

**Friends of Combe Valley**  
**Annual Report**  
**for the Year October 2019 to September 2020**





# Friends of Combe Valley



## Annual Report

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#### 1. Introduction

- (a) Having re-established Friends of Combe Valley (FCV) in 2019 a plan for activities during the summer of 2020 was drawn up, but had to be abandoned because of the coronavirus.
- (b) In spite of the difficulties everyone has faced this year, we have been able to continue with some of our activities and planning as well as developing our relationship with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC (CIC), for whom our chair Pete Clarke is the vice-chair and Rebecca Nolan is a co-opted director, and their agents for the park Groundwork South (GWS), in particular Lindy Kelly their executive director.

#### 2. Members

- (a) Our membership has increased gradually and is now over 55, with both active members who are able to help directly with our work and informal members who support us but have less time for direct involvement.
- (b) Our new website, [www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](http://www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk), enables people to join on line and make donations via Paypal Giving Fund, which will collect donations for us without charge: an important tool to enable our membership to grow.

#### 3. Volunteers

- (a) At the beginning of July, with the lifting of the lock down provisions we started up regular Thursday work party mornings: working outside in very small groups so that the covid guidelines could be followed. This has brought in a number of new members
- (b) In particular for volunteers are unable to come during the week, in August we introduced a weekend volunteering work party day, on the third Saturday of the month. This started on August 15



#### (c) Activities

- i. Path clearing: in particular along Pebsham Lane from Freshfields, where the gorse had over grown the path, it is now cut right back and beginning to re-sprout. Other paths have also been cleared during the summer, by volunteers.

- ii. Combe Haven: a tree fell over the path and although a way was cut through the trunk was left. We were able to manoeuvre the trunk off the path and re-fix it as a bench. Further along Combe Haven we repaired a foot bridge, recovering a side plank which had come off from the river. At the next bridge at marker point 3, a willow tree had been cut practically to ground level in the autumn of 2019, but the branches had been left uncollected, with some in the river. These were removed and put into the undergrowth away from the river, where they can rot undisturbed.



- iii. The wood between the main recreation grounds and the field for model aircraft: we continued the work from last year, removing hundreds of the plastic tree protectors which had outlived their purpose, clearing litter and broken down fencing. The path now runs through the wood up to the second entrance to the model aircraft field.



- iv. Litter pick on September 19: this was the national coastal litter pick and about a dozen volunteers joined forces with the Bexhill Environment Group to clean the stretch of coast between the site of the Amsterdam wreck and Little Galley Hill, all of which falls within the boundary of the countryside park. This also attracted 2 new members.

#### 4. Wardens

- (a) In late 2020, the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner gave us a grant of £2500 to establish a warden service in the park. Initially the proposal was to employ someone to establish the service with volunteer wardens, but after discussions about this and the complications of our small organisation employing someone the Police agreed that we could invest the grant in equipment and run the service on a voluntary basis.
- (b) 6 wardens have volunteered and the park has been divided into roughly 5 sections, with wardens having particular sections to visit on a regular basis. Any problems whether natural, such as branches falling, or man-made, such as litter, flytipping, anti-social behaviour are reported to David Dennis, who acts as coordinator, and either passed on to the volunteers to deal with or to the authorities.
- (c) The wardens meet up from time to time and the local police representative, Lauren Gilbertbrown also attends these meetings.
- (d) We were able to continue with the activities throughout the lock down, because the wardens were operating individually and it fell within the exemption for exercise. The regulations established with the easing of the first lock down also include charitable and voluntary work within the category of work which is allowed to take place subject to compliance with the Coronavirus Guidelines. Since our activities are outside this is not difficult to do.

## 5. Activities

- (a) We started the year in October 2019 with “Spooky Saturday”. This was a successful event which brought families and children into the park: some for the first time.
- (b) Website: thanks to the enormous work of David Dennis a new website was established in the early part of 2020 and it is now on line at [www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](http://www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk).



