

Minutes of Combs Parish Council Meeting
Monday 13th April 2026 @ 7.30 pm, Battisford Cricket Club

Present: T Kitson (councillor); T Bamber (councillor); A Tomlinson (councillor); T Betchley (councillor); S Penman (councillor); K Harding (councillor); S Ottewell (clerk); Cllr K Oakes (county); Cllr J Matthissen (district)

2604 - 01 Apologies for absence

Cllr C Ratcliffe to attend funeral – apology accepted by all the councillors

2604 – 02 Declarations of Interest / Declarations of Lobbying / Declarations of gifts and hospitality

None

2604 - 03 Public Forum

None

2604 - 04 To agree and sign the minutes of meeting held on Monday 9th March 2026

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

2604 - 05 Clerk's Report

The Clerk distributed the report ahead of the meeting, giving councillors a chance to read through it. No further questions were raised (Appendix 1)

2604- 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.

2604 - 07 Chairman's Report

The Chair distributed his report before the meeting. No questions were raised (Appendix 2)

2604 - 08 County Councillor's Report

Again, the report was distributed to the councillors prior to the meeting, and no further questions were raised (Appendix 3)

2604 - 09 District Councillor's Report

Cllr Matthissen submitted the report prior to the meeting (Appendix 4). He spoke about the new recycling system and asked whether everyone present had received their new bins. The clerk asked about Model Farm, which has communal bins and, to date, has not been notified of their changes. Cllr Matthissen agreed to follow up on this.

2604 –10 Planning applications for consideration

- (a) **DC/26/01221** – Listed building consent 7 Model Farm, Replacement of rotten timber windows and front door. Existing softwood double glazed storm casements with drip detail and solid glazing bars with same. Existing timber door with glazing panel replaced with same.

While all the councillors are in favour of the application, they were unsure whether the style is in keeping with the rest of Model Farm and asked the Clerk to mention this in the response.

- (b) **DC/26/01180** – Listed building consent 7 Model Farm
1no. new opening formed in original brickwork wall (expose and enlarge existing opening); modern partition walls removed and altered, and new partition walls installed; 2no. bathrooms relocated to adjacent areas; 1no. new single bedroom formed; 1no. existing

doorway infilled to create hall storage closet; Replacement of windows and doors like for like

The councillors are in support of this application

- (c) **DC/26/01250** - Application for Listed Building Consent - Construction of rear porch Dots Cottage 2 Little London Combs

The councillors are in support of this retrospective application

2604 - 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 as of 31st March 2026, which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

b) To confirm the new salary payment schedule for the clerk

The Chair explained that following the February meeting, during which the clerk's salary payment was approved, there was a proposal to switch to monthly payments instead of yearly. The clerk agreed to consider this modification. The councillors concurred that this approach would be fairer and agreed to make payments on the last Thursday of each month going forward.

c) Payments to hand

i.

- i. Clerks & Emp'ers NI payment £754.47
Approved for payment – Local Government Act 1972, s112
- ii. Electricity for streetlights – March usage £209.84
Approved for payment (direct debit) - Parish Councils Act 157, s.3; Highways Act 1980. S.301
- iii. Monthly bank service charge – £7.00
Approved for payment (direct debit) – LGA 1972, s111
- iv. Newsletter printing costs £393.75
Approved for payment – – Local Government Act 1972, s142
- v. Refurbishment of bench £954.48
Approved for payment – Parish Councils Act 1957, section 1
- vi. ICO – annual fee paid by direct debit £47.00
Approved for payment - Local Government Act 1972 s143

d) Internal Audit Update

The clerk confirmed that SALC has been in contact regarding the audit, and the requested files have been sent to them. They are expected to reach out again this week to ask for additional backup and information.

e) Review and agree AGAR (Annual Governance & Accountability Return)

The completed forms had been circulated to the councillors prior to the meeting for review
Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement was approved by all the councillors, and it was agreed for the Chair and Clerk to sign
Section 2 – Accounting Statements was checked and agreed by all the councillors and approved for the Chair to sign

f) Review and agree CIL report

The report had been sent to the councillors for review prior to the meeting
The annual CIL expenditure report was reviewed and approved by the councillors.
It was agreed for it to be signed and submitted to MSDC

g) Review and agree Assets Register

The report had been sent to the councillors for review before the meeting
All councillors concurred that the asset register was accurate and complete, and it should be signed.

h) Review and agree Risk Assessment and Financial Management Report

The report was sent to the councillors for review prior to the meeting.
All councillors concurred that the report was accurate and comprehensive, and it was approved to be signed.

2604 - 12 To review and agree Internal Control Statement

Although the Internal Control Report was agreed and signed at the March meeting, the Statement was not signed, so it was added to this month's agenda to prevent confusion. The councillors all agreed with the Statement and approved its signing.

