

**Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 8th January 2024 at 7.30pm, Battisford Cricket Club**

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

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor) had sent provisional apologies as he had two other meetings to attend.

2. Co-Option of New Councillors

The chairman welcomed Hannah Larsen and Kevin Archer, who had previously indicated a willingness to be co-opted onto the council. Councillors had privately considered the matter and now voted unanimously to co-opt both volunteers.

Action: Clerk to attend to paperwork

3. Declarations of Interest/Lobbying

There were no issues involving councillors' interests.

4. Public Forum

No issues to raise (the two members of the public having now become councillors).

5. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 18th December 2023

Minutes for Monday 18th December 2023 were reviewed. A spelling error was noted and once corrected it was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

6. Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising that are not dealt with elsewhere.

7. County Councillor's Report

The county councillor had sent her report previously and this is attached as appendix 1. Councillors thanked her for her very prompt attention to the request for a street light in Russet Gardens, which is now under consideration by the engineers. Cllr Oakes added that the concerns over the unfenced pond next to Russet Gardens was also being investigated.

8. District Councillor's Report

The district councillor had not arrived but councillors had seen his report, which is attached as appendix 2.

9. Parish Council Chairman's Report

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

10. Planning

Applications:

None received

Decisions

None received



11. Finance

a. Sub-committee report

Cllr Tomlinson reported that the cheque drawn on Santander to empty that account had been credited in the new year to the Unity account, and that the chairman had then moved the amount to the savings account.

b. Accounts review to date

The clerk reported that the Current Account balance with Santander as of 31 December 2023 was £60,599.09 and the savings account balance was £0, while the new Unity account had £1,507.52 in the current account and £13,500 in the savings account. As noted above, the funds from the Santander current account have now been received into the Unity account. Once the Santander bank statements showing nil balance have been received the clerk will write to Santander asking them to close the accounts. Based on past experience with Santander the clerk expects they will treat this request with their customary courtesy, providing no acknowledgement but perhaps a little light entertainment value in predicting how many more statements they might continue to send.

There was a discussion on whether CIL funds might be put into an earmarked fund for future purchase of more cemetery land, despite the customary five year limit on retention of CIL money. Councillors agreed to discuss this further next month.

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

Action: clerk to write to Santander.

c. Payments received

Nothing received

d. Payments to hand

(i) Npower electricity for streetlights (direct debit) £214.17: This was approved by all councillors (*Parish Councils Act 1957, S.3; Highways Act 1980 s.301*)

12. D-Day Commemorations

The chairman explained the national campaign to commemorate D-Day and councillors supported the idea of participating. The beacon should be lit at 9:15PM and Cllr Betchley will read the tribute that has been drawn up. Councillors agreed that it may be best to have a small formal ceremony on the day itself (Thursday), with a larger event if possible on the following Saturday. It was agreed that a committee be formed to consider this further and cllrs Larsen, Archer and Betchley volunteered to sit on this, chaired by the council chairman, who will arrange the first meeting.

Action: Chair to convene committee meeting.

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

- The clerk reported that the builders at the development in Bildeston Road had moved the notice board to stand in front of their boundary fence.
- Councillors were concerned about the number of contractors' vehicles parking outside or near to The Appleyard, Bildeston Road. With so many parked so close together it was sometimes dangerous for vehicles to pass. The clerk was going to raise this in an email to Cllr Matthissen, however Cllr Matthissen arrived after



the meeting had closed and this was discussed informally. Unfortunately, he advised that parking constraints were usually only imposed on large developments, not on work to individual houses. The only possible remedy would be to call the police if road conditions were becoming dangerous.

- Items for the next agenda: Newsletter; D Day; Village map

14. Date and time of next meeting : Monday 12th February 2024 at 7:30pm, Battsford Cricket Club.

The Meeting closed at 8.29 pm



Appendix 1 – County Councillor Report

County Council report January 2024

An article by Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding.

As temperatures plummet, highways teams have now switched their focus to ensuring the county's roads are treated and kept free from snow and ice. Despite experiencing mild temperatures in the autumn, our highways teams have been carefully planning our winter gritting operation for months to ensure we are prepared for whatever the weather throws our way.

The gritting treatment of our roads in Suffolk is vital to ensure people can continue to travel and do so safely during winter. During the 2022/23 winter season, Suffolk used around 12,989 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 177,983 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth over seven times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 17,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any further drop in temperatures.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B 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 conditions.

This entire operation requires extremely careful pre-planning and running throughout, every single decision to grit or not is based upon forecasted road surface temperatures, whilst also considering the impact of other factors, such as wind and heavy rain.

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's residents can also do their part to support us with our gritting efforts by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Anyone who would like to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, all gritting activities will be posted to Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook and Instagram accounts – so I encourage you to give us a follow and keep abreast of all our team's movements this winter season.

