

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 8th September 2025 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (councillor); C Ratcliffe (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk); T Bamber (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (county councillor) Cllr J Matthissen (district councillor)

2509-01 Apologies for absence

A Tomlinson away on a business trip which was accepted by all Councillors.

It was also reported that Hannah Larsen had resigned from the Parish Council after being a Councillor since January 2024. Everyone agreed that Ms. Larsen would be sadly missed but were all delighted that she agreed to continue working on the PiYP Project.

2509 - 02 Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

None

2509 - 03 Public Forum

One Combs resident attended the meeting regarding the road signs and footpath alongside Oaks Meadow

2509 - 04 To agree and sign minutes of meeting held on Monday 14th July 2025

The Minutes for Monday 14th July were reviewed. It was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

2509 - 05 Clerk's Report

The Clerk sent out the report prior to the meeting to allow the councillors time to read. No questions were raised (Appendix 1)

2509 - 06 Action Points review

The action points summary was reviewed, and no questions were raised.

2509 - 07 Chairman's Report

The Chair sent out the report prior to the meeting to allow the councillors time to read. No questions were raised (Appendix 2)

2509 - 08 County Councillor's Report

The County Councillor's report was circulated to all the councillors prior to the meeting. No questions were raised (Appendix 3)

2509 - 09 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 4)

2509-10 Planning applications

No planning applications received

2509 - 11 Finance

a) Accounts review to date and finance approval

All councillors agreed with both the Budget Analysis/ Variance Report and the Accounting Statement report. The Clerk explained that the PiYP expenditure shown on the Accounting Statement was reported net of VAT in line with the requirements of MSDC; the VAT element is included in the 2025-2026 budget line.

b) Payments to hand

(i) Electricity for streetlights – 5 x invoices received totaling £781.25
Approved for payment - Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301

(ii) Monthly bank service charge – 2 x £6.00
Approved – Local Government Act 1972, s111

(iii) Cemetery grounds maintenance – £590.00
Approved for payment – Local Government Act 1972 s214

(iv) Picnic Table (PiYP Project) - £149.00

Approved for payment – Parish Councils Act 1957, section 1 (Power to provide roadside seats and shelters)

(v) Bin and dog bin emptying - £645.89

Approved for payment – Litter Act 1983 s5 & s6

(vi) Village Gates (PiYP Project) - £918.00

Approved for payment – LGA 1972, section 144 (Power to use decorative signs to inform visitors)

(vii) Village Map Board (PiYP Project) - £2,376.00

Approved for payment – LGA 1972, section 144 (Power to use decorative signs to inform visitors)

c) Audit Update

The Clerk confirmed that the Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been received from PKF Littlejohn LLP.

All the Councillors agreed that the notice be signed and displayed on the website, and on the noticeboards for 14 days.

As in the prior year, a fee of £10 was agreed if any local government electors request a copy of the AGAR.

The external audit fee invoice for £252.00 was approved for payment (Accounts & Audit Regulations 2003 regulation)

d) Npower invoicing update

The Clerk confirmed that all the invoices from Npower for the period March – July had now been received following the upgrade of the non-metered supply invoicing system – refer 11.b.(i) above. The invoices were compared with the previous year and as they had reduced slightly in cost, were accepted by all the Councillors.

Cllr Bamber pointed out that the insurance policy was due for renewal at the end of September. It had been discussed in July but was omitted from the September agenda. The Clerk confirmed that Zurich had quoted the same fee of £300 for the renewal. A further quote was requested but the response was that they couldn't beat the competitive rate received from Zurich. It was therefore agreed to accept the quote from Zurich for £300.

