

FINNINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

*Minutes for the PARISH COUNCIL MEETING held on
Monday 16th March 2026 in St. Bartholomew's Church, Finningham, starting at 7:30pm*

Present: Cllr Charter, Cllr Davies, Cllr Trew, Cllr Pope

In attendance: Miss J. Challis (Clerk), Cllr Mellen, 1 member of the public

26.23 Chair's welcome and to consider and approve apologies for absence

Cllr Charter welcomed everyone to the meeting, and apologies received from Cllr Winter and Cllr Saunders were approved unanimously. Apologies received from Cllr Black for the meeting held on 9th February 2026 were also approved unanimously.

26.24 District and County Councillor Reports

Cllr Mellen's District and County reports, can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes.

26.25 Footpath Warden's Report

Mr Aiken sent his apologies in advance of the meeting, his report can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes.

26.26 Public Participation Session

The member of the public, Mr Kilbee former Chair of the Parish Council, asked if the speed limit on the B1113 entering the village from the A143 could be reviewed. This has been an agenda item previously, when it was agreed to discuss it with the local SCC Highways Officer. The site visit is yet to be held and will be requested again, prior to it being discussed further by the Council.

26.27 To receive any pecuniary or non-pecuniary declarations of interest on agenda items, and any Gifts of Hospitality

None.

26.28 To consider requests for dispensations on agenda items

None.

26.29 To approve minutes of the Parish Council meetings held on 9th February 2026

Approved unanimously with 2 abstentions (councillor who was not present at the meeting, and councillor who had not read the minutes).

26.30 Chairman's Report

Good evening everyone,

After two years serving as a Parish Councillor, and the past year as Chairman, I have decided that due to increasing work commitments I can no longer offer the time that the role deserves. The Parish Council benefits from a group of councillors who put in a great deal of effort, care and commitment for the community. I feel that the position should be held by someone who can give the same level of time and attention that the rest of the council consistently provides.

I would like to say how brilliant you all are and thank you for the work you continue to do for the parish. A special thank you must go to our Clerk, Jane, who puts in a huge amount of work behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly. Much of what she does often goes unseen, but it is absolutely vital.

It has been a privilege to serve with you all. Thank you for your support and friendship during my time on the council.

With that, I will be stepping down and leaving the Parish Council prior to the AGM in May.

Thank you.

26.31 Clerk's Report

- The precept request 2026/27 has been submitted and accepted. MSDC has confirmed it gives the Parish a Council Tax Band D amount of £51.25. This is an increase of 7.22% on 2025/26. These are the amounts that will be shown on the Council Tax Bill.
- The article for the next issue of the Friends of Finningham newsletter article has been written, and included a feedback request from residents on the current bus service in the village. So far one resident has responded. This will be an agenda item for the next meeting.
- The report on the felled birch tree in the churchyard has been received from the contractor. It can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes, and has been shared with the PCC.
- Email received from MSDC regarding Biodiversity; 'Since 2022, Mid Suffolk DC has been managing some areas of grass as meadows, letting the grass and native wildflowers grow to support wildlife, in particular pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. We call this approach meadow management. This involves altering the mowing regime, switching from regular monthly visits to an initial cut at the start of the season (March or April), then leaving the grass uncut until September or October, at which point the areas are cut and the material removed'. MSDC is asking for help in identifying areas within the village that could both be suitable and supported by those that live close to and use them. Full details sent to councillors.

26.32 NSIP and large-scale energy development update

The hearings for National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury development consent order application are continuing, full details can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN020027?lang=en/> EN0110019 EcoPower Suffolk Solar Project EIA Scoping Notification – no update yet.

7:55pm Cllr Mellen arrived.

Cllr Charter proposed returning to agenda item 2. Approved unanimously.

(26.24 District and County Councillor reports)

Cllr Mellen read through his reports, and advised that he will not be standing for re-election at the upcoming County Council elections in May, which have been reinstated.

Cllr Charter thanked Cllr Mellen for his reports and his County Council support to the Parish Council.

26.33 Churchyard Maintenance responsibility update

No further update; waiting for the Diocese to respond and provide a copy of the closure Order.

26.34 Village Green and play equipment improvements update

An updated quotation has been requested from Wicksteed. Waiting for meetings with two further companies for comparable quotations. A meeting will also be requested with MSDC to discuss a District CIL bid, or alternative funding options.

