

STOWLANGTOFT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

**MONDAY 20 JANUARY 2025 AT 7.30PM
THE COMMON ROOM, St GEORGES Rd**

Present: Cllrs Suggett (Chair), Bourne and Cuff. A Osman (Clerk) was also in attendance along with County Cllr Mellen, District Cllr Richardson and a member of the public.

76 **Apologies for absence.** Cllrs D'Lima, Catchpole and Marsh sent apologies which were accepted.

77 **Declarations of Interest.** None.

78 **Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2024.** Cllr Bourne proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2024 be approved. Cllr Cuff seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

79 **Matters arising from the last meeting:**

Minute 66: 18 November 2024: Churchyard Grass Cutting/Clearing. Cllr Cuff confirmed that he had spoken to the Community Caretaker who had agreed to do the work for £225 and discussions were ongoing as to when the work would be completed.

Minute 68: 18 November 2024: Future Parish Council Meeting Venue. **Cllr Catchpole was still to advise on Parish Council meeting room options within the Stowlangtoft Estate.**

Minute 73: 18 November 2024: Remembrance Statues. Cllr Cuff reported that the Remembrance Statues were now stored in the Church.

Minute 73: 18 November 2024: Parish Council Storage. The Clerk confirmed that the PCC had given permission for Parish Council owned tables and chairs to be stored in the Church. **Cllr Cuff and the Clerk agreed to move these after the March Parish Council meeting.**

Minute 73: 18 November 2024: Events Sign. Cllr Cuff reported that discussions were ongoing within the PCC over an events sign.

80 **County Councillor Report.** The meeting noted the contents of the County Councillor's report that had been previously circulated. County Cllr Mellen provided the following additional updates:

A1088 Bridge. Works were due to finish by the end of February. A site visit on 21 January 2025 will be attended by Cllr Cuff and the Clerk on behalf of the Parish Council. The opportunity will be taken during the site visit discuss ongoing request for Quiet Lane status and retention of 30mph speed limit on Kiln Lane with County Council Cabinet Member for Highways. The meeting noted ongoing discussions between landowners and Suffolk County Council over recent upstream flooding.

40mph Speed Limit. The meeting agreed to support the principle of retaining the current temporary 40mph speed limit between the village and Hunston but wished to gauge future traffic flows once the bridge had reopened before a final decision on support was taken. No funding for this aspiration was agreed.

81 **District Councillors Report.** The meeting noted the contents of the District Councillor's reports that had been previously circulated.

82 **St Georges Church:**

Windows. Cllr Cuff stated that grant funding had been secured, and the damaged stain glass windows would be repaired shortly.

Porch. Cllr Cuff reported that the PCC had agreed to leave the Church Porch open

83 **Admin and Finance:**

Finance Report. The meeting noted the financial report (current bank balance of £4,626.70, projected outturn at the end of the FY of £1,800 current account(excluding £1976.58 ringfenced CIL funding) and £1,500 savings account), circulated before the meeting. Payments authorised:

Newsletters	£81.00
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The Chair agreed to authorise payments.

Precept for FY25/26. The meeting agreed a precept for FY25/26 of £3,850 based upon the budget previously agreed at the November 2024 meeting.

Dog Waste Bin. The Clerk reported that Mid Suffolk District Council had now agreed to the location of the new bin (on the corner of Church View) and for this to be collected weekly. The meeting accepted the £57 charge for this collection and authorised the **Clerk to proceed with purchase** within the £200 plus VAT allocation, also previously agreed. **Cllr Cuff agreed to take receipt of the new bin** and to liaise with other councillors to install.

84 **Planning Matters.** None.

85 **Highways Matters.** The Clerk reported that discussions with the County Council on Quiet Lane status and retaining the 30mph speed limit for Kiln Lane were ongoing. The Quiet Lane project was currently in limbo awaiting the County Council to revise their costing offer to match with the available locality funding and Stowlangtoft Estate contribution (total £4,000). It was noted that if this was not resolved by February, then it was likely that the locality funding offers would be withdrawn and work on the scheme would stop. The request to retain the temporary 30mph limit was currently waiting for an exemption decision by Suffolk County Council as the road does not meet the policy criteria for this speed limit.

86 **Correspondence.** The meeting discussed a previously circulated notice from BT to decommission the payphone kiosk on St Georges Rd. It was noted that the proposal met the Ofcom criteria, in particular improved mobile signal and limited number of calls made. The Clerk indicated that a note of concern passed to the Chair before the meeting about the proposal had been passed to Mid Suffolk District Council as the relevant local authority for further investigation. Considering the availability of the payphone in the future and previous discussions within the Parish Council on provision of a defibrillator, the meeting then discussed a quote from Community Heartbeat that was handed out at the meeting for the supply of a locked defibrillator to be placed in the payphone box. It was noted that:

- BT will transfer ownership of the box to the Parish Council for £1 and will commit to supply power to defibrillator kiosks for a period of 7 years.

