

Annual Parish Meeting 11 May 2015
Combroke Parish Council
2014-15 Annual Report of the Chairman

Meetings and Administration

We held 6 scheduled meetings of the Parish Council this year. We also called four extra-ordinary meetings in the year to respond to planning consultations on time and extended two of our scheduled meetings to manage significant planning consultations.

Our meetings are well attended by our Parish Councillors, District and County Councillors. We have been pleased to welcome residents to meetings, to observe, ask questions and make comments. Residents' attendance has been especially strong and welcome when the agenda has included planning matters of particular interest. We welcomed Tim Goodhead who was willing to accept a co-option to fill a vacancy.

Environs

Jim Blenkinsop has decided to stand down from the Council for the new 2015/16 year. He leaves behind a good number of improvements across our lanes, verges, ditches and drains over the years. He has led on a practical level - a can-do-it approach with a shovel at times! - but also strategically and in meetings with the County Team. Most recently, this year the completion of the oak verge posts last autumn were the culmination of one such project. It feels now as if they have *always* been in place.....

We continue to be grateful to the County Highways Teams for keeping on top of surface patches on our roads this year and the little things that matter - flushing the gullies, ensuring the grit bins are replenished for winter, keeping the grass verge at the Fosse well trimmed in summer.

Similarly, thanks to the District Teams... for the grass cut around the village verges; the always helpful teams on the refuse/recycle bin collections; the kerb sweeper driver who did a magnificent job on the lane opposite the Bottom End Fountain which turned into a well deserved "worker of the month" nomination. - he even returned to repeat the feat at the end of leaf fall. What a star!...And many thanks to all those unsung stars whose work involves support to our village.

We continue to be grateful to Stephen Bates for maintaining our links with the County Footpath Team and keeping an eye on our wider network of paths and bridleways. Thanks must also be recorded to our local landowners who keep their paths open, accessible and hedges trimmed.

Communications

It was disappointing that the broadband upgrade at the Kinton exchange has not yet got as far as Combrook. However we are pleased to note that CSW Rural Broadband Project is already on top of the next round of grants for the hard-to-reach cases, from which Combrook is hopefully going to benefit. All fingers crossed!

Many thanks to Liz Bates' continued involvement with the website. It's over 5 years since we established Combrook on the web... and in that time it's been great working with Stratford on Avon District Council IT Services who have been hosting our website. However web hosting software has changed and we were locked into a system which was great value at the time but is now superseded. The website was originally set up with a fantastic grant from BIG Lottery which covered our costs.

...being prudent the Parish Council needed to rethink at the end of this year... and take the opportunity to refresh SDC IT Services have also moved on and could offer us the newest systems but we will need to find a grant to set up again..... meanwhile we needed to save our ££s

So come on over to our new website its work in progress: <http://combroke.co.uk>
If anyone would like to get involved you will be gratefully welcomed!

We should record our very many thanks to SDC IT Services — it was a great project and brilliant way to get started and we hope we might be back some time...

Planning

As ever, responding to planning application consultations have occupied much of the Parish Council's energies throughout the year. There have been several significant cases requiring much time and ongoing engagement. In the majority of cases, we have been in agreement with the Planning Authority on the eventual decision outcomes.

If decisions are taken in the context of coherent and clear policies, differences in outcome should only ever be at the margins. Sadly there have been a small, but significant number of cases over this last year, where this coherence and clarity is missing. Parish Councils have a unique local insight which can benefit the planning and regulatory process and it is disappointing when this is ignored.

Finance

Spending this year has been kept within the budget. We have raised the precept for next year (the money allocated from Council Tax) by 2% for the first time since 2008. Our balance carried forward *looks* depleted, but we have outstanding Leys project grant to reclaim in due course and we await VAT repayment from HMRC.

During the year the lease on the Village Hall was renewed. And not surprisingly there was a significant increase since it was last adjusted in 1999. Whilst we have reserves to absorb this initially, as an on-going budget item we will need to ensure we can manage the increase in years to come.

The Leys - Fostering Our Heritage

We have had a number of events and ongoing activities over our second year of the project. Highlights included a Willow Sculpture day and a guided Butterfly Walk in July; we all seemed to enjoy the sheep grazing the grass during the autumn ready for a brilliant bonfire night; and the keen observer will have spotted that we welcome a barn owl again this spring. Many thanks to Mycroft for cutting the hay. And huge thanks to everyone who has contributed or got involved in one way or another.

With a **special thanks to Liz Bates** for her ongoing coordination of a biodiversity management plan - and for just keeping on keeping on -reptile mats and bird boxes have appeared over the last 12 months! And thanks also to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Compton Verney and other agencies for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Finally

A big thank you to all the Parish, District and County Councillors, and many others who have given, their time and energy so generously to maintain and improve the life of the Parish.

District Councillor Alan Scorer leaves us this year under the district reorganisation. We have appreciated his support over the last 4 years and wish him well.

And huge, huge thanks must go to **Jim Blenkinsop**. Jim is leaving the Parish Council after 15 years of service. He will be missed enormously at our Council Meetings. Not only his practical approach on lanes and ditches; his commitment and support for the Council has been outstanding, he has been one of those very important cogs without which the wheel will not turn.... very many thanks for **all** you have done Jim.

As Chairman I have been grateful for the unstinting support of the whole Parish Council Team during the past year. They have been brilliant at doing what matters when it matters. Thanks.

Brenda Rayson
Chairman (May 2014-15)