

**Draft until signed**

**Minutes of Combs 126<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting  
Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at 7.00pm, Battisford Village Hall, Straight Road, Battisford**

**Present:** S Scarff (Chairman), D Thorpe (Councillor), J Crooks (Councillor), V Whitehead (Councillor), C Todhunter (Councillor). T Chaplin (Councillor)

**Attending:** T Bamber (Clerk)

**1. Introductions**

**2. Apologies for absence**

Cllr K Oakes (County Councillor) (arriving later), Cllr J Matthissen (District Councillor)

**3. Minutes of the 125<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

The minutes were signed as a true and accurate copy of the meeting by Cllr Scarff (Chairman)

**4. Matters Arising**

It was noted that, as mentioned last year, funding has been limited and the impact on the village, particularly Highways, is evident.

**5. Chairman's Report**

See Appendix 1

**6. Report from Suffolk County Councillor**

Cllr Oakes summarised her report later: see appendix 2.

**7. Report from Mid Suffolk District Councillor**

Cllr Matthissen has sent his apologies and his report: see appendix 3.

**8. Councillor Reports**

Cllr Crooks reported on planning: There have been 23 planning applications in the last year, resulting in 18 Approvals, 4 refusals and 2 withdrawals.

Cllr Thorpe reported on Street lights and footpaths: The council has now upgraded 21 of the village's 27 lights to led bulbs to save on energy costs and maintenance and four more are scheduled for the near future. No problems at all have been reported in respect of footpaths.

Cllr Reynard, who stood down last month, had kindly provided a report on the cemetery. This is attached as appendix 4

**9. Local Organisation/Club Reports**

See appendices 5 and 6 for reports from Battisford & District Cricket Club and the Church

**10. Parishioner questions, comments and suggestions**

Mr Ian Clark congratulated the Council on the excellent condition of the cemetery: as an ex councillor he appreciates how difficult this has been.

The Meeting closed at 7.25pm

## Appendix 1:

### 126th Combs Annual Parish Meeting

#### Chairmans Report

Monday 13th May 2019 7pm

Yet again the Parish Council have had a full on year dealing with many topics new and old. I am so lucky to have a group of councillors that are willing to get involved with the village and give their time to create a better village for everyone. We have managed to co-opt a new councillor, Tracey Chaplin, onto the Parish Council, Tracey has already shown her involvement into many items in the village. I would to thank all the councillors for what they have done which makes the chairman's job a pleasure to do.

This year has seen the end of our four year term as parish councillors and the start of a new council. I am pleased that six councillors have put their names forward to stand in the new council but Sue Reynard has decided to stand down after 10 years. I would like to thank Sue for all her help she has given to the parish over this time.

Much of our time at our monthly meetings is taken up by planning applications, we continue to make comments on most applications whether this be new builds within the village, or extensions and alterations to properties. The Poplar Hill application for 160 new houses has created a lot of concern against the development, although this is outside the parish boundary this will have a big impact on Combs. I must thank councillor Chris Todhunter for all his work in putting the Parish Councils objections together to this application. MSDC have turned down the application and this has now gone to appeal, Gladmans the developers have since put in a second application for 138 new houses, we await the decision on this, Combs Parish Council have lodged our objections.

On 11th November 2018 we saw the 100 year ending of the WW1, Combs parish marked this with erecting a beacon as a memorial to the parish fallen, in the cemetery. The beacon was lit on the Sunday evening with over 300 people attending followed by a service in the church.

I commented in my last year report the lack of funds that Suffolk Highways seem to have to manage the minor roads in the village. We have seen many potholes repaired this year but only to a temporary standard leaving parts of the roadway in a poor state. A big concern is of the speed signs many of these are missing or have faded so much as they are not readable, this must have a big factor in cars speeding in the village. Combs Parish Council are looking at purchasing a speed indication display to make people aware of their speed in the village.