Action Point – Clerk to renew insurance policy before the end of September 2025 (Local Government Act 1972 s145)

2509 - 12 To review Oaks Meadow Report

The Trustees of Oaks Meadow have agreed to submit a report to each Parish Council meeting with their events, plans, and news. This was gratefully received by the Council and their plans to hold future fundraising events appreciated. September report received and attached as Appendix 5

2509 - 13 To discuss Oaks Meadow “Children at Play” signs and footpath

Following on from our July meeting, and the subsequent petition organized by one of our residents, Cllr Oakes was pleased to announce that Suffolk County Council Highways have agreed to the “Children at Play” road signs on the approach to Oaks Meadow, on the condition that the Parish Council agreed to cover the cost. This is estimated at £2,183 plus any additional costs due to traffic management etc. This was agreed by all the Councillors.

Cllr Oakes also reported that she had spoken to Highways about extending the footpath, but this was not easy to resolve mainly due to cost and drainage.

A Combs resident attended the meeting and spoke about the footfall number passing his house each day, including families with young children walking in the road due to the lack of pavement or footpath. It was suggested that instead of having “children at play” signs, “pedestrians in road” might be a more appropriate alternative and this was agreed by all. Cllr Oakes agreed to speak to Highways again for approval of the changed wording and to have flashing sign with a repeater to remind motorists of the 30mph speed limit.

Cllr Ratcliffe had recently downloaded the information from the SID placed outside Oaks Meadow over the school holiday period. Between 25th July and the 5th September approx. 10,500 vehicles passed the SID; of these 85% were driving below 34mph; **50% were driving below 29mph** and 30% at less than 27mph. Although not ideal, it was seen as encouraging.

Cllr John Matthissen arrived at the meeting at 8.20 and joined the latter part of the conversation. Cllr Matthissen had previously offered to contribute towards the road signs and agreed again to consider this funding.

He then went on to speak about the issues in Hubbard's Close and the developer Chatsworth Homes. MSDC are pursuing the possibility of legal action for the unfinished landscaping work. It was suggested that the Parish Council could assist the residents

of Hubbard's Close in creating a management company to maintain the communal grounds. Cllr Matthiesen to seek advice from MDSC.

2509 - 14 To Review and agree updated Standing Orders Policy

After a recommendation to update our policy in line with NALC's new template, the Clerk had redrafted Combs PC's policy to include all the mandatory items. It was sent to all the Councillors prior to the meeting to review and was agreed and accepted by all.

Action Point: Cllr Kitson and the Clerk to sign the policy and update on website

2509 - 15 To update progress on "Pride in Your Place" project

Cllr Ratcliffe confirmed that the concrete base for the picnic table had been laid and that the signboard, picnic bench and gates had all been delivered and were waiting to be installed over the next week. The bulbs are ready to be planted in October. Everyone expressed a big Thank You to all the project team for their hard work over the past 6 -7 months.

2509 - 16 To consider Community Self – Help Scheme

Following on from the PiYP project, it was proposed that by registering for the Community Self-Help Scheme the Parish Council could organise general maintenance including grass cutting of several areas within our village. All the Councillors agreed it would be beneficial and suggested writing an article for the next Community Newsletter seeking volunteers and Supervisors (supervisors would need to attend a traffic management course with SCC Highways). It was also agreed that all the Councillors should think about any areas in Combs they feel would benefit from the additional maintenance and the types of work they would be happy to assist with.

Action Point: All Councillors to consider prime areas within Combs and types of maintenance to include.

Action Point: Clerk to arrange article for November newsletter; to nudge everyone before the next meeting for ideas.

2509 - 17 To review cemetery fees proposal

Postponed to the October meeting

2509 -18 To consider new dog bin request

Cllr Ratcliffe questioned whether the requested location is in the Parish of Combs.

Action Point: Clerk to double check and contact Mid Suffolk District Council

2509 - 19 To consider domain change as per NALC Best Practices

It is now considered best practice for Parish Councils to use the .gov.uk. domain name for websites and emails. It was proposed that the Clerk should contact several suppliers from the Parish Council Helper Service Register to investigate buying .gov.uk email addresses for all Councillors. As the Parish Council don't have their own website, it was decided by all the Councillors no change would be necessary.

