

# Diss Town Council

## Minutes

### Draft

Minutes of the **Annual Town Meeting** held in the **Main Auditorium** at **Diss Corn Hall** on **Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026** at **6pm**.

Present: Councillors: D. Craggs (Chair), A. Kitchen, T. Knights, R. Peaty, T. Shava, L. Sinfield, J. Welch.

In attendance: Sarah Villafuerte-Richards (Town Clerk/CEO)  
Kimberley Jaynes (Marketing & Events Officer)  
District Councillor Minshull  
76 members of the public

#### **ATM0426/01 Welcome By the Town Mayor of Diss**

Councillor Declan Craggs welcomed those in attendance to the Annual Town Meeting.

#### **ATM0426/02 Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025 were agreed as a correct record and were duly signed by the Town Mayor. It was

**Resolved:** To approve the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

**(Action: Clerk; immediately)**

#### **ATM0426/03 Presentation by Adrian Ramsay MP**

Adrian Ramsay MP gave a presentation outlining his work since his election and his role in representing the constituency in Westminster. He thanked the wide range of local organisations present and acknowledged the strength of the local community and the contribution made by volunteers and organisations supporting Diss throughout the year. The MP highlighted the breadth of issues raised with him by residents and organisations, noting that his role was to act as the constituency's voice in Parliament including:

1. The impact of increased heating oil prices on rural communities, including farmers, and the need for improved short-term support beyond current Government measures.
2. Two current Government consultations:
  - a) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), identified as the largest area of casework, with concerns around resourcing, appropriateness of mainstream provision, and the need for alternative support models. Reference was made to inclusive support initiatives and planned local engagement events.
  - b) Proposals relating to social media use by under-16s, with evidence being gathered from young people, parents and teachers, and discussion of regulation, age-appropriate design and reduced screen time.
3. Farming and rural issues, including sustainable and nature-friendly farming, and opposition to changes to agricultural property relief.
4. Nature recovery and environmental resilience, including landscape-scale projects, biodiversity loss, flooding, drought and fire risk, and the need for improved preparedness and support for affected communities.
5. Health services, with particular emphasis on dentistry, engagement with campaign groups, training provision supported through the University of East Anglia, urgent dental care funding, preventive care, and proposals for neighbourhood health centres.
6. Animal welfare issues, including wildlife protection, puppy smuggling and farming practices.
7. Representation on local infrastructure matters, including proposed pylons affecting

Roydon, accessibility improvements at Diss railway station, and regeneration proposals for the former John Grose site.

8. Engagement with education, including school visits, traffic concerns around schools, and environmental initiatives supported by schools.
9. Ongoing constituency engagement through casework, surgeries, community visits, local media, annual meetings and social media.
10. Support for cultural initiatives, including the Town of Culture bid and a sustainability conference held at the Corn Hall.
11. The MP noted he was pleased to attend the Annual Town Meeting in person, having joined virtually the previous year.

Members of the public raised the following matters:

1. Health care provision and development

Concern was expressed regarding health care capacity alongside new development. Adrian Ramsay MP acknowledged the importance of infrastructure keeping pace with development and advised that he would engage with local GP surgeries to better understand the rationale for declining additional space on the bus station site.

2. Crisis care for young people and mental health provision

Concerns were raised about crisis mental health support for young people, including instances where families felt existing systems had failed and clarity was sought on appropriate routes for referral. Adrian Ramsay MP recognised the seriousness of the issue, noted his direct experience of supporting affected individuals, and advised that individual cases could be shared with him to help highlight the wider problem.

#### **ATM0426/04 Report on Activities of Diss Town Council including partnership working:**

The Mayor gave a presentation on the activities of Diss Town Council. Key highlights included Skate Park upgrade, restoration of St Mary's Church boundary wall, new fencing and planting at Rectory Meadow, landscaping and sleeper works at Anglia Garden, Council Offices exterior refurbishment, installation of bleed kits, ongoing maintenance and targeted improvements across parks and play areas, boardwalk & Mere garden improvements, five successful town events & two new councillors.

