

MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
2 DECEMBER 2025 AT 7.00 P.M. IN WOOLPIT INSTITUTE

Present: Dr Geake (Chair), Mr Hardiman, Mr Guyler. Mrs Hammond and Miss Tomlinson.

In attendance: District Cllrs Mansel and Overett, County Councillor Mellen (in part) Mrs Fuller, Clerk and 4 members of the public.

The Chair advised that Mrs Ewans has stood down as voluntary Deputy Clerk. She has done a huge amount for Woolpit PC in the capacity of Councillor, Chairman and Deputy Clerk over the last seven years. We are very grateful for all she has done.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Osborne-Lomax.

2. Co-option of a Councillor/Councillors.

Two residents have expressed an interest in joining the Council and hopefully may be co-opted at the January meeting.

3. Public comment: Dr Geake advised a small group cleared brambles from the beds and weeds from the paths in the Millennium Garden at the weekend. There will be another working party arrange for February.

Dr Geake advised that the budget would be discussed at the next meeting and the precept set for 2026/27 and this was the last opportunity for any projects to be put forward for inclusion in the budget.

4. County & District Councillors reports.

District Councillors' report: The Government has launched the consultation about the future of local government in Norfolk and Suffolk. Both proposals for Suffolk have been put forward – the One Suffolk option and the 3 unitary councils for Suffolk. The consultation is open to everyone.

Mid Suffolk District Council has committed £1.8 million over the next three years to accelerate work which enhances biodiversity and nature – in a bid to safeguard the environment for generations to come. The investment is a major step towards reversing habitat loss and supporting wildlife across the district.

The Council agreed to the formation of a Youth Council for Mid Suffolk. It is important to get young people engaged with local politics, and there was cross party support for this proposal. It is hoped to get this Youth Council formed by September 2026 at the beginning of the next school year.

A reminder that the Mid Suffolk Rural Support Fund is still open for applications. This is a fund created to support towns and villages outside of Stowmarket.

Our Sustainable Communities Food Fund provides grants to small scale food initiatives such as community pantries, fridges and food pop-ups. Between £250 and £5,000 is available and can be used for anything from the purchase of equipment and revenue costs to delivering training and workshops.

Our monthly drop-in sessions are ongoing, when we are available for residents to meet us and discuss local issues. Our next session is Wednesday 10 December at Green Wolf Café, Tuesday 6 January at Wesley Café, Elmswell and Thursday 12 February at Green Wolf Café, Woolpit all 10-12.

Mr Guyler asked if MSDC is allowed to spend reserves before the local government reorganisation or would this be prohibited. Cllr Mandell thought there would likely be a ban on this once a date has been set. In the meantime, MSDC are trying to complete a lot of projects before the changes.

The mud and leaf debris in Masons Lane and Rectory Lane has been cleared today.

County Councillor's report: On 19 November, the government launched their consultation on the two proposals submitted for council reorganisation in Suffolk. Suffolk County Council developed and submitted a business case for the government proposing one council for the whole county, and the districts and boroughs submitted a business case proposing three councils, Western Suffolk, Central and Eastern, and

Ipswich and Southern Suffolk. The government consultation is different from local consultations you may have filled out recently, and central government will be making the decision on what councils will look like in Suffolk in future. This consultation is only available until 11 January 2026.

On 4 November, Cabinet reviewed the council's financial performance for the first two quarters of the 2025-26 financial year. The council is now predicting an overspend for the year of £20.8m, which it will have to fund using its Risk Reserve. This is an increase of £7.5m compared to the prediction at the end of quarter one. Council financial reserves are forecast to reduce by £37m overall during the year, which is extremely worrying and unsustainable. The Dedicated Schools Grant 'negative reserve', a debt relating to Special Education Needs and Disabilities spend, is likely to be -£72.9m by the end of the year. The government allows local authorities to hold this debt via a 'statutory override' which is due to expire in March 2028. If the provision for this expires, it is likely that many councils in the country – not just Suffolk County Council - would be unable to balance their budgets. As well as SEND, overspends at the council are mostly in adult and children's social care.

