

# COMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Report of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – approved

## Present

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

**Guest Speaker:** Hilary Brown

**Village Representatives:** Rachel Joannou – Combe School, Dave Lee – VH&RG, Celia Adamson – Combe Charities, Andrew Hobson – PCC and The Hub, Sally Pursell – Combe Pre-School and After School Clubs, Martha O’Curry – Comag

**Members of the Public:** 5

## 1/21 Apologies

John Hunt – Parish Councillor, Ralph Williamson – Rector, PCSO – Ben Hallam, Roger Pursell – Reading Room

## 2/21 Guest Speaker – Hilary Brown, Sustainable Woodstock

The Chairman welcomed Hilary Brown.

Hilary briefly outlined the zero plastic, replacing plastic bags with canvas ones, swap shop and free cycle campaigns before moving on to the main topic of the woodland and community orchard.

In 2011 to celebrate 900 years of Woodstock volunteers created a community orchard and woodland by planting a variety of fruit trees, including apple, pear, cherry, damson, plum and medlar on land donated by Blenheim on an 80-year lease. The orchard has promoted wildlife and wild flowers and bee hives and bat boxes have been added. Hilary said that although the orchard needs a lot of maintenance, looking after habitats and good community spirit make it all worthwhile.

## 3/21 Report of the 2021 Annual Parish Meeting

The report of the 2021 APM was circulated prior to the meeting and there were no questions arising.

## 4/21 Parish Council Report – Elena Softley

It is good to see everyone back in person following the last two annual parish meetings that were held online.

It has been a busy year but I want to start by focussing on two of the Parish Council’s priorities for the year: Speedwatch and the Village Design Statement.

**Speedwatch** - Vice Chairman Alan Revell has taken the lead on the Speedwatch initiative, which culminated with a village survey on introducing a 20mph speed limit and a consultation day for Combe residents in the Reading Room. The results were clear: 80% favoured the introduction of 20mph. We made our application to Oxfordshire County Council at the end of March and were pleased to hear that Combe is to be in the first tranche of villages to implement 20mph. We were also extremely pleased that, in addition to £1,000 from Andy Graham’s Councillor Priority Fund, OCC will also fund the cost of the signage, further reducing our contribution to the implementation costs. So, hopefully, before the end of the year, Combe’s 30mph signs will be replaced by 20mph, and we will join Stonesfield as one of the first villages to introduce 20mph.

**Village Design Statement** -We held a consultation session for the Village Design Statement (VDS) in the Reading Room last year, before Councillor Deborah Phillips submitted the final version in December to WODC. We’re still waiting for final approval and the notice that it will become a statutory instrument appended to the local plan. This is vitally important if we wish to have any input into potential future development in Combe. Deborah Phillips did very thorough and professional work on the VDS, collating all the responses and writing an excellent evidence-based report. Sophie Johnson designed the booklet and

David O'Brien took the photos of the village included in the booklet. I would like to thank them all for their excellent contributions.

**Village Travel Network** - Another initiative I want to mention is the Village Travel Network. This is a group consisting of representatives from Blenheim and from the six villages, including Woodstock, that surround Blenheim. The objective is to promote active travel, mainly walking and cycling, between the villages. One project is looking at providing a path through Blenheim from Bladon coming out at the Hanborough Gate opposite Hanborough Station. Councillor Denise Cripps and I are representatives on this group and are keen that in future Blenheim considers opening up an internal route from Combe Gate, East End to Hanborough Station. A Family Bike Ride launch event for the Village Travel Network, with one section starting from Combe, is being planned.

**Broadband** - Gigaclear installed ultra-fast fibre broadband in the village but, due to installation issues, left out Church Walk. Denise Cripps as the Council's Broadband Champion has been negotiating with Gigaclear, first to get them to include Church Walk and now to complete the installation of the last section of Church Walk which has to be from overhead electric poles.

**Playpark** - The Playpark is an important village amenity and we are responsible for its safety and upkeep. Councillor John Hunt is the Parish Council Playpark representative and is responsible for inspecting it weekly and liaising with our clerk, Julia Sharpe, over what needs to be repaired.

**Bonfire and fireworks** - I also want to mention the bonfire and fireworks this last November: The Parish Council learnt a couple of weeks before the 5<sup>th</sup> November that the Bonfire committee which had organised the event for the last few years no longer wished to run it, so we were extremely grateful to Don Slatter who stepped up to manage the event, and also to everyone who helped him. It was a superb display.

