

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 12th January 2026 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

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

2601 - 01 Apologies for absence

Cllr S Penman – holiday, approved as booked prior to being co-opted
County Cllr K Oakes
District Cllr J Matthissen

2601 - 02 Declaration of Interest/Declaration of lobbying

There is nothing for this meeting, but Cllr Kitson and Cllr Ratcliffe wished to declare a retrospective Declaration of Interest regarding the St Mary's Church item in December's meeting, as they are both members of "Friends of St Mary's Church".

2601 - 03 Public Forum

A member of the public attended the meeting to observe

2601 - 04 To agree and sign the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 8th December 2025.

The minutes for Monday, 8th December, were reviewed. It was agreed that the chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2601 - 05 Clerk's Report

The Clerk distributed the report before the meeting to give councillors time to read it.
No further questions were raised (Appendix 1)

2601- 06 Action Points review

The action points summary was distributed to the councillors before the meeting, and they were reminded to inform the Clerk once they completed any assigned tasks. This helps maintain transparency and promotes smooth coordination.

2601 - 07 Chairman's Report

No report was issued this month

2601 - 08 County Councillor's Report

Cllr Oakes' report was circulated to all the councillors prior to the meeting. (Appendix 2)

2601 - 09 District Councillor's Report

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

Questions emerged regarding the government's decision to delay the Norfolk and Suffolk mayoral election until May 2028 and whether this move is democratic. It was agreed that, although it might not be very influential, Cllr Kitson will write to both the District and County Councils to voice our concerns.

Action Point: Cllr Kitson to write to both District and County councils

2601 - 10 Planning applications for consideration

None received

2601 - 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, which had been sent out prior to the meeting.

The issue with the Hubbard's Close CIL receipt was raised again because the final payment has not been received, and the outstanding amount has been removed from the MSDC website. The Clerk confirmed she emailed MSDC but has not received a response. Since Cllr Matthissen also agreed to investigate the matter, the clerk will follow up with him on this and other unresolved issues related to Hubbard's Close.

Action Point: Clerk to contact Cllr Matthissen regarding Hubbard's Close matters

b) Payments to hand

- (i) Electricity for streetlights – December usage £278.13
Approved for payment (direct debit)- Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301
- (ii) Monthly bank service charge – £6.00
Approved for payment (direct debit) – Local Government Act 1972, s111

2601 - 12 To review and agree 2026 – 27 budget and precept

Following confirmation of the tax base by MSDC, both the budget of £23,262 and the precept of £12,406, as presented at the December meeting, were approved by all councillors. Appendix 4

Action Point – Clerk to post budget and submit precept form

2601 - 13 To review village gate signage proposal

Cllr Ratcliffe showed the councillors examples of the available signage, featuring green wording and a gold outline to match the village sign. Several options were discussed, including incorporating the village sign on the Poplar Hill gates. Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to review the quality of the digital version of the logo and to follow up with the supplier accordingly. A budget of £300 plus VAT was agreed for all four signs

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to check the logo and obtain further examples of the signs for the councillors to consider

2601-14 To consider articles for the March newsletter

It was reported that the current business advertisers have been approached and thanked for their ongoing support, with several already confirming they will continue advertising in the newsletter during 2026.

Additionally, councillors discussed adding new content and potential contributors for the upcoming edition, with suggestions for articles highlighting recent community projects, upcoming village initiatives, and historical facts. The editor will compile proposed topics and invite input from residents and organisations before finalising the March newsletter for distribution.

2601 - 15 To consider replacing or repairing village noticeboards

It was proposed and agreed that all village noticeboards, including the one at Combs Cemetery, need replacing. The locks are damaged, and the wood has warped, making them hard to lock and unlock. This has led to notices inside becoming water-damaged and unreadable. The Clerk will check costs with suppliers and local tradespeople and check local colleges for students seeking a project.

Action Point: Clerk to investigate replacing all five noticeboards

2601 - 16 To consider possible boundary changes with Little Finborough

A misunderstanding has arisen regarding the deadlines for the Community Governance Review. Although the parish council had intended to seek a review of the boundary lines between Combs and Little Finborough, the deadline for submitting an application was 7th November, followed by the first stage of consultation. It was also noted that MSDC would not be considering boundary line changes at this time.

