

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

Present: T Kitson (Parish Councillor); C Radcliffe (Parish Councillor); T Bamber (Parish Councillor); A Tomlinson (Parish Councillor); S Penman (Parish Councillor); K Harding (Parish Councillor); J Matthissen (District Councillor) M Bently (County Councillor); S Ottewell (Parish Clerk); D Shelley; J Stephens-Row; C Peeling; J Portway; K Archer; J Straughier;

1. Introductions

Parish Councillor Tony Kitson took the chair and welcomed those present. Each person then introduced themselves to the other attendees.

2. Apologies for absence

A James (PiYP Project Team)

3. Minutes of the 131st Annual Parish Meeting held on 12th May 2025

It was agreed that the minutes of the 2025 meeting be signed as a true and accurate copy of the meeting by Cllr Ratcliffe (Acting Chairman at the 2025 meeting)

4. Matters Arising

D Shelly expressed concerns at the 2025 meeting about the lack of a footpath outside Oaks Meadow. Both County Councillor Kay Oakes and the Parish Council agreed to follow up on this. Although extending the footpath is not possible, Suffolk County Council has agreed to install “Pedestrians in Road” signs along that stretch of road. It is hoped that this will be completed by the end of May 2026.

5. Chairman’s Report – Appendix 1

Cllr Kitson reviewed his report and thanked both Councillors and residents for their contributions over the past year. He also discussed the Neighbourhood Planning project, which was stalled last year but is now under review again, pending funding and resident support.

6. Report from Suffolk County Councillor

There was no available County Councillor report following the recent elections

7. Report from Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Appendix 2

Cllr Matthissen primarily discussed Mid Suffolk’s housing targets for the next 20 years and supported Combs Parish Council’s choice to reassess the Neighbourhood Plan Project. While it won't prevent new houses from being built, the NHP will serve as guidance for appropriate development sites.

8. Councillor Reports

Cllr Bamber reported on the plan to update the cemetery car park. Subject to costs, the Parish Council is investigating extending the car park, using the far end for spoil, installing a fresh-water tap by the car park, and repairing and improving the gateway to St Mary’s Church. Cllr Tomlinson spoke about the ongoing problems at Hubbards Close, caused by the developers failing to honour all their obligations. He has been working closely with Cllr Matthissen and residents to find solutions, including landscaping the common grounds.

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

9. Local Organisation/Club Reports

The Tannery (Appendix 3)

James Portway delivered an engaging talk about the Tannery, covering its family history, maintenance, and current tenants. There is a project underway to repair or replace parts of the old roofs to help preserve the buildings.

St Mary's Church Combs (Appendix 4)

Rev Sarah had submitted a report to the meeting and the meeting was attended by Church Warden Jenny Straughier. She reported on fundraising efforts. Although the last event was unfortunately cancelled, another is currently in planning. The historic church continues to attract visitors, including a group from Oklahoma, but more promotion of the church is needed to generate additional funding. Mrs. Straughier also provided an update on the work at St Mary's Church Hall, starting with the toilet block renovation, followed by work on the front and car park area.

Oaks Meadow (Appendix 5)

D Shelley attended the meeting to read their report, and answer any questions

Battsford & District Cricket Club (Appendix 6)

J Stephens-Rowe attended to meeting and read the club's report.

Combs Village – Pride In Your Place Project (Appendix 7)

Anna James submitted a report but was unable to attend. Cllr Ratcliffe, who was part of the project, gave a brief overview on what they had managed to achieve over the past year.

Community Newsletter (Appendix 8)

Suzanne Ottewell, the newsletter editor, discussed the newsletter's success over the past year and expressed gratitude to all advertisers, contributors, and distributors for their support.

Battsford Village Hall and Battsford Gardening Club also submitted reports and these are attached as Appendix 9 and 10.

10. Parishioner questions, comments and suggestions

No additional questions were asked. K Archer and J Portway both expressed an interest in participating in the Neighbourhood Planning Project if it proceeds.

11. Any Other Business

Cllr Kitson thanked all those attending for doing so.

The meeting closed at 20:10

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

APPENDIX 1

Combs Parish Meeting, May 2026

Chairman's Annual Report

1 People

2025-2026 has seen a big turnover in Combs Parish Council's matchday first team!

