

Notes of the meeting of

Battisford Annual Parish meeting held on 20th May 2025 at Battisford Village Hall 7 pm start.

Attendees

From the Parish Council

Councillor Cook, Councillor Wilson , Councillor Card, Councillor Pope and Councillor Greenwood.
Julia Stephens-Row Clerk to the Parish Council.

District Cllr Pratt. Peter Horrex and Jenny Crook representing Battisford Free Church, Caroline Burgoyne representing St Mary's Battisford, Alan Burgoyne, Denis Wicking representing the Gardening Club.

Apologies

County Councillor Kay Oakes, Adrian Cooper from the Free church, Lucy Durrant, Richard Prentice from Battisford and District Cricket Club, and Dean Williams from Battisford Village Hall Management Committee.

1. Introductions took place

2. Notes of last meeting held on 21st May 2024.

These were agreed as a fair and accurate record of the meeting.

3. Chairman's report and Parish Council financial summary.

Cllr Cook as chairman of the Parish Council handed out a copy of his report to all those present. A copy of this report is attached to the notes. Cllr Cook introduced his report and highlighted a few key areas, including giving thanks to all those involved in the parish council and in the work of the community, a number of whom were present at the meeting. He explained the work that had been undertaken regarding litter picking, cleaning of the play area and on road safety, with the plans to erect some white picket gates near the play area to try to emphasise the speed limit. He gave thanks to all those who were involved in organising the village Fete last year. With regard to the cemetery, some regulations have been changed and headstones which were unsafe have been laid down and relatives contacted where they can be identified. The Parish Council are keeping a watching brief with regard to devolution. Finally with regard to the finances, the precept had been slightly increased in line with inflation and areas of spend have been identified, including maintenance of the play equipment etc. There have been some savings because the Clerk's post was vacant for some months. There were no questions.

4. County Councillor Report

This had been placed on the website prior to the meeting. A copy of this report is attached to the notes. There were no questions.

5. District Councillor Report.

Cllr Pratt introduced his report a copy of which had been placed on the website prior to the meeting and is attached to the notes. He highlighted the number of items within the report including funding that had been supported from his locality budget. He also made reference to the proposed devolution arrangements which will be the subject of further discussion and consultation over the coming months. A question was asked as to why Gateway 14 has not had to have solar panels on their buildings. Cllr Pratt explained that UKPN have not got the capacity to cope with the electricity that

this would have generated however approximately 13% of the roof area does have solar panels. He is hopeful that this will be addressed retrospectively.

6. Reports provided by local groups and organisations.

- Denis Wicking as chair of the Gardening Club gave his report a copy of which is attached to the notes. He referenced that membership is now at a good level and described the speakers that they had had and trips undertaken. He thanked the Parish Council for funding to help support the Fete. There were no questions.
- Caroline Burgoyne as warden of Saint Mary's Church read out her report a copy of which is attached to the notes. She referenced a number of areas including the number of services taking place each month, and that over 100 people attended the carols by candlelight. The church has not needed any significant repairs and continues to support and encourage wildlife and biodiversity. She thanked the Parish council for paying for the occasional cutting of the grass in the church yard.
- Alison Card as a member of the Village Hall Management committee introduced the report which had been provided by Dean Williams and is attached to the notes. She stressed how the facility is accessible to the entire community and the bookings have increased on the back of events which have taken place including Chinese New Year celebrations; two wreath making events; an Indian curry night and a children's event to meet Santa. Very recently the VE Day event was very successful. A first aid and defibrillator awareness session is planned for July. Thanks were (for taken out) given to all the volunteers who are involved both on the committee and in assisting at events. There were no questions.
- Jenny and Peter from the Free church gave brief details of the services and other events and clubs which are taking place at the Free church. They are considering holding a quiz to support a charitable cause and would be keen for the Parish Council and others to help support the promotion and attendance at this event.
- Julia Stephens-Row gave highlights of the report from Battsford and District Cricket club. A copy of the report is attached to the notes. She particularly gave thanks to both the District Councillor and the Parish Council for their financial support. There were no questions.

