**COBHAM PARISH COUNCIL’S**

**ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY (APA) 2016**

The Meadow Room, Cobham on

Monday 11th April 2015 at 7.30 pm

**PRESENT**

**COUNCILLORS:** CLLR R DYMOND (CHAIR)  
CLLR S DYER  
CLLR K SMITH  
CLLR M BOOTH  
CLLR S ARNOTT  
CLLR J BLACKETT  
CLLR B SMITH  
CLLR G GABBITTAS

**IN ATTENDANCE:** MRS K LANE (CLERK)  
CLLR B SWEETLAND (KCC)  
VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

The Chairman Councillor Rosemary Dymond welcomed everyone to the 122nd Annual Parish Assembly of Cobham Parish Council.

Cllr Dymond started the meeting by paying tribute to Dr Nigel Haig, ‘a dear member of our village’ who sadly passed away the week before the meeting. Cllr Dymond said that Nigel was devoted to preserving community life and spent 39 years on the Parish Council. Everyone present was then invited to pay tribute to Nigel with a two minute silence.

Following the two minute silence, Alan Rowe, previous Parish Chair was invited to say a few words. Alan said that just a year ago he had spoken at the APA to thank Nigel for his work and said that the people in this village owed a great deal to Nigel Haig. Alan went on to list Nigel’s many achievements as Parish Councillor and as Alan’s Vice Chairman. These included successes with the Wainscott by-pass, A2 widening and improvements in the Street. Alan explained that Nigel spoke at the public enquiry for the Wainscott by-pass and worked incredibly hard in opposing the Rail link, petitioning both Houses and making representations at Westminster. As Alan explained, the war was not won, but one or two important battles were won along the way.

With regard to the A2 widening, Alan explained that the roundabout at the end of Halfpence Lane is there thanks to Nigel’s recommendations and opposition to the original messy proposals. Alan also explained that when improvements were made to the Street, Nigel had insisted that doorsteps and foot scrapes remained to preserve as many original features as possible whilst ensuring that a suitable footpath was developed so that people could leave their houses without the risk of being run over.

Cllr Dymond concluded by saying that our thoughts are with Margaret Haig, one of our current Councillors, and the whole family.

1. **Apologies:** Cllr M Haig, Adam Holloway MP, Cllr S Jassal.

**2. Finance:**

The Summary of the Cobham Parish Council’s income and expenditure for 2015/16 was presented and examined by those present. There were no questions. The Parish Council’s General Fund for the Financial Year 2015/16 was adopted and agreed by all those present.

1. **Report by Chairman of Cobham Parish Council, Cllr Rosemary Dymond:**

Once again a very busy year dominated in no small part with our concern over speeding and traffic chaos in Sole Street and Cobham.

**Speeding in the village.**

There have been six meetings with KCC traffic management and design officers here in the village between March 2015 and February 2016, all involving your local speedwatch group who have been very proactive and will continue to be so with your council until a conclusion is reached. Financially the project is huge and the original plans were to cost £16000 minimum and the Parish Council had budgeted £3000 and our KCC Councillor Bryan Sweetland gave us a grant of £3500, so the plans were revised at our last site meeting in February and are as follows:

Battle Street junction to be realigned forward onto the main highway.

White road edge marking line to be added along south side of highway from Battle Street to Owletts in order to visually narrow the view of the highway to slow traffic.

Twenty mph limit to be installed instead of a zone with three pairs of repeater signs on the bollards through the main part of the Street each 200m apart.

Taller road signs changed to 20mph.

Double yellow lines at the end of Lawrence Drive.

Renew all white hatching.

Parking restriction in layby opposite school.

Cut back vegetation at Cobhambury to reveal road signs.

Moving giveway signs closer to the chicane.

New extra bollard on foot way by Crockers Place.

**Pedestrian foot way in Sole Street.**

Three preliminary meetings were held to discuss traffic control all with KCC officers the last meeting concentrated on the route for a foot way from Scrattons to the pond beside which is the school bus waiting area. The favoured line was that on the east side where some land was under KCC jurisdiction but other was under private ownership. A children's walk route to catch a school bus could initiate a grant. This to be followed up with KCC later in the year. Lower Thames Crossing.

Highways England put forward their preferred optionC with a choice of the east route near Peartree Lane Shorne or the west route near Thong Lane. The Parish Council have made it clear at public meetings and on banners erected in the village that they object to both routes and suggest option A. Councillor Kerry Smith and myself are both on the Gravesham committee to oppose option C that arranges lobbies with MP's and is preparing for a judicial review, a government announcement is expected in July. Gravesham Council have committed £150000 to the action. The Parish Council held two public meetings here in February and March,there was a leaflet drop to every household in the parish,we spent £100 of our budget on 5 banners erected in the area, and erected numerous large and small posters on every bollard. In addition Councillors attended every public meeting in Gravesend and local Parish meetings and the Council signed a formal letter of objection from our MP together with other rural parishes,GBC Councillors and KCC member Bryan Sweetland.

**Benches.**

Those in the Street, Cobham were repaired and one was completely renewed and the area looks so much better now. Those on the Sports Field will be repaired in April 2016 and those in the children's play area which also underwent a spring clean when the Councillors spent a morning during February half term to weed ,prune and clean the play safe surfaces of the whole area. New swing seats are also to be purchased.