Cllr Hannah Larsen has stepped down for personal reasons and Cllr Terry Betchley MBE said his farewells after serving on the council for 5 years as he had always intended. We shall miss them both for the different contributions that they were able to bring to proceedings and I hope that we have not seen the end of their contributions to village life.

Cllr Cliff Ratcliffe stepped into the shoes of vice chair and consistently applied sharpness of thought, true commitment and no little practical application (he's now our go-to guy for speed indicator devices). His tenacity with obtaining more constructive participation from Anglian Water on road closures has been gratefully acknowledged by residents. Cllr Tony Bamber also puts in a shift with SID and defibrillators and has continued to offer wise collegiate and collaborative contributions. Tony has also been leading our push to improve facilities at the cemetery.

The residents of Hubbard's Close have a champion in Cllr Alan Tomlinson who has persistently lobbied the District Council to apply restorative measures on the lamentable Chatsworth Homes. Alan led the charge on procuring new notice boards and these will be installed later this year. He also led an excellent budgeting exercise in the Autumn.

We were delighted to welcome two new councillors who we co-opted around the end of the year. Both Sarah Penman and Keith Harding have prior council experience and have already made strong contributions. I look forward to working with them both.

We do find ourselves one councillor short at the end of this year and will make efforts to secure the services of a willing volunteer.

Suzanne Ottewell has made the position of Parish Clerk her own, having grown into the role at a rate that has both surprised and delighted us all. She has demonstrated her commitment to the role by achieving accreditation in the Society of Local Council Clerks 'Introduction to Local Council Administration' (ILCA) and 'Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration' (FILCA) courses. She is dependable and thorough and we are lucky to have her keeping on top of parish governance requirements.

I must also give shout-outs to two of our residents. Anna James initiated activity to secure funding for and management of the much appreciated 'Pride in Combs' initiative and Kevin White instigated a petition to raise the issue of pedestrian risk on the road near Oaks Meadow.

Finally we have continued to enjoy ongoing active support from our County and District Councillors Kay Oakes and John Matthissen. Due to divisional boundary adjustments we will

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

be welcoming a different County Councillor before too long and I think it fair to say that he or she will have large boots to fill.

My thanks to all for contributing so much in the service of the residents of Combs Parish.

2 Financial

Our budget for the financial year 2025-26 was £23,512 plus brought-forward reserves of £13,379 giving us a spendable total of £36,891. Our out-turn was £29,235 which meant that we were £7656 underspent. This is largely accounted for by an underspend of £4,115 on cemetery maintenance (fewer cuts were required during the summer drought); an £1,100 grant for new road signs; and unspent election expenses reserves of £1,060. We will carry the surplus over into the £2026-27 budget as reserves.

Our total income this year was £46,313, the bulk of which was precept, burial ground income and Community Infrastructure Levy and is made up as follows:

| Category | Amount |
|--|----------------|
| Precept | £10,106 |
| Burial Ground Income | £15,400 |
| Deposit Account Interest | £2,264 |
| Other income (e.g. VAT, grants) | £1,799 |
| | |
| Total before CIL | £29,569 |
| | |
| CIL | £16,744 |
| | |
| Total Income | £46,313 |

The bank balance at the start of the financial year was £86,792; the end of year balance was £101,140.

During the budgeting process for 2026-2027 we decided that inflationary pressures meant that it was becoming necessary to reduce our recent strategy of bringing forward general reserves to top up our expenditure and to increase the precept from £10,106 to £12,406, an increase of 22.84%. This results in an increase in Band D property payments from £29.77 to £43.22 per annum (£1.12 per month). The total compares favourably to our neighbours in Battsford (£54.35 in 2024/25) and Great Finborough (£48.56 ditto).

A similar increase is likely for the next financial year 2027-2028.

3 Donations and Support

We were again able to provide financial support to several local causes. This year the Council granted £577.48 to Oaks Meadow for equipment maintenance and insurance; the £1,500 towards sewerage infrastructure improvements at the Cricket club at Moats Tye; and £652.82 towards 'Pedestrians in Road' signage for the unpaved stretch on Bildeston Road

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

between Fenn's Meadow and Burnt House Vineyard thereby increasing protection for people visiting Oaks Meadow.

4 Newsletter

Suzanne Ottewell has successfully introduced and established the Community Newsletter, bringing in substantial advertising revenue that lessens the cost of production to residents of both Combs and Battsford parishes. It should be noted that Suzanne not only compiles the content: she nudges contributors for that content; formats it into the allocated page count; organises its printing; and manages the team of people (in Combs at least) who distribute it.