7. Parishioners Questions Comments and Suggestions.

There were no questions or comments coming from the meeting. Councillor Cook commented that it is quite hard to know the best way to communicate with residents and whilst (that removed) there were some mechanisms that can be used for example the community newsletter, the website, the 4 parishes magazine and the noticeboards around the village etc; there were concerns that still residents were not always aware of new initiatives and also that the Parish Council did not feel confident that they knew the views of residents. There was a general discussion and a suggestion to use other links to promote information for example through the Gardening club and the Punchbowl Facebook page. Leaflet drops were felt to be quite productive. There was a suggestion that QR codes could be included on information that goes onto the noticeboard so that people can then follow up the information when they get home. It was recognised that a range of different outlets were needed. Those present were encouraged, as were other residents to feed any ideas to the Clerk.

Councillor Cook thanked everybody for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 7:50 pm.

Appendix 1 Reports to the meeting

- a. Report from Parish Council and Financial Summary Chairman Jonathan Cook

I closed my Annual Report in May 2024 by thanking all who **support and promote** our community in their different ways; Community and Faith Groups, the Village Hall Committee, the Punchbowl team, local clubs, our County, District, and Parish Councillors, and many unseen individuals.

A great deal happens within this parish thanks solely to people in our community who volunteer their time, skills and enthusiasm to planning, organising, hosting, and clearing up after all manner of events. So, I find myself again in a position of extending my thanks and appreciation to many people. Thank you!

Administering the functions of the Parish Council in the absence of a **Parish Clerk** following the resignation in May 2024 was a steep learning curve for myself and Parish Councillors. Particular thanks are due to Cllr Pope for her minute-taking skills, Cllr Wilson for admin support, and County Cllr Oakes for her guidance and support.

We were pleased to receive several **applications for the Clerk vacancy**. Following a selection process, Julia Stephens-Row was offered the position of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and has been with us since Christmas.

Our **litter picks** (now coordinated with Combs) continue to be well-supported, with 12 volunteers helping out this Spring. A mention must go to residents who routinely litter-pick outside of the organised events- thank you.

We continue to seek to **improve road safety** and have a mandate to erect white 'picket fences' on roadside verges by the Village Green to highlight the 30mph limit. County Cllr Oakes has again investigated for us the possibility of changing the existing right-of-way priorities at the Straight Road/Church/Valley Road junction. However, the viability and cost of altering this junction is deemed unnecessary by County Highways. Representation was made by a parishioner in January about potentially implementing 20mph limits within Battsford and Battsford Tye. We investigated further and have determined that we do not meet the criteria for a reduced speed limit.

It was pleasing to see so many attend the weekend festivities of the **Village Fete**. These events take much personal time and effort to coordinate, and thanks are again due to those who did so much to ensure that Battsford had a great weekend.

Early 2025 saw our annual Health and Safety/General Check of **Battsford Cemetery**. This includes a check where headstones are assessed for security; a small number failed this test and the Parish Clerk has contacted relatives to ask for appropriate remedial action to be taken. We also have agreed a revised Cemetery Policy that provides more information and enhanced processes.

During April some essential maintenance was undertaken at the **Village Green** play area; thanks to those volunteers, and particularly Denis Wicking, who inspects and helps us maintain the play equipment.

We are conscious that **Devolution** is again on the political agenda; we receive regular updates from our County and District Councillors and will pass on information as we receive it.

Finances: at our January meeting, Councillors debated the Parish Council Precept and, very conscious of continuing financial pressures on us all, agreed an increase in line with the annual inflation rate of 2.53%. This equates to an additional £1.37 for a Band D Council Tax bill.

Our 2024-25 accounts show a reduced annual expenditure, due largely to the prolonged period without a Parish Clerk, and subsequent reduced salary costs.

