsider their preferred onshore option following findings of a recent review.

The councils jointly commissioned and have now published an independent report into the Norwich to Tilbury project, which proposes the construction of a new high voltage electricity transmission line between Norwich in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk and Tilbury in Essex.

Leaders of the three county councils are now asking National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) and the electricity system planner, National Grid Electricity System Operator (NGESO) to consider the findings.

The report, by Hiorns Smart Energy Networks, reviews the options considered by National Grid, including the preferred option of a pylon line between Norwich and Tilbury.

The total length of the line would be 183 kilometres. This would consist of around 158 kilometres of new overhead line supported by 520 pylons. There would be also four sections of underground cabling. These underground sections would run through, and in the vicinity of, the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Grid's proposals also include a new substation on the Tendring Peninsula, to allow the connection of offshore wind farms.

Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk County Councils, accept that the transmission network in East Anglia needs reinforcing to support the transition to net zero, and provide energy security. However, they remain concerned that the need for, and timing of, the current proposals is uncertain and not robust.

This uncertainty brings into question the need case for National Grid's preferred option, of a land-based pylon line. All three county councils have expressed their concerns that this option will harm the local economy, environment and the health and wellbeing of their communities.

The review focused on a re-appraisal of the need case for the project; that need case was developed by National Grid Electricity System Operator.

The review investigated the need and timing of the proposals. It also investigated National Grid's decision that a terrestrial route, comprised mostly of overhead lines and pylons, would be preferable to an integrated offshore option.

The review supported National Grid's position that there is a need for additional electricity transmission capacity to connect renewable and low carbon energy generation in the East Anglia region.

However, it challenged the delivery date of 2030, and suggested that the need for additional transmission capacity would be closer to 2035, or beyond. This supports the concerns raised by the three councils.

While this potential delay to the need for Norwich to Tilbury is likely to reduce the cost of National Grid developing an integrated offshore alternative, the report concludes that the most economical option for meeting the need for future transmission capacity remains onshore overhead lines, and pylons.

The Hiorns Smart Energy Networks final report is available to read in full [here](#).

Given the uncertainties around the need for, and timing of, the Norwich to Tilbury Project, all three councils strongly recommend that National Grid carefully consider the Hiorns report, and its potential implications for the project.

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

"The effects of pylons and all the associated infrastructure cutting across all three counties cannot be underestimated. The impact on local communities and businesses will be significant, along with consequences for wildlife, our visitor economy, and protected landscapes.

"This will come in the short-term through building works, disruption, and disturbance of habitats - but most notably in the long-term for future generations who will suffer from construction that they cannot reverse, all for a project that could have less impact if it went by sea.

"To ensure the UK's energy security, our clear preference is for a coordinated, offshore centred approach, delivered at pace to minimise onshore works in Suffolk."

Extra £108 million for Suffolk's roads welcomed

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107,590,000 has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Today's news is extremely welcome and will certainly help us to make Suffolk's roads better for everyone. We still need to understand the detail in full. But so far, what we know is very positive and will make a significant difference to our road network."

4.7 million litres of water and 8,412 drains cleared since Storm Babet battered Suffolk one month ago

4.7 million litres of water has been pumped away and 8,412 highways drains cleared of post-storm debris since Storm Babet hit Suffolk one month ago.

The scale of work undertaken since the storm includes:

- Clearing and jetting of 8,412 drains
- Removing 121 trees blocking roads
- Cleared flood water from 198 locations
- Repairing 1,200 road and pavement potholes
- Contacting landowners about blocked private watercourses and roadside ditches, which are generally their responsibility to maintain.

The areas worst hit by the storm, including Debenham, Framlingham, Needham Market and Cavendish have all had their drains blitzed to clear tonnes of silt, leaves and other debris that has been washing into them as flood waters have subsided.

After drains are cleared, water from large tankers is run through them to check they are operating and if they are not, high pressure jets can be brought in to clear any blockages. In extreme cases, cameras are used to locate hidden blockages and then work is scheduled to dig up the pipes and fix the issues.

Suffolk County Council is also pumping an extra £10 million into drain and gully clearing projects.

135 drainage sites were addressed during 2022/23 and 89 new projects are currently in the design phase with the county council's new highways partner Milestone. This is in addition to Suffolk's annual drain clearing programme which saw 111,000 drains cleared last year.

The county council has also gathered over 800 reports of flooding to homes and businesses, to enable owners to access funding from the Government. Suffolk councils are working together, with Suffolk County Council collecting information and assessing the reports, and the district and borough councils distributing the funding to eligible property owners.

Eligible residents who experienced exceptional property flooding during Storm Babet and have reported this to the county council, will start receiving financial support during November.

Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet

Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues.

Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk.

As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and any actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events.

In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look to be needed.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council's leader, said:

"The impact of this truly unprecedented event is still being felt across the county and will continue to do so for months to come, so it is important that we recognise that and increase our resources appropriately.

"These investigations help us to work with communities to establish the cause of flooding in the worst hit areas and identify ways to manage the risk better in future."

Suffolk Highways prepared for the County's cold snap

With 39 gritting lorries, around 17,000 tonnes of salt and a winter team of over 80 people, our depots are ready to spread salt and treat over 2,000 miles of roads across the county.

Suffolk Highways has been carefully planning for the arrival of the colder weather, including training and hiring drivers, checking the routes and preparing the gritting lorries for action. The service is responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads (except trunk roads), roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations.