The cemetery is now being well looked after with the grass cutting under taken by David Windle and councillor David Thorpe helping out with tidying and other maintenance needed. A new wider gate has been installed to give better access. David Windle has also taken over the grass cutting at the church yard for us.

We have continued with the upgrading of our street lights, having had more replaced in Moats Tye last year the remaining lights in Moats Tye have been ordered to be replaced in the next few weeks.

Last year saw the unexpected loss of our Suffolk CC councillor Anne Whybrow. Ann had always liaised with Suffolk CC offices and departments in helping us resolve problems in the village. At a by election Councillor Kay Oakes was elected, Councillor Oakes has already been very helpful getting involved with the village litter pick and helping with the SID speed sign with Suffolk Highways. Our MSDC councillor David Whybrow has decided not to stand again for re election. I thank David for all his input over the years and the help he has given to the parish. We will be welcoming our new District Councillor John Matthissen

We have in the last few months introduced a newsletter for the Parish Council. This simple newsletter will give residents an insight into what is going on within the Parish Council in the village and hopefully encourage some people to get involved.

Finally I must thank our parish clerk Tony Bamber for all his work in keeping everything and everyone in order. Keeping up to date and understanding all the rules of a council is a major task to which Tony has well under control.

Stuart Scarff

Combs Parish Chairman.

## 2018/19 News Highlights

Here is a selection of news items from Suffolk County Council that featured over the last 12 months. For further details on any of these stories, and more, visit <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>.

### **Councillor Matthew Hicks takes the helm at Suffolk County Council**

On 24 May 2018, Councillor Mathew Hicks was elected as the new leader of Suffolk County Council. Councillor Hicks has promised a new era of working in partnership and listening.

In a speech following his election, he pledged to work with district and borough councils, other public sector partners, businesses and residents to find the best ways of delivering services to the people that need them most.

Councillor Hicks also confirmed Suffolk County Council's focus on major infrastructure projects. He stressed the need for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to bring these into the 30 plus year vision, so there is clarity on how major infrastructure projects can be delivered when funding is so tight.

### **Plan for £6million upgrades to Suffolk recycling centres**

On 24 July 2018, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet approved a plan to invest £6million into upgrading Suffolk's recycling centres.

The plan has earmarked £3m for the Foxhall Recycling Centre – Suffolk's busiest with 20% of all recycling waste in the county – and £1m for Haverhill for "urgent improvements". The plans will see improvements to traffic access at Foxhall and measures to prevent people from having to climb steps to dispose of their waste in the containers. Existing planning permission for work expires in March 2021.

Currently at Haverhill the site has to be closed when containers are emptied because of space. The funding aims to double the size of the site and prevent such closures.

Elsewhere, £1m has been earmarked for a site to replace the Portman's Walk Recycling Centre in Ipswich town centre, and a further million for the same in Stowmarket.

The existing Ipswich and Stowmarket sites are considered to be severely constrained for space, with no expansion opportunities available and the surrounding roads not offering a safe area to queue onto the facility.

Construction for improvements is expected to get underway in 2019/20.

### **Superfast broadband coverage continues to grow**

On 24 August 2018, it was confirmed that 98% superfast broadband coverage will be achieved in 2020.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, Jo Churchill, MP for Bury St Edmunds and Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach, were joined by representatives from West Suffolk Council, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, Church of England, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Better Broadband for Suffolk Team to confirm plans to reach 98% coverage in 2020.

**Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, said:**

“We have now confirmed that we will achieve 98% superfast broadband coverage by the end of 2020, which highlights our commitment to connecting Suffolk. We have already seen an increase in delivery, with 137 new structures built last quarter. This equates to approximately 3,000 additional premises receiving a new superfast broadband connection.

“With this agreement in place, Openreach will continue to ensure that we meet our ambitious goal. In the meantime, we will continue to look for further funding opportunities to work on delivery to the final 2%.”

