



ASHFIELD-CUM-THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

All Councillors are reminded of their obligations under the Code of Conduct Regulations.

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 10th December 2025 at the Community Hall

Attendance Robert Grimsey (Chair) (RG) Myles Hansen (MHa) Chris Sharpe (CS)
Lindsay Pearson (LP) Tom Luxmoore (TL) Monica Brown (MB)
Nick Hardingham (District Councillor for Stonham Aspal) (NH) Sarah Clare (Clerk)
Matthew Hicks (County Councillor) (MHi)

Public present at the meeting: 0

ACTPC 25-06-01 Apologies for Absence & Appointment of Chair

Simon Garrett (SG) had sent his apologies due to personal commitments. The Council accepted.

Teresa Davis (District Councillor) (TD) had also sent apologies, but had asked for fellow District Councillor Nick Hardingham (NH) to attend in her absence.

ACTPC 25-06-02 Public Forum

None

ACTPC 25-06-03 Declaration of Interests

TL declared interest in ACTPC 25-06-08 a) i) being the applicant.

All Councillors declared interest in ACTPC 25-06-10 c) to set the precept as residents of the parish, although dispensations had been applied and accepted on the grounds that a) without dispensation the number of persons unable to participate in the transaction of business would be so great as to impede the transaction of the business; and b) the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the authority's area.

ACTPC 25-06-04 Update from County Councillor

The County Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website: <https://ashfieldcumthorpe-pc.gov.uk>

MHi brought attention to the following:

The Mayoral Elections that were due to take place next May have been put back by two years. MHi will be meeting with the Minister to find out more soon and whether the delay will also apply to the investment fund that was due to be released to the County next May. CS asked what the reasoning for the delay was, MHi said that all he knew was that Central Government has stated that they want a strong local government to be in place first, but as Norfolk and Suffolk are as ready as they could be to proceed, it is unclear what this means in practice. The delay decision was taken without any consultation, the only concession was that the individual leaders of the six areas around the country were advised ahead of the information being released to the public.

The elections for the Shadow Unitaries will still be taking place in 2027, along with District elections. The public consultation for the final shape of the unitary authorities is under way at the moment and residents are encouraged to take part.

A new service called 'Wonderlust by Bus' is being launched across the county to encourage visitors to tourist attractions to use public transport. CS asked about what was being done to help residents use public transport, as the Parish Council has raised concerns a number of times about the poor connectivity of buses in Ashfield-cum-Thorpe, with several buses going to Ipswich, including early times well suited for workers, but only one return journey scheduled, which is in the middle of the day, so workers cannot return. MHi said that there was

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to be another consultation to find out where bus routes are needed taking place soon and he would forward the link to the Parish Council once it was available.

Suffolk County Council has recently received recognition for their EV charging infrastructure, in particular the use of pavement gullies to allow residents without off-road parking to safely charge their vehicles. More information is available on the Plug in Suffolk website.

The Culture Fund is now open for new applications and will be operating on the same very successful basis as last year, with no restriction on how small a group is to apply. Any arts organisation in the County is encouraged to find out more.

RG queried why Sizewell were applying speed limits on roads way outside of their area. MHi explained that this was part of the planning permission given and the process has been underway for a very long time, it is in anticipation of workers cars arriving on site. RG argued that with more restrictions in place on the major roads people are opting to use the back roads instead, that are not designed for the traffic load and this decision is leading to unforeseen consequences. MHi said that Sizewell have the right through their planning permission to carry out highways work in their area, only needing to notify Suffolk Highways of when the works will be happening and it cannot be changed.

ACTPC 25-06-05 Update from District Councillor

The District Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website: <https://ashfieldcumthorpe-pc.gov.uk>

NH spoken on behalf of TD to update the Council on the current position regarding the Stonham Barns site, explaining that it is understood that HMRC have submitted a winding up application against the site. Despite this the site still appears to be continuing as before and having met with the owner of the site, NH understands that the funds being requested are available and HMRC will be paid. RG observed that on the Companies House website the liabilities listed are very considerable.

The planning issues at Stonham Barns go back many years, NH has familiarised himself with the facts since taking office and is pressing enforcement officers to act on the breaches that have occurred. There are ongoing quarterly review meetings and NH will press for enforcement action where possible, although surprisingly enforcement is not a statutory requirement. The principle is first to try to negotiate and attempt to come to an amicable solution, with potential court action viewed as a last resort. There is a separate investigation ongoing into car boot sales taking place at times when permission has not been granted.

