

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

Present: T Kitson (chair); T Betchley (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); T Bamber (clerk); one member of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr K Oakes (county councillor); Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor). Both apologies were accepted.

2. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying

There were no issues involving councillors' interests.

3. Public Forum

The member of the public had come to the meeting as a member of the finance sub-committee.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 16th October 2023

Minutes for Monday 16th October 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 reported that, following enquiries, he had ascertained that the damage to the verge in Moats Tye had been caused by vehicles involved in farming sugar beet, and that this activity would not be likely to recur for at least two years. There were no other matters arising that are not dealt with elsewhere.

6. County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent her apologies, due to ill health. She had sent her report previously and this is attached as appendix 1.

7. District Councillor's Report

The district councillor had warned that he had two other meetings to attend first and provisionally sent his apologies, together with his report (appendix 2) and invited councillors to contact him if they had any questions.

8. Parish Council Chairman's Report

The chair reported that he had attended the memorial service on Remembrance Sunday at St Mary's, and had laid the wreath on behalf of the parish council. He reported that he was made extremely welcome, and it was clear that the participation of the parish council was appreciated. All agreed it would be good to try to ensure support in future years.

9. Planning

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



10. Finance

a. Sub-committee report

Cllr Tomlinson reported that the committee had met to consider the budget and precept for y/c April 2024. The meeting had been very productive, and a draft budget had been drawn up.

It was agreed that, while past surpluses had been used in recent years to avoid passing on increased costs to residents, the time was coming when the council should start to ensure its current expenditure was matched by current revenue. To this end it was also agreed that a gradual, modest, increase each year would be better than a large increase when surplus funds were no longer available.

Until the district council can provide details of the tax base for the year, no formal precept could be decided but as the committee was minded to aim for a gradual increase the clerk had drawn up a range of precept options based on the current tax base and the committee will meet in December to finalise their recommendation in time for a decision at the December council meeting.

b. Accounts review to date

The clerk reported that the Current Account balance with Santander as of 31 October 2023 was £60,599.09 and the savings account balance was £0, while the new Unity account had £19,039.07 in the current account.

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

Despite the district council having confirmed to the clerk that they had noted the new Unity account, the CIL funds just received had been paid into the Santander account. The clerk will attempt to clarify the position but will have to wait to see how Santander handles the request sent last month, asking for funds to be moved to the Unity account.

Action: clerk to write to MSDC and Santander

c. Payments received

(i) Mid Suffolk District Council – community infrastructure levy (CIL) £ 17,030.24

d. Payments to hand

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £160.51: 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 October: £510.00. 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) (cost of wreath – mentioned on agenda – was not approved as the clerk could not locate the receipt. This will be resubmitted next month)

Action: clerk to process payments and inform councillors when ready for their authorisation. And to find the receipt for the wreath.

e. Budget and precept

As mentioned under (a) above, the finance committee will meet (4th December) to finalise their proposals for budget and precept, ready for a formal discussion at the next meeting.

Action: clerk to liaise and circulate draft budget after committee meeting

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11. Communications sub-committee report

Ms Ottewell informed councillors that she had met with the current editors of Barclif magazine and that it was expected she would take on the role in the early part of next year. The chairman assured Ms Ottewell that she had the council's full support and that there was no pressure on her to proceed unless she were comfortable with the arrangements, particularly over editorial control.

12. Oaks Meadow

Cllr Betchley had no news to report.

13. War memorial

Following a suggestion that the council look into the notion of a war memorial for the village, Cllr Betchley reported that there was a plaque in St Mary's church, listing the 44 names of those from Combs (and Combs Ford in the time that was part of the parish) who had lost their lives in service to the country. As the plaque is well made and recognised each Armistice Day it was agreed that there was no need to consider a further memorial.

Cllr Betchley and Ms Ottewell will seek to obtain more details about those remembered on the plaque, with a view to possibly writing an article for the Barclif magazine. They will also look for details of the fallen commemorated in Battsford.

14. Next year meeting calendar

The clerk had circulated a draft list of potential meeting dates for 2024 and all agreed that they would check their calendars. Unless the clerk hears of any objection, this will be posted as the formal calendar.

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.

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

- The clerk had received an email from the community governance team regarding the boundary review, as also mentioned in Cllr Matthissen's report (appendix 2). The committee recommended that, with the exception of Bowl Meadow, no other change was appropriate. Residents are to be polled on whether Bowl Meadow should become part of Battsford.
- The clerk had received a donation request from Citizens' Advice Bureau, but too late for formal consideration this month, so this will form an agenda item in December.

