

**Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting**  
**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club**

**Present:** T Kitson (chair); A Tomlinson (councillor); H Larsen (councillor); K Archer (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (county councillor); Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor); T Bamber (clerk); S Ottewell (committee member); one member of the public.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

T Betchley (councillor). The apology was noted and accepted.

**2. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying**

There were no issues involving councillors' interests.

**3. Public Forum**

A resident from Combs Green expressed concern that the trees growing in the old play area at the bottom of Combs Green were in danger of becoming a hazard as they grew older. The clerk had found that the original builders were still in business, though the latest report in Companies House showed they had no employees. Cllr Oakes will investigate the ownership of the land, and Cllr Matthiesen will check whether this formed part of the transfer of the road from the builders to Highways.

**4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Minutes for Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024 were reviewed. 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. Cllr Oakes reported that funds were available for refurbishing of faded or damaged road signs and invited councillors to report any to her for inclusion in the exercise.

There had been several complaints about congestion in Mill Lane, triggered by the 'emergency' closure of Tannery Road for two weeks and the behaviour of sat-nav driven drivers seeking a short cut that resulted in substantial damage to the verges. Cllr Oakes was able to report that the highways department was looking for ways to prevent any recurrence.

With regard to Russet Gardens, the councillor had to report that, as no application had been made for a streetlamp at the time of the planning application, Highways had not considered the issue. Consequently, any request for a lamp now could not involve any contribution from the builders. However Cllr Oakes will investigate the possibility of installing low level solar lamps to help motorists see the kerb.

The councillor added that the concerns over the unfenced pond next to Russet Gardens were still being investigated.

**7. District Councillor's Report**

The district councillor summarised his report, which is attached as appendix 2.

**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/24/00174 17 Model Farm – Replacement windows - listed building consent sought*  
Councillors agreed that they had no objection to this application.

### Decisions

*None received*

## 10. Finance

### a. Sub-committee report

Cllr Tomlinson reported finances were in order. He proposed that a review of the infrastructure CIL plan be undertaken particularly to ensure that the five year time limit is not allowed to pass before funds are used. Ms Ottewell confirmed that she had started looking into this and will report back.

Cllr Archer reminded the clerk that there had been a discussion on the possibility of allocating CIL funds to a long term plan for future cemetery expansion. The clerk will look into this.

***Action: Clerk to investigate potential to defer use of CIL funds and ringfence them for future capital investment.***

### b. Accounts review to date

The clerk reported that, as at 31 January the Unity accounts had £5,406.79 in the current account and £72,027.46 in the savings account. The Santander accounts are now empty, though no statements have yet been received.

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

To ensure sufficient signatories are available, it was agreed that the chair, Cllr Kitson, be authorised as a bank signatory, although he would only use this power if all other signatories were unavailable.

### c. Payments received

Nothing received

### d. Payments to hand

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £222.22: This was approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 s.301*)

(ii) Morelock Signs (mount for SID) £87.60 This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment (*Highways Act 1980 s.274a*)

(iii) Community Heartbeat Trust (defibrillator battery) £267.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment (*Public Health Act 1936, S 234*)

(iv) Hartleys Garden Services Ltd – Hedge trimming for cemetery - £250.00. This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for BACS payment. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.214(2)*)

(v) Information Commissioner (data protection act fee) (Direct debit) £40 (may be £35 after suggested discount for direct debit). This was approved by all councillors and the clerk was authorised to process this for direct debit from the new bank account. (*Local Government Act 1972, s.142*)





**e. Internal Audit**

Councillors agreed that SALC be instructed to conduct the internal audit for the council again this year.

**11. Communications Committee Report**

Ms Ottewell provided an update, which mainly related to the newsletter (see below). She also confirmed that plans were being drawn up to publicise the D Day 80 commemorations.

**12. Newsletter**

A new newsletter, covering Battisford, Ringshall and Combs, was being drafted, to replace "Barclif". The provisional name for this is "Community Newsletter" and the first edition is expected to be available for distribution at the end of March, comprising 24 pages. Councillors expressed their appreciation for the excellent work being done by Ms Ottewell.

**13. D-Day Commemorations**

The chairman reported that plans were proceeding. A quiz related to D Day will be advertised to residents of Combs via a link in the newsletter. The first five correct entries will win vouchers for a fish and chip supper for two at the Punch Bowl. Apparently the national event organisers have stipulated that the commemoration must also involve national fish and chip week.

Mr Scarff has kindly agreed to organise the lighting of the beacon and the event will be the subject of articles before and after in the new newsletter.

**14. Village Map**

The chair produced a sample of a map of the village, which could be amplified to show various features and locations. It was suggested that a graphic designer be sought who could create the map in such a way that it could be shown on the website, printed, and updated as appropriate. Councillors agreed this was a splendid idea and will give some thought over the next month to the sort of item that could be included in it.

