

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 9th March 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); K Harding (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk)

2603 - 01 Apologies for absence

Cllr K Oakes (County);
Cllr J Matthissen (District)

2603 – 02 Declarations of Interest / Declarations of Lobbying / Declarations of gifts and hospitality

None

2603 - 03 Public Forum

None

2603 - 04 To agree and sign the minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th February 2026

The minutes for Monday, 9th February, were reviewed. It was agreed that the chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2603 - 05 Clerk's Report

The Clerk distributed the report ahead of the meeting, giving councillors a chance to read through it. Since this is Cllr Terry Betchley's final meeting, heartfelt thanks were extended to him for his service as a councillor.

No further questions were raised (Appendix 1)

2603- 06 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.

2603 - 07 Chairman's Report

The Chair distributed his report before the meeting. He confirmed he plans to attend the Oakes Meadow Community Room Consultation at the end March. Once again, the departure of Cllr Terry Betchley was acknowledged, with Cllr Kitson personally thanking Terry for his work on the council. He remarked he would miss Terry's dry humor and his refreshingly down-to-earth contributions. No questions were raised (Appendix 2)

2603 - 08 County Councillor's Report

No report received as Cllr Oakes is on annual leave.

2603 - 09 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen submitted the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 3) but was unable to attend the meeting.

2603 –10 Planning applications for consideration

None received

2603 - 11 Finance

a) Accounts review to date and finance approval

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

b) Payments to hand

- i. Electricity for streetlights – January usage £269.86
Approved for payment (direct debit) -
- ii. Electricity for streetlights – February usage £218.17
Approved for payment (direct debit) -
- iii. Monthly bank service charge – £7.00
Approved for payment (direct debit) – Local Government Act 1972, s111

c) Internal Audit Update

The clerk confirmed that SALC has not yet contacted us regarding the internal audit dates.

2603 - 12 To review and agree Internal Control Statement and Report

Cllr Penman reported back on her review of the Internal Controls Report, which has been updated for 2026 following Assertion 10: Digital & Data Compliance. It was confirmed that all tests had been checked and the necessary comments made. No further action is required at this time, however reviews will be ongoing.

Action Point: Clerk to upload documents to website.

2603 - 13 To review and agree banking mandate and signatories

It was agreed that the current bank mandate is suitable for its purpose, with the administrator processing payments through the system and two councillors subsequently approving them. Following the resignation of Cllr Betchley, he is to be removed from the mandate and replaced by Cllr Ratcliffe.

Action Point: Clerk to amend mandate with bank.

2603 - 14 To consider notice board options

Cllr Tomlinson reported on his progress with researching notice board options. He has contacted several suppliers for quotes and is awaiting replies. Since there is no notice board at the Combs Green end of the village, he wondered whether it would be worth installing one there or if Oaks Meadow might permit additional posters on theirs. He also believes that several of the existing notice boards could be easily repaired and intends to explore this further with the help of Cllr Ratcliffe.

Action Point: Cllr Tomlinson to submit quotes and options to councillors for consideration at the April meeting.

2603 – 15 To review village gate sign artwork for agreement

Cllr Ratcliffe stated that he is currently working with sign suppliers and aims to finalize the arrangements soon.

Action Point: Cllr Ratcliffe to liaise with the sign suppliers

2603 - 16 Update on the Tree Protection Order plan

Several of the councillors commented on their confusion with understanding the MSDC website regarding TPOs. Cllr Kitson confirmed that he had written to the Arboricultural Officer for clarification.

2603 – 17 Update on cemetery maintenance planning

Cllr Bamber confirmed he had reached out to other councillors to arrange the site survey and will report back at the April meeting.

2603 – 18 Other correspondence and items for next agenda

Cllr Ratcliffe expressed his disbelief at the ongoing problems caused by Anglian Water during repair work. The clerk agreed to follow up on this.

The clerk confirmed that the Litter Pick dates have been advertised across the village; new grabbers had been ordered and arrangements made for MSDC to collect the rubbish bags.

April agenda to include: audit update, IT and email policy, noticeboards, and cemetery maintenance.

Meeting Closed at 20:30

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 13th April 2026 at 7.30pm
@ Battsford Cricket Club**

APPENDIX 1

Clerk's Report March 2026

Finance

Total balance as of 31st January 2026	£107,986.00
Plus February Receipts	
Burial grounds income	£1,220.00
Less February Payments	
Bank charges	£6.00
Streetlight electricity (Jan usage)	£269.86
Burial grounds maintenance	£590.00
Clerk's Annual Salary & Emp'ers NI	£9,054.19
Combs Village website domain name fee	£11.13
Clerk's FILCA training course	£168.00
Suffolk County Council for road signs	£2,103.38
Balance as of 28th February 2026	£97,003.44
Current account	£4,752.81
General savings account	£87,305.68
Cemetery savings account	£4,944.95
Total in Bank as of 28th February 2026	£97,003.44

"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.

Community Newsletter

The Spring edition of the newsletter has now been completed and sent to the printers. We continue to receive many interesting articles about events happening in both Combs and Battsford, and the feedback is very encouraging. There have also been several new inquiries for business advertising, which is a much welcomed source of funding.

