

COMBE PARISH COUNCIL

Report of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 10th May 2023 – approved

Present

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

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

Members of the Public: 5

The Chair opened the meeting by expressing thanks to the outgoing Chair, Elena Softley, for her wise and professional leadership over a period of 11 years, and an appreciation of all that she has helped to achieve.

1/23 Apologies

PC Chris Cochrane, Neighbourhood Supervisor for West Oxon and manager of the local police team and PCSO’s across the West Oxon area.

2/23 Guest Speaker - Cllr Charlie Maynard

Due to unforeseen circumstances the guest speaker did not attend.

3/23 Report of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting

The report of the 2022 APM was circulated prior to the meeting and there were no questions arising.

4/23 Parish Council Report – Elena Softley

After 11 years as Chair of Combe Parish Council this will be my last annual report. The Parish Council’s new Chair is Deborah Phillips. I am looking forward very much to collaborating with Deborah, who I know will be an excellent Chair.

First of all, I want to mention John Hunt, who has retired from the Council, and thank him for all his work as a councillor, particularly as Play Park representative.

For the recent election only five nomination papers were received for six councillor places, resulting in an uncontested election, so we were all duly elected. We will be co-opting a sixth member and will be advertising the vacancy.

So...some highlights from the year:

20 mph - In October, Combe became one of the first Oxfordshire villages to put in 20mph, following close on Stonesfield who had introduced it a few months earlier. Many thanks to our Oxfordshire County Councillor Andy Graham for supporting us in our application and for Councillor Alan Revel for gathering the Speedwatch data.

Village Design Statement - We heard at the end of last year that WODC was very pleased with our Village Design Statement (VDS) and it went out to public consultation in February this year. WODC said it was ‘a leading example which other Councils should be encouraged to follow’. The online consultation also resulted in some very positive comments, particularly from Heritage England. The VDS is now due to be signed off at a WODC cabinet meeting and then it becomes a legal statutory instrument appended to the WODC local plan. Thank you to Deborah for producing such an excellent document, and for leading this sometimes-difficult process.

Village Travel Network - The Parish Council is represented on the Village Travel Network, a group of villages working with Blenheim to promote active travel, such as walking and cycling, between them. The project that I mentioned last year: providing a path through Blenheim from Bladon Gate coming out at the Hanborough Gate opposite Hanborough Station has been completed and the path has recently been opened. We are hopeful that additional paths through Blenheim will be opened up in future years, including one from Combe to Hanborough station.

Gigaclear - Following the initial wiring of the village, Councillor Denise Cripps has shown amazing perseverance liaising with Gigaclear to get the houses in Church Walk who wanted to switch to Gigaclear connected.

Queen's Jubilee - The Parish Council has underwritten two important events: the Queen's Platinum Jubilee last year and the coronation this year. Last year's events covered their costs and this year's has done the same. A big thank you to the organising committee and all their helpers. And thank you to our clerk Julia Sharpe for organising the Combe coronation mugs and to Sue Goodman for designing them.

Bonfire and fireworks - In November, once again Don Slatter took the lead and with a wonderful band of helpers organised a brilliant firework display. Many thanks to Don and all those who helped him.

And all the rest!.....

Then there are the myriad issues that have to be dealt with day by day, including planning, which require administration, collaboration and correspondence, and the person who deals with all this and keeps us all on track is our totally amazing Parish Clerk, Julia. We are incredibly lucky to have her as our Clerk.

Lastly on a personal note, I would like thank Julia for being so supportive during my time as Chair.

5/23 Report from County Councillor – Cllr Andy Graham

A year is a long time in politics during which it has been a pleasure to work with Combe Parish Council. In my role as a County Councillor one of the challenges has been that of pot-holes. The way in which the service is funded and the current contract arrangements are being reviewed prior to the renewal of the contract.

OCC continue to fund the S3 bus, the £2 per adult and £1 for young people per journey will continue until the end of June. People must be urged to use the service or it will be cut in 2024. (Revd Williamson asked whether replacing the double decker bus with a single decker bus would make the service more economical and less harmful to the road surfaces. Cllr Graham agreed to raise the question with Stagecoach and report back).