Accounted expenditure (fourth quarter accounts) for 2024/25 of £8,081.83 was over £13,500 less than for 2023/24. £3,003 of agreed commitments are yet to be made from the 24-25 budget; the actual expenditure is therefore £11,084.83, some £3,190 less than the predicted spend of £14,275.

Given the underspend, Councillors agreed to provide additional support in some areas, and some other costs were higher than expected. These include; grants to support community events/infrastructure, a changed funding model for the Community Newsletter, and defibrillator maintenance (thanks to Clive Nicholas for continuing to maintain the defibrillators).

The year-end balances for Parish Council accounts for 2024/25 and the previous year are shown below:

	Current account	Savings account	Total
2023/24 year-end	£7,575.86	£13,308.63	£20,884.49
2024/25 year-end	£8,769.03	£19,721.04	£28,490.07
Difference	+£1,193.17	+£6,412.41	+£7,605.58*

*The current overall balance is therefore £7,605.58 more than last financial year, though this will be reduced by £3,003 when all commitments have been realised.

The Parish Council is grateful to Denis Wicking for completing our Internal Financial Audit.

Budget forecasting for 2025/26 suggests a spend of £16,000, due to generic rising costs, but also (for example); maintenance of the playing field, increased defibrillator costs, acquisition of fit-for purpose IT equipment, and increased training costs.

b. Report from County Councillor Kay Oakes

March

Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk

The Roadmender has arrived in Suffolk, as the county sees a 34% increase in pothole repairs through extra investment, more resource, and new ways of working.

The county council has been working to repair the increasing number of potholes which have been breaking out following very wet and cold weather recently. One way in which the council is increasing its repair rate is by trialling new methods of fixing potholes.

Suffolk Highways welcomed 'Highway Workforce' with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs, which are quicker to carry out. The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county's roads.

The 'Roadmender' works on both asphalt and concrete roads and is designed for repairs to all types of road defects and is capable of overlaying areas with multiple defects in a single visit. The process is more efficient, reducing material and waste by 90% and avoiding unnecessary disruption on roads.

April 2024

Highways Report and Statistics

Since Storm Babet in October 2023 (which generally coincided with the commencement of the new highways contract with Milestone) there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways.

Annual data from 2022/23 (40,003 customer reports) and 2023/24 (60,043 customer reports to 23 February) shows there has been an increase of over 20,000 reports so far in 2023/24.

If this continues at the same rate, it is expected that the volume of customer reports could top 65,000 representing a 63% increase on last year.

Between October and February, Suffolk Highway completed in total **10,533 safety defect repairs**, a 45% increase on the last 2 years. **7,328 road defect repairs** have been completed since October. During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs provided is 20.2 per day (excluding Dragon Patcher).

For the same period during 2022/23, the old contract provided an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.

May 2024

East of England local authorities collaborate to appeal for more foster families to work with their council

Eleven local authorities across the East of England have joined forces in a bid to collectively recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Suffolk is taking part in a new initiative for fostering under the banner Foster East. There is an urgent need for foster carers in the East of England with more than 7,000 vulnerable children already in the care of their local authority, and a further 150 children coming into care every month.

The Foster East initiative which is funded by the Department of Education and launched today Wednesday 29 May 2024, is a new, collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support. Councils will work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. Each applicant will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council and via a buddy network. Foster East advisors will help people find out how fostering can become part of their life.

In Suffolk there are more than 900 children and young people ranging from babies to 18-year-olds who need safe, loving and nurturing homes where they can thrive and develop. Every local authority aims to keep children and young people local to their support networks, but a shortage of foster families in our area means this is not always possible.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children.

June

Residents advised - don't do business with cold callers

Suffolk Trading Standards is reminding people to stay alert to the risk of being ripped off by cold callers knocking on their doors.

The warning comes after recent incidents of people approaching householders on the doorstep and touting for business.

Suffolk Trading Standards advises people to only use businesses registered with the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Trading Standards urged anyone thinking of having home improvement work done to use a business that has been vetted and approved under the Suffolk Trusted Trader scheme.

