

**Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Thursday 6 May 2021 at 7.30pm, via Teams 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 8:30); T Bamber (Clerk).

1. Election of Chairman

The clerk reported that he had received a nomination for Cllr Scarff as chairman, and no other nominations were put forward. Cllr Scarff confirmed he would be willing to stand this year but planned to step down next year. Cllr Whitehead proposed that Cllr Scarff be appointed chairman for the coming year and this was seconded by Cllr Betchley. It was AGREED unanimously that Cllr Scarff be appointed chair and Cllr Scarff confirmed that he would sign the Declaration of office.

Action: Clerk to arrange signature

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

The chairman invited nominations/volunteers for the post of vice chair and Cllr Walker confirmed he would be willing to stand. It was AGREED unanimously the Cllr Walker be appointed vice chairman for the coming year.

Action: Clerk to arrange signature

3. Apologies for absence

None

4. Declarations of interest/ lobbying

Cllr Walker in respect of item 16

5. Public Forum

There were no members of public present.

6. Minutes of meeting held on Monday 12 April 2021

Minutes for 12 April 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

7. Matters arising from the minutes

- (i) Cllr Kitson produced with a well-earned flourish a report extracted from the SID, demonstrating that the data could be retrieved and reviewed. It had only been procured that day, following a considerable amount of effort, and will need a little more time to be crafted into a clear report.
- (ii) Cllr Walker reported he had learned that the artist who created the village sign many years ago was Jane Worsley. Apparently she is no longer in the village so it was proposed that a request be included in the next newsletter for either news of her whereabouts or volunteers with an artistic bent who may be able to refurbish the sign.



8. County Councillor's Report

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

Cllr Oakes had received a response to her enquiry regarding the possibility of a 'stop' sign at the junction of Tannery Road at Park Road. This had been prompted by residents' concerns that the junction was not safe but Highways reported that in their view the visibility was acceptable. Highways added that it was very rare for a junction to be made a 'stop' rather than 'give way' junction and the requirements were very exacting. They added that visibility might be improved by further cutting back of residents' hedges.

Cllr Oakes had also been advised of a communication to Jo Churchill, MP for the area, regarding a house in Park Road, whose owner was concerned that it was at risk of flooding due to a combination of poor drainage and a gradual increase in the height of the road surface. Highways are looking into the road surface issue and also the condition of nearby ditches. The chairman pointed out that drainage was a growing issue along that road: there was originally a drainage ditch at the end of all the front gardens but various residents have filled in those bits in front of their property over time and so the ditch no longer runs the length of the road.

9. District Councillor's Report

District Cllr. Matthissen had not yet arrived as he had another parish council's meeting to attend first. The councillor's report (attached here as appendix 2) had been circulated and noted by councillors. Upon his later arrival he sent the clerk a copy of the Great Finborough footpath plan and map that he had promised.

Action: Clerk to send footpath map to footpath committee

10. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chairman reported that Cllrs Chaplin and Whitehead were having difficulties giving their usual attention to their council roles. It was agreed that they both be granted leave of absence, to be reviewed in six months. Cllr Chaplin will liaise with Cllr Ottewell and help her to learn how to use the newsletter application.

As the permission to hold remote meetings was due to cease, it was agreed that the next meeting be held at Battsford Village Hall on 14 June. There was interest in considering a move to the cricket club but not without giving fair notice to the Battsford village hall committee.

Given the fact that the council is legally required to hold its next meeting in public, but that it is constrained in the number of people permitted to attend, the clerk will include with the agenda a requirement that all people wishing to attend should give the clerk 24 hours notice, so that any necessary PA equipment might be procured.

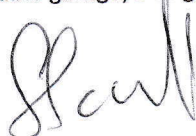
Action: Clerk to contact Battsford Village Hall and the Cricket Club

11. Planning

a. Applications received for consideration:

- i. **DC/21/01983 – The Bungalow, Bildeston Road, Little Finborough – Erection of first floor extension etc**

Following a discussion Combs Parish Council agreed to support this application in principle but observed that the proposed double garage, being at the front of the plot, may overwhelm the view of the property from the road.



ii. **DC/21/02271 – Fir Tree Farm** – erection of industrial building etc

Combs Parish Council agreed to support this application but instructed the clerk to ask the planning department:

- 1) There will be no risk that the public footpath, which passes through the property, will be compromised;
- 2) That the stated working times/days are exclusive, and that there will be no work carried out on Sundays or bank holidays

iii. **DC/21/02225 Oaks Meadow** – changes to toilet specification

All councillors were in support of this application

Action: Clerk to post Councillors' views on planning website

b. Decisions received from MSDC

- i. DC/21/01180 – Land East of Gardener's Arms – erection of two dwellings - *Granted* Noted

12. Finance

- a. **Accounts review to date** – due to the early meeting date no statements had been received . The clerk confirmed that the Section 137 expenditure had been £350, which is well within the permitted limit. Following a discussion and brief explanation of the effect of S 137, the clerk was instructed to look into the possibility of studying for the Certification in Local Council Administration (CILCA), which would help the council to achieve the General Power of Competence and not be subject to the S137 limitations regarding expenditure.

In light of the comments made by the internal auditor, it was AGREED that a reserves sub-committee be set up to earmark funds for specific projects. Cllrs Kitson and Betchley agreed to participate.

Action: Clerk to convene meeting


b. **Payments received**

i. Precept	£ 4,500.00
ii. CIL receipts	£10,875.62
iii. Parish Grant payment	£ 164.00

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. T Bamber (planning fee for Oaks Meadow) £ 145.00 Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22257 was written, and the clerk will arrange for it to be signed (*Open Spaces Act 1906, ss 9&10/ Local Government Act 1972 s 133*)
- iii. Rewts Ltd (tree assessment Webbs Close) £85.00 Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22258 was written, and the clerk will arrange for it to be signed (*Local Government Act S 111*)
- iv. SALC – internal audit fee £292.80. Approved by all councillors. Cheque number 22259 was written, and the clerk will arrange for it to be signed (*Local Government Act 1972, s 111/ s 133*)

Action: Clerk to arrange signatures and send



d. Approval of Annual Figures

The annual figures and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (**AGAR**) forms had been circulated previously and these were approved by all councillors: the clerk was authorised to post details on the village website and to include in the submission to external auditors.

Action: Clerk to post on web site

e. Approval of publication period for annual reporting documents

The clerk suggested that the publication dates for the public rights to view the council's accounts be set as the dates recommended by the external auditors, namely Monday 14 June to Friday 23 July. This was AGREED.

Action: Clerk to publish public rights notices on 13 June.

13. Review of Council Policies

a. Review of Standing Orders

The standing orders, updated last year, had been circulated prior to the meeting for review. It was AGREED that, with one minor error that the clerk will correct, these were still valid and were approved by the Council.

b. Review of Financial Regulations

The Financial Regulations, updated last year, had been circulated prior to the meeting for review. It was AGREED that these were still valid and were approved by the Council.

c. Review of Asset Register and Risk Assessment

The Risk assessment was reviewed and accepted as before, and the Asset Register was reviewed and confirmed correct. It was then AGREED that these be approved.

d. Review of Internal Control Policy

The Internal Control Policy was reviewed and accepted as before. It was then AGREED that this be approved.

e. Review of Data policies

The Data Protection policy, data breach and subject access policies were reviewed. It was AGREED that, with one minor error that the clerk will correct, these were still valid and were approved by the Council.

Action: Clerk to modify/ arrange signatures where appropriate and post to website

14. Webbs Close parking issues

Cllr Oakes will arrange a meeting in Webbs Close involving the highways engineer.

15. Bus Shelter

It was noted that the village bus shelter is in need of repair. The chairman had obtained a quotation from Daniel Bellamy, who is making the new notice boards, for repairing the roof in the sum of £868. Given that this is a much lower price than had been previously estimated, councillors agreed there was no need for any formal tender and authorised the clerk to instruct the work to be commenced.

Action: Clerk to contact Mr Bellamy



16. PIIP (Infrastructure Plan)

Cllr Walker referred to a request received from the church bells project, seeking a contribution from CIL funds.

In order to be sure there was no perception of a concealed interest, Cllr Walker reported that he had been in conversations with the church PCC and the church bells committee in the past with various trusts regarding fundraising for the bell project.

Again in the interests of clarity, the chairman reported that his wife was on the church bells committee.

Following discussion all agreed that the bell project was an appropriate subject to consider for CIL funding and that it will be on the list of possible projects for consideration by the committee. Each project would be considered impartially, in the context of contribution to village life. The chairman will try to arrange for a speaker to attend the next meeting to explain the bells project.