2604 - 13 To review and agree revised IT & Email policy

Cllr Kitson updated the IT & Email policy once more to include the use of gov.uk email addresses. The policy was circulated to councillors before the meeting for their review. It was agreed to be practical and approved for signing off.

2604 - 14 To consider training requirements for the councillors and clerk

Several councillors expressed interest in undertaking basic councillor training, cemetery management, and working with volunteers, and the clerk agreed to explore these options. Additionally, the clerk plans to continue her studies and will investigate the CILCA qualification.

2604 – 15 Update on noticeboards project and funding

After the March meeting, during which we decided to explore options for the notice boards, it was revealed that the County Councillor had funds available in her Locality Budget that we might be able to apply for. Cllr Tomlinson had already received quotes from several companies, and he worked with Cllr Kitson to complete the required application forms before the deadline. If successful, the funding should cover the cost of purchasing the noticeboards, and the PC will fund any additional costs including the installation.

2604 – 16 Update on cemetery maintenance planning

Cllr Bamber confirmed that he has contacted other interested councillors and is organizing a site visit to explore options.

2604 – 17 Decision on the storage of the council-owned safe

Cllr Bamber reported that a large council-owned safe, currently at a former councillor's residence, needs to be relocated. The safe contains historic paperwork and documents, and it was agreed that the first step should be to sort through the contents to determine whether anything needs archiving, electronic storage, or disposal.

Action point: Cllr Kitson to arrange sorting through the paperwork

2604 – 18 To consider the agenda for May's Annual Meetings including the election of Chair and Vice-chair

The clerk explained the purposes of the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Parish Council meeting for the benefit of new councillors. She asked for suggestions of local businesses or individuals to invite to attend or to submit a report for the Annual Parish Meeting. It was also noted that the Annual Parish Council Meeting provides an opportunity to nominate and elect a new Chair and Vice-chair, if anyone is interested.

2604 – 19 Other correspondence and items for next agenda

The clerk reported receiving correspondence from the family wishing to plant a commemorative plum tree in the cemetery. They have suggested planting it on either Wednesday 15th or Thursday 16th May. As there are no burials taking place on either day, it was agreed they could proceed.

Next agenda to include audit update

Meeting Closed at 21:00

**Date and time of next meeting: Monday 11th May 2026
Annual Parish Meeting @ 7pm
Immediately followed by the Annual Parish Council Meeting
@ Battsford Cricket Club**

APPENDIX 1

Clerk's Report April 2026

Finance

Total balance as of 28th February 2026 **£97,003.44**

Plus March Receipts

Burial grounds income	£3,765.00
Newsletter Advertising	£144.00
Savings Account Interest	£500.32

Less March Payments

Bank charges	£7.00
Streetlight electricity (Feb usage)	£218.17
ICO (direct debit) - Data Protection Registration	£47.00

Balance as of 31st March 2026 **£101,140.50**

Current account	£4,389.64
General savings account	£91,780.50
Cemetery savings account	£4,970.45

Total in Bank as of 31st March 2026 **£101,140.59**

PiYP Project

Although the project is now finished, it was agreed to refurbish the bench on the triangle in Moats Tye. This has also been completed, and it is hoped that it will encourage people to sit and enjoy the view across the area. Several residents have kindly begun deadheading the daffodils so they can bloom again next year.

Litter Pick

Our recent litter pick was a great success, with twelve dedicated volunteers coming together to collect over twelve bags of rubbish. The main focus was on Poplar Hill and Tannery Road, where a wide variety of items—such as beer cans, plastic bottles, and food wrappers—were collected. Thank you once again to everyone who contributed their time and effort. Your ongoing support not only helps keep our community clean but also encourages others to get involved.

Election of County Councillors

As you're aware, after much uncertainty regarding the local elections, it is now confirmed they will be held on Thursday, 7th May. Suffolk County Council recently supplied me with three posters promoting the local candidates and providing polling station details. These posters have been displayed on the Combs Village website and our notice boards.

APPENDIX 2

Chairman's Report April 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

The Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government has decided that local elections should go ahead in May.

In the longer term, the Secretary also opted for 'three authorities' model supported by District Councils (but not by the County). Suffolk will find itself under the administration of three unitary authorities of approximately the same population numbers. The overall calculation has resulted in Stowmarket and the immediate surrounding areas (including Combs, Battisford and both Finboroughs) being allocated to the Central and Eastern Suffolk area. It appears that the new ward boundary as far as Combs is concerned remains the same as (or at least close to) the current Onehouse ward under MSDC.

Oaks Meadow

The Oaks Meadow Project held a viewing of "concept plans" for the previously noted Community Room over the weekend of March 28th and 29th. Some of the designs were impressive and the costing models thereof will form a substantial component of the robust lifetime business case we have requested.

