

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 9th June 2025 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); H Larsen (councillor); C Ratcliffe (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk)

Cllr C Ratcliffe chaired this evenings meeting as Cllr T Kitson was unsure whether he would be able to attend

2506-01 Apologies for absence

Cllr T Bamber – due to mix up in dates with booking family holiday
District Cllr J Matthissen
County Cllr K Oakes

2506 - 02 Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

None

2506 - 03 Public Forum

I Clark regarding website

Item 2506 - 14 was b/fwd to allow Mr. Clark chance to leave the meeting early.

Mr. Clark talked about the history of setting up the Combs Village website as part of the 2011 Parish Plan. When it became necessary for the Parish Council to have a website, they were given space to keep everything easier for Combs Village. The other areas of the website have been slightly neglected over the last few years, with the Parish Council becoming the major users.

Three issues were then discussed - the website has recently experienced several problems and was "down" for a few days recently; lack of use of most parts of the website; Mr. Clark wants to step back as the main administrator.

It was agreed that Cllr Ratcliffe would contact the website hosts for more information regarding the contract with them, dealing with issues and how we can manage the website more effectively going forward.

As the Clerk currently uses website for the Parish Council reports, she offered to take over the day-to-day running of the website until other arrangements could be made.

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to contact website hosts for further information

Action Point: The Clerk to speak to Mr. Clark regarding any usual tasks

2506 - 04 To agree and sign minutes of meeting held on Monday 12 May 2025

The Minutes for Monday 12th May were reviewed. It was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

2506 - 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)

2506 - 06 Action Points review

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

2506 - 07 Chairman's Report

No report was issued

2506 - 08 County Councillor's Report

No report was received from the County Councillor

2506 - 09 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 2)

Cllr Matthissen did not attend the meeting. We were reminded that he is looking into the planning conditions regarding the Russet Gardens / Tannery Road pond fencing and that we haven't received a response. The Clerk agreed to contact him for an update.

Action Point: Clerk to contact Cllr Matthiessen regarding Tannery Road pond issue

2506-10 Planning applications

- (a) DC/25/02082 Oak Tree Place, Fenns Meadow, Combs, Stowmarket Proposal: Application for Works to Trees subject to Tree Preservation Order MS323/T1 - Reduce 1 No. Oak (T1) by 3-4 m

The Councillors had no objections to the application

- (b) DC/25/02199 Windy Ridge, Park Road, Combs, Stowmarket Proposal: Oak trees - 1,2,and 3 -Cut back by up to 3 metres.

The Parish Council has no objection but before the work is granted we ask that the District Council check the ownership of these trees as they appear to be outside of Windy Ridge's boundary line. It may be that these trees are the responsibility of the County Council and therefore this will impact who pays for and carries out the work. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that on the BMSDC Webmap the TPO's have been registered against a different address (Dragon House).

- (c) DC/25/02394 4 Ropers Row, Park Road, Combs,

Proposal: Householder Application - Retention of existing solar panels installed on the roof of a detached outbuilding (retrospective

The Councillors had no objections to the application

Action Point: Clerk to submit responses

2506 - 11 Finance

a) Accounts review to date and finance approval

All councillors agreed with both the budget analysis/ variance report and the predicted income/expenditure report. Cllr Ratcliffe queried the time frame of using the CIL funding. It was explained that we have 5 years from the date of receipt and that Clerk monitors this on a regular basis.

Action Point: Clerk to update and circulate the CIL receipts/expenditure report

b) Payments to hand

(i) Electricity for streetlights –Invoice not yet received.

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

(iii) Cemetery grounds maintenance – £442.50
Approved –

(iv) Parish Online annual fee £64.80
Approved –

(v) Internal audit fee £338.40
Approved -

c) Audit Update

The Clerk reported that the audit had been successfully completed and that the reports had been sent to all the councillors and made available to all residents on the website.

The accounts for 2024 – 25 must now be made available for inspection by any local electors for a 30 working-day period. The Clerk suggested the period 23rd June – 1 August and this was accepted by all Councillors.

Action Point: Clerk to publicise the "inspection period" online and on the noticeboards

d) No invoices have been received since March from NPower for the street lights due to upgrades in their systems. The Clerk reported that she had received an email updating the Council on the progress of the new account hub and that invoices should be received within the coming weeks.