Action Chairman to arrange speaker for church bells

17. Parish Walks

Cllr Kitson provided an update. Cllr Ottewell offered to 'test ride' the proposed plans during her regular walks around the village.

18. Cycle Paths

The Chairman reported he had no update yet.

19. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Whitehead provided an update on the project. Funding is in place for the main gateway and there will be an open day on 4 July. The next working day will be on 24 May (10-12 and 2-4).

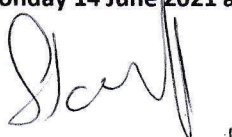
Due to other commitments, Cllr Whitehead has resigned from the Oaks Meadow steering committee. Cllr Betchley, who is already a member of the user group, agreed to liaise between the steering committee and the council.

20. Correspondence/Any Other Business

- The clerk had received and circulated a letter of thanks from Battsford Parish Council in respect of the CIL donation to their playing area.
- Recognising the possibility that the elections may mean that this is Cllr Oake's last meeting the chairman, on behalf of the council, thanked her for her steadfast support.
- Noting the leave of absence agreed for Cllrs Chaplin and Whitehead, the chairman took the opportunity to thank them for their contributions so far, and to express the hope that they will find themselves able to return in the future.

21. Date and time of next meeting – Monday 14 June 2021 at 7.30pm in Battsford Village Hall

The Meeting closed at 9.34 pm



Appendix 1 – County Councillor’s Report

2020/2021 News Highlights

This is a selection of news items from Suffolk County Council that have featured over the last 12 months. For further details on any of these stories, and more, visit:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>

March 2021

Suffolk County Council secures £3.1M for building decarbonisation initiative.

Suffolk County Council (SCC), working in conjunction with property specialists Concertus, has been successful in gaining over £3M of funding from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to promote capital energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation projects within buildings used to provide frontline public services.

Working with Concertus, the council has been preparing a range of packages to support the decarbonising of various buildings in the Council’s estate including applications for the council's headquarters at Endeavour House in Ipswich, four rural fire stations, Beacon House, Waterloo Centre and Leiston Children’s Centre.

The council's Children and Young People service also reviewed their portfolio of school buildings along with Concertus. This review resulted in the submission of grant applications for nine schools across the county, all of which were successful.

This grant scheme aligns with BEIS’ new mission and priorities: fighting coronavirus, backing business, unleashing innovation, and tackling climate change. Through this scheme, it is supporting the council's own commitment to be net zero by 2030 along with the Government’s own net zero goals and encouraging further green investment within the UK.

Packages of work vary from building to building, but many include the fitting of solar panels and battery storage, as well as improvements to wall or roof insulation and installation of Air Source Heat Pumps to move away from the use of fossil fuels for source of heating.

February 2021

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.

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.

January 2021

Suffolk 2020 fund project embraces love of the great outdoors – Discovering Suffolk

The Discovering Suffolk project was launched in January 2021.

The aim of the project is to raise further awareness of the range of great walking routes, areas of interest and the variety of landscapes that form Suffolk's beautiful countryside through public rights of way and points of access.

Given the experiences many people have faced over the last year living through the pandemic, it was recognised that exercise and wellbeing is a fundamental element in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Suffolk's countryside offers a freely accessible means for many of us to experience nature and stay healthy.

The key element of the Discovering Suffolk project is the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring in Suffolk's countryside.

Discovering Suffolk builds on our changing behaviours when visiting the countryside, as people become ever more interested in local exploration and taking short walks and cycling exercises during the pandemic. The project will continue to promote the Discover Suffolk website as new content, information and advice continues to be added to the current offer, promoting walking routes and cycle rides through local communities. The project seeks to actively engage new audiences who are not aware of the options available on their doorstep or have perhaps only begun to explore the local countryside beyond their neighbourhood.

Work will shortly start on developing the Discovering Suffolk App and setting the sites for the QR code points around the county. After development, the new, free App will provide access to the full range of Discover Suffolk outdoor guides with over 100 walks across the county. The App and QR codes will include audio, video, imagery and fun activities to further enhance people's enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Suffolk's natural and built environment.

DECEMBER 2020

Suffolk wins the Most Innovative Family Information Service award

On December 16th, Suffolk won the Most Innovative Family Information Service award at the National Association of Family Information Service Awards (NAFIS), 2020.

