

Diss Town Council

Minutes

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the **Town Council** held in the **Council Chamber** at **Diss Corn Hall** on **Wednesday 4th March 2026** at **6.00pm**.

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

In attendance: Sarah Villafuerte-Richards (Town Clerk)
District Councillors Kiddie & Minshull
17 members of the public

EFC0326/01 Apologies

Councillor's Name	Apologies Received	Absent Without Apology	Reason / Approval
S. Browne	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
K. Murphy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

EFC0326/02 Declarations of Interest

Minute No.	Councillor's Name	Personal/Other Interest	Pecuniary Interest	Reason
EFC0326/06 2026/0271	A. Kitchen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lives on Roydon Road

EFC0326/03 Minutes

Members noted that the minutes of the Full Council meeting and Planning committee on Wednesday 11th February 2026 will be considered at the next scheduled meetings respectively.

EFC0326/04 Public Participation

19 members of the public were in attendance. A representative of the Diss Heritage Trust (DHT) presented some alternatives to existing design most notably creating an entrance from the car park side where most people will arrive either by car, bike or bus and the swapping of the soft play and community space so that the latter benefits from an extended green usable event space next to the Park and improved views over the Mere. Other suggestions included reconfiguring internal spaces, creating a third floor in the roof, and adopting stronger sustainability measures such as solar panels and rainwater harvesting, stressing that the scheme currently underuses the site's unique potential.

Several members of the public spoke of the warehouse type appearance of the building given its significant location and another spoke in favour of the application siting the numerous opportunities there have been for comments during the public consultations. The DHT representative stated that their comments had already been sent to the District Council following the public consultation but these comments had not been incorporated into the current scheme.

South Norfolk District Council's project team reported that the scheme has been developed openly and constructively, with responses provided to Freedom of Information requests and community queries. Work has progressed through RIBA Stages 1–4 to achieve design and cost certainty, supported by extensive public engagement through market events, the DTC AGM, online feedback, demand surveys and input from the local high school. With over 300 responses and more than 95% positive feedback, the proposals are described as informed, balanced and reflective of community needs, recognising that no design will satisfy all views.

The building design is intended to be simple, robust and appropriate to its setting, using durable materials that reflect local character, with timber and glazing to create an active frontage. Practical adjustments have been made, including the removal of the roof terrace to reduce costs and revised highway access for safety. The internal layout follows the agreed brief, and sustainability features include photovoltaic panels and air-source heat pumps. The team concluded that the proposal is deliverable, affordable and future-proof, providing a well-considered civic facility for Diss.

District Councillor Minshull asked members to consider the proposals in the agenda pack and either accept or refuse. Planners did not support more than two floors and he reiterated the involvement of experts in leisure centres who have worked on previous successful projects. He explained that re-assessing the plans at this stage would likely add up to half a million pounds extra, which would put the project in jeopardy given the limited budget. It has taken 10 years to arrive at this point, and the town needs this facility to draw visitors into the town and for those living here. The gym facility will be available to all members of the community and will support GP referrals, supporting a key objective of the Council around healthy living. It will also support the night-time economy with people sitting outside with views over the Mere, listening to music and enjoying a drink.

Members of the Diss Leisure Centre commented that the public consultation could have included engagement with the 400 existing members and that there are many issues to be learnt from the swimming pool redevelopment.

Another DHT representative reiterated their support for this type of development on the site. They tried to get feedback from the community about what they would like, hasn't seen the results of the District Council's consultation and want to maximise the potential of the development. They requested financial information to see how their proposed changes may impact that and feel the design should be re-appraised.

The District Council representative explained that they have been responding to DHT, as a member of the public, but is unable to disclose financial information due to commercial sensitivity.

A third alternative design was then proposed siting the building at the front of the site by Park Road with the car park to the rear. It was suggested this would provide an entrance on the street frontage, better 'showcase' SNC leisure facilities, allow the Mere edge to be green space, locate the café and toilet facilities close to the bus station and be a more cost-effective option with a smaller car park.

Discussion amongst Town Council members included the benefits of a soft play facility for young families and the clubs that they and older children could attend via the community facility offering. Members felt the town needs this development and were mindful of the additional time and funds that would be needed to make changes. Although they felt the suggestions had merit, they were aware that they have already been considered and dismissed by the District Council. Members considered the risk of delaying the project, the likelihood of a revised design that would match the proposals given the limitations of the site and previous investigations and aesthetics of the building in its setting, which although could be improved, is in keeping with the area and local design principles.

EFC0326/05 Items of Urgent Business

There was none.

