

COMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Report of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 – Approved

Present

Parish Council: Elena Softley – Chairman, Alan Revell – Vice Chairman, Michael Green, Deborah Phillips, Denise Cripps, John Hunt, Cllr Bishop, Julia Sharpe – Clerk

Guest Speaker: Rev. Ralph Williamson

Village Representatives: Rachel Joannou – Combe School, Jo Willis-Bund – VH&RG, Celia Adamson - Combe Charities, Martha O'Curry – Comag

Members of the Public: 2

1/21 Apologies

Helen Keen – PCSO, Roger Pursell – Reading Room, Andrew Hobson – Parochial Church Council and Combe Community Hub, Sally Pursell – Pre-School and After-School Club

2/21 Guest Speaker

The Chairman welcomed the Reverend Ralph Williamson to the village and to the Annual Parish Meeting. Revd. Ralph introduced himself by saying that he is delighted to have been appointed Rector of Stonesfield and Combe joint benefice and that he is pleased to find the church in good heart with a congregation of children and people of all ages. He also said that he is very much looking forward to getting involved with the school as education is very close to heart. He concluded by saying that he has no agenda of change and is eager to get to know people and how to support them.

All present at the meeting then briefly introduced themselves.

3/21 Report of the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting

The report of the 2019 APM was circulated prior to the meeting and there were no questions arising.

4/21 Parish Council Report – Elena Softley

This last year has certainly been rather different for all of us. For our monthly meetings, the Parish Council has been meeting virtually, rather than in person. At the beginning of the pandemic we lent our full support, including a grant, to the Combe Mutual Aid Group (Comag), which was set up by a group of public-spirited volunteers from the village. Their initiative to set up a pop-up shop at the Reading Room was an incredible success. It helped so many people by providing a local source for day-to-day essentials, and served as a focal point for social contact. I'd like to offer a special thanks to the group members, and also to all those villagers who offered their support in so many various ways throughout the past year.

Speedwatch and Village Design Statement

Councillors Alan Revell and Deborah Philips lead on the Parish Council's two priority initiatives: Speedwatch and the Village Design Statement (please see their separate reports). I thank them for their commitment and hard work on these important issues.

Planning and Environment

As ever, planning has been an important part of the Parish Council's work. Apart from commenting on Combe planning applications, last year the Parish Council reviewed and commented on plans for Salt Cross, the 'Garden Village' at Eynsham; the Government's White Paper on Planning for the Future; and also Blenheim's Sketchbook of an Emerging Vision which is a plan to link six of its surrounding villages, including Combe and Woodstock. We intend to continue to provide input into this last proposal and the Parish Council is represented on the Village Travel Network which has been set up by the villages to promote more active travel, including the introduction of 20mph through our villages.

The Parish Council also works hard to preserve Combe's village environment and we have: arranged for repairs to the damaged edges of the village green, thanks to Councillor Michael Green who donated 4 tonnes of soil; arranged for removal of ivy along the recreation ground wall; corresponded with the landowner to have the vegetation cutback on Swan Bridge, coordinated with WODC over litter being left at

the river during the summer and liaised with OCC over various road issues. In February, we invited Blenheim representatives and East End residents to join our Parish Council meeting to discuss the parking at East End which, owing to increased housing development in the area and temporary parking restrictions in Blenheim, has led to unneighbourly and dangerous parking. We will continue to monitor the situation. We supported the cycle to school initiative with a donation for the purchase of road signs and are grateful to Blenheim for allowing the children to cycle through the park to Woodstock. We have given a grant to the Village Hall and Recreation Ground Committee for their new car park, as well as to Combe Community Hub for their refurbishments.

The Playpark is an important village amenity and we are responsible for its safety and upkeep. It needs to be inspected weekly so thanks to our Parish Clerk Julia Sharpe and Councillor John Hunt who has taken over the inspections from Julia.

Due to the first lockdown we were unable to hold our usual annual litter pick in spring 2020, instead an individualised litter pick was arranged in October, many thanks to the villagers who took part. This year the litter pick will take place on Saturday 5th June and we hope many of you will join us.

Gigaclear

I am sure it can't have escaped your notice that over the summer, the roads and verges in Combe were dug up for the laying of ultra-fast fibre broadband. Councillor Denise Cripps liaised with Gigaclear, in particular ensuring that Church Walk would be fully included in the installation and that Gigaclear will be doing some further repair work to the village verges. Thanks to Denise for her work on this. Also, Gigaclear will be supplying a free connection to the Combe Community Hub, and it is very much hoped that it will be possible to extend it to the Pavilion so that both organisations can benefit.

Precept

I hope that villagers were pleased to see in their Council Tax statement that the parish precept did not increase last year (nor indeed for this forthcoming year). The Parish Council felt that, given the rises in the County and District precepts, we should maintain our precept at the previous year's level. I'm pleased that we have been able to do this with no reductions in any of our normal expenditures.

West Oxfordshire District Councillor

On behalf of the whole Council, I'd like to express our heartfelt thanks to our District Councillor, Richard Bishop, who is retiring from this position. I know I speak for all Combe residents when I thank him for his commitment and support over the past seven years, especially in supporting the village with two applications to the WODC Community Facilities Grant (for the Hub and the Recreation Ground car park). It has been a great pleasure having Richard join our Parish Council meetings; we could always rely on his wise counsel and considered contributions; he will be greatly missed.

Parish Clerk

Finally, many thanks to our hard-working, conscientious and dedicated Parish Clerk, Julia Sharpe. Apart from everything else Julia does, including being on Comag and organising the financial affairs of the Council, she also spent many hours working on updating the Parish Council's new website, including all our documentation, so that it now conforms with accessibility guidelines. We are especially fortunate to have her as our Clerk.