**The Hold construction is underway**

By November 2018, the construction of The Hold building was well underway. The Hold will deliver a new home for the majority of Suffolk’s unique archival collections, as well as state-of-the-art public facilities including seminar rooms and a 200-seat auditorium.

The new building, which will be situated near the junction of Fore Street and Grimwade Street in Ipswich, will be part of the University of Suffolk campus and will be run by the county and the university together.

Work began on the construction of The Hold building in August 2018, with the demolition of a derelict building at the northern end of the site. The construction will focus on the strongrooms first, where the archives will be kept. The building will formally open to the public in Spring 2020. Once finished, more than 100 direct and indirect full-time jobs will be created as well as training and apprenticeships.

**Suffolk’s roads warming to £300,000 thermal patching technology**

January 2019 saw Suffolk Highways celebrating road repair success following a £300,000 investment in Nu-phalt Thermal Patching technology.

The investment, which has been funded from the extra £9.67 million received from central government in the autumn, has aided the county’s Highways teams to carry out more effective, longer-lasting repairs to Suffolk’s road surface.

Over the month of January, Suffolk Highways deployed three thermal road repair machines which repaired approximately 1,700 potholes county-wide.

The process includes an eight-minute heating cycle of the road surrounding the defect allowing for the existing road surface to be heated to 200 Celsius. The surface is then raked, topped up with bitumen binder and pre-heated material, then compacted. This all takes place within the service’s much-favoured 15-minute temporary closure.

The process does not require excavation of the highway, meaning no dust or noise, and better still, no waste material. The result also means there are no surface joints, which can be prone to faster deterioration.

Following its success, Suffolk Highways is now looking to accommodate this technology by adapting some of its own fleet to self-deliver this repair technique from March 2019.

### Department for Education recognises outstanding performance by Suffolk students

On 24 January 2019, the Department for Education published revised GCSE and A Level results.

#### **GCSE**

Suffolk has risen in national league tables for students in the county achieving the standard GCSE pass in English and Maths.

Department for Education figures confirm that 1% more students in Suffolk are achieving the expected standards in English and Maths at GCSE compared with last year.

Since 2015 there has been a change to the way that English and Maths GCSEs are graded. Results are now graded from 9 to 1, (previously A to G) with 9 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

The expected standard for pupils to achieve is now a grade 4 (a standard pass) and above (previously a C grade and above), with grade 5 considered a 'strong pass'. These changes will be phased in to cover all subjects by 2020.

64% of students in Suffolk are now achieving the expected standard in English and Maths, putting Suffolk in the top half of authorities achieving this standard.

GCSE progress remains above average and Suffolk students have seen a steep increase this year with a Progress 8 score of +0.08, compared with -0.02 nationally. This figure puts Suffolk in the number 1 position in our statistical neighbour group.

Progress 8 measures how well pupils of all abilities have progressed by comparing them with students who achieved similar levels in Key Stage 2 across the country. Suffolk is in the top half of authorities for this figure, ranked 42nd out of 151.

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils in the county achieving the standard pass in English and Maths is in line with national figures. The Progress 8 figure for disadvantaged pupils is also above the national level and is in the top half of authorities, ranked 42nd out of 151 (up from 67th in 2016).

#### **A Level**

The validated A Level figures confirm that Suffolk pupils have once again performed well with the number of A\*- E grades remaining above the national average figures.

The figures show that 98.1% of A Levels taken in the county have been awarded an A\*-E grade, compared to 97.6% nationally. A Level attainment is measured by the Department for Education using a points system. Points are given based on the type of A Level and the grade achieved. For example, an A Level at grade A is worth 50 points, whereas an AS Level would be worth half of this.

Suffolk's A Level average points per entry this year has risen by 0.3 to 30.3 compared with this time last year.

### Green light to develop more specialist education placements in Suffolk

On 29 January 2019, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed recommendations to move forward with creating more specialist education places in Suffolk.