At Cabinet on 4 November, it was agreed that the council would object to the National Grid's proposed Norwich to Tilbury grid reinforcement, which would see pylons and overhead electricity lines bisecting the county. Some undergrounding is planned in the Dedham Vale National Landscape area, with the council pressing for undergrounding in the Waveney valley too, and more generally objecting on the basis that offshore alternatives had not been fully explored, and that the grid reinforcement might not be necessary in the timescale asserted by National Grid Electricity Transmission. The council is also concerned about the impacts of the project and its construction on the environment and residents of Suffolk, and the possibility that the new lines might lead to an increased number of solar farm applications and energy projects along the route which would have a cumulative effect on the local area. The council is also objecting to the Sea Link project, whereby cables would make landfall between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, with a new substation and energy infrastructure built at Friston near Saxmundham. The grounds for objection include inadequate road access, impact of the scheme on the local landscape and the proposals for a new bridge being 'disproportionate' and damaging to the environment and local heritage including Grade II listed buildings nearby.

At Scrutiny Committee on 20 November, the council's business continuity arrangements were reviewed. Business continuity refers to how the council ensures it is able to continue providing essential services in situations of emergency, for example power outages, flooding, or pandemic illness like Covid 19. Members of the Joint Emergency Planning Unit joined the meeting to explain that all directorates at the council held plans for possible scenarios and incidents, with directors providing oversight and teams in each directorate reviewing and updating the plans as necessary. The council can also set up an Emergency Control Centre to respond to incidents and coordinate if multiple council directorates are affected. The council undertakes planned exercises to assess how its plans would work, and reviews processes after each incident or exercise to improve them. It also takes part in regional exercises, and uses a Home Office recording and planning system, Resilience Direct, to respond to emergencies, which means that it is not reliant on council IT systems in case of a cyberattack. Paper copies of all plans are kept in case of power outages.

Suffolk Archives has received a grant of £139,107 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver a new project called Beyond Labels: Celebrating Disability which aims to shine a light on the lives achievements and challenges of people with disabilities in Suffolk. Beyond Labels will collect and preserve personal stories - as well as the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that support disabled people - to create a record that celebrates disability while sparking conversations about inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

As part of the project, Suffolk Archives will work with local schools and community groups to offer free workshops that teach skills in recording, organising, and preserving archives. There will also be workshops around the county that provide opportunities for participants to co-create projects that amplify disabled voices and educate others about the challenges faced in daily life. The project will also include cataloguing and selective digitisation of existing disability-related records, making them more accessible to the public and ensuring that Suffolk Archives reflects the diversity of the county. There will be a free public exhibition at The Hold in Ipswich which will run from February to May 2026 to celebrate the stories collected through the project and encourage greater awareness and empathy across Suffolk.

5. To receive declarations of interest and requests for dispensation.

There were none.

6. To approve the minutes of the meeting 4 November 2025

The minutes were approved and signed.

7. Planning

a) to consider current applications

25/04626 Application for outline planning permission (Access to be considered, all other matters reserved) for the erection of up to 5 No. self-build or custom built dwellings. Land North of Warren Lane. Object - Site is outside the settlement boundary; Highways safety grounds for pedestrians and drivers; unsustainable development, flood risk due to the brook along the south boundary that is prone to flooding, increased run-off into the brook; no comments from SCC Highways, MSDC Heritage team, Historic England, and MSDC Ecologist team. Without these it is surely impossible to seek full comments on this application; Residents' objections who know the flooding situation well; Self-build problems – lack of demand in Woolpit as there are already five self-build plots along Old Stowmarket Road that have been available for years, and none have been taken up; long-term disruption as self-build plots will all have to be built individually, leading to disruption going on along Warren Lane for many years and if the principle of development is accepted for self-builds, but there is no demand, it may be possible to successfully argue that the principle of development has been accepted, leading to a commercial development being consented here where it would not have been allowed normally; as Mid Suffolk has a strong land supply which is likely to continue, the benefit of five self-build houses in Warren Lane is outweighed by the harms caused by development in this area.

25/05025 Full planning application – proposed conversion of residential garden to open air commercial storage. Lawn Farm, Warren Lane. Object - Traffic. agree with SCC Highways that the application needs a Transport Statement; Warren Lane to Woolpit and Elmswell, and Wood Road further south, are narrow lanes unsuitable for HGV traffic; high speeds of traffic along these roads is eroding their value as back lanes for safe cycling and walking between the villages; the old A45 route towards Haughley New Street is also becoming more and more dangerous for all traffic, as development in this area results in congestion coming off the A14 east-bound: there is no easy route back on to the A14. Lawn Farm is a Grade II listed building and this development will inevitably cause some harm to its setting; Flood risk - the increased hardstanding will contribute to run-off and heighten the flood risk in the area.

25/05143 Erection of a single storey extension and loft conversion. 4 Rathland Close – no comment.

