

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting  
Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

**Present:** T Kitson (councillor); C Ratcliffe (councillor); T Bamber (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); S Penman (councillor); Cllr K Oakes (County); Cllr J Matthissen (District); S Ottewell (clerk)

**2602 - 01 Apologies for absence**

None

**2602- 02 To agree co-opting new councillor**

The chairman welcomed Keith Harding, who had indicated a willingness to be co-opted onto the council. Councillors had considered the matter privately and voted unanimously to co-opt him.

**Action Point: Clerk to attend to paperwork**

**2602 – 03 Declarations of Interest / Declarations of Lobbying**

None

**2602 - 04 Public Forum**

None

**2602 - 05 To agree and sign the minutes of meeting held on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

The minutes for Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> January, were reviewed. It was agreed that the chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**2602 - 06 Clerk's Report**

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

**2602- 07 Action Points review**

The action points summary was circulated to the councillors ahead of the meeting, and they were reminded to inform the Clerk once they had completed any assigned tasks. This helps uphold transparency and ensures smooth coordination.

**2602 - 08 Chairman's Report**

The Chair circulated his report prior to the meeting; no questions were raised (Appendix 2)

**2602 - 09 County Councillor's Report, Quiet Lanes and street sign update**

Cllr Oakes' report was circulated to all the councillors prior to the meeting. (Appendix 3)

Cllr Oakes confirmed that the deadline to apply for Quiet Lane status has passed and that the County Council is no longer accepting new applications.

The Clerk confirmed that payment was made to Suffolk County Council for the "Pedestrians in Road" sign, and Cllr Oakes agreed to follow up with the relevant department for a timeline.

Cllr Ratcliffe reminded Cllr Oakes about the finger post signs on the triangle at Mill Lane / Park Road, and she once more agreed to follow up on this.

**Action Point: Cllr Kitson to inform Anna James about the Quiet Lanes decision**

**2602 - 10 District Councillor's Report and Hubbards Close issues**

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

The Hubbards Close issues were then discussed, with Cllr Matthissen updating the councillors on the progress being made by MSDC

**2602 – 11 Planning applications for consideration**

None received

**2601 - 11 Finance**

**a) Accounts review to date and finance approval**

All councillors agreed with the Budget Analysis/Variance Report, the Accounting Statement Report, and the Bank Reconciliation, which had been sent out prior to the meeting.

**b) Payments to hand**

- i. Electricity for streetlights – invoice not yet received for January usage
- ii. Monthly bank service charge – £6.00  
Approved for payment (direct debit) – Local Government Act 1972, s111
- iii. Combsvilage domain name fee USD15 (£11.13)  
Approved for payment – Local Government Act 1972, s142
- iv. Clerk's salary & HMRC payment £9,054.19  
Approved for payment – Local Government Act 1972, s112

**2602 - 13 To review and agree Financial Regulations Policy**

NALC issued a revised Model Financial Regulations Policy in March 2025, which was checked against our existing policy dated February 2025. No amendments were deemed necessary, and the policy remains unchanged.

To be reviewed again in February 2027 or if NALC announces any updates.

**Action Point: Clerk to upload the policy to the website, showing the updated approval date.**

**2602 - 14 To review and agree Internal Control Statement and Report**

Following Assertion 10: Digital & Data Compliance, the Internal Control tests have been updated. Cllrs Bamber and Penman agreed to review the tests and provide comments as necessary. To be reviewed again at the March meeting.

**Action Point: Cllr Bamber and Cllr Penman to review the Internal Control tests.**

### **2602 - 15 To consider SALC Internal Audit Service 2026**

Before the meeting, the Clerk circulated an email from SALC containing the Internal Audit Service Letter of Engagement for the council's approval. This was approved by all the councillors.

A further email will be issued once the audit booking slots become available in March.

### **2602 – 16 To review village gate sign artwork for agreement**

Cllr Ratcliffe reported that the digital version of the logo was not of sufficient resolution to be used on the village gate. It was therefore agreed to use the wording "Please observe the speed limit" in the hope of raising driver awareness of the 30mph limit through the village.

**Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to liaise with the sign suppliers**

### **2602 - 17 To consider noticeboard options**

The Clerk reported on the various types of noticeboards available, along with approximate costs and the pros and cons of each material. Cllr Tomlinson volunteered to carry on with the investigations and potentially contact local tradespeople.

**Action Point: Cllr Tomlinson to continue exploring options.**

### **2602 – 18 To review and agree Charitable Donations Appraisal form**

Following some suggestions, the Charitable Donations Appraisal form has been revised and approved by all the councillors.