**Natural environment** - As ever the Parish Council has been working hard to look after Combe's natural environment, organising the mowing of the greens and the verges – but not all of the verges as Combe has a new group, led by villager Janet Robinson Wood, which is keen to promote wildflowers.

We held the annual litter pick on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March, and thank you to everyone who came along. It was a good sign that the amount of litter collected was much less than in previous years.

**Thanks** - I feel honoured to serve with such an outstanding group of councillors, each of them actively involved in village life and affairs. I thank them all for their commitment and hard work.

Finally, a very special thank you to our brilliantly efficient and dedicated Parish Clerk, Julia Sharpe, who works so hard on all Parish matters. We are incredibly lucky to have her as our Clerk.

## 5/21 Report from County Councillor – Cllr Andy Graham

Cllr Graham was unable to attend but provided the following report.

Area Covered: Woodstock, Bladon, Blenheim, Stonesfield, Combe, Wootton, Kiddington, Tackley, Steeple Barton, Westcote Barton, Sandford St Martins

Attended: over **60** meetings of the parish councils and **12** county council/committee including: People's Scrutiny Committee and Locality Meetings.

Site Visits/inspections: over **40** locations (highways, flooding and railway crossings)

External Representative for OCC and meetings attended on Cotswold National Landscape Board, Oxfordshire Music Board, Oxfordshire Museums Council and Oxford Airport Committee

### Highlights (for Combe and nearest villages)

**Woodstock** - HGV Burford Ban Lifted, detailed analysis meetings leading to highways objections on Banbury Road and Hill Rise developments, Pedestrian and highways safety measures for the A44, new bridge and barriers at the Black Prince being designed for Autumn 2022, support for 30mph to 20 mph reduced speed scheme, car parking plan created, partnership group set up to further new Health Centre and profiling the need for a new library with the cabinet member to find a permanent home.

Supported Village Travel Network initiative and other community organisations and Oxfordshire Museum. Supported/organised Standing in Solidarity meeting for Ukrainian refugees outside Woodstock Town Hall-ongoing.

**Bladon** - furthered the completion of the widening of pathway for cycling and pedestrian safety, supported 30mph to 20 mph reduced speed scheme, Bladon roundabout work completed and currently investigating other parking improvements in the village with parish councillors and OCC highways officers.

**Combe** - Supported 30mph to 20 mph reduced speed scheme and partner funded the geophysical survey on site of former church.

**Stonesfield** - Supported the implementation of the 30 to 20 mph reduced speed with some partnership funding support, the initiative to save The White Horse pub from permanent closure and part funding the café carers group.

**Wootton** - Supported the reopening of the footpath with removal of falling rocks causing it to close and the installation of security fencing, supported 30 to 20 mph reduced speeding scheme and general support/advice to the parish council.

**Kiddington** - Met residents over the safety needs for equestrians through the village (signs now in place) advice on flooding and reduced speed options. Instructed new yellow backing for 40 mph on the A44 now in place.

Ongoing Projects for the whole division include: Youth service provision being brought back to support the needs of young people, Home to schools, Transport revision on Policy.

Thanks to all parish councillors for all their efforts and the clerks who have done a first-class job in supporting us and the OCC staff who have supported me in the last year.

## 6/21 Report from District Councillor – Cllr Matthew Parkinson

It has been a steep learning curve during my first year as a District Councillor. Despite having quite a bit of local government experience, the role was quite different to what I expected.

West Oxfordshire, over the past year, has succeeded in many areas, from major, international contributions such as the aid project to home Ukrainian citizens, to the slightly smaller project of the introduction of Hedgehog Highways.

In my view, one of the more long-term successes has been the introduction of electric vehicle charging points in Woodstock car park, looking towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future.

I couldn't, of course, write about the past year without bringing up the 'C' word, Covid. Whilst this forced many West Oxfordshire District Council projects to be shelved, the Council did manage to keep many local businesses afloat with support to town centres, financial contributions to 1712 local businesses and the planning regulation support for outdoor dining, aiding our hospitality industry.

Finally, an unprecedented cross-party motion to openly question Thames Water's actions in recent years may prove to be the beginning of an historic monitoring process that could hopefully improve the biodiversity within our rivers.

Looking forwards, it seems we may have slightly more influence over decisions in West Oxfordshire in the coming year. I would encourage anyone and everyone to continue to contact me via my email address [Mathew.parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:Mathew.parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk).

Thank you to everyone for your support over the last year and I look forward to achieving more in the next.