2601 - 17 Other Correspondence and items for next agenda

The clerk reported receiving an email from a resident who experienced anti-social behaviour from someone living at Prospect Place. Both the police and care providers have been informed. It was agreed that the clerk should notify Cllr Matthissen for his records.

Action Point: Clerk to notify Cllr Matthissen of anti-social behaviour by Prospect Place resident

The Battsford PC clerk contacted the Comb PC to see if any of the Combs councillors knew anyone needing the services of a new Food Hub initiative. While it is thought that some residents might use the food bank, none of the councillors were aware of anyone requiring additional help.

Cllr Ratcliffe mentioned that he discussed the clay soil at the cemetery with Andrew Bingham. In the past, topsoil was added to improve drainage, and it was advised that this should be done again. Cllr Ratcliffe agreed to organise this work.

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to arrange for topsoil to be added to the cemetery land.

Other items for next agenda include Policy reviews; Clerk's salary, Newsletter Update; Co-opting of Councillor and Cemetery maintenance planning

Meeting Closed at 21:14

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 9th February 2026 at 7.30pm
@ Battsford Cricket Club**

APPENDIX 1

Clerk's Report January 2026

Finance

Total balance as of 30th November 2025	£108,798.85
Plus December Receipts	
Burial Ground Income	£500.00
Interest Received	£583.08
Less December Payments	
Bank charges	£6.00
Streetlight electricity (Nov usage)	£253.21
Street light repair	£450.00
PiYP- installation of gates, sign board and picnic bench	£3,169.20
Supply and planting of spring bulbs	£630.00
Bookshelf cabinet for Book Swap	£27.39
Gov.uk email registration	£192.00
Balance as of 31st December 2025	£105,154.13
Current account	£2,903.50
General savings account	97,305.68
Cemetery savings account	£4,944.95
Total in Bank as of 31st December 2025	£105,154.13

Change to gov.uk email addresses

All Councillors and the Clerk are now set up with gov.uk email addresses; MSDC and SALC have both been notified, and the website has been updated. The Clerk is working through all other contacts to advise them of the change.

New Councillor

We were pleased to welcome Sarah Penman as our newly co-opted Councillor. The Clerk has sent Cllr Penman her new email details and the "Declaration of Interests" form to complete. Cllr Penman has also been advised to read the Policies and Procedures listed on the website, primarily the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, and IT & Email Policy.

PIYP

The PiYP Project has now finished, with all the bulbs planted and ready for spring. Over the next few months, we need to consider the ongoing maintenance of these areas and are open to any suggestions and help from residents.

Book Swap

After a successful trial of the Book Swap initiative, Cllr Ratcliffe has installed a shelving unit in the bus shelter. We encourage residents to continue using this facility, but we ask that boxes of books are no longer left on the seating area. A notice will be posted in the shelter and included in the next newsletter.

APPENDIX 2

County Council report – January 2026

Suffolk secures more than £26 million bus funding over three years

Millions of pounds of investment is to take place in Suffolk's bus network over three years following allocation of Government funding.

Services, ticketing, and infrastructure will all benefit under the package worth nearly £27 million between 2026 and 2029.

Suffolk County Council will receive a total of £26,813,760 under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG).

This funding will enable the continuation and expansion of new and improved services introduced over the past two years through LABG support and its predecessor, the Bus Services Improvement Grant (BSIP), many of which were shaped by community feedback.

Suffolk will receive:

- 2026/27 - £8,849,119
- 2027/28 - £8,937,920
- 2028/29 - £9,026,721

The funding is split into two areas.

Revenue investment will focus on:

- Maintaining and growing enhanced services based on local suggestions.
- Increasing publicity and travel information to help residents make informed choices.

Capital funding will deliver:

- Renewal and expansion of Real Time Passenger Information across Suffolk.
- Improved ticketing options and accessibility in partnership with bus operators.
- Investigations into bus priority measures to reduce journey times and encourage modal shift.
- Upgraded bus stops with new shelters, better footway links, and accessibility enhancements—many suggested by local communities.

Local authorities will have flexibility to use LABG funding to meet local needs—whether by reducing fares, introducing new routes, investing in zero-emission buses, or improving bus stops and stations.

