

FINNINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

*Minutes for the PARISH COUNCIL MEETING held on
Monday 9th February 2026 in St. Bartholomew's Church, Finningham, starting at 7:30pm*

Present: Cllr Charter, Cllr Saunders, Cllr Davies, Cllr Trew

In attendance: Miss J. Challis (Clerk), Cllr Mellen, Mary Webb (Chair of Friends of Finningham)

26.01 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 Pope were approved unanimously.

26.02 District and County Councillor Reports

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

26.03 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.

26.04 Public Participation Session

Mary Webb asked for clarification as to why the birch tree by the path in the churchyard has been felled. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's contractor conducted a review of the trees on the Green, and reported this tree to be diseased and posing a high public health and safety risk, particularly with its proximity to the path. Therefore, at the meeting held on 10th November 2025, item 25.237, it was unanimously approved to fell the tree. A full report from the contractor will be requested and made available for public viewing once received. The Clerk will check the description of the tree in the November minutes to confirm it was recorded as a birch tree and not a beech.

Mary Webb also reminded that the deadline for the PC's inclusion in the next FoF newsletter is the 20th February.

The report for the birch tree can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes.

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

None.

26.06 To consider requests for dispensations on agenda items

None.

26.07 To approve minutes of the Parish Council meetings held on 8th December 2025

Approved unanimously with 2 abstentions (councillors who were not present at the meeting).

26.08 Chairman's Report

Good evening everyone,

As we begin a new year, it feels appropriate to pause briefly and reflect on the year just gone. Over the past twelve months, the Council has continued to work hard on behalf of the parish, dealing with the day-to-day matters that keep our village running smoothly, while also making progress on longer-term issues that matter to residents.

One particularly positive piece of news to highlight is the installation of our additional solar-powered Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS). These are already proving to be a valuable and visible reminder about speed awareness, and they demonstrate our ongoing commitment to improving road safety within the parish. My thanks go to all councillors involved in supporting and progressing this initiative.

I would also like to offer my apologies for my non-attendance at the December meeting. Despite rumours to the contrary, it was not flu at the time – that arrived a few weeks later and rather unhelpfully resulted in me spending Christmas and New Year largely in bed! Thank you to everyone for their understanding and for ensuring that Council business continued seamlessly in my absence.

Looking ahead, I am very optimistic about the year to come. We are fortunate to have a strong, dedicated and supportive team of councillors who consistently give their time and energy for the benefit of the parish. I would like to thank each of you for your continued commitment, cooperation and good humour.

Here's to a positive and productive year ahead, working together for the good of our community.

26.09 Clerk's Report

- Highways have advised of the following road closure -

Location: B1113 Walsham Road, Finningham - from junction Westhorpe Road to junction Gislingham Road

Date & Time: Tuesday 10 February 2026 (10am-3pm)

Please note that while the road closure times are as stated above, it's likely that the teams on site will not be present for the full duration. All works will be carried out within the timeframe stated.

Reason for Closure: Gully cleansing

Access Arrangements: Access and egress will be maintained where safe and possible to do so. Please speak to a member of staff on site. Through traffic will need to follow the diversion route in place.

Diversion Route: B1113, B1115, A1120, A140, A143 and vice versa.

- MSDC have forwarded a confidential briefing pack regarding the changes to improve recycling in Suffolk due to take effect this summer (from June 2026), which has been shared with councillors.
- MSDC have sent an invitation to the launch of a new Mid Suffolk grant, to support projects operating at catchment and landscape-scale. This grant will support projects that are addressing biodiversity loss, flood management, water quality and increased community engagement with the natural environment, across multiple locations and working with multiple stakeholders. The free event is being held on 4th March 2026 in Stowmarket, full details shared with councillors.
- Following notification of the funding Suffolk County Council have secured under the Local Authority Bus Grant, a request for feedback from residents on the bus services in Finningham, will be included in the PC's article in the FoF newsletter.
- The Clerk shared a Biodiversity Action Plan template with councillors, who agreed that this is something to look at further at a future meeting.
- Meetings with two additional play equipment suppliers, to look at the agreed improvements to the Green, are due to be held in the next few weeks.

26.10 National Grid Norwich to Tilbury – invitation from Planning Inspectorate to preliminary meeting and notifications of hearings

As an interested party, the PC has received an invitation to the Preliminary Meeting for National Grid's application, which will be held on Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 10:00 in The Sir Bobby Robson Suite at Ipswich Town Football Club, Portman Road, Ipswich, IP1 2DA and virtually via Microsoft Teams. Councillors agreed that they do not wish to make a verbal representation further to the written submission already made.