## 7/21 Combe School Report – Rachel Joannou

There are currently 109 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, FOCS, English, PSHE, British Values, School Council

<b>Deputy Headteacher- S Legge</b> 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		<b>Business Manager- C Checksfield (term time plus INSETs plus two weeks)</b> Admin, Finance, HR, Health and Safety	
Staff			
<b>Teacher- V Gehin</b> SENCO (More Able, EAL), Art & Design, Design & Technology, Year R/1 Class Teacher, Deputy DSL	<b>Teacher- J Page (0.8)</b> Maths, RE, Year 3/4 Class Teacher	<b>Teacher- K McBride</b> Year 5/6 Class Teacher, Computing and Music	
<b>Teacher- G Challender (0.2)</b> Languages, Year 3/4 Class Teacher	<b>Jennifer Walsh- 1:1 TA (term time only)</b> 17.5 hours	<b>Chris Ball (term time only)</b> TA- 33.25 hours Inc 1x breakfast club and 1 x ASC	
<b>Hira Gul (term time only)</b> TA 32.25 hours Inc 1x breakfast club	<b>Sarah Horner (term time only)</b> HLTA 11 hours TA 21.33 hours	<b>Sarah Timms (term time only)</b> 1:1 Support 11.33 hours	
<b>Jo McKechnie (term time only)</b> TA 16.5 hours	<b>Lucy Martin (term time only)</b> TA 13.25 hours inc 1 x breakfast club HLTA 6.5 hours		
	<b>Anna Hanusova (year-round)</b> 6 hours	<b>Sally-Anne Clavaud (year-round)</b> 18.25 hours	

In July 2021, Mrs Millar retired following over 30 years' service. We are very grateful for her commitment to the school over many years.

**September 2021 admissions** - We welcomed 19 new Reception children to the school in September 2021. 12 children had siblings at Combe and 7 children are from new families to the school.

**July 2021 Leavers** - Our 13 Year 6 pupils left Combe School at the end of July 2021, moving to a variety of schools including Bartholomew School, The Marlborough, Abingdon School and Cokethorpe School.

**Coronavirus** - We have continued to be impacted significantly by the Covid 19 pandemic. 74% of pupils tested positive this academic year and 60% of staff. This is caused disruption within school. Remote learning is provided for isolating children if they are well enough to participate. We offer as much 'live streaming' as possible, as is the DfE's preference.

**Achievement** - Due to the Covid- 19 pandemic, there was no statutory assessments for primary school pupils in the summer term 2021. We continue to monitor pupil progress and attainment within school.

**Friends of Combe School** - 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 included - Sponsored Summer Challenge, Christmas Fair, including a raffle, Quiz Night. The money raised by FoCS will go towards our Health and Wellbeing pod, to be installed in the school garden.

**Visits in and out of school** - The following overnight visits out of school have taken place - Four-night residential to Yenworthy- Year 6. One-night residential to Hill End- Year 2. Two-night residential to PGL Liddington- Year 3/4

**The following out of school have taken place** - Visit to British Motor Museum- Reception/Year 1/Year 2, Visit to Chedworth Roman Villa- Year 3/Year 4, Sailing at Farmoor Reservoir- Year 5/6, Swallows Class to Hampton Court Palace- Year 5/6, Visit to Hughenden Manor- Year 3/4, Visit to Millets Farm Falconry Centre- Reception/Year 1/Year 2, Story Museum Workshops- whole school, Visit to National Space Centre- Year 5/6, Visit to Chipping Norton Pantomime- whole school, Orienteering day at Hill End- Year 5/6, Legoland- Reception/Year 1/Year 2

**The following visits into school have taken place** - Hatching Partridge Eggs- all children, Spoons Workshop- Year 3/4, Science Oxford Workshops- whole school, Virtual Reality workshops- whole school, Brazilian Capoeira Dance workshops- whole school, Greek Day in school- Year 3/4, Evenlode River Project- Year 5/6, Bikeability- Year 5, Seaside workshop- Reception/Year 1/2, Spoons workshop- Year 1/2

**Inter-school events** have been limited due to Covid-19. The following have taken place - Girls Football Tournament- Year 3/4. Year 5 Maths competition at Cranford House School

**Community Events** - Over the past year, community events have been more limited due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Services in the church were held at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. We were able to hold the annual silence at the memorial on Remembrance Day. Our May Day celebration will be held at 2pm on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May.

**Developments to building and site** - Replacing toilet windows in KS2 building, replacing UPVC doors with aluminium in KS2 building, repairing dry stone wall on school grounds, repainting wooden door in KS2, refurbishing KS2 girl's toilet, Gigaclear installed.