**15. Litter Pick**

The chairman proposed that the council hold its annual litter pick on 24 March, to coincide with the Great British Spring Clean. He will enquire if Battisford Parish Council are minded to hold theirs on the same day. Meanwhile the clerk was instructed to liaise with the Tannery (to be used as a meeting point) and MSDC (to procure bin bags and arrange collection of the litter the next day). He will also ask Mr Scarff if he might be able to help with gathering of collected bags. Ms Ottewell will work on publicity for the day.

**16. Internal Control Report and other Council Policies**

The clerk drew attention to the internal control report, which had been originally drafted to be reviewed every six months. This was discussed and councillors agreed that the village did not need such intensive reviews, and henceforth the report would be formally reviewed on an annual basis. The chairman observed that councillors regularly walk around the village and would promptly notify the clerk of any problems with village assets. He will conduct the review this month.

The clerk pointed out that it would soon be time for a review of all the council policies, to ensure they were still relevant, and asked councillors to spend some time reviewing those on the website when convenient.

*Anderson*

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

- The clerk reported that the cricket club had sent an email, too late for formal consideration, asking if the council might be willing to contribute £2,500 towards the cost of improving the car park. Councillors were generally supportive of allocating CIL funds to this and will discuss it formally at the next meeting. The clerk will advise the club accordingly.
- The clerk reported that two streetlamps on Tannery Road had ceased working. In liaising with contractors and communicating with residents it became clear that the lights were not really wanted by locals and so the contractors were instructed to ensure the lamps were safe and then to switch off, until further notice, numbers 4,5 and 6 (the last three before the Tannery).
- Items for the next agenda: Newsletter; D Day; Village map; Cricket Club

**18. Date and time of next meeting: Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 7:30pm, Battisford Cricket Club.**

The Meeting closed at 9.26 pm

*Abderson*



# Appendix 1 – County Councillor Report

## County Council report – February 2024

### More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been [published on the council's website](#), include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with many archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99%



increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)  
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

This is why we're spending an additional £74 million on these services but having to make £65 million of savings too.

What's involved in these services might come as a shock. We're talking about some of the most challenging and life-critical public services that people often don't consider until they need them. When they do, they are vital. I'm talking about protecting children and adults from neglect or abuse, providing education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, supporting teenage parents, supporting disabled people or adults with dementia to live independently and providing care for the elderly. Some of us take for granted that we can get up in the morning, use the toilet, dress and feed ourselves and even make a cup of tea. But there are more and more people who can't do these basic things and need our help. This is where councils step in and do life-changing work for people who need it most.

£528k, which is the amount we need to remove from annual arts grants, could for example pay for one of the following:

- 12 elderly people to be in residential care for a year
- Home care for 35 people who need extra help for a year
- 23 children in foster care for a year

Let us be clear, I'm not (and I repeat not) pitting the arts against these services. What I am saying is that Suffolk County Council must focus on what it is fundamentally and legally here to do and ensure the limited resources it has available are spent directly supporting those most in need. For now, annual arts grants are not something we can do if it means vulnerable residents going without support from us.

Some have said this is a short-term decision, that it ignores the myriad of benefits the arts bring to Suffolk. I do not dispute the benefit both social and economic that the arts bring. But when we are faced with children that need to be removed from abusive families and taken into care or getting those with special educational needs to and from school, or keeping a vulnerable resident in their own home - we must act.

In many senses, these aren't even choices. We have a legal duty to provide these services and are held to account on their quality. We must focus on what we are directly responsible for. What we need to spend on children's services has gone up by 28% in the last 12 months alone.

We lobby the Government hard for more funding alongside other councils, the county's MPs and directly. However, we must face the fact that local government is only one of many public services in need of money. The Government provided a financial lifeline to residents and businesses during COVID and the cost-of-living challenges. That money is not available right now, so councils like ours must make difficult decisions.

The decisions we now face are not wilful acts, they are born out of necessity and the need to make finely balanced prioritisation decisions in the full glare of public scrutiny. We know they are painful – we're feeling it too with £11 million of staff savings. None of this is easy but it's our job. Transparency is fundamental in public services, which is why we have published these proposals, I am talking about them here and they will now be subject to scrutiny and decision making in public. Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us remains absolute.



## **Accessible cycling scheme launched in Stowmarket**

The Way to Go Sustainable Travel team at Suffolk County Council (SCC) has launched a new accessible cycling scheme at Leading Lives Stowmarket Hub. Several community groups from across the county were invited to attend the launch and see for themselves the range of accessible bikes on offer.

Up to twelve adult bikes are available to loan for free, which is all part of SCC's drive to encourage residents to travel sustainably, especially for shorter journeys. This follows a survey conducted earlier in the year which asked community groups and their members for feedback on whether they would use accessible bikes. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, and the scheme will now give community groups the opportunity to hire the bikes up to three times a week for free.

The 12 bikes - which include 4-wheelers, balance-supported bikes, a tandem option as well as a 2-seater with the seats positioned next to each other - will be stored in Stowmarket and are funded through the Capability & Ambition Fund from Active Travel England, an executive agency of the Dept. for Transport. The team hope that community groups will book the bikes and introduce regular cycle rides for their members and carers.