**Community Litter Pick.**

Two dates were chosen and on the first one,14th June there was a tremendous turnout from the parish and the clerk had organised it so well that we all had yellow jackets with plenty of litter picker tools and black sacks, not only were the roads and hedgerows cleared but the road signs cleaned too courtesy of the children and their large water pistols. The next date 5th March had less volunteers but those who could come with all the Councillors cleared a huge amount of rubbish away.

**Community Bus.**

The Council pays £400 a year to Meopham Council towards the upkeep of this 12 seater mini bus to enable Cobham to run a weekly service on Thursdays into Gravesend and it is also used by Cobham College for occasional social trips to places of interest. The service is manned by our own parish volunteer drivers and provides a door to door service for local people and a quicker route into Gravesend than public transport, it does however need to be used by more parishioners.

**Other Highway Improvements.**

Gold Street now has an HGV prohibition sign at its junction with the main highway and there are plans to request similar at the junction of Ifield Way and Henhurst to keep huge transporters from travelling into the villages to park overnight. The site line at the junction of Manor Road with the main highway has been improved by changing the line of the kerb. There has been a major inspection of the main highway in Sole Street to find a permanent solution to the frequent flooding problem,a project is expected to be presented for consideration in September. In the meantime KCC has improved its system of regular maintenance of the drainage system.

**Potholes in The Street**

Cobham are worsening but there is little possibility of repairs until the new financial year so everyone is urged to keep contacting KCC's helpline whenever they see another one appear or the present ones worsen. A new wooden sign has been erected at Tollingtrough Green so that the ancient hamlet that predates Cobham according to Domesday records is visible to all.

**Preparations for the Queen's Birthday.**

On the 21st April Cobham Church bell ringers will ring a quarter peal and a large bonfire will be lit on the sports field at 8.00pm The school pta will arrange the refreshments. The 12th June will see several gardens open to the public and the village decorated by householders willing to enter the Front Of House competition. In addition there will be several "street parties" including one in Round Street.

**Venues of meetings.**

These have been purposely varied this year between Sole Street Church Room, the Meadow Room(thanks to CADS for changing their dates to accommodate us),the National Trust Barn (thanks to the warden Jonathan Ireland) and the Sports Pavilion (courtesy of John Jackson).

Finally I wish to thank all my fellow Councillors for their hard work throughout the year and the support they have given me. A special thankyou to Kirsty, our Clerk who is so very efficient and keeps us well informed of all new legislation and local initiatives.

**Reports from Village Organisations:**

**St Mary Magdalene Church, Cobham, Revd Angela Walker:**

St Mary Magdalene Church Being a grade 1 listed building is always in need of restoration work and this has to be financed by us, the people of the church. In recent years, work has been carried out to restore the stained glass windows and the roof. Financed by the Friends of Cobham Church (FOCC) and grant aid. At the moment we have to do extensive work to the North Chancel wall which will include removing the rendering and replacing with it with more sympathetic Lime materials. We have applied for grant aid for this and other remedial works to the building.

We also have responsibility for the St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street which is also in need of refurbishment. We have approved plans and building regulations drawn up for this work. We have now received some quotes for the work and we are currently in the process of applying for grants to do the work. The LFG (local fundraising Group) have been steadily fundraising with various creative events and they have currently raised somewhere in the region of £16,000.

That is the buildings but of course the church isn’t the building the church is people. And over the last 3-4 years we have been busy trying to reach out to people. We began and have now completed our prayer visiting in the parish. A small group of us visited every home in the parish, going out each month to knock on doors, introduce ourselves and ask if people had any need for prayer. We got to meet some very lovely people and on many occasions people did ask us to pray for specific needs which was a delight and a privilege. I think on the whole people were pleased that we had taken the time to visit and the care shown.

We have also begun a parent/carer toddler group which meets on the 1st and 3rd Thursday afternoon from 1.15pm -2.45pm in the St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street.

We also run Messy Church in the St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street every month on the 1st Sunday from 3pm-5pm. We have had up to 15 children along with a parent attend.

The New-Covenant Church began last year in the St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street. This is a new, informal service which takes place every 3rd Sunday of the month starting at 6pm.

The village shop held a Snake Davis concert in the Church last year and are doing so again this year on the 4th May. We continue to provide various concerts and other event through the FOCC to raise funds and we have put on a very successful Valentines meal in the Meadow Room for the past 4 years. Our special occasion services are usually well attended and our regular congregation ranges from about 12 -35 attendees on any one occasion.

I have around 12 weddings booked for this year, we have had several baptisms and funerals and I continue to do assemblies at Cobham School.

Finances are always a struggle and people resources are low as we are all getting older. However, we are optimistic for the future growth of the church. We held an Advent Prayer room in St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street during Advent and we are planning to hold another week of prayer St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street during the week 8th -15th May. We were greatly encouraged with the answers to prayer that we received from the 1st prayer room event and therefore we are expectant of great answers to prayer again this time. Revd Angela Walker.