**Charity Fundraising** - The following fundraising has taken place - Wear it Pink- Breast Cancer - £108, Christmas Jumper Day- Save the Children - £131, Jeans for Genes - £109, Children in Need - £ 235, Red Nose Day - £100, Ukraine Day - £550 plus donations of items, Food Bank donation at Harvest time

**After School Clubs** - The children have been offered the following extra-curricular after-school clubs this year - Spanish, Footy Kids, Hockey Club, Basketball Club, Netball Club, Rounders Club, Musical Theatre, Science Club, Craft Club, Yoga Club, Martial Arts Club, Choir

## 8/21 Combe Reading Room Report – Deborah Phillips

Roger Purssell was unable to attend, Deborah Phillips read the report on his behalf.

The Covid pandemic still cast its long shadow over our activities in 2021.

As can be imagined our fundraising was severely curtailed, although not as badly as 2020. Nonetheless we did manage to have a plant sale in May and to resume our monthly coffee mornings from July. We were most fortunate that the weather was kind to us and we were able to convene in the Reading Room Garden, which went a long way to mitigating the possible transmission of the virus. We were also able to put on our summer Sunday teas, albeit in a somewhat truncated form. One of the few good things to emerge from the pandemic was the increased use of online banking facilities. This was particularly true of our traditional 100 Club. We received a record number of subscriptions, 127 in all, giving an even bigger than usual boost to our funds. This was much improved by many members kindly agreeing to reinvest their prizes.

We were fortunate not to have incurred much major expenditure beyond that on routine maintenance. We did, however, improve the lighting in the long room lavatories by installing movement activated sensors. This having the added benefit of ensuring lights never being left on inadvertently. We were also able to address a damp problem in the corner of the main room.

Our Treasurer's prudent handling of all things financial ensures that, despite so many bumps in the road, our finances remain in very good order. We look forward to calmer times ahead, which we hope will strengthen our position even further and allow us to add to our roof repair fund, currently standing at £6500. In essence our main incomes and expenditures were as follows:

### **Incomes**

Coffee Mornings	£1250
100 Club	£1500
Premises Hire	£2050

### **Expenditures**

Insurance	£950
Council Tax	£1600
Utilities	£750
Maintenance	£1950

The upshot of the above is a small annual surplus of £400 compared to a £900 loss, excluding grants, in 2020.

The Reading Room functions so well because of the unstinting input of your trustees who have, as always, underpinned the successful operation of this central village amenity. Their tireless support, combined with that of our ever-obliging resident caretaker Sue Golder, is what allows this lovely building and its surrounds to prosper. As will often be the case there have been comings and goings within our group of trustees. We have sadly said goodbye to two of our long serving members in Tony Hyder and Rachel Whitehead. We are, however, delighted to welcome Jo Mckechnie onto our board.

## 9/21 Village Hall and Recreation Ground (VHRGC) Report – Dave Lee

Looking back over the past year, the Village Hall can report on a number of improvements which we hope will benefit users of our playing fields and pavilion facilities for years to come.

The resurfaced car park was several years in the planning and fund raising and we were delighted when the works were finally finished in August 2021.

A new hall floor was also laid in 2021 which has provided a much-improved surface for toddlers, exercise classes and sports participants and spectators alike. We also took the opportunity to have a plumber fix the leaks and grumbles from the toilets and sinks, as well as apply some anti mould paint in the men's changing rooms and automatic extractor fans. In addition, a number of wooden posts were replaced and reflectors were added to improve the use of the car park. The removal of brambles along the south facing boundary has improved the views for all concerned and we are looking forward to seeing the fruits of the wildflower planting.

The preschool play area has transformed what was a previously unattractive area of land and we hope has improved the offering of the preschool amenity to new and existing families in and around the village.

The committee appreciates the support of everyone involved to help maintain and improve what is an important village asset for the benefit of our beautiful village. However, we could not have done any of it without the hard work of everyone on the committee but particularly David Lee, Paul Bowerman, Malcolm Hawkins, Alan Revell and Mike Lloyd. Thanks also to the Parish Council for their donation, we also need to acknowledge the generous donations from West Oxfordshire District Council, Viridor Credits Environmental Company, the Bernard Sunley Foundation and the Doris Field Charitable Trust.