16. Date and time of next meeting - **NOTE CHANGE FROM LISTED DATE: Monday 18th December 2023 at 7:30pm, Battsford Cricket Club.**

The Meeting closed at 8.34 pm

Appendix 1 – County Councillor Report October

County Council report – November 2023

New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements, and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

When seeking a new highways partner, the county council wanted a keener focus on delivering greater social value, building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction, and protecting the environment, using local skills and talent, and giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector.

The new partnership was built around six key contract objectives, which will form the basis for all that Suffolk Highways delivers going forward. These objectives are:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Social Value
- Environment and Net Zero Carbon
- Customer Communication and Engagement
- Commercialism and Enterprise
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

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

"I am delighted to welcome our new highways partner, Milestone, to Suffolk. There has been a great deal of work taking place over the past few months to ensure we were ready to start the new partnership on 1 October whilst continuing to deliver services to our residents.

"As highways services tend to impact all those living, working, or travelling in our county; it was essential we found the best possible fit for what was needed here in Suffolk.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in successfully procuring, awarding and mobilising this new contract, whilst continuing to keep our county safe and moving."

Statement following funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions

The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions today.

Councillor Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“This is excellent news for Suffolk. The infrastructure at these junctions currently lacks capacity for the demand from freight and passenger traffic. This investment will reduce those constraints and allow more trains to run through Ely and Haughley, including freight on rail out of Felixstowe and more passenger services between Ipswich and Peterborough.

“This will ease congestion on our roads, help us on our journey towards net zero by reducing carbon emissions and provide a significant boost to the local economy.”

Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as the latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily today (October 11th) by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid, are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

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

“It is both shocking and disappointing to me that councils and communities in Suffolk are finding out about these very large proposals for the first time in this way. Suffolk County Council has not been approached by any of the businesses that have had a connection offer from National Grid, and neither have the communities, who will be expected to host these huge schemes. When you consider that a connection offer from National Grid forms a legally binding contract with developers, it is simply inexplicable to me that such a contract could exist without anyone locally being made aware, by the developer, of their proposals. In my view, this treats the opinions of local people, and their council representatives, with contempt and is a terrible way to begin projects of this nature. Any of these projects, if they do come forward and are submitted to the planning inspectorate for planning permission, have serious implications for local people, our county's infrastructure, our agricultural capacity and heritage, not to mention our precious natural environment and wildlife habitats.”

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of

the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

Cllr. Rout continued:

"Suffolk County Council readily understands and accepts the extent and magnitude of the infrastructure required to deliver national energy independence. However, food security is equally important, and we have grave concerns about taking vast swathes of high-quality agricultural land out of food production for solar farms. It is critical that projects, like those emerging for the first time today, are handled in the right way and treat local people with the respect they deserve. Any attempt to sneak projects through the back door or avoid early meaningful engagement with communities is simply not good enough, and I will continue to call it out when I see it happening."

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

Council seeks your views for next year's budget

Suffolk County Council is keen to hear from Suffolk residents, businesses, and local communities, as it decides how it will spend money next year.

[An online consultation](#) has been launched, and several focus groups will be held, to explain the council's current financial situation, along with the chance for Suffolk residents and businesses to have a say on Council Tax proposals.

The council's budget setting process will consider the responses to the consultation, advice from council officers, elected members from political groups, businesses and partners in health and other public service organisations across Suffolk.

Results of the consultation will be included in the report considered by the council when agreeing the budget in February 2024.

More than 200 properties flooded by Storm Babet

Interim figures show more than 200 properties in Suffolk were flooded by Storm Babet.

The number of flooded premises, including businesses and homes, is expected to be higher as Suffolk councils and emergency planners work together to compile a full list.

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

"It is key that all residents who suffered flood damage report the incident. I understand that the pressures of finding somewhere to live or work, or stripping out damaged belongings may have dominated people's lives since Friday, but I would urge them to take the time to fill in a flood report online. We know that this financial support is urgently needed, and we will do everything in our power to get it out to home and business owners as soon as possible."

On Wednesday, Communities Secretary Michael Gove and Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey announced several financial measures to support those who have experienced exceptional localised flooding.

