

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CONEY WESTON PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON THURSDAY 15 JANUARY 2026 AT CONEY WESTON VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllrs: B Francis (Chair), CllrP Sullivan (Vice Chair), CllrP Clarke and CllrP Hines.
Cllr Joanna Spicer (SCC) (in part) and Cllr Andrew Smith (WSC) (in part). L Hibbert (Clerk).

Cllr Francis announced that the meeting would be recorded. No objections were made.

1. Co-option of new Parish Councillors

None

2. Apologies for absence

Cllr Smith had given his apologies that he would be late due to a clash with a WSC committee meeting.

3. Members Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

- 3.1 Cllr Clarke declared a pecuniary interest in the proposed reimbursement to him of £52.29 in respect of his purchase of sand for the village for flood alleviation. He also declared an interest in any issues relating to the Bowls Club.
- 3.2 Cllr Sullivan declared a pecuniary interest in the proposed payment to him of £21.56 in respect of his purchase of sandbags for the sand for the village.
- 3.3 Cllr Francis declared a pecuniary interest in the proposed payment to her of £279 in respect of her purchase of new printer for the Council.

4. Minutes

- 4.1 The draft Minutes of the meeting on 6 November 2025 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting and Cllr Francis was authorised to sign them accordingly.

5. Meeting open to the Public

- 5.1 A resident set out a request on behalf of the Bowls Club for grant funding from the Council towards the construction of a new Bowls Club pavilion. This is part of the Club's long term development project. The land had already been purchased with an access road and car park built, and a new toilet block installed. The final part of the project is replacement of the existing pavilion that is dilapidated and is not big enough for the club's requirements, particularly with the closure of the pub. Planning consent has been obtained. The Club anticipates that it will need approximately £75,000 to complete the project, with Club members providing most of the labour. Whilst some grants have been obtained, unfortunately the National Lottery has declined to make a grant. Sport England are being approached and a crowdfunding project is planned. However, there is still a shortfall of approximately £60,000. The Club has a track record of delivering on projects and supporting village events such as Open Gardens. A grant

from the Council would assist towards the proposed new pavilion.

6. Report from SCC Joanna Spicer

- 6.1 The key issue is the completion of the flood alleviation works. The work with the landowner regarding an easement is still ongoing. Cllr Spicer asked that the Council inform her if there is any worsening in the flooding issue in the village.
- 6.4 The work on the A143 at Stanton has been completed. Three quarters of the road closures in Suffolk are at the request of Utilities companies, not Suffolk Highways.
- 6.5 The Mayoral elections previously scheduled for May 2026 have been postponed to May 2028. The Consultation on Local Government Re-organisation has closed. SCC are proposing one Unitary Council whereas the District Councils are proposing 3 authorities. The Boundary Commission would have to work out the boundaries of the Unitary Authorities. SCC have indicated that they would prefer the Council elections also to be deferred from May 2026 to May 2027 to allow them to prepare for the proposed Local Government Reorganisation.
- 6.6 Coney Weston Parish Council has asked Cllr Spicer about the availability of grant funding for the coming year because of the calls on its resources, particularly should it become Sole Trustee of the Playing Field. Cllr Spicer reported that her Locality Budget technically ends in March 2026. A grant has already been given towards the Village Hall toilets. However, she could perhaps arrange a grant of £500 to assist the Council with its increased costs, for example around its legal costs. The Council and Cllr Spicer should continue to correspond on the issue.

ACTION: CLERK

Cllr Spicer left the meeting.

7. Report from WSC Cllr Andrew Smith

- 7.1 Cllr Smith reported that he is very close to finalising his work on Bardwell PC Emergency Plan (updated following serious fire and flooding in 2025) which he should be able with the Council which may assist in updating the Council's Emergency Plan.
- 7.2 The 'Better Recycling' project means that residents will receive an additional large bin and 2 food waste bins (one for inside the property and one outside). The project is intended to start in the first week of June 2026. The collection of black bins will alternate with collection of the recycling bins on a 2 week cycle. The food waste bins will be emptied every week.
- 7.3 Cllr Smith reported that the Village Hall will receive 2 years of glass recycling payments based on the payment that it has received this year. The Village Hall committee have received a letter confirming this.
- 7.4 Cllr Smith reported that a consultation on parish councils including any mergers would complete on 13 February.
- 7.5 Cllr Smith has sought clarification within WSC as to what funding may be available to assist the

Council with its costs this year, for example relating to the professional fees in respect of the becoming Sole Trustee of the Playing Field charity (should that occur).

8 Councillors' Reports

8.1 Cllr Clarke gave the following reports:

8.1.1 Defibrillator

Nothing current to report. New parts such as pads will be required next year.