Noticeboard Funding

I became aware of an opportunity to secure some funding from Cllr Oakes' locality budget. As there was a time limit on the application due-date, Cllr Tomlinson and I prepared a proposal and request for up to £5,600 to put towards replacement noticeboards as we have discussed in our previous three meetings. Cllr Oakes was kind enough to put aside £5,200 of the total identified and this was then formally submitted through the appropriate governance channel. We expect to be notified the outcome of our application in late May.

Tree Protection Orders

As we were concerned about some of the older trees in the parish being unprotected I contacted our local Arboricultural officer, Mr David Pizzey. He replied as follows:

"Protected status with a tree preservation order (TPO) can normally only be considered for trees of significant landscape or historical importance which are at risk. Hopefully, the trees in this case aren't under threat, but if they are, I will be happy to advise further. Photos of the trees and details of why they are vulnerable would initially be helpful.

Precautionary TPOs for trees that are not threatened or are under good management are only likely to be feasible when resources permit. Unfortunately, the council have ongoing cases of trees that could be lost to development and/or changes of ownership, and these have to be prioritised."

I take this to mean that we would need to identify an imminent risk to a tree or trees before we could prosecute a case for a TPO. This is likely to be difficult if not impossible as we cannot know what is in the minds of landowners who may decide to undertake work on or, *in extremis*, remove

trees entirely. We aspire though to be the eyes and ears 'on the ground' in Combs and can seek support for intervention if we think it appropriate.

Cllr Kay Oakes

This month's meeting is the last before the May elections which this time will involve a reallocation of some division boundaries. It therefore also marks the final attendance of Councillor Kay Oakes who has served our parish and supported its council for over a decade. Councillors will have noted the knowledge of process and insights into parish administration that Kay has brought to bear and our residents have all benefitted from her support and application. Kay was an early supporter of Oaks Meadow and was instrumental in obtaining a significant portion of the early funding for that project. She has engaged with Suffolk County Council's senior officers on our behalf on multiple occasions, helping us with issues relating to drainage, trees, footpath and road signage, speed detection provisions, pavement repairs and other safety measures and most recently helping to secure permission to install road safety signs on Bildeston Road in the face of initial resistance from policy makers.

I have previously relayed to the County Council Leader Matthew Hicks our appreciation of the hard work Kay has put in on behalf of our parish and will take this opportunity now to thank her especially on behalf of the Parish Council to whom she will always be regarded as a friend. Thank you, Kay!

Tony Kitson
Chair, Combs Parish Council

£3.9 million investment proposal to protect and enhance Public Rights of Way

Suffolk County Council plans to invest nearly £4 million to improve and protect the public rights of way network.

The network, which provides more than 3,500 miles of off-road access for walking, cycling and horse riding, is supported by 3,770 structures including bridges, boardwalks, revetments and signposts.

A report to be considered by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday March 24 said the £3.9 million investment will enable replacement or refurbishment of 735 priority structures, with a particular focus on bridges and boardwalks in central and coastal areas.

It follows a comprehensive condition survey where the council has identified a programme of improvements to replace or refurbish ageing structures.

The report says that over the next five years, 1,800 structures will need to be replaced or undergo major refurbishment.

Of these, 735 structures have been prioritised for 2026/27 and 2027/28 due to their known condition.

The structures are spread across the county, with the largest impact in the central and coastal area of Suffolk.

These are predominantly bridges but there are also several boardwalks on key coastal and estuary routes.

The cost of this two-year programme is £3.9 million in total - £2.05 million in 2026/27 and £1.85 million in 27/28.

The current budget for infrastructure maintenance is £225,000 a year, but since this figure was set in 2020/21 costs have risen by more than 50% for materials and contractors' installation fees, as well as changes in specifications.

The council's investment plan comes at a time of significantly increased public use of the network.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, customer reports have risen by more than 50%, with 3,411 reports received in 2025 alone.

By investing now, the Council aims to reduce the risk of route closures, avoid rising revenue costs and ensure the network continues to provide high-quality access for residents and visitors.

Temporary closures—required when structures become unsafe—cost around £1,200 each time and place pressure on the revenue budget, which also funds the county’s annual grass-cutting programme.

The planned capital investment will help prevent these costs and protect essential maintenance services.

It will also help to meet the council’s objectives for health and wellbeing, strengthening the local economy and providing value for taxpayers’ money.

The full report can be read on the [Suffolk County Council website](#).

Innovative EV charging for Suffolk’s conservation areas

Partnering with supplier, Urban Fox, the units are specially designed to blend into the historic streetscapes of such sensitive areas, which are subject to planning considerations.