This year, we were delighted to welcome back Ian Ashcroft to the committee as lettings officer as well as new villager Nades Wyatt, we are also recruiting for a new treasurer as Mike Lloyd prepares to step down in June to take on another voluntary role. Many thanks to Mike for sorting out and organising the finances, including many months spent sorting out the authorities to the Bank mandates, courtesy of HSBC plc who seem to continue to specialise in mindless bureaucracy and delays.

On the subject of finances, in the year ending 31 March 2021, we reported £13,040 of income to the Charity Commission (which included a government grant of £10,000) and expenses of £8,952, (which included the costs of contributing towards the car park works and the flooring). Current cash balances are c £4,300 with reserves of £7,900; however, we need to raise a minimum of £5000 every year to cover forecast expenses (which does not include the expected rise in electricity costs or any exceptional items). Lettings are up this year over last year and we hope to promote the pavilion more as a possible wedding or other amenity venue, we are looking to improve our website to support that, provided of course it fits in with football and cricket fixtures.

## 10/21 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 three donations from the fund for help since the 2021 Annual Parish Meeting, one to a family, another following a theft and another to Combe School.

This year we were able to hold our usual annual fundraising tea afternoon, and £525 was banked as a result, £138 of which was from the sale of Combe Charity cards produced by Mary Denham and Sue Goodman. The collection from the Combe Feast open air service on The Green was £185 and a donation was received of £25.

The bank statements on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 show a recent high figure, with a total of £5073.42, although this figure will drop when all the current bequests are cleared. 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, Pat Richens for her advice and interest, 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 Soderberg and since last May, our Rector Ralph Williamson whose interest and involvement has been greatly appreciated.

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

## 11/21 Parochial Church Council Report – Andrew Hobson

Ralph Williamson has now completed a full year as Rector of Stonesfield with Combe Longa.

It is hard to remember that when I was installed as Rector there were still regulations governing how many people could attend the service.

2021 was a year of modest achievement for St Lawrence. Attendance at services is as strong as ever and All Age Worship has seen a pleasing growth of family attendance and is led by an enthusiastic team from the village who consistently come up with novel ideas to explain our faith to the children. Our involvement in the village has undoubtedly been strengthened by the Tuesday coffee morning, which has proved increasingly popular with all ages and which owes a considerable debt to the volunteers who conceived it and run it.

The Church has I think strengthened its relationship with our wonderful school and I attend regularly to take assemblies and RE lessons, and act in my role as a governor.

We were pleased to be able to have once again our Feast Day service on the green which was well attended as later was a more solemn event on Remembrance Sunday.

The Church is pleased to continue its material and financial support for the Witney Foodbank. Donations of food and personal necessities are collected at the Church and delivered to the Foodbank regularly.

Our stewardship of the fabric and churchyard has involved some significant tree-work in the churchyard together with planning of a scheme to open up the back the Church with removal of the old organ and substituting chairs for a few of the uncomfortable pews acquired from St Luke's Cowley in 1995 to make for a more flexible space aimed particularly at enhancing the attractiveness of services to families.

Looking to the future, we are sorry to be losing our Licensed Lay Minister Helen Walker, who is moving away, but are pleased that Linda Soderberg is training for her license and will we expect be licensed later this year.

Financially the church has fared reasonably well, though once again it has been necessary to draw on reserves to meet Parish Share demands of the Diocese, which as you may be aware is a significant issue for parishes across the country and particularly rural parishes such as ours.

## 12/21 Combe Community Hub Report – Andrew Hobson

2021 was the first year we have been able to let the two main areas of the building separately, following the extensive works undertaken in 2000. We are pleased to report that we almost immediately achieved two new lettings, one for an informal parents' group and the other for a yoga class. We were able to undertake the work thanks to initial grant from the Parish Council which assisted greatly in getting further grant aid to complete the work.

The works themselves completed by early 2021 although there were a few snagging issues to deal with.

During the year we obtained further grant aid and were able to

- complete the building of fixed cupboards for storage at the front of the main room and to put new gutters on the building to replace the old cast iron guttering;
- complete the double glazing of the windows;
- replace the flooring in the main room.

Grants were awarded by:

- Blenheim
- Pye
- Foyle Foundation.

Despite the Covid restrictions we were able to keep lettings (such as Saturday yoga, Monday exercise class, craft and cinema clubs) up throughout the year and with Covid related grants from WODC ended the year with income at a level to meet our outgoings.

Our current projects are some stonework repairs to the porch and the installation of sound panelling to try to improve the acoustics of the main room.