The award highlights the work undertaken to adapt Suffolk's online Community Services Directory, **Suffolk InfoLink** (www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink), to meet the public's rapidly changing needs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Community Information Team and teams across the children and young people's directorate worked together with thousands of community partners to collate and provide information to support to the public. Many service providers in the voluntary and community sector were quick to adapt their offer and were supported to use Suffolk InfoLink to promote these opportunities to the public.

There are 7000 community organisation records provided on InfoLink allowing teams to communicate information quickly to thousands of sector partners, and the voluntary sector, and report progress to relevant government departments. On a week-by-week basis Suffolk InfoLink was updated to highlight which childcare providers were open for vulnerable children, and key workers such as NHS staff during the first National Lockdown which was an essential element of the Covid rapid response.

As well as helping key workers to find childcare, these developments also supported Suffolk's Track and Trace, Home but Not Alone and the Suffolk Advice and Support Service and provided 'easy to use' access to essential information including financial help and food banks.

October 2020

Adopt East launches

14 October marked the launch of Adopt East, a regional adoption agency which has been established to recruit adopters across the East of England.

Adopt East will work across local authorities in Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Bedford and Luton to find families for children who are waiting to find their forever home. Adoptionplus, Barnardo's, and Adoption UK are also part of the partnership.

The Adopt East alliance will deliver the highest quality adoption service to children and families throughout the region by bringing together the expertise and skills of all its partners.

The scale of the organisation means that adopters will have access to a larger number of children waiting for adoption. This will help partners to match children with the right family for them, at the earliest opportunity.

Adopt East is committed to providing good quality adoption support services to support all families with their adoption journey.

Council announces £228,000 for tree-planting, protecting hedgerows and verges across Suffolk

In October, it was announced Suffolk's natural environment will receive investment for tree-planting, restoring hedgerows, and improving roadside verges for wildlife.

£228,000 from the Suffolk 2020 Fund will enable Suffolk County Council to enhance its work to protect and encourage biodiversity in the county. The authority will do this through a number of new schemes, as well as building on existing work.

Working with The Woodland Trust, Suffolk Tree Wardens, landowners, and county farm tenants, the funding will support the planting of around 100,000 trees, including replanting hedgerows in suitable locations across Suffolk over the next 18 months. It will also help establish around 10 community tree nurseries, which will support more planting in years to come. Local volunteers will be supported to collect seeds, set up nursery beds and grow trees in their communities.

The funding will also be used to trial better ways to manage roadside verges for wildlife. This includes exploring the use of new technology and cutting techniques, as well as developing new partnerships with parishes and landowners. The funding will help expand the existing Roadside Nature Reserve network managed by the council with the help of volunteers, seeing a 25% increase in the overall length of verges managed for wildlife.

September 2020

The Hold welcomes first visitors and opens inaugural exhibition

Monday 28 September saw the public able to access The Hold, Suffolk's flagship new heritage facility on Ipswich Waterfront.

This versatile new building will be the permanent home of the Suffolk Archives Ipswich branch and is shared with the University of Suffolk, who have dedicated teaching spaces within the building.

The creation of The Hold, and its associated countywide programme of events and activities, has been made possible thanks to a grant of £10.3m from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and further funding support from other national organisations and local Suffolk heritage groups.

The public are currently able to access 'front of house' areas, including archive inspired displays, the café, shop, and toilets, including a new Changing Places facility.

First year History students were some of the first to try out the new facilities, with lectures and seminars beginning in the new facilities. The main area, known as 'The Street', as well as the café and shop, enjoyed a steady trickle of curious visitors and passers-by.

On 2 October, the long-awaited Exhibition Gallery also opened to visitors. The inaugural exhibition, *Global Events: Suffolk Stories*, examines how Suffolk has responded as a community to key global events over the past 100 years.

It focuses on the arrival of American service people during the 'Friendly Invasion' of World War Two, as well as the rising tensions and public messaging of the Cold War period, and the collective community response to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020.

Through original archival documents, photos, music, and film, visitors will be able to explore the similarities and differences between these three global events and understand how Suffolk has changed as a result.

Council announces £300,000 for electric vehicle charging points in rural Suffolk

On September 23, it was announced that 100 fast charging points for electric vehicles will be installed in rural parts of the county by Suffolk County Council.

The council will be reaching out to interested parish and town councils and non-profit organisations to put in fast chargers where there are currently none. The funding will cover the installation and set-up costs, meaning very little expense for the hosts and possibly creating a source of income for them.