Last July Suffolk County Council announced a £2.8m investment in new bus routes and improved services following announcement of LABG funding of £8 million for 2025-26. As well as new routes, some services gained increased frequency and a Sunday schedule added.

Alongside the £2.8m revenue for delivering new or enhanced services, the county council also [previously announced £5.2m of capital funding from the DfT](#) for new and improved bus stops, bus stations, bus priority measures or vehicle upgrades.

For more details of public transport in Suffolk go to the [Suffolk On Board](#) website.

OPINION: How Suffolk is investing in our roads

By Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Operational Highways, Flooding & Ipswich

Potholes are undoubtedly the bane of a motorist's life and remain one of the most common complaints landing in councillors' inboxes.

In a recent newspaper column, the Ipswich MP claimed that Suffolk will receive £219.4 million over the next four years to address potholes.

However, this figure does not tell the whole story.

The Department for Transport's small print makes clear that the funding must also be used for footways, bridges, highway drainage, and street lighting, not solely for pothole repairs. Moreover, the announcement assumes the government will fully deliver on this commitment.

Recent experience suggests otherwise. In the last two weeks, it has been confirmed that the postponement of the mayoral elections means Suffolk will miss out on its share of £37 million in the next two years, funding that was originally included in the devolution deal.

The MP went on to suggest that the additional funding would allow us to “renew worn-out road surfaces” and “end the endless cycle of emergency repairs.”

Most of the road funding is already spent on planned resurfacing and surface-dressing schemes.

This financial year alone, nearly 150 locations and more than 100 miles of road are included in such programmes across the county.

Preventative maintenance remains a key priority. Last autumn, Suffolk Highways trialled specialist equipment, including a Dragon Patcher and Roadmender, to repair defects before they developed into potholes.

During the trial, more than 3,500 defects were treated across over 230 roads. While assessments are still underway to determine value for money and where they can be best used, early indications suggest this approach could improve efficiency in the future.

There is no doubt that Suffolk's roads have steadily improved in the last ten years.

Independent surveys show a two-thirds reduction in A-roads classified as being in the worst condition since 2011, with nearly 300 miles of road moved out of the poorest category, while more than 350 miles now fall within the best condition band, bringing the total to 3,295 miles - 77% of Suffolk's roads.

This improvement has not come by chance. Since 2017, Suffolk County Council has invested more than £20 million of local taxpayer funds, resurfacing 1,000 miles of road and securing additional investment for drainage and pavements.

Suffolk has also consistently met the highest performance standards, enabling it to secure full funding from the Department for Transport under previous best-practice schemes.

The busier a road is the greater the chance that a defect could cause a problem, so Suffolk Highways gives greater priority to repairing roads that carry the most vehicles.

Regular safety inspections are carried out, with the frequency depending on how busy the road is.

However, potholes and other defects may still appear between inspections, especially after freezing conditions when water in the road surface freezes and expands, causing cracks.

This year alone the Suffolk Highways 2025/26 surface dressing programme, which concluded at the end of August, treated a total of 90 sites covering over 90 miles of road.

Similarly, this year's resurfacing programme will deliver works across 57 locations covering more than 11 miles. So far, 22 of the 58 resurfacing sites have been delivered with the remainder coming by the end of the financial year.

Yet there is more to be done. Progress cannot stand still. As a motorist myself, I want to see both local and national government commit further funding to our road network.

Motorists already face mounting costs—vehicle tax, fuel duty, and rising insurance premiums among them – so it is important we get something back.

Another charge is now also looming. In the recent Budget, the Chancellor announced plans for a pay-per-mile road tax for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

While the government has delayed implementation until April 2028 to work up the detail, road pricing, it seems, may soon be added to the growing list of financial burdens facing motorists.

I expect this is one promise that the government will keep.

Suffolk residents urged to apply quickly for free home energy upgrades

At the end of November 2025, Suffolk County Council secured £1.38 million from the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Fund.

Residents and landlords are urged to apply quickly, as the funding must be allocated by the end of March 2026.

The fund aims to provide free energy saving improvements to energy inefficient homes if residents are on a low income, receive certain benefits or live in a certain postcode area. This could be wall and loft insulation, solar panels or air source heat pumps.