I was pleased to support the Combe VH&RG with a grant of £1,000 from my Councillor's Priority Fund. The system for applying for grants has now changed slightly making it easier for smaller projects to apply. The Home to School transport working group (of which I am Chair) has investigated the recommended areas of improvement as identified by County councillors, officers and residents, including: reviewing the spare seats scheme so that it maximises the number of seats available to parents; ensuring all county councillors report parents' concerns over the safety of walking routes and where necessary reassessing the routes; providing SEND transport provision for post-16 students to increase independent travel and providing a more accessible and streamlined process for appeals. OCC is continuing to work with parents and schools to get children to school.

6/23 Report from District Councillor – Cllr Matthew Parkinson

I must firstly congratulate my newly elected colleague for the Stonesfield and Tackley Ward, Tim Sumner, who I know will be dedicated in helping the parishes Stonesfield, Combe, Tackley and Wooton. Thank you to all that voted for him and in so giving me someone really positive to work with!

Reflecting on the first year of a new administration, I feel the majority of the council's priorities are on track. We have a new local plan in the making which should mean we have a clear vision up until 2041. The purchase of the shopping area, Marriott's Walk in Witney means we now have a bit more control to support our local economy and keep it within the hands of local people.

We have made significant progress with Thames Water who, in a what I believe to be a nationwide first for a District Council, are now sitting down with our Councillor for Environment to try and work a way to prevent River and Waterways pollution.

We have also successfully installed ground-breaking broadcasting technology within some of our committee rooms, with a plan to do the same in a new look council chamber which means everyone will be able to remotely access our meetings. This will also mean the spaces can be booked for a variety of functions for the community such as meetings and weddings, all from a central government grant.

I look forward to working with Tim and the local communities in the coming year and, as ever, I would encourage anyone who needs to get in touch to do so via my email address -

Mathew.parkinson@westoxon.gov.uk

7/23 Combe School Report – Rachel Joannou

There are currently 116 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 (0.73)- R Joannou		
Deputy Headteacher- S Legge		Business Manager- C Checksfield
Staff		
Teacher- Vicky Gehin	Teacher- Jan Page (0.8)	Teacher- Kate McBride
Sarah Horner (TA)	Hira Gul (TA)	Chris Ball (TA)
Jo McKechnie (TA)	Jennifer Walsh- 1:1 TA	Sarah Timms (1:1 TA)
Lucy Martin (TA)	Matilda Bugler 1:1 TA	
	Anna Hanusova (cleaning staff)	Sally-Anne Clavaud (cleaning staff)

In April 2023, Mrs Challender (Y3/4 class teacher on Fridays) left her post at the school. We are very grateful for her commitment to the school over her time with us. Mrs Joannou is covering her role temporarily.

September 2022 admissions - We welcomed 18 new Reception children to the school in September 2022. 7 children had siblings at Combe and 11 children are from new families to the school.

July 2022 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.

Achievement - Statutory assessments took place in Summer 2022, although the data was not published and not used to create league tables. This was due to the uneven impact of the COVID pandemic.

We were pleased that 85% of Year 6 pupils reached the expected standard in English reading and writing and 100% pupils reached the expected standard in spelling, punctuation and grammar and maths.

In KS1, 80% of Year 2 pupils reached the expected standard in English reading and maths and 60% pupils reached the expected standard in writing. In Year 1, 100% of pupils passed the phonics screening check.

In EYFS, 82% reached the expected 'good level of development'.

Friends of Combe School - We are grateful for the ongoing support of FoCS. This year fundraising events included: - Summer Fete (June 2022), Christmas Lights, including a raffle (Dec 2022), Brush Party (Feb 2023), Quiz Night (March 2023). The money raised by FoCS helped fund a Garden Room, installed in the school garden. They are now fundraising for much needed 'shade sails' for the school playground.

