

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JANUARY 2026 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 (in part) and Overett, County Councillor Mellen (in part) Mrs Fuller, Clerk and 1 member of the public.

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

2. Co-option of a Councillor/Councillors.

Mrs King was co-opted and duly signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

3. Public comment The Churchwarden has advised that the new Rector will be inducted 23 January.

The village sign is due to be reinstalled and Mr Hardiman asked if some sort of celebration can be arranged. This will be discussed at the February meeting.

4. County & District Councillors reports.

District Councillors' report: The government has delayed the election for a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk until May 2027. The government has also offered the option for Councils undergoing reorganisation to further delay local elections i.e. the County Council election currently planned for May 2026.

The 'call for sites' ends on 9 January. The sites put forward will be assessed by the planning policy team at Mid Suffolk. This information will be used to guide part of the Joint Local plan site allocation.

A new 3G football pitch is set to be delivered to Stowmarket after funding from the Premier League, the FA and the Government's Football Foundation was secured. MSDC has secured 51% of the project costs from the Football Foundation, with the pitch due to open in spring 2026. It will be built on the grounds of the high school and made available for community.

Construction work on a state-of-the-art skills and innovation centre at Gateway 14 in Stowmarket has reached a key milestone with the core construction now complete and the centre due to open in June next year.

A new community darts venue has opened with £125k in matched funding. The venture which will be an accessible community darts hub, offering everything from darts equipment and accessories to coaching sessions and pay-and-play lanes.

This year waste education sessions were held for over 1700 children and staff at primary schools in Mid Suffolk to provide education about what happens to our waste.

Monthly drop-in sessions are 10-12 Tuesday 6 January at the Wesley Café, Elmswell and Thursday 12 February at Green Wolf Café, Woolpit.

County Councillor's report: At council on Thursday 11 December, a motion was proposed to strengthen protection for rivers in the county via the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers which include the right to flow naturally, be free from pollution or contamination and the right to recover from environmental harm. Several councillors spoke passionately about rivers and the harm being done to them by sewage and agricultural and highways run off. Unfortunately, the motion was not carried. Other motions tabled at the meeting including writing to the government to protest against the recent budget announcements, a motion criticising the council's record on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the importance of local Post Offices.

At Cabinet on Tuesday 2 December, preparation arrangements were agreed for the county's Minerals and Waste plan, which is now five years old and due for renewal. The plan looks at the county's needs and decides what planning measures need to be taken to meet them – for example, aggregates such as sand and gravel which are necessary for housebuilding. As the government has announced high targets for

housing in Suffolk, the amount of these materials needed will be higher than before. As the Local Government Reorganisation process means that Suffolk County Council will likely not exist by the time the plan is due to be adopted, the decision made by Cabinet was to undertake all the prep work and gather evidence for it so that the new authority/ies who have to publish the plan will be well-placed to do so once established.

On Thursday 4 December, the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee convened to scrutinise progress on the action plan for improvement to Suffolk's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services. The action plan was developed following a poor inspection report from Ofsted and CQC in November 2023. Council officers and Cabinet members for children's services joined the meeting and acknowledged that although progress had been made to clear the backlog of EHCPs and improve the waiting times to produce them and review them annually, many families had not yet felt the benefit of improvements the council and health partners were trying to embed. The Cabinet member for Education and SEND apologised at the meeting for this. It was noted that some issues, like the shortage of speech and language therapists, were a national issue rather than specific to Suffolk. The council is also working closely with the Department for Education and in partnership with Bedford Borough Council on best practice and support with strategy. The government's Schools white paper, which is expected to include an overhaul of the SEND system nationally, is expected soon in 2026. Members of the committee included education professionals and parents of children with special educational needs who expressed their concern that the council was still not providing a good enough service to Suffolk families.

Suffolk has been awarded £27m of funding for bus services from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG). This can be used for routes, ticketing or improving infrastructure like bus stops and shelters. Previously known as the Bus Services Improvement Grant, communities in Suffolk will be able to suggest improvements in their area.

The council has also been awarded just over £12m from Active Travel England to promote sustainable travel in the county. This can be used to invest in footpaths, cycle lanes and other infrastructure. Cllr Chris Chambers, the Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy at the council, said it was important for the council to develop a network of measures to encourage people out of the car wherever possible in order to reduce congestion and pollution.

