

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting

Monday 14th July 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) T Bamber (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (county councillor)

2507-01 Apologies for absence

None, but Cllr Matthissen not present at the beginning of meeting

2507 - 02 Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

None

2507 - 03 Public Forum

One Combs resident attended the meeting regarding planning application for Hazelmere

2507 - 04 To agree and sign minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th June 2025

The Minutes for Monday 9th June were reviewed. It was agreed they be signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting by the chairman.

2507 - 05 Clerk's Report

The Clerk sent out the report prior to the meeting to allow the councillors time to read. The small emergence of Hemlock by Hubbard's Close was discussed and Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to contact the resident as he was unsure if they were aware of response from MSDC. No other questions were raised (Appendix 1)

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to contact resident concerning the hemlock at Hubbard's Close

2507 - 06 Action Points review

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

2507 - 07 Chairman's Report

No report was issued

2507 - 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 2) Cllr Oakes confirmed that she had spoken to Highways regarding the fingerpost sign on the Moats Tye / Tannery Road triangle and that she would cover the cost from her budget for which the councillors were very grateful.

A discussion then followed regarding the overgrown verges and hedges. Although Highways had made some improvements, some areas still look very untidy. It is believed that these areas might be private land and not the responsibility of Highways. The pavement on Poplar Hill running down into the Slough was most problematic and it was agreed that as an initial course of action the Clerk would contact the landowner to politely enquire whether he had any plans to help clear away encroaching foliage.

Action Point: Clerk to contact landowner

2507 - 09 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen sent in the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 3)

2507-10 Planning applications

- a) DC/25/02616 Hazelmere, Park Road, Combs
Proposal: Application for Works to Trees subject to Tree Preservation Order MS311/W1 - Tree 1, Holly touching the house to be side trimmed back to boundary Tree 2, Turkey Oak to be reduced away from fence and lower bough trimmed back to previous cut @ 6/7 years ago Tree 3, Turkey oak to be cut back away from the front of the house to a similar position to previous cut @ 6/7 years ago Tree 4, Turkey Oak, reduce overhanging branch close to garage roof and extending into neighbouring property and trim back away from the telephone cables

The Councillors supported this application

Action Point: Clerk to submit response

Cllr Ratcliffe queried whether the trees opposite Ropers Row were protected by a TPO in line with other trees in the village. He agreed to follow up on this with MSDC.

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe TPO enquiry on trees opposite Ropers Row. This action is now complete as the trees do have a TPO as per the recent planning application DC/25/00350.

2507 - 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. A report detailing the CIL receipts and expenditure was also circulated; the Clerk explained the logic of the report and the timeframes set by MSDC. This was accepted by all the councillors.

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 – £1917.50
Approved to be paid – Local Government Act 1972 s214

(iv) Newsletter printing costs £396.90
Approved to be paid – LGA 1972, s142

c) Audit Update

The Clerk confirmed that all requested documents had been sent to the external auditors within the deadline date. A confirmation email had been received but no further requests to date..

d) Npower invoicing update

e) 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 spoken to Npower and that invoices should be sent out soon! They were unable to give any clarification on when that would be or when the direct debit payments would be collected.

Cllr Matthissen arrived at the meeting

Cllr Matthissen spoke about the PiYP Grant and Locality Budget being available again for this financial year. MSDC are also considering funding for any Parish Councils starting on a Neighbourhood Plan project since central government recently discontinued their funding.

The Hubbard's Close issues regarding rubbish and overgrown foliage were discussed again. Cllr Matthissen was unsure that he could offer any further help with regards to the developers, who the PC and residents feel have left the site unfinished. Cllr Kitson suggested writing to our MP as the developer continues securing work in Suffolk and, to our knowledge is subject to many other complaints.

Action Point: Cllr Kitson to write to Peter Prinsley MP

Cllr Mattissen was also reminded about the Tannery Road / Russet Gardens pond issue, which he is looking into.

2507 - 12 To review Oaks Meadow project, including "Children at Play" signs

An email had been received from a resident concerned about the traffic along Bildeston Road outside Oaks Meadow. Children's playground signs were suggested; this was previously discussed in July 2024 when a request was made to the County Council but was declined. Cllr Oakes agreed to speak to Highways again to understand the reasons for their refusal and if there is any solution.

Although all the councillors who attended the Oaks Meadow "Meet & Greet" on the 29th June enjoyed the initial tour and the opportunity to meet the Trustees and the very impressive volunteer force, they were disappointed with the conversation held afterwards. The discussion seemed to imply that the Parish Council did not support Oaks Meadow and there appeared to be signs of discontent from the Oaks Meadow Trustees towards the Parish Councillors.