Visits in and out of school - The following overnight visits out of school have taken place: - Four-night residential to Woodlands- Year 5/6, One-night residential to Hill End- Year 2, The following out of school have taken place: - Pitts Rivers Museum, Year ¾ Oxford City Tour, KS2, Ashmolean Museum, Year 5/6, Ascension Day at Lincoln College, Year 5, London, including Houses of Parliament, KS2, Visit to Chipping Norton Pantomime- whole school, Orienteering day at Hill End- Year 5/6 Story Museum- Reception, Peter Rabbit Experience at Blenheim- Reception and Year 1, Forest School, Year 1/2 and Year 6, Bournemouth Beach- Year ½, The Earth Trust, Year ¾, Autumn Fest at Blenheim, Year ¾, Junior Citizens, Year 6, Matilda the Musical, London, KS2, Oxford Schools Challenge (part of Oxford Half Marathon), Year 2-6, Harcourt Arboretum, Reception, Year 1 and 2, Adventure Play at Blenheim, whole school, Cotswold Wildlife Park, Reception, Year 1 and 2, The Living Rainforest, Year 5/6, Maps and Trials day at Hill End- Year 3/4,

Coleshill Farm, Year $\frac{3}{4}$. The following visits into school have taken place: - Poetry Workshops with Poet, Kate Wakeling, all year groups, Mayan Drumming, Year $\frac{3}{4}$, Viking Day, Year 5/6, Diwali Dance Workshops, all year groups, Injury Minimisation Programme for Schools, Year 6, Chinese New Year dance workshops, all year groups, Spoons Workshop- Year 5/6, Spoons Workshop- Year $\frac{3}{4}$, Science Oxford Workshops- whole school, Bikeability- Year 5, Spoons workshop- Year $\frac{1}{2}$, Author visit and workshops, Anna Kemp, all year groups.

Community Events - Events have included: - Services in the church were held at Harvest, Advent, Christmas and Easter, The annual silence at the memorial on Remembrance Day, May Day celebration on the village green, KS2 Concert and KS1 Nativity Performance.

We are grateful to the Parish Council for gifting all our pupils the Combe Coronation mug.

Developments to building and site - Installation of garden room, installation of new storage heaters in the old building, we are currently arranging roof repairs and the replacement of the large feature window as it is rotten. We also need to switch our lighting to LED lighting ahead of the discontinuation of fluorescent bulbs. Balancing spend on the building is a challenge. Our school only receive £5000 towards major building works each year. Other works, maintenance and rents come from our delegated budget, which reduces the funds then available to spend more directly on the children's education.

Charity Fundraising - The following fundraising has taken place: - Wear it Pink- Breast Cancer- £124, Christmas Jumper Day - Save the Children- £206, Children in Need- £274, Poppies- £188, Red Nose Day- £304, Food Bank donation at Harvest time

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

8/23 Combe Reading Room Report – Deborah Phillips

Roger Pursell provided the following report which was read by Deborah Phillips.

2022 was the year in which we began to emerge from the restrictions of the Covid pandemic. These, although lessened, still impacted on our activities, particularly in the first half of the year. Many of our fundraising efforts had to be outside and thus at the mercy of the weather. We were fortunate that on quite a few occasions the weather gods looked down kindly upon us.

Our income was £8444, which, unsurprisingly, was nicely up on 2021, but still well down on 2020. Our main sources of funds remain coffee mornings, cream teas, the 100 Club and hire of the premises. All these income streams were an improvement on the previous year, with cream teas and coffee mornings increasing by £900 and premises hire by nearly £1700, continuing a very welcome trend. On line banking and electronic payments continued to play a greater part in facilitating our fundraising.

Our expenditure was, as to be expected up on the recent past. As you will be aware energy costs have risen significantly with little relief for charities and businesses. Another significant increase, experienced we know by other village organisations, has been insurance costs, up by over 50%. Not all of our expenditure was ongoing, we did manage to replace all the lighting in the barn, install an outside light to illuminate the path, mothball the very bright security light and purchase a sturdy gazebo to enhance outside fundraising events.

The outcome of all this is that we generated a surplus of some £1800. When added to previous reserves we now hold a positive balance of a little over £22,000. This we are trying to build up knowing as we do that the roof will require attention in the not-too-distant future. It is hard to be definitive but the cost is likely to be in excess of £100K.