5/21 Speedwatch Report – Alan Revell

Background: Following growing concern about the speed and volume of traffic through Combe, efforts began in 2017 to monitor vehicle movements, especially along Akeman Street and Stonesfield Road. There followed an extensive period of 'Speedwatch' trials carried out by volunteers using a hand-held device purchased by the Parish Council. Results of these trials were discussed at a number of subsequent Parish Council meetings.

A decision was taken to buy two Speed Indication Devices – otherwise known as SIDs – to display the speeds of vehicles approaching the 30mph signs at two entrances to the village. These were purchased using funds provided by our County Councillor, Ian Hudspeth, and installed in January 2021 at the northern and western entrances to Combe – on Akeman Street and Stonesfield Road.

Results so far: As well as measuring and displaying the numbers of approaching vehicles and the speeds at which they are travelling, the SIDs capture and store this data. At the end of each month the data has been downloaded, analysed and reported to councillors.

Some of this information has then been included in the PC report for the Combe Courier. As a flavour of this, the following is from information captured in March:

- Total vehicles passing the 2 SIDs was 10275 compared with 7309 in February (and 5162 in January) an increase of 40.5% month on month and 99% versus January.
- Of those 10275 vehicles, 5225 passed the Akeman St SID (from the north) and 5050 passed the Stonesfield Rd SID (from the west).
- The average speed recorded at Akeman St in March was 33.4mph compared to 32.7mph in February and 31.4mph in January.
- The average speed recorded at Stonesfield Road was 29.1mph compared to 28.9mph in February and 28.2mph in January. The maximum speed permitted at each location, of course, is 30mph.
- The highest speed recorded in March was 61.4mph (more than twice the legal limit) at Akeman St versus 59.6mph in February.
- On Stonesfield Road it was 49.7mph in March versus 52.1mph in February.

In summary, traffic has become faster and heavier each month – and we should expect further increases in traffic volumes as restrictions imposed to help combat the pandemic are relaxed.

Combe residents may have noticed, or read about, the success of other Oxfordshire towns and villages in reducing their speed limits from 30mph to 20mph. This is something the Combe PC is actively pursuing, too. This change is supported by the County Council and its leader, Ian Hudspeth, who has attended many of our meetings when speeding and traffic volumes have been discussed. We are hopeful of progress being made towards this goal in the current financial year.

6/21 Village Design Statement Report – Deborah Phillips

It's two years since the Parish Council decided to write a Village Design Statement (VDS) for Combe. The aim of the VDS is to produce a planning document that helps to preserve and enhance the Combe landscape that we love and sustain it for the future. The main input for this comes from local residents.

We knew that this would be a long project – the average time taken to complete such a project is 2-3 years. But we didn't anticipate Covid-19, which put our progress on hold for a while. The WODC planners, with whom we work in partnership, understandably had other priorities in the emergency.

Progress

Despite unavoidable delays, we have achieved a lot over the last couple of years. We have:

- Undertaken a village consultation and a household questionnaire.
- Written a report on the consultation findings – this may be found on the Parish Council website.
- Drafted the VDS document, which covers the history of Combe, its key landscape features, its architecture, and infrastructure.

As part of this, we have proposed a series of design guidelines that will help to shape any future development in Combe, and put in place principles that will move towards a more sustainable local environment.

Next steps

We are now waiting for feedback from WODC planners on our draft VDS document. We will then consult with Combe residents, so that everyone gets a chance to comment on the proposed design guidelines in the VDS. This will take place later in the year. We will also discuss our VDS with Blenheim – an important player in shaping the landscape in the locality.

We still have a lot of hard work ahead, but it's an important community venture for Combe, and will hopefully make a difference for all of our futures.

Thanks

I should particularly like to thank members of the Steering Group, past and present (Elena Softley, Alan Revell, Julia Sharpe, Margaret Moore, Jen Hurst and Paul Coffey), volunteers who helped with the village

consultation and household questionnaire, and those who have contributed to the preparation of report – especially Amanda Ford, Jonathan Ford and Sue Goodman for their helpful comments.

Thank you too to David O'Brien who has been taking photos to illustrate the document. His work captures the essence of our beautiful village.

7/21 Report from County Councillor – Cllr Ian Hudspeth

I'm sure nobody could have imagined the year that we have had, the pandemic has completely changed the way we all are working and living. We are in a situation where we must learn to live with Covid as we approach a new normal.

My thanks go to all Oxfordshire County Council staff who have worked incredibly hard over the last year as well as being flexible to ensure we provide services for the vulnerable in Oxfordshire. I would also like to thank all the community groups that were created to assist locally which helped all services to be delivered. Oxfordshire County Council has worked hard with all partners including West Oxfordshire District Council and the NHS to support residents during these difficult times. Last year when there were problems with getting personal protective equipment, we purchased £2 million which we then distributed to our care providers, particularly the smaller organisations who struggled to get bulk discounts or even just a delivery. I made phone calls to some local suppliers who helped us get supplies to those who needed them. We also provided every school with a pack of PPE before they reopened and have been working with all schools to assist them to be Covid-secure. I want to say a big thank you to all teaching staff as they have continued to provide education whether that be online or in the classroom to continue teaching for key worker and vulnerable children.

We have received extra funding from central government to assist during the crisis which meant we made some in-year budget adjustments in September to enabling us to deliver a balanced budget by the year end. There were some savings due to not using office space and travel which we will look at for future budgets as we approach the new normal.

The Council set its budget 9th February with £400,000 extra funding for drainage/vegetation clearance and 20 mph speed limits in villages that want them. The heavy winter rainfall has highlighted some areas that require additional work to keep the drains clear. I'll be making sure that those areas are cleared more frequently. It's important to coordinate the work with WODC to ensure the kerbs are clear otherwise the rain simply pushes the detritus into the drains. The additional funding for 20 mph speed limits will be to work with Parish Councils that see a lower limit as part of the solution to improve road safety.