**Friends of Cobham Church, Elizabeth Holland, Chairman**

During the past year fund raising events organised by the Friends have included a Bridge Drive in June, a display in the Church of “Flowers in my Garden” in August and Carols in the College in December plus a generous donation from Anna Ghomi from her “Picnic in the Park!”

The FOCC are unable to organise the Biennial Art Show this year over the August Bank Holiday weekend because there are insufficient helpers. The Church is always open every day of the year but during the coming August Bank Holiday we plan to serve refreshments and have Church Guides available to tell visitors more historical facts, figures and stories.

The FOCC installed the flood lighting in 1998/9 and sponsorship has supported this ever since. The monthly sponsorship money has varied from 50p, by a boy for his Mother’s birthday, to £100… Any sum will support this Village feature and a suitable citation is included in the monthly Church Magazine. Would anyone like to sponsor the lighting for the Queen’s birthday celebrations in June?

**St Mary’s Church Room local funding group, Su Rowe, Chairman of the Local Funding Group**

To launch the project to restore St. Mary’s Church Room, Harry Seaford organized a public meeting in the Church Room on 25th April, 2012. 48 villagers attended as well as the Member of Parliament, Adam Holloway, and the Parish Council.

At the meeting it was stated that a survey would be required before estimates could be obtained.

The Local Funding Group was formed. We pledged to raise £20,000 - 20% of the amount required for the work, at that time.

This year from April 2015 – March 2016 the amount raised totals £7,088. 88p.

Our main events:-

June Coffee Morning £605. 41.

Garden Party £1,096.30.

July Peter McCoys Party £310.00.

September Kent Churches Sponsored Bike Ride – Rosemary Dymond £100.00.

October Safari Dinner £90.00.

Auction of Promises £4,223,00.

December Sweet Stall £72.00.

Knitting £56.00.

January Scrimpers £347.00.

Plus various donations £189. 00.

Our balance at the bank is £16,682 at 31st March, 2016

Expertise has been offered to St. Mary Magdalene Church from the community including technical construction knowledge, carpentry, groundwork, labouring, general building and grant application advice. All to no avail. Everything we suggest is considered as ‘interference’.

As far as I am aware, St. Mary Magdalene Church has yet to provide the first steps of a restoration project: a survey and schedule of works for builders to work from to supply comparable estimates to submit for grants.

I believe that Battersea Power Station will be completed before the Church Room.

**Community Wardens represented by Steve Gray**

I have pleasure in giving my report on the last 12 months as Community Warden for Cobham and Sole Street.

Over the last year I have maintained a regular presence outside the Primary School to engage with parents and try and ensure that motorists drive and park sensibly so as not to endanger the children.

In March of last year I gave presentations to the KS1 and KS2 pupils of the Primary School on the role of a Community Warden and Personal and Road Safety. This was well received, I believe, by both the School and pupils.

June saw the return of SIA at Cobham Hall. This is attended by several local schools, learning about personal safety e.g. around water, railways, drugs to name but a few. I was instrumental in delivering this program.

October was a busy time for us, undertaking the Stop the Scammers project run by Trading Standards. We visited over 150 homes across Dartford/Gravesend, the occupants of which have been victims of postal scamming.

In November I attended First Aid at work training to renew my ongoing certificate. I am pleased to say this is valid for three years.

Speeding through Cobham continues to be a problem and I have helped out with a number of Speed Watch sessions run by your local Speed Watch group. This is a scheme which does help deter speeding motorists but can only continue to be successful if volunteers are available. Further details are available on their facebook page. We also need to establish a group in Sole Street and I am more than happy to help with this.

As Community Wardens we continue to be on standby as part of Emergency Response, for Flooding, and any other unforeseen emergency incidents.

During the 1st week of December I was present in the Christmas Community Safety Shop, organised by Gravesham Community Safety Unit, which was held in the St. George’s Centre, Gravesend.

I have tried to help reduce the amount of dog fouling in Cobham and Sole Street by supplying various posters and stickers to local residents.

Please remember it is only through us all working together that we can achieve our aim of making Cobham and Sole Street better and safer places to live in.

In closing may I say a big thank you to both the Parish Council and residents of

Cobham and Sole Street for all their co-operation over the last 12 months.

I can be reached or message left on:

Mobile: 07811 271256

E Mail: steve.gray@kent.gov.uk

More information about the KCC Community Warden scheme can be found by logging on to our website: [www.kent.gov.uk/communitywardens](http://www.kent.gov.uk/communitywardens)

**Cobham Community Pre-school, Claire Hargrove**

Overall the pre-school has had a good year in the time since the last Annual Parish Meeting. In June of last year we were delighted to be awarded ‘Outstanding’ in our Ofsted inspection, providing much deserved official recognition of a view long held by the families of the pre-school. It was a fitting end to the careers of our long serving Supervisor and Deputy Supervisor, Angela O’Brien and Dorcas Brierley, who both retired at the end of the academic year, after nearly 25years service each. We marked the occasion with a summer picnic attended by well over 100 pre-school family members, past and present, including two generations of pupils from some families – it was a fitting display of how much both they and indeed the pre-school as a whole means to our local community. We were lucky that in the run up to the end of that era we were able to recruit two highly experienced and qualified members of staff to fill those positions. In September Alison Scott and Jane Allen joined our team of excellent staff as our new supervisor and deputy respectively. They have hit the ground running and have managed to create an ideal balance of maintaining all that everyone values about the pre-school whilst introducing new ideas to keep it moving forward. As we approach the end of this academic year another era will end with the retirement of Jackie Leeson, our long standing and highly efficient administrator, who has been with us for nearly 20years. It is fair to say that much of what Jackie does goes unnoticed by most but if she didn’t do it as well as she does the pre-school would quite simply cease to function. She will be greatly missed but we are in the process of recruiting a suitable replacement to ensure another smooth transition of staff.