The Reading Room relies largely on the efforts and professionalism of its trustees. That these are given so feely and competently makes the management of this special village amenity so effective, not to mention the job of the Chair so much easier. As is usually the case personnel come and go. In 2022 we saw the sad departure of Jo Mckechnie and the welcomed arrival of four new trustees: Janet Robinson-Wood, Leanne McKean, Jacqueline Morrison and Gini Beavis. This brings us up to our full complement of 12, something we have not enjoyed for a number of years. We thank them all most warmly for all that they do and have done to ensure that the Reading Room remains a significant village asset. There is, of course one person without whom we would most certainly flounder and that is our hard working and much-loved caretaker Sue Golder. Thank you, Sue.

Finally, the Reading Room only functions because of the support it receives from our wonderful community. This can come in a variety of ways, for example by attending fund raising events or hiring the facilities – in whichever way this may be thank you.

9/23 Village Hall and Recreation Ground (VHRGC) Report – Dave Lee

The past year has again seen successful cricket and football seasons – with Combe adult cricket team still thriving, and junior ‘All Stars’ beginner sessions introducing cricket to the next generation. Football teams have also been out in force – with training during the week and matches at the weekend – from the adult team, to youth teams which span from Under 18s down to Under 6s. In the hall we’ve had regular exercise classes, the baby and toddler group and a number of family events throughout the year.

We have, however, had to focus on managing rising costs by a variety of measures including raising rental prices, as well as grant applications and increased fund raising. Although we are a small committee, we managed to run a number of Friday evening Barbecues last summer and to arrange and host a pop-up bar to support the November 5th fireworks celebrations. We also successfully applied for grants totalling £1600. From Blenheim we received £500 to install a 4G antenna to bring internet to the pavilion, and to cover costs for the first 18 months. This has been an enormous help for Combe Cricket Club, Combe Junior Sports, Michelle Eeley’s exercise classes and this committee for fund-raising events. As members of the Parish Council are aware, with your help we also applied to Oxfordshire County Council’s Community Building Energy Support Scheme and received £1,100 to help with our soaring energy costs, topped up by £377 from the Parish Council. Our key fund-raising target this coming year is to raise the money to upgrade our ageing mower. As the PC is also aware, we have been pledged £1,000 by Oxfordshire County Council and we are looking at other means to raise up to £10,000 in total.

We also very much appreciate the donation of £700 from the Parish Council in 2022/2023. We would appreciate continuing support from the Parish Council going forward to help meet rising costs. We would like the Parish Council to consider increasing their contribution for the coming year to £1000 as the rising electricity costs started to impact in March 2023 and will continue at least for the rest of the year.

We have really appreciated the willingness of committee members to give up a considerable amount of their time to help manage and maintain what is an important village asset for the benefit of our beautiful village. Most of the hard work is focused on the maintenance and upkeep of the playing fields and we are feeling the loss of Paul Bowerman from the committee, who retired last year after many years of unstinting service and practical expertise, for which we were extremely grateful. Also leaving the committee over the last year has been Jo Willis-Bund, our former Lettings Officer, so we have been on the hunt for new members to fill these gaps and more - to get us back up to viable levels.

As a result, we were very pleased when in early 2023 one additional trustee in Danny Maher, agreed to join us. Nades Wyatt, who joined us in 2022, has kindly agreed to take on treasurer responsibilities. She has managed finally to consolidate and update the authorities for all our bank accounts, which is no small feat, as well as locate monies on deposit with National Savings, of which we were previously unaware. That gives us a committee consisting of Madeline Laxton, Dave Lee, Nadine Wyatt, Ian Ashcroft, Danny Maher and Alan Revell, who is also Parish Council representative. A shout out also to Malcolm Hawkins who helps out at events when he can, and to Chris Drinkwater who this year is going to step in to help with the weekly mowing of the field, along with regular mower Simon Oliver, and newly trained recruits from the committee, Dave Lee and Ian Ashcroft. We are still in search of a mechanically-minded individual who can commit fully to help us maintain the mower ourselves. It is worth pointing out that most of the committee has full time jobs, which makes it very challenging finding time for grounds maintenance, lettings and treasury work, as well as the time involved in fund raising and grant applications. We still consider this to be a precarious position and would ask the Parish Council to give consideration to leading the formation of a combined resource team that could work across all the village charities. The recent COMAG committee showed what is possible. We also feel a way to bring the various charities together to promote greater collaboration and pooling of resources would be of great benefit.