Other key points of the budget:

- A total of £1m long-term funding would be invested in expanding the youth offer in Oxfordshire. A study is due to report in the Spring on the needs of young people and how the wider partnership of the voluntary, community and public services can best provide support. An additional £500,000 of one-off accelerator funding will also be provided to develop sustainable long term approaches and help tackle the impacts of the pandemic on young people.
- An extra £4m will be added to the adult social care budget for 2021/22. This includes a total of £1.35m for managing risks such as provider sustainability.
- The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government. It seeks to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. For 2020/21, the County Council agreed with health partners that £1.2m of the improved BCF for Oxfordshire would be used to support activities to deliver better outcomes over the winter period in the county. However, it was one-off funding. The council is proposing to continue the funding for 2021/22, which would be used to support measures to help people be discharged from hospital, enable new ways of working and better outcomes for residents.
- The number of adults of working age with physical disabilities has increased during 2020/21 and there are forecast overspends for both care at home and for residential care. Whilst this is being managed within pooled resources between the NHS and council in 2020/21, it is not anticipated that it can be maintained in the longer run. Pending a review of the needs and activity for these service users, £750,000 has been proposed to support expenditure on assessed care needs from 2021/22.

- The County Council has been part of a joint partnership to procure and manage services for single homeless people in Oxfordshire, since the partnership was formed in 2017. A further one-off contribution to the partnership of £500,000 was included in the budget, with £250,000 of this allocated for 2020/21 and the same in 2021/22. The council is proposing to continue the council's support for the partnership from 2022/23.
- During the period of the pandemic, more people have chosen to take up drugs and alcohol residential rehabilitation services and this has led to the council proposal to put £50,000 more into existing services.
- A £300,000 fund to support innovative community-developed projects and activities that improve people's health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire is proposed. A total of £150,000 of this will be new funding and £150,000 will come from existing public health budgets.
- An extra £330,000 will be invested into children's services on increasing early intervention services, increasing the skill base of children's social care workers and improving special educational needs related services.
- A total of £100,000 would be invested in issues linked to digital exclusion.
- A total of £81,000 will be invested in providing services for domestic violence and £150,000 into apprenticeships.

We will continue to find savings by transforming the way we work, not just within the council but with our partners. This is to protect frontline services along with new investment as part of Oxfordshire County Council's budget proposals for 2021/22. This includes a proposed 1.99% rise in basic council tax rise, plus an extra 1% specifically for investment in adult social care, making a total of 2.99%. We recognised that this year has been difficult financially for some residents and we wanted to keep the tax increase as low as possible.

Given the circumstances, I think we produced a good budget that provides investment for the future along with safeguarding current services. I was disappointed that the Liberals failed to produce any alternatives and voted against these proposals at the budget meeting. The Labour group did put forward some proposals which were accepted and supported the overall budget.

There was good news for West Oxfordshire residents as they benefit from a funding deal with Homes England for £102m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) dedicated to providing a significant upgrade to the A40 west of Oxford. The key route carries up to 32,000 vehicles a day on the section between Witney and Oxford and is single carriageway in some sections.

The sum of £102 million will deliver the Housing Infrastructure Fund 2 A40 Smart Corridor which comprises:

- An extension of the dual carriageway from Witney to the proposed Eynsham Park and Ride, including improving cycling facilities along the route.
- An extension of the A40 westbound bus lane from west of Duke's Cut canal and railway bridges close to Oxford near to the proposed Eynsham Park and Ride.
- A40 capacity and connectivity improvements to widen access at Duke's Cut canal and railway bridges, extending the eastbound and westbound bus priority lane, prioritising bus rapid transit at this pinch point.

This is in addition to the Local Growth Fund of £35 million which will deliver the westbound bus lane along with the Eynsham Park and Ride.

The work will increase A40 capacity for all users of the route between Witney and Eynsham, whilst providing a high-quality, congestion-free public transport, cycling and walking link for travel between Witney, Eynsham and Oxford to encourage residents and travellers to adopt active travel to slash emissions and improve air quality. The development is great news for residents in the villages along the A4095 as it should reduce vehicles using the road as an alternative to the A40, in particular HGVs.

I can understand that some residents will ask how this will help them in other parts of the county. The real benefit will be seen in future years when the investment of over £600 million in highways will mean routes such as the A40/A4130/A415 will not require as much maintenance releasing funds that can be used elsewhere in the county.

Congratulations to all those involved in saving The White House pub in Bladon which is now owned by the community and reopened. It has been stop/start with the restrictions and I look forward to the complete reopening in summer. The work carried out has been fantastic and the new team are brilliant, working hard to produce good food. In Stonesfield the same process was followed with The White Horse which is listed as a community asset. The funds were raised which was brilliant news, but the pub was sold to another bidder. I hope that at some point the community scheme can buy the pub; if the community spirit is anything like that of Bladon it'll be a success. This is just the start and we all must remember to support our pubs if they are to survive and become sustainable particularly during the winter months. I try to support all the pubs in the division but my wife, Carolyn, thinks it's just an excuse for me to have a pint or glass of wine.

The recent reduction in the number of Covid-19 infections is welcome news as is the consequent reduction in the number of hospital admissions which reduces the pressure on the NHS. The vaccination programme is being rolled out at pace and again, I want to thank those helping to ensure everybody gets a jab as soon as possible. Oxfordshire County Council is working with its partners to assist where required and will continue to help protect vulnerable residents across the county.

The road map set out by the Government gives us a view of the way forward which is welcome news. However, we must all continue to play our part by observing the guidelines so that life can return to what will be a new normal as quickly as possible.

Stay safe and I wish you a better 2021 to come.