We have been working hard with our fundraising efforts to ensure we can continue to plug the gap between the funding we receive from the government for the so called free early years entitlement and the actual cost of providing that service. The money we raise through a variety of events throughout the year also enables us to fund new equipment and special projects for the children to learn from and enjoy and also to cover our ever increasing rent, which has gone up by another 10% this year, on top of the 36% increase of the 2years prior to that. Without fundraising we simple couldn’t do that, the government grant has now been frozen for over 6 years and covers less than 80% of the actual cost of running a session for each child, and that is before we even contemplate buying new resources or booking educational workshops. On average a maximum of only 8 children a year pay fees and we have to keep these affordable. We are therefore very grateful to all members of our local community who support our fundraising events and help us raise these much needed funds. And on that note ask that you all the put 21st July in your diary to join us for our summer fayre!

The popularity of the pre-school has always been high, and following the Outstanding Ofsted rating has increased even more, we currently have a waiting list of over 50 children hoping to join us in September, and whilst we are able to ensure that all parish children will get a place we will simply not be able to accommodate anywhere near all of those families. We are currently discussing possible ways to increase the number of children we can offer places to whilst maintaining the family feel of the pre-school and of course meeting Ofsted regulations. We really hope to be able to do this both to ensure we can serve as many families as possible but also to increase our income so that we can cover the ever increasing running costs we face due to further expected rent increases and government policy changes which will have a large impact on our basic running costs. The pre-school continues to run as a not- for profit charity, managed by a group of volunteer parents giving their time to support a team of highly qualified, experienced and loyal staff. Together we are committed to do all that we can to ensure a much needed and valued local asset can continue to serve our community.

**Cobham Primary School School Governors Report, Cllr Steve Dyer**

Children currently at Cobham – 219

Road crossing patrol lady, Mrs Greenstreet retired at Christmas. Two new replacements are now in place, with the KCC training to be completed. The Headteacher is doing this role most days currently.

One of the Teaching Assistants, Mrs Reece also left to relocate to New York.

Attendance figures have dropped slightly over the last 2-3 years, with family holidays in term times being one of the main reasons. The school is therefore now employing an external company to work with any families with attendance issues.

This has been really successful and has seen the attendance average go from 95% up to 97.6%.

**School trips and enrichments**

Reception Class – African Day

Y2 – Cobham Mausoleum

Y6 – Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey

Whole school attended a Cinema as part of Film Week

**After School Clubs**

Fantastic variety, with something every day after school.

Sewing, cookery, computing, football and netball being some of them.

The teaching staff have visited other schools to help with maintaining the high standards of teaching and learning that Cobham Primary demands.

**Maintenance of the Buildings and Grounds**

The school is in constant need of maintenance and Mrs Saunders and Mrs Styles do an excellent job of keeping on top of all tasks, and always looking for best value from contractors for repairs.

**PTA**

The PTA works hard in the background, the Christmas Fayre being one of their big events. They will be running the BBQ at the Queens bonfire at Cobham Sports Club on Thurs 21st later this month as a fund raiser. Feel free to come along for a burger to support the school.

It is a pleasure to be a governor at the school, and see how much the children get from their time at Cobham. Of course all thanks to the hard work of Mrs Saunders and her amazing team.

**Bell Ringers, report by Peter Hartley, Cobham Tower Captain**

Nigel Haig’s dedication to this village is well known here for he served on the Parish Council for 39 years.

He served the church in the choir and as a bell ringer learning to ring in the 1950s. In retirement he has been a stalwart member of our small band of ringers. Failing health curtailed some of his activities but he never gave up his bell ringing.

He rang with us on palm Sunday and died a fortnight later. Nigel, we shall miss you.

New members of the band are always needed and most welcome. With a little dedication and perseverance rope handling can be mastered and then you are a valued team member. Do let me know of anybody who might be interested to acquire a new and enjoyable hobby and a useful skill.

In the last twelve months we have rung for Sunday Services and Weddings and practised on Wednesday evenings. Six visiting bands have come to enjoy our bells. Eleven Quarter Peals were rung for various occasions including Angela Walker’s special birthday, the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Agricourt, and in memory of William Watheley Pye on the exact Centenary of his death in the Battle of Loos on 14th October 1915.

We continue to keep the bells ringing and will be ringing Quarter Peals at 5.30pm this Sunday, 17th April in celebration of the life of Nigel Haig and then at 10am on Thursday 21st April on The Queen’s 90th birthday.