This means that those living in conservation areas won’t be at a disadvantage, with thousands of other charge points being installed across the county on streets and in community spaces.

As part of its Plug In Suffolk programme, the county council was awarded £5.3 million to install 6,000 on-street and community charge points following a successful bid to the government’s Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund, the county council.

Urban Fox who are providing substantial private investment, will work closely with Suffolk County Council and local stakeholders to ensure charge points are installed in the most appropriate locations, reflecting community needs and minimising disruption during deployment.

The charge points will be suitable for long-stay or overnight charging, and drivers will benefit from an overnight off-peak tariff, and a dedicated resident’s tariff which always features discounted charging.

Unlike traditional charge points, Urban Fox will supply chargers that are fully retractable and sit flush with the pavement when not in use.

Find out more about [Plug in Suffolk](#).

Suffolk road schemes included in Government's five-year investment plan

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the government's announcement of its next five-year Road Investment Strategy (RIS) which features four key projects in the county.

The RIS is the Department for Transport's investment plan for operating, maintaining, renewing and enhancing the strategic trunk road network in England.

Known as RIS3, it runs from April 2026 to March 2031 and in Suffolk sees:

A12 improvements at Woodbridge – a recommitment by the government to funding its share during this period of the £63 million scheme to upgrade the A12 between the Seven Hills junction with the A14 and the Woods Lane junction, subject to Suffolk County Council submitting the Final Business Case, anticipated for later this year.

A140 - A1120 Earl Stonham junction improvements – this has been classed as a scheme 'recommended to continue', where the government accepts work on developing improvements should go ahead during this period. However, this is subject to affordability, value for money and deliverability assessments.

The junction is an historic staggered crossroads where queuing traffic causes congestion. The improvement scheme would realign the eastern A1120 arm, providing more space for vehicles to queue and avoiding vehicle conflicts by simplifying the junction. Two other schemes in Suffolk have been earmarked for progression.

They are improvements to the **A11 Fiveways junction near Mildenhall** and the **A12/A14 Copdock interchange**.

These will see the government and National Highways continue to develop but not deliver them during the RIS3 period.

Both schemes remain uncommitted and with no guaranteed funding, but it does mean they have a better chance of being included in the next RIS after 2031.

Both Copdock interchange- a key junction serving freight traffic bound to and from the Port of Felixstowe – and the A11 junction have suffered from problems of congestion and design flaws.

Full details of the scheme can be found on the [Department for Transport](#) website.

APPENDIX 4

Mid Suffolk District Council Report - Onehouse Ward April 2026

<p>Devolution and local government reform</p>	<p>The County Council elections are on 7 May 2026.</p> <p>The government has decided that there will be 3 unitary councils for Suffolk. While detailed boundaries and names are still being finalised, the three councils are planned to be in place from 2028. Our villages will be in the rural central council. Elections for the new shadow authorities will take place in May 2027, with the new councils formally taking over responsibilities from April 2028. The idea of the transition period is to enable detailed work for reorganisation to take place, while services are delivered as usual throughout the process. The current plan is for Mayoral Elections to be held in May 2028.</p>
<p>Recycling & Waste Collection</p>	<p>The delivery of new bins ready for the rollout of Better Recycling is well under way. This means the delivery of a new blue recycling bin for glass, plastic and metal bottles, cans and containers, using the existing green bin for paper and card and the new kitchen food caddie and food recycling bins.</p>
<p>Funding for Neighbourhood Plans</p>	<p>Government funding for Neighbourhood plans has been withdrawn. MSDC has now introduced funding to support Parish Councils in the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans / Reviews, which seek to allocate sites for housing development that make an agreed contribution to meeting the district-wide housing needs. There is a limit of £20,000 for any specific Neighbourhood Development Plan.</p>
<p>£120k boost for art and culture in Mid Suffolk</p>	<p>This year, 10 organisations have received a share of £119,496 from the Mid Suffolk Culture Fund. for projects covering a wide range of areas and all age groups, including Stowmarket Culture Group, which has been awarded £15,000 for the delivery of the ‘Jubilant’ youth summer arts festival, and Orchestras Live, which will use a grant of more than £8,000 to facilitate an intergenerational orchestral project in Eye and the surrounding areas.</p>
<p>Works starting on 3G football pitch</p>	<p>Works to deliver a brand new 3G football pitch and mini athletics track in Stowmarket are due to start in the coming weeks.</p> <p>The project is being funded by contributions from Mid Suffolk District Council, the Premier League, The FA, the Government’s Football Foundation as well as S106 developer contributions.</p> <p>Being built in the grounds of Stowmarket High School, the 3G pitch and athletics track will be available for community use with Everyone Active managing the facilities and associated booking system outside of school times.</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>

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

07976 308128