Action Point: Clerk to contact suppliers

2509 - 20 To consider date for autumn litter pick

The Clerk reported that she had been contacted by Battisford Parish Council regarding combining both litter picks across the villages. Sunday 12th October was proposed and agreed.

Action Point: Clerk to contact Battisford PC and arrange for posters to be placed on the notice boards.

2509 - 21 To review Russet Gardens / Tannery Road's pond issue

Cllr Mattissen confirmed that the developer was not responsible for the land between the pond and Russet Gardens. As the land is privately owned, the Parish Council have no power to provide fencing.

Action Point: Cllr Bamber agreed to speak to the manager of the Tannery to understand his view of the situation.

2509 - 22 To review Book Swap cabinets ideas for bus shelter

Following the success of the Book Swap initiative, it was proposed that we change the plastic boxes for smart wooden ones fixed to the sides of the shelter. Cllr Ratcliffe offered to source the boxes, to a maximum spend of £200, and to fit them which was approved by all the Councillors.

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to source and fit bookcases in bus shelter.

2509 - 23 To agree next steps for the Neighbourhood Plan project

It was discussed and agreed to put the NHP Project on hold until MSDC announce their intentions with Neighbouring Planning and hopefully re-instate the grants available. It will also allow time for the Parish Council to recruit new Councillors following the recent resignations.

2509 - 24 To motivate recruitment of new Councillors

It was agreed that as well as advertising for more Councillors in the next newsletter, Cllr Kitson and Cllr Ratcliffe would approach several residents directly to ascertain any interest in the role.

2509 – 25 Other correspondence and items for next agenda

Other Correspondence

SARS funding request – it was agreed not to approve the funding request as they have no direct connection with Combs' residents.

Email from resident regarding road closures due to water leak repairs – although all the Councillors agreed the road closure were often frustrating and a nuisance, it was considered to be vital work and something the Parish Council have no influence over.

Action Point: The Clerk to respond to resident

Cllr Ratcliffe reported how he had spoken to several dog walkers who commented on how lovely our village is; they were on a day trip to the area and following some of the walks advertised on the Combs Village website. Cllr Ratcliffe told them about the improvements currently in hand through the PiYP and they promised to return next year which everyone found very encouraging.

October agenda: to include Community Self-Help Scheme; Domain change options; Tannery Road's pond issue; cemetery fees; PiYP update, Recruitment

Meeting Closed at 21.26

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 8th September 2025 at 7.30pm
@ Battisford Cricket Club**

Meeting closed at 21:29

Appendix 1



Combs Parish Council
Clerk's Report September 2025

Councillor Resignation

Hannah Larsen has resigned from the Parish Council after taking on additional responsibilities at work. She will be greatly missed by us all for her commitment and ideas, and also for her great sense of fun!

Hannah has agreed to continue to work on the Pride in Your Place project for which her colleagues are very grateful and will also participate in community events such as the litter pick.

The Council now has two vacancies for additional Councillors

Planning Decisions Approved

DC/25/02616 Application for Works to Trees subject to Tree Preservation Order MS311/W1 Hazelmere, Park Road, Combs,

Finance

Total balance as at 30th June 2025 £109,939.04

Plus Receipts

July 2025

Cemetery Income £2,500.00

Deposit Account Interest £580.37

Newsletter Advertising £190.00

August 2025

Cemetery Income £2,175.00

Less Payments

July 2025

Bank charges £6.00

Newsletter printing £396.90

Cemetery maintenance £1,917.50

August 2025

Bank charges £6.00

Village gates – PiYP project £918.00

Balance as at 31st August 2025 £112,140.01

Current account £7,073.06

General savings account £100,176.83

Cemetery savings account £4,890.12

Total in Bank as at 31st August 2025 £112,140.01

Cemetery

We had four burials/interments in July and August 2025 - three being for Combs Ford residents and one for a Stowmarket resident.

