

NOWTON PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish held 4 March 2026

At 7 p.m. in Nowton Village Hall, Nowton

Present: Councillor - Mr Henry Hopking (Chairman)
Councillor - Ms Abigail Smith
Councillor - Mr Ross O'Hara
Parish Clerk - Mrs Pauline Stoddart

Four members of the public were in attendance.

1. **Apologies for Absence** – Apologies for absence were accepted from Cllr. Karen Soons and Marijke Heatrick.
2. **To ratify the Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on the 7 May 2025**, as approved at the meeting held 16 July 2025. Resolved as a true and accurate record.
3. **Annual Report of the Parish Council**, by the Chairman of the Parish Council.
The Chairman thanked fellow Councillors for their voluntary service, the Clerk for her support, particularly during a period of reduced Councillor numbers, and County and District Councillor Karen Soons, for her continued support, advice and generous financial support from her Locality Budget, to assist with the purchase of a Speed Indicator Dvice (SID.) Appreciation was also expressed to Nowton Park's Head Ranger, Liam Judd, for his productive collaboration, and to retiring Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator, Andy Tucker.

Summarising the year's key activities, the Chairman reported that speeding remained a major concern, although progress had been made towards installing a SID with two pole locations now approved. Funding remained a challenge and whilst contributions from Cllr. Soons' Locality Budget and Parish Council funds would support the project, further community involvement and funding options would need to be investigated.

The Council was also exploring the possibility of introducing 20mph zones in qualifying areas, such as Low Green, but could only proceed following formal consultation with residents. If there was sufficient support, the Council would then look at how such zones might be implemented, in a way that enhanced safety whilst preserving the character of the village.

Potholes continued to be a problem and the Chairman urged residents to report such issues via the SCC reporting tool system.

The Chairman noted that it was a pleasure to welcome a number of new residents to Nowton and a community self-help scheme was being reconsidered, dependent on volunteers, with details to follow in a forthcoming village newsletter.

To conclude his report, the Chairman gave special thanks to long-serving councillor Mike May on his retirement from the Council after 27 years, recognising his contribution to the village, the Council, Neighbourhood Watch, and the creation of the wooden Nowton village sign.

4. **Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch Report** – by Cllr. Henry Hopking, Neighbourhood Watch Volunteer. Cllr. Hopking began his report by tabling a statistical chart showing the different types of crime reported in Nowton, from 2019-2025. Suffolk was the third lowest crime area in the country, with Nowton a particularly safe area, but Cllr. Hopking warned that residents must not become complacent. Following the retirement of Mike May, a new Neighbourhood Watch volunteer was now needed to assist in this important village role.

5. **Annual Reports Suffolk County Council & West Suffolk Council**

No reports presented.

6. **Annual Financial Report of the Parish Council** - by the Responsible Financial Officer. The Council had kept to budget with no extraordinary or unexpected outgoings. The Precept for 2026-2027 had been increased by 13.8% against a 9% decrease in 2025-2026, resulting in an increase for a Band D property of £8.56 per annum. Rather than increase the precept request to raise funds towards the purchase of a SID, accrued Council funds of £1,411 would be used, leaving approximate reserves of £2,500.

7. **Working together to reduce Speeding**

- 7.1 **Fundraising for Speed Indicator Device (SID)**
The Chairman reported that Cllr. Soons had already contributed £313 from her Locality Budget this year, with a further £1,000 allocated from the 2026-2027 budget. Cllr. O'Hara would be investigating the setting up of GoFundMe options and fundraising within the village and any possible grants would be sought.
- 7.2 The Chairman advised that a battery-operated SID, rather than solar powered, would be purchased. Volunteers would be needed for re-charging the battery and moving the device; the project needed to be community led.
- 7.3 20mph – The Council is exploring a proposal to reduce the speed limit to 20mph on certain roads within the village. In order to do so the Council must formally gather widespread community support, which it intends to do by consultation with the parish, possibly in the form of a survey.

8. **Informal Reports/Discussion**

- 8.1 Nowton Village Hall Committee – no report presented.
- 8.2 Nowton Park – report from Liam Judd, Senior Parks Ranger for Nowton Park.

Liam began his report by highlighting a difficult period, following three incursions of the travelling community in Nowton Park. He went on to explain the tight security measures since undertaken, to ensure this does not happen again in the future.

The pathway near to the Bakery had been shut off, due to the danger of a dead tree which will need to be removed, and also danger of pedestrians stepping out from the hedge into the road; a new exit has been established and will eventually have a kissing gate fitted. The hedgerow beside the bend in the road has been cut back and will in future have a tighter cutting schedule.

The Lime Avenue, Liam explained, had already had several older trees removed as they had a tendency to 'drop limbs.' However, they were being replaced in a restorative programme.

The pond near Nowton Court was receiving attention, along with coppicing in order to bring more light to the pond.

Liam reported that the condition of the Park as a whole was a constant battle with mud. The increased footfall of visitors, particularly after Covid and the regular Park Runs, meant that the grass did not get a chance to recover. Liam advised that West

Stow would shortly be starting Park Runs and it was hoped this might relieve the numbers.

Nowton Park was the main clone bank for the native Black Poplar, Liam reporting that 600 trees had been propagated last year, with a further 2,000 this year. Associates becoming involved in the planting of the Black Poplar included named celebrities and Nowton Park would also be participating in the 250th anniversary of John Constable, with specific focus on the Black Poplars, by gifting some trees which were deeply connected to the Suffolk landscape Constable painted.

Questions put to Liam included access into the Park from the new housing development; Liam advised the addition of a new entrance, for pedestrian use only, with the creation of a pathway from the all-weather pitch to the café, as high footfall was expected. Further works included updated signage, maps, way markers and upgraded CCTV. Liam recognised that there was a need to educate Park visitors, particularly with the expected influx of visitors from the new housing development.

Chainsaw sculptures were mentioned, Liam advising that an Owl would be positioned at the new entrance. It was hoped to replace the Dragon with a Western Red Cedar chainsaw sculpture, and the Frogs were being moved to the pond.

8.3 St Peter's Church – report from Joyce Fynn, Churchwarden.

Joyce reported that St Peter's Church had lost a lot of its congregation and held just two services a month. The Church was within the Horringer Benefice of six, and had to find its Parish share, which Joyce advised equated to £4,000 this year. St Peter's Church was in desperate need of funds, and of particular concern was the East Window, as there was a crack in the wall of the Church which was being investigated, however, the amount required to resolve the issue could be as much as £30,000; fundraising and possible grants were being explored.

The Chairman said that St Peter's was a beautiful treasure in Suffolk, and praised Joyce, and Adrian Potter who cared for the churchyard, for all their hard work.

8.4 Nowton Cricket Club – no report presented.

The Chairman advised that the Cricket Club had a good relationship with the village and offered free Social Membership to residents.

9. **Any Other Business and Questions from the Floor**

The placing of the bee hives, looked after by the West Suffolk Beekeepers Association, within the Nowton Park old tennis court was considered an excellent idea and Liam confirmed it worked well.

The Chairman thanked those present for attending and closed the meeting at 8 p.m.

Signed

Date