



*Nature walk on the sea front*

# Friends of Combe Valley Annual Report for the Year October 2021 to September 2022



*Volunteers after some path clearing*

**Friends of Combe Valley**  
Combe Valley Countryside Park  
Café & Discovery Centre  
Freshfields, Bexhill,  
East Sussex, TN38 8FB  
email: [team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](mailto:team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk)  
website: <https://friendsofcombevalley.co.uk/>

correspondence to  
William Ackroyd  
501 Bexhill Road  
St Leonards on Sea TN38 8AT  
01424 539 73

Friends of Combe Valley is a Registered (in England) Charity Number: 1163581

## 1. Introduction

- (a) At the beginning of the year we were still under COVID so our AGM in December was held partly in person but also on line. Since then we have held all our meetings in person and been developing our work.
- (b) We continue to have good relations with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC (CIC), for whom our chair Pete Clarke is the vice-chair and their agents for the park of Groundwork South (GWS), in particular Emma Ramsden who is also one of our trustees
- (c) Our membership has continued to increase and is now around 90, with both active members and subscribers on the website.

## 2. Activities

### (a) Conservation work



*1066 path before*

In November 2021 with help from Crowhurst Environment Group and Dean Morrison who operated a chain saw we cleared back the willows overhanging and blocking the 1066 path between MP 13 and Three Bridges.



*During*



*After*

- (b) In January we worked again with Crowhurst Environment Group on the footpath from MP 14, by the Greenway to Combe Haven: in the process we discovered a few old Harvest Mouse nests and it is great news to know they are living here. Unfortunately, we had to stop due to the discovery of a dormouse nest which makes it a protected area.

At other times we worked clearing overgrown vegetation on the disused railway line and paths in the Filsham Reed Bed, and indeed where ever in the park the paths needed clearing for access, sharing this work with ESCC who regularly clear the paths for which they are responsible and also with the GWS' trainees under the Greener Recovery Project.



*Crowhurst path*

### (c) Litter picks



Litter is a perennial problem and any outing will result in some litter being collected, there were specific litter picking outings on 19 March in the woods and recreation grounds round the Discovery Centre and on 17 September along the coastal walk.

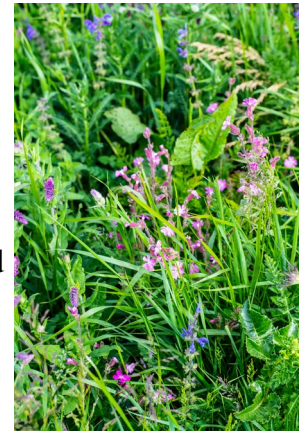
In July and August following the occupation of the land round the Discovery Centre by travellers there was a lot of rubbish to collect, helped by Hastings Council.

The major work of the last two years has been the removal of tree guards, used when the trees were planted, but unfortunately not removed whilst the trees were small. A substantial number were accumulated in the car park at the Discovery Centre and GWS arranged for two skips which we helped fill.

#### (d) Wild flower mound:



Work on the flower mound has continued successfully with much admiration for the beautiful flowers. The grass was scythed at various times through the year and plugs grown by Julie were planted out in the spring. In September more areas were cleared and covered to inhibit the growth of grass and prepare the land for wild flower seeds in the spring.



#### (e) Nature Detectives: *Helping local communities connect with nature*

This project started in the summer of 2021, supported by funding from the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and there was an autumn session on 23 October 2021. Since then the project has been continued in partnership with GWS led by Emma Ramsden, who had helped with the initiation of the programme in 2021 and Jill Tyson, funded by the Greener Recovery Project. There were sessions on 19 March 2022 with a local cub group and on 3 August 2022, on the beach at Glyne Gap. A further session had to be cancelled because of warnings of lightning.



#### (f) Container and equipment



A major event of the year was the purchase and installation of a container in the car park at the Discovery Centre: this project had been proposed in 2020 and finally came to fruition with the support of the CIC and GWS.