In the year ending 31 March 2023, we look to have improved our income (including grants) to circa £10,780, less expenses of £7840.¹ Cash balances reported to our April meeting are quite low at £687; however, we should have improved the position considerably after the BBQ and pop-up bar over the Coronation bank holiday weekend. Final takings and expenses are still being calculated but we hope to have increased our cash balances to over £1000 at the time of writing. We have agreed to support three further cricket events at the pavilion with a BBQ which will help mitigate the very high electricity costs currently running at £350pcm, with cleaning costs our second largest area of expense. We have c £12,000 on deposit, however this is needed to help fund our 10-year maintenance plan which we estimate to cost approximately £33,000; more will be needed if we continue to make losses and need to tap into the reserves.

Although it has been a difficult year due to managing rising costs and with depleted resources, the committee is feeling positive about what it has managed to achieve. With some more resources, particularly for the grounds maintenance and for fund raising events, we could plan once again for improvements to the facilities.

10/23 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 ten donations from the fund since the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting, with at least three more pending. We have been asked by Combe Pre-School and the After-School Club to help fund children and also Combe School has asked for help towards paying for school meals and the cost of residential school trips. We have also made donations towards medical expenses and a small donation to a newly formed voluntary transport scheme. We are very happy to help all these concerns.

This year we were able to hold our usual annual fundraising tea afternoon, which resulted in £490, of which £90 came from the sale of Combe Charity cards produced by Mary Denham and Sue Goodman who is also to be thanked for arranging the publicity for the Charity. The collection at Combe Feast open air service was £202. A funeral collection, football sweepstake and very generous and often anonymous donations ranging between £550 to £30 arrived throughout the year. There was also some bank interest and the Charity bank account shows £4582.17 on 6th April 2023, however some payments are still to be made for current bequests. We are too small to be regulated by the Charity Commission so donations cannot be gift-aided.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those people who help so considerably and willingly with the charity. To mention a few who helped enthusiastically and worked hard with the fund raising - Margaret Moore, Linda Soderberg, Andrew and Katy Hobson, Deborah Manning and Sue Goodman. Also, Tom Digweed for attending to various accounts matters.

Lastly but by no means least, a wholehearted thank you to all who help and support the village charity which is currently receiving many requests for help.

11/23 Parochial Church Council Report – Ralph Williamson

I have now been here in the parish for two years, and I am very happy to have settled into the role and the life of the two villages of the Benefice. The hope of the PCC when I arrived was that the life of the Church within the village could be reinvigorated after the difficulties of Covid and the period without a Rector.

Together with the PCC and the Church's wonderful band of volunteers, we are making progress in fulfilling that aim. Attendance at Church services is healthy, most services are in more modern language, and we are welcoming newcomers and families to our worship. I visit the school regularly. I take assembly there once a week and I also teach a little. The Church's coffee mornings in the Reading Room every Tuesday are well attended by parents of children at the school, as well as older members of the community. The engagement with the school, and especially the participation of the school choir in our worship has seen a

¹ Please note these numbers are provisional pending a check

welcome rise in family attendance at our All Age Worship services on the first Sunday of each month. In April we had our first service with Sunday School attended by six children and we are looking to grow this. Much credit to Caroline Sloan and Leanne McKean for leading this initiative. Over the past year we have obtained permission from the diocese to remove some of the pews and the old organ at the back of the Church and acquire some chairs. The organ has now gone and the pews will be offered first in the village from the coming weekend. The space cleared will allow us more flexibility in our use of the space behind the font for socialising after services and for other gatherings in the Church. Finance is a challenge for every rural parish. St Laurence is lucky to have a healthy endowment for the maintenance of its fabric. This fund is however very tightly circumscribed by the terms of the gift and it cannot be used for the day to day running of the parish. Over the last two years we have encouraged an increase in giving both on a regular basis and with one off gifts on gift day, as a part of our Christian discipleship, and we hope that this will continue, and will help to move our finances out of deficit. On the subject of fabric, the lighting and heating systems are in need of attention or upgrading. We are actively pursuing the options available to update both systems, though it may be some time before we see new installations as we have to work closely with the Diocese fabric authorities. We have a number of other plans and ideas for the future, to make the church more open to the community, and to make the message of God's love accessible to all!