8/21 Report from District Councillor – Cllr Richard Bishop

Each month for the last seven years, I have attempted to give Combe residents and the Parish Council, as much information as possible, both relevant to the village and the District. These reports have included much that was not necessarily village oriented but, hopefully, may have been of interest to our residents. I have tried to champion the interests of Combe in any way in which the District Council could help. I feel quite proud of the way in which WODC has responded with helpful advice, consideration of village concerns and, importantly, financial assistance with village projects.

This last year's activities have been constrained by Covid-19, but the work of the District Council has continued unabated. Maximum grants have been made to local businesses in West Oxfordshire which have suffered curtailed activity during the restrictions caused by the pandemic. New and developed strategies have been formulated and agreed to deal with such topics as: climate change the introduction of electric vehicle charging points, alleviating the dangers of flooding and its aftermath, and, of course, consideration of a large variety of planning applications. Much of this achieved through the auspices of zoom and Webex, with a majority of officers working from home. That so much has been accomplished speaks volumes about the efficiency and dedication of our staff in Witney.

Although not a resident of Combe, I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Combe Parish Council and, indeed, to Combe as a whole, for making me feel so welcome and at home amongst you all, whilst serving as your District Councillor.

Finally, I hope that the Parish Council will continue to make wise decisions, find caring solutions and arrive at solid achievements to the benefit and well-being of all Combe residents.

9/21 Combe School Report – Rachel Joannou

Context

There are currently 112 children on role. The children are split across 4 classes (Year R/1, Year 1/2, Year 3/4, Year 5/6). The staffing is as follows:

Leadership Team
Headteacher (0.6) - R Joannou Responsible for: Strategic Direction, Monitoring, Curriculum, Staff, Timetables, Teaching and Learning, CPD, Calendar of Events, Attendance and Punctuality, Website, Behaviour, DSL, Induction, Assessment, English, PSHE, British Values, School Council

Deputy Headteacher - S Legge Responsible for: Cover, Risk Assessments and Offsite Visits, Pupil Voice, Wellbeing, Year 1/2 Class Teacher, Outdoor Learning and Forest School, PE (inc. Extra-Curricular, Healthy Schools), Science, History, Geography, Rotas, Students, Pupil Premium, Corinthian Partnership link, Deputy DSL		Business Manager - C Checksfield (term time plus INSETs plus two weeks) Admin, Finance, HR, Health and Safety	
Staff			
Teacher - V Gehin SENCO (More Able, EAL), Art & Design, Design & Technology, Year R/1 Class Teacher, Deputy DSL	Teacher - J Page (0.8) Maths, RE, Year 3/4 Class Teacher	Teacher - K McBride Year 5/6 Class Teacher, Computing and Music	
Teacher - G Challender (0.2) Languages, Year 3/4 Class Teacher	Jennifer Walsh - 1:1 TA (term time only) 23.5 hours	J Millar (term time only) HLTA - 15 hours Cover Supervisor- 21 hours Lunchtime supervisor- 2.5 hours	
Hannah Hill (term time only) TA 26 hours Breakfast club- 1.5 hours	Sarah Horner (term time only) HLTA 7.5 hours, TA 19.5 hours Breakfast Club 1 hour	Sarah Timms (term time only) 1:1 Support 17 hours	
Kate Bustin (term time only) 1:1 Support 17 hours	Jo McKechnie (term time only) TA 16.5 hours School Garden	Lucy Martin (term time only) TA 11 hours, HLTA 6.5 hours Breakfast Club 1 hour	
	Anna Hanusova (year round) 6 hours	Sally-Anne Clavud (year round) 18.25 hours	

September 2020 admissions

We welcomed 15 new Reception children to the school in September 2020. 10 children had siblings at Combe and 5 children are from new families to the school.

July 2020 Leavers

Our 17 Year 6 pupils left Combe School at the end of July 2020. The usual leavers' events were unable to take place due to Covid-19. We hosted an outdoor cinema evening with popcorn machine and an outdoor socially distanced cream tea leavers' assembly.

Coronavirus - Lockdown 1

Between March 2020 and May 2020, the majority of children learnt remotely for 7 weeks as schools closed to all children except vulnerable children and children of key workers. We had ten key worker and vulnerable children in school between March and May 2020.

We provided remote learning for the children, mainly through Google Classroom. Children had work to complete which could then be uploaded so that teachers could mark it. We used 'Google Meets' to allow the staff to interact with the children and so that the children could interact with each other.

In June 2020, children in reception, Year 1 and Year 6 returned to school, whilst Year 2, 3, 4 and 5 continued to learn remotely for 5 further weeks. Towards the end of June, schools were given some flexibility to welcome back further pupils, if capacity allowed, so we hosted outdoor games with picnics to allow children to socialise with friends again.

In July 2020, children in Year 2, 3, 4 and 5 were able to return to school for the final two weeks of the academic year. Between June and July 2020, we were providing places for 15 key worker or vulnerable children from years 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Measures within school

Coronavirus has had a huge impact on the school over the last year. Some of the changes are listed:

- The children and staff are currently limited to 'bubbles' so cannot mix with pupils outside of their own classes.
- Enhanced cleaning takes place throughout the day.
- School assemblies can only take place virtually.

- Visitors to school have been limited.
- Events for parents have been unable to take place, unless virtual.
- Staggered start and end times to the school day.
- Staggered lunch and break times.
- No shared sporting events.
- Reading volunteers not able to come into school.

Lockdown 3

In January 2021, schools closed again to the majority of pupils for a period of 8 weeks. The children accessed remote learning. During this lockdown, we provided teaching videos and additional live lessons and live assemblies in addition to the work set through Google Classroom. We had 22 key worker and vulnerable children in school between January and March 2021 school closures.