Planning permission was obtained from Rother DC in December 2021 and the container arrived in January. The project involved a considerable input of time from volunteers, in particular Pete and Cliff, with foundations being prepared in November and



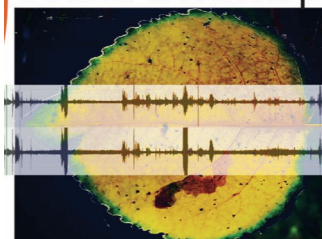
December and then fitting out being carried out in the first half of 2022. The inside was insulated and lined with boarding, and electric lighting, working with photovoltaic panels, was installed. Then racks and shelving were built for tools and materials, with the space being shared with GWS for the Greener Recovery Project. Two work benches at the front complete the inside and outside an area has been cleared and fenced for use as a workspace.

The project was funded by the Police with a contribution from The Green Recovery Fund.



#### (g) Art Project

##### sound workshop



This project also started in 2021. In the summer a sound workshop was held on 7 May. This was followed by a series of audio walks round Combe Valley Countryside Park being prepared and they can currently be found on [https://soundcloud.com/eliseandmary\\_2015](https://soundcloud.com/eliseandmary_2015) They should be available on our website in the near future. The titles are:

Bulverhythe History walk David Dennis - Bulverhythe Medieval Harbour with David Dennis  
Early history of Combe Valley Julian Porter Bexhill Museum - Old Railway Line Birdsong David Rogers  
Nature walks in Combe Valley David Rogers - A naturalist's shoreline in Bexhill-on-Sea Peter Hunnisett.



Boundary Stone

### 3. Events

#### (a) Walks with Peter Hunnisett

Pete led two interesting and informative walks in April and May, down to Pebsham Lake and along the sea front; he also did a walk as part of the Great Big Green Day on September 25, identifying local flowers and fauna.



#### (b) Queen's Platinum Jubilee June 5



Members and local people celebrated the Queen's Jubilee with a picnic party at the Discovery Centre on June 5, with many cakes and games.

#### (c) Eco fair with Community Supporters June 25

We welcomed Community Supporters from Bexhill for their AGM on June 25, which was an opportunity for FCV to showcase our work and achievements in the park.

#### (d) Great Big Green Day September 25

We responded to the national environmental campaign "The Great Big GreenWeek" by planning a day of introduction to the Combe Valley Countryside Park. The day was a collaboration between FCV, the CIC throughGWS, and Community Supporters. We received grants from the Big Green Week and the Chalk Cliff Trust to cover expenses. There was an exhibition of photographs taken in the Park and of animals and plants which can be found there at different seasons in the year. As mentioned above Pete Hunnisett did a guided walk to Pebsham Lake, there was a workshop on recycling paper as plant pots, seed and seedling planting and another on woodworking, with bird boxes being constructed. In the afternoon there was a foraging walk along Pebsham Lane. Emma from GWS offered a Nature Detectives craft event for children. There were also outdoor games for children, including croquet played with mallets made from recovered tree branches.



We offered free transport to and from the park, and were very pleased to be able to hire Happy Harold, a renovated trolley bus from the 1920s with an open top. The buffet lunch, based on plant food, included Uzbek snacks and bread, also home made cakes as well as juices and fruit which were donated by Tesco.



### 4. Wardens and Security in the park

(a) Currently the wardens are Pete Clarke, Chris Dadswell, Will and Heather Kemp, William Ackroyd, Cliff Willard, Heide Roberts, Lindsay Lycett and they have been making regular patrols in the park and reporting on problems. The Sussex Police Commission Safety Fund have financed the purchase of hi-vis jackets for the wardens, so that they are more visible in the park.



## (b) Problems

- i. The use of trail bikes continues to be an issue, although much reduced as a result of kissing gates being installed which inhibit access



- ii. Sewage leak at Pebsham Lake: this appeared in April and involved a lot of discussion with the Environment Agency and Southern Water, because it was not clear whether the leak was a run-off of leachate from the landfill site or a broken sewer pipe. In the end it was determined that there was a leaking sewer pipe and Southern Water promised to investigate. During the dry summer the earth dried up, and in the Autumn Southern Water started their investigation: the outcome is currently unknown.