At the end of November 2025, Suffolk County Council secured £1.38 million from the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Fund, which means Suffolk residents living in properties which are not energy efficient could be eligible for funding to make their homes warmer and reduce their energy bills. Residents and landlords are urged to apply quickly, as the funding must be allocated by the end of March 2026. In addition, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk council have teamed up to provide Winter Warmth Packs to help vulnerable residents stay warm and healthy at home even if they are struggling with rising living costs.

Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service are holding workshops at fire stations around the county to advise older people on how they can stay safe while driving. Nationally, one in four car drivers killed on the roads last year were aged 70 or over, and as a rural county, many residents are reliant on cars to stay independent.

Cllr Mellen is gathering views of parish councils and residents on the postponement of SCC elections. WPC's view is that elections should not be postponed further.

Cllr Mellen is meeting with SCC Community Liaison Engineer to see what can be done to alleviate flooding in Mill Close.

Mr Hardiman asked if the road sign advising Mason's Lane is not a through route can be illuminated as it is still being used as a rat run. This has been looked into before and it was a negative response.

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

There were none.

6. To approve the minutes of the meeting 2 December 2025

The minutes were approved and signed.

7. Planning

a) to consider current applications

25/05630 Erection of new garden room and shower room (following removal of existing conservatory). 12 Roman Fields – no comment.

b) to receive MSDC decisions.

25/04372 Erection of single storey rear extension, single storey front extension and car port; exterior alterations including cladding, render, new flat roof with solar panels and rooflights, new fenestration; erection of front boundary fencing. Meadowside Lodge Warren Lane – granted.

25/04496 Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/24/01506 - 7 (Sustainability Measures), 8 (External lighting), 9 (Foul Water Discharge), 11(Contamination) - Part 1 only, 12 (Cycle Storage) 14 (EV Charging) and 16 (Demolition and Construction Management Plan). Grassy Lane Farm, Grassy Lane, Woolpit – conditions 7 & 11 refused, conditions 8, 9, 12, 14, 16 satisfied.

8. Clerk's Report

The Street car park – MSDC has ordered the sign.

Locality funding - £1,500.00 received for an additional defibrillator at The Bull.

Road repairs outside the East of England Co-op – repairs have been booked in and County Cllr Mellen has requested plenty of notice so residents can be made aware.

Police pop-up event – a further event took place on 6 December.

Allotments – the bank account with Unity Trust bank has been opened. All Cllrs should have received details and were asked to set up as signatories.

Councillor Basic Training – SALC are happy to rebook for Miss Tomlinson.

Masons Lane drain – the gully cover is stuck/rusted and will be replaced then SCC will clear the drains to try and alleviate the flooding.

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

East Anglian Air Ambulance would like to have an article in Woolpit Diary. It was agreed they could have one page free of charge. Copy of letter from resident to District Cllr Overett regarding advertising on the fence near the new roundabout and design of properties that Tilia Homes are building. **The following items were circulated to Cllrs: Rural Services Network** weekly newsletter 3, 10, 17 December.

NALC Chief Executive newsletter 4, 11, 18 December, letter from NALC Chair.

SALC news bulletin 8, 15 December, training bulletin 9, 16 December, Local Reorganisation & devolution update. **MSDC** Suffolk & Norfolk mayoral elections delayed, Have your say on LGR before 11 January, NSIPs and large scale energy developments update January 2026, Norwich to Tilbury examination – Town & Country Planning Association webinars, Town & Parish update January. **SCC** delay to Suffolk & Norfolk mayoral elections, One Suffolk bringing care, health and housing together, LGPS draft Triennial valuation results, safeguarding leaders back One Suffolk. **CAS** fully funded training opportunities for B&MSVCFSE groups, introduction to community led housing Zoom events 2 February, CAS Insurance Services Limited is new name for Business Services at CAS. **MARPA** winter 2025 newsletter. **SARS & Mid Suffolk CAB** thanks for donation. **Resident** thanks for arranging Salvation Army carol event.

10. Finance

a) To receive a monthly report from the Clerk.

The balance of the current account at the end of December was £32,066.36 and the balance of the savings account was £609,844.96 including £3,342.41 quarterly

interest. With £5,158.17 VAT reclaimable for the year to date, the overall figure is £647,189.49 of which CIL £473,716.98 (£370,364.52 is allocated), earmarked reserves £70,308.60, general reserve £37,000.00 and general funds £66,163.91.

b) To approve accounts for payment.