Achievement

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no statutory assessments for primary school pupils in the summer term 2020. We continue to monitor pupil progress and attainment within school.

Friends of Combe School (FoCS)

We are grateful for the ongoing support of FoCS. Over the past year, coronavirus restrictions have prevented some of the usual fundraising activities from going ahead but FoCS have worked hard to arrange alternative events. This year fundraising events were:

- Sponsored Summer Challenge
- Pumpkin Trail
- Christmas Hamper Raffle
- Easter Egg Trail
- Light Up Combe for Christmas

The money raised by FoCS has funded:

- Greenhouse for the school garden
- Staging for the school hall
- Cookery trolley

Visits in and out of School

Coronavirus restrictions and school closures have limited the visits in and out of school that could take place this year. The following visits in and out of school were able to go ahead: Zoo Lab - Year R, 1, 2, 5 and 6; Virtual Quad Kids - Y5/6; Cricket workshops - all years; Bikeability - Y5; Hill End Visit - Y6 and Y1; Viking Day - Y5/6; Combe river visit - Y1/2; and The Earth Trust - Y3/4.

Community Events

Over the past year, community events have been limited due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Developments to building and site, include:

- Over the summer holiday the school hall was redecorated.
- The fence around the playing field has been repaired.
- The school garden has undergone development to make it a more useable space.
- The children have planted saplings along the border with the allotment.

Charity Fundraising

The following fundraising has taken place:

- Wear it Pink- Breast Cancer – £109
- Christmas Jumper Day- Save the Children – £96
- Jeans for Genes – £100
- Children in Need – £632 (including a generous donation from a member of the wider school community)
- Young Minds – £107

- Choose Love – £50
- Red Nose Day – £108
- Food Bank donation at Harvest time

After School Clubs

Unfortunately, due to Coronavirus restrictions, we have been limited with what clubs we can offer to the children over the last year. Some clubs have been able to take place with a limited number of children. The children have been offered: Spanish (virtual); Musical Theatre; Green Club (including virtually); Science Club (including virtually); Dance; and Cookery Club.

10/21 Combe Reading Room Report – Roger Purssell

You will not be surprised to hear that the Reading Room, in common with most other public spaces, had a rather quiet year in 2020 and consequently this report is rather shorter than usual.

We were only able to have a coffee morning for the first two months, thereafter Covid-19 restrictions dictated that our activities were significantly curtailed for the remainder of the year. We did manage to run two pop-up stalls, one in October and one in December. These were brilliantly supported by the village and gave us most welcome boosts to our funds. As in previous years the 100 Club produced a steady net income of almost £1000. This was much enhanced by prize winners' generosity in donating back their winnings. All in all, our income, excluding grants, was reduced by almost £10,000.

With the lack of activity our expenditure was very much reduced. We did, however, still have to fund certain fixed costs, for example council tax and fire protection. The net result was that we incurred a small loss of circa £800.

Two things have combined to reduce the impact on our ongoing financial position. Our previous prudent financial management has ensured that we have reserves in place to cover most unforeseen circumstances. The other is the receipt of a Covid-19 inspired government business support grant of £10,000. We have thus been able to set up a sinking fund in preparation for the repair to our 130-year-old roof, which we are advised will require attention in the next year or so.

I am, as always, indebted to my fellow trustees for their support and commitment to our remit of looking after and enhancing our magnificent village amenity. In the background, but fundamental to the effective running of the Reading Room, is our wonderful caretaker Sue Golder without whom our jobs would be so much harder.

11/21 Village Hall and Recreation Ground (VHRGC) Report – Jo Willis-Bund

The 2020 – 2021 season at the Recreation Ground was just one more casualty of the Covid pandemic, a year that can be marked by what didn't happen rather than what did. The end of the football season, toddler group, and Michelle Eeley and Jessie Penton's exercise classes were the first victims, all having to be cancelled at the start of the first lockdown.

Next came the cancellation of the Kidlington Runners' two races, both of which normally fill the village with several hundred runners; followed by the indefinite postponement of two wedding receptions and then, unthinkable, the suspension and possible cancellation of the cricket season.

When the first lockdown was announced, the VHRC committee undertook a detailed risk assessment for the pavilion and, thanks to our newly updated website, we were able to post regular Covid updates on the website, enabling us to publish the latest guidance for village halls. After the first lockdown ended, a few cricket matches were salvaged before the end of the season, and Jonathan Ford's running club and Jessie Penton's exercise classes took place outside in a socially distanced manner.

The football season also started well, but was shut down by lockdown 2 in November and has only just started up again at the end of March. Running club has also recently restarted after a several-month suspension and outdoor exercise and training are also back in business.

However, the year has not been exclusively about cancellations and absences. Right from the start, the playing field has seen a huge abundance of walkers, both with dogs and without, and numerous parents kicking a ball with their children or flying a kite, all enjoying their allotted daily exercise and appreciating the joy of having such a large and beautiful open space in the heart of the village.

In addition, the committee has worked to secure enough grants to fund the re-development of the car park and we are hoping that work on this can begin as soon as possible. This facility not only serves the playing field and pavilion, but is also essential for the Hub and Pre-School and is a whole village amenity, so we are delighted to have secured its future.

The committee has also worked hard at administration and brought all its compliance and Charity Commission reporting up-to-date as at the end of 2020. In addition, we were able to undertake some essential repairs and are delighted to have a new floor in the main hall, as well as having repaired some persistent leaks in the showers and loos in the changing rooms, which have also been spruced up with some new shower curtains and a good clean. We are also keeping on top of the brambles which have had a trim back along the bottom pitch on the playing fields.

Like everyone else, we are hoping that this year will prove more productive and busier, but we have already had a wedding postponed and the Kidlington Runners cancel, so nothing is certain. Still, football is happening and a full cricket season is planned, including Dynamo and All Stars sessions for the youngsters, so things are looking up. However, our income levels are depleted and we expect to make a net loss in the current financial year unless we can secure more funding.