- iii. The biggest disturbance in the park was at the end of June when a group of Travellers broke the barriers into the car park at the Discovery Centre and installed caravans on the field in front of the centre. They remained for several weeks, but were finally evicted towards the end of July 2022, leaving a lot of rubbish which was cleared by Hastings BC and FCV volunteers.
- iv. There have also been smaller problems, for example the damaging of the kissing gate on Pebsham Lane by the riding centre, and the some partying, which is generally fine, if all rubbish is removed at the end.

## (c) Solutions

### i. Kissing gates



After much discussion kissing gates, with access for wheel chairs, using a radar key, were installed at the Crowhurst Road entrance, MP19, also MP 22 on the path along side the railway and at the entrance to Filsham Reed Bed off Reedwood Road, MP81. The materials were funded by FCV, with a grant from the Police and installation carried out by ESCC, with some funding from the Green Recovery Fund.

### ii. Information and Interpretation Boards

This is an on-going project and during the year, Annie Brown a landscape designer has been employed by GWS under the Green Recovery Project. She is working on designs for the information boards for the entrances to the park as well as information boards. Funding has been obtained for at least the replacement of some of the existing boards and one or two information boards and we hope these will be finally installed in the current year.

### iii. Round the Discovery Centre

The visit by the travellers showed how easy vehicle access is onto the recreation ground from car park at the Discovery Centre: there are three routes and now after a very successful salvage of wood from skips by Pete and Chris, two substantial raised beds have been constructed with posts which have concreted into the ground. For the access by the Discovery Centre, two removable posts have been installed. This was all done by the FCV volunteers with financial support for materials from the Chalk Cliff Trust.



## 5. Café

An attempt was made to restart the café with a trial run from Easter to the end of June on Friday and Saturday afternoon. Although there were customers, business was very limited except when it was linked to an event, such as the Community Supporters day and also the Primary Schools football competition run by Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link. There were also insufficient volunteers and so the decision was made to close it except for specific events.

One aspect of the use of the café is the car park at the Discovery Centre, which is kept locked except when the café is open or there is some activity at the centre or in the park. This is unlike the car park on the other side of the recreation ground, with its entrance from Bexhill Road. Many visitors to the park will come by car and they need to have somewhere to park which is reliably accessible at least during the day: if the car park was open more then the café might be more viable.

## 6. Fundraising:

We are very grateful for the support we have received for our work:



- (a) Tesco Community Fund: who have provided funds to buy outside furniture to use at the Discovery Centre, specifically for the café.
- (b) Great Big Green Week: who contributed towards the funding of the Great Big Green Day.
- (c) The Chalk Cliff Trust: who have provided funds for the Great Big Green Day, security measures at the Discovery Centre and the painting of the Discovery Centre, which should be happening this year

- (d) The Sussex Police Commission Safety Fund: many of the projects outlined above have been supported by the police with funding provided in earlier years. This year they have also funded the hi-vis jackets for the wardens. We were pleased to welcome the PCC Katie Bourne at the Discovery Centre and to show her the work we had been doing.

## 7. Planning

We have had to be involved on a number of planning proposals affecting the park:

### (a) Bulverhythe Recreation Ground

The proposal by Hastings to build housing on the lower tier, which is both owned by Hastings and within Hastings Borough, has been around for several years. The council persisted in pursuing the plans, although opposed by the Environment Agency, because the field is a flood zone and Sports England, because it is a recreation ground. Many other bodies objected and we have been involved in helping with that opposition. All these efforts finally paid off in March when Hastings withdrew the planning application.

Since then we have worked with the CIC and GWS and others to develop ideas for the improvement of the lower tier, by improving its capacity to take in flood water as well providing a natural environment for exercise.



*The recreation ground in March 2020*

### (b) Pebsham Farm

Pebsham Farm was sold by Hastings to a family many years ago and it has now become the Pebsham Rural Business Centre, with the old farm house being converted into smaller housing units which have been sold off. All of this land is within the countryside park. The original owners were left with just the field running down from the business centre to Pebsham Lake, which was put on the market in April 2021. It was sold to Trafalgar Properties, a property development company based in Dubai. We have had contact with their agent in the UK and at the moment they do not appear to have any plans for the land, but clearly their hope is that they will be able to obtain planning permission for development of the land, which would be contrary to the policies of both Rother and Hastings for the park.