Suffolk will need between 300 to 400 places for children with additional needs between now and 2020, and this figure is likely to continue to increase. The demand for specialist education places in Suffolk is rising rapidly due to the county's population growth, advances in medicine, and the increasing complexity of specialist needs.

The recommendations include three new special schools and 36 specialist units attached to existing mainstream schools, which combined will create over 800 new specialist education places in the county. The Cabinet also agreed that a clarified education pathway for specialist provision is created to assist families in understanding what the local offer is.

Following the approval of the recommendations, the proposal to borrow up to £45.1 million to fund the new places will now go to the county council's Capital Strategy Group to be reviewed. If agreed, the decision will go back to Cabinet in the spring for final sign-off so the recommendations can be rolled out.

### **Suffolk wins £4.4 million for “smart” street lighting**

A highlight of January was the announcement that Suffolk has won a grant of £4.4 million from the Government for a pioneering project to develop “smart” street lighting. The project will see streetlights adapted in a range of innovative ways, including being equipped with wind vanes and solar panels to generate rather than consume energy. Highways’ electricity bill is currently £2.3 million a year and set to rise, so anything that reduces the bill is very welcome.

The street lights will be equipped with sensors to undertake a range of tasks such as measuring traffic speed and volume; measuring road temperatures – so gritting runs can be better targeted; and indicating whether nearby grit bins need filling or gullies need emptying. The street lights can also be adapted to act as Wi-Fi and 5G transmitters.

### **Plug In Suffolk – the UK’s First ‘Fully Open’ Electric Vehicle Charging Network**

On 6 February, EO Charging, one of the UK’s leading electric vehicle (EV) charging manufacturers, launched ‘Plug In Suffolk’ in partnership with Suffolk County Council and renewable energy provider Bulb.

This is the country’s first ‘fully open’ public fast charging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles, meaning EV drivers simply pay by contactless payment with no need to register with networks or become members of organisations.

The first ‘Plug in Suffolk’ charging location was unveiled at Urban Jungle Plant Nursery and Cafe in Beccles. The company offer two 7kW EO chargers alongside the EO Pay kiosk, allowing members of the public and employees to charge their electric vehicles.

‘Plug In Suffolk’ will see the installation of electric vehicle charging stations (up to 400 individual sockets) across the county at 100 key locations and business addresses. Once completed the charging network will be available for all plug-in vehicle drivers with each charging location listed on [www.pluginsuffolk.org](http://www.pluginsuffolk.org) or searchable via Zap Map and Google Maps.

The ‘Plug In Suffolk’ charging network forms part of Suffolk County Council’s ambition of Creating the Greenest County in the UK.

### **Suffolk successful in winning £1.725 million in extra funding for business broadband roll out**

On 1 March 2019, it was announced that Suffolk County Council, working in partnership with West Suffolk Council, East Suffolk Council of Suffolk Coastal and Waveney, and Babergh and Mid Suffolk district councils has been successful in securing £1.725 million from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

The funding will contribute to providing Superfast Broadband access to many businesses, across Suffolk’s most rural areas, who are not in plans to receive Superfast Broadband as part of the current fibre broadband rollout.

The funding will cover connection to over 550 businesses across the county where current internet speeds are limited to lower speed connection methods. On top of the business connections, this funding will also reach a further 600 non-business-related premises who will be able to upgrade to superfast speeds.

Suffolk has been at the forefront of fibre broadband rollout, via its Better Broadband for Suffolk Program, since 2010 and currently the county enjoys a superfast broadband coverage of 93%, with

the current contract due to reach 98% by 2020. This additional funding will contribute towards meeting some of the remaining 2% of the county that is not covered by the existing contracts.

Work on connecting these new areas will begin later in 2019.



## Appendix 3

### District Councillor report

#### **Annual report from your District Councillor - John Matthissen**

Formerly representing Onehouse, Great Finborough, Buxhall, Harleston and Shelland

Now representing Onehouse, Great and Little Finborough, Combs, Harleston and Shelland

#### **Governance**

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England carried out a review of ward boundaries in Mid Suffolk proposing reducing the number of councillors from 40 to 34. The final proposal included a revised Onehouse ward including Combs and Little Finborough, but transferring Buxhall to the Rattlesden ward.