Residents can also protect themselves and their neighbours by nominating their area to become a No Cold Calling Zone, of which there are now more than 200 across Suffolk.

July

Councillors recommended to approve an extra £9.1 million for SEND services

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet will discuss a further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting next Wednesday 24 July.

- Funding would pay for new permanent SEND staff to support children and young people
- If approved, this year more than £20 million would have been committed to expanding the service
- Investment to be discussed at Cabinet next week

The additional investment would mean that more than 30 new permanent members of staff could be recruited to help the council keep up with expected need for SEND services and deliver its important improvement plans. It would also pay for contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity – key to helping children and young people access the help they need.

This investment is in addition to the £11.2 million over three years agreed by Cabinet in February 2024, which is being used to grow the SEND team by 15% or around 60 members of staff.

In total, the council is proposing to commit more than £20 million over the next three years to bolster SEND services.

Of the £9.1 million, £2.6 million will be spent in 2024/25. This investment in permanent staff will recur in subsequent years as they continue to support children and young people with SEND. In 2025/26, £500,000 will be added to the SEND budget and in 2026/27, a further £500,000 will be added – both of which will be recurrent in subsequent years.

This investment follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership. As a result of this, the partnership, which delivers SEND services and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, published a Priority Action Plan. One of the actions in the plan includes increasing the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and Annual Reviews. The proposed new staff would, in part, support the delivery of this work.

August

[Small improvements needed as children's services' Ofsted report published](#)

Ofsted has published its report into Suffolk County Council's children's services. The report rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good'.

The ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) report conveys a mixed picture across Suffolk. Importantly, inspectors concluded that children's safeguarding is strong and that the experiences and progress of children in care were good. They also reported that 'children in care thrive'.

However, they highlighted weakness in some of the processes and systems in place. These included inconsistencies with the way first contact with children and young people is processed, and the quality and support to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. It also found inconsistencies in the level of understanding that care leavers have about the range of support available to them.

The report outlined seven points for improvement, which have either been implemented already through small amends to systems or processes or are in progress.

September

[Uncertainty looms for 177,000 Suffolk residents currently eligible for winter fuel payments](#)

As many as 177,000 Suffolk residents are currently eligible for winter fuel payments and should be protected from Government plans to cut the allowance, Suffolk County Council has warned.

According to 2023 mid-year population estimates from the ONS, around 177,000 people over the age of 66 in Suffolk are eligible for these crucial payments, leaving them potentially vulnerable if they are withdrawn.

In response, Suffolk County Council's leader, Councillor Matthew Hicks, has written to all the county's MPs - urging them to vote against the proposed changes. The council is particularly concerned that rural areas, like much of Suffolk, will be disproportionately affected due to reliance on expensive oil heating and the added burden of rural deprivation.

Rural homes are statistically less energy efficient compared to urban homes, meaning they require more energy to maintain a healthy temperature. Furthermore, many rural homes are not connected to mains gas, forcing households to rely on more costly heating sources like wood, canister gas, or oil. The price of heating oil has now risen to 66p per litre, a 12p increase since 2020.

October 2024

Suffolk County Council set on major investment to further protect Suffolk from flooding as it calls on Government to 'step up'

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work.

- Council set to agree £1.5 million to deliver first phase of works identified in initial flood investigation reports
- Authority calls on Government to recognise ongoing impact of Storm Babet and fund £20 million of further prevention work urgently needed
- Extensive work already completed since Storm Babet including more than 111,000 drains cleared and significant road repairs.

The commitment comes as initial flood investigation reports have identified that a further £20 million is needed to complete the work – a figure that the county council can't afford. The council has therefore written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, and demanded the government step up and plug the funding gap.