26.11 EN0110019 EcoPower Suffolk Solar Project EIA Scoping Notification

Councillors agreed unanimously that they do not wish to comment against the Scoping Opinion, and noted that EcoPower Suffolk are due to hold a statutory public consultation spring 2026.

26.12 To consider repositioning of VAS device (vehicle activated sign) on Wickham Road

Cllr Saunders requested this be an agenda item, and asked councillors to consider moving the VAS post on Wickham Road further toward the edge of the village, due to the current site being too far into the village, where cars are naturally slowing down due to the proximity of the crossroads. After discussing, councillors agreed unanimously that they agree to moving the VAS post further out of the village, if approval is provided by Highways.

ACTION – Clerk to request approval from Highways as above.

7:57pm Cllr Mellen arrived.

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

(26.02 District and County Councillor reports)

Cllr Mellen read through his reports highlighting the upcoming changes to bins and recycling, and the postponement of the County Council elections which were due to take place in May.

Cllr Charter thanked Cllr Mellen for his reports.

26.13 To consider replacing oldest VAS (vehicle activated sign) due to unreliability concerns

The oldest VAS device, which does not have the solar panel back up, has started to work intermittently, and the batteries are not holding a charge for very long. ElanCity have quoted a price of £2,200 plus VAT, taking into account the order for the new device agreed at the previous meeting. After discussing, it was agreed to proceed with replacing this device, but to look at funding options due to the level of available reserves. Proposed by Cllr Trew, seconded by Cllr Saunders and approved unanimously.

ACTION – Clerk as above.

26.14 Consideration of new 20mph speed limit policy

Following information shared by the Clerk advising that Suffolk County Council has agreed a new 20mph speed limit policy to enhance road safety and improve quality of life across Suffolk's communities, Cllr Pope asked for this to be an agenda item for consideration.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has backed the proposal to make it easier to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph.

Under the new scheme any applications for a 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph or under is likely to be approved.

After discussing, and taking into account the new VAS devices, it was agreed unanimously not to apply for a 20mph speed limit in Finningham.

26.15 To consider quotations for mower servicing

After discussing, and taking into account advice received from the previous Chair, Mr Kilbee, who also organises the mowing rota, it was agreed it is unnecessary to service the mower annually, and to conduct it on a biennial basis. Therefore, the servicing will not be looked at for another 12 months.

26.16 Churchyard Maintenance responsibility update

No further update to the previous meeting, when as the Clerk has followed all three official avenues to obtain a copy of the closure Order without success; the Diocese being unable to provide a copy, the Ministry of Justice failing to find a copy, and the Gazette being unable to find a copy of the Order with the Privy Council, it was agreed unanimously that the council needs to inform the PCC that they cannot take on the ongoing maintenance without sight of the Order, and the onus now rests with the PCC and/or Diocese to provide a copy.

26.17 Correspondence received

None.

26.18 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 February	£523.20
Clerk expenses (mileage)	£18.70
HMRC PAYE/NIC February	£130.80
P. Saunders expenses – fuel stabiliser	£10.49
C. Winter expenses – defibrillator pads	£105.54
Finningham PCC – Church hire for 10 x meetings 2025	£200.00

Cllr Charter proposed authorisation of the above payments, seconded by Cllr Trew and approved unanimously. **ACTION – Cllr Davies and either Cllr Winter or Cllr Trew to pay approved payments above, online, (dual authorisation).**

26.19 Planning

To consider applications: None.

Decisions and to consider planning matters coming forth:

- DC/25/04976 - Householder Application - Erection of a single storey side extension inclusive of alterations to existing external facing materials. Maycroft, Walsham Road, Finningham, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 4JG – **GRANTED.**
- DC/25/04121 - Householder application - Replacement windows, replacement / refurbishment of fascias and soffits, re-cladding of dormer window. Lautrec, Gislingham Road, Finningham, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 4HY – **GRANTED.**
- DC/25/03856 - Householder Application - Erection of a detached double garage. Riverside, Gislingham Road, Finningham, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 4HY – **GRANTED.**

26.20 Documents and Policies

- Asset Register
- Internal Control Statement
- Standing Orders
- Health & Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment & Management Policy

Cllr Davies suggested updates to the Internal Control Statement and Health & Safety Policy, however the documents and policies above will be deferred to the next meeting as not all councillors have read them.

26.21 To discuss date of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 16th March 2026, at 7:30pm in St. Bartholomew's Church, Finningham.

26.22 Items to be discussed at the next meeting and included in the February agenda.

As per agenda.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8:34pm.