A landscape report was commissioned by the District Council in 2021, with the brief of mitigating the impact of Stonham Barns on the local area and prescribe the limits of what can be done on the site. NH is also a Suffolk Tree Warden and has approached the owners to offer help to meet the suggestion in landscape report to strengthen the visual boundaries of the site, by filling the area between the earth bund and A1120 with woodland planting. RG asked if the bund itself was ever given permission. NH said such earthworks themselves did not need permission, as barriers such as fences can be put up on land without seeking planning permission, but as it is over 2m tall the site owners have been asked to reduce the height. The owner and the agent are keen on the tree planting and are prepared to remodel the bund to facilitate the planting. The work may not take place this planting season, due to time constraints, but NH is pleased that liaison between the village and the site is improving.

CS thanked NH for his comments, but explained that the general feeling from surrounding villages is that the ongoing situation at Stonham Barns completely undermines the planning process. Individual householders are held to far higher accountability and enforcement is taken against people who have not followed the rules, whereas this site seems to be able to get away with anything. NH agreed that it is a difficult situation that has developed over a number of years and will likely take a number of years to resolve.

ACTPC 25-06-06 Minutes of previous meetings

The Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8th October 2025 as a true and accurate record, were proposed by MB, seconded by CS all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Minutes were signed by the Chair and the Clerk

ACTPC 25-06-07 Matters Arising and Action Points from the October Minutes

1. Contact Suffolk Highways to arrange a site visit about reflective posts to mark dangerous ditches at the edge of the road. To be discussed later in meeting.

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2. Investigate cross field pathway between Ashfield-cum-Thorpe and Debenham. To be discussed later in meeting.
3. Invite Emergency Planning Officer at the District Council to attend the December meeting to explain the process fully to the whole Council. DISCHARGED – The Clerk advised that the Emergency Planning Officer will be attending the March 2026 meeting.
4. Contact contractor/landowner to ask for assistance in mitigating the problems caused by the unpleasant smell. To be discussed later in meeting.
5. Forward links to guidelines about the use of treated human sewage as a fertiliser to all Councillors. DISCHARGED
6. Put note out on Ashfield Talk and into next Parish Council summary to remind residents about the need to keep vegetation cut back from roads and pathways. DISCHARGED
7. Inform Footpath Warden about the hornets nest on the footpath to Thorpe Farm, so that local residents can be warned about the risk. DISCHARGED
8. Contact Community Action Suffolk to request that the answers to queries raised about the need for Antivirus Software are received. ONGOING
9. Purchase Antivirus Software for Parish Council laptop and claim reimbursement at next meeting. DISCHARGED
10. Advise Community Action Suffolk that the Antivirus Software has been purchased and arrange for Cyber Security Cover to be added to the Parish Council insurance. DISCHARGED
11. Contact Community Action Suffolk to arrange for the move to gov.uk domain website and emails. DISCHARGED
12. Advise Community Council of the website changes. DISCHARGED
13. Once the two websites are set up, tailor them to the Community and Parish Council needs as appropriate. ONGOING
14. To arrange virements as agreed at the October 2025 Parish Council meeting. DISCHARGED
15. Publish new model Internal Financial Control Statement on the village website. DISCHARGED
16. Advise SALC that the NJC pay settlement has been accepted. DISCHARGED
17. To distribute payments as approved at the October meeting. DISCHARGED

ACTPC 25-06-08 Planning

- a) To consider planning applications that had been submitted since the last meeting:
- i) DC/25/05062 – Householder Application – Barn replacement, Erection of Potting Shed, Greenhouse, Solar Array and a below ground pool. Grove Farmhouse, Grove Lane, IP14 6LZ

Councillors had all studied the application in advance of the meeting. After discussion it was decided to **SUPPORT** the application with the following comment:

- The application is sympathetic to the site.

RG proposed, LP seconded, 3 voted in favour, 1 left the meeting for the duration of this item and abstained due to declared interest and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**

- b) To consider any planning applications that have been submitted since agenda was published: None
- c) Updates and outcomes on previous planning applications: None