8.1.2 Playing Field

The Parish Council has received advice from the Charity Commission and Community Action Suffolk after the three existing trustees of the village playing field indicated they wished to resign and no replacements had come forward despite the Trustees and Council's efforts.

The Council is now minded become the Sole Trustee of the Playing Field. Should the Council decide to do so, its appointment will not be automatic. The appropriate formalities around its appointment will need to be undertaken. More importantly, the current governing document is nearly 60 years old. The unanimous advice of the professional charity specialists who have been contacted for the purposes of providing fee quotes is that the governing document must be replaced. Professional legal/charity advice is required. Estimated professional costs to complete the adoption and produce a new governing document are £4,000–£5,000. The Council is asking the Charity Commission whether some tasks can be carried out by the Parish Council under professional oversight to reduce costs. A public meeting is proposed to explain the situation, seek volunteers, and ask residents to approve the Council becoming Sole. It is important to note that whilst the Council as Sole Trustee will undertake the grass cutting, maintain the insurance and deal with any Health & Safety issues, its capacity is very limited and, as such, it will expect volunteers to undertake other tasks such as applying for grant funding.

ACTION CLLR CLARKE

8.1.3 Suffolk Parish Councils group on speeding and safety

Haverhill Town Council and Bury St. Edmunds Town Council have joined the group.

8.1.4 Support Our Buses

The Department of Transport has allocated additional funds for rural buses which Coney Weston should benefit from. The bus routes in the village are secure for the next 2 years, but funding beyond that is linked to how much the bus services are used. Bus users have complained about the length of time the buses take to get to Bury St. Edmunds which is a disincentive to use the service. However, usage of the bus services has increased slightly.

8.1.5 Village Group liaison

Nothing to report

8.1.6 Village Car Park

Some of the village hall car park is owned by the Riddlesworth Estate. For the last 14 years it has been leased from the owners by the Parish Council. The £150 rent per month, is paid by the Parish Council who in turn is re-paid by the Village Hall

Committee. The Lease is due for renewal this October (or, more likely, in January 2027 - over-written by hand). The Parish Council has asked the land agents to supply details of the new lease. When these details are received they will be shared with the Village Hall committee at which time the situation with the car park lease will need to be considered more generally with the Village Hall committee.

ACTION: CLLR FRANCIS

8.2 Cllr Francis gave the following reports:

8.2.1 Community Development
Nothing to report

8.2.2 Drainage and Highways
Nothing to report

8.2.3 Local Government Re-organisation
Covered in Cllr Spicer's report

8.2.4 Battery recycling
The Village Hall committee has declined the proposal for a battery recycling collection unit in the lobby. A suggestion was made that the unit could be placed in the bus shelter. However, this is not possible because batteries cannot be stored outdoors. Most supermarkets provide recycling facilities.

8.2.4 Emergency Plan
See Cllr Smith's report.

8.2.5 Noticeboard
The Noticeboard at the Village Hall needs repair work. The Village Hall committee is happy for the Council to undertake that work, painting it black to match the Village Hall. A sum for this work is included in the 2026/27 Budget.

ACTION: CLLR FRANCIS

8.2.6 New Residents
There are new residents in the Swan, Crown Lane and elsewhere in the village. Cllr Francis will deliver a copy of the Parish News etc.

ACTION: CLLR FRANCIS

9. Policies

9.1 The Council considered the draft Risk Assessment policy and unanimously AGREED that it should be adopted.

9.2 It was agreed to hold over the draft Reserves Policy.

9.3 The draft updated Asset Register was unanimously AGREED subject to correcting the total value figure to £40,444.67.

9.4 Web Accessibility Statement – see Clerk's report.

Cllr Smith left the meeting.

10. Clerk's Report

- 10.1 The Clerk noted that most matters had been dealt with in the earlier reports.
- 10.2 The Clerk reported that the one outstanding issue identified in previous Internal Audit reports had now been resolved: a previous Internal Audit report had recommended that the Council check whether the Insurance Premium Tax on a previous year's insurance policy premium had wrongly been claimed as part of a VAT reimbursement claim. The Clerk reported that having checked the position, the IPT had not been claimed as part of any VAT reimbursement claim.

As such, all recommendations raised by previous Internal Audit reports had now been investigated and resolved.

- 10.3 The Clerk has today received the report of Suffolk Cloud in respect of the accessibility of the Council's website. To respond to Assertion 10 in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return the Council should undertake a review of the accessibility of its website by reference to the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. In accordance with advice given by SALC, Suffolk Cloud (who created the Council's website) have reviewed the Council's website by reference to these latest standards. Having only received the Suffolk Cloud's report today, the Clerk has not yet had an opportunity to carry out a full review. However, the report summary records that the website achieves an overall accessibility score of 9.4 out of 10. The Clerk will review the report in full.