Under the measures announced:

- Flooded households in affected areas can apply for up to £500 to give cash quickly to help with immediate costs.
- Households and businesses significantly affected by recent flooding will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least three months.
- Small-to-medium-sized businesses in affected areas will be eligible for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant to help them return quickly to business as usual.
- Eligible flood-hit property owners will be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.

The support will be made available through a scheme known as the Flood Recovery Framework, which is used in exceptional circumstances to support councils and communities following severe flooding.

The full details of the scheme are yet to be announced by the Government, including where residents can apply and who is eligible. Suffolk County Council will share updates once received.

To report a flood visit the [report a flood in Suffolk](#) page. Alternatively, you can call the customer service number on 0345 606 6171.

Suffolk Residents invited to help shape the future of library services

A public consultation has been launched today (Monday 30 October), encouraging Suffolk Residents to tell Suffolk County Council what they want from their library services in the future.

Suffolk County Council's contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) Limited, the independent charity that runs the library service, comes to an end on 31 May 2025, with a new contract set to begin in June 2025. The Council is therefore seeking views from the public about what is important to them, ahead of awarding the new contract.

The 13-week consultation will be followed by a competitive Tender Process, before the new contract is awarded in November 2024.

To inform the consultation, the council has undertaken engagement with over 30 organisations including Suffolk's Libraries IPS Limited staff, key service users, schools, and partner organisations.

A key focus of the consultation is the council's Library outreach services, which include three mobile library vehicles, serving more than 500 stops across rural parts of the county each month, for the pickup and exchange of books.

The mobile library vehicles are coming to the end of their life and the council therefore needs to consider the best way to continue to deliver these services to people in rural areas of the county going forward.

The council is keen to hear from people who currently use library services and those who do not, to better understand the needs across the county. This feedback will help to inform the requirements for the future contract.

The value of the new contract will be £6.8m per year, increased from the previous contract value of £5.9m. The increase considers increased service costs, management of the Library Outreach service, and to allow for innovation in future years.

The term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years.


The consultation is open from today, Monday 30 October, until Friday 26 January.

Residents can have their say by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation

The results of the consultation will be considered by Suffolk County Council at its meeting of the Cabinet in March 2024.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor Report October

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward November 2023

Boundary Changes	<p>An internal review of requests for changes has recommended <i>no change</i> as between Onehouse and Stowmarket, but that the transfer of the 9 homes near The Punchbowl pub <i>should</i> be transferred to Battisford. These recommendations have been issued for public consultation. www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-governance-review</p>
Flooding	<p>After Storm Babet, the Council has been working hard to help residents in affected homes and businesses. Householders are being urged to report flood damage via Suffolk County Council's reporting tool: https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/report-a-flood-in-suffolk . The government has announced some financial support and we are waiting to see how this can be distributed. Mid Suffolk District Council will be reviewing their processes that are currently in place for dealing with this type of emergency situation. Affected businesses should also contact Mid Suffolk to register for support. Please visit www.midsuffolk.gov.uk for full details.</p>
Solar Farms	<p>At Mid Suffolk's Council meeting on 26th October, a position statement on Solar Farms was agreed. This stated that solar farms should not be based on prime agricultural land and the landscape impact on our communities needed to be taken into account. In the absence of clear Government policy, the Council cannot make planning policy regarding renewable energy such as solar farms or solar PV on roof tops. We can only provide a statement of intent in terms of how we wish to see developments proceed. In January next year we expect to produce a full Supplementary Planning Document on this which takes longer to put together as it has to be consulted on and provide relevant evidence</p>
Council Housing	<p>The Council currently provides a very poor level of service for maintaining our housing stock and have a very low level of tenant satisfaction. The new Administration at Mid Suffolk is focussing on the backlog of housing repairs that are needed. This backlog will be dealt with via a separate contractor allowing the in-house team to concentrate on day-to-day repairs. We are also investing heavily in the repairs and maintenance service for our Council stock. We have engaged external partners to monitor our service moving forward.</p>
	<p>Last few days for this consultation but you can always tell me what is right or wrong or could do better. https://baberghandmidsuffolk.citizenlab.co/en-GB/projects/setting-the-future-direction-of-your-councils</p>



The *Cosy Homes* initiative is being launched on 15th November. Eligible households will be able to apply for energy efficiency measures in their own homes, including if privately rented. Full details to be available soon. Particularly vulnerable households can continue to access this via the wider Suffolk scheme, www.warmhomessuffolk.org

Locality Awards

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. Let me know your ideas. There is an application form on MSDC web site. <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards>

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