- Community Heartbeat can supply a defibrillator, lockable case and signs for the kiosk for £1680 (ex VAT). Pads would need to be placed every 2 years for £58 and the battery every 4 years for £210.
- The ringfenced CIL funding can be used to purchase a defibrillator.

It was agreed that the Clerk would:

- Apply to BT to adopt the kiosk for the purpose of a defibrillator location.
- While the adoption process was ongoing, confirm electrical connections required and obtain a quote from a local electrician to complete the installation
- Once the adoption was agreed, purchase the defibrillator from Community Heartbeat based upon costings above.
- Note potential costs to maintain the defibrillator as part of future years budget setting.

87 **Councillors’ Forum.** None

88 **Public Forum.** None

89 **Date of next meeting:** The next meeting will be held on Monday 17 March 2025 at 7.30pm The Common Room, St George’s Rd.

If any planning applications or urgent actions are identified after the November meeting, these will be considered at a short meeting on Monday 17 February 2025 at 7.30 pm.

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm.

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Chair

Parish Report – January 2025

Councillor

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Motions Passed at Council

At Council on Thursday 12 December, three motions were passed more or less unanimously by councillors. The first was a Conservative motion opposing government's changes to Agricultural Property Relief, which mean that from April 2026, Suffolk farmers will only have relief from inheritance tax for up to £1m of combined agricultural and business property. Above this £1m, they will have to pay inheritance tax at half the usual level (20% rather than the usual 40%). The change has inspired protests since it was announced by the government, including farmers driving hundreds of tractors into Westminster and in Suffolk, along the A14 from Ipswich to Felixstowe at 5mph. The Conservative motion also opposed industrialization of the countryside by major energy projects, including solar farms.

The motion brought by my group also related to solar farms, specifically the need to prioritise rooftop solar over solar farms and lobby for changes to planning so that new housing and commercial developments have solar panels, and priority is given to retrofitting solar to buildings or brownfield sites over new solar farms which take good quality farmland out of food production. For example, in France solar panels are often mounted on canopies above car parks to maximise space. As well as contributing to the country's net zero targets, solar panels could significantly reduce energy bills for Suffolk schools and libraries.

The final motion was tabled by the Conservatives on knife crime and proposed that a knife crime action plan for Ipswich be discussed at the next meeting of the Safer, Stronger Communities Board in March 2025.

Suffolk Economic Strategy

At Cabinet on Tuesday 3 December, a new economic strategy was tabled which followed the creation of the Suffolk Business Board earlier in 2024. The Board produced a strategy for the county for the next five years, listing the areas which are most important to the Suffolk economy, including clean energy, agriculture, tourism, and ports and logistics. It also outlined how the Board hopes that digital innovation, AI and robotics can help drive improvements and growth in these areas, along with plans to support start ups, provide business mentoring and skills projects with young people. My group asked questions about the impact of Sizewell C on the tourism industry, and the competition for workers where Sizewell was offering wages that local hospitality businesses, for example, would be unable to match. We also expressed concern that the strategy barely mentioned arts, heritage and culture, and that no arts or cultural organizations were represented on the Board. The plan was approved by the council's Cabinet, and the Suffolk Business Board will now finalise how it plans to deliver the strategy and will report back to Cabinet every year on their progress.

Children's Services Improvement Plans

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met on 5 December to review the plan for improvement following the Ofsted inspection of the council's children's social care provision earlier in the year. The Ofsted report was published in August 2024 and the council learned it had dropped two grades, from being rated Outstanding in 2019 its current grade of Requires Improvement. The council had to produce an action plan for improvement which it has submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The Cabinet member for children's services and officers from the department attended the committee meeting to outline the actions they have taken so far, including recruitment of extra staff members to drive improvement,

and arranging peer reviews with other councils. There will also be a new Strengthening Services for Children and Families Board, which will be chaired by the council's Chief Executive, Nicola Beach. The council particularly needs to improve services for care leavers and consistency of practice and quality assurance - this means reviewing interactions with children and families to make sure the council is doing the best it can to help them. This work is separate to the council's improvement work for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which is subject to a separate inspection process by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Devolution and Council Reorganization

Following the new government's shelving of the previous devolution 'county deal' for Suffolk, the Government published a white paper just before Christmas, outlining the approach they wish to see in reforming local government, including the abolition of district councils. (it can be accessed here: [English Devolution White Paper](#)) This sets out the government's plans for a massive shake-up in local government, including the formation of mayoral authorities across the whole country, and also a change to the two-tier local government structure, replacing this with unitary councils. This is a very big change, but the government is ambitious and wants to work at pace. This would be the biggest local government reform since 1972, when the two-tier (three including parish councils) local governance structure was introduced.

While there are obvious benefits to having a 'one stop shop' for all things local government, if this is to be introduced without losing the 'local' from local government the minimum resident number needs to be more flexible. With the recommended figure in the white paper being a minimum 500,000 residents per council, this potentially means only one council for the whole of Suffolk (760,000 residents) would fit this requirement.