- [Read the council's letter to DEFRA](#)

Examples of the kind of projects that could be delivered include:

1. Creating flood water retention ponds in land above villages and green spaces within communities to capture water and slow the flow into residential areas.
2. Installing flood doors and non-return valves on drains to stop water entering properties that are particularly at risk of flooding.
3. Help landowners with advice and guidance, especially those within responsibilities to maintain ditches and streams on their properties (known as 'riparian ownership').
4. Bolstering Suffolk Highways' resources to deliver planned and reactive maintenance on the county's roads and footpaths.

Storm Babet struck between October 18 and 21 last year and caused substantial flooding and disruption across Suffolk. A month's worth of rain fell in 24 hours, flooding more than 900 homes and businesses. The impact of the storm was exceptional and demanded an urgent multiagency response.

So far, Suffolk County Council has committed more than £13.75 million for work to aid recovery from Storm Babet. Suffolk County Council has made several achievements as part of our continued commitment to reduce flood risk.

The council has already committed £12.25 million, including:

- £1 million on bringing in additional flood investigation specialists
- £1.25 million for repairs to Suffolk's highways following the flood damage
- £10 million funding, which was committed in 2021, to address long-standing drainage issues over three years. This complements £2 million a year invested in drainage repairs and improvements funded from the Department for Transport maintenance grant.

The council has completed seven location-based flood investigations, with an estimated 50 to complete. This compares to an average of three or four investigations in an average year. These reports provide a detailed account of events for each flooding location and recommendations for other organisations, landowners, businesses and residents.

Carried out extensive works on Suffolk's highways. Specifically:

- Cleared 96% of highway drainage gullies across Suffolk, more than 111,000. This involves lifting the iron grates and sucking up the debris that has washed off the roads
- Attended more than 3,500 emergency call outs for flooding related incidents – an unprecedented number. This includes pumping an estimated 2.5million litres of water from the roads, removing 53 tonnes of debris and clearing 121 fallen trees
- Rolled out the DEFRA-funded Recovery Scheme which meant that flooded property owners could apply for up to £5,000 to make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is administering the scheme on behalf of government. Applications are open until April 2025.

The new money is set to be agreed by the council's Cabinet on 5 November.

November

Suffolk's new gritting fleet to keep county safe and moving during the colder weather

With temperatures forecast to drop, Suffolk's new gritting fleet will commence its winter season shortly, treating thousands of miles of roads to help minimise risk for highway users.

During the warmer autumn months, highway teams have been carefully planning for the winter gritting operations, preparing for the potential snow and ice that winter will bring. In total, there are 36 gritters ready for action, with two additional spare vehicles available to be deployed to any location, if needed.

The new fleet is equipped with advanced digital systems and the latest route planning software to support winter maintenance drivers and enable them to grit their routes efficiently and effectively.

All gritters in the fleet use hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), which reduces carbon dioxide emissions by around 90%, supporting Suffolk County Council's continued commitment to protect and enhance our environment.

During the last winter season, Suffolk used around 7,822 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 198,594km/123,400 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth five times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 21,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any drop in temperature.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations.

There are also 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network. This includes other bus routes where the service level is 5 days a week in the school term, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools.

P1 treatments are considered when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C, whilst P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions.

Further details of which roads are gritted can be found on one.network, by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

All gritting decisions are based on forecast road surface temperatures, not air temperature, as the road surface temperature is often cooler and reflects the true risk to highway users. The timing and amount of salt we use considers factors such as traffic levels, wind and rain.

During the lead up to the winter season, our teams also dedicate their time to refilling grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. To

date, we have filled over 50% of the total grit bins and will conclude the remaining refills over the next few weeks ahead of the commencement of the core winter season.

Suffolk Highways fills grit bins that are approved and owned by parish and town councils, however, to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and request grit refills via the reporting tool. Suffolk Highways do not fill private grit bins.

Suffolk's residents are requested to support us, as well as emergency services throughout the year, by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Drivers are reminded to always drive to the conditions; although the gritting teams have treated the roads, this doesn't mean they are completely risk-free.

Those wishing to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, should follow Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook, to keep updated of our teams' movements this winter season. Safety messages will also be issued during spells of cold and wet weather.

