**COBHAM PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY (APA) 2015**

 The Meadow Rooms, Cobham on

Monday 13th April 2015 at 7.30 pm

**PRESENT**

**COUNCILLORS:** CLLR A ROWE (CHAIR)
CLLR R DYMOND
CLLR M HAIG
CLLR N HAIG
CLLR B GLENISTER
CLLR J GILESCLLR ELLIS

**IN ATTENDANCE:** MRS K LANE (CLERK)
ADAM HOLLOWAY
CLLR A MOORE (GBC)
VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

The Chairman Councillor Alan Rowe welcomed everyone to the 121st Annual Parish Assembly of Cobham Parish Council.

1. **Apologies:**

Cllr Bryan Sweetland, Cllr Steve Dyer, Cllr Kerry Smith.

1. **Minutes:**

The previous year’s minutes were agreed by all those present, with one minor typo noted. On the agreement of all those present, the Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Assembly held on 14th April 2014 were confirmed and signed.
 **3. Finance:**

The Summary of the Cobham Parish Council’s income and expenditure for 2014/15 was presented and examined by those present. There were no questions. The Parish Council’s General Fund for the Financial Year 2014/15 was adopted, on the proposition of Mrs Rons and seconded by Mr Chamberlain and agreed by all those present.

1. **Report by Adam Holloway, Conservative Candidate for Gravesham**

Mr Holloway gave a brief report in which he stated that he is not currently an MP but the Conservative candidate for Gravesham. He gave a brief outline of the other candidates standing in Gravesham. He then went on to talk about Cllr Alan Rowe on the eve of his retirement from the Parish Council. Mr Holloway ran through Cllr Rowe’s work, both on the Parish Council and also as a County Councillor. He finished by thanking Cllr Rowe, on behalf of everyone, for all his work over the years.

1. **Report by Kent County Kent County Councillor, Bryan Sweetland (Cllr Sweetland was not present but submitted the following report after the meeting:)**

Once again we have had our fair share of rain in the last twelve months which has caused flooding on our local roads. Kent Highways responded well with pumps and sandbags and fortunately, no properties were damaged. I managed to have new bore holes drilled at the flooding point on the A227 between Meopham and Istead Rise and that seems to have cured the problem at that location. As a County Councillor I have access to a small amount of grant money. Some of the money this year was spent on a road gang to do various work on the roads in the rural area. I’ve also secured grants for other projects including buying new camping equipment for the Scouts, new fences at the Meadow rooms in Cobham and an interactive speed sign in Shorne. HGV’s along our country lanes continue to be a problem, I have ensured that a number of ‘Unsuitable for HGV’ signs have been erected and together with ‘Lorry Watch’, the problem has improved a little. Sorry about the huge HGV signs that were erected in Cobham recently, they have been taken down and will be replaced with much smaller signs more in keeping with the area. Oh dear, KCC Highways got that wrong! We are lucky to have several Speed Watch schemes in the rural area and well done to the volunteers who run them. It really does make a difference. In March, I presented a petition to KCC Highways on behalf of Cobham Speedwatch (who do a great job) about cars speeding and mounting the pavement and this should result in several improvements. A few weeks ago I joined the litter picking team at Meopham. We collected about fourteen black sacks of rubbish. I wish people would take their litter home! It’s good to see that other Parishes have also arranged litter picking days. I would like to finish by saying well done to all six parish council’s in the rural area, who work very hard to represent the views of local residents and they do it extremely well. Well done! Thank you to everyone who has helped to keep the rural area of Gravesham a safer, cleaner and nicer place to live. Please call me if I can assist in any matter concerning Kent County Council