ACTION: CLERK

11. Village Group requests

11.1 Coney Weston Playing Field charity

The Council has received a request from the Trustees to provide assistance to the Charity in the form of funding for (1) the grass cutting for the period January to December 2026, (2) the insurance premiums, (3) professional advice in connection with any appointment of the Council as Sole Trustee, (4) hire of a skip to take away the membrane removed from around the swings, and (5) re-seeding the area around the swings where the membrane has been removed.

Vertas have quoted £1,950 inclusive of VAT for the grass cutting for 2026. The insurance premiums are currently £42.93 a month. The cost of a skip from Kent Skips is £270 inc VAT. Vertas have quoted £600 to do the re-seeding. It was proposed by Cllr Clarke and unanimously RESOLVED that the Council provide this financial assistance.

One of the Playing Field Trustees formally asked that the Parish Council adopt the Playing Field Charity as the Sole Trustee. The Councillors resolved to discuss and vote on this request at an Extraordinary Meeting if necessary, taking into account the outcome of a Public Meeting to be called by the current Trustees, and the satisfactory upgrading of the Charity's Governing Document.

11.2 Bowls Club

Cllr Clarke left the room. The Council considered the application for grant funding made

on behalf of the Bowls Club in the public section of the meeting. After discussion the Council agreed that the Bowls Club is a valuable village asset attended by many residents and is well supported, being a growing organization in the village and an organisation that supports village events. Cllr Sullivan proposed a grant of £1,000. The Council (other than Cllr Clarke) unanimously RESOLVED to make a grant of £1,000 to the Bowls Club.

11.3 Churchyard grass cutting

The PCC of the Church has reported that none of the £1,000 grant awarded and paid for the 2025/26 financial year had yet been spent. Under the Council's Grants Policy, any grants not spent within 6 months should be repaid. The Council is raising the issue with the PCC. If the PCC applies for a grant for 2026/27 and the Council agrees to award a grant, any of this year's grant unspent can be deducted from the 26/27 grant payment (i.e there will be a net payment). Should the Council decide to award a grant smaller than the unspent portion of this year's grant, or to make no grant at all, the difference will have to be repaid by the PCC. In the meantime, the Council can extend the 6-month period in the Grants Policy until the end of the financial year. This is in accordance with advice from SALC. The position will be communicated to the PCC. The Council unanimously AGREED to extend the 6-month limit for repayment of any unused grant to 31 March 2026.

ACTION: CLERK

12. Budget and Precept

12.1 The Council considered the draft Budget. The Clerk noted that the Cllrs have worked extremely hard to fix a budget at a level that means the Precept will increase by less than £3 or 4% for Band D households. This includes using £1,000 from reserves towards this year's budget, which reduces the Precept by an equivalent amount.

The Council unanimously RESOLVED to agree the draft Budget and that the Clerk and the Chair are authorised to submit the Precept application.

13 Finance

Invoice reference	Detail	Online payment/direct debit/cheque	
1	Lloyds Bank charge	Direct debit	4.25
2	Patrick Sullivan (Reimbursement for sand bags)	Online	21.56
3	Vertas (Playing Field grass cut)	Online	144.95
4	Vertas (Playing Field grass cut)	Online	144.95
5	Amy Mann (Rent for Village Hall car park)	Online	150.00

6	Peter Clarke (Reimbursement for sand)	Online	52.29
7	Bren Francis (Reimbursement for new printer for Parish Council)	Online	279.00
8	Administration	Online	1968.82
9	Lloyds Bank charge	Online	4.25

13.1 Playing Field grass cutting contract
See 11.1 above

13.2 Banking arrangements:
Cllr Sullivan has been added to the mandate and can now approve payments.

12.3 To review income and expenditure from 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025:
The Cllrs reviewed the Schedule and there were no questions.

12.5 To approve payments and receipts:

The Bank Reconciliation and Schedule of Payments were reviewed and the following payments agreed, with Cllr Sullivan, Cllr Francis and Cllr Clarke not voting on the proposed reimbursement payments to them, in accordance with their declarations of pecuniary interest.

13. Date of next meeting

13.1 The date of the next meeting is Thursday 6 March at 7pm at Coney Weston Village Hall.

14. Exclusion of the Public and Press

14.1 The meeting was closed to the public and press to consider Legal/Personnel Issues.

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Cllr Bren Francis
Chair