2506 - 12 To consider Battisford Cricket Club funding request

Battisford Cricket Club had requested a sum of £1000 towards purchasing a flat cover to protect the cricket wicket from rain. The Councillors were not in favour of this, classing it as sports equipment and of no benefit to the wider community. It was suggested that the District Councillor might be able to help through the Locality Budget.

Action Point: Clerk to inform the Cricket Club of decision and suggestion of contacting the District Councillor

2506 -13 To review the Accessibility Policy

The Accessibility Policy on the website has not been updated since 2022. As there are plans to review the website over the coming months, it was agreed the policy should remain unchanged, apart from contact details, and revise if necessary once the website has been updated.

Action Point: Clerk to change contact details on policy

2506 - 14 To discuss Combs Village website management

Moved to item 2506 - 03

2506 - 15 To update progress on "Pride in Your Place" project and additional funding

Cllr Ratcliffe, Cllr Larsen and Cllr Tomlinson updated everyone on the positive progress of the project. The street furniture licences have been received for the picnic bench, village gates and village signboard; the style of the gates has been decided; and the draft design of the village sign board is being finalised. Cllr Ratcliffe also confirmed that he had spoken to the landowner whose land is adjacent to where the gates are to be fitted on Poplar Hill – apart from ensuring that the farm vehicles had enough space to manoeuvre onto their land, no other issues were raised.

Due to the increase in the cost of the project, mainly due to unexpected contractor fees, the Parish Council agreed to cover additional costs up to a maximum of £4000, approx. £1500 of this will be reclaimable VAT.

Ongoing maintenance was discussed, with the hope that residents and councillors would be willing to assist with most of the upkeep of flower beds, grass cutting etc. It was suggested that the gardening service used for the cemetery grounds might also be interested in the additional work.

Action Point: Clerk to contact gardening contractor

2506 - 16 To review cemetery fees proposal

Postponed to the July meeting

2506 -17 To review Russet Garden / Tannery Road's pond issue

Discussed under item 2506 – 09

2506 - 18 To consider Book Swap cabinet for bus shelter

It was agreed that the Book Swap was a great success; the selection of books is changing on a regular basis, and it is mostly being used thoughtfully. We have received one complaint from a resident regarding several additional boxes being left in the shelter, reducing the amount of sitting place. All the councillors agreed that we should consider wall cabinets to house the books, and Cllr Larsen agreed to take measurements and research possibilities.

Action Point: Cllr Larsen to explore cabinet options

2506- 19 To agree next steps for the Neighbourhood Plan project

Cllr Kitson and Cllr Ratcliffe to discuss outside of the meeting.

2505 – 20 Other correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

The Clerk reported that she had received correspondence from the granddaughter of a late resident. The grandmother was to be interred with her late husband at Combs Cemetery and the addresses given showed they lived in Stowmarket so were charged the non-resident rate. It then transpired that the grandparents had lived in Combs for nearly 50 years before their retirements and the need for a smaller more manageable house. As a gesture of goodwill, it was agreed to consider them as residents and charge the lower fee.

Mid Suffolk District Council have written to the Parish Council regarding publicising their Shaping Suffolk Together survey so resident, businesses and communities can help shape the future of the county. Posters have been provided for the notice boards and website. Postcards have also been supplied and the Clerk agreed to request more so they could be delivered to all households in Combs.

Action Point: Clerk to request additional postcards

July agenda to include Book Swap cabinets; Npower invoicing update; Tannery Road's pond issue; cemetery fees; PiYP update, Neighbourhood Plan, Audit update.

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 14th July 2025 at 7.30pm
@ Battisford Cricket Club**

Meeting closed at 21:30

APPENDIX 1



Combs Parish Council
Clerk's Report June 2025

Planning Decisions Approved

DC/25/01201 Moat Farm Bildeston Road - Demolition of existing barn and erection of 1No dwelling

Planning Applications Awaiting Decision

DC/25/00422 Yew Tree Cottage Mill Lane - Erection of 1no two-storey rear extension, single storey side extension, replacement of conservatory, erection of a triple bay detached garage

DC/25/02142 Tannery Cottage, Park Road, Combs - Application for works to trees protected by Tree Preservation Order MS217/G1. Beech - Fell to ground level.