Planned Projects for 2026-27 & beyond include the Diss Youth & Community Centre development, porta cabin community facility (with Citizens Advice Diss & Thetford), improving Mere water quality (with partners/stakeholders), memorial safety testing at the Cemetery & St Mary's Churchyard & exploring options for the Park Pavilion (with South Norfolk Council / external funding). Due to improved financial investments, & cost savings across all areas, we have been able to allocate £174,000 towards these future projects.

The Mayor then introduced key partners who provided updates on how we work together.

##### **a) Citizens Advice Diss & Thetford**

An update was provided on the relocation to Market Place premises. It was noted that the charity is self-funding and relies on trained staff and volunteers to deliver services, working closely with partner organisations. Support includes general advice, legal and debt advice, energy support, and partnership work with organisations such as the Big C. They also provide mental health and money management support, work experience opportunities for young people, and grief management.

The organisation's ongoing partnership with Diss Town Council was noted, including use of their former portacabin and delivery of local drop-in sessions, with funds reinvested for community benefit.

Reference was made to further projects including Volunteer Week activities in June, and the role of trustees drawn from the local community, including governance, strategy and budget setting.

#### **b) Friends of Parish Fields**

The history of Parish Fields was outlined, including past development proposals and community opposition. It was noted that strong local support had led to the formation of Friends of Parish Fields, with Diss Town Council support including funding for signage. The involvement of South Norfolk District Council as a landowner and the use of ecological advice were noted.

A petition of approximately 2,600 signatures was referenced. Land management measures, including fencing, reduced strimming and resulting biodiversity improvements, were described. Surveys undertaken, including a bat survey identifying multiple species, were noted, along with aspirations to extend the woodland walk to Shelfanger Road.

#### **c) Diss Community Woodland Project**

An update was given on the Diss Litterpicking Group, which meets monthly with support from Diss Town Council, with 232 bags collected over the past year.

The Diss Community Woodland Project was established approximately 20 years ago, with significant developments in recent years, including woodland creation, ecological assessment by Norfolk Wildlife Trust, and progress towards County Wildlife Site status. Sites including Quaker Wood and a second recently acquired site were referenced, along with historical context for Bombard Copse.

A draft programme of proposals from the steering group was outlined, covering woodland management, access, visibility and signage. Consultation opportunities were highlighted, including the Annual Town Meeting and a forthcoming annual meeting. Ongoing collaboration with Diss Town Council through a memorandum of understanding was noted, including maintenance work at the Council Offices gardens that benefits biodiversity and generates income to support other projects. Volunteer involvement and working parties were acknowledged.

#### **d) Diss Corn Hall Trust**

Thanks were expressed to Diss Town Council for funding support for projects at the Corn Hall. Outreach activities were outlined, including sessions for young children, social activities for adults, dementia-friendly provision, school holiday activities and youth theatre sessions.

Reference was made to open mic and comedy events supported by Council funding, with plans to continue and expand programming. The forthcoming DISSCover Bookfest was highlighted as a current event, partly funded by the Council.

An update was provided on the UK Town of Culture bid, noting that it was aimed at small and medium-sized towns, involved a two-stage process, and had been submitted jointly with other local theatre venues. The wider benefits of collaboration and development of further cultural opportunities were noted, alongside ongoing efforts to engage younger audiences.

### **ATM0426/05 Reports on the Activities of County & District Councils**

Councillor Minshull presented a report on the activities of the District Council. An apology was conveyed on behalf of Councillor Kiddie, who had stood down due to ill health. Tribute was paid to his contribution to the community, including his work in support of the children's centre, involvement in community activities such as the carnival and bunting volunteer group, and his wider service to the town.

The following updates were provided:

A visit by Sir Chris Whitty in November was noted, during which he was shown facilities including the swimming pool. A £4.5m refurbishment of the pool was outlined, including a move from gas heating to air source heat pumps. Phase 2 works at the leisure centre were reported to commence in June, with reopening anticipated in June 2027. The facility was described as providing a range of services beyond a gym, including youth access, health-related provision in partnership with the NHS, studio space, soft play and café facilities, with particular benefit for young families.