EFC0326/06 New Planning Applications and Development Control Matters

Regarding application 2026/0271, members felt the proposal was a huge improvement on existing, in keeping with the neighbouring properties and set back from the road. One member felt the site plans could be improved to include properties surrounding the proposal and was directed to the Planning Portal where further information is available. It was noted that the applicant intends to retain the mature trees at the front of the property.

Application No.	Type	Address	Proposal	Response
2025/3866	Full Planning Permission	Land South of The Mere Park Road Diss Norfolk	Erection of a two-storey building for leisure and community activities (Class E (d) and F2 (b)) with access, parking, landscaping, and drainage	RECOMMEND APPROVAL The proposal for the Diss Leisure & Community Centre offers several notable planning considerations. First, it redevelops the former John Grose brownfield site, making efficient use of previously used land and contributing to the wider South Mere regeneration area.

				<p>Second, the scheme delivers substantial community and health benefits, with facilities such as a fitness suite, studios, soft play, café, and flexible community rooms — all aligning strongly with district priorities around wellbeing.</p> <p>In terms of design, it's a modern two-storey building appropriate for contemporary leisure use, but members should note that some local heritage groups have raised concerns about how it fits within the existing townscape.</p> <p>Transport plans include adequate parking spaces and sit alongside discussions about a new bus station opposite the site, supporting sustainable travel.</p> <p>The development aligns with national, district, and local policy priorities — including efficient land use, strengthening market towns, and enhancing community infrastructure.</p> <p>Finally, the project has benefited from public engagement, with around 400 responses shaping the proposals.</p> <p>The Town Council therefore supports the delivery of this leisure and community facility development for Diss, recognising its strong community, environmental, and strategic benefits. The District Council is asked to continue to monitor design quality to ensure it respects local character and reflects public views.</p> <p>It is recommended for approval and consideration by the Development Management Committee.</p>
2026/0271	Full Planning Permission	Waycross 43 Roydon Road Diss Norfolk IP22 4LW	Demolition of existing dwelling and construction of self-build dwelling	<p>RECOMMEND APPROVAL</p> <p>This application is deemed acceptable and delegated to Officer subject to consideration of protection on the mature trees at the front of the property.</p>

(Action: Office Administrator to send response; by 06.03.26)

EFC0326/07 Citizens Advice Portacabin

Members considered further information regarding the proposal to utilise the former Citizens Advice porta cabin to benefit the local community (report 48/2526). The Clerk summarised the report. There was a question regarding the likelihood we would fill the space to cover the operational

costs. Citizens Advice previously canvassed the community regarding use of space and received a positive response. It was noted that the repair café run by volunteers is a different format to the community shed, which is a members-based arrangement but there may be cross over with that and the Diss Community Workshop relocating back to Diss and the lead volunteer setting up the community shed has been asked to contact both groups to see if they can work together.

There is some associated risk but the Council has budgeted to cover some of the operational costs and Citizens Advice support the initiative and are prepared to back it financially also. The Council has not been able to offer certain community services since the DYCC closure, and it would provide an opportunity to test the market in advance of any future development. Once the community shed is set up as a Charity, it can apply for funds to purchase equipment, support costs and maintain the premises. There are lots of successful community sheds around the area and it would be good to have one in Diss.

District Councillor Minshull confirmed that the District Council would be supportive of a lease agreement with the Council on similar terms to the Citizens Advice. They were paying around £900 per annum when the lease ceased, which is less than value of car parking spaces. The Council is also keen to continue to strengthen its relationship with the Citizens Advice. It was

Resolved: To enter into a lease agreement with South Norfolk District Council for 2 years on the same terms as former lease with CADAT to bring the former Citizens Advice porta cabin on Shelfanger Road into community use subject to approval by South Norfolk District Council and review of the lease agreement.
(Action: Clerk to follow up with SNDC; immediately)

EFC0326/08

Skate Park

Members noted the successful funding outcome from The National Lottery towards the costs of the Skate Park repairs and considered a quotation following the assessment of the half pipe equipment. The Clerk advised that the contractors couldn't have determined the full costs of the half pipe work until after they dismantled it, the funds are available following the grant outcome and black skate lite can be ordered immediately to progress the works more quickly. It was noted that the Skate Park users are keen to promote facility with a re-opening event post works. There was discussion regarding the addition of a pump track. Significant funds would be required, and users have committed to undertaking a fundraising campaign to help with costs. It was

Resolved: To approve the additional costs of £3,242.50 excl. VAT to progress the Skate Park repairs following the assessment of the half pipe equipment and the change of skate lite surface colour to black.
(Action: Clerk; immediately)

EFC0326/09

Date of Next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of Full Council is scheduled for Wednesday 18th March 2026 at 7:15pm.

Meeting closed: 19.12.

Councillor D. Craggs
Chair / Town Mayor