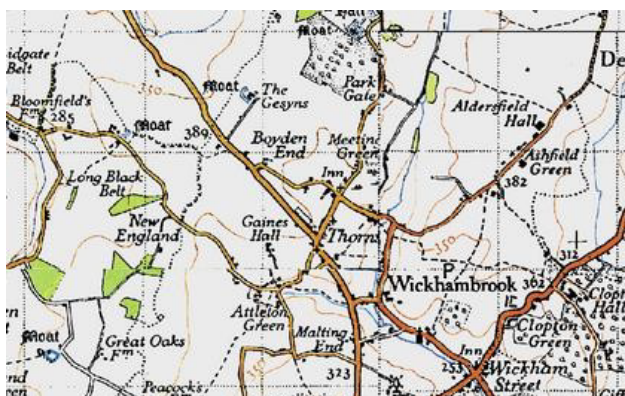


# WICKHAMBROOK PARISH COUNCIL

## Action Plan 2025/26



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## **Introduction**

### **Context**

This is our fourth Action Plan, prepared at a time of austerity across society when all organisations that provide services to the community, be they public, private or voluntary are facing cost pressures and resource restrictions. The emphasis is on value for money, efficiencies, collaboration and accepting that some things just will not get done. Through a planning process though, we can have a shared vision and direction, protect what is important and consider new ways of getting things done.

Although not new, encouraging others to help themselves and not to rely on things being done for them is as important as ever. The aspiration for West Suffolk has been set out elsewhere as being **'committed to ensuring that everything we do takes account of the needs and views of local communities, residents, businesses and interest groups'**. That means communities that can help themselves, that have the networks and resources to find local solutions to local problems, and have the means to ensure that wherever possible those that do need services can access them at a time and in a way that is most suitable.

Wickhambrook Parish Council, as the first tier of local government, is uniquely situated to provide the forum for understanding and supporting the needs of this community. It provides advocacy on behalf of its residents, uses linkages to other organisations to bring in services, or directly procures them itself. Liaison with West Suffolk and Suffolk County Councils happens at all levels, and there are linkages to health and social care as well. Day-to-day, the Council will seek solutions for the community, looking for skills and volunteers to make improvements to our surroundings or bringing particular neighbourhood issues to local attention to promote a better quality of life for all.

Above all your Parish Council is here to help, support and encourage. This Plan tells you how.

### **The Planning Cycle**

Planning (and performance) is a continuous process of gathering and assessing information, formulating actions, doing them, and then reviewing performance and gathering again.



Of course, at key stages one has to pause and reflect, and consider how the plan is evolving – and not just once per year, as the plan is relevant to every significant decision made.

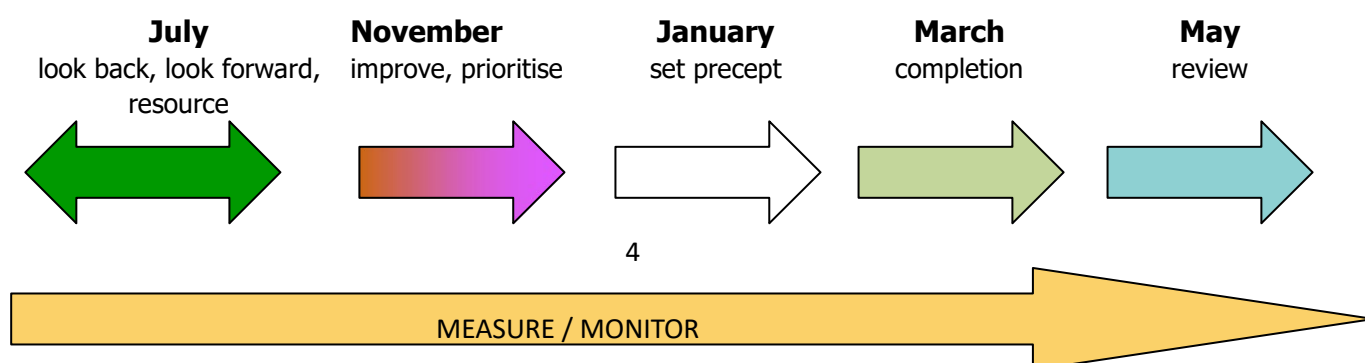
Once specific actions are agreed to deliver this Plan, will be entered on the Actions Register, which will be monitored at every meeting of the Council.