**The Meadow Room, Antony Silk**

The Meadow Room continues to serve as an essential amenity for the User Clubs, Societies and local community – and continues to struggle to keep its head above water – making a loss of £14.50 last year.

In December, we held a public meeting to put the Meadow Room in numbers – outlining the ongoing costs of keeping this public facility.

Presenting figures since 2006, we advised how running costs (insurance, utility bills etc) have gone up by 129%. Maintenance costs over the same period have shot up by 1890%. Through fundraising events and the like, we have tried to cushion the impact on hire and user rates – but these have also seen a 59% increase over the last ten years. As a matter of interest, in 2014/15, this building cost us £34,000 to keep open.

We recognise our User Clubs and societies cannot bear the brunt of these ongoing costs. And our strategy is to improve the building to attract more private hirers and new user clubs to the Meadow Room – and to keep running costs down.

We launched this approach on 16 March. We welcomed an impressive and representative audience of over 50 residents to highlight the part they need to play to safeguard the future of the Meadow Room. We require community involvement to organise and run events – and to make greater use through private hire. And this ‘Cobham Collective’ came up with a range of fantastic ideas for the future – such as summer picnics, fish & chip film nights and even a Dads Pantomime (oh yes they did). We now need these same people to make these fundraising events a reality.

Mike Shipway has been impressive this year in unearthing grants available for improving the premises. Amongst others, he has secured £3000 for a new servery – and a whopping £20,000 for the new roof – a project we had to bring forward this year. He is relentless in hunting down further grant – to improve the heating & insulation of the building and to replace the windows with double glazed units.

We need a compelling argument from residents to justify such large value grant funding. It’s a prerequisite of any of the major grant funders. We aim to represent this by canvassing views locally – and at this year’s Munchies Festival (30 April) – through the online Consultation Survey. Our ambition is for 2000 voices to be captured through the survey – and really make a resounding din to funders. We’ve gathered 200 voices so far. 97% of those do not want to see the building fall into neglect with over 2/3rds saying they’d make more use through private bookings in an upgraded hall.

This year, a number of positions on the Management Committee become available, principally the Chair and Vice-Chair. Matthew Peterson-Pearce has presided as Chair for the last five years – shepherding a small team and a wider public to fall in love with this old building again – and in doing so focusing on its long-term health and viability. He leaves it in a much stronger position for others to take up. And as one of his many essential roles here at the Meadow Room, Mike Shipway will stand down as Vice Chair – allowing him to refocus on getting grant income and keeping the meadow presentable and maintained. We would like to put on public record, our huge appreciation and thanks for their fantastic contribution to village life.

Our AGM is scheduled for mid-May. We look forward to supporting a new team of volunteers to progress the Meadow Room through its next exciting chapter.

**The National Trust, Jonathan Ireland**

* Always busy at Cobham wood & this last year has been no exception.
* My volunteer teams & I have been making significant headway with our aspirations to return Cobham Wood to a fully functioning wood pasture system.
* This has entailed a continuation during the felling season of the removal of sycamore & ash regeneration which is choking the more mature trees.
* All major routes through the wood have been subject to a tree safety survey & where necessary work has been undertaken to render safe.
* This year we have been lucky to retrenchment prune some more of our most vulnerable hornbeam pollards, which given the recent inclement weather could not have come at a better time.
* Sadly a number of trees were severely damaged. This also led to fence damage.
* On a more positive note a combination of tractor work & more importantly all year Highland cattle grazing has had a really positive effect on the undesirables….bramble, bracken etc.
* All in all a good year out doors
* The mausoleum has reopened for the summer season.
* Unfortunately this has coincided with works to improve ventilation. Currently NT are in discussion with Historic England with regard to the best way to proceed.
* As many will know this has been an ongoing issue with the Mausoleum. It is considered that if left unaddressed this accumulation of moisture could have significant detrimental effect on both stone & more immediately plasterwork.
* Unfortunately this ongoing process necessitates several lifts of scaffolding to fill the chapel rendering access pointless as it obscures almost all features.
* At present visitors are permitted to peer through the door of the chapel whilst access to the crypt is unaffected. I am led to believe that this arrangement could well last most of the summer.
* Additional interpretation has been developed to explain the work in progress.

That concludes my summary.

**WI Cobham & Luddesdown (report sent in)**

Although we have lost a few of our members through ill health, we have been pleased to welcome new ones and we are now forty strong. We are particularly pleased to have welcomed an increasing number of visitors to our meetings. Our committee has also increased from four to seven and our President, Margaret, aided by the committee, has worked tirelessly to make sure that things run as smoothly as possible. Last year was our ninety-sixth birthday, which we celebrated with lunch at Bartellas in May.