December

[Suffolk and East of England councils seek fairness in the face of energy projects](#)

Suffolk County Council is joining with other local authorities in the region to challenge National Grid and the government on energy projects, demanding fairness for their communities and environment.

The county councils from Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire all face similar challenges with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being planned for their counties.

These are typically related to energy projects, including solar farms, wind turbines, pylons and the infrastructure associated offshore wind farms, such as substations and cabling.

Two of Suffolk County Council's main concerns, shared with the other counties, are:

- The uncoordinated approach to NSIPs - this is creating significant challenges for Suffolk's rural communities under the current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate and Secretary of State
- The government's 2030 target for decarbonising the electricity grid – this is too hasty, making it impossible to deliver alternative solutions to pylon projects like Norwich to Tilbury

January 2025

[Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons](#)

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year's Valued Landscape Assessment, a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that “the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy.”

The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

February 2025

Suffolk prepares for another significant solar farm proposal

Suffolk County Council is preparing to respond to another large solar farm proposal, set to cover around 1,500 acres, near Eye.

EcoPower Suffolk is putting forward plans to build a solar farm and battery storage facility, which would impact Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold, with connections made at the existing substation to the north of Yaxley.

The project aims to deliver around 250 megawatts of renewable energy. At that size, it will be classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring planning approval from the Secretary of State, rather than the local authority.

Several consultations, beginning in March 2025, will be held by EcoPower Suffolk as it shapes its final planning application.

The county council will be contributing to these, to support and represent residents, businesses, agriculture, our landscape and ecology.

EcoPower Suffolk hopes that the project will connect to the Grid in 2030.

More information can be found at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said.

Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's County, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform.

The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services.

The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level.

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

The government will then undertake a public consultation.

The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

March 2025

[Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House](#)

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- Keep all 45 libraries open
- Maintain opening hours
- Create job security for all frontline staff
- Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries' role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement.

The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on 1 June 2025.

c. Report from District Councillor Daniel Pratt

Free Compost for Mid Suffolk Residents

Residents in Mid Suffolk can collect free compost this spring. The aim is to support people to live a greener and healthier lifestyle through growing their own food and plants. The giveaway coincides with International Compost Awareness Week from 4th to 10th May. The nearest collection event is taking place at Needham Lake on Sunday 11th May from 8 am. The event will run on a first come first serve basis and attendees are allowed a maximum of two bags per vehicle.

Funding for Community Projects

Our website now includes a new webpage to promote our available funding schemes and non-financial support. The new page covers information on financial support for a range of community projects and events. For more information see - <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/community-funding>. Other funding streams include the Suffolk Greenest County's Climate Community Match Funder and Aviva's Community Fund.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation updates

Mid Suffolk held an additional full council meeting on April 10 to discuss the council response to the consultation on the Government's devolution plans. Mid Suffolk councillors recognised the positive impact a mayor could potentially bring but also shared concerns of limited representation of community leaders at the mayoral level. Councils in Suffolk share the view that more devolved powers from government could bring benefits for the region, but conversely, a centralisation of power away from local communities would lose the benefit of local expertise and knowledge.

All District and Borough Councils in Suffolk have published their joint proposals for two or three unitary authorities across the county, but the exact boundaries for these authorities is yet to be determined. This contrasts with Suffolk County Council's vision for a single unitary authority in Suffolk. Letters to this effect have now been sent and acknowledged by the Secretary of State. Now more detailed business plans for the proposed new authorities will need to be finalised and agreed.

Locality Awards

The Locality Grant fund is now closed for 2024/25 but will re-open for applications when the next round of funding begins - hopefully in late May/early June. More information can be found at: <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/locality-awards>

c. Report from Chair of Gardening Club Denis Wicking

The Gardening Club continues to flourish with membership stable at around 50, returning to our pre-COVID levels when we suspended meetings and fee collection.