Finally, we are planning to hold two Friday night barbeques to support the children's cricket on 25 June and 2 July so hope to be able to invite as many villagers as possible to attend.

12/21 Combe Charities Report – Celia Adamson

Combe Charities exists to help those in our community in financial need. It is an historic charity with reference to a bequest in 1636 and the interest from the fund was distributed by the church wardens. It is connected to the Church in so far as the incumbent or rector is a trustee, but the recipients of the fund do not have to have any connection with the Church.

We have made two donations from the fund since the 2020 Annual Parish Meeting, both at the beginning of 2021. We offered to help buy I-pads needed by the school to ensure all children had the opportunity for online learning, but in the end, helped them with something else they needed.

This year we have not been able to hold our usual annual fundraising tea afternoon, nor received money from collections at the Combe Feast open air service on The Green, nor the Songs of Praise. However this loss of revenue has been more than compensated by an extremely generous donation. We also had a donation by Katy Hobson, a £20 note found on the riverbank. The bank statements on 5th March show a total of £3824.30. We are not regulated by the Charities Commission as our annual income is below £5000; unfortunately, this means any donations cannot be gift-aided.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our trustees and everyone involved in this village charity, who so willingly help when needed. Special thanks to Margaret Moore, Sue Goodman, Mary Denham, Jan Stride, now moved away, Pat Richens for her advice and wisdom, and Katy and Andrew Hobson for willing help and particularly advice when sought on financial and legal matters.

We would also like to thank the Church Wardens, Andrew Hobson and Linda Sodenberg who acted in the absence of a Rector this year. Also, thanks to Tom Digweed who happily reviewed the accounts.

We look forward to welcoming our new Rector, Ralph Williamson, when he feels able to take on the responsibilities, as the third trustee.

Finally, our thanks to all who support us in what we are trying to do for our community in Combe.

13/21 Parochial Church Council Report – Andrew Hobson

The most important event for the Church in the past year was the appointment of Ralph Williamson as Rector of Stonesfield with Combe Longa from 1 May. We welcome Ralph and his wife Rachel enthusiastically. Ralph was installed at St James the Great, Stonesfield by the Bishop of Dorchester. Ralph was previously vicar of St Peter's Eaton Square and before that Chaplain of Christchurch Oxford. He has family locally.

We were saddened by the loss in December of our friend Peter Esnouf, a former Churchwarden and great supporter of the Church.

2020 was always going to be a challenge with Roy Turner leaving at the end of March 2020. As it turned out Roy's valedictory service was the last service in the Church until church services resumed in July.

During the lockdown an online presence was created in the form of reflections, well received by the congregation, along with written reflections included in the Benefice weekly Newsletter We are pleased to say that services have been held continuously since July with the assistance of visiting clergy and home-grown talent along with our Licensed Lay Minister, Helen Walker.

The great success of the Combe Covid Support group rendered the Church somewhat redundant in the wider Combe community, but the material and financial support for the Witney Foodbank has continued uninterrupted and successfully throughout the year.

No work of significance beyond routine repairs and maintenance have been undertaken, save the replacement of damaged external locks following an attempt at a break-in in late summer.

Financially the church has fared as well as could be expected in the circumstances, though once again it has been necessary to draw on reserves to meet Parish Share demands of the Diocese. We were heartened both financially and pastorally by an excellent Christmas bazar and the ongoing support of the village community.

14/21 Combe Community Hub Report – Andrew Hobson

This has been a frustrating year for the Hub. Although it has weathered the year in reasonable form financially and has successfully completed the building work necessary to allow the two main rooms to operate separately, only limited use of the building for its intended purpose has been possible for most of the year, due to Covid-19.

Financially the Hub has benefitted from: 1. A full quarter of normal use prior to Lockdown 1; 2. A number of discretionary grants from WODC and latterly further grant aid following the setting of a rate on the building; and 3. Limited use for operation of Pre-School and at various times After-School Club as regulations permitted.

During the summer holidays Hooper Brothers of Witney undertook the remodelling work to the building to create a space much more suited to the present use of the building including modernised the kitchen and lavatory spaces. Thanks go to Richard Sherrott for overseeing the work for us, to Mandy Collis and Dave Quinton for design assistance and to Sally Pursell for her energy in organising many aspects of the work. Combe Hub gratefully acknowledges that this work was extensively supported by grant aid from the following organisations: Combe Parish Council, Action with Communities in Rural England (Acre), Awards for All, the Doris Field Charitable Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation.

This year we have replaced the flooring in the main room (again organised by Sally) and are preparing for necessary work to the guttering and replacement to the windows in the quiet room of the Pre-School, which when done will see us fully double glazed. Many thanks to the following organisations for grants to support this further work: the Foyle Foundation, the Pye Foundation and the Bartlett Taylor Charitable Trust.

Our main non-educational uses in 2020 were Jessica Penton's exercise classes and films by the Cinema Club before lockdown and one film in December.

As a result, it seems, of the planning application for the remodelling work, the Hub has been assessed for rates for the first time. There are a number of factual and legal issues with the assessments and we are pursuing appeals.

We are looking forward to welcoming general users back to the building as soon as possible.

15/21 Pre-School and After-School Club Report – Sally Pursell

Pre-School started this year in good shape, with Lisa Humphry joining our staff team, and Annemarie Ferrett being promoted to deputy. Numbers were buoyant and finances in a good state.

With the arrival of Covid-19 and the 1st lockdown, Pre-School was forced to close from the end of March until early June, when limited opening was then possible. After-School Club (ASC) remained closed until September 2020. Full opening resumed from September, but numbers remained low as several children and families decided not to return, or to postpone their start at Pre-School and ASC. Through the 2nd lockdown Pre-School remained open with many restrictions still in place.