The WI itself celebrated its one hundred years with a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 2nd June, which two of our ladies were lucky enough to attend and which they both enjoyed, despite the windy weather. Unfortunately, the West Kent Federation’s own centenary celebration at Lullingstone Castle clashed with our Strawberry Tea and only a few went along to enjoy the event on a wonderfully hot and sunny day. Our Craft group is still meeting twice a month in the National Trust barn and the art group still meets once a week in each other’s houses. The two book groups are also going strong and a new Beginners’ Embroidery group has been formed, which meets fortnightly, ably taught by Veronica Rees. At our monthly meetings, we have enjoyed a range of talks and activities. We have heard about one hundred years of the WI, David Sandon (from “Antiques Roadshow”) talked about antiques, pottery and porcelain and entertained us with some amusing stories about his father, Henry and we learned about the Hall Houses of Southfleet from Dr. Anne Knief. We had a talk about the Flemish Weavers of Kent and two ladies, who formed a company called “Wild at Heart”, told us how to forage for food, on which their products (some of which are on sale in the village shop) are based. In November, the art group had everybody painting and drawing and at our Festive Tea in December, we were entertained with a musical quiz.

We have just held our annual Spring Show where our members are able to exhibit their skills in art, craft, cookery, photography, gardening and floral art and hopefully win an award for their work. It is always an enjoyable day, where the efforts of everyone involved are rewarded by the display of some stunning work that literally lights up the Meadow Room, and this year was no exception. Following the judging, The Darnley Arms provided the judges and helpers with a very welcome lunch before they returned for the meeting and presentation of the awards.

Our members continue to attend various meetings, activities and events elsewhere, organised by the WI and others, such as the annual arts and crafts and home economics days. Those of us who went to the West Kent Federation’s Annual Council Meeting at the Assembly Rooms, Tunbridge Wells last month were looking forward to hearing a talk by Jeremy Paxman. He was, however, filming in Spain for the BBC at the time and the organisers had only been notified a few days before the meeting. However, Henry Bloefeld, agreed to stand in for him at short notice and most of us were glad he did. He had us all in stitches with his fantastic and really funny stories, not all of which were about cricket.

In summary, we have had a really enjoyable and successful year and look forward to another year working closely with and within the parish and its community. We are an active, caring and friendly group of ladies who meet on the first Wednesday of every month (except August) and who warmly welcome visitors and new members. We are always willing to share our talents and skills with others and perhaps offer a little advice and understanding if needed.

Jenny Brooker (Secretary)

**Sports Association, Chris Broadley**

Cobham Sports Association raises funds for sports facilities in Cobham. There are currently 4 senior cricket teams playing competitive games at weekends during the summer, as well as 4/5 colts teams. There are also 5/6 junior football teams plus 1 senior football team. The tennis club is also well attended. Funds are raised mainly from the annual fete although over the past 2 years the weather has not been kind. We will continue to raise funds for additional facilities

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**Cobham Bowls Club, sent in by Graham (not present)**

**Development Plan for Cobham Bowls Club**

**Background**

Cobham Bowls Club was founded in 1921 and is one of the oldest clubs in Kent. We are affiliated to Bowls England, Kent County Bowling Association and Kent County Women’s Bowling Association as well as Gravesend and District, Medway and District and RACS Bowling Associations. Our Patron is the Right Honourable Earl of Darnley. We have over 100 gentlemen and lady members whose ages range from early teens to those in their 90s. We are an active, thriving and competitive club, with both men and ladies enjoying current and recent successes at District and County levels.

The Recreation Field was acquired on 10 December 1947 for the village of Cobham in perpetuity from three local benefactors; Miss Emma Stevens, Mr James Pye and Mr Robert Arnold at a price of £452/9/6. The purchase was made possible by donations, grants and money raised by local events by the Victory Fund Committee, chaired by Mr FC Lawrence JP. The Victory Fund Committee also reached agreement with the Kent Education Committee to buy the bowls green and pavilion land and amalgamate it with the Recreation Ground. Title to the land is with Cobham Parish Council.

The General Committee of Cobham Bowls Club has explored ways to strengthen the Club and better its position for the future. The measure of success is a greater local appreciation of the sport, leading to a widened membership. The Committee is particularly keen to attract new members and tap the considerable talent of younger sports men and women in Cobham and the surrounding areas. We also want to extend the playing enjoyment of our older members, to allow them to continue to bowl despite any frailties they may have.

**2 Recent Developments**

The Committee has taken a number of initiatives over recent seasons.

* We have launched a comprehensive and informative website, providing background to the Club and a summary of current affairs
* We have a Bowls England qualified coach available to develop our players’ skills
* We have a Friday afternoon intra-club friendly competition, especially appealing to those who are less interested in the more formal inter-club league matches and weekend games.
* We have great games between the Club and our next door neighbours, Cobham Cricket Club
* We have developed a 1 – hour “Introduction to Bowls” session for those new to the game to explain the basics and give a practical on-green experience of bowls.

The Committee now wants to take this to the next level and has identified that the single most significant limiting factor is the amount of playing time available, due to playing only during the summer months and because the green us unavailable for morning play due to maintenance. The Committee has therefore approved the investigation of an ambitious and extensive Development Plan, centred around the creation of a synthetic bowls surface. The synthetic surface involves replacing topsoil with crushed stone, then installing underlay and an all-weather carpet on top. We are one of the few local clubs to venture into this exciting new forum.