Reference was made to plans for a new bus station. Designs could not be shared during the pre-election period, with further information expected after 8 May. Concerns were raised regarding the impact of Local Government Reorganisation, including financial sustainability, asset distribution and the implications for smaller market towns. It was noted that correspondence had been sent to the Minister highlighting these concerns.

Joint working with Diss Town Council was reported, including the purchase of a new street-cleaning machine and the introduction of more regular cleaning along Mere Street. An update was provided on the introduction of food waste collection. While an agreement had been signed previously, implementation had been delayed, with service provision expected later in the year. Residents will receive two additional food waste bins.

Diss has received Mindful Town status, recognising volunteer-led mental health awareness and first aid training, including training of trainers. Reference was made to progress on a school of dentistry, including funding secured, with ongoing approvals required. The benefits of local training provision and access to services were noted.

Updates were given on increased national housing targets to £1.5m and the associated requirement to review the recently adopted Greater Norwich Local Plan, and implications for land supply and development control, including the role of the Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan.

Refurbishment of play areas across the district was reported, including sites in Diss and Roydon, with consultation undertaken and replacement equipment planned. An increase in councillor casework was noted, including complex issues such as domestic violence. The opening of refurbished temporary accommodation at Clare House was reported, providing local units and reducing reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation.

It was also noted that the District Councillor regularly appears on local radio to provide updates to residents.

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## Break & Networking

### ATM0426/06 Question & Answer session

The following matters were raised during the Question-and-Answer session:

1. An update was requested regarding an alternative site for the substation relating to the Shelfanger Road development. It was noted that a response is being chased from the developer and that the Town Council did previously discuss an additional financial contribution and new road access from the development to the Cemetery extension when the request to accommodate the substation was received.
2. An update on the plans for developing the Diss Youth & Community Centre site was requested. It was noted that a quotation from an architect to provide RIBA Stages 0-2 services (Strategic Definition through to Concept Design) has been received and comparative quotes are being requested.
3. The use of Diss railway station was discussed, including the absence of current funding for improvements. Reference was made to the need for improved accessibility, including lifts. It was noted that Network Rail progress had been slow and that previous usage figures had been cited as insufficient to justify investment. The matter was noted as being under review by Norfolk County Council. Diss Town Council will consider reviewing the proposals.  
**(Action: Clerk; by 31.07.26)**
4. Concerns were raised regarding approved cabling works linked to a solar park, including the agreed route and short-term traffic impacts. It was noted that planning permission had been granted under delegated authority, that highways officers had raised no objections, and that the local planning authority had no legal grounds for refusal. Reasons were outlined as to why alternative routing options were not considered feasible, and reference was made to discussions with landowners and the

preference for routing within publicly owned land for maintenance purposes.

5. A representative of Diss Heritage Trust explained that residents had not received correspondence from the District Council regarding the cabling works and indicated an intention to seek further information via a Freedom of Information request.

**ATM0426/07 Award Presentations to the Honoured Citizens for 2026/27 & the 2025/26 Town Mayor's Nominated Charity, Friends of Diss Primary Academy Partnership (PTA)**

The Mayor introduced the award presentations and thanked those who had submitted nominations for the Honoured Citizen Awards, recognising individuals who demonstrate outstanding commitment to the community. Three strong nominations were received, and this year's award was presented to Iain Sturgeon. His proposer, Andy Davidson, spoke about his exceptional service as Bandmaster of the Diss Salvation Army Band, his longstanding support for the Diss Royal British Legion and veteran community, and his leadership in the 80th anniversary commemorations of D-Day, VE Day and VJ Day. His dedicated role in organising the annual Remembrance Parade during a period of significant change was also acknowledged.

Alison Bannister, another nominee, received a certificate of recognition for her decades of dedicated service to the town. Her proposer, Bronwen Moran spoke highly of her contributions to the community including a central role in establishing the Citizens Advice Bureau, ongoing commitment to church and neighbourhood initiatives, long-standing involvement with the Dove Dementia Café, and generous support for local groups, charities and residents.

The Mayor also presented the 2025/26 Town Mayor's nominated charity cheque award of £1,643.25 to Friends of Diss Primary Academy Partnership (PTA).

Meeting closed: 20:48.

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Councillor D Craggs  
Chair / Town Mayor