## **Linkages**

This Plan is linked very closely to the allocation of resources – mostly financial, but people's time and energy too. Our finance is almost entirely derived from the Council Tax system, which follows the financial year April to March. Our precept, or 'demand', placed upon the Council Tax system has to be declared every January, in order that West Suffolk Council can calculate the overall tax collection sums for each eligible household and produce the billing required.

## **Key dates**

Therefore this Plan will be drafted from November in each year, allowing it to evolve as the budget is also prepared, for final precept calculations in January. The Plan cycle will run from April to March, to match the funding available, and will be formally reviewed in May and November to assess achievements in the previous cycle, and progress in the current one.



## **What is a parish council?**

There are two sorts of parishes whose boundaries do not always coincide:

- the Ecclesiastical Parishes centred on an Anglican church with a parochial church council and,
- the Civil Parishes, which are part of local administration, having a parish (or town) council.

A civil parish is an independent local democratic unit for villages, smaller towns, and suburbs of urban areas. Each parish has a Parish (or Town) Meeting consisting of all its local government electors and most (where the electorate exceeds 200) have a Parish or Town Council. Over 13 million people live in such parishes, with approximately 1279<sup>1</sup> in the parish of Wickhambrook.

The parish council is a small local authority. Its councillors are elected for four years at a time in the same way as for other councils. Bye-elections may be held to fill vacancies occurring between elections, or members may be co-opted onto the Council if no election is called. The council is the corporation of its parish in the Suffolk area, it covers the village of Wickhambrook and outlying Greens. In May each year the councillors choose a chairperson from amongst their number. In the Wickhambrook Parish, there are eight councillors who make up the Parish Council, which employs a part-time Clerk to manage administration.

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<sup>1</sup> Suffolk Observatory 2020

## **What can we do?**

### **Powers and Duties**

Parish councils have a number of formal powers, set out in a wide range of legislation. A duty is something that a council must do, a power is something that it may do, if it so decides. A parish council cannot do anything that is not permitted in law.

Parish Councils in Suffolk have lately become more significant, particularly with the proposed local government re-organisation and a move to unitary authorities. The parish councillors know the villages and can now represent their views directly to other authorities like West Suffolk and the Area Boards, Health Authorities, Police and Fire Authorities at County level.

The parish council is entitled to be consulted on planning applications<sup>2</sup>, which include work to listed buildings and on proposals in conservation areas, and is sometimes consulted on such things as schools and roads. It puts the parish's case at public inquiries. Recent moves from Government toward greater 'localism' may increase the role of Parish Councils even further, especially in the field of development control and planning. An example of this is the Parish Council's support of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, a parish led project which will help local people to identify and promote the right development for their community (whilst still meeting local and national planning guidance and requirements).

### **Accountability**

You elect its members every four years - the next time will be May 2027 - and you are entitled to attend the annual parish meeting (held between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June each year) and to say what you think. You can also go to every meeting of the Parish Council and meet the Council members, listen to their business and participate in the time especially set aside for that purpose at the start. The accounts are strictly audited every year and published.

You can find out more about what we do, how we do it, and our meetings on the parish website at <https://www.wickhambrook.org>

## **What do we do?**

The Parish Council provides a number of direct services to the community, and acts as custodian to a number of assets held in the 'public name'.

A full [list of the parish assets](#) is listed on the website, but includes:

- Open Spaces (e.g. Six Acres, the Greens and Cemetery)
- Play equipment
- Street Furniture (Notice boards, benches, waste bins etc)
- The War Memorial, Chapel of Rest and Village Sign
- Office Equipment

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<sup>2</sup> Generally, Outline Planning, Full Planning, Householder Applications, Listed Building Consents and Tree Preservation Orders

The Council is responsible for maintenance, repairs and insurance for these items and facilities.

Although West Suffolk Council is the Planning Authority, the Parish Council is consulted on most planning applications<sup>3</sup> made in the parish. Councillors consider planning applications at their meetings and inform West Suffolk Council of their views.