**Action Point: Clerk to upload onto website**

### **2602 – 19 To consider Tree Protection Order plan**

Cllr Kitson has spent considerable time updating the Parish Online site with all the trees in Combs that have a Tree Protection Order (TPO). However, concerns have been raised about the number of old but healthy trees in Combs that lack a TPO, which means they could potentially be felled. It was suggested and agreed that all councillors check the MSDC website to learn more about this subject and the procedures to follow in establishing a TPO. Each councillor also agreed to consider any trees they believe should be protected..

**Action Point: All councillors to understand the TPO Process on the MSDC website**

### **2602 – 20 To consider articles for the March newsletter**

It was agreed that the newsletter remains popular and serves as an important source of information for residents about local events and news, especially for those not near a noticeboard. Several articles were suggested for the March edition to keep it engaging to read.

### **2602 – 21 To consider cemetery maintenance planning**

Cllr Ratcliffe confirmed that the topsoil for the cemetery grounds has been ordered and he is awaiting its delivery. Checks have been made with Anglian Water regarding the installation of a water tap. Both the car park area and the track leading to the old graveyard require resurfacing. Cllr Bamber agreed to carry out a site visit to determine the specific work needed at the cemetery. Cllrs Ratcliffe, Kitson, Harding, and Betchley agreed to assist.



<b>Balance as of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026</b>	<b>£107,986.00</b>
Current account	£5,735.37
General savings account	£97,305.68
Cemetery savings account	£4,944.95
<b>Total in Bank as of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026</b>	<b>£107,986.00</b>

### **“Pedestrians In Road” signs**

The requested road signs have now been agreed upon by Suffolk County Council Highways; a contribution has been received from Cllr J Matthessen’s budget; we are now waiting for Highways to confirm a date for the installation.

### **2026 – 2027 Precept**

I can confirm that, following acceptance of the 2026-2027 budget and precept, the precept form has been submitted to MSDC and accepted.

### **2026 Audit**

We have now received the SALC Internal Audit Services Letter of Engagement, and it is on this month’s agenda for agreement by the Councillors. We should be contacted in March regarding an Internal Audit date.

### **Combs Village Website**

Over the past few weeks, I have been updating the Combs Village Website by removing many outdated articles. I have also been checking for accessibility compliance, which is part of the new Assertion 10 in our internal controls.

### **Clerk Training**

I have now enrolled in the FILCA course (Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration), as agreed in March 2025, after it was delayed for personal reasons. While studying this course, I will be enquiring about enrolling on the CILCA course (Certificate in Local Council Administration), which, once qualified, will allow the PC to use General Powers of Competence.

I have also completed an online GDPR Awareness course with assessment and attended a Preparing for Audit teams meeting organised by SALC.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Chairman’s Report February 2026**

#### **New Councillors**

We are pleased to welcome back Sarah Penman and Keith Harding. This month marks Sarah’s first meeting as a full councillor, having been co-opted in December. All things being equal, Keith will be

co-opted this month and the arrival of both brings the council up to its full complement of seven. Both are very welcome additions to the team.

### Local Government Elections

As instructed, I wrote to the leaders of our local District and County Councils *and* the Secretary of State expressing our discontent at the possibility of postponing local elections and expressing our view that this would be undemocratic. Ultimately the SoS decided to postpone the elections for a year, a predictable if disappointing outcome.

### Oaks Meadow

I wrote to the Trustees of Oaks Meadows on January 13<sup>th</sup> setting out the council's expectations around the business case and plans for the mooted Community Room and offering to discuss with the team leader responsible for this activity.

### Precept

MSDC has accepted our proposal for a precept of £12,406 for FY 2026/2027. This marks a 22.84% percentage increase from the current year (after several years of minor or no increases) and moves us closer to being to pay for services without drawing on general reserves. The total for a Band D property will be £36.57 per annum and remains the lowest precept amount in the near locale.

### ParishOnline

The assets purchased within the 'Pride in Combs' project have been added onto the ParishOnline map. We should be aligning the council's asset register with ParishOnline but do not currently have a procedure for doing so.

### Anglian Water

Councillor Ratcliffe's persistent exchanges and negotiations with Anglian Water have paid dividends. The Clerk was supplied with road closure notices by the utility and has posted them publicly. Combs Parish residents will hopefully be pleased to have had at least *some* notice of impending disruption.

## APPENDIX 3

### County Council report – February 2026

#### Suffolk County Council backs new 20mph speed limit policy for communities

A new 20mph speed limit policy to enhance road safety and improve quality of life across Suffolk's communities has been agreed by county councillors.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has backed the proposal to make it easier to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph.