Payments of £50.00 to the Salvation Army as a donation for the Carols evening and £21.74 to Anglian Water (Business) for allotment water September-December were ratified. Mr Gardiner £567.00 Highways Ranger December, Mrs Fuller £1,305.96 December salary, Suffolk County Council £421.48 pension payment December, HM Revenue & Customs £1,959.32 Tax and N/I October-December, Mill Road History Society £30.00 six bottles of Mulled wine, Mr Hardiman £61.99 reimbursement for mince pies, mulled wine and plastic glasses for Christmas Carols evening, Top Garden Services £735.95 grass cutting September-November, SLCC £200.00 annual subscription 2026, Mrs Fuller £128.39 reimbursement of expenses October-December. All payments were approved and authorised for payment. £2,537.32 was transferred to the Allotment for the Labouring Poor Woolpit bank account and will now be run separately to the parish council accounts.

c) To consider the budget, set the precept for 2026/27 and take any necessary action.

Cllrs were presented with actual WPC costs for 2025/26 and current reserves along with predicted costs for 2026/27. After discussion it was proposed and seconded to set the precept at an unchanged £70,000.00. This was unanimously approved. This will mean a decrease of 2.94% in a household contribution due to the additional properties that have been built and occupied in the village this year.

11. To consider increasing the Clerk's contracted hours to 22 per week and take any necessary action.

The Clerk has regularly worked 22 hours per week for the last nine months. It was agreed to increase her contracted hours from 20 to 22 per week from 1 January 2026.

12. To consider increasing advertising rates for Woolpit Diary and take any necessary action.

The Clerk advised that the advertising revenue was no longer covering the cost of printing without the added cost of editing. There has not been a price rise since before Covid and probably several years before that. It was agreed to increase the rate to £66.00 per annum.

13. To consider grant request from Communities Together East Anglia and St Elizabeth Hospice and take any necessary action.

After consideration, it was proposed, seconded and carried that no donations would be made to these charities.

14. To consider the revisions by MSDC Neighbourhood Plan Officer to the Woolpit Neighbourhood Plan addendum and take any necessary action.

Apart from a couple of minor grammatical changes, Cllrs accepted the revisions. The Clerk was asked to thank the NP Officer for the work involved. *Action: the Clerk*

15. To consider a succession plan for the Clerk and take any necessary action.
Carried forward to the February meeting.

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

Mr Guyler has been contacted by someone interested in becoming a councillor and he has provided them with information and is due to have a conversation with them shortly.

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

The Clerk has requested a correct map for the area to be re-aligned by the footpath near the tennis courts. The Clerk will review the emails received from SCC regarding ownership of the fence and responsibility for the paths and verge areas and prepare a summary for Cllrs to consider at the February meeting. *Action: the Clerk*

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

Awaiting a meeting with youth leaders from The Mix.

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

The January progress meeting has been cancelled. The Clerk will email County Cllr Mellen (copy Teresa Davis, MSDC lead for Thriving Communities and District Cllr Overett) requesting that some of the grant of £12m from Active Travel England which seems to have largely been used to fund projects in East Suffolk towns be used to complete the overdue cyclepath between Elmswell and Woolpit which needs more funding . *Action: the Clerk*

20. 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 Bury Road SID has been redeployed to Green Road. The Briar Hill SID will be turned the other way for the time being.

b) to receive an update on 20 mph zone

No update received. The Clerk will request an update for the February meeting.

21. Completed training details for December 2025. There was none.

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

District Cllr Overett advised that a resident has questioned if Tilia Homes were building properties with a variety of appearances as per the planning consent. MSDC Officer have checked and Tilia are complying with the detailed approval. The resident was also concerned about the amount of advertising on the fencing at the roundabout. A considerable amount has been removed since Christmas and she will contact the residents about this.

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

Three half plots had been returned at renewal which have all be re-let. The Clerk advised that this was the last time allotments would be on the WPC agenda as the Allotment Charity will have its own meetings. Mrs Ewans will be thanked for her work in getting the status of the allotments sorted. *Action: the Clerk*

24. To receive a report from Woolpit Parish Council's Village Hall Committee representative. No report received.

25. Date and time of the next meeting – Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 7.00 p.m.

Noted.

The meeting closed at 8.42 p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....