

Diss Town Council

Minutes

Draft

Minutes of the meeting of the **Town Council** held in the **Council Chamber** at **Diss Corn Hall** on **Wednesday 11th February 2026** at **7.15pm**.

Present: Councillors: D. Craggs (Chair), S. Kiddie, A. Kitchen, K. Murphy, R. Peaty, L. Sinfield, J. Welch

In attendance: Sarah Villafuerte-Richards (Town Clerk)
District Councillor Minshull
8 members of the public

FC0226/01 Apologies

Councillor's Name	Apologies Received	Absent Without Apology	Reason / Approval
S. Browne	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
C. Dente	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal family reasons
J. Robertson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Holiday

FC0226/02 Declarations of Interest

Minute No.	Councillor's Name	Personal/Other Interest	Pecuniary Interest	Reason
	K. Murphy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of Planning Committee Interest in Items of Urgent Business
	All			Item 9

FC0226/03 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Full Council meeting on Wednesday 14th January 2026. The apologies were amended as cllr Murphy verbally advised the Chair of his absence. It was

Resolved: To approve the amended minutes of the meeting of the Full Council held on Wednesday 14th January 2026 as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

FC0226/04 Public Participation

Nine members of the public were in attendance. One member of the public raised a query regarding an incomplete co-option form in relation to item 8. It was confirmed that the Clerk held a complete copy of the form at the meeting.

District Councillor Minshull reported on the final settlement received on Christmas Eve, confirming that the precept request process was underway. He further noted that additional Government changes had revised the financial framework, resulting in a projected £1 million reduction in funding for the District next year, followed by a further £1.1 million reduction in the subsequent two years. These changes are associated with the wider programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and national redistribution of resources.

The street cleaner machine, for which Diss was the only town to submit a request, has now been approved. A recent report issued indicates that the number of vacant retail units in Diss is slightly higher than in other market towns within the District. Diss has a significantly larger number of total retail units (including Wymondham), with a recorded 12% vacancy rate, compared to a 14% national average. This figure excludes B&M. The next quarterly report is expected to reflect an improvement. A small number of recent closures were noted (including Copy Diss), while other businesses are opening or relocating, such as Hemstocks, which intends to reopen adjacent to Diss Publishing.

Funding is available to support the review of the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan (DDNP), although these funds are likely to be allocated quickly. The District is required to identify more than £1 million to fund the new food waste collection vehicles, following the withdrawal of central Government support. Delivery of the vehicles is now expected in October, later than the previously anticipated date of April. Great Yarmouth faces similar delays. In light of the above, the Council Tax increase is likely to be £5 per Band D property.

County Councillor Wilby submitted a written report for Members' information. The report noted the county council elections scheduled for May 2026 would not proceed so that the authority could focus on local government reorganisation and the devolution programme. This follows the cancellation of the Mayoral Elections originally planned for May 2026. A by-election will, however, take place in Diss and Roydon on Thursday 7th May due to the resignation of Cllr Keith Kiddie.

Their Bus Service Improvement Plan has delivered a 26% increase in passenger numbers since 2022 and introduced improvements across 44 bus routes, including enhanced evening and Sunday services, affordable fares, investment in a greener fleet and improved passenger information and waiting areas. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has rolled out 160 new Axon body-worn cameras across stations to support improved situational awareness, decision-making and firefighter safety, with live-streaming and two-way communication capability for incident support.

There is an ongoing need for foster carers in Norfolk. Residents are encouraged to find out more at to find out more visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/fostering.

FC0226/05

Items of Urgent Business

Members were updated on a booking made by the Green Party at the Corn Hall. District councillor Minshull advised that the Council had previously operated a policy of not permitting political events on Council-owned land but that the booking had been accepted by the Corn Hall Trust.

A review of the lease and associated documents confirmed that there is no restriction on political events, and that responsibility for bookings lies with the Corn Hall Trustees, who must act in accordance with charity law. The Corn Hall Manager had obtained assurances from the organisers that the event would be a closed meeting, not a rally, with attendance controlled by prior registration, and with expected numbers below 100.

Members discussed the need for consistency should similar requests arise in future, and the possibility of developing a policy to clarify expectations and the respective roles of councillors and Trustees. It was also noted that enquiries from other political parties had previously been made but did not proceed, as alternative venues were found. The event will be charged at full commercial rates.

FC0226/06

Finance

- a) Members noted bank outgoings for January 2026 retrospectively.
- b) Members noted the Income & Expenditure report for January 2026.
- c) Members noted the Earmarked Reserves report for January 2026.
- d) Members noted the internal control councillor bank reconciliations for November & December 2025.