25/05099 Application under Section 73 of The Town and Country Planning Act for DC/23/04645 (6no dwellings) for the variation of Conditions 2 (Approved plans & documents) 8 (Parking) and 9 (Refuse and recycling bins). Clopton Dower House Clopton Green, Rattlesden – no comment.

b) to receive MSDC decisions.

25/04376 Discharge of conditions Appl 24/00117 Condition 6 (Dust Control), Condition 7 (Construction Management Plan) and Condition 8 (Fire Hydrants) Land at Stag Café, Old A14 – acceptable

25/03169 Discharge of Conditions Appl DC/24/05355 - Condition 7 (Hours of use of Illumination), Condition 8 (Out of Hours Noise Restriction), Condition 9 (Hours of Operation), Condition 13 (HGV Delivery Management Plan) and Condition 15 (Details of Waste Strategy). Plot 4 Land At Lawn Farm Business Park, Warren Lane – sufficient and acceptable.

25/03177 Discharge of Conditions Appl 24/05355 - Condition 19 (Written Liaison Scheme). Plot 4 Land At Lawn Farm Business Park, Warren Lane – sufficient.

25/03544 Discharge of Conditions Appl 24/05355 - Condition 11 (Arboricultural Method Statement) and Condition 18 (Screen Planting to Boundary with Lawn Farmhouse). Plot 4 Land At Lawn Farm Business Park, Warren Lane – satisfied and acceptable.

8. Clerk's Report

Casual vacancy – MSDC has confirmed that the third vacancy can be filled by co-option.

Various Tilia Homes advertising signs – have now been removed from road sign poles and street light columns.

Brickmakers Place – residents concerned with the site boundary, public land works and highways safety were referred to MSDC and have been dealt with.

Bank charges – Unity Trust Bank has advised that it is to increase bank charges as from 1 February 2026. Monthly fee will be increased from £6 to £7, cheque deposits from 30p to 40p per item and BACs up from 14p to 15p.

NALC subscription – SALC has confirmed that NALC part of the subscription will increase by 3.6%.

9. To receive correspondence/communications and deal with any matters.

SCC Christmas and New Year street lighting switching times. It was agreed to leave lights switched on all night from Christmas Eve into Christmas Day and New Year's Eve to New Year's Day. **MSDC** Community Housing has received anonymous letters regarding the condition of two gardens in Steeles Road. MSDC is working with the residents to improve matters but it will not be resolved quickly as it is a complex case and will take some time to resolve. There are already big improvements to the front of one property. MSDC confirms and reassures that MSDC is not in breach of Awaabs Law as this relates to damp and mould within properties, not the concerns that have been raised. **MSDC** car parking sign options. Cllrs opted for number 1 fingerpost with car park and P sign. **The following items have been circulated to Cllrs:** **NALC** CEO bulletin 6.13, 20, 27 November, Star council awards 2025/6 finalists. **SALC** news bulletin 10, 17, 24 November, 1 December, training bulletin 11, 18, 25 November, 2 December. Rural Services Network newsletter 5, 12, 19, 26 November. **SCC** One Suffolk gains support in Westminster, Government consultation on LGR in Suffolk, consultation launched as One Suffolk gains countywide backing. **MSDC** Norwich to Tilbury NSIP: Babergh & Mid Suffolk drop in surgery 13 November, Town & Parish update December, NSIP & large scale energy developments update December.

10. Finance

a) To receive a monthly report from the Clerk.

The balance of the current account at the end of November was £39,918.99 and the balance of the savings account was £606,502.55. With £5,158.17 VAT reclaimable for the year to date, the overall figure is £651,579.71 of which CIL £480,074.83 (£335,014.52 is allocated), earmarked reserves £69,970.34, general reserve £37,000.00 and general funds £64,534.54.

b) To approve accounts for payment.

Payment of £910.00 to Woolpit Village Hall, £900.00 to SARS and £1,450.00 to Mid Suffolk CAB as Section 137 grants agreed at the November meeting were ratified. Payments to Mr Gardiner £585.90 Highways Ranger salary November, Mrs P Fuller £1,401.06 Clerk salary November, Suffolk County Council £421.48 pension payment November, Gipping Press £430.00 printing December/January Woolpit Diary, Mr R Raisey £132.10 edit December/January Woolpit Diary, Woolpit Institute £60.00 meeting room hire October-November and Woolpit Institute £455.00 office rent October to December were approved. Payments by Direct Debit BT £214.31 quarterly bill and E-on Next £54.10 pimp light August-October.