*Pebsham Farm Field*

### (c) Biffa Site



*The Biffa site soon after it had been sold*

This unoccupied site which was owned by Biffa is behind the recycling and refuse transfer centre and runs along side Pebsham Lane, where it becomes a footpath, going down to Freshfields. Biffa have sold it to a local developer who is thinking about trying to obtain planning permission for a light industrial unit or storage facility. The site along with the recycling area are excluded from the park although these sites are all within the park. Rother Planning Department have indicated that they would oppose the development and so far no planning application has been made.

### (d) Beach below Galley Hill – beach huts

This is a proposal by Rother DC to install 20 beach huts on the beach below Galley Hill, where the Coast Guard station is situated. It is an environmentally important site for insects and plants, in particular kale and horned poppy; the cliffs are unstable and it is an inappropriate development within the park. We have lodged an objection in the preplanning consultation procedure and since then no further action has been taken. Hopefully the council will accept that the project should not go ahead.



*Galley Hill Cliffs*

### (e) Upper tier of Recreation Ground – golf academy

In September we heard about a proposal to use the top tier of the recreation ground, where the 1066 Model Aircraft Club operate and in a field used by walkers for a golf driving centre, with other related activities. The plans would involve forcing the club to relocate, and access would be obtained across the car park of the Discovery Centre and also require the relocation of the Southern Oval Model Car Club. Hastings BC own the land, but it is within Rother DC and Rother have made it clear that they do not consider the proposed development is appropriate. Again it remains to be seen whether a planning application will be made.

## 8. Volunteers

- (a) Volunteers are the life blood of our organisation and it is through their contributions over the year that we have been able to achieve so much. We have a register of 36 volunteers.
- (b) Regular Thursday work mornings have continued together with activities on the third Saturday of each month, largely regardless of the weather. The mornings end with savoury treats and cakes, prepared by Teresa Clarke, which are very much appreciated. This has brought in a number of new members and volunteers with, on average, groups of 10 to 15 at the sessions.
- (c) All the other activities outlined in this report rely on volunteers and this year we have continued to keep a record of the time spent by volunteers on work for the park. The following are the totals, from those records and also estimates of time spent on other activities:
  - i. Thursday mornings and Third Saturdays about 1600 hours over 56 sessions
  - ii. Additional work on the container and security, about 300 hours shared by Pete, Chris and Cliff
  - iii. Other events – about 430 hours over 8 events, including events in partnership with GWS for the CIC
  - iv. Wardens – about 940 hours over the year with 6 wardens until September when we were joined by Lindsay Lycett
  - v. The café: 210 hours over 21 sessions, with 5 volunteers

vi. Administration, including dealing with calls about security etc about 1100 hours

(d) Overall about 4,500 hours during the year, with a comparatively small band of volunteers

## 9. Administration

### (a) Trustees

The twelve trustees are headed by Pete Clarke, our chair. with Cliff Willard, Will Kemp, Karl Beaney, Chris Dadswell, William Ackroyd, Elise Liversedge, Anna Sabin, Emma Ramsden, Virginia Vilela, Stevie Collins and Jay Brewerton. Julie Willard assists and attends our meetings and other members are welcome to join us. We were pleased that Rother Voluntary Action recognised Pete's work with an award as a volunteer of the year.



### (b) Website and communication:

We have reworked our website during the year and our website address is

[www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](http://www.friendsofcombevalley.co.uk). It includes our email address [team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk](mailto:team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk)

and we are on facebook as Friends of Combe Valley News at

<https://www.facebook.com/CombeValley/>

and instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/friendsofcombevalleyartrail/>

## 10. The future

(a) We intend to continue to develop our relationship with the CIC and GWS in expanding our work in the park.

(b) In particular we will continue with the work of landscaping round the Discovery Centre and hope that we will be able to start the wilding of the lower tier recreation ground. We also expect to start making benches for the park, first by the wild flower mound and then on the board walk in Filsham Reedbed.

## 11. Conclusion

Thanks for all the hard work of our members, our volunteers, the wardens as well as the committee and Pete Clarke our chair, which have made it a successful year.

William Ackroyd and other trustees



15 November 2022

*Path Clearance*