Hartley Garden Services continue doing a fantastic job of keeping the cemetery looking neat and tidy.

Combs Village Website

I agreed to take over the administration of the Combs Village Website until we decide how to operate it in the long run. Work has started tidying up some of the out-of-date pages and will hopefully make more progress over the coming weeks. A Combs resident has expressed an interest in taking over this role and training can be arranged over the next few months pending our decisions over the new gov.uk domain change.

Defibrillators

Both defibrillators belonging to Combs PC have been added to The Circuit website, an online system operated by the **British Heart Foundation**. The Circuit allows for the Ambulance Service to directly inform Guardians when the defibrillator they are responsible for may have been deployed and needs checking. It also allows Guardians to directly inform the Ambulance Service when their defibrillator is unavailable. This direct approach can reduce the delay between incidents and action.

Faulty Street Light

The streetlight in Moats Tye near Whitehouse Farm has been reported to me as faulty. I have reported this to our electrical contractor but due to other commitments they haven't yet been able to attend to the problem. I will continue to follow up on this.

Poplar Hill

The overgrown weeds and foliage on the pavement on Poplar Hill have been reported to SCC Highways. I haven't received a response yet.

APPENDIX 2

Chairman's Report September 2025

Councillor Hannah Larssen

Hannah has tendered her resignation after taking on new responsibilities at work. She brought intelligence, energy and integrity to her Council role and we shall sorely miss her contribution. Hannah will though continue to work on the Pride in Your Place scheme and will always have friends in the Council.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Council is now two members light which impacts on our ability to work on the Neighbourhood Plan. There is a potential advantage in having a break in proceedings as MSDC are working out how best to support parish councils financially on such projects and waiting a few months could work to our advantage.

Recruitment

Clearly we need to recruit two new councillors and perhaps to identify further candidates for the overall pipeline of interested people.

Oaks Meadow

I was invited to hold a face-to-face meeting with Mrs Shelley, chair of the Oaks Meadow Project trustees, to discuss recent difficulties in the relationship between our two groups. I thought it not be appropriate to accept, suggesting instead that trustees attend a PC meeting and present their position to full council in the public forum section but received no reply.

Oaks Meadow trustees have issued a survey for residents of both Combs and Little Finborough that references the Parish Council in terms of providing future funding. We have consulted SALC who have confirmed our understanding that funding decisions remain solely in the gift of the Council.

Resident Mr Kevin White has gathered nearly 100 signatures on a petition that provides useful empirical support for the work we have motivated in collaboration with County Councillor Oakes on road safety measures at Oaks Meadow.

APPENDIX 3

County Council report – September 2025

New council boundary proposals mean 3 councils, 3 sets of salaries and the same old story for Suffolk

- District and borough councils' new boundary proposals criticised as costly and unworkable
- Creating 3 new councils in Suffolk would lead to increased costs and carry safeguarding risks
- One new unitary council for Suffolk is best for county

The proposed map comes following repeated calls from Suffolk County Council for clarity on how their suggested 3-council model will be formed. The map is essential information for Suffolk residents to ensure they fully understand the proposals being put forward.

Under their suggested boundaries, Ipswich would form a unitary council with Hadleigh, Kesgrave and Felixstowe (known as South Suffolk); Bury St Edmunds would be grouped with Sudbury, Haverhill, Newmarket and Brandon (known as West Suffolk) and Lowestoft would find itself with Woodbridge, Eye and Stowmarket (known as East Suffolk).

Alongside the map, the districts and borough have not released any information of what impact these proposed boundaries would have on council tax rates – with Ipswich residents currently paying the highest rate of district or borough council tax in the whole country.