5 Cemetery

Parish Clerk Suzanne Ottewell has administered dealings with the cemetery with customary sensitivity.

The cemetery is kept neat and tidy and we thank Hartley's Garden Services for their services.

Councillors have established a fund so that any future purchase of land would be less problematic for the council in place at that time. We intend to place £500 per annum into a separate deposit account and we also transfer cemetery receipts above our projected £4,500 into that account annually. At financial year end, the fund stood at £4,970; with income at £15,400 the fund stands to be increased significantly.

We have also restructured our fees to disincentivise burial and interment requests from outside of the parish footprint. While this may reduce income it will lengthen the utilisation period of the current land.

Plans are under way to redevelop the car park and the entrance to St Mary's Church burial ground. Hopefully next year this report will be able to provide an update on progress.

6 Planning Applications and Development

Councillors considered 11 Planning Applications over the course of the year, the same number as the last two years, supporting those where due consideration to the built and natural environments and neighbourliness had been evidenced.

The breakdown though is indicative of the widely acknowledged slow-down in building generally: of the 11 applications, 4 were retrospective; 3 were for tree work; and 1 was in any case refused due to encroachment onto a footpath. 2 are currently in train.

7 Neighbourhood Plan

At the start of the administrative year we were minded to embark on a consultation exercise to gauge the level of community support for developing a Neighbourhood Plan. Such a plan would empower residents to work together to identify their collective preferences for Combs' future growth and development and, if accepted by MSDC, would carry with it real legal force. Regrettably, the central funding grants to support this work were withdrawn and so we decided not to pursue the exercise further.

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

However, recently MSDC are considering establishing a new grant scheme and are sounding out parish and town councils to establish the levels of interest. We shall be discussing our position at the first parish council meeting of the new administrative year.

8 Litter Picks

The PC organised two Litter Picks this year, in October and in March. Excellently organised by Suzanne Ottewell in collaboration with our neighbours in Battsford, teams of 20-30 volunteers salvaged nearly 50 bags of rubbish from our road verges.

9 Pride-in-Combs

Having driven the awarding of an MSDC 'Pride-in-Your-Place' grant of £5,000 for improving the look and feel of the Parish, resident Anna James of Mill Lane oversaw a project – localised as 'Pride-in-Combs' - that delivered welcoming picket fences on two approach roads (in the slough and by the Tannery); a picnic bench on the Tannery Road/Moats Tye triangle; a map highlighting village features and walking routes; and the planting of bulbs that bloomed splendidly throughout the village in early spring. The PC topped up the fund and Councillors Tomlinson and Ratcliffe rolled up their sleeves and were actively involved. Huge thanks to Anna and all participants whose collective diligence, commitment and drive were the key factors in securing the grant.

10 IT and Data

New rules (collectively and somewhat obscurely titled 'Assertion 10') meant that we were bound to adopt new policies and procedures around IT systems and our use of data. We have now adopted '.gov.uk' email addresses, have revised our IT and Email Policy and updated our Data Protection (GDPR) policy. The internal audit picked up on one issue which we've already actioned. My thanks go to our Clerk, Suzanne Ottewell, for identifying the requirements and actioning their incorporation into our ways of working.