Suffolk and Norfolk could potentially go into a 'priority programme' as one of the early areas to seek change, though there are differing views between the various councils involved. Both Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils are holding extraordinary council meetings on Thursday 9th January so that they can make decisions ahead of the government's deadline of Friday 10th. This is a fast-moving situation and I can provide verbal updates when I attend parish council meetings.

Whilst I am open to discussion about change, and welcome devolution of powers from central government, I am very concerned that these changes will reduce democratic accountability and local decision making.

District Councillor Report:

December 2024

Council meeting	There was no scheduled council meeting in December. The next meeting will be held on 23 rd January 2025.
Budget updates	Proposals for the General Fund budget were approved in this month's second cabinet meeting, and discussed later on in the Overview & Scrutiny committee on the 19 th December. This shows the council's finances to be surplus, unusual for District councils, in part due to expanded housing developments and income generated from Gateway 14, with these surplus funds being used to proceed with the Mid Suffolk Plan. Key figures include an increase of £1.689m in net revenue service expenditure, a £2.660m increase in gross expenditure, no increase in council tax from 2024/25, and a capital budget of £29.986m in 2025/26.
CIL Expenditure updates	New updates regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy programme were discussed in the first cabinet meeting of this month. This includes approval of half a million pounds of investment into the Stowmarket Health Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF), and £188k of funding for Thurston Community College.
Devolution White Paper	The White Paper regarding devolution has now been published, which despite not mentioning Suffolk directly, it strongly suggests at a change to the two-tier local government structure. This could potentially suggest a large Unitary Authority covering all of Suffolk, abolishing the district councils altogether. The paper also includes the use of introducing a "Strategic Authority", which is likely to include a Mayor for both Suffolk & Norfolk.
National Planning Policy Framework	Changes have been made to the National Planning Policy Framework to assist with the government's housebuilding plans. This includes mandatory housebuilding targets for councils, with a priority on brownfield sites. The new plans have sparked both praise and backlash, with concerns over the role of individual councils. Mid Suffolk's portfolio holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure Cllr Andrew Stringer has commented on the new proposals. Statement in response to Government's National Planning Policy Framework announcement - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk
Additional Information	

District Councillor Report – Harry Richardson

3rd January 2025

<p>Local government reform</p>	<p>Following the publication of the government’s devolution white paper in December, Suffolk County Council are now meeting on Thursday 9th January to decide whether to submit an expression of interest to join the government’s ‘Devolution Priority Programme’. The Conservative Group, who hold a majority on the Council, are supportive of this position and so this is likely to go ahead.</p> <p>The submission deadline is Friday 10th January, and the government is expected to make a decision in mid-February on whether to approve applications for the priority programme. Those that are approved will see County Council elections postponed from May 2025, with elections to the new unitary authorities in May 2026.</p> <p>For Suffolk, there are three main options being considered, in descending order of likelihood: a single, Suffolk-wide authority; two Suffolk-wide authorities (East and West); and one urban authority concentrated in and around Ipswich, with another covering the remainder of the county.</p> <p>The third is the least likely to materialise as Ipswich’s wider population, i.e. including Kesgrave, is smaller (~circa 180k) than the government’s intended minimum of 500k for a unitary authority. For context, the total population of Suffolk is approximately 768k as of the 2021 census, so either of the first two options are plausible.</p> <p>In either scenario, and if the plans do proceed, then Mid Suffolk District Council would be abolished in May 2026 and its statutory responsibilities transferred to the new unitary authority.</p>
<p>Thurston station upgrades</p>	<p>At MSDC’s Cabinet meeting in December, Network Rail were awarded £6k to progress the steps of the Thurston rail improvements and level crossing project. This will allow them to complete the pre-ES3 stage works, and to develop a cost and programme for the ES3 phase which will confirm the final option chosen of a suitable crossing at this Station.</p> <p>Although this is only a relatively small sum of money, it is a necessary part to progress to ES3 stage.</p>

Skills & Innovation Centre	<p>Planning permission has been granted for MSDC’s Skills and Innovation Centre at the Gateway 14 site in Stowmarket. This will be a three-storey, 35,000 sq. ft facility and will include office space for high growth start-ups, collaboration and innovation spaces, training and meeting rooms, and a café.</p> <p>Freeport East agreed £16.6m funding for the centre earlier this year, with Mid Suffolk District Council meeting the remaining cost of £2.4m.</p>
Suffolk Economic Strategy	<p>The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group, which includes Mid Suffolk District Council, has endorsed a Suffolk Economy Strategy.</p> <p>The strategy was developed by the Suffolk Business Board through extensive collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders and aims to build a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable economy that supports local communities and contributes to the national economy.</p> <p>It is also designed to leverage Suffolk’s strengths in clean energy, agri-food, and logistics, integrating these core sectors with emerging opportunities in technology and innovation. The hope is to establish Suffolk as an epicentre of clean technology convergence, supporting robust economic growth while ensuring that every resident can benefit.</p>

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