Under the new scheme any applications for a 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph or under is likely to be approved.

The scheme was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on Friday January 9.

**Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Transport Strategy, said:** "I am delighted this proposed policy has been accepted, it will make a real difference to the quality of life of our communities.

"This update to the 20mph policy reflects a greater demand for lower speed environments where people live.

"It is not a blanket speed-reduction policy, it is simply a more efficient way of introducing a 20mph limit on roads where it is appropriate to do so."

Under the new scheme communities, typically parish or town councils, will be invited to come forward with proposals for 20mph limits, supported by their local county councillor and backed by local engagement.

This could include formal surveys or consultation through neighbourhood plans to demonstrate community support.

Assessment criteria will consider observed average traffic speeds, the role and character of the road, and the presence of vulnerable road users.

Schemes will still need local funding, as is currently the case, except where they align with existing council programmes as part of the Local Transport Plan.

Under the scheme, areas with recorded speeds of:

- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

The new policy will come into immediate effect for all new applications.

### **Nationally significant Anglo-Saxon burial ground found at Sizewell C site**

- **Ancient graves of two high-status individuals found with weapons and personal items**
- **Discovery sheds fascinating new light on Suffolk society in the 7<sup>th</sup> century**
- **Remarkable archaeological find to feature on BBC Two's *Digging for Britain***

Among the most remarkable discoveries is a high-status grave containing two individuals buried alongside a fully harnessed horse, weapons, and personal items. These finds, dating to the 7th century, suggest the individuals were elite members of Anglo-Saxon society and reflect their complex burial traditions.

The team from Oxford Cotswold Archaeology (OCA), working on behalf of Sizewell C, identified at least 11 burial mounds, known as barrows, along with cremation and inhumation burials. All had been carefully arranged across a prominent point in the landscape near Theberton in Suffolk.

Despite poor bone preservation caused by the local sandy soils, detailed excavation and recording have preserved valuable information about burial practices and social status in early Medieval Suffolk.

**Len Middleton, OCA's Project Officer leading the site, said:**

“Excavating a section of the Sizewell Link Road has been an exciting experience for me and the team. The site is an early Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery dating from the 6th to 7th centuries, with both inhumation and cremation burials, many furnished with weapons, jewellery, and vessels. Soil conditions have resulted in little preservation – we are instead left with striking sand silhouettes that capture the outlines of the bodies in remarkable detail.”

“One barrow, containing a horse and two individuals buried with weapons and personal items, stands out as a ‘princely’ burial – part of the same elite tradition seen at Sutton Hoo, Snape and Prittlewell. Discoveries like this are of national importance because they deepen our understanding of power, belief, and identity in early medieval England, and how those ideas were expressed along the East Anglian coast.”

Other significant finds from recent Sizewell C excavations include evidence of Roman industrial activity, such as a well-preserved pottery kiln discovered in Middleton, and an extremely rare Iron Age oak ladder found at the same site.

Excavations at Goose Hill, north of Sizewell, reveal a long history shaped by its coastal setting - from Early Bronze Age farming to Roman salt production and Second World War coastal defences. Archaeologists also uncovered Beaker-period activity, including a well-preserved cremation urn.

## **Suffolk County Council appeals against incorrect government Red highways rating**

Suffolk County Council has called on the Department for Transport to correct a report it says wrongly labels the authority in the worst category of a new ratings system.

The move comes after a meeting with department officials (DfT) by Councillor Paul West and senior highways officials.

The new system ranks highways authorities using a traffic-light system based on effectiveness in spending the government's highways maintenance funding.

The council says the DfT failed to include in its assessment £10 million of highways funding it brought forward from 2025/26 and invested early in 2024/25.

Had this been included, Suffolk would have received an Amber rating for highways expenditure, consistent with its ratings in road condition and best practice, rather than an overall Red.

**Councillor West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Operational Highways, said:**  
“That £10 million delivered much welcomed resurfacing ahead of time, but we have now been unfairly penalised for it.

“We fully support transparency in the reporting of highway maintenance performance, but transparency can only be meaningful if the data being published is accurate.

“We have demonstrated to the government where it has gone wrong and we want it to recognise its mistake and correct the rating to Amber.

“Make no mistake, we ultimately want a Green status, but it is important that we at least have a ranking that accurately records where we are.”

## Council set to approve much-needed provision for children with complex needs

Papers published today set out plans for the new provision, which will provide purpose-built Ofsted-registered accommodation, improving outcomes for children and reducing reliance on high-cost, private placements.

Following a successful bid, £1.4m of Department for Education funding has been secured for the project, which will be match-funded with a further £1.4m from Suffolk County Council.