Councillors voted to increase their allowance from £4,000 to £5,000 per year. The changes voted through included Portfolio Holders gaining a 25% increase and the Leader of the Council a rise to £12,500 from £8,000. Backdating this uplift a few months was especially controversial. I voted against this.

#### **Budget and investments**

The 2019/20 budget was approved for approximately £10 million on core services (as in previous years) with a council tax increase of 0.5%. This was despite an expected underspend in 2018/19 of £1.9 million.

The Administration re-named the “transformation fund” of over £10 million – calling it a “Growth and Efficiency Fund”. It began to spend some of the money from this – including on purchasing the former NatWest Bank in Stowmarket, the former Aldi building and on refurbishments of the Regal Cinema in Stowmarket.

Funding has also been put towards two PCSOs available for the District. I am able to make referrals to them, but they only work up to 6pm.

Previously, Mid Suffolk borrowed £25 million to invest in commercial property outside of the Mid Suffolk area and currently owns properties in Harlow, Brentwood, Peterborough, Norwich and Milton Keynes. It is expecting these properties to provide over a million pounds of income per year. During this year it agreed to borrow a further £25 million for property investments. I voted against this.

#### **Planning and Housing**

Much of the year was spent with Mid Suffolk District Council not having a five-year housing land supply and, as such, any housing policies from the Local Plan can be disregarded when a planning application is being considered. Many refused applications were appealed on the basis of Mid Suffolk not having a five-year housing land supply. Notably, an application in Woolpit was appealed whereby the applicant convinced the inspector that Mid Suffolk only had a three-year housing land supply.

Just last month (April) Mid Suffolk has now confirmed it has a 5.24 years supply. This is based on a consultation undertaken in March and on changes to forecast housing numbers by the Office for National Statistics to all councils in England and Wales.

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils put in place a Homes and Homelessness Strategy and a Communities Strategy. They continue to work on a new Joint Local Plan but consultation on this has again been delayed until June 2019.

**Supporting the community**

Locality awards went to a good range of local organisations again this year, as reported in the village newsletters. I hope this scheme will continue for the 2019/20 year. Watch my reports in the Village News for an announcement.

**Thank you**

Thanks to everyone who has voted to re-elect me to continue representing our villages, which remains both a privilege and a pleasure.

## Appendix 4

### Cemetery report

#### **Report on the Cemetery for Combs Annual Parish Meeting**

**May 2019**

Combs Cemetery is owned and maintained by Combs Parish Council. Once again it has been kept in good order throughout the year and feedback to this effect has been received from several family grave owners.

During the year April 18- March 19 there were 15 interments, all for non residents of the civil parish of Combs.

The only issue during the year was the gate post having been damaged in the summer. This has been replaced, together with a new gate, paid for by the driver's insurance company.

The Parish Council was pleased to be able to erect a beacon within the cemetery which was lit on November 11<sup>th</sup>, along with others all over the country, to mark the centenary of the end of World War I. This was an amazing ceremony paying tribute to the servicemen and women who lost their lives and were wounded; it was attended by around 300 people and culminated in a packed church service at St Mary's.

Thanks must go to all parish councillors who have helped with the maintenance of the cemetery during the year, in particular Stuart Scarff, Jamie Crooks and David Thorpe.

Cllr Sue Reynard

## Appendix 5

### BDCC

Battisford and District Cricket Club report to Combs Parish Council April 2019 Below is a summary of information which was presented to the AGM in November 2018 Meetings and finances The committee always receive reports from the treasurer, captains, child welfare officer, coaches, fixture secretary, grounds and social lead. We have upgraded aspects of the club including an electronic scoreboard and we now have a laptop for scoring and wifi. The bar has been a good source of income and grants, board sponsorships and VPs lunch and a very successful Auction of promises ensures that income streams were strong throughout the year. Money has been spent on outfield mower although this will mean that we don't have to have council cut the outfield so this will save money in the long term. Also needed to purchase bar fridge and flat cover for the outfield and a laptop. Electricity costs have also increased as being undercharged. Match fees and some subscriptions were less than last year as had nine games less.