FC0226/07

Park Road Development update

Members received an update from South Norfolk District Council regarding the redevelopment proposals for the north and south sides of Park Road. The Project Manager provided an overview of the project background, consultation process and emerging designs. Over 300 consultation responses were received, including 119 from Diss High School, representing a range of ages and genders.

Feedback indicated support for a multi-use community facility, not solely a leisure or gym space, but a community hub offering areas to relax, healthy café options, space for classes, and rooms that could be hired for board games or informal activities. Young people reported a need for places they could use without being asked to leave. Some consultees expressed views that the facility was not needed. The project team noted the ambition to improve the appearance and function of this part of Diss, which forms a key gateway near the bus terminal.

The project has progressed to RIBA Stage 4, incorporating consultation feedback and ongoing work with designers and architects. A planning application has been submitted. As the site lies within the Conservation Area, comments were received regarding the brick façade, which may require refinement to ensure it remains in keeping with the character of the area and the Mere.

Minor internal amendments have been made, and the building remains fully wheelchair accessible, with stepped access removed due to cost and replaced by a continuous slope. Discussions continue with Diss Town Council on boundary levels adjoining Madgett's Walk, where existing raised planters are located.

The building will be energy-efficient, including an e-gym suite, a Changing Places facility, and consideration of how toilet provision will accommodate different needs, including transgender users. A digital "fly-through" of the building design was shown. The project team reported they are close to confirming the design and associated costs, with further value engineering ongoing. A paper is expected to go to Cabinet in April to enable funding draw-down, with a planned start on site in May/June, and an estimated 45–50 week build programme, targeting completion in April 2027.

Provision for EV parking spaces is included as part of planning requirements. The north-west side of the site may be opened up through reduced hedging, though there will be no access through to B&M, following discussions with Colliers.

On the south side of Park Road, proposals include utilising the footpath/cycle path alignment to allow buses to exit via the Morrisons roundabout, reducing the need for reversing movements. Morrisons are no longer willing to engage further on land options for this element, though the economic and social benefits have been outlined and subsequent to the approval of their planning application. A Traffic Management Consultant will be required to review the combined impact of both projects. It was also confirmed that the planned GP surgery will not be relocating to this site. Short-term repairs will be carried out to resolve issues with bus station lighting.

FC0226/08

Co-Option

Members considered two applications for co-option to Diss Town Council. The first applicant explained that she has lived in and around Diss all her life and has always wanted to be more involved as she loves the town and particularly enjoys organising events. Her proposer, cllr Kiddie commented that she knows Diss well & knows people and may capture an audience the Council doesn't reach and help dispel negative rumours. Resourcing events has been a challenge, and she would like to source funds to help improve the look of the town specifically shop windows.

The second applicant has been attending recent meetings and got to know some councillors and is curious to know how local government works. Life changes have afforded him some time, he likes to learn and has lots to offer in terms of creativity. He would like to improve the evening offering in Diss for economic and cultural gain particularly with the close connection to London. His proposer, cllr Craggs has known applicant for number of years. He feels he has a good vision of what Diss should be, is eager to learn, attended nearly all meetings over the last 4 months and brings new expertise will complement team. It was

Resolved: That Christina Knights and Takudzwa Shava be co-opted to serve as Members of Diss Town Council with immediate effect, having met the eligibility requirements for co-option, been duly considered by Council & signed their declarations of office before the Clerk.

(Action: Clerk; arrange completion of Register of Interests; by 11.03.26)

Councillors Knights and Shava joined the table.

FC0226/09

Councillor Allowance Review

Members considered the amended conditions for claiming councillor allowances as set out in report 43/2526. It was noted that it was intended the revised conditions apply for the current year. Members referenced attendance at other authorities (as low as 8%), that the councillor allowances had not increased for many years and noted that some councils do not pay allowances at all.

The discussion also included whether events, civic activities, and broader participation should form part of attendance expectations, and whether additional wording was required to clarify the role of apologies or dispensations. Members noted concerns regarding low attendance levels at certain functions and the principle of ensuring allowances reflect active engagement. It was:

Resolved: That only councillors achieving 75% or higher attendance at both Full Council meetings and any opted-in committee meetings within a financial year may claim the annual allowance. Councillors who do not qualify may appeal to the Council Leader.

(Action: RFO; update and publish the revised allowance conditions; by 28.02.26)

FC0226/10

Internal Controls

Members considered recommendations regarding the review of internal controls (report 44/2526). It was

Resolved: That the recommendations set out within the review of Internal Controls be approved.