## **Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk**

Suffolk County Council is today (26<sup>th</sup> January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

- Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
- New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
- Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county's most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

The new £500,000 fund would contribute to delivering on the council's ambitions such as looking after the health and wellbeing of Suffolk's residents, particularly those most in need of extra support to live as safely, independently, and healthily as possible.

## **Suffolk local area partnership commits to urgent improvements to SEND services and apologises to families**

The partnership responsible for overseeing and delivering services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk have apologised to families and commits to urgent action to strengthen and accelerate improvement plans following an inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

- Ofsted and CQC Inspection Report finds significant concerns with SEND services
- The Local Area Partnership promise urgent action to accelerate and strengthen improvement plans
- Senior leaders offer joint apology to Suffolk families



The inspection, which took place in November, highlighted that 'there are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns' about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The report can be read [here](#).

The local area partnership which delivers SEND services is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB.

The inspection report, published January 30<sup>th</sup>, identifies two priority actions as follows:

1. The partnership should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
2. Leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory Education Health Care plan process, Education Health Care plan needs assessments and Education Health Care plans and annual reviews. This should ensure that plans meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.

The local area partnership is now implementing several urgent actions. These include the proposed investment of £4.4 million into SEND services next year by Suffolk County Council (subject to Full Council agreement on February 15), and the establishment of a Suffolk SEND Improvement Board, which will be chaired by an Independent Chair, to oversee the improvement plan and actions needed. A new SEND Strategy is also in the process of being co-produced with parents and carers to set the strategic direction.

Alongside key priorities, the report identifies several areas where the partnership is working well. These include:

- In some areas, the local area partnership has worked successfully to improve services
- Strong levels of capital investment have increased the availability of special school places
- Initiatives to equip professionals in schools, such as the online tool to support schools, Valuing SEND or VSEND, are showing early signs of impact
- Several health teams support families sensitively and successfully, including the neonatal physiotherapy service
- Social care teams are effective. Social work assessments and reviews are comprehensive and helpful.
- Many providers, such as schools and colleges, praise their relationship with the local area partnership

As a result of this inspection, a monitoring inspection will be carried out within approximately 18 months. The local area partnership is now required to prepare and submit a priority action plan to address the identified areas for priority action.

The Ofsted and CQC report follows two years of significant investment into the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. Reform progress has been monitored by the Department for Education, who reported [in March 2023](#), that progress was 'reassuring' and noted 'the leadership's commitment to improvement in a wide range of areas'.

Significant pieces of reform include:

- Investment of more than £55 million to create more than 1,250 additional places in specialist and mainstream schools
- Creation of specialist SEND support teams and training for all Suffolk schools to support them to meet the additional needs of children in mainstream schools
- Proposed investment of £4.4m in 2024/25 and £3.4m in 2025/26 to expand our statutory SEND teams and secure sufficient educational psychology resource to improve the quality and timeliness of Education Health and Care assessments and reviews



- The ICB has invested £700,000 in recurring funding in the voluntary and community sector to provide support for families waiting for these diagnoses, as well as co-producing a new parent resource pack as part of the Suffolk Local Offer

## Appendix 2 – District Councillor Report

### District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward – February 2024

MSDC Plan	<p>At the January Council meeting, the priorities for Mid Suffolk District Council were agreed. There had been extensive consultation to ensure a wide range of views were taken into account. The core of the plan is putting environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything we do, “helping to create thriving and resilient communities in Mid Suffolk”. This encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing and infrastructure</li> <li>- Resilience</li> <li>- Community wellbeing; and</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability.</li> </ul> <p>A key principle is to work collaboratively with communities.</p>
MSDC 2024/25 Budget	<p>At Mid Suffolk’s Cabinet meeting, the draft budget for 2024/25 was discussed. This includes a 2% council tax increase to ensure financial stability for day to day services in the wake of shrinking government grants.</p> <p>A financial reserve has been built up over the last eight years and this will be spent on areas to benefit Mid Suffolk residents including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cosy Homes project</li> <li>- Bringing disused land back into use for amenity or other uses</li> <li>- Land for biodiversity and to meet Biodiversity Net Gain</li> <li>- Stowmarket town centre regeneration</li> <li>- New foot/cycle paths to improve connectivity</li> </ul> <p>In the housing budget, in order to be able to fund improvements to the Council’s housing stock, it is proposed that rents increase by 7.7% (in line with the Government formula – CPI+1%). Many tenants receive housing benefit or universal credit and due to recent increases in the rent portion of this, the major of tenants will not see an increase in rent.</p>
Gateway 14	<p>The proposed Green Skills and Innovation Centre business plan was approved by Council subject to funding from Freeport East.</p>
Flooding	<p>The Council agreed a motion to support communities on flooding and to help with emergency plans. In Debenham and Needham Market, community meetings have been held, attended by the Environment Agency, Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District amongst others. From these, various initiatives are now underway. I will be attending a meeting of parishes in the River Rat catchment on February 19.</p>
Planning Enforcement	<p>There are numerous cases outstanding in most villages, and I am pressing for more of these to be resolved.</p>
Locality Awards	<p>I have now finalised the awards for 2023/24, but a new budget will be available, probably starting in June.</p>