At each meeting of the Council, reports from our District and County Councillors are received (and we work with them to resolve issues which affect the parish). Each meeting considers issues for our communities such as:

- planning (for example, housing or tree felling)
- speeding and volume of traffic
- crime and community safety
- responding to consultations on issues which might affect our community.

Some matters, such as, facilities for young people, or items of maintenance in the 'public realm' that need reporting to appropriate authorities are dealt with by our Estates Committee.

The Council can act as advocate for residents, a conduit for communicating information, and will liaise with appropriate departments of other public authorities to ensure that views, comments and necessary actions are dealt with.

### **What we have achieved in the past Twelve months**

Between April 2024 and March 2025, we have achieved a wide range of improvements, both to the way we work, and to the community we serve:

#### **Meetings:**

The Parish Council has held:

- 7 Ordinary meetings
- 2 Extra-ordinary meetings
- 5 meetings of the Estates Committee

#### **Finance:**

Made 230 payments for services to the parish, including:

- Transferring £2334.03 to Wickhambrook Memorial Social Centre (recycling grant)
- Grants to local organisations:
  - Wickhambrook WI £ 170.00
  - Carnival Committee (Fete & Flower Show) £ 220.24
  - Local History Society £ 300.00
  - Repairs to Memorial Clock £ 350.00
- In Kind Grants (as part of parish council grounds keeping):
  - Wickhambrook Outdoor Bowls Club £ 459.88
  - Wickhambrook Tennis Club £ 270.00
  - Wickhambrook Memorial Social Centre £3010.08
- Donated £250.00 to the following Charities
  - Royal British Legion
  - East Anglian Air Ambulance
  - HeadwaySuffolk

And received the following grants:

- West Suffolk Council – Communities Capital Fund £2250.00
- West Suffolk Council – Locality Funding – supporting volunteers £ 500.00

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<sup>3</sup> There are some exceptions, for example, Discharge of Conditions

The cost of maintaining grounds and assets in the parish last year included:

• Grounds Contract	£11,738.35
• Six Acres	£ 400.00
• Tree Surgery	£ 3,135.00
• Cemetery & Churchyard	£ 3,832.00
• Play Areas, MUGA & Skate Park	£ 4,015.05
• Greens	£ 580.70
• Bin & Dog waste	£ 905.88

**Total: £24,606.98**

**Reviewed** its policy statements and procedures for:

- **Governance** – including Financial Regulations, Financial Risk Assessments and Standing Orders
- **Information** – including Complaints, Data Protection, Document Retention, Media, Publication Scheme, Requests for Information and Social Media
- **Organisation** - including Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Training Policy
- **Assets** – including Cemeteries Regulations and Fees; Six Acres Agreements, specification for grounds contract and review of parish lands

**Considered and responded to** a range of consultations, including:

- West Suffolk Draft Local Plan
- Police & Crime Plan Consultation
- Twenty Planning applications, most of which were supported by this Council

### **Projects:**

Our major project over the past year has been preparing the [Neighbourhood Plan](#), which sets out for the parish any development can occur in it. This year's work has included:

- Reporting on feedback from the parish council's consultation on the Draft Neighbourhood Plan, including a draft list of policy changes arising from this
- Applications for Technical Support for
  - Strategic Environmental Impact assessment and
  - Habitats Regulations Assessment
- Submitting further comments and engaging representation from its planning consultant at West Suffolk's Local Plan Hearings
- Submission of draft Neighbourhood Plan to West Suffolk Council in March of this year

The draft plan has been submitted to West Suffolk who have now completed their formal consultation and appointed an Inspector to review the plan. A referendum on the plan should take place in late summer.

This has been a massive and detailed project, and thanks go out to Cllr Tracey Turner for leading the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, Secretaries Richard Byers & Roger Merry, and the group members, Diana Carroll, Emily Bayman, Jamie Green, Maro Limnios, Penny Bayman, Sandra Law, Sue Sternberg and Tara Hayden.

## **Highways:**

Unfortunately, despite a traffic survey commissioned by the parish council, we have so far been unable to convince Suffolk County Council Highways that there is a case for reducing the speed limit at Wickham Street from 40mph to 30mph.