26.35 To discuss Annual Parish (village) and Annual Parish Council meeting arrangements

The Annual Parish (village) meeting will be held on Monday 11th May 2026, followed immediately by the Annual Parish Council meeting. The agenda for the Annual Parish (village) meeting will be published as soon as possible in advance, to ensure residents are aware, and encouraged to attend.

26.36 To consider process for reimbursement of expenses

This is an agenda item following an email request from Mr Kilbee, who has asked the council to consider the way in which the grass cutting volunteers are reimbursed for purchasing fuel for the mower. The usual way is to submit an expenses claim for reimbursement for approval at the next council meeting, however, this can sometimes lead to a delay between the purchase of the fuel, and the volunteer receiving reimbursement. After discussing, Cllr Trew indicated that he would be happy to purchase the fuel and wait until the next meeting for approval of his expenses. Agreed unanimously with 1 abstention (Cllr Trew).

26.37 Correspondence received

A resident has reported that HGVs have driven over the grass triangles in the village, damaging the daffodil bulbs planted by Friends of Finningham. Cllr Saunders advised that it appears this happened when two HGVs tried to pass each other, having been diverted by a road closure, and was not a deliberate act.

The member of the public also raised concern that the road markings by the railway bridge have faded. This will be reported to Suffolk Highways via their online reporting tool.

A second member of the public contacted the Clerk to report fly tipping of commercial fridges on the concrete pad on Eastlands Lane. This was reported to MSDC, but they were removed in the meantime.

Report a Highways concern to SCC via their online reporting tool:

<https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/en-gb>.

Report fly tipping to MSDC: <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/report-fly-tipping>.

26.38 Finance

a. RFO's report (bank balance, receipts, and payments)

Balances as of 29th October 2025

Community Bank Account: £4,618.12

Deposit Account: £10,527.57

b. Requests for payment

Clerk admin payment (5 weeks) March	£621.30
Clerk expenses (mileage)	£18.70
HMRC PAYE/NIC March	£155.33
Clerk holiday pay 2025/26	£745.96
HMRC holiday pay 2026/26	£186.49

Cllr Charter proposed authorisation of the above payments, seconded by Cllr Saunders and approved unanimously.

ACTION – Cllr Davies and either Cllr Winter or Cllr Trew to pay approved payments above, online, (dual authorisation).

26.39 Planning

To consider applications:

- DC/26/00836 - Application for works to trees in a Conservation Area - T1 - Walnut tree to be crown reduced by 2 meters all over keeping a balanced crown T2 - Walnut tree to be crown reduced by 2 meters all over keeping a balanced crown T3 - Weeping willow to be re pollarded to approx. 4 meters in height. Walnut Tree Cottage Church Lane Finningham Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 4JB.

Councillors agreed unanimously that they have no objection to this application.

ACTION - Clerk to update MSDC Planning Portal.

Decisions and to consider planning matters coming forth: None.

26.40 Documents and Policies

- Asset Register
- Internal Control Statement
- Standing Orders
- Health & Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment & Management Policy
- Financial Regulations
- To agree review dates for all documents and policies, and whether any new policies are required.

The above documents and policies were sent to councillors in advance of the meeting, and approved unanimously. It was agreed to review these ones annually, as the Council's core documents. All remaining policies will be reviewed biennially. It was agreed to look at adding a policy specifically for volunteers.

ACTION – Clerk to update and publish documents and policies above, and to create draft volunteer policy.

26.41 To discuss date of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 13th April 2026, at 7:30pm in St. Bartholomew's Church, Finningham.

26.42 Items to be discussed at the next meeting and included in the March agenda.

As per agenda.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8:41pm.

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT – MARCH 2026

Devolution and local government reform – election reinstatement. The County Council elections planned for May 2026 have now been re-instated (the elections team at MSDC deliver the election process)

The current plan is for:

County Council elections in May 2026.

Elections to new unitary council(s) in May 2027.

Election of a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk in May 2028.

We are expecting the announcement from government on reorganisation before 26th March (start of parliamentary Easter recess)

Call for sites for housing, employment etc.

The Council has published a map of all sites submitted during these Call for Sites exercises.

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites>

Note: This is not a list of preferred development locations.

Publication promotes transparency and ensures communities have early visibility of what has been suggested.

No planning status is granted by submission. Sites do not benefit from any presumption of development.

Submissions will now be assessed against planning policy, constraints, evidence and deliverability criteria.

Assessment outputs will be published through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) in Spring 2026.

River Gipping Trust

The River Gipping Trust has announced it has secured a £ 16,000 locality award grant from Mid Suffolk District Council. This will go towards improvements along the Gipping footpath, including two new footbridges.