11. To consider a donation to the Salvation Army Band for the Christmas Carols event on 3 December 2025 and take any necessary action.

The Clerk confirmed that donations must be for the benefit of the local community, and The Salvation Army's work is considered to fall under this category. It was unanimously agreed to give a £50.00 donation.

12. To consider a succession plan for the Clerk and take any necessary action.

This item was carried forward to the next meeting.

13. To receive an update from the working group considering recruitment and retention of councillors and take any necessary action.

There is nothing to add except an advert is in the current Woolpit Diary.

14. To consider the Proludic report on the play equipment including damage to the slide and condemnation of the swings equipment and take any necessary action.

Proludic have declared that the wood struts of the cradle swings need to be replaced as parts near the ground are rotten. Quality Equipment have been approached and have suggested that an option would be to put a metal sleeve around the bottom half metre partly into the ground. The cost would be around £450.00 for the four legs + VAT.

Proludic has quoted £7,323.79 to replace the cradle and flat swing in wood and £6,601.61 in metal.

It was unanimously agreed to have Quality Equipment metal sleeves around all legs of both the cradle and the flat seat swings at an approximate cost of £1,000.00.

The slide has been damaged and there is a jagged edge at the bottom which has been covered with warning tape. It is unlikely to have been caused by kicking and could have been caused by the grass cutter. It was decided that that the replacement of the panel was urgent and that there are sufficient funds in the play equipment maintenance reserve to cover the cost of £691.43 and not to submit an insurance claim as this would delay matters.

The Clerk will contact the grass cutting contractor and advise that what it suspected has happened and ask them to be more cautious around the equipment.

Action: the Clerk

15. To consider repairs to the village sign and take any necessary action.

It has been noticed that the sign had a tilt and on investigation the bottom of the post was rotten and the sign was removed for safety. Quality Equipment can either replace with a metal post for £345.00 or a planed oak post for £289.00. Cllrs unanimously agreed that the oak post would be more in keeping in the Conservation Area and the Clerk will make the necessary arrangements.

Action: the Clerk

16. To receive an update regarding the transfer of amenity land from Hopkins Homes to Woolpit Parish Council and take any necessary action.

Having checked the information and plans received from Hopkins Homes on 3 November, clarification is required from SCC regarding ownership of the fence

around the landscaped area and that SCC is responsible for the path and roundabout maintenance. The Clerk has been trying to find out who to contact at SCC regarding these matters and has asked County Councillor Mellen for assistance. He has contacted various officers but has not yet received a response. Councillors agreed not to take any land until all information is received and issues resolved.

A further email has been received from Hopkins Homes regarding the footway/cyclepath to the car park by the Tennis Club. WPC had expressed concerns regarding the line of the footpath/cycleway by the burial ground in relation to the UKPN stays. Hopkins Homes has proposed a slight realignment of the cycle path, to move it further away from the stays and provided a sketch drawing. This would slightly reduce the burial ground area and in turn slightly increase the amenity area. The drawing is incorrect and does not show the stays and poles in their present positions. The Clerk was asked to respond that WPC requires a drawing showing where the poles and stays are now before considering the changes. It is noted that a wayleave will probably be required from UK Power Networks for their equipment on our land.

Action: the Clerk

17. To receive a report from the meeting with Woolpit Cricket Club regarding the use of amenity land once it has been transferred from Hopkins Homes and take any necessary action.

Sporting 87, a football club based in Bury St Edmunds has approached Woolpit Cricket Club regarding junior football pitches. WCC would like to take over the use of part of the amenity land once WPC has ownership. WCC would like to add this land to their current lease (which is with WRGC not WPC) on the same terms. Sporting 87 has agreed to a 10 year commitment. There would not be any building, lighting or extra parking, the current facilities at WCC would be used. WCC might consider taking on the skate park on land nearer the burial ground.

Firstly, the land needs to be acquired from Hopkins Homes and then the terms of any lease need to be looked into. To prepare the land for football pitches, WCC would need to lease the land from February to have it ready for the start of the season in September. WCC has been advised that it is very unlikely that WPC will have the land by February 2026. In the meantime, WCC is talking with Sporting 87 regarding children's football on the outfields of the cricket club during close season.

It was agreed to set up a working group to look into the proposal further and this would be Mr Guyler, Miss Tomlinson, Mr Hardiman and Dr Geake.

Some of the concerns are parking and access, parking along the spine road, access to the skate park.