Cllr Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said:

"We have been asking the district councils for their proposed council boundaries since March. Given what they've released today, I can see why they've kept them secret for so long. Their proposals are chaotic, confusing, and ultimately unworkable. They will mean higher council tax across the county, but particularly in places like Felixstowe, Hadleigh, Kesgrave the villages south of Ipswich and the Shotley peninsula, more money spent on senior staff and administration and less money going on frontline local services in Suffolk.

"The financial figures that the districts and borough are putting forward are optimistic to the point of being dangerous. We must never lose sight of the fact that the key care services we deliver support some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Spurious assumptions to support an argument to protect their perceived political fiefdoms have no place in this debate.

"Breaking up key expensive care services, that are currently delivered county wide, won't just cost more as they employ new senior teams, it will put the most vulnerable in our community at risk. They will create a

postcode lottery for care, drive up costs and create boundaries where they don't currently exist.

"The districts and borough have finally given into pressure to publish their plans, but what they have brought forward just means three sets of salaries and the same old story from local government. I remain as convinced as ever that One Suffolk is the only solution with the best interest of Suffolk's residents at its heart."

Residents are being encouraged to have their say on the future of councils and public services in Suffolk by [completing Suffolk County Council's survey](#). You can also complete the survey by visiting a Community Library or by calling **0345 603 1842**. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete.

Responses will inform the One Suffolk business case, which will be submitted to Government in September.

Guide published to support developers in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has updated its "[Developers Guide to Infrastructure Contributions in Suffolk](#)", following a consultation over the summer.

It has been updated and redesigned in line with the feedback and takes account of legislative and policy changes.

The guide is there to support developers appreciate the myriad ways which a new project will affect local communities and its financial implications on local authorities.

The guide sets out what developers should consider, including financial contributions, to help reduce the impact of new projects on communities and the county council.

For example, new housing would have a knock-on effect on things like the local environment, education, waste services, local amenities, highways, and flooding, and therefore cost implications for local authorities.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste, said:

"When a major planning application is proposed, it will have an impact on local infrastructure, services that local authorities provide, and associated costs.

"The government's National Planning Policy Framework outlines that developers will financially support local authorities, allowing infrastructure to support the new project and allow for growth.

"We have been regularly updating our guide since it was originally published in 2011. It's there to support developers appreciate the myriad ways which a new project will affect local communities and its financial implications on local authorities."

The "Developers Guide to Infrastructure Contributions in Suffolk" can be found on the [Suffolk County Council website](#).

Council remains opposed to pylon project, as application submitted

Primarily, the county council maintains that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme, not 114 miles of pylons cutting through countryside, sensitive landscapes and communities in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex.

Previously, SCC has formally and strongly requested that National Grid pauses the Norwich to Tilbury proposals, to allow for effective consideration of offshore alternatives.

“When the full details of National Grid’s application are published next month, we hope they reflect many of the concerns raised by us, and local communities, from consultations and discussions.” **Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs**

The application for the Development Consent Order - essentially planning permission - was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) by National Grid on Friday 29 August.

PINS has 28 days to determine whether or not to accept the application. Should it be accepted, full details of the project will then be published, with the six-month Examination period likely to begin in early 2026. If consent was then granted, construction could begin in 2027.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs, said:

“In its current guise, the Norwich to Tilbury pylon project is not suitable. The less damaging alternatives, such as offshore transmission or high voltage direct current undergrounding, have never been fully considered.

“Such a significant and impactful project should not be determined simply for being the cheapest and fastest solution. The Hiorns Report concluded that proposals were premature and would not be needed until the mid-2030s.

“When the full details of National Grid’s application are published next month, we hope they reflect many of the concerns raised by us, and local communities, from consultations and discussions. We have highlighted the need for numerous local mitigations, issues around airfields, construction traffic, public rights of way, removal of existing pylon lines, the list goes on.

“For example, we consider there to be a robust case for undergrounding where the line crosses the Waveney Valley – only to be told earlier this year, that this was not going to happen, and that was that without any alternative mitigation proposed.”