In January, following a letter to our new MP, Nick Timothy wrote to Suffolk County Council Highways supporting our request for a reduction in the speed limit. This was followed by a site visit from Nick Timothy MP, with our County Councillor, Bobby Bennett to Wickham Street followed by a meeting with concerned local residents. We are fortunate to have the full support of both our MP and County Councillor, and the profile of this issue was subsequently raised by a number of articles in the local press.

Our County Councillor, Bobby Bennett, has kindly agreed to fund two new tube surveys of speed at Wickham Street, and the parish council has allocated funding to commission a full report by Suffolk County Council on which both it and Suffolk Constabulary will be consulted before a decision is reached on whether a reduction in the speed limit will be agreed.

This spring, we successfully recruited a team for Community Speed Watch, who have now completed all their approvals and training with Suffolk Constabulary. Ten sites have been approved by Suffolk Constabulary, and the group has now completed its first Speed Watch survey, with more planned through the spring. A good number speeding over 35mph in the past week. Will be out and about now over the summer.

## **Planning:**

20 planning applications were notified to and considered by the parish council over in the past year (including one appeal to the planning inspector).

## **Other projects**

and activities in the past year have included:

- Ongoing transcription of historic cemetery records and plotting of Memorials (thanks to Andrea Grimes) – all our burial and deed records have now been uploaded to our new cemetery software – lots of new spring flowers
- A stand at Wickhambrook Fete and Flower Show
- Repairs to 11 memorials in Wickhambrook Cemetery following testing the previous summer
- Eight volunteer mornings tidying the cemetery and play areas
- Three litter picks (with thanks to Mary Jolland and Barbara Merritt of WMSC)
- Resolving land ownership and registration
- Work to negotiate transfer of parcels of land at Bury Road Pocket Park to the parish council, which maintains it (the parish council took the decision in July not to proceed with the transfer on the advice of its appointed solicitor).

We also collaborated with a wide range of groups and individuals to bring about further improvements to the parish, including:

- With Suffolk Climate Change – Keep the Heat. With thanks to Cllrs Andrea and Kevin Grimes, sixteen properties in the parish benefited from a Thermal Imaging survey, with advice on how to interpret the images and grants that could be accessed to make improvements. We hope to run this project again next year.
- With Suffolk Public Rights of Way team, to investigate ways to improve the surfacing of BOAT 31 and reduce the impact of surface water flowing onto the track at Coltsfoot Green (ongoing)
- With Wickhambrook MSC – to improve security at the Recreation Ground and Six Acres through the purchase and installation of a height restriction barrier (two further barriers to be installed at the eastern end of Six Acres)

- A team of volunteers in the parish (coordinated by Amanda Lavelle) who put on Warm Winter Wednesdays in January and February, hosted at the WI Hall; and
- Mary Jolland leading the Cemetery Tidying days and volunteers

### **What do we want to do next?**

The Parish Council reviewed its priorities for the next three years as part of the draft budget review in November.

The table below sets out the Action Plan adopted by the Council and arranged over the next three years:

Ser	Issue	Action	Lead Partners	Resource Implications	Timescale
<b>Long-term Overview</b>					
1	Maintain impetus of Action Plan	Formal and regular overview by Parish Council	WPC	Nil Time for Clerk @ 3 hours per quarter	Bi monthly (suggest combining with Budget Report)
2	Maintain relevance of Parish Plan	Annual review by WPC Presentation at Annual Parish Meeting	WPC	Nil Time for clerk 2 hours	April 2025
<b>Facilities and Services</b>					
3	Providing facilities for children, young people and families	Review the recreational area facilities and capture ideas for future consideration 1. Replacement equipment for children's play area – Cemetery Road & Bury Road 2. Improvements to surfacing beneath swings 3. Improvements to surfacing beneath zip wire 4. Re-surfacing of Skate park 5. Re-surfacing of MUGA space	WPC,  Estates Committee  West Suffolk Families & Communities	Small consultation expenses & display boards Time for Clerk  Match funding of equipment and installation costs	Complete 1 & 2 by June '25
<b>Community Safety</b>					
4	Emergencies and public health risks	Review Emergency plan & publish guidance to residents of parish	WPC West Suffolk Council Residents, Businesses and Volunteers	Some assistance available from Suffolk County Council for Emergency Plan advice	May '26