“Over recent years, Warm Homes Suffolk has made improvements to hundreds of properties, giving people warmer, safer homes and reducing their energy bills.”

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

To be eligible, Suffolk homes must:

- be privately owned (either by you or your landlord)
- have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of D, E, F or G (you can find this out when you apply)

Household income must usually be £36,000 a year or less - but if you earn more than that, you might still be eligible if either:

- you live in a certain postcode area
(certain areas of Beccles, Felixstowe, Ipswich, Lowestoft and Stowmarket)
- someone in your household is getting certain benefits
- you have a severe or long-term health condition, which is adversely affected by living in a cold home

Once these conditions have been approved, an assessment of your home will identify which measures are best suited to your property. These will then be installed by trusted contactors, for free.

To check your eligibility, or to find out more about how Warm Homes Suffolk could help you, visit www.warmhomessuffolk.org or call the team on 03456 037 686.

Statement on provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2027

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, economic development and skills, said:

“We are deeply disappointed by the government's [provisional local government finance settlement](#). Our current understanding is that Suffolk County Council now faces a £6 million budget gap — £3.5 million worse than we had previously forecast.

“This is despite government assumptions that councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum amount every year, and the introduction of a so-called ‘fairer’ funding model. The government has shifted resources towards metropolitan areas at the expense of rural counties like ours, while injecting very little new money into the system.

“This settlement makes an already difficult financial position even more challenging. We will continue to press for a genuinely fair funding formula that properly reflects the needs and costs of delivering services in rural communities.”

Council secures £2.9 million from DfT Incentive Fund for 2025/26

Suffolk County Council has been awarded £2.9 million from the Department for Transport's 2025/26 Incentive Fund for best practice in highways management.

The fund, introduced by the current government, rewards local authorities that demonstrate excellence in highway asset management and efficiency.

The award builds on the council's strong track record of success in previous years, where it has consistently secured the maximum available funding under similar schemes.

Under the Incentive Fund scheme authorities must report:

- Highway maintenance spends over the past five years
- Road condition data, with trend analysis
- Pothole repair statistics for the last five years
- A 2025/26 resurfacing plan
- Show a balance of preventive against reactive maintenance
- Coordination with utilities to reduce disruption
- Climate resilience efforts
- Adoption of best practices and innovation

Suffolk County Council will spend a total of £47.3 million on highways maintenance in 2025-26.

The Suffolk Highways 2025/26 surface dressing programme treated a total of 90 sites covering over 90 miles of road.

Similarly, this year's resurfacing programme will deliver works across 57 locations covering more than 11 miles.

So far, 22 of the 58 resurfacing sites have been delivered with the remainder coming by the end of the financial year.

APPENDIX 3

Mid Suffolk District Council Report - Onehouse Ward January 2026

Elections for Mayor delayed	The government has delayed the election for a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk until May 2028.
Local Government Reorganisation	The government has also offered the option for Councils undergoing reorganisation to request a further delay to local elections. Suffolk County Council is writing to Government following a special meeting today (Jan 12). This could result in the County Council election (currently due in May 2026) being postponed again. The Green Party group has called for these elections to go ahead as planned.
Cost of Living support	A reminder that residents can seek help and support with the cost of living, here: Help and support for you - Mid Suffolk District Council - <u>babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk</u>

