

MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
3 FEBRUARY 2026 AT 7.00 P.M. IN WOOLPIT INSTITUTE

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

In attendance: District Cllrs Mansel and Overett, Mrs Fuller, Clerk and 3 members of the public.

1. Apologies for absence there were none.

2. Co-option of a Councillor/Councillors. There were none.

3. Public comment: Mr Hardiman advised that the new sectioned bin outside the Co-op has been installed but the public are not putting rubbish in the correct sections although they are well marked. Mr Hardiman will ask the Co-op if they would like us to put something in the Diary.

Mrs Osborne-Lomax reported that she had encountered a truck and a car exiting the EG garage at the entrance almost causing an accident. She was advised to report this to the police so they can keep a record of near misses.

Dr Geake has attended the Quieter Way Onehouse-Woolpit presentation and Walk Wheel Cycle Trust were horrified that Heath Road was a lorry route.

There are still many concerns from residents regarding a lack of a pedestrian crossing near the double roundabouts.

The beavers reintroduced in Norton have escaped and two are still missing.

4. County & District Councillors reports.

County Councillor's report: At an extraordinary council meeting on 12 January, a debate was held about the resource implications of an election in May on the delivery of Local Government Reorganization in Suffolk. The administration unanimously voted down an amendment that the council was in favour of the elections going ahead, although some councillors spoke passionately about the importance of Suffolk voters getting to have their say. A Cabinet meeting was held following the council debate, where the administration voted unanimously to write to the government outlining capacity concerns that might be felt if elections were to go ahead. On 22 January, the government announced that the elections in Suffolk, and in 28 other councils around the country, would not take place in May this year. The elections were postponed already in May 2025, so this second postponement means county councillors like myself will end up serving a seven-year term instead of four years. (As part of the Local Government Reorganization process, unitary councils are due to be in place in the county from April 2028).

At Cabinet on 27 January, the budget for the 2026-27 financial year was presented for approval. The council is planning to raise council tax by the maximum 4.99% this year, reflecting the serious financial concerns it is facing. The budget for 2026-27 is forecast to overspend by £5.9m and the council will need to draw that from its reserves to balance the books. It is also planning savings of £46.5m across the council to make ends meet, and is predicting a budget 'gap' of £23.4m for 2027-28 and £24.6m by 2028-29 which it will need to fund by savings. Cost pressures for the council include care purchasing in adult social care, high-cost social care placements for children and young people and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Regarding SEND, the council holds a 'negative reserve', a debt of education funding under the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) that the government allows it to hold until 31 March 2028. This is a national issue rather than just relating to Suffolk County Council, but the council will not be able to repay it if the government calls it in: by the end of 2026-27 it is forecast to be -£252.3m. Although the council is allowed to hold the debt, it is spending millions on interest costs to service the debt, by 2027-28 the cost of that will be £8.9m. There are also concerns about the amount of money

the Local Government Reorganisation will cost the council. This is currently estimated as £47.8m overall, but will be divided between all Suffolk councils. Also coming to Cabinet on 27 January was the annual report on the council's efforts to reach net zero carbon by 2030. In view of the Local Government Reorganisation and Suffolk County Council not existing past 2028, the target has been adjusted to a 63% reduction in emissions by 2027-28 and will only include scopes of emissions that the council is in direct control of – that is, excluding things like its supply chain, or staff commuting to work. In addition, to reflect the financial position of the council, any measures taken by the council towards this will now have to create an in-year financial saving: this means that the financial benefit from it must be greater than the cost. The work undertaken so far for the net zero programme has saved the council many thousands of pounds. For example, changes to the heating controls in Endeavour House should reduce energy costs by £30k each year, and a new car park solar array and battery storage at Beacon House is expected to save more than £50k a year. The council is also involved in a heat network project in Ipswich to heat large buildings by drawing heat from the River Gipping.

The government recently released RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings each county based on how effectively they use the government's highways maintenance funding. Suffolk's road maintenance was rated as Red, the worst category. This has struck a chord with residents in the county, who have been clear that they agree and want the quality of Suffolk's roads to improve. Suffolk County Council's administration, however, has denied that the rating is accurate, saying that overall the condition of Suffolk's roads are rated Amber, with the overall Red rating being arrived at because the Department for Transport did not include in its assessment £10m of highways funding that it brought forward from the 2025-26 financial year and invested early in a resurfacing programme in 2024-25. The council has met with the Department for Transport to press for the Suffolk rating to be raised to Amber, pointing out that Department for Transport data shows that only 3% of the county's A roads is in poor condition, which is better than the England average. In addition, in December the council received £2.9m from the Department for Transport's Incentive Fund, which rewards authorities with a record of good performance in highway maintenance.