These lockdowns, with resulting reduced numbers and/or complete closures have had a huge impact on our finances. Government funding has continued for funded 3- and 4-year-olds, but all our fee-paying

income (2 year olds and ASC) has been lost. We have only been able to access minimal grants to compensate for this loss, so we still find ourselves with more than £12,000 lost income for the year. Fundraising too has been hit hard this year, although an extremely successful and well-supported online auction of promises in the autumn raised nearly £1800 to provide new climbing equipment and a new outdoor sandpit.

Staff have worked really hard to cope with the ever-changing Covid requirements, showing flexibility and resilience. We are very lucky to have such a dedicated staff team and committee who work tirelessly to ensure the success and future of Combe Pre-School and After-School Club.

16/21 Combe Mutual Aid Group Report – Martha O’Curry

Introduction

This is a draft annual report to account to Combe Parish Council for the activities of the Combe Mutual Aid Group (Comag), an affiliated society, from March/April 2020 to March 2021 inclusive. A further draft will be agreed by the committee and finalised at the Comag annual general meeting.

Comag is grateful to the Parish Council for its support and collaboration, including financial support to enable the pop-up shop, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We would also like to thank the Combe Courier for its wholehearted cooperation to publicise the society and communicate with residents; the Combe Charities for pooling information about residents’ needs, and funding; and the Reading Room trustees for kindly giving the pop-up shop the use of the premises.

Summary

Comag was formed by volunteers in March 2020 and subsequently formalised as a voluntary society with membership open to all residents of Combe and nearby areas. Its initial volunteer committee and officers were ratified by a special general meeting in June 2020.

Its principal activities in 2020-21 were:

- To establish a network of communication in the village by which residents could ask for, and offer, support during the Covid-19 crisis.
- Offering support to all who needed it with access to food and other essential items.
- Offering support to get prescriptions collected or delivered.
- Sponsoring and delivering a twice weekly pop-up shop from April to August 2020 to enable vulnerable and shielding people to access fresh food and household items.
- Providing regular and frequent communication through a variety of channels to keep residents informed about Covid-19 and local support, and to reassure the community.
- Raising a small amount of funding to be offered on an easy-access basis to anyone experiencing Covid-related financial difficulty.

At least 58 people received regular direct support from volunteers. The pop-up shop generally served around 70 people each Tuesday and over 100 each Saturday. We believe everyone in the village was able to access prescriptions, in the first period through volunteer support, and later when deliveries were negotiated with the two pharmacies.

Only one person made use of a financial grant. A financial survey undertaken by Comag in April 2020 showed that while a significant number of the residents who responded were feeling financial strain, few had experienced deep difficulty, partly as a result of government support schemes.

Money from the hardship fund was used to purchase essential IT equipment for families in the village for whom access to home learning was being limited by not having laptops or chromebooks available for children to use.

Feedback from residents suggests a key intangible impact of Comag’s activities was to reassure anxious residents, reduce loneliness and provide a feeling of community membership and ‘being supported’ even when people did not draw on direct volunteer help.

Aside from income and expenditure at the shop, the fund received the following donations: Combe charities: £500; Witney Round Table: £300; Combe Parish Council: £540; Individual Donations: £3668.

Activities are now generally at a low level. The bank account holds a positive balance of £4,667.82, which remains available to the hardship fund.

Establishment

In March and April 2020 as the country realised the threat from Covid-19 and the first lockdown began, over 4,000 mutual aid groups were formed to support local communities around the UK. Comag was one of these.

Martha O'Curry took the initiative to ask a group of residents to form the initial committee, which immediately established a list of vulnerable members of the community (held securely), a WhatsApp group and a Facebook group open to all residents. The committee took the necessary steps to formalise Comag as a voluntary society with objectives, membership, officers and a bank account. Committee member Laura Snook began organising food deliveries to the village, which rapidly evolved into a pop-up shop run on a non-profit basis with its accounts managed by Comag and run by volunteers. A Special General Meeting was held by Zoom on 1st July 2020 at which the Constitution of the society was agreed, and a committee and officers formally elected.

Objectives

Although prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic the objectives of the society were framed in more general terms to enable it to be a forum for mutual aid between residents with the potential for wider purposes and longevity. The objectives are to:

“Provide support and relief during any time of general emergency to individuals or households in the Combe parish or nearby, who are in need, by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage; where ‘support and relief’ may mean: mobilising volunteer help; securing essential household supplies; providing financial aid; working with other local organisations to achieve the above.”

Membership

Membership is open to each resident of Combe parish or nearby areas who is over 18. To become a member a resident need only join the Facebook or WhatsApp group. Each member can exercise a vote at the Annual General Meeting or Special General Meetings.

Officers and committee

The following voluntary Officers were elected at the Special General Meeting and continue to serve:

Chair: Martha O'Curry, Secretary: Julia Sharpe, and Treasurer: Karen Paine. The remaining members of the committee are: Sam Birkett, Denise Cripps, Jenny Olivier, Don Redding, Laura Snook.

Activities March 2020 to 31 March 2021

Communications

To reach out to residents, recruit them as members and register their needs, Comag established electronic communications in the form of a Facebook Group, a WhatsApp group and email newsletters.

Recognising that not all residents are comfortable with or able to use electronic channels, these were supplemented by leaflet drops to all households – of which the first was delivered by Comag, and subsequent issues enclosed with the Combe Courier – and leaflets displayed around the village.

The newsletter, managed by Sam Birkett, evolved into a weekly communication for most of 2020, reducing in frequency in 2021, and was a forum for residents to exchange their own news and initiatives as well informing them about Comag.