**3 Objectives of the Plan**

The Committee seeks to create a platform for the success of Cobham Bowls Club for the next 100 years and, with it, the success of our immediate and neighbouring communities of Cobham and Gravesham. An artificial surface will allow increased participation, leading to more members joining the club and all members being able to play at a younger age or to an older age. The advantages arise in the following ways:

* The new surface is all-weather, so our season will extend to the full calendar year, from the six month season we have at present.
* Maintenance of the green will be reduced from four mornings per week to one hour per week, allowing significantly more playing sessions each week.
* The bowls surface will be similar to the speed we have in mid-summer. That speed is considerably quicker than the speed in April and May. This means that our frailer or younger members will be able to play throughout the year, rather than just the balmy months of mid-summer. It means that all players will be able to enjoy a longer and more active career.
* The new surface is far more robust than a traditional grass surface. This will allow more participation by newer bowlers who will no longer fear the damage they might otherwise inflict by creating divots or pot-holes on the green.
* More playing sessions allow greater access to those who have other time commitments. In particular, we are planning to extend our youth development programme. We have an annual match against the youngsters of Cobham Cricket Club, with a number of members affiliated to both clubs. We have enjoyed competitive games between the two clubs in recent years. The new surface allows us to extend this by introducing coaching and playing sessions on week-end mornings, purposely designed to avoid a clash with afternoon cricket matches.

**4 The Challenges**

There are a number of hurdles we face in delivering our plan, including the following.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 4.1 | **Funding**  The capital cost of the project is over £120,000, well beyond the means of our small club. We have a modest reserve and we will conduct fund-raising events and seek donations from members. However, the only realistic route to fully fund the development is by grants, principally Sport England. |
|  | Eligibility for Sport England grants is dependent on meeting at least one of their three strategic objectives: to get more people playing sport; to retain those people who already take part; and to develop talent. Our development plan envisages that we will achieve all three of the Sport England strategic objectives. |
|  | Critical to the success of any funding application is the support of all those who have an active interest, ideally in writing. We have identified these as including the following:   * Our current members * Cobham community and the Parish Council * Gravesham, as represented by our standing Member of Parliament, Mr Adam Holloway and by Gravesham Borough Council * Kent County Council, as represented by our local Gravesham Rural County Councillor, Mr Bryan Sweetland * Our immediate neighbours, Cobham Primary School * Other very local schools (Cobham School for Girls, Meopham School and Gads Hill School) * Cobham Sports Association (our fellow residents of the Cobham Recreation Ground, Cobham Cricket Club, Cobham Football Club and Cobham Tennis Club) * The New College, Cobham, our warden assisted housing for retired people   We have made initial approaches to most of these bodies and to date have received their full support. We plan to canvas the remainder over the coming weeks and months. |
| 4.2 | **Planning Permission** |
|  | We approached Gravesham Council Planning Department, seeking to obtain written acknowledgement that planning permission was not required, as was the case with other Councils approached by bowls clubs who have installed artificial surfaces. However, Gravesham have a different policy and require plans to be submitted. These are in the course of preparation. |
| 4.3 | **Landlord’s Consent and Lease Extension** |
|  | Cobham Bowls Club currently leases the land from Cobham Parish Council on a peppercorn rent. The development requires landlord’s consent and an extension to the current lease which expires in July 2021. |
| 4.4 | **Drainage** |
|  | The artificial surface needs drainage and one of our prospective contractors proposed a soak-  away, in essence a pit filled with stone then re-surfaced with grass to reinstate the original appearance. It appears that two soak-aways may exist within the bowls club boundary. If these are unsuitable, an alternative will be required. Kent County Council was approached to evaluate a site in the Cobham School playing field though this option is not being pursued. |
| 4.5 | **Competitive Tender for the Contract**  The installation of an artificial surface requires technical expertise. The key skills relate to the composition of the base layers (to avoid later subsidence), the measurement of the final surface (to ensure an almost perfectly flat surface) and the selection and installation of the carpet matting. Demand for artificial surfaces is nascent in the UK, with very limited supply. However, a condition for the award of grants is that a competitive contract tender takes place. High on our list of priorities is the identification of alternative competent contractors. |

**5 Timescale**

The Committee proposes that the new Green is available for play from April 2017. This is achievable providing the following milestones are reached by the indicated dates.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| June 2016 | In principal support from :   * Cobham Parish Council * Gravesham Member of Parliament * Gravesham Borough Council * Kent County Council * Cobham Primary School and other local schools * Cobham Sports Association * New College, Cobham |
| June 2016 | Submission of Planning Application to Gravesham Borough Council  In principal approval from members at an Extraordinary General Meeting  Submission of grant applications to Sport England and other bodies |
| September 2016 | Planning consent by Gravesham Borough Council  New lease completion |
| November 2016 | Award of grants by Sport England and other bodies  Contractor appointment |
| February 2017 | Installation of the new surface (and soak-away if needed) |
| April 2017 | Opening of the new facility |

**6 Development Committee and Contacts**

The Development Committee members are:

Ian McDermid Club Chairman

Graham Dunnachie Club Secretary

Terry Ralph Club Greenkeeper

The contact details are:

Email cobhambowls@gmail.com

Telephone 07770 151407

Address Lodge Farm House, Cobham, Kent DA12 3BS

**Jeskyns - Denise Bird, Ranger**

Some changes since I updated PC at the last AGM.