Anthony (Tony) Kitson

Chairman, Combs Parish Council for 2025-2026

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

APPENDIX 2

District Councillor Annual Report: Onehouse Ward -May 2026

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| Recycling update | <p>The new recycling regime is due to start in June 2026.</p> <p>Mid Suffolk currently only recycles 42% of waste and is not in the top 150 Councils in the UK. Aim is to exceed 60%</p> <p>The bins are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food waste • Green recycling bin – paper and card • Blue recycling bin – glass, plastics, tetrapaks i.e. non paper • Black bin – refuse bin |
| Planning system | <p>Mid Suffolk’s housing target has increased from 535 per annum to 734 (an increase of 37%). If you include a 5% buffer this amounts to a requirement of 15,414 for the period from 2024 to 2044, although 5,475 of these are in the current identified supply.</p> <p><i>Owing to the change in government housing targets it is vital to create a development plan that meets government targets or we end up with a planning free for all which is what happened 5 or 6 years ago.</i></p> <p>As part of this process the Council carried out a call for sites.</p> <p>The published map of all sites submitted during the Call for Sites exercises.</p> <p>https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites</p> <p>Note: This is not a list of preferred development locations. Publication promotes transparency and ensures communities have early visibility of what has been suggested. 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.</p> |
| Council Housing | <p>Mid Suffolk has c.15% of Council Houses that do not meet the Decent Homes standard. We are planning to invest £19m in our Council Housing stock this year alone. Mid Suffolk was successful in obtaining a £1.5m government grant to supplement the £2m already committed by the council to install energy saving measures in social housing. This work not only helps lower income households by delivering warm and energy efficient homes, but also lifts tenants out of fuel poverty by helping to save money on energy bills.</p> <p>Work is well underway to tackle the 100 council properties with the lowest EPC (energy performance certificate) ratings by adding a range of improvements, including cavity and loft insulation, new windows, PV panels and air source heat pumps.</p> <p>The Council has also built about 250 new Council houses in the past 3 years.</p> |

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

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| Stowmarket Innovation Gateway | Construction work on a state-of-the-art skills and innovation centre at Gateway 14 in Stowmarket has now been completed. New clients will be moving in from July 2026 and a programme of training courses is about to be launched. The purpose of the centre is address the skills gap in the district and to encourage high tech companies to locate here. |
| New fund for sports facilities in rural areas | A £1.5m fund for Sports provision outside of Stowmarket has been established. The aim is to develop sports infrastructure in a rural areas of Mid Suffolk, outside of Stowmarket, by exploring upgrading or extending existing sites, as well as opportunities for new sports provision or facilities. |
| Temporary accommodation | Demand for temporary housing in Mid Suffolk rose by over 100% since 2020 and there are currently over 60 households in temporary accommodation in Mid Suffolk. MSDC propose to increase the acquisition of temporary accommodation by up to 30 units. This is to provide better standard accommodation and save the Council money on temporary accommodation. |
| Pylons | MSDC have told the public hearing that National Grid’s plan for more pylons in the Suffolk countryside should be halted. National Grid proposes 159km of new overhead lines between Norwich to Tilbury, with the route cutting through the Suffolk countryside. MSDC has called for a delay to the project so other options can be considered and costed – such as an undersea route or undergrounding of the entire length of the project. They cite serious concerns about the impact on the environment, communities and businesses. This is consistent with the position taken as under previous governments. |
| Nature recovery budget | Mid Suffolk District Council has allocated a budget of £1.8m to support nature recovery. This covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant funding for communities • Grant funding for river catchment and landscape • Habitat creation, management and monitoring on new sites • recovery • Pond creation and restoration • Tree planting • Meadow management • Public engagement and awareness / Schools programme |
| Stowmarket high street investment | Mid Suffolk District Council launched a dedicated £1.5m fund, and associated framework, to support a thriving Stowmarket high street and town centre area Funding has been recently agreed for £615k towards the John Peel Centre and £125k for the Community Darts Venue including a darts retail area |

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

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| Cosy Homes | <p>Cosy Homes is an energy efficiency initiative dedicated to making private sector homes in Mid Suffolk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • warmer • more economical to heat • more environmentally friendly <p>Residents need to meet certain criteria but any works are carry out for free. The initiative aims to help residents in the district improve the energy efficiency of their home - which will help them save on energy usage and reduce their carbon footprint.</p> <p>The Cosy Homes scheme has been extended to include solar panels as well as insulation measures.</p> |
| Solar for Business | <p>Businesses can reduce their carbon emissions and save money on energy bills by signing up to have solar panels provided and installed on their premises, for free. Electricity generated by the panels is then sold to the business at a rate lower than their current tariff, helping to slash energy bills and improve their bottom line.</p> <p>Solar for Business has been running successfully in West Suffolk for nine years – helping more than a hundred companies to save a total of around £700,000 and 2,000 tonnes in harmful CO₂ emissions per year.</p> <p>The initiative has now being extended, with businesses across Babergh and Mid Suffolk also able to sign up to the scheme.</p> |
| New REACT team now live | <p>The two-person "respond, enforce and clean team" - or REACT – has been set up to patrol litter hotspot areas in the Mid Suffolk District Council area. It will be funded by £360,000 from the council-owned Gateway 14 development.</p> <p>Introducing REACT operatives means reaction to incidents, such as fly tipping, and our scheduled works, aren't competing for resource and time.</p> <p>In the area of Mid Suffolk District Council there were 399 reported incidents, with the majority of them being on highways.</p> |
| Food Museum in Stowmarket receives £3.9m from the Heritage Lottery Fund | <p>The Food Museum is now able to start a £5.5 million project thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Mid Suffolk District Council. The ambitious scope covers conserving and developing three historic buildings - the barn, the factory and the house and linking them together to create a coherent visitor experience. A good museum significantly benefits a town by boosting tourism, enhancing the local economy, fostering community development, and contributing to cultural enrichment.</p> |
| Mid Suffolk Magazine | <p>A regular magazine released in September and February has been introduced to keep residents informed of what is going on in the district.</p> |