(Action: RFO; implement the approved internal control measures; by 31.03.26)

FC0226/11

Community Grant Scheme

Members considered a recommendation from the Council's Grant Panel regarding an application for funding to support a book festival (report 45/2526). It was noted that the full grant fund of £10k remained available and that the proposal represented seed funding for an event that could, if successful, become a regular feature for the town. Members discussed the potential benefits of the event, including opening the Corn Hall to new audiences, supporting local businesses, and encouraging reading and literacy, particularly among young people. It was also noted that Diss Town Council has a longstanding aim to promote arts and cultural activities within the community. It was

Resolved: That a grant award of £3.5k is made to the Diss Corn Hall Trust to support DissCover Book Festival 2026.

(Action: Clerk/RFO; issue grant award confirmation and arrange release of funds; immediately)

FC0226/12

Memorial Safety Testing

Members considered recommendations for testing memorials in the Cemetery and St Mary's Churchyard (report 46/2526). It was

Resolved:

1. That the quote from Contractor 1 to undertake memorial testing at Diss Cemetery and St Mary's Churchyard at a cost of £4,310, plus £4.50 per label for unsafe memorials, allocated from Earmarked Reserves – Cemetery Grounds (including monuments), be approved.
2. That permission be sought from the Parochial Parish Council.
3. That a Memorial Testing Policy be drafted for submission with the faculty.
4. That an application be made for a List B faculty for the testing of memorials in St Mary's Churchyard.

(Action: Cemetery Lead; by 31.03.26)

FC0226/13

Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan

Members considered correspondence regarding the review of the Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan (DDNP). It was noted that the Mid Suffolk Local Plan is expected to be released sooner than the South Norfolk Council (SNC) plan. Members agreed that it may be prudent to postpone further action until additional information is available from SNC.

From a planning perspective, it was highlighted that applications referencing DDNP policy points continue to be received. The current Plan was adopted prior to the introduction of additional site allocations within the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) and the emerging Mid Suffolk Plan.

Members noted that the authority does not currently have a five-year housing land supply, resulting in the application of the "tilted balance" when determining planning applications. Applications must therefore be assessed on their individual merits. Discussion took place regarding the need to review the DDNP given the resources required to do so and the implications of continuing to rely on the existing document, with reference made to the Shelfanger Road allocation, where only half of the designated land has been retained.

It was reported that SNC grant funding of up to £6,000 is available for neighbourhood plan reviews, with a further potential £10,000 in additional support. Members acknowledged that maintaining an up-to-date Plan provides the strongest available protection in the absence of a five-year land supply. It was

Resolved: to liaise with the other Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan parishes to propose submitting a grant application for a review of the DDNP.

(Action: Clerk; immediately)

FC0226/14

Events

Members considered the revised Stallholder Terms and Conditions, Bar Tender Document & Entertainer Agreement for use at events. It was

- Resolved:**
1. That the Stallholder Terms & Conditions for use at Council-run events be approved.
 2. That the Bar Tender Document for use at Council-run events be approved.
 3. That the Entertainer Agreement for use at Council-run events be approved.
- (Action: DTC Office; immediately)**

FC0226/15

Items for Noting

- a) It was noted that the Clerk & Town Mayor's updates on activities since their last reports will be on the March agenda.
- b) It was noted that NALC has published a new online resource showcasing practical case studies on devolution from parish and town councils across England and case studies are available to view via the Council's subscription. Clerk to circulate examples.
- c) Members noted the information regarding the EcoPower Suffolk Solar Project, which is outside of local control. It was noted that there could be traffic impacts given the significant amount of aggregate being brought in.
- d) Members noted the progress on decisions made at the last meeting of council.

FC0226/16

Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Full Council is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 18th March 2026 at 7.15pm.

FC0226/17

Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings)

Members considered a resolution under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 and Standing Orders 3d to exclude members of the public and press in order to discuss the next item of business, which was properly considered to be of a confidential nature.

FC0226/18

Legal Support Services

Members considered a recommendation for appointing legal support services (confidential report 47/2526). Cllr Craggs summarised the report and meetings with the proposed solicitors. It was noted that three solicitors, two based in Diss, had been approached and

- Resolved:** That Clapham & Collinge Solicitors be appointed to carry out Diss Town Council's legal work on a fixed-price basis, and that their service be reviewed following the completion of the two specified tasks.
- (Action: Clerk; immediately)**

Meeting closed: 21.13.

Councillor D. Craggs
Chair / Town Mayor