At Cabinet on 9 January, a new 20mph speed limit policy was approved with the aim of making the process for communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit easier and more streamlined. From now on, any application for a new 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph and under is likely to be approved by the council. The local county councillor must also be in favour of the change, and there should be majority support from residents. My group pointed out that the new requirement to prove majority support for the new speed limit was likely to make the process *more* onerous for town and parish councils rather than less. The council states that local engagement needs to be carried in the community, for example a survey or consultation of residents living on the roads/in the area. Any new 20mph limits will also still need local funding to be in place, unless the scheme aligns with a council programme as part of the Local Transport Plan.

District Councillors' report: The County Council elections planned for May 2026 have been cancelled and we can assume there will never be any further County Council elections. So as predicted we have ended up in a position where the biggest change in local government in a generation will all be implemented with virtually no public involvement and with all elections over the period cancelled.

Mid Suffolk Councillors unanimously agreed to support Ipswich becoming the City of Culture in 2029. The status is a competition run by the Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) every four years, with a £ 10 million prize. The government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport will then longlist up to eight bids, awarding each a grant of £60,000 to support them with developing and strengthening their full application over a three-to-four-month period from February until May/June 2026.

The New Community Nature recovery grants were launched earlier this month. Community groups are able to apply for grants up to £50,000 for projects such as expanding wildlife corridors, tree planting, creating wildflower meadow and other environmental initiatives to safeguard natural spaces for future generations. A leaflet explaining the changes to waste collection has been delivered to all homes in Mid Suffolk. More items such as tetra-pak, plastic bags and film will be able to be recycled and there will be a weekly food waste collection too. Residents will begin to receive their new bins over the coming months ready for the new collections to start in June 2026.

We were delighted to award all the funds in our locality budget 2025/26. The following projects in Woolpit were supported: new dance flooring in Woolpit Institute, stage lighting for Woolpit Village Hall, radio microphones for Woolpit Drama Club, defibrillator for the centre of Woolpit, new cooker for Woolpit Cricket Club, updates for CCTV and Wi-Fi at Woolpit Village Hall. The 2026-27 locality funding budget will be launched in the spring.

Monthly drop-in sessions are 10-12 Thursday 12 February at Green Wolf Café, Woolpit, Tuesday 31 March and 28 April at the Wesley Café, Elmswell.

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

There were none.

6. To approve the minutes of the meeting 6 January 2026.

Folio 1252 item 3 the induction of the new Rector is 23 February and not January. With this amendment the minutes were approved and signed.

7. Planning

a) to consider current applications

There were none.

b) to receive MSDC decisions.

25/05143 Erection of single storey extension and loft conversion, 4 Rathland Close – granted.

26/00214 Discharge of Conditions appl. 23/05350 Condition 11 (hydrants), land South of Melvin Way – satisfied.

25/05149 Appl to discharge Sect 106 obligation relating to 19/02656 Sect 3.1 (open space scheme), land South of Old Stowmarket Road – Public Realm agreed to discharge obligation.

26/00333 Discharge of Conditions appl. 25/04372 Condition 6 (air source heating pump) and Condition 9 (construction method statement), Meadowside Lodge, Warren Lane – approved.

8. Clerk's Report

Changes to recycling credit payments – due to recycling changes in June 2026, to help with the transition Suffolk Waste Partnership have agreed to fund payments for two further years covering 2026/7 and 2027/8 of £1,945.00 as a final payment in April 2026.

Car park sign – MSDC has installed car park sign in the car park opposite the church.

Slide on playing field – the damaged panel has been replaced and awaiting invoice.

Antisocial behaviour – issues have occurred again outside the village hall. The Police have been asked to patrol at the appropriate time.

Neighbourhood Plan addendum 2026 – revised version is with MSDC for publication.

Tree cutting from near powerlines – BTS will be trimming trees around powerlines in Rectory Lane and the car park beside the tennis courts.

Section 137 expenditure – the rate for 2026/27 is £11.60 per elector, up from £11.10 for 2025/26.

Clerk holiday – the Clerk will be on leave 2 June and it was agreed to bring forward the meeting scheduled for that date to 26 May.

EV points – Suffolk Plugin has advised that due to the lease complications they are no longer considering installing EV points in the village hall car park and will concentrate on the car parks opposite the church and behind the Health Centre. District Cllr Overett advised she is still chasing for the EV's, flooding issues and landscaping at the car park behind the Health Centre.

Repairs to the swings – the metal feet will be fitted in the next two weeks.