This application was received on the 14th May with a deadline for responses of the 2nd June. Typically, we would have applied for an extension in the deadline to allow us to discuss any issues at our next meeting. At an arboriculture assessment the beech tree, which is in very poor condition, was deemed hazardous due to its proximity to several houses and Park Road and required urgent attention. Under the circumstances, as none of the councillors had any objection to the request, a response was submitted by the original deadline "Combs PC has no objection to the tree felling with the proviso that a suitable replacement or replacements are planted as suggested in the accompanying report".

Finance

Total balance as at 30th April 2025 £108,450.46

Plus Receipts May 2025

Cemetery Income	£650.00
Newsletter Advertising	£95.00

Less Payments May 2025

Oaks Meadow (CIL funding)	£577.48
Bank charges	£6.00

Balance as at 31st May 2025 £108,611.98

Current account	£5,625.40
General savings account	£98,112.35
Cemetery savings account	£4,874.23

Total in Bank as at 31st May 2025 £108,611.98

Audit

The internal audit was successfully completed on the 20th May 2025, with just 2 recommendations. The website Accessibility Statement has been overlooked when reviewing our policies and was last updated back in 2022. It will be reviewed June/July 2025 and annually thereafter; NALC released an updated version of the model standing orders in April 2025 which will be taken into consideration on our next review of the policy.

The internal audit reports have been uploaded onto the Parish Council website.

We should hear from the external auditors within the next few weeks regarding dates.

Newsletter

The next edition of the newsletter is due out in early July, with a deadline of the 20th June for articles.

Cemetery

In May a transfer of £4,367.00 was made from the general savings account to the cemetery land savings account.

It was agreed that the cemetery fund should be topped up as follows:

Actual income - projected income +£500

For the 2024 - 2025 financial year the figures are:

$£8,367 - £4,500 (= £3,867) + £500 = £4,367$

We had two interments in May, and one Green Burial.

Hartley Garden Services have now invoiced us for March/April grass cutting. They have also sent me a schedule of the dates they expect to carry out the works for 2025. We also need to be mindful that they are now VAT registered.

VAT Return

In May, I submitted the VAT return for the financial year April 2024 – March 2025 which totalled £749.76.

Shaping Suffolk Together

I have received posters and cards to promote the launch of a survey regarding the restructure of Suffolk's district and borough councils. I will put the posters on the notice boards and website. Please mention this to your friends and neighbours!

APPENDIX 2

Onehouse Ward – Parish Report - June 2025

Annual Council Meeting	The annual council meeting for Mid Suffolk District Council took place on the 15 th May, and confirmed new appointments for the council. This included the appointment of Cllr Keith Scarff as Chair of the council, and Cllr Lorraine Baker as Vice Chair.
Devolution and local government re-organisation update	The council has received a response from central government in regards to its proposed plans for council re-organisation. The response was welcome to the proposal to have multiple unitaries, although the actual number is still down to the councils.
Seeking your views on the future of local government in Suffolk	Mid Suffolk has organised a survey on behalf of all the Districts and Borough of Ipswich, which allows residents across Suffolk to voice their opinions and concerns. Project: Have Your Say on the Future of Local Government... Mid Suffolk District Council https://midsuffolk.govocal.com/en-GB/projects/have-your-say-suffolk
Cabinet Agenda June 10th	A major allocation of CIL funding £3m for the Elmswell to Woolpit footway and cycleway is recommended, as are £33,750 for Rattlesden church and £100,000 Needham Market football club new stand. Each project also involves funding from other sources.
Locality Budget	Several awards have been paid out and others are in progress. There is still plenty left from the increased budget, and I will be pleased to hear from organisations with project ideas to benefit the communities. Full details available https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards
River Ratt catchment	With help I was able to remove the main remaining patch of Himalayan balsam from the council-owned land near Wash Lane, Great Finborough. News of this invasive species anywhere upstream would be welcome. Landowners are encouraged to pull it up when spotted, to benefit the environment and help others downstream.

John Matthissen

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