Over the last year we have had 7 meetings with speakers, the Xmas quiz run by George Bethell, and made Xmas wreathes

We organised a Show at the Fete which attracted 350 entries from 48 individuals (including 6 children). This is lower than our pre -COVID peak but reflects the weather conditions that disrupted fruit and veg sentries. We are very grateful for the grant from Battisford Parish Council supporting the broader community interest in the Show especially the Children's, Craft, Food and Drink classes.

We had three trips out, to RHS Hyde Hall, Holm House (National Garden Scheme), and Beth Chatto's Garden.

No big show being planned for this year but we are ready to support future Fetes or community events.

d. Report from Church Warden of St Marys Church Caroline Burgogyne

Although with increasingly small congregation numbers, St. Mary's remains, ten centuries after a church on the site was mentioned in the Domesday Book, as Battisford's village church for weddings, baptisms, funerals and an ever open place for quiet prayer and reflection. We continue to have a service of Morning Prayer on the first Sunday of the month and Holy Communion on the second. We still join with Ringshall on the fourth Sunday, as we have done for more than 30 years, and after a 9.00a.m. service at Battisford we united with them, and other village representatives, in November, for the Remembrance Day Service and National two minutes silence, at the Wear Road memorial. Mike Cubbin again read the 13 names from the list recorded in St Mary's, of the Battisford men who gave their lives in the First World War. Our "Carols by Candlelight" service on Christmas Eve was attended by more than 100 villagers and was a joyful start to the Christmas celebrations.

Flaking plaster and small pieces of dislodged render after high winds or very wet weather, remind us that maintenance of a centuries old building is permanently on-going, but, fortunately, we have needed no major repairs this year.

We await Bishops to service the organ and gratefully thank Sandra (Reynolds) for playing for us on second Sundays and wrestling with its unpredictable quirks. Equally we thank Sandra (Rankin) for providing us with Jane to keep us clean and tidy and Jenn for her efforts as sacristan, especially as work commitments mean she cannot join us for services.

We are very grateful to the Parish Council for arranging the grass cutting in our orchard and an annual late summer cut of the church- yard, which allows meadow flowers to flourish.

We are an Eco-church under the A Rocha scheme and this year achieved their silver award. This is not only for nurturing our bats, owls, jackdaws, bees and other visiting wildlife, and keeping the churchyard as a meadow for native flora, but also “deepening engagement with caring for creation and embedding this in church life” through worship ,our buildings, use of energy, involvement with the community, lifestyle and awareness of our place in protecting creation globally.

e. Report from Village Hall Management Committee Dean Williams

The Management committee meets once a month to discuss the hall and review finances, events, policies, groups, and maintenance. The group is formed of 7 volunteers from Battsford who have been part of the committee for a number of years, and give up their time freely.

Events

Over the past 12 months we have increased the number of social fundraising events, bringing the community together, whilst raising money for the up keep and running costs for the hall.

2023

- August – We hosted a defibrillator awareness session along with some basic first aid training for local residents. This was well attended and following feedback will look to arrange again.
- November - we out on a Halloween family disco
- December - we held a wreath making evening, followed by an evening for the children to have super with Santa.

2024

- January - we celebrated the Chinese New Year, with food supplied locally and social evening
- Moving forward, we will be supporting the Battsford & Combs Fete in July with the BBQ, planning to hold a curry night and the annual festive events.

Thank you to everyone that has attended and helps us raise funds for the hall.

Also, thanks also to all of the volunteers, both on the committee but also who helps out at the events. Without your support and giving your time freely, we wouldn't be able to put on such events.

Groups / Clubs

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

We have seen an increase in private hire bookings and other local fund-raising events (non-village hall).

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

We continue to support and listen to the needs of all of the clubs / groups and try to accommodate their individual needs wherever possible. We also thank each club for their understanding and support to each other to enable the hall to be a setting that can be used and enjoyed by all.

We still have availability during the daytime Monday to Friday. We are currently advertising to help promote this space and looking for other groups / clubs to make use of the facilities. We are also looking at ways in which we can generate income aside from Hall Hire.