A14 litter

Concerns about Health and safety (including a fatal accident in Norfolk) have meant litter picking along fast routes such as the A14 have had to be re-assessed. Contractors are about to be employed to address the litter. The A14 and slip routes will get cleared within a few weeks.

Ultimately, this problem is caused by an irresponsible minority of people who think it is acceptable to throw rubbish out of their car windows.

Pylons

National Grid's plan for more pylons in the Suffolk countryside should be halted, leading councillors from Mid Suffolk District Council have told a public hearing (11 February).

National Grid proposes 159km of new overhead lines between Norwich to Tilbury, with the route cutting through the Suffolk countryside.

Mid Suffolk has called for a delay to the project so other options can be considered and costed – such as an undersea route or undergrounding of the entire length of the project. They cite serious concerns about the impact on the environment, communities and businesses. This is consistent with the position taken as under previous governments.

Former HQ site in Needham Market

Mid Suffolk District Council has announced the sale of the remainder of its former office site in Needham Market to Hatch Homes – in a deal that supports the town's regeneration and realises funds for reinvestment into council housing.

The council also successfully delivered the first phase of the transformation of its former council office site – creating 32 homes, including further affordable housing, plus a new retail unit, which the Co-op moved into in 2023.

Armed Forces Day, Stowmarket

Plans are beginning to take shape for Armed Forces Day, which will be held in Stowmarket on 27th June, supported by both Mid Suffolk District Council and Stowmarket Town Council. Armed Forces Day is a chance to show your support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community. There will be a number of attractions such as climbing wall, assault course, and hopefully a helicopter from Wattisham. It is shaping up to be a great family day out. Please support if you can.

Bins

The delivery of new bins ready for the rollout of Better Recycling has now started. This means the delivery of a new blue recycling bin and the new food caddie and food recycling bins. The new timetable of collections will begin in June but your bin day will not change.

Mid Suffolk budget and Council Tax

Mid Suffolk Budget Scope - In addition to the day-to-day provision of the current services and current activities the 2026/27 budget includes further funding for:

- Major implementation of food waste collection and better recycling
- Enhancements to our current depot in readiness for Better recycling
- Further support for recycling education
- Cost of living support and Council Tax Support scheme
- Support for our towns and rural communities outside of Stowmarket in the wider District
- Support for sports and leisure facilities in the wider district
- Sorting out various long standing property issues in the District
- Communities Infrastructure projects
- Leisure centre maintenance
- Stowmarket sports facilities - SHELF Project
- Support for Stowmarket regeneration
- Support for the Cosy Homes scheme which has been expanded to offer solar panels
- Funding for the Reach Retrofit Hub to be an advice centre for the district
- Grant funding for nature recovery and community biodiversity groups
- Support for new footpaths and cycle ways
- Completing the build of the Stowmarket Innovation Gateway
- Developing the skills offering for the Stowmarket Innovation Gateway
- Funding for disabled adaptations and the disability action plan
- Expansion of temporary accommodation to avoid homeless residents being put into bed and breakfast accommodation and save on costs going to private providers
- Use of Land Transfers and/or Capital Receipts to alleviate the pressure in the HRA
- Support for planning such as neighbourhood plans
- Support for local food production
- Support for local energy production

Mid Suffolk District Council is increasing Council Tax by 2.99%.

Only 8% of the total Council Tax bill is attributable to Mid Suffolk District Council and this % has been reducing. For context for a Band D property the increase attributable to Mid Suffolk is about £5.23 per year or 10p per week.

Cllr Andy Mellen
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COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT – MARCH 2026

February Council meeting - annual budget

The Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) meeting on 27th February approved the council's annual budget for 2025/26. Details can be found here: (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Mid Suffolk Council, 27/02/2025 17:30

No increase in Council Tax: The council tax bill for a Band D property remains at £175.03. That works out under £3.37 a week to cover all district council services, including waste collection, licensing, planning, public realm and supporting the local economy, culture and communities. (Council Tax overall is expected to rise, however, as MSDC only sets and receives a small portion, with the bulk going to the County Council.)

MSDC expects a budget surplus of £2.4m in 2025/26: This is down from last year, due to factors including rising employee costs and costs for services, and the ending of the government's Rural Services Delivery Grant.

Capital programme agreed: The Council committed to a capital programme of £36.3m (£26m committed, with another £10m proposed 'capital ambition' projects), partly funded from reserves. This will deliver an ambitious pipeline of projects across the district.