More information on gritting can be found on the county council website, and details of which roads are gritted can be found on [one.network](#), by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

Suffolk Highways' winter gritting efforts form part of the county council's wider 'Winter Matters' campaign, which launched last week, and offers advice to help Suffolk residents stay warm, safe and well this winter.

From stopping the spread of winter illnesses, to heating your home for less, residents can find advice at www.suffolk.gov.uk/wintermatters to help you and your loved ones look after your money, health, wellbeing and safety during the colder months. Information will be regularly shared on the council's social media channels throughout winter, follow Suffolk County Council on Facebook or @SuffolkCC on X, using the hashtag #WinterMatters.

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 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 most 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.

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

"This is the most challenging budget-setting process the council has faced for many years. But once again, we are putting adult and children's care at the heart of our plans.

"However, to ensure appropriate levels of funding for these key services, and those most in need in Suffolk, we must make difficult decisions about all the other services we deliver, and how we deliver them.

"This is necessary because the demand on council services for those most in need in Suffolk is at an all-time high. The cost of providing many of those services is significant, but the funding that we need is not keeping up. Across the country, councils are having to make similar tough choices.

"Our proposed budget next year will be around £752 million, of which £105m alone is down to these cost pressures from inflation and increased demand.

"We are a well-run council and over the last five years, we have saved £66 million by working smarter and leaner. But we now need to go even further.

"We have spent months scrutinising all the council's spending. There is competition for every pound across all our services, and I understand that each service means something to someone."

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 direct.

Full details of Suffolk County Council's financial plans for 2024/25 will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January.

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)

Cllr Rout continues:

"We understand the financial pressure facing the Government with public services everywhere asking for more money. This is money that simply isn't available now, especially after the vital financial support made available during and following the pandemic. This means it is up to local authorities like us to find savings to balance the books.

"I would like to thank the record number of people who completed our online budget consultation, and those who took part in our focus groups.

“Although most people said that they would rather not see council tax being increased next year, I hope they can understand why - for the first time in years - we must ask for the maximum amount possible to help support those most in need.

“Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us is absolute.”

The budget proposals will be discussed at the council’s Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

The Scrutiny Committee meeting will be available to stream on Suffolk County Council’s YouTube channel, and public questions can be submitted in advance, details are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk.

Appendix 2 – District Councillor Report October

District Councillor Report: Onehouse Ward January 2024

Empty homes and Council Tax	<p>To incentivise bringing more homes back into use, MSDC is proposing to increase the amount of Council Tax payable on long-term empty homes. Currently these attract a levy of an extra 50% on the Council Tax payable. The new policy will be levies of 100% for empty homes being left for one (to five) years, 200% for five (to ten) years and 300% for ten years or more. Exceptions will apply – such as property under probate or properties undergoing major repairs. If approved, this will be from April 2024. Additionally, it is proposed that second homes attract a 100% levy. If approved, this will be from April 2025 as a year’s notice has to be given. There had been the opportunity to increase some of these from 2019 but the previous Administration did not take these up.</p>
Greenhouse gas emissions	<p>MSDC has published a report for its own Greenhouse Gas Emissions report for 2022/23 which shows a reduction in emissions against 2018/19 when the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to be carbon neutral by 2030. The leisure centres are the biggest cause of emissions. As the first reductions made are the “low-hanging fruit”, there will be a lot more work to continue this downward trend.</p>
Fees & charges for 2024/25	<p>For the annual review process of setting fees or charges MSDC has to consider factors such as inflation and the hours involved. The Council cannot charge for some statutory services and national Government sets fees others. Discretionary charges, such as taxi licensing, litter bin emptying and pavement licensing, can be set locally and for these MSDC aims to cover costs.</p>
Stowmarket sports facilities improvements	<p>MSDC Cabinet is proposing approval of the full business case of the Stowmarket Sports Health and Leisure Project to allow the first stage, covering new and updated sports facilities, to go ahead. This includes a 3G pitch, special athletics track, multi-games area (MUGA), improving existing pitches and other facilities. If full Council approves this, it is hoped work can start in 2024.</p>
Cosy Homes	<p>The <i>Cosy Homes</i> initiative has launched with a £2 million fund and we are encouraging householders to apply. Eligible households can apply for free energy efficiency measures in their own homes, including if privately rented. Full details available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>This initiative is in addition to a programme of retrofit for the Council’s own housing stock. Also, particularly vulnerable households can continue to access help via the wider Suffolk scheme, www.warmhomessuffolk.org</p>
Flooding	<p>To receive warnings of expected flooding, you can call the Environment Agency flood-line to register: 0345 988 1188 or https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings</p> <p>The live flood map can be viewed here : https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/ along with other useful information.</p> <p>Flood payments (of £500 for residents and £2,500 for businesses) are being processed by Mid Suffolk on the basis of information from the SCC highways reporting tool and information submitted to MSDC. Affected households may</p>

	also be eligible for a discount on council tax. I will be working with parishes to seek alleviation of flooding.
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 for an application form.

Councillor John Matthissen

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