We have been very successful in gaining grants from Mid Suffolk and Suffolk County Council and through tokens that have been given out at the tills of three local supermarkets which turned into cash and it is planned to use this money to move the front of the pavilion forward and increase the size of the kitchen. It had been anticipated that work would start in October but at the last minute it was discovered that planning permission has to be sought however we are still aiming to complete it before the start of next season. (This has now been granted however start delayed til end of season 19.) We have maintained our Club mark for this year which is important as it helps us access funding and focus on our priorities one of which was to engage with the local community. We provide coaching on Wednesday afternoon maintained our strong links with Great Finborough primary school, who also held their sports day here on an extremely hot Friday. We have been used as a refreshment stop for a women on wheels fundraising event and hired out the venue for a couple of parties and a wake. We have also tried to encourage those who live in the vicinity to pop in when there is a game or on a Friday night.

Two Counties Ladies T20 2018 Season This has been a real turn around season for the ladies team, winning 4 of the 7 matches and finishing 6th in the league. The Saturday XI completed their 3rd successive year as champions, taking the Two Counties Division 6 title and therefore sealing a 3rd promotion in 3 years into Division 5 for the 2019 season. A frustrating year for the Sunday 1st team having only played just over half of our scheduled fixtures, losing games to the weather and concessions! Eventually we finished 5th out of 8 avoiding relegation. Overall the Sunday II's had a successful season, playing a total of 11 games of which only 10 qualified for inclusion in the league table as our game against Bardwell was played on a Monday. We were forced to concede the game against Twinstead on a World Cup Final Sunday due to a shortage of players, but nevertheless we finished the season in 5th place...comfortably mid table!! T20 report A Fantastic 2nd season for BDCC in the Suffolk T20 competition with us making the finals day along with 3 other clubs that all play Premier league cricket. Junior report We started the year with a schedule for three

junior teams; - Under 9s Kwik cricket - 8 festival mini-matches, 4 teams per festival, 6 players per team, bat in pairs with 2 overs per pair - Under 11s Super 8s - 10 matches, 8 players per team, 18 overs per innings - Under 13s Super 8s - 10 matches, 8 players per team, 18 overs per innings Early in the season a number of children dropped out of the Under 11s team, leaving insufficient players to fulfil the fixtures; so the decision was made to cancel the Under 11s matches and merge the remaining children into the Under 13s team. This was a stretch for some of the younger children, but they responded very well and rose to the challenge. Across the season a total of 10

different children took part in the Under 9s matches and 12 different children took part in the Under 13s matches

**Coaches Report** We have seen continued improvement in our junior section, both in terms of the standard of cricket being played and the number of children attending junior training. Once again we have had our juniors selected to attend winter training with Suffolk cricket. What we lack in numbers of coaches, I believe we more than outweigh in effort and uncompromising determination to provide the best we can offer. With moves afoot to improve and enhance our coaching offering for coming season's the future looks bright.

**Vice Presidents** We are most grateful to the Vice Presidents who have donated to the Club this year. Their contributions are as always most welcome. A number of them also support Club social events throughout the year and we are always delighted to see them. The Vice Presidents luncheon was again a great success with 50 VPs and their guests enjoying the usual the delicious home-made food.