They also have 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network, this includes other bus routes, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools.

The P1 routes are completed when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C and P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather.

But gritting the priority network isn't all that the teams do to prepare our county for wintry weather; Suffolk Highways has also refilled 2,100 grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. Grit bins are owned by [parish and town councils](#) and to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, our communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and if more is required to report it via the reporting tool.

Suffolk Highways is encouraging residents to make sure their cars are winter ready and ensure they drive to the condition of the road, as a treated road may still have some ice forming particularly in areas where there is water runoff from adjacent land.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor Report October

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward December 2023

Joint Local Plan adopted	Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils formally adopted the new Joint Local Plan Part 1, which is the blueprint for future development until 2037. There are a number of updated and new policies relating to housing, economic development, environment and infrastructure. The Councils also agreed the Local Development Scheme which is a schedule for production of several supplementary planning documents (SPD) as well as Part 2 of the Joint Local Plan, which will include the strategic site allocations and settlement hierarchy. Details can be found at https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/joint-local-plan .
Call for land to support nature recovery	MSDC are now working with The Woodland Trust. There is a call for land which could be planted or improved for nature. Of particular interest is land of low agricultural value which is near or close to existing natural habitats, or can help provide green corridors to link them up. MSDC currently has low tree cover so the Council is already actively planting more trees and changing the way that public open spaces are to be managed.
Flood Aftermath	County and District councils are considering how to lessen the impact of future flood events, and particularly how to alleviate flooding by delaying the flow of ditches and streams across the catchments. Our villages comprise much of the catchment of the River Rat, and I hope to hear from landowners willing to play a part in this work, which may qualify for grant aid.
Official opening of Gateway 14	The large building at Gateway 14 has been completed and handed over to The Range, for their main distribution warehouse. It is a high specification building, with a number of sustainability features. Gateway 14 is part of Freeport East, which provides businesses with a range of benefits including tax relief.
Gateway 14 Innovation & Skills Centre	This will be developed in association with the Freeport designation of the site. A multi-purpose building for education, start up businesses, large and small spaces for rent.
Energy saving improvements in listed buildings	There is currently a consultation about applications for energy saving improvements in listed buildings across the district. The councils are considering the relaxation of the current requirement to apply for listed building consent. This would hopefully reduce the bureaucracy and time it takes for owners of listed buildings to make improvements to their properties. The consultation runs until 29 th December and can be accessed from the website https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MUEQAA/ .
Badley Solar Farm	This large proposal was refused at planning committee recently for heritage impact and lack of a noise report. Assuming this report is produced, there may be a difficult balance between the public interest in more renewable interest and the impact on the listed buildings around Badley Hall and Church. A small part of the land is in the parish of Combs, so I am not allowed to take part in the decision.
Locality Award	A reminder that this year's locality awards are still open for applications. Any group or organisation can apply for amounts of £250 or more. Please contact me to discuss and see https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards for application form.

Appendix 3 – Budget 2024/5

2024/2025 Budget Agreed December 2023 meeting

CATEGORY		Total to Nov 2023	Budget 2023/24	possible budget 2024/5	Comment
1	Audit Fees	£ 255.60	£ 600.00	£ 600.00	unchanged
2	Barcliff/media	£ 303.60	£ 1,000.00	£ 800.00	Change to Barclif
3	Batteries	£ -	£ 250.00	£ 250.00	accruing
4	Burial Grounds Maintenance - Combs Cemetery	£ 875.00	£ 2,000.00	£ 2,000.00	hard to predict - merge into one line for grass care
5	Burial Grounds Maintenance - St Mary's Churchyard	£ 1,450.00	£ 1,500.00	£ 1,500.00	hard to predict - merge into one line for grass care
6	Bus Shelter	£ -	£ -		oilng to be considered, but could be from PIIP/CIL
7	Clerk's Expenses - Petrol/Stationery	£ -	£ 100.00	£ 100.00	Stamps etc occasionally needed
8	Clerk's Overtime	£ -	£ -	£ -	
9	Clerk's Salary & Expenses	£ -	£ 5,541.90	£ 5,931.00	in line with national scale
10	Community Projects	£ 214.54	£ 1,500.00	£ 1,000.00	D day, litterpick promotion
11	Councillors' Expenses	£ -	£ 50.00	£ 50.00	unchanged
12	Dog Bins Maintenance	£ 597.38	£ 636.00	£ 700.00	allow for increase
13	Donations - Section 137	£ 44.00	£ 500.00	£ 300.00	reflecting trend
14	Election Expenses	£ 140.12	£ 200.00	£ 200.00	building fund for next election
15	Hire of Hall	£ -	£ 300.00	£ 300.00	will apply after this year
16	Insurance	£ 264.00	£ 500.00	£ 500.00	unlikely to be so low next year
17	Miscellaneous	£ -	£ 500.00	£ 100.00	to be monitored
18	Street Lights-Energy	£ 831.24	£ 3,600.00	£ 2,400.00	best guess
19	Street Lights-Maintenance	£ -	£ -	£ -	445 in earmarked
20	Subscriptions & Fees	£ 392.42	£ 400.00	£ 400.00	unchanged
21	Training	£ -	£ 500.00	£ -	500 in earmarked
21a	bank charges			£ 72.00	new item
					identifies change from previous