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

The following items have been circulated to Cllrs: SALC LGR-County Council elections, news bulletin 12, 22, 26 January, 2 February, training bulletin 13, 27 January, 3 February, new code of conduct factsheet series, Sect 137 expenditure 2026/7. NALC CEO bulletin 15 and 22 January. **Rural Services Network** weekly newsletter 7, 14, 21, 28 January. **MSDC** Community energy event 21 January, important information regarding changes to recycling credit, Babergh & Mid Suffolk charities and voluntary groups free training at CAS, NSIP and large scale energy updates February, Town & Parish update February, Norwich to Tilbury NSIP-drop in surgery 5 February. **SCC** Onesuffolk what happens next. **Suffolk Police** Have your say–Suffolk PCC asks for views on precept proposal. **CAS** introduction to rural and community housing 3 February. **Walk Wheel Cycle Trust** Onehouse to Woolpit engagement events 3 & 4 February. **Suffolkonboard** Suffolk Taxi Bus Stowmarket circular cancelled from 13 January due to low passenger numbers. **Able Community Care** 'Do not Knock' stickers for older people.

10. Finance

a) To receive a monthly report from the Clerk.

The balance of the current account at the end of January was £15,689.65 and the balance of the savings account was £594,844.96. With £5,288.66 VAT reclaimable for the year to date, the overall figure is £615,823.27 of which CIL £450,366.98 (£347,014.52 is allocated), earmarked reserves £67,771.28, general reserve £37,000.00 and general funds £60,685.01.

b) To approve accounts for payment.

The payment under CIL to Woolpit Cricket Club of £23,350.00 as a grant for clubhouse alterations was ratified. Mr Gardiner £422.10 Highways Ranger salary January, Mrs P Fuller £1,007.66 Clerk salary January, Suffolk County Council £463.63 January pension payment, Gipping Press £391.00 printing February/March Diary, Mr Raisey £132.10 editing February/Mary Woolpit Diary, Woolpit Nurseries £245.00 Christmas tree and filling planters. All payments were approved and authorised. Payments by Direct Debit BT £214.31 quarterly bill and e-on Next £89.17 pump area quarterly bill.

11. To consider a request that Woolpit PC match funds the Locality grant received for replacement CCTV and Wi Fi at the village hall and take any necessary action. In addition, consider a request that the hedging on the playing field is cut back for optimum CCTV coverage.

£2500.00 Locality funding has been received. Three quotes have been obtained and the preferred quote is from Flagship AV for £3,468.44 for CCTV and £1,745.31 for WI-Fi. Cllrs unanimously agreed a grant of £2607.00. *Action: the Clerk*

The hedge by the Cathie Prior room needs to be reduced in height for optimum CCTV cover. Mr Hardiman advised this is part of Top Garden Services contract and the Clerk was asked to contact them to cut the hedge to 1.8 m. *Action: the Clerk*

12. To consider grant request from East Anglian Air Ambulance and St Nicholas Hospice hospice and take any necessary action.

After discussion it was unanimously agreed to award grants of £250.00 to both organisations. *Action: the Clerk*

13. To consider a request that street name signage be changed at Hay Barn Meadow to show it is a cul-de-sac and take any necessary action.

A resident has requested this as cars are going into Hay Barn Meadow to get to the new development. Cllrs feel that this is temporary and agreed to wait until the spine road is fully opened to see if this resolves the issue.

14. To consider the purchase of a new trolley for the Highways Ranger and take any necessary action.

The current trolley is falling to bits. The Highways Ranger would like something smaller and with puncture proof tyres. It was agreed to purchase this from Wheel Barrows UK at a cost of £135.95 including VAT.

Action: the Clerk

15. To consider a request to pay for the hire of the Village Hall for a youth outreach event 20 February 2026 and take any necessary action.

The Mix are hiring the village hall on 20 February for activities and engagement with the youth of the village. The hire fee will be £135.00 and the Village Hall Committee has asked if the Parish Council will fund this. District Cllr Overett advised that The Mix has received funding for such events and she had been told there will be no cost to the village. Mrs Osborne-Lomax will ask The Mix to use their funding to pay for the hall hire. WPC will pay the fee if The Mix cannot fund it.

16. To consider a celebration event for the reinstatement of the village sign and take any necessary action.

It was agreed to hold a ribbon cutting on Saturday morning after the sign is reinstated. Paul Diaper will be asked to cut the ribbon as his father designed the sign.

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

The Clerk has asked Mrs Ewans to help with this and hopes to have something available at the March meeting.

Action: the Clerk

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

Mrs Osborne-Lomax will attend an 'Encouraging youth to be Councillors' course. It was agreed to hold a drop-in event at a weekend, date to be agreed and a councillor will attend one of the District Councillors' monthly drop-in sessions.