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

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| Mid Suffolk budget and Council Tax | <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 • Sorting out various long standing property issues in the 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 in the HRA • 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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**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

APPENDIX 3

Webb & son (Combs) Ltd at Combs Tannery in 2026

History

The site has been active since 1711 – in the family since 1776, Oldest Family Business in Suffolk – Probably East Anglia. It was an operating tannery up until 1988, then the manufacturing closed down and since then the site has been used as a business park.

Size

Site is 22 Acres, within which we have a central core of buildings which we lease out.

7 Warehouses – totalling 60,000 ft²

10 Small Business Units 500-1,800 ft² (11,000sqft in total)

Tannery House - 13 serviced offices – 3,600 ft²

2 listed Buildings

Bark Barn and Tannery House with other old buildings in their curtilage.

24 Tenants on site employing 100-120 people (full time equivalents)

Examples of Tenants Businesses

Logistics & Warehousing Services – Pick & Pack goods & a local delivery Service.

2 Gyms

2 Electricians

2 Companies making bespoke 'artisan' products

2 Personal services Nails & brows

2 Finance Companies, Dress designer & others

The Meadows

A tenant lives in a caravan on site & a large meadow leased out for sheep grazing. There has been a change of tenants over the last 3 years from more traditional professional fields to companies offering Lifestyle services. This is increasing visitors and opening hours.

Development

Planning Permission was given in 2020 for a new 20,000 sqft Warehouse on Brown field land at the back of the site. We have started work – removed old structures, cleaned the site & removed all contamination. We have profiled the land & put in a road but we have stopped short of the main build because currently the financials do not add up, the cost of the build and financing has increased dramatically more than the rental rates we could expect.

We review regularly to see how these factors change.

Future Plans

We have a rolling plan of Maintenance, Repairs and upgrades across the site.

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

Currently working on the old roofs to ensure that our larger buildings are still good for the next 35 years.

We wish to continue to grow organically – Repair and sympathetically upgrade.

We wish to continue to offer a fantastic facility for Local Businesses to grow with a variety of facilities across the site.

We are looking to keep the business within the family for generations to come and continue to do what we currently do!

James Portway
Managing Director
Webb & son (Combs) Ltd

APPENDIX 4

RECTOR'S REPORT FOR APCMS – 2025

Our benefice of seven parishes had another busy and fruitful year in 2025, and there is much to give thanks to God for throughout all our communities.

Across our ministry team, we were joined by Revd Andy Little who was ordained as a Deacon at the cathedral in Bury St Edmunds at the end of June. Andy was previously one of our Lay Elders and it was a joyful day to see him ordained by Bishop Graeme. Revd Andy will serve as a curate within our benefice for a minimum of 3 years as he continues with his training. We give thanks that our Readers and our Elders continued with their ministries – pastoral care, prayer and the leading of services – enabling us to continue to offer two services every month to each church and also on zoom for those unable to get to church. Sadly, at the beginning of April 2025 the Revd Canon Barbara Bilston died. Barbara had been a huge support to the ministry team and myself and was still ministering up to the last few weeks of her life. She is much missed across our benefice, the deanery and the wider diocese.

Huge thanks go to our churchwardens, treasurers, PCC secretaries and PCC members, and our parish safeguarding officers for their time, support and energy as we continue to serve our communities and enable our church buildings and churchyards to be welcoming to everyone. And thanks also to all who volunteer whether doing the flowers, bell ringing, reading the lesson, assisting at Holy Communion, offering hospitality after services and at fundraising events, and a multitude of other tasks that regularly arise in our church communities. Without all of your help, support and prayers our benefice would not be in the place of strength and stability that it is and we thank you for everything you do for our churches and church communities.