These initiatives included a regular weekly Zoom Quiz Night for residents.

Direct support to residents

Comag established a list of the most vulnerable members of the community as well as contact details for as many village residents as possible. With this the committee was able to mobilise volunteers to provide residents as appropriate with: regular phone calls to check wellbeing, help to access food and essential items and to organise shopping, and help to get prescriptions delivered.

Committee members and volunteers used their contacts and networks to recruit residents to the Facebook and WhatsApp groups where their needs could be made known. During the first lockdown, in April 2020, 58 residents were being supported by volunteers.

This support included help to get their prescriptions, and volunteers made trips to pharmacies. Over time, however, the Secretary's liaison with the pharmacies in Woodstock and Long Hanborough resulted in regular doorstep deliveries organised by the pharmacies themselves.

From May 2020 Comag worked to establish 'street champions' who could get to know people in their local patch and respond to needs there.

Pop-up shop

In the first lockdown access to food and essential goods could be challenging, especially for people who were 'shielding' or otherwise vulnerable or anxious about contact.

The pop-up shop aimed to support these groups in particular. It made available fresh food, dry goods such as pasta and cooking oil, and essential household items through a Covid-compliant stall on the grounds of the Reading Room.

Most of the fresh produce was sourced directly from wholesalers (whose market to supply catering services had disappeared), at a discount to their usual prices. Items were priced to enable the shop to run 'at cost', using unpaid volunteers. Some food items were donated by residents, including from Belazu, Green's farm and unwanted food parcels from shielding individuals. However, there were also overhead costs such as food wastage, sanitising equipment and rental of the electronic payment service. We are grateful that, in May 2020, Combe Parish Council agreed to support these costs.

After initial experiments the shop became regular on Tuesdays and Saturdays. People over 70 and/or shielding were prioritised for the first two hours of opening. An advance ordering system was available; as were doorstep deliveries for those who could not come in person. Between 50 and 75 sales were made each Tuesday, and over 100 on several Saturdays, during the lockdown period. By the summer of 2020 as social restrictions began to ease and people solidified their arrangements for food shopping, the shop began to feel less essential and the decision was made to end it in August. The accounts show that over its lifetime the shop turned over £19,000 worth of goods.

In September residents were invited to a virtual meeting to discuss the shop experience, and those who participated made clear their very strong appreciation not only of the access to food but also the quality of produce, the community spirit and social interaction, and the value of being able to shop without using cars. However, with wholesalers regaining their markets, catering establishments reopening, supermarkets expanding online ordering and people being freer to move, the justification for continuing did not exist. The shop organisers offered to make their expertise and learning available should any residents wish to revive a village shop in the future.

Throughout the year Comag has publicised local suppliers who can deliver food directly to residents.

Financial Survey and Hardship Fund

The pandemic threatened the livelihoods of many people in the UK, especially those who were made redundant and forced onto Universal Benefit. In April 2020 using the contact lists built through rapid communications Comag carried out an online survey of residents to assess who was feeling these effects, achieving 127 responses. Three quarters of those responding were financially settled – either retired or with their employment unaffected. Unemployment was negligible. But around a quarter of respondents had either experienced loss of business (self-employed) or being put on furlough.

On a preventive basis, in case hardship increased (for example, when furlough ended) Comag established a hardship fund. The Combe charities made their existing funds available and generous residents also voluntarily donated. From May 2020 the fund was publicised to all residents, offering a grant of up to £100, or an interest free loan up to £200. In the event only one resident has accessed a loan.

It seems likely that those who lost business either found ways to survive (or were supported by spouses/families); while unexpectedly the government has repeatedly extended its support to the furlough scheme. It is still possible that when furlough does end there will be redundancies. Funds continue to be held against that eventuality.

By the time of the third lockdown (January 2021) a further need had arisen as schools were closed and children were expected to access online learning. Some families had inadequate equipment and so funding was given via the primary school to purchase additional laptops for families in need.

17/21 Police Report – PCSO Helen Keen, Eynsham Neighbourhood Team

Wow what a year it's been. Who would have thought a year ago we would end up in the grip of a national pandemic and the country would be put into not one but three national lockdowns. We would like to personally thank members of the public who are doing their bit and staying home.

The Neighbourhood Policing structure has changed yet again this year. PCSO Helen Keen has left the Woodstock area returning to the Eynsham area, PCSO Chris Jones is still our schools officer covering the whole of West Oxfordshire, PC Rob Webb and the Neighbourhood team from Chipping Norton will now be overseeing the Woodstock area. Should you wish to contact them directly please use:

ChippingNortonNHPT@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk, if you require an officer non-emergency is 101 or 999 in an emergency.

Throughout this year the West Oxfordshire neighbourhood team have continued to patrol Combe and the surrounding villages and I would like to thank them for their dedication and professionalism in what has been a very difficult and challenging year. We continue to use of the Thames Valley Alert system which is a great way that the police can communicate with the public as well as receive messages back. We encourage people to sign up for this and they can do so at www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk. You can also follow the team on Facebook and Twitter just search for TVP West Oxon.

It goes without saying that we rely on your continued support which is much appreciated so if you notice something that is out of the ordinary, or you are concerned about the welfare of a child or adult, there are ways to report it to the police and the relevant agencies. Call 101 or report anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

Figures for the year 22/03/20 to 22/03/21

Burglary (residential & business) 1, criminal damage 2, thefts including from vehicles 3, assault without injury 5, drug offences 2, ASB 4, criminal damage 2, dangerous driving 3 and 1 suspicious package.

Please be aware of frauds, trends across the local police area have seen a rise in Action fraud reports-online scams (not just elderly).

18/21 Any Other Business

There was no other business and the meeting ended at 21.30pm.

Deborah Phillips thanked the Chairman for her proficient leadership of the Parish Council.