**Social and Fund Raising Report 2018** We started off with our regular curry quiz in November, which was as usual a great success and well attended. New Year's Eve was a new venture, opening the pavilion and more importantly the bar for a "bring your own food" social evening which had the clubhouse packed. 2018 was welcomed in with a firework display. January saw another new venture, celebrating Burns Night. In March we held our big fund raiser of the year which exceeded all expectation. An Auction Of Promises saw a wide variety of promises sold under the expert gavel of our local auctioneer. Our last closed season event was the spring quiz, again this tried and tested event was well supported and enjoyed by all who attended. In addition to these social events the bar was open for Skittles every Friday which not only helped with the income from the bar but also keeps club members connected through the winter months. The marquee has been erected twice for club events this year over what seems like the only two wet days of the lovely hot summer. In October the "Creepy Crawl" round the Cricket Ground and a nearby meadow was as successful as in 2017. Last but by no means least the Grounds report. We eventually got a ride on mower which has meant that the outfield has been cut more frequently and shorter than the council who used to cut it were able to do. We should recoup the cost of the mower through not paying for mid Suffolk to do it after another season Getting the wicket together has been a pleasure this year as the warm dry weather for most of the year has really helped. The wicket has been put to bed, now it has had time to settle it has been recently spiked and top dressed and the new grass is coming through well.

April 19.

## Appendix 6

### Church Report

#### **Report for Combs Annual Parish Council Meeting 13th May 2019**

Thank you for asking me to report and be with you to hear what else is going on in the parish.

The church building remains in good condition, through careful inspection and regular maintenance. Its surrounding Churchyard is maintained very well by the Parish Council and we are grateful for that work and also its enhancement with a specific wildlife area and the recent installation by our children of the Bug Hotel. We were all pleased to see the church used so well by the community for the Remembrance celebrations in November 2018, with almost 300 in church for the short service and reception.

The Bell project has been delayed by the offer of a complete set of 8 bells from a redundant church in Yorkshire which we have accepted. The necessary permissions and re drafting of the plans and estimates inevitably takes time but it does mean the project should be significantly cheaper and the bells will a great attraction to many. Ultimately there will be 14 bells in the tower, the 4 originals hung dead for chiming and the new ones for ringing.

In the long term I am pleased to confirm that the Group of Parishes in which Combs is situate was finalised by Order of the Privy Council as from the 1st December and I became Rector on that date – the first since Eric Crouchman retired in 1990. It is significant in that it means a merger with Stowmarket is now very unlikely and Combs retains its independent status.

Foremost in many people's minds is the whole issue of rural isolation loneliness and the impact on mental health. We try to play our part in alleviating those issues through our Lunch Club at Trinity School, various Friendship Clubs and now the Coffee Caravan during the summer months in Combs Green. Even if you don't feel lonely, it would be good if you could come and join in and perhaps help others thereby. It starts on 22nd May 10-12 and then in June and July. There are flyers and posters. I have also looked at the Cricket Club pavilion and that may be the base for something else in due course as I am very keen to identify the parish Church with the village of Combs – despite its geographical location.

All our events are of course open to everyone and I am pleased that the Curry Evening Harvest Supper Strawberry Fayre BIG Brekkie for Christian Aid Mc Millan Coffee Morning etc receive good support – but there is always room for more. Innovative events such as the Vintage Cycle Ride. That and the Big Brekkie all attract a wide age range

Sunday School, Friendship Club, Choir and Men's Breakfast all thrive as do our increasingly strong links with Trinity Church School Lavenham Way whose facilities are open to us. We continue to see a gently increasing congregation and interest.

Many of you will know that the Church Hall has been improved significantly with new Chairs and all new cutlery and crockery. Much clutter has been cleared and it remains a useful community asset. We have a management committee and are developing long term plans.

I still harbour the dream of a free village magazine which I believe will strengthen Community but appreciate there are costs which some feel prohibitive. Like my last 4 predecessors I also harbour dreams of sorting better Car Parking and heating in the church – but we can't always have what we want!

To some extent my role is to dream dreams as to what might be possible for the development of community and I am always reminded of the verse from the Psalms, 'Where there is no vision the people perish' Amen!

Rev Chris

Combs Rectory

13th May 2019