This project is the first to benefit from the council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which was announced earlier this year. This is a £3m fund for the council's own projects to bid into. Projects must help address the council's climate emergency declaration and must improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come.

The £300,000 award will link into the council's existing Plug In Suffolk project, which was launched in February 2019. It is the UK's first 'fully open' public fast charging network for electric vehicles, meaning drivers simply pay by contactless payment with no need to register their details.

August 2020

Suffolk celebrates 1,000 miles of newly surfaced roads

On the 5 August, it was announced that Suffolk Highways completed its 1,000th resurfaced mile, following the Council's commitment to relay new road surfaces on a quarter of Suffolk's road network.

In 2017, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet committed to resurfacing 1,000 miles of road across Suffolk over a four-year period; in a bid to improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and to help stop potholes from forming in the first place.

The commitment also makes sound financial sense, as preventing the deterioration of road surfaces by machine surfacing or surface dressing helps reduce the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance repairing potholes now, and in future years.

The 1,000th mile was laid at Horham Road in Eye.

July 2020

Council proposes unprecedented environmental plans in response to climate emergency

In response to its declaration of a climate emergency, Suffolk County Council aims to lead the way with an unparalleled range of activities and policy changes to support its ambition of being a 'net zero' authority by 2030.

At its meeting on 14 July 2020, the council's Cabinet reviewed and agreed an extensive programme of recommendations to achieve this ambition.

The plans include dozens of changes and new ways of working, from making its pool car fleet all-electric, to making it mandatory for all future committee decisions to consider the net zero ambition.

Being 'net zero' means that the council will remove its carbon emissions where it can; if it is unable to do so, it will compensate for those emissions. The council will adopt a more detailed method to measure its carbon emissions output, so that it can more accurately track its progress on an annual basis.

June 2020

Better Broadband for Suffolk reaches 100,000th customer as third phase contract is agreed

By June 3, more than 100,000 households across Suffolk were using faster broadband, thanks to the council-led Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

The partnership - between Suffolk County Council, Openreach, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and local councils – has made faster broadband available to around 150,000 premises so far, since being launched in 2010.

It means the current total superfast broadband coverage in Suffolk stands at more than 96 per cent, with plans currently in place to reach 98 per cent coverage before the end of the year.

The team has plans to go even further, after today announcing an additional phase of work, to provide connectivity to approximately 5,000 more premises, including over 550 businesses, in some of the most rural parts of Suffolk.

The work will be carried out by Openreach – operator of the UK's largest phone and broadband network, used by the likes of BT, Sky, Plusnet and TalkTalk – and is set to start as soon as deployment under the current contract ends. Work will continue until September 2022.

Faster broadband provides many benefits including staying in contact with friends and family through video conferencing services, easier web browsing and online shopping, the ability to stream high-definition video and work from home. Covid-19 has led to many of these benefits becoming even more crucial during times of social distancing and will have a large part to play during the recovery phase.

May 2020

Discover Suffolk's history with new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website

On 20 May, Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service announced the launch of its new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website at heritage.suffolk.gov.uk. This offers users a completely free resource of interesting, up-to-date information on the archaeology and history of Suffolk.

The new website includes an upgraded searchable interactive map and a database of known archaeological sites, which can be used to discover more about Suffolk's history from the comfort of your home.

Alongside free downloadable publications and resources, there is updated guidance and best practice advice on finds recording and access to the county's archaeological archives.

The website features key archaeological sites and projects, such as Suffolk's World War II heritage. You can find out more about the internationally significant Anglo-Saxon site at Rendlesham, its 12 years of ongoing archaeological research and results, with podcasts and archaeological reports.

A dedicated section on Ipswich also summarises the town's development through the ages, featuring the recently completed 'Urban Archaeological Database' with useful archive and planning guidance. There are also lots of downloadable activities for families and children.

April 2020

More than 98% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

On 16 April, it was reported that over 98.57% of Suffolk children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of the schools preferred by their parents.

Suffolk County Council received 7,602 applications from parents indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2020.

Some 7,116 children received offers for their first preference school and 7,493 children received an offer for one of their three preferred schools.

March 2020

Access for all at Suffolk rail stations

Following successful bids for funding, Needham Market and Bury St Edmunds rail stations will now receive improved access to platforms for its passengers.