Policies

We review all of our policies each year, this includes Safeguarding, Risk Management, H&S, Financials, Equal Opportunity and Environmental policies. This also includes H&S Risk Assessments, PAT testing and Fire Alarm systems.

Finances

We're currently in a good position financially, but are mindful we have just lost a source of income which we need to replace. We constantly reviewing our outgoings to see if there are any cost savings we can make, by negotiating with our suppliers.

Special thanks to the Parish Council and local councillors for your continued support over the past year enabling us to purchase new equipment and supporting us with the events we have put on.

Improvements

A massive thankyou to Jenny for leading the project for the recent energy saving improvements at the hall.

This included:

- Roof repairs
- External & Internal wall insulation, using insulated plasterboard.
- Replacement radiators installed where required.
- New kitchen door
- New internal door
- New energy efficient lighting in the main hall
- New heating controls
- Purchase of a new cooker
- Purchase of a new fridge

These improvements are recognised by our hirers, the hall is now a much warmer building with a big reduction in drafts and holding the heat within the building. We will continue to monitor this to see what cost savings this generates from a reduction in heating / electricity.

Barclif

We reviewed the importance of the Barclif last year and its future role, we felt both the Barclif and the Combs parish magazine produced very similar content and start discussions with them about producing a joint magazine moving forward, coincidentally they had also had similar discussions. Myself, Trudy and Suzanne from CPC meet to discuss the idea with the benefits being a reduction in time spent producing and distributing, reduction in printing costs and paper.

The Barcliff / Combs Parish Magazine was replaced in January with the first edition of the Community Newsletter. Suzanne has taken ownership as the editor and has done a great job of merging the 2 newsletters providing information on recent news stories and upcoming events and relevant information and support. Well done Suzanne.

A big thankyou from all of the committee to the Parish council and local councillors for their continued support to enable us to upgrade and provide a community facility which can be used and enjoyed by all.

f. Report from Battsford and District Cricket Club Julia Stephens-Row Cricket Administrator

I am very pleased to report that a grant has been awarded from Mid Suffolk District Council using Community Infrastructure Levy funding towards a new treatment plant. Both the County Councillor, the District Councillor and this Parish Council have also contributed towards this project and installation will take place in the Autumn.

We have been also been very fortunate to obtain grants from Combs Parish council, the ECB, and Suffolk Climate Change Partnership to install Photovoltaic panels on the roof of the pavilion and two EV chargers. We are already seeing the benefits in the reduced cost of our energy bills.

The cricket club continues to punch above its weight in that our groundskeeper David Stephens-Row was listed as one of three finalists in the volunteer groundskeeper section of the Grounds Management Association awards held in at Anfield in March. Sadly he did not win but it is great that his work has been recognised.

Cricket

We have two senior teams and T20 side, a ladies team and this year we are running 5 junior teams. We hold coaching for juniors on a Friday night.

We were fortunate that the Saturday team and the Sunday team were both promoted last year and we are getting very good feedback about our facilities and the hospitality that we provide. The weather has certainly helped in ensuring that the ground is looking exceptionally good. We hold approx 60 senior fixtures each year.

Social

We have a number of social members and a Vice Presidents scheme for individuals who are non-playing, who want to support the cricket club financially and they come along to a lunch as a thank you. This year the lunch is actually going to take place when there is a game being played. We also have a number of sponsors boards around the ground and again we hold a specific game for sponsors to come along to this year which will be in August. We've already held hold a couple of well supported social events, including a curry and quiz, a pie and pint night, and a beer tasting and fish and chips. More are planned.

The club is also available for hire and so far this year we have held a diamond wedding, two funeral wakes and a 60th birthday party.

The club is all run by volunteers. Our current membership is approx 150. We are at heart a family friendly club and we want to inspire youngsters to take up the game. Last week at junior coaching we had over 35 youngsters and their parents which shows we are certainly focused on the future of the club.