**New Staff member**  
Our previous Asst Ranger, Alison Atkins left in Sep 2015 to start teacher training. Michael Neath replaced her in October 2015. He works at Jeskyns 3 days a week. His main tasks include assisting Denise in managing and maintaining Jeskyns, providing a visible site presence and delivering a work experience programme for Ifield School.

**Dog Issues on site**  
The introduction of the dogs on leads zone in 2014 and increased site Ranger presence has continued to have a positive effect upon the number of dog-related complaints and conflicts on site. In 2013 we recorded 38 incidents/complaints, after implementation of measures; the total number had fallen to 8 recorded incidents/complaints in 2014 and 10 in 2015.

**Groups – Community Involvement**  
Jeskyns continues to provide regular work placements for both Ifield School and Community Payback and our volunteer team continue to work on site once a month. Our Jeskyns Young Farmers club has continued to increase membership and they have just started a new growing project in our Community Tree Nursery. Local education practitioner Anne Marie Medhurst continues to deliver a popular Forest Schools programme on site. This coming year Jeskyns will be hosting a Charity Colour Dash in aid of Parents Consortium, a Marathon for Saxon-shore runners and we are hoping to work with a charity called J&S on a project called SMLES, providing outdoor activities for people with mental health issues.

**Children’s Trails**  
Our seasonal self-led family trails have continued to prove popular over the last year. Based upon Julia Donaldson (author of the Gruffalo) book characters, these trails enable families to complete fun, educational outdoor activities at Jeskyns at a very affordable price. The first half of the year was a Superworm themed trail followed by stickman in the latter half. Due to the popularity of the Stickman Trail, it will be in place until 30th June 2016 when it will be replaced with a new trail activity – theme yet to be confirmed.

**Heritage Fruit Collection / Orchard**  
Our collection of 3000 heritage fruit trees continues to grow well. Jeskyns is a very exposed site and so in the last year we have planted some new hedge’s, to provide wind break protection to trees that were showing some signs of stress. Alongside the usual pruning and maintenance, we have also completed a full inventory and assessment of the orchard blocks to identify those trees that are growing vigorously and need thinning, those trees that are weaker and need further protection and those that have died and need replacement.

**Wildlife/ Biodiversity Improvements**  
In the last year we have fenced and planted another 1/2 hectare to provide extra dog and people free habitat for wildlife – in particular ground nesting birds. We have also installed 40 dormouse nesting box and tubes which we will be monitoring to help us determine how well our resident population is doing.

**CADs, Ron Chamberlain**

During the past year CADS has entertained parishioners and supporters with two productions.

In May 2015 the society produced a Murder Mystery play by Chris Martin it was called “Who Killed the Director” During the evening the audience were provided with clues and in the supper break had to make suggestions as to the culprit and why they had done the deed. From the favourable comments received our audience greatly enjoyed the evening.

The November Production, a full length comedy , “How Does Your Garden Grow” was written by Geoff Bamber An extremely funny farce, with mistaken identity, much confusion and chasing around the stage, all was well by the final curtain. Almost full houses each night showed how popular this type of entertainment is in our village.

Looking forward to May this year, CADS next production is called “Laying the Ghost” and is by Simon Williams. There will be three performances from Thursday 19th to Saturday 21st May.

Tickets costing £8 will be on sale from the end of this week from the Box Office 01474 814250 or 07785 182 319.

CADS enjoy local support and appreciate rehearsing and performing in the Meadow Room. CADS Members fully support village fund raising initiatives to improve Meadow Room facilities They consider the hall is vital to the existence of their group.

**Gardeners Society (report sent in)**

‘’Sharing a love of gardening …….. locally’’.

The Society with a traceable history, dating back well over 100 years, offers membership to those living in the Cobham Parish and the wider boundaries of the Gravesham Borough. Adults and juniors are welcome as members, thus participating in the Society’s Spring, Summer & Autumn Shows and attending regular expert speaker talks on gardening related subjects throughout the year.

Meetings and Shows are held at the Meadow Room, The Street, Cobham DA12 3BZ.

Annual membership is just £8, money which is more than recovered by substantial discounts enjoyed by members at local garden centres and free entry to all expert speaker talks (non-members pay £3 for each of these).

Full details of the Society’s Schedule of events for 2016 and membership application form can be found on the Society’s website http://cobhamgardeners.weebly.com/

**The Monday Club**

We meet on Mondays in ‘term time’ from 1.30-3.30pm in the ‘tin tabernacle.’

This year we have met 43 times:

22 with outside speakers

14 ‘socials’ (chatting, games, Quizes etc)

7 outings (lunches, visits)

Transport is arranged.

Age range – 78-95years. Members – 13.

For further information, please ring Brian Williams on 01474 814049 or Pat Clarke on 01634 71125.

**Any other Business**

Cllr Dymond said that Heritage England had contacted the Parish Council to say that they were considering adding the War Memorial to their National list due to its architectural interest.

Cllr Dymond also congratulated Alan Rowe on being awarded the British Empire Medal which he will be presented with at Buckingham Palace in May.

Cllr Dymond closed the meeting at 9.50pm.