Councillors have made grants of more than £10k in the first half of this year alone. The discontent appears to stem from the PC questioning whether it should be funding running costs in perpetuity. The PC are reluctant to commit to this and believe that OM Trustees should by now have taken steps to cover their running costs or at least indicated that they plan to do so.

It was agreed that the Parish Council wishes to maintain a positive relationship with Oaks Meadow while also encouraging them to consider their financial planning processes, including the possibility of local fund raising to cover running costs.

Finally, councillors reiterated that any future funding requests would continue to be assessed fairly as all applications are.

This conversation was longer than expected, some of the remaining items have been deferred to September

2507 -13 To consider commemorative tree location

The only ideas suggested were the cemetery or Oaks Meadow as the PC doesn't own any land

Action point: Clerk to contact applicant

2507 - 14 To consider "Community Self-Help Scheme"

Clerk to obtain more information for discussion at September meeting

2507 - 15 To update progress on "Pride in Your Place" project

Cllr Larsen confirmed that the signboard had been ordered and was on a 6-week delivery time; an order for the picnic table and gates would be placed within the next weeks for delivery at the same time as the signboard.

Action Point: The PiYP to arrange installing the street furniture once delivered.

2507 - 16 To review cemetery fees proposal

Postponed to the September meeting

Action Point – Clerk and Cllr Bamber to review figures and suggest increases

2507 -17 To consider Clerk attending a Cemetery Management & Compliance training course.

Unfortunately, the course has already "sold out." The councillors approved the clerk booking the next available course to a top value of £500 inc VAT.

2507 - 18 To consider domain change as per NALC Best Practices

Action Point: Clerk to obtain more information for discussion at September meeting

2507 - 19 To review Russet Gardens / Tannery Road pond issue

Action Point: Cllr Matthissen to speak to MSDC Planning.

2507 - 20 To review Book Swap cabinet ideas for bus shelter

Action Point: Cllr Larsen to research more options as only cabinets found are thought to be too small for requirements.

2507- 21 To agree next steps for the Neighbourhood Plan project

Action Point: Cllr Kitson & Cllr Ratcliffe to discuss next steps for consideration at the September meeting.

2507 – 22 Other correspondence / Items for inclusion on the next agenda

September agenda to include Community Self-Help Scheme; Domain change options; Npower invoicing update; Tannery Road's pond issue; cemetery fees; PiYP update, Neighbourhood Plan, Audit update, Insurance renewal

**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 July 2025

Planning Decisions Approved

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.

DC/25/02199 Windy Ridge, Park Road, Combs - Oak trees - 1,2, and 3 -Cut back by up to 3 metres. Although this application has been approved, the homeowner has since cancelled the work. There was a question raised regarding ownership of the land and trees on the corner of Park Road and Jacks Lane, and it has since been confirmed that this land is the responsibility of SCC.

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.

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

Planning Decisions Refused

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.

Finance

Total balance as at 31st May 2025	£108,611.98
Plus Receipts June 2025	
Cemetery Income	£1,300.00
Newsletter Advertising	£129.00
VAT Receipt April 24 – March 25	£749.76
Less Payments June 2025	
Bank charges	£6.00
Internal Audit Fees	£338.40
Cemetery maintenance	£442.50
Parish Online annual subscription	£64.80
Balance as at 30th June 2025	£109,939.04
Current account	£5,452.46
General savings account	£99,612.35
Cemetery savings account	£4,874.23
Total in Bank as at 30th June 2025	£109,939.04

Audit

The AGAR and other requested documents were emailed to PKF Littlejohn on the 2nd July. They have confirmed receipt and will contact me again if they require any further information.

Oaks Meadow Visit

On Sunday 29th June, the Parish Councillors were invited to a guided tour around Oaks Meadow so that the councillors could get a better understanding of the project and the requirements in maintaining the meadow. It was attended by 3 Parish Councillors and me, Cllr John Matthissen, a representative from Wild Heritage Suffolk and an enthusiastic team of OM trustees and volunteers. We were given a guided tour of Oaks Meadow, followed by a conversation on funding and future plans.

Newsletter

The spring/summer edition of the newsletter has been successfully delivered across Combs thanks to all our wonderful team of distributors.

Cemetery

We had three burials/interments in June; to date there are two booked for July.

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

VAT Return

In May, I submitted the VAT return for the financial year April 2024 – March 2025 which totalled £749.76. This was credited to our bank account on the 4th June.