5	Accident and Public Health Risk	Encourage reporting of fly tipping to West Suffolk DC Maintain periodic 'litter pick'.	Residents, Businesses and Volunteers	Promotion time for Clerk	Ongoing 3 – 4 times a year
<b>Culture, Leisure and Recreation</b>					
<b>Local Economy and Tourism</b>					
6	Assisting the local economy, including encouraging tourism	Continued marketing of the church, countryside, walks, B&Bs, etc	WPC Estates Committee (Footpaths Officer) Clerk & Web Master	Will evolve out of preparation of Neighbourhood Plan	Continuing
<b>Education and Communications</b>					
7	Improve communication of Parish Council activities	Monthly Parish News Facebook Page Noticeboards	WPC	Officer time	Continuing
<b>Environment and Countryside</b>					
8	Maintain support for conservation and restoration in village, greens and outlying and countryside	Continue recruiting volunteer support for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Litter picking</li> <li>Cemetery maintenance</li> <li>Footpaths</li> <li>Hedging and tree planting</li> </ul>	WPC Volunteers Residents Farmers	Officer Time	Ongoing
9	Improve knowledge and understanding of Rights of Way, their use and accessibility	Advertise Rights of Way Standard Request feedback on condition of rights of ways walked by parishioners	WPC Footpaths Officer Farmers Residents	Time spent by clerk collating, reporting and liaising with PROW	Ongoing
<b>Health and Social Care</b>					

10	Improve support to older people	Consider establishing Suffolk Good Neighbour Scheme	WPC Volunteers West Suffolk Families and Communities  Community Action Suffolk	To be established	Ongoing
<b>Housing, Development and the Built Environment</b>					
11	Taking forward local preferences when considering local planning applications.	Consider how profile of Planning applications can be raised	WPC	Clerk time	Ongoing
12	West Suffolk Council's respect for local views in determining housing strategy allocations	Preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan  Housing Survey Kept updated	WPC West Suffolk AECOM	Grant Funding from Locality  Time spent by Clerk supporting project	Ongoing
13	Development of Rural Exception Site if evidenced through NP preparation	Discussions with West Suffolk Council, Landowner of preferred site under draft local plan	WPC  West Suffolk Strategic Housing  Cams ACRE/CAS	<£1000	Establish evidence in Year 1
<b>Transport and Traffic</b>					
14	HGV use of B1063 and C Routes through parish	Monitor	WPC	Clerk Time	Continuing
15	Road Safety/Reduction of speed in vicinity of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VAS Monitoring &amp; Reporting</li> <li>Increased use of footpaths and cycling</li> <li>Cross parish working</li> </ul>	WPC Road Safety Working Group Suffolk County Council Highways Suffolk Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clerk time</li> <li>Grant funding</li> <li>Support through locality funding</li> </ul>	Current year
16	Road Safety/Reduction of Speed in Wickham Street	County Cllr to promote need with SCC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	WPC SCC Highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clerk time</li> <li>Locality Grant</li> <li>£750 – full report by SCC</li> </ul>	Current year

Parish Assets					
17	Repair to Cemetery Gates leading to Chapel of Rest	<p>To replace the posts and re hang the gates and railings</p> <p>To remove gates and railings, powder coat</p> <p>Paint existing top finials</p>	WPC	<p>£ 2980.80 inc vat</p> <p>£ 2191.20 inc vat</p> <p>£ 417.60 inc vat</p>	2026/27
18	Parish Lands	Updating HM Land Registry and registering Six Acres & Cemetery Land	WPC Suffolk County Council	Valuation £600 per parcel of Land £1500 plus Disbursements	Current FY
19	Cemetery Extension Project	Purchase of parcel of land to east of Cemetery for additional burial space. The priority for this may increase if changes to Environmental Permitting Regulations force larger burial plot sizes	WPC Local Land Owner SALC	£10 - £40K	On Hold
20	Churchyard Memorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Testing</li> </ul>	WPC	<£600	2027-28
Organisation/ Governance					
22	Cemetery Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving accessibility to Councillors</li> </ul>	WPC	Officer time	Continuing
23	Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make use of support provided by Parish Insurers to review risk assessments for activities and events</li> </ul>	WPC	available through Parish Insurance	Ongoing