Throughout 2025 we continued to build on the progress made in previous years and here are a few high points from ministry across the benefice:

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

- Our Messy Church events continued to take place throughout 2025 celebrating Easter, Pentecost, Harvest and Christmas - the number of families attending is growing with each session
- We continue to offer regular ministry in the form of services of Holy Communion, prayer meetings and Remembrance services to the care homes in Great Finborough and Onehouse
- Throughout 2025 Revd Canon Pauline has been working through the THRIVE programme with the ministry team and our PCCs. THRIVE is aimed at helping multi-parish benefices to grow and support each other and the programme will continue throughout 2026
- Our schools ministry to Trinity CEVAP School in Combs, Combs Ford Community Primary School in Combs and Great Finborough CEVCP School in Great Finborough has continued to thrive. Revd Andy has joined Revd Canon Pauline in delivering collective worship to Great Finborough Primary School and Revd Sarah continues to support both Trinity and Combs Ford Primary Schools
- A second benefice quiet day was held in August at the church hall in Stowupland on the theme of 'The Road to Emmaus'. This day was well attended and we will continue to have an annual quiet day with a different theme each year
- The annual confirmation service at the cathedral was held in May and there was 1 candidate from Combs
- In June a launch event for the Friends of St Mary's, Combs was held in church. A musical evening supported by local church historian, Roy Tricker, was very well attended
- In July a special service was held at the site of the Onehouse Paupers' Graves to commemorate those who had been buried there with just a number to identify them. This was the second year a service had been held at this site and it will become an annual event. Our thanks go to the Paupers' Graves team who work tirelessly to maintain this important place for all to enjoy

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All this is in addition to our regular pattern of services, many fundraising events, baptisms, weddings and funerals, and regular events such as Meet Up Monday in Combs, the village coffee morning in Onehouse and the continuing visits of the Rural Coffee Caravan to Combs, Buxhall and Harleston. So you can see 2025 was another busy year of ministry in the life of our benefice. Of course I haven't been able to mention everything that happened but I do hope you'll be able to see how the importance of ministering together as a team, to both the people who attend our churches and everyone in the wider community, is key to our roles as Christians. By living a Christian life and spreading the good news of the Gospel we become the light of Christ in our communities.

With thanks and blessings
Revd Sarah Jenkins
Rector, Combs & Finborough Benefice
9th April 2026

**Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs**

APPENDIX 5

Oaks Meadow Project Report for Combs Parish Council AGM 11th May 2026

The Oaks Meadow Project is continuing to work with the community to create and build much-needed facilities for recreation, socialisation and education in a rural area that has no communal space.

Our vision is to create a thriving, sustainable, and inclusive Oaks Meadow community where people, nature, and culture are interconnected and resilient for generations to come. Our aim is to provide a community area with something for everyone regardless of age or ability, with the provision of facilities for recreation, leisure and education. All in an environment that fosters learning and wellbeing where we can support each other. Our mission is to preserve natural landscapes, foster biodiversity, empower local communities, and promote sustainable practices that enhance well-being and resilience.

The number of active volunteers has increased and they are involved in regular Friday morning maintenance of the meadow. The Focus Group organise and participate in fund raising events and activities. The Education Group are organising and running a programme of children's 'Nature Explorers' events. Wild Heritage Suffolk launch their 'Let it Grow' Programme on May 19th and are taking referrals for this valuable social prescribing initiative.

The Project Group have been working closely with Community Action Suffolk and Mid-Suffolk District Council to plan for a Community Room on the meadow. To date, we have had a meeting with MSDC planning department and the Community Grants and Funding team. CAS organised the services of an architect and a subsequent meeting resulted in concept plans produced. A consultation with local residents took place at the end of March and the Project Group have collated the responses which have now gone back to the architects. We now await the update on the drawing and preparation of a Pre-App Enquiry documentation to be submitted to the Planning Department.

MSDC Community Fund will take us to the next stage of full planning application. The architects will do a review survey and Biodiversity Net Gain requirement, develop the Design and Access Statement and prepare drawings and documents to make a full planning application to MSDC. An ecological survey has been undertaken by Suffolk Wildlife Trust today.

Once the Project Group knows what is to be built a business plan and costings will be worked out. Please rest assured that the Trustees have expert guidance in the process. To apply for any funds, such as the Community Fund all the official documents and policies have to be in place, otherwise the application would not be considered let alone granted.