18. To consider youth projects in the village and take any necessary action.

District Cllr Overett has been in contact with The Mix in Stowmarket. They are aware of issues in Woolpit and are keen to offer two sessions during autumn/winter where a small team of workers come to Woolpit once young people are home from school to chat to gain interest. The goal would be to establish an event each school holiday which the young people would like starting from February 2026 half term. Examples could be a pop-up youth club/drop-in, a gaming van with consoles, football or carnival games equipment, support with work, education and training. It would need a Councillor to meet with The Mix to take the matter further. Miss Tomlinson agreed to do this and then report to council.

Action: Miss Tomlinson

19. To consider installing a streetlight near Kiln Row, Old Stowmarket Road and take any necessary action.

This has been requested by a resident as windscreen wipers have been ripped off twice. Whilst councillors sympathise, there is no evidence that streetlighting will deter vandalism and they go off at 11.00 p.m. The environmental impact outweighs any benefit and it was unanimously agreed not to install a light.

20. To review Reserves, Lone Worker, Data Protection, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety and Complaints policies and update as necessary.

The Clerk advised that there were minor amendments required to the Safeguarding policy in regard to changing the websites quoted to Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership. These have been made and all the policies will be reviewed in December 2026.

21. To receive an update on the Elmswell to Woolpit cycle/footpath and take any necessary action.

A meeting was held last week and there has not been much progress, which is disappointing. The detailed design is likely to cost more than anticipated and it will take eight months to produce the detailed plan. SCC is working on the outline design for the Elmswell section and conducting a speed survey on the A1088. Presently, there are no plans of how the scheme will get over A14 bridge. It has been proposed that the next meeting be chaired by a councillor and an agenda is produced. There needs to be a timeline for the project to be established at the next meeting in January.

22. To discuss traffic issues in the parish

a) to receive an update on solar powered Speed Indicator signs and locations and take any necessary action

The pole in Green Road has been concreted in and a SID removed from Bury Road to Green Road.

b) to receive an update on 20 mph zone

SCC Officer has advised there has been a delay in getting the job pack/order to their contractor but should have been sent by end of November which would mean the project should be completed by end of April 2026. County Cllr Mellen asked for copies of correspondence.

23. Completed training details for November 2025.

Mrs Fuller, Clerk and Mrs Ewans completed A two day Cemetery Management course. Miss Tomlinson has been unable to attend basic councillor training due to personal circumstances. The Clerk will contact SALC to see if this can be rebooked.

Action: the Clerk

24. To receive an update on the Bury Road development and take any necessary action.

Cllr Overett has not been contacted by any residents to report any issues.

25. To receive a report on the allotments and take any necessary action.

Two half plots have been offered to residents on the waiting list. A further half plot has become available and will be offered to the next person on the waiting list. Payment is still outstanding for four half plots. The tenants have been contacted.

Action: the Clerk

26. To receive a report from Woolpit Parish Council's Village Hall Committee representative.

This month, focus has been on addressing the financial inequality in the cost of hall hire and in underpinning the trusts placed upon the charity. As it stood regular hirers from outside the village were receiving reduced rates of hire, whereas the one-off Woolpit hirer was expected to pay the standard rate. Notification of a change to this has been issued to hirers and will be effective from 1 January 26.

The amount of time that the hall is being used by hirers outside of the booked period has been looked at and many are having the hall longer than booked. As the hirer is using hall resources and utilities during this time, trustees feel that the cost of the additional time should not be met by the village hall. Hirers have been made aware that this change will be effective from 1 January 26.

Invoicing of regular hires will be changed from quarterly to monthly, also with effect from 1 January 2026. This will provide for a more even income distribution throughout the year. From the last invoicing schedule in October, some hirers settled within a few days, whilst a small percentage have taken almost 6 weeks. This is also something that we are hoping to address with a small charge being made for administration where payment is not within agreed timeframes.

Hire agreements with regular hirers do not exist and are currently being drawn up.

A number of policies that should be in place, according to the governance information held by the charity commission, do not exist.

The newly designed website is almost complete and will be launched very soon.

There will be a fund-raising event this Sunday. It is not expected to raise significant profit, but is an opportunity to draw people into the village hall and to perhaps become more invested with the need for its development

27. Date and time of the next meeting – CIL meeting Tuesday 16 December 2025 and full council meeting Tuesday 6 January 2026 at 7.00 p.m. Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.59 p.m.

Signed.....approved.....

Dated.....6 January 2026.....