ACTPC 25-06-09 Parish Council Activities

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- a) Highways & Footpaths: Report on activity since the last meeting including:
- i) Concerns about erosion of verges by large agricultural vehicles. – As noted at the last meeting, it would be a decision from Suffolk Highways if kerbing is required for areas where there is a serious drop-off at the edge of the tarmac which can be reported using Suffolk Highways Online Reporting Tool. CS noted that there are track marks from vehicles very close to ditches in a number of places and it is probably only a matter of time before an accident occurs.
 - ii) Update on hedges overhanging the highway – Following CS reminding residents of the need to cut back vegetation this issue has now been largely resolved in the village. RG noted that one particular property in the village still has a hedge overgrowing the highway and will keep trying to work with the landowner.
 - iii) Reflective posts to mark dangerous ditch – RG is still waiting to work with MHi, the road flooded in the area again recently and underlined the need for the posts.
 - iv) Cross field path to Debenham – RG reported that he had now established the owner of the cross field path and will be talking to the landowner about clearing the legal path, along with getting the footpath sign reinstated.
 - v) Consideration of nominating Thorpe Lane as a Quiet Lane – The idea of nominating a Quiet Lane in the village had been considered back in 2020, but had been rejected due to no perceived benefit, only potential costs. Currently there is no central funding for Quiet Lane signage, so if Thorpe Lane was nominated the Parish may well be expected to find the funding. The experience of neighbouring villages had been that designation of Quiet Lane had led to frustration and a drop in safe use of the lanes, as walkers, cyclists and horse riders had been lulled into a false sense of security. RG also expected that the traffic flow along Thorpe Lane would likely exceed the numbers to qualify for designation. RG proposed that the nomination is not supported, CS seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will advise the Debenham resident who had raised the query.
- b) Consideration of an Emergency Plan – The Emergency Planning Officer will be attending the March 2026 meeting, so the matter was deferred.
- c) Policy Reviews: Bring Your Own Device/Email Communication Policy – Concerns had been raised by SG about the wording of this policy, but due to his absence the matter was deferred.
- d) Calendar of meetings and events for 2026 (to financial year end 2027) – Annual Parish Meeting and AGM of the council Wednesday 13th May 2026. Other Parish Council meetings to be held Wednesday 8th July, Wednesday 9th September, Wednesday 9th December 2026 and Wednesday 10th March 2027. The Clerk will publish the dates on the website and confirm the Community Hall bookings.
- e) Update on move to Gov.uk domain and emails – The new emails are all now active and Councillors are encouraged to start using them as soon as possible. The gov.uk website now only contains information relating to the Parish Council.
- f) Update on concerns about the unpleasant smell causing problems in the village – RG suggested that a meeting is arranged with the landowner and the contractor. CS suggested that a face-to-face would be best. RG will research to find out who was involved with the problem last year and see what can be done to avoid a similar situation occurring next summer, suggesting that the product is only brought to site when the spreading is due to take place, rather than stored for extended periods ahead of cultivation.
- g) Consideration of purchasing replacement screen for noticeboard – The current noticeboard screen has become discoloured and scratched. The Clerk had obtained a price for replacement from the original company, CS had also obtained a price for replacing the screen with materials purchased from a DIY store. TL felt that he could better the prices currently obtained and offered to look into the matter. RG proposed that if the purchase can be done for less than £100 to go ahead, LP seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. Money to be reimbursed to TL at the March meeting.

ACTPC 25-06-10 Finance

- a) To review the Financial Statement as supplied by the Clerk – The Clerk had previously circulated the Financial Statement. There were no queries. RG proposed acceptance, TL seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Chair signed the corresponding Bank Statements to confirm the figures.

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- b) To finalise and adopt the 2026-2027 Budget – The Clerk had circulated two versions of a draft budget for the Council to consider. One with all the costs increased in the next financial year, one using some reserves to spread the raise. After discussion it was agreed to raise the precept by 25% overall (£900 across the whole village) to cover the increasing costs.

RG proposed the adoption of the budget as specified, CS seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will arrange for the approved Budget to be published on the website

- c) To set Precept for 2026-2027 - Following adoption of the budget the Precept was set at £4,664 for 2026-2027. An overall increase of £900, translating to a £9.52 increase across the whole year for a Band D property (approx. 79p per month). RG proposed, CS seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will complete and return the form to the District Council
- d) Virement of £450 from General Contingency Fund to Community Account to be done early March 2026 to cover anticipated bills to be paid for 25/26 financial year: - Following the budgeting process, it had become clear that due to unexpected bills this year, some funds would be needed from the contingency. RG proposed the movement, LP seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will move the funds early in March, to allow money to stay in the interest bearing account for as long as possible.
- e) To agree payments as detailed on the Payment Schedule
TL proposed authorisation, CS seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**.

ACTPC – 25-06-11 Urgent Matters to be brought to the attention of the Council

- a) Items for next agenda:
- Presentation on Community Emergency Planning
 - Review & Re-adoption of Standing Orders

Items for the March Agenda – please notify the Clerk of any further items for the agenda as soon as possible and by Monday 2nd March at the latest, with any accompanying paperwork ready to be circulated with the agenda upon publication.

There being no further business requiring the attention of the Parish Council, the meeting was closed at 9.47pm. The next meeting is set for **Wednesday 11th March 2026** at 7.30 pm in the Community Hall.

Sarah Clare
Parish Clerk

Robert Grimsey
Chair