Citizens Advice	Citizen's Advice is available in for advice on debt, bills, and lots more. 01449 676060 or office open at 5 Milton Road, Stowmarket
Stowmarket Innovation Gateway	Construction work on a state-of-the-art skills and innovation centre at Gateway 14 in Stowmarket has reached a key milestone, with core construction now complete. The centre is due to open later this year. The centre will provide meeting spaces and support to assist local businesses. The centre will also provide training and skills development to fill local skills gaps, in partnership with local colleges and universities.
Darts Venue in Stowmarket	A new community darts venue has opened with £125k in matched funding. The venture which will be an accessible community darts hub, offering everything from darts equipment and accessories to coaching sessions and pay-and-play lanes.
New 3G football pitch	A new 3G football pitch is set to be delivered in Stowmarket after funding from the Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation was secured. Mid Suffolk District Council has secured 51% of the project costs from the Football Foundation, with the pitch due to open in spring 2026. It will be built on the grounds of the high school and made available for community use. The pitch will use cork infill –as part of research by the Football Foundation that is looking at the use of a variety of different pitch systems.
Locality Awards	The Locality Award is an annual grant that allows each District Councillor to support local projects and organisations. Full details of this grant https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/d/mid-suffolk/msdc-locality-awards-22-december-25 The fund is expected to re-open in spring for 2026/27 – please contact John to discuss ideas.
Other Council grants	A range of other District Council grants are open for applications, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Fund – up to £20,000, closes Jan 18th • Sports Infrastructure Fund – up to £250,000 • Town Centre Shop-front fund – up to £10,000 for projects to improve shop fronts • Community Asset Fund – up to £100,000 to buy community assets to run as social enterprises <p>For more information, see: www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-funding or email BMSDCgrants@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk for advice on funding options.</p>

Mid Suffolk District Council services: see www.midsuffolk.gov.uk, phone 0300 123 4000, or drop in to see Council staff at the Ipswich Street, Stowmarket office. Open Monday – Friday 54 Ipswich Street, Stowmarket, IP14 1AD

John Matthissen councillor@matthissen.net

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APPENDIX 4

Budget and Precept for 2026 - 2027

As agreed at December 25 and confirmed January 2026

Payments	£0.00	B/fwd Reserves ***	Total	
Audit Fees	£614.00	£0.00	£614.00	
Bank Charges @ £6 per month	£72.00	£0.00	£72.00	
Newsletter 3 Editions per year	£1,500.00	£0.00	£1,500.00	as agreed at finance meeting 28
Consumables (defibrillators and SIDs)	£250.00	£250.00	£500.00	
Burial Grounds Maintenance	£5,470.00	£4,000.00 **See NoteBelow	£9,470.00	Annual contract £5310.00 - plus
Clerk's Expenses - Petrol/Stationery	£250.00	£100.00	£350.00	as agreed at finance meeting 28
Clerk's Overtime	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Clerk's Salary	£8,866.00	£0.00	£8,866.00	Plus 4% as agreed at finance me
Clerk's Salary - Er's NIC	£580.00	£0.00	£580.00	Plus 4% as agreed at finance me
Community Projects	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Community Projects - PiYP	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Councillors' Expenses	£100.00	£100.00	£200.00	as agreed at finance meeting 28
Dog & Waste Bins Maintenance	£665.00	£0.00	£665.00	
Donations - Section 137	£250.00	£0.00	£250.00	CAB payment
Election Expenses	£200.00	£1,060.00	£1,260.00	increase reserves
Hire of Hall	£0.00	£100.00	£100.00	b/fwd reserves
Insurance	£350.00	£0.00	£350.00	2025 - 26 actual cost £300
Miscellaneous	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	
Street Lights-Energy	£2,500.00	£0.00	£2,500.00	
Assets - Maintenance	£745.00	£0.00	£745.00	
Subscriptions & Fees	£850.00	£0.00	£850.00	

Training	£0.00	£704.00	£704.00
Totals	£23,262.00	£6,314.00	£29,576.00

Receipts

Reclaimed VAT	£1,600.00	Higher due to PiYP costs
Deposit Account Interest	£1,500.00	
Burial Ground Income	£4,500.00	
Newsletter Income	£1,000.00	
Miscellaneous income	£0.00	
Donations received	£0.00	
Precept	£12,406.00	See F93
Totals	£21,006.00	

PRECEPT CALCULATIONS

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
tax base per MSDC	316.26	330.35	339.47	339.23
precept (or as proposed for 26/27)	9000	10106	10106	12406
increase in precept %	0.00%	12.29%	0.00%	22.76%
Tax rate (for a band D house)	28.46	30.59	29.77	36.57
increase in tax rate for D %	-1.63%	7.50%	-2.69%	22.85%

28.93

NOTES

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Accrue £500 each year from general reserves to be ear-marked

Burial Grounds Maintenance

Possibly a £4k reserve to carry fwd if not used at the beginning of

Overspend partly covered by increase in precept but mainly covered by general reserves

*** b/fwd reserves subject to change at 31st March 2026