It includes an email address [team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](mailto:team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk)

- (c) The café at the Discovery Centre was beginning to go well in 2019, although finding enough volunteers was difficult. But the beginning of 2020 was very difficult because of the extensive flooding on the recreation grounds and up Combe Haven, which combined with the very rainy days reduced the number of customers considerably. Because of this at the beginning of March it was decided to close the café and then the national lock-down began and the café has been closed since then. It was decided that requirements for reopening were too difficult, especially since several of the volunteers were over 70. It is hoped to re-establish the café in 2021.
- (d) One particular loss was Dylan Lawson who died on January 7 2020. Dylan had a number of health problems including autism. He was a regular volunteer at the café and is much missed.



- (e) Schools Project: the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner also gave us a grant to work with schools and in particular prepare materials about the wild life in the Country side park and to arrange visits by schools to the Park. This project has had to be changed by the Coronavirus situation and at the moment we are engaged in making information packs which can be sent to schools with the offer to work with them and hopefully arrange visits to the park in the future. We also intend to make the information and materials for schools available on lin.
- (f) Members event on August 30: although we had recognised that we could not re-open the cafe or propose of any of the public events which had been planned, we decided we could have a small outside gathering for members. This took place on August 30 and proved a good opportunity to meet a number of established members, as well as welcoming some new members.



- (g) Facebook: David Dennis has been very active in keeping us informed of the life in the park with his newsletters. He also maintains a facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/CombeValley> to which members can also contribute.

Peter Hunnisett who is a director of the CIC publicises life in the park on his facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/996841033726667>

(h) Visits:

- i. Councillors Andy Batsford, who is the lead councillor for housing and homelessness and Ruby Cox who is chair of the CIC took a walk round the southern end of the park: including Pebsham Lake, Combe Haven and Filsham Reed Beds on October 15 led by David Dennis with William Ackroyd



- ii. Councillor Lynn Langlands, the Mayor of Bexhill, visited on Thursday August 6 and was very interested and supportive of our work. The photo shows the group walking through the wood which we cleaned up
- iii. Andrew Blackman, the High Sheriff of East Sussex, visited on Friday August 21 and was welcomed by our chair Pete Clarke and other trustees who provided information about the park and the activities of FCV with the volunteers.

- iv. Michael Moore, chair of the Friends of Hastings Country Park and Nature Reserve, visited on Tuesday August 25 to have a discussion with Pete Clarke and William Ackroyd about our respective organisations and cooperation in the future.

## 6. The future

- (a) Fundraising: David Dennis has been very active as our fundraiser and mention has already been made to the grants from the police. In addition towards the end of this reporting year grants were successfully applied for including:
  - i. Cooperative Community Fund have adopted FCV for a year from October 25 2020: this raises funds through its members based on their shopping at Co-op stores. If you are a co-op member, please select Friends of Combe Valley as your chosen local charity and if you are not a member please join them. You can find more information here:  
<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/53303>  
the link will enable you to select FCV as your chosen charity if you are a member or to join the co-op if you are not a member and then select FCV
  - ii. Hastings Direct have given us a grant for signs in the park and we are discussing how best to use this with the CIC and GWS.
  - iii. The Chalk Cliff Trust have given us money towards further equipment for use in the park, which with money already received from the police and promised by Rother Community Fund, will enable us to buy a brush cutter and a chain saw, along with safety equipment and training for at least two of our volunteers.
- (b) We continue to develop our relationship with the CIC and GWS in expanding our work in the park.

- (c) In 2021 we hope to be able to re-open the café and have some activities for members, including walks in the park.
- (d) Discussions have begun on creating a cultural strategy for the park, working with the CIC and GWS.

## 7. Conclusion

- (a) Although the year has been difficult with both a very wet winter and then the coronavirus and all the complications resulting from that, we have consolidated our membership and are hopeful for the future
- (b) Thanks are due to our members, volunteers, the wardens as well as the committee and Pete Clarke our chair.



Report prepared by William Ackroyd with help from the other trustees.  
23 November 2020