### 13/21 Pre-School and After-School Club Report – Sally Pursell

Combe Preschool and ASC continues to operate 5 days a week, from 8.50 – 6.00pm during school term times in the Combe Hub. We have 27 2- 4-year-old children on Preschool roll, and we now employ 7 staff working with the children, as well as a cleaner and an administrator. Afterschool club numbers vary, but we have between 8 – 16 children most days. We are running open days this term to encourage new families to come and see what we offer at Combe. This is to try and boost numbers, but also in response to a comment from a visiting Parent who said she had no idea what a lovely Preschool we have in Combe, and if she'd have known, she would have sent her children in preference to her own local village preschool!

Both the indoor and outdoor spaces have received much attention over the past year, and continue to offer the children a stimulating, inviting and challenging environment. Lisa Humphrey has taken the lead in this area, and has been resourceful and inventive, finding ways to develop the provision without spending much money in these difficult financial times.

Finances continue to be difficult, with increasing staff costs, lower than average numbers on roll, and the carry forward deficit resulting from the pandemic. Monthly finance meetings are held to monitor the position, and various strategies are being tried to help us improve our position. One of these strategies has been to step up our fundraising efforts, which we have done effectively this spring. So far in 2022 we have raised approximately £2500, with the Garage sale and two cream teas still to come. We are extremely grateful to Combe for continuing to support our Preschool both through these fundraising events, and also through donations.

The committee has recently undertaken a restructuring of our leadership team, and has now split the manager's role into two jobs. Andrea Oliver continues to take the lead on Safeguarding and Welfare, and Lisa Humphrey is now the lead on Teaching and Learning. This structure divides up what is a hugely demanding role, and utilises the strengths of our team members to their best advantage. The committee will continue to monitor this new way of working to ensure the best provision for our children and families. Our committee and staff continue to work closely with the Combe Hub, the Primary School, and the VHRGC all of whom are very supportive of Preschool and ASC. We are very grateful to have the support of these and other village organisations.

Although we are still going through a difficult time financially, we are confident that with the continued support of Parents and the Village we will survive these challenges, and look forward to a more financially stable time next year. Whilst these challenges go on in the background our dedicated staff and committee get on with continuing to provide the very best early education for the young people of Combe and local villages.



## 14/21 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 2021 to March 2022 inclusive. A further draft will be agreed by the committee and finalised at the Comag annual general meeting.

**Background** - 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; and
- 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 chrome books 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.

**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

Treasurer: Jenny Olivier

The remaining members of the committee are: Sam Birkett, Denise Cripps, Don Redding, Laura Snook.

**Activities** - Since May 2021 with the easing of COVID restrictions and a successful vaccination programme many of the practical activities of the group are no longer required. An active WhatsApp group still provides a point of contact and an opportunity to seek support from the village community. All other formal activity has ceased.

**Hardship Fund** - The value of the hardship fund currently stands at £4687 with no direct requests having been made in the last twelve months. As agreed on formation it is the intention of the committee to consult the members on the proposed transfer of the funds to Combe Charities at the AGM in June for continued

distribution to the community post-pandemic. Due consideration will be given to GDPR if it is decided at the AGM to cease activity and retain no organisational structure.

## 16/21 Police Report – PCSO Ben Hallam

PSCO Hallam was unable to attend but sent the following report:

I am the Police Community Support Officer for the surrounding area. I should soon be joined by a lady from Oxford Neighbourhood team who will join me in Woodstock around summer time, this is not fully decided yet. If anyone would like to contact me, they can use the neighbourhood email inbox which is:

[WoodstockNHPT@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk](mailto:WoodstockNHPT@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk)

work a shift pattern of different hours so I may not respond straight away but I will at my next available opportunity.

Please encourage the residents of Combe and surrounding area to report crime to us. Whether it be suspicious activity, drug dealing or any concerns. I have noticed that there is a large problem with people not reporting crimes in the Woodstock area. This could be due to the lack of police presence. On that note, I would like to add that we are about in the area when we can be. Sometimes other commitments take priority but we will always find time to patrol areas. If we receive reports, we tend to allocate more resources to that area. I often patrol the area myself and I usually drive an unmarked silver Vauxhall Corsa. This means people may not realise I am police and I am in the area but I am never that far away.

## 17/21 Any Other Business

Jubilee – Sally Pursell gave an overview of the celebrations planned for the Jubilee Weekend. The Chairman thanked her and the Jubilee Committee for all of their hard work in planning such a variety of activities and events.

There were no questions from the public.

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

The meeting ended at 21.45pm.