12/23 Combe Community Hub Report – Andrew Hobson

The Hub has continued to flourish throughout the year since my last report. We are sorry to have lost Andrew Walker-Brown as a director/trustee in January 2023, but pleased that Richard Sherrott, who has been so helpful to us in many ways already has stepped into Andrew's shoes. Andrew continues to help us with our IT and Web. We have also welcomed Amanda Ford and Aiden Coates into our group of volunteers.

Lettings have held up well and in addition to the regular cinema events the music evenings have been a tremendous success and attracted a wide range of audience from the village and beyond. We continue to host craft club, fitness classes and private events such as birthdays, funerals and christenings.

Our accounts show that we cover our expenses and have been able to repay some of the capital of the loan which we obtained from a member of the community to buy the building.

We have obtained grants over the past year from the W E Lawrence Charity and the Doris Field Charitable Trust.

We were also again selected for Gigaclear's community award this year, for which we are grateful.

The two projects mentioned as current in last year's report, namely repair of the porch stonework and installation of acoustic panelling (for which the two grants referred to above were made) have both been successfully completed and the acoustic panelling has made a big difference to the acoustics without affecting the aesthetics to any appreciable extent.

Last summer's prolonged dry spell caused significant movement of the porch away from the main building, leaving us with daylight visible on both east and west joints between the two. An insurance claim is in train and insurers are undertaking various investigations and monitoring. To this layman no significant movement has happened for some time, but monitoring will continue for a good while yet. An initial report from loss adjusters has recently been received.

Our current projects are redecoration of the chapel room windows, whose original paintwork has not held up very well and seeking funding for further rationalisation of the storage facilities in the chapel room.

We are organising a Combe Open Gardens weekend on 10 & 11 June and will supporting the Cream Teas as usual.

We remain grateful to all those who support the Hub's work whether it is by donations, volunteering, advising, sitting on the committee, repairing things, baking cakes, helping at open gardens or any other way whatsoever.

13/23 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 34 2- 4-year-old children on Preschool roll (up significantly on last year), and we now employ 8 staff working with the children, as well as a cleaner and an administrator. Afterschool

club numbers vary, but we have between 10 – 22 children each day. We have had 6 children join Preschool this term following the closure of two well established local settings (WUFA and Daffodils). We have been able to accommodate all our Combe children and most of those wanting to come to us following these closures.

Finances continue to be tight, with our annual figures for year ending 2022 showing a profit of just £296. These figures include over £6450 in fundraising and donations. Our current increase in child numbers will help our financial position going forward, but this is somewhat mitigated by increased staff costs to provide these places as well as the 9.2% increase in minimum wage, and general inflationary increases. Monthly finance meetings continue, to monitor our position. We are extremely grateful to Combe for continuing to support our Preschool both through these fundraising events, and also through donations.

This year we have been very grateful to receive the support of COMAG and Combe Charities, who have provided funding for 5 children. This support has enabled children to take up additional places, and / or funded a hot lunch where this would not have been affordable for the families. Comag support has also enabled us to take up a government offer of training for the early years workforce that is aimed at upskilling practitioners in the post-covid world. This training is specifically focused on the areas where children have fallen behind as a result of the pandemic: social skills, speech and language and physical development. The Comag donation of £1500 will all be spent by the end of this academic year.

We are grateful, and fortunate that our staff team has remained stable throughout the year. Recently one member of the ASC team has moved on to a different job, but we have been fortunate to replace her with an experienced TA from the school, who brings knowledge and skills from working with the older children in the school environment. Recruitment in the early years sector continues to be a national problem, and indeed was the reason for recent local setting closures, so it is important that we continue to value and reward our staff as much as possible.