Suffolk County Council’s response to previous consultations for the Norwich to Tilbury project can be found at [suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

APPENDIX 4

District Councillor Report – Onehouse Ward - September 2025

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)	The council has released draft proposals for its 3-unitary model, which forms “Western”, “Central & Eastern”, and “Ipswich and Southern councils. A full website on the 3-unitary model, including the proposed map effecting these changes, is available here: https://threecouncilsforsuffolk.org It is important to remember that the decision will be made by Government ministers, not locally. There will be 2 public sessions about LGR where you are invited to come along and ask questions. • Wednesday 10th Sept, 6-8pm, Food Museum Marquee, Stowmarket • Monday 15th Sept. 6-8pm, Eye Town Council.
Introduction of new electrical recycling banks	6 new electrical recycling banks have been installed across the District. This is part of a new scheme to help reduce e-waste. Banks are located at Iliffe Way carpark in Stowmarket, Stowmarket Leisure Centre, Elmswell Station, Needham station and Thurston New Green Centre.
Temporary Emergency housing	Mid Suffolk Cabinet have agreed to invest in up to 30 new properties in the district to be used for temporary emergency accommodation. To be eligible to be accommodated someone must be legally homeless and meet all the necessary immigration and residence conditions and have a priority need for housing. This investment will reduce the Council’s reliance on having to use B&B accommodation and will save revenue in the long term.
MSDC secures 62-acre site at Thorndon for Nature and Flood Resilience	The site which contains a mixture of habitats and permissive footpaths was previously owned by the Kerrison Trust, a charity supporting young people, and was recently put up for sale. MSDC recognised the potential to protect improve the site which contains habitats including enhancing wet grassland and grazing marshes, pond habitats, lowland meadows and pastures, and deciduous woodland. MSDC will develop a management plan for the site following an ecological survey and consultation with local residents. There will be no change to public access arrangements with permissive paths being preserved.
September 25th Full Council	This meeting will debate and finalise the Mid Suffolk submission to Government proposing that 3 Unitary Councils would be the best balance of efficiency, democracy and public services.
Locality Budget	I have received more requests recently but there is still money left, so please get in touch if there are projects that may be eligible. Details at https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards

John Matthissen councillor@matthissen.net 07976 308128

APPENDIX 5

OAKS MEADOW PROJECT REPORT FOR COMBS PARISH COUNCIL MEETING SEPTEMBER 8TH 2025

As was suggested at the meeting on Oaks Meadow, the Trustees will prepare a report for the next and future PC meetings.

August has been a very busy month on the meadow. Starting with the Teddy Bears Picnic which was well attended. The Bug Hunt run by Julie Peeling, qualified Field Teacher was enjoyed by the children attending and similar events will be organised in the future. Julie has found some rare and interesting creatures on the site and these have all been registered with the appropriate organisations. This is illustrating the biodiversity that is on our doorsteps.

Wild Heritage Suffolk are organising an Apple Press Day on September 28th with a variety of activities for a family day out. The OM User Group will be organising a Bring and Buy Produce Stall to raise funds.

A Bingo Night will be held in St Mary's Church Hall on October 4th at 7:30, again as a fund raising event. With this and the other events that have been held this year we will have raised enough to cover the running costs for another year.

As suggested, the Treasurer will be preparing a budget plan for the next five years, and this will be presented to the PC once complete.

The Five Year Strategy Plan is in process and will be presented to the OM AGM in November.

At the suggestion of Community Action Suffolk, the Project Group have had a meeting with MSDC Planning Department to discuss the feasibility of a Community Room on site. Both CAS and the planners said that a survey of the residents and users of the meadow should be asked for their opinions, hence the questionnaire in circulation at the moment.

Village residents have made good use of the meadow during the summer holidays meeting up with friends, making new acquaintances or enjoying a picnic in the sunshine. There have been birthday celebrations, exercise classes and yoga as well as using it as a base to walk around the village.