19. To receive an update regarding the transfer of amenity land from Hopkins Homes to Woolpit Parish Council including

a) current position regarding the plan to divert the cyclepath/footpath

A revised map has not been received from Hopkins Homes for the alteration to the cyclepath/footpath by the burial ground to the car park by the tennis courts. The Clerk advised that SCC has confirmed the fence and cyclepath/footways by the roundabout will be in its ownership and will be maintained by SCC.

WPC is not willing to take on the area of amenity land without the dead trees and shrubs being replaced by Hopkins Homes. District Cllr Overett advised that if this is not carried out it can be raised as an enforcement issue.

The Clerk will advise our solicitors of the delay to the land transfer. *Action: the Clerk*

b) receive a report from the working group regarding a request that part is leased to Woolpit Cricket Club and Sport Sporting 87 to develop amenity land beside the Cricket Club into high quality football pitches and parking facilities and take any necessary

The working group of Cllrs Guyler, Geake, Tomlinson and Hardiman met on 22 January. On balance there are more advantages to leasing the area but a further meeting needs to be arranged with Woolpit Cricket Club and Sporting 87 to answer additional questions. The working group hopes to have a recommendation for Council at the March meeting.

c)to consider a request that an area of the proposed burial ground site which is unusable for burials be sold to adjacent properties and take any necessary.

As WPC is unable to say when we will take ownership of the land, councillors cannot consider the request at this time. *Action: the Clerk*

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

The Clerk was asked to request the date of the next meeting from SCC. It is noted that there has been a change of personnel at SCC. *Action: the Clerk*

21. 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

Green Road SID is now working. The SID in Heath Road is not working due to the lack of sunlight and the battery will be changed.

b)to receive an update on 20 mph zone including to approve the cost of construction of the scheme

SCC has confirmed it is in a position to raise a construction order for the implementation of a 20mph zone on various roads within the centre of Woolpit, including The Street and the cost of the work at £6,756.07 including VAT is slightly cheaper than initially estimated. Cllrs unanimously approved the cost and the Clerk will advise that WPC is happy to proceed. *Action: the Clerk*

22. Completed training details for January 2026.

The Clerk has attended a SALC workshop on Assertion 10.

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

Complaints of litter, cement bags in drains and ditches have been reported to the site manager and this was cleared within 24 hours.

Hopkins Homes will be asked to cover the sign to Ipswich by the spine road roundabout on Bury Road and will be asked to reinstate the no through road sign near the A14 junction until the spine road is fully opened.

Action: the Clerk

Landscaping between Clear View and the site should have been place last autumn but has not been carried out. District Cllr Overett will contact Tilia Homes.

24. To receive a report from Greener Woolpit Group on the Warren Lane project.

A public meeting held on 21 January was not very well attended, although the group gained one new volunteer from the village. Richard Parmee MSDC Biodiversity Officer attended. Julia Ewans put together a PowerPoint presentation of the recent progress of the pond, hedge and tree planting with before and after photos. There was particular emphasis on the continuing battle with Ragwort. The long dry summer of 2025 may not have been kind to small trees. It is too early to tell if anything has survived.

Work for this year was discussed and the meeting agreed to ask contractors for quotes for cutting back last year's growth and seeding with grass and wild flowers. Richard Parmee mentioned a new 'community' grant from MSDC and Mrs Ewans undertook to look into the grant and contact contractors for quotes. So far one contractor has looked at the land. He can flail it for £240 plus VAT. He has not yet quoted for harrowing and seeding. He advised that it would be best to weed kill but this is unlikely to find favour.

25. To receive a report from Woolpit Parish Council’s Village Hall Committee representative and Trustees including a business plan and a report on the drainage at the village hall.

The new committee has audited the booking system and has changed the pricing and structure. At the AGM in October 2025, it was projected that the VH would have a £3k loss at year end 31 January 2026. However, with expenditure of £28,854.71 and income of £31,294.13, this has been turned around to a profit of £2,439.22.

The Trustees have produced a Business Plan and Financial Business Model. LED lighting has been installed in the Cathie Prior Room and lighting in the disabled toilet has been upgraded.

The AGM will be held on 27 March 2026 at 7.00 p.m.

Dr Geake congratulated the Trustees on their hard work and turning things around in such a short time.

There are issues with the drainage. Originally there were four soakaways, with three being replaced when the extension was built but none have been maintained for the last twenty years. The Trustees wish to have a survey of the drainage as there are tree roots in the downpipe and will get quotes before submitting a CIL application.

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

Noted.

The meeting closed at 9.16 p.m.

Signed.....Approved.....

Dated.....3 March 2026.....