A partnership of stakeholders including Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and the Needham Market Group has secured Access for All funding – a government funding programme for schemes to improve station access.

For Needham Market, the station will receive an upgrade to improve access to the Ipswich-bound platform 2.

At the Bury St Edmunds station, the funding will provide a new accessible entrance on the north side of the station, linking the new car park with the station concourse.

Plans for improvements to the Bury station have received support from Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Trust and other local organisations.

Following the funding announcement, all parties involved are now committed to making the initiatives happen as soon as possible.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor’s Report

Mid Suffolk District Council –Onehouse Ward

Mid Suffolk District Councillor Annual Report (2020/21)

- **Governance**

Due to the Covid 19 emergency, there were no Council meetings from 23 March 2020 until the new Government legislation to allow virtual meetings was approved in May. Council staff have been working from home where possible and all Council and committee meetings are currently being conducted virtually using the Teams platform. The Annual Council meeting was deferred until September. The Green Party councillors formed a council group with the Liberal Democrat councillors, so we now form 50% of the total number of councillors. The cabinet, leader and committee chairs (all Conservative) were elected on the casting vote of the outgoing chair of council in 2019.

- **Budget and investments**

The COVID pandemic is continuing to have a financial impact on the Council’s budget. There are already losses of approximately £1M with projected losses of a further £1M during 2021/22. The Government has provided support but not sufficient to cover all the extra costs and reduced income.

Despite having about £10M in reserves the Council increased Council Tax by 1.66%. It has been agreed that £4M of the reserves are to be allocated to the following departments Communities, Housing, Economy and Well-being. The new rules about Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing did not immediately halt the second round of property acquisitions, but the threat from Government of no further loans for council housing projects seems to have ruled out further speculation.

- **Climate Change and Biodiversity**

The Climate Change working group made a number of proposals to Council, including projects such as Solar Carport at the Mid Suffolk Leisure centre site, and waste fleet conversion to biodiesel fuel. Work is also underway at the leisure centres to reduce the carbon footprint. There is to be a biodiversity mapping project across the district and the public realm team are hoping to work with parish councils to promote more tree and hedgerow planting, and meadow management.

- **Housing**

Council housing rents are set to increase by CPI+1%, which is on average £1.25 increase per week. Garage rents are to remain the same. Sheltered housing service charges are to increase by £1 per week, and sheltered housing rents are to remain the same as last year. In principle ‘right-to-buy’ receipts are to be retained for use to develop and acquire new council dwellings.

There is a programme of decarbonising Council dwellings. This year (20/21) 62 Air Source Heat pumps and 169 boilers have been installed in Council properties and there are a further 200 planned boiler installations over next year at a cost of £1.8m. A pilot project in Harleston is underway to test various schemes to find out the most suitable approach to refurbish our housing stock.

- **Planning**

The Regulation 19 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan was agreed by both Councils and is now awaiting examination by the Planning Inspectorate. It is hoped that this will be able to proceed to adoption by the end of this year.

A number of unsatisfactory planning decisions affected the ward this year, although a few were rejected, followed in some cases by appeals. Worst by far was the outline approval of 146 houses south of Union Road, Onehouse, forced through on the casting vote of the Conservative chair despite only being a reserve allocation in the Stowmarket Area Action Plan, despite the District already having over 6000 planning approvals awaiting builders, and despite opposition from the parish council on behalf of many local people.

Public concern has grown to alarm as trees and hedges have disappeared in many places, in stark contradiction of the council declaring a biodiversity emergency in 2019. This highlights the need for more detailed study of the implications of planning applications, but also the many loopholes in legislation which purports to protect trees, hedges and wildlife. I will ask again that the council appoints more tree officers.

- **Supporting the community**

Many community groups have struggled during the pandemic, but I was pleased to support the following organisations with my locality budget this year:

Harleston	Tree and Green maintenance
Great Finborough	Wildflower meadow information board
Ward-wide	Mobile Public Address system
Onehouse	Trinity Hall floor
Onehouse	New Mower
Combs & Lt Finboro'	Oaks Meadow project
Harleston	Dog waste bin

Community grants of over £150k have been awarded to community projects throughout the district as well as £100k specifically targeted at COVID related support groups.

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**.

I would like to thank the Parish Councils for all their work done throughout the year, and in particular thank many people for the formal and informal support that has helped our communities through the pandemic.

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