Cllr Mellen – District Council Report February 2026

Devolution and local government reform – election cancellation	<p>The government has announced its intention to cancel the County Council elections planned for May 2026, and we can assume there will never be any further County Council elections, with the decision on reorganisation expected to be announced next month.</p> <p>So we have ended up in a position where the biggest change in local government in a generation will be implemented with no public vote and with all elections over the period cancelled.</p>
Support for Ipswich's bid for City of Culture 2029.	<p>Mid Suffolk Councillors unanimously agreed to support Ipswich's bid to become 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.</p> <p>The government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport will 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.</p>
Community Nature Recovery Grants	<p>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. More details of the grants can be found on the website https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/boosting-biodiversity-by-funding-nature-in-your-neighbourhood</p>
Better Recycling update.	<p>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.</p>
Locality Funding	<p>I was delighted to have been able to award all the funds in my councillor locality budget for 2025/26. The following projects have been supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Landscaping the patio area in North Close, Bacton• Helping with digital access costs for Westhorpe parish council• Contribution to making the Cotton bus shelter into a community exchange• Flashing speed sign for Finningham• New chairs for Wyverstone village hall• Support for facilities for Bacton football club• Improvements to Bacton bowls clubhouse <p>2026-27 locality funding budget will be launched in the spring.</p>

Cllr Andy Mellen

Andrew.Mellen@midsuffolk.gov.uk

07790 992619

County Council Report – February 2026

Cllr Andy Mellen, Thedwastre North

20 South View, Wyverstone, Suffolk, IP14 4SP

07790 992619 - andy.mellen@suffolk.gov.uk

Local elections in May 2026 postponed

At an extraordinary council meeting on Monday 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 Conservative administration unanimously voted down an amendment proposed by my group that the council was in favour of the elections going ahead, although we 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. Needless to say, I and many others are disappointed by this turn of events, where it appears that a Labour government and a Conservative council have conspired to deprive Suffolk electors of their democratic right.

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).

Council budget 2026-27

At Cabinet on Tuesday 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 2027-27 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.

Net Zero Carbon Report

Also coming to Cabinet on Tuesday 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.

Suffolk Roads Rated Red by UK Government

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.

New 20mph Policy

At Cabinet on Friday 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. The new policy is based on recording speeds as follows:

- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

You can read the new policy here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/imported/20mph-speed-limit-policy-criteria.pdf>

Social Media and Helpful Links

Follow us on:

Twitter - [Suffolk Green, Lib Dem & Independent Group \(@SuffolkGLI\) / Twitter](#)

Instagram – https://www.instagram.com/suffolkqli_group/

Facebook - [Suffolk GLI - Green, Liberal Democrat & Independent Group | Facebook](#)

Website - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkqli.wordpress.com\)](#)

Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=>

[6](#) Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/what-to-do-in-a-flood>

<https://suffolkprepared.co.uk/get-prepared/risk-advice/flooding/>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

FINNINGHAM FOOTPATH WARDEN REPORT OCT 2025 – JANUARY 2026

WE HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE THAT THE WEATHER FOR THE END OF 2025 WAS VERY GOOD AND THIS NEW YEAR HAS ONLY IN THE LAST WEEK OR SO, PROVIDED US WITH EXTRA RAINFALL, WHICH HAS MADE SOME OF OUR PATHWAYS RATHER MUDDY.

I HAVE ONLY TWO REPORTS TO SCC THAT HAVE BEEN RECORDED WITH THEM, AS FOLLOWS;

REF. 00539001 25TH OCT 2025 : FOOTPATH 16 OFF WICKHAM ROAD IP144HT HEADING SOUTH, THE FINGERPOST ROTTED AND FALLEN. THIS HAS BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED, WITH A REPLY THAT WORK MAY COMMENCE ONCE THEY HAVE OTHER WORK IN THE AREA.

REF. 443388 8TH FEB 2026: COTTON FOOTPATH 15/ FINNINGHAM FOOTPATH 18 LEADING OFF MILL LANE AT THE RAILWAY BRIDGE IP144TH. THESE FOOTPATHS CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER MID WAY LEADING TO THE B1113 NEAR THE WATER TOWER. HERE THE FOOTPATH HAS BRANCHES AND FOLIAGE OVERGROWING AND ALSO LOTS OF DEADWOOD LAYING BESIDE THE PATHWAY, MAKING THE AREA UNTIDY. I HAVE ASKED IF IT COULD BE CUT BACK AND CLEARED AWAY, RATHER THAN JUST DUMPED BESIDE THE PATH AND IN THE DITCH THERE. THIS REPORT HAS BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED ONLY AT THIS POINT.

DOUG AIKEN

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

☎ 0800 7720548 | 📠 0790 0297546

🌐 www.topgardenservices.com

📘 facebook.com/topgardenservices1