Nationally, councils are facing growing demand and increasing complexity of need. Suffolk is facing the same pressures, with more children coming into care, and children entering care later with lived experiences meaning that they often require more specialist care and support at higher costs.

A lack of choice in the current care market means there is a critical need for local, Ofsted-registered placements for children with complex needs in Suffolk.

If approved, the new accommodation will deliver much-needed additional capacity to support children with complex needs in Suffolk. The proposed home will provide a stable,

therapeutic and nurturing environment, designed to improve the health, education, and behavioural outcomes for the children cared for.

The numbers of children in Suffolk County Council’s care fluctuate daily. There are currently around 900 children in care in Suffolk, with approximately 20 requiring residential accommodation.

It is estimated that the current cost for a child with complex needs living in private provision is approximately £16.4k per week. In the proposed accommodation, this cost would reduce to approximately £12k per week, offering a saving of up to £4.4k per child per week.

The papers outline that for two children living at the accommodation, this would represent an annual saving of £454.8k and by Year 3, a potential saving of £1.4m.

## APPENDIX 4

### Mid Suffolk District Council Report - Onehouse Ward February 2026

<p><b>Devolution and local government reform – election cancellation</b></p>	<p>The County Council elections planned for May 2026 have been cancelled and we can assume there will never be any further County Council elections.</p> <p>So as predicted we have ended up in a position where the biggest change in local government in a generation will all be implemented with virtually no public involvement and with all elections over the period cancelled.</p>
<p><b>Better Recycling update.</b></p>	<p>A leaflet explaining the changed to waste collection has been delivered to all homes in Mid Suffolk. More items such as tetra-pak, plastic bags and film will be able to be recycled and there will be a weekly food waste collection too. Residents will begin to receive their new bins over the coming months ready for the new collections to start in June 2026.</p>
<p><b>Local Plan Land Bids Map</b></p>	<p>Following calls for sites in 2023 and 2024, Mid Suffolk is publishing a map showing all the land put forward by owners for potential development up to 2044. This is part of work on a new Local Plan for Mid Suffolk and Babergh. It is important to understand that these bids will be considered as to suitability and then sieved to allocate more suitable ones, sufficient to provide for the total number required by Government between 2024 and 2044. There will be several rounds of consultation before this is finalised as part of the new Local Plan.</p>
<p><b>Proposed Quietway designation and improvement</b></p>	<p>This proposal to improve the National Cycle Route between Stowmarket and Woolpit has been put forward by the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans) with 2 recent public workshops in Onehouse and Woolpit. While the initial suggestions and comments are considered, further views and ideas can be put forward via the website <a href="https://communitymap.uk/project/257/">https://communitymap.uk/project/257/</a></p> <p>Unfortunately the scope cannot be extended to consider the call for other routes such as in Combs at this time.</p> 

<b>Community Nature Recovery Grants</b>	The New Community Nature recovery grants were launched earlier this year. Community groups are able to apply for grants up to £50,000 for projects such as expanding wildlife corridors, tree planting, creating wildflower meadow and other environmental initiatives to safeguard natural spaces for future generations. More details of the grants can be found on the website <a href="https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/boosting-biodiversity-by-funding-nature-in-your-neighbourhood">https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/boosting-biodiversity-by-funding-nature-in-your-neighbourhood</a>
<b>Catchment and Landscape Nature Recovery Grant</b>	Focused on river catchments, addressing biodiversity loss, flooding, water quality and community engagement. This grant will support nature-based solutions, land purchases or other activities and projects in support of these goals.
<b>Locality Awards</b>	The Locality Award is an annual grant that allows each District Councillor to support local projects and organisations. Full details of this grant <a href="https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/d/mid-suffolk/msdc-locality-awards-22-december-25">https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/d/mid-suffolk/msdc-locality-awards-22-december-25</a> The fund is expected to re-open in spring for 2026/27 – please contact John to discuss ideas.
<b>Other Council grants</b>	A range of other District Council grants are open for applications, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sports Infrastructure Fund</b> – up to £250,000</li> <li>• <b>Town Centre Shop-front fund</b> – up to £10,000 for projects to improve shop fronts</li> <li>• <b>Community Asset Fund</b> – up to £100,000 to buy community assets to run as social enterprises</li> </ul> For more information, see: <a href="http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-funding">www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-funding</a> or email <a href="mailto:BMSDCgrants@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk">BMSDCgrants@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk</a> for advice on funding options.

Mid Suffolk District Council services: see [www.midsuffolk.gov.uk](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk), phone 0300 123 4000, or drop in to see Council staff at the Ipswich Street, Stowmarket office. Open Monday – Friday  
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