We are not rushing ahead with this project, but taking our time to make sure that everything is done as it should be with due care and attention.

Desiree Shelley

Chair of Oaks Meadow Project CIO Trustees

07.05.26

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting
Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

APPENDIX 6

Combs Annual Parish meeting report from BDCC May 26

The cricket season started in the middle of April and despite the wet weather earlier in the year the ground is remarkably dry and playing very well. Performances so far are very positive.

The senior men's teams performed well last year and the ladies team won their division. We also have a number of junior teams and Friday night junior coaching is exceptionally well attended. Overall we have about 75 senior and junior playing members, in addition we have many parents, social members and vice presidents who support the club, many of whom live locally.

The cricket club is well used throughout the year. With the bar being open 2/3 nights a week and more when there are games being played. There have been a number of functions held last year including wakes and birthday parties and the club continues to host the regular gatherings of the darts team and the gardening couch had used the premises on a couple of occasions. We are very pleased that the Parish Council continue to hold their monthly meetings at the club and the number of businesses advertising around the ground by way of sponsorship boards remains high.

The club has organised a number of social events in the closed season including a race night, bingo and a quiz which were all well supported.

The club's charitable sponsorship activities have continued last year during which we supported the Motor Neurone Disease charity; an initiative that remains very well received with contributions to the collection bucket made by many clubs visiting us for their away games and was very well supported by the Vice Presidents raffle and end of season do heads and tails. Overall raising almost £1000. This year our chosen charity is Alzheimers.

Aside from a limited amount of coaching which is remunerated, all those involved in the club remain volunteers and we are always looking to recruit people in a range of capacities be it assisting with coaching, helping with events, administrative functions, helping with the bar or ground maintenance etc etc

The main project last year was the installation of a new treatment plant with significant funding from Mid Suffolk District Council using Community Infrastructure Levy. Funding was also received from the County Councillor, a district councillor and Battsford Parish Council. Our next project is to explore the refurbishment or re siting of the nets.

There have been a number of highlights including watching a significant number of the junior members rise through the ranks to become valued members of each of the ladies' and mens' teams.

Overall the support that the club receives on Friday nights and when games are being played is amazing. Certainly when the sun is shining there is no better place to be.

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

We are at heart, a family friendly club and we want to inspire youngsters to take up the game and it's great to see so many people enjoying the facilities.

Julia Stephens-Row
BDCC cricket administrator
May 2026

APPENDIX 7

COMBS PARISH "PRIDE IN YOUR PLACE" GRANT PROJECT

In 2024/5 Mid Suffolk District Council invited Parish Councils to make applications for funding for projects up to a maximum of £5000 aimed at making small scale improvements to village environments.

As a local resident, having heard of this opportunity, I approached the PC and offered to become involved by setting up an Action Group to work with the PC and make a proposal for this funding.

With agreement of the PC, 3 members of the PC along with myself and 2 other residents formed the Action Group which met on 13th Feb. Together with ideas invited from the village, we came up with a list of possible improvements to the village and submitted these to the PC for their approval.

These were:

- Daffodil Bulb Planting in 11 areas throughout the village
- Installation of an Information Board about the village showing local walks etc
- The installation of a picnic table at a viewpoint overlooking the village.
- Installation of white picket "Gates" marking the entry to the village on two roadside locations

Two other issues were identified ie the refurbishment of a bench and the landscaping of a new development that had been abandoned by the developers. Whilst not being within the scope of the PiYP project, the PC later took up these issues.

The PC having agreed in principle to the suggestions offered by the Group, the group set about costing them. Submitting the draft application to the PC for approval it was agreed that the PC would fund an additional amount to supplement the grant should this be required to complete all elements of the project. Once the application was written and approved by the PC it was submitted and on the 24th March the District Council approved a grant of £5000.

Informing the village through regular updates on the website and the PC Noticeboards, all elements of the project ie the installation of the "gates", the information board, the picnic table and bulb planting were completed by November 2025.

Minutes of Combs 132nd Annual Parish Meeting Monday 11th May 2026 at 7.00pm, Battsford Cricket Club, Combs

This project was the joint effort of the PC and residents with support from the wider village and businesses in the community. It is hoped that these improvements to the village will be enjoyed for many years to come.