Among other things, expenditure includes:

- investment in sports and health facilities in Stowmarket and in Stradbroke
- major investment in the new Skills and Innovation Centre to upskill the District
- £1.5m fund to support High Street regeneration in our largest town, Stowmarket
- £300k per year funding pot for projects in other market towns and rural communities
- investment in cycling and walking infrastructure
- an increase in the Locality Award to £10,000 per Ward, giving an annual total of £340,000 in Locality grants to fund smaller projects around the District
- ongoing support for range of other grant schemes to fund community projects

Local Government reform

As noted in the last report, the government has announced proposed major changes to the way local government is organised. This includes the creation of a new mayoral authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, and the combining of District and County Councils into unitary authorities.

In January, Suffolk County Council voted to apply to the 'fast track' version of these changes. The government accepted this, resulting in the cancellation of the May 2025 County Council elections.

Mayoral authorities – the government has opened a consultation until April 13th. To share your views, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution-consultation>

Creation of unitaries:

- Initial plans are to be sent to the government by 21st March 2025.
- MSDC is concerned about the lack of public consultation on this aspect of the reforms.
- An Extraordinary meeting of Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils to discuss the issues was rescheduled from Feb 10th to April 10th to allow more time to review emerging details.

Planning Policy updates

As noted in the last report, the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Babergh and Mid Suffolk is being reviewed, to make sure it stays compliant with the government's increased new targets for housebuilding. The timeline for this work was approved at the February Council meeting. Further information can be found here: [babergh-and-mid-suffolk-joint-local-plan-review](#)

The Cabinet member for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Andrew Stringer, has highlighted the importance of Neighbourhood Plans, which form part of the district's local plans.

EcoPower Suffolk: solar application

EcoPower Suffolk (a subsidiary of Econergy International Ltd) has announced plans for a 600 ha solar project: <https://ecopowersuffolk.com/>

The project includes parcels of land along the B1077 between Occold and Eye, as well as several other villages.

Because of the project's size, it is classified as a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP), and so the government (not the Local Authority) will decide if it goes ahead.

The first consultation period will run from 10 March to 22 April 2025. For details see: [Have Your Say | EcoPower Suffolk](#)

Mid Suffolk Council leader Cllr Andy Mellen and Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure, Cllr Andrew Stringer, have urged the government to take a more coordinated approach to such large-scale infrastructure projects in the District:
Energy infrastructure 'must be coordinated' to minimise impact on Mid Suffolk communities - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk.

Increased access in Stowmarket and Eye

From February, the council's access point in the centre of Stowmarket is open 5 days a week – reverting back to pre-covid opening hours. Alongside this, MSDC is opening its first joint customer-access point at Eye Library, alongside Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice, starting 28th March. Staff from both organisations will be on hand to help residents between 9.15am and 12pm every Friday.

Both these changes aim to make life easier for residents who prefer face-to-face contact. The Council can also be contacted about many issues by phone and through the website: www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or phone 0300 123 4000

Funding for community projects

Details of Mid Suffolk Council's community funding can be found at: www.midsuffolk.gov.uk – click on the 'Access community funding' button.

For advice or further information, please email the grants team at: BMSDCgrants@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

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Report for felled silver birch tree re item 26.04

Species: Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*)

Location: Churchyard adjacent to public footpath

Condition: Poor – advanced physiological decline and structural defects

Observations

The tree exhibits significant upper crown dieback with extensive deadwood and reduced foliage density, indicating advanced physiological stress and loss of vitality.

Bracket fungi are present on the main stem, suggesting the development of internal heartwood decay. Historic pruning wounds and longitudinal stem seams further indicate compromised structural integrity.

Birch is a relatively short-lived species with limited ability to compartmentalise decay. At this stage of decline, the likelihood of unpredictable limb or stem failure increases.

The tree is situated approximately one metre from a frequently used public footpath providing access through the churchyard to a recreational area. This represents a high target occupancy zone.

Risk Assessment

Due to:

- Advanced crown dieback
- Presence of decay fungi on the main stem
- Potential internal structural weakness
- Close proximity to a regularly used pedestrian route

There is an elevated risk of limb failure or potential stem failure which could result in serious injury to members of the public.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the tree is removed as soon as reasonably practicable in the interests of public safety.

Given the current level of decline, remedial pruning or deadwood removal would not sufficiently mitigate the risk associated with potential structural failure.

Regards.

Top Garden Services

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