PiYP Project Spring Bulbs

Our village is now welcoming spring as the daffodil bulbs start to bloom, creating many beautiful yellow displays throughout the village.

Councillors

While we warmly welcome our two new councillors to the Council, we are saddened to say goodbye to Terry Betchley, who has diligently served Combs residents for the past five years. I wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

APPENDIX 2

Chairman's Report March 2026

Oaks Meadow

Councillors have been invited by Oaks Meadow Project Trustees to attend a viewing of some "concept plans" for the previously noted Community Room. Viewings are scheduled for March 28th and 29th from 10:30am-4:30pm in 'The Shed' at Fenn's Farmhouse.

Terry Betchley OBE

The March meeting marks the final appearance of Cllr Terry Betchley who has served the residents of Combs Parish for 5 years. Providing liaison with Oaks Meadow in the early stages of that project, Terry provided a coherent link between our two entities.

Terry also volunteered to attend to the management of the cemetery during his tenure. It was fitting that we held our D-Day 80 commemoration event there as Terry read the public address with poise and military distinction.

I would personally extend my thanks to Terry for providing discreet and welcome counsel from time to time and we shall all miss his dry humour and refreshingly down-to-earth contribution. He carries with him all our thanks and good wishes.

APPENDIX 3

Mid Suffolk District Council Report - Onehouse Ward March 2026

<p>Devolution and local government reform – election reinstatement</p>	<p>The County Council elections planned for May 2026 have now been re-instated.</p> <p>The current plan is for:</p> <p>County Council elections 7th May 2026.</p> <p>Unitary elections in May 2027 for a shadow council to take control in 2028</p> <p>Mayoral Elections in May 2028.</p>
<p>Local Plan Call for sites</p>	<p>The Council has published a map of all sites submitted during these Call for Sites exercises. https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites</p> <p>Note:</p> <p>This is not a list of preferred development locations.</p> <p>Publication promotes transparency and ensures communities have early visibility of what has been proposed by landowners.</p> <p>No planning status is granted by submission. Sites do not benefit from any presumption of development.</p> <p>Submissions will now be assessed against planning policy, constraints, evidence and deliverability criteria, and reduced to sufficient area to deliver the Government target of 734 per year up to 2044.</p> <p>Assessment outputs will be published through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) in Spring 2026.</p>
<p>Locality Awards</p>	<p>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 after the local elections – please contact John to discuss ideas.</p>
<p>A14 litter</p>	<p>Concerns about Health and safety (including a fatal accident in Norfolk) have meant litter picking along fast routes such as the A14 have had to be re-assessed. Contractors are about to be employed to address the litter. The A14 and slip roads will get cleared within a few weeks.</p> <p>Ultimately, this problem is caused by an irresponsible minority of people who think it is acceptable to throw rubbish out of their car windows.</p>
<p>Former HQ site in Needham Market</p>	<p>Mid Suffolk District Council has announced the sale of the remainder of its former office site in Needham Market to Hatch Homes – in a deal that supports the town’s regeneration and realises funds for reinvestment into council housing.</p>
<p>Armed Forces Day, Stowmarket</p>	<p>Plans are beginning to take shape for Armed Forces Day, which will be held in Stowmarket on 27th June, supported by both Mid Suffolk District Council and Stowmarket Town Council. Armed Forces Day is a chance to show your support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community. There will be a number of attractions such as climbing wall, assault course, and hopefully a helicopter from Wattisham. It is shaping up to be a great family day out. Please support if you can.</p>
<p>Recycling & Waste Collection</p>	<p>The delivery of new bins ready for the rollout of Better Recycling has now started. This means the delivery of a new blue recycling bin and the new food caddie and food recycling bins.</p>

<p>Mid Suffolk budget and Council Tax</p>	<p>Mid Suffolk Budget Scope</p> <p>In addition to the day-to-day provision of the current services and current activities the 2026/27 budget includes further funding for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major implementation of food waste collection and better recycling • Enhancements to our current depot in readiness for better recycling • Further support for recycling education • Cost of living support and Council Tax Support scheme • Support for our towns and rural communities outside of Stowmarket in the wider District • Support for sports and leisure facilities in the wider district • Communities Infrastructure projects • Leisure centre maintenance • Stowmarket sports facilities - SHELF Project • Support for Stowmarket regeneration • Support for the Cosy Homes scheme which has been expanded to offer solar panels • Funding for the Reach Retrofit Hub to be an advice centre for the district • Grant funding for nature recovery and community biodiversity groups • Support for new footpaths and cycle ways • Completing the build of the Stowmarket Innovation Gateway • Developing the skills offering for the Stowmarket Innovation Gateway • Funding for disabled adaptations and the disability action plan • Expansion of temporary accommodation to avoid homeless residents being put into bed and breakfast accommodation and save on costs going to private providers • Use of Land Transfers and/or Capital Receipts to alleviate the pressure on Council Housing finances. • Support for planning such as neighbourhood plans • Support for local food production • Support for local energy production <p>Mid Suffolk District Council is increasing Council Tax by 2.99%.</p> <p>About 8% of the total Council Tax bill is attributable to Mid Suffolk District Council and this % has been reducing. For context for a Band D property the increase attributable to Mid Suffolk is about £5.23 per year or 10p per week.</p>
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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
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