Anna James Local Resident and Action Group Lead

Action Group: Sue Hendry, Alan Tomilinson, Cliff Ratcliffe, Hannah Larsen, Mike James

APPENDIX 8

Community Newsletter

Over the past year, we have continued to publish and distribute the Community Newsletter, which has received very positive feedback. Readers appreciate the diverse range of articles, the local events featured, and the diary on the last page.

We continue to enjoy strong support from local business advertisers, who contribute a small fee towards the printing costs, with any shortfall covered by Battsford and Combs Parish Councils.

We sincerely thank all the wonderful volunteers who dedicate their time to distributing the newsletter throughout our villages. It reaches around 600 households in Combs, Moats Tye, and Battsford.

Suggestions, new ideas, photos, and articles are always appreciated and welcome.

APPENDIX 9

Report of the Battsford and District Gardening Club to the Parish Councils

Another good year for the Club, with membership hovering around 50, mostly from Battsford, Combs, Needham Market and Stowmarket. The members' ages range from 50 to 90, and the six Autumn, Winter and Spring talks at the Battsford and Combs Village Hall attract an average of 30 people. In the Summer we organise a couple of trips out to gardens that are often private and only open as part of the National Garden Scheme giving insights into how others do it.

This year we successfully experimented with holding our Xmas quiz and a January lunchtime talk at the Cricket Club. Both were very well attended.

The Xmas Wreath making is always popular and is now at the highest number of attendees ever. Our next meeting is a trip to a private garden in Hadleigh on Monday 11th May.

thanks

Denis

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APPENDIX 10

Battsford Village Hall Chairperson's Report 12/05/2026

The Management committee meets monthly to discuss the hall and review finances, events, policies, groups, and maintenance. The committee consists of seven volunteers from Battsford and Combs who have been serving on the committee for several years and devote their time voluntarily.

Events

Over the past year, it's been a pleasure to see the hall continuing to bring our local community together. We're grateful that private hire bookings have grown, and we sincerely appreciate the lovely feedback from those who have used the space.

We have held fewer fundraising events than in recent years due to limited volunteer availability. However, we have continued to run Toastie Tuesdays, a free community event where people can meet and socialise over a hot drink and light food. We will be looking to put on more fundraising events into 2026.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped us raise funds for the hall.

We're also grateful to all our volunteers, committee members and event helpers alike. Your time and support make these events possible.

Groups / Clubs

The hall is regularly used by the Snooker Club, Yoga and Zumba classes, and the Gardening and History Club.

We have seen an increase in private hire bookings, as well as other local fundraising events held outside the village hall.

The hall is also used for local elections and by a local business for team meetings.

We remain committed to supporting all clubs and groups and will accommodate their needs wherever we can. Thank you to each group for your cooperation and shared support, which helps keep the hall welcoming and enjoyable for everyone.

In addition to these clubs, we welcomed Lapwings in January 2025. Lapwings is a therapeutic education provider offering tailored alternative provision for young people aged 4–25 with complex additional needs across East Anglia. The organisation helps students develop academic, personal, emotional and life skills to support them in everyday life and future work.

The group meets at the hall three times a week and has made good use of the facilities, providing a guaranteed regular source of income. We have recently been informed that, although the hall suits their needs, their September 2026 intake will be travelling from

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farther afield, so Lapwings has decided to relocate. As a result, their sessions at the hall will end on Monday 29 June 2026.

Policies

We review our policies annually, including safeguarding, risk management, health and safety, finance, equal opportunities and environmental policies. This includes risk assessments, PAT testing and fire alarm checks.

Finances

We are currently in a stable financial position. We continually review our expenditures to identify potential cost savings through negotiations with our suppliers.

We have benefited from regular income from Lapwings, but as the group finishes in June this will significantly affect our revenue. We will actively promote the hall to fill these available slots.

We are very grateful to the Parish Council and local councillors for their continued support in recent years. Your help has enabled us to buy new equipment and run the events we have organised.

Improvements

Our latest project to make Battsford Village Hall more sustainable and resilient is underway. The Management Committee has secured funding to install solar panels. Alongside generating electricity, we will also have a battery backup system to provide emergency power during outages. This would allow the hall to operate as a Warm Hub for residents of Combs, Battsford, Moats Tye and Little Finborough if a prolonged power cut occurs.

We are also in the process of reviewing the front outside area, to redevelop this space during 2026.

We continue to review the condition of the hall and carry out remedial action where required.

Many Thanks,
Dean Williams - Chairperson.