A visit from our OCC advisor went very well, with lots of positive feedback, and some small action points. We were very pleased when it was commented that she would love to be able to send her grandchildren to our setting!

Our committee and staff continue to work closely with the Combe Hub, Combe Charities, 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. This year we have welcomed in several villagers as regular volunteer readers who come in and share books with the children. This has been very popular and is lovely for the children to get to know other members of their community.

Although we are still going through a difficult time financially, with the continued support of Parents and the Village we are confident that we are now on a more sustainable footing. Recent announcements around 2-year-old funding will pose new challenges next year, but the committee will continue to work together with our dedicated staff to continue to provide the very best early education for the young people of Combe and local villages.

14/23 Combe Mutual Aid Group Report – Martha O'Curry

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 2022 to March 2023 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 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.

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: - Chair - Martha O'Curry, Secretary - Julia Sharpe, Treasurer - Jenny Olivier. Members of the committee are: Sam Birkett, Denise Cripps, Don Redding, Laura Snook.

Activities and Expenditure - At the COMAG Annual Meeting on Wednesday 29th June 2022 the balance of accounts was £4687.82. There had been no activity in the account during the previous financial year except for a donation of £20. The committee received two applications for contributions from the hardship fund for consideration which were approved: - An application from Combe Primary for funding to purchase speech and language support and an application from Combe Pre-School for funding to provide additional sessions for two-year-olds where these could not otherwise be afforded.

The committee recognised the significant effect that COVID continues to have on young children's development. Particularly in the areas of speech and communication, but also in behaviour and social and emotional development. It was therefore agreed that this was an appropriate use of funds and each applicant received £1.500

An additional £217 was granted to provide learning resources and materials for a Wellbeing and Resilience programme (printing, posters, paper, play doh) delivered by a member of the community to the children at the school.

From January to March 2023 in response to rising energy and food costs, COMAG supported the Winter Warmer initiative providing warmth, companionship, refreshments, lunch and a community space weekly on a Wednesday. There was an average attendance of 30 representing a cross section of the village community. Total expenditure for the programme was £1310. With a small increase in donations over the Winter Warmer Period, funds currently stand at £382.55

The committee would like to extend its gratitude to the community members and volunteers who facilitated the Winter Warmers including Tilia who provided a weekly hot lunch. We offer particular thanks to Julia Sharpe whose organisation, forethought, consideration, and time ensured the success of the initiative.

15/23 Police Report – PC Chris Cochrane was unable to attend but sent the following report:

Combe falls under the Woodstock area has had 1 crime reported in Feb 2023. The number of all crimes at 62 accounts for all crimes in the Woodstock area and surrounding towns and villages.

Since December 2022 there has been a sharp rise in burglaries to farms, sheds and burglaries where high powered cars are being stolen. We have increased the policing patrols in the A361 corridor and surrounding villages and in the last 5 weeks that seemed to have decreased the frequency of these type of crime in the Chipping Norton area. However, we have seen in the last 2 weeks attempted burglaries in Milton, Shipton and Charlbury. We believe these are the same people targeting the area earlier in the year. We are working with bordering forces and it seems that these offenders maybe coming from out of the force area to commit these crimes. The rural tasking team within TVP has also been tasked to patrol in these areas as well more often and the local Neighbourhood teams have been providing reassurance, patrols and crime prevention advice to villages and farms in the area.

During the last year the West Oxon PCSO staffing has fallen to 50% due to PCSOS joining the police service as Police Officers. I am happy to report that we are getting out numbers back up but we are still looking to recruit 2 PCSOS in the Chipping Norton area and 1 more in the Woodstock area and surrounding Villages in the near future. Any family or friends looking to join the police please see www.tvpcareers.co.uk

16/23 Any Other Business

Concern regarding the loss of the bus service was raised as a great threat to village life especially for younger people relying on the service to get to and from work and the new parking enforcements about to be introduced in Woodstock. Cllr Graham said that people do really need to use the service to prove its viability.

A suggestion to hold more regular meetings of all village organisations to share information and experiences was discussed.

The meeting ended at 21.30