Hemlock at Hubbard's Close

Cllr Ratcliffe informed me that after being advised by a resident, he had reported the hemlock growing in the grass verge in front of Hubbard's Close. MSDC responded *"Hemlock is a native plant, and though toxic, the number of recorded cases of poisoning is very low. The most likely to be affected are cattle, so controlling Hemlock where livestock reside would be sensible, but otherwise there is no need to control this. Hemlock is not palatable so anyone or any animal that goes to eat this would quickly discard it before they could eat enough to poison them. The area in question does not seem to be council owned land and it would be down to the landowner to clear should they wish to do this."*

Appendix 2

County Council report – July 2025

Suffolk Libraries to Become Suffolk Community Libraries from 1 June

The service will continue to operate as usual, with no changes for library users and all 45 libraries will remain open.

This ensures the council can continue delivering library services in a sustainable way, strengthening the role libraries play across Suffolk's communities.

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality, said:

"This move is not just about preserving the service we have; it's about making libraries even more integral to the services we offer. While they already provide excellent spaces for reading and community engagement, we want to expand their role and ensure they become vital access points for a wide range of public services.

"We're incredibly grateful to Suffolk Libraries and all their dedicated staff for everything they've done, and for working closely with us to ensure a smooth transition. We value their expertise and passion, and we look forward to working with them as they become Suffolk County Council staff."

Suffolk County Council extends its sincere thanks to everyone involved in the transition and looks forward to this new chapter for library services in Suffolk.

For more information, please visit www.suffolkcommunitylibraries.co.uk

Council reorganisation affects us all - so have your say today

A new survey giving residents the opportunity to shape the future of councils and public services in Suffolk has been launched.

It's part of the Government plan to reshape and streamline councils in Suffolk to save money, reduce confusion and improve public services for residents.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said: "It's well known that we strongly believe that replacing Suffolk's six local authorities with a single new council would be smarter, simpler and better for our county.

"We've arrived where we have because early figures show it's the only way to save money, improve services and keep your council tax as low as possible.

"But that doesn't mean our proposal is the finished product. We want our plan to improve residents' connection with their local council and we'd like their help to ensure that's the case.

“A key part of this work is finding out what people think about the state of local government in Suffolk – and what their hopes are for the future.

"After all, it's their council tax and services so what they think is vitally important.

“This survey will help us to develop our plan so that we can be confident it addresses the issues that matter most to you. I'd therefore encourage all Suffolk residents to take a moment to have their say.”

The survey only takes about 10 minutes to complete, and can be done online at www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution, by emailing devolution@suffolk.gov.uk or by calling 0345 603 1842 where a member of Suffolk County Council's customer services team can help residents to complete the survey.

People can also visit any of Suffolk's 45 libraries to complete the survey online.

It asks questions about local democracy – such as how you raise issues that need addressing, local decision making – such as how you might want to get involved and about the specifics of council reorganisation itself.

The survey is open for eight weeks – until 4 August 2025.

The survey will play a part in helping Suffolk County Council to develop a comprehensive business plan that looks at the best way to organise councils and deliver public services in Suffolk – so that the Government has all the information it needs to decide which proposal(s) to put out to public consultation.

From best practice elsewhere in the country to the costs of various options currently on the table, no stone is being left unturned.

Whilst a final proposal is still to be developed, Suffolk County Council believes that a new single local council is the smartest, simplest, and best option for the whole of Suffolk which will deliver the biggest savings and most sustainable service improvements.

The council argues that any alternatives will have to work hard to justify the risks of breaking up critical services like social care, creating new council boundaries and smaller population sizes.

Early analysis by financial consultants PwC suggests that establishing a single new local council could cost around £19 million but that this could be repaid quickest through the significant financial savings achieved by having one council.

Alternatively, the cost of breaking Suffolk into two or even three – as proposed by Suffolk's district and borough councils - would cost £7 million to £13 million more and, in the case of three new councils, that investment would never be repaid as there would be no savings to be found.

Councillor Rout said: “If we want our new structure to retain key local services and to be truly accessible, then the new council or councils needs to be able to afford to do so.

"Breaking Suffolk up would place such financial pressure on new councils that those small, discretionary local services we all value would be at risk from day one.

“To create a truly sustainable and effective council structure for Suffolk, one new council is not just the only viable option, but also the best one.”

Suffolk challenges Government on Planning reform at a National Infrastructure Conference

The Council and other speakers raised concerns that proposed changes to the NSIP regime were not suitably robust to manage the significant changes which NSIPs can bring to host communities, particularly with the proposed replacement of a statutory duty for pre-submission consultation with statutory guidance.

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

"I'm proud that Suffolk County Council continues to lead the way with its NSIP expertise and influence and can bring together colleagues and speakers from around the country. "Suffolk has one of the greatest concentrations of NSIPs in the UK, and for me it's important to ensure that local communities are considered first-and-foremost by local authorities, project promoters and government. "Today there were some robust discussions around government's proposals to scrap the statutory duty to consult for NSIPs. "This is something that the county council fundamentally disagrees with - our communities need more and better consultation, not less. "We welcome any opportunity to further engage with Government to share our expertise as to what meaningful engagement should look like."

The conference further cements Suffolk County Council's recognised role as a Centre of Excellence for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) for its expertise when engaging with projects, such as Sizewell C, the Gull Wing, National Grid upgrades, solar farms and offshore wind farms.

£8m funding for Bus Service improvements

The funding from the Department of Transport's Local Authority Bus Grant can be used to create new bus services or enhance existing routes.

Following on from previous grants from the Department for Transport to improve bus services, totalling £3.7m of revenue funding between 2023 and 2025, the new grant which has been allocated for 2025/26 comprises of:

- £2,805,076 revenue for delivering new or enhanced services.
- £5,229,805 capital for new and improved bus stops, bus stations, bus priority measures or vehicle upgrades.

This money will enable Suffolk County Council to invest up to £5 million in capital projects to increase bus priority on congested streets, make improvements to bus stops and gain a better understanding of the journeys people are taking, paving the way for more innovative fare offers in the future. The council also plans to upgrade the current Real Time Passenger Information system, giving live updates on when buses will arrive at stops across the county.

The remaining £2.8 million will be spent supporting the existing services on the county's bus network and working with bus companies to finalise several route improvements and new services, set to launch later this year.

The previous funding has created and enhanced more than 15 routes across the county, through the council's Bus Service Improvement Programme (BSIP). These included the first Sunday and evening service between Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds for more than 20 years and direct links from Haverhill and Mildenhall to the West Suffolk Hospital.

Successful bids will be contacted in the coming days with new and enhanced services coming online later this year.

A full list of enhanced and new services funded with the previous BSIP funding can be found at: [Bus Service Improvement Plan - Suffolkonboard](#) including videos from services who received BSIP round 1 funding.

Details of successful bids for the latest round of funding will be posted on Suffolk On Board.

Appendix 3

Onehouse Ward – Parish Report - July 2025

Councillors Support Motions Calling for Speed Limit changes and a Disability Champion	Two motions gained cross-party support at Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC)'s June 26 th Council meeting (available to watch on YouTube). The first called on Suffolk County Council to make the process for applying for 20mph zones simpler and more cost effective in areas where they have community support, and to commit to a future target for zero deaths on our county's roads. A second motion was to appoint a disability champion for Mid Suffolk, whose role will include seeking to raise awareness and to improve accessibility to public buildings and services.
Pride In Your Place Grant Re-Launch	This fund to promote local identity and tidy up the environment has now re-opened for applications. Funds can be awarded to Parish Councils or community and voluntary groups – for example for planting schemes, local heritage and cultural initiatives, new signage, benches and seating areas for public use, and equipment for litter picks and community clean-up. More information via our Community Funding page: https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-funding
Seeking your views on the future of local government in Suffolk	The Survey for residents to have their say on the future local government options (https://midsuffolk.govocal.com/en-GB/projects/have-your-say-suffolk) is closing late July. Mid Suffolk must submit its final recommendations in September. The final decision as to how the county will be reorganised will be made by national government.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Spending Review	CIL is a charge that planning authorities can levy on new developments to help deliver community infrastructure in the district. MSDC annually review the guidelines on how CIL is spent to ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs and priorities of our communities. The new changes make for more agile

	CIL applications by ceasing the 'bid round windows' and enabling all-year CIL bids. The scope for CIL spending has also been broadened to include community farming projects and community run pubs and cafes.
MSDC Welcomes New Councillor Following By-Election	Dr Agnes Watson (Green Party) was elected to represent Haughley, Stowupland & Wetherden after a by-election on 12 th June.
Cabinet Agenda July	Cabinet approved a major grant to the Food Museum and improvements to the Creeping Rd depot, needed to accommodate additional recycling streams next year. (the project to find a new depot is on hold due to uncertainty around local government reorganisation). These decisions will need to be endorsed by a full council meeting
Locality Budget	<p>I will be pleased to hear from organisations with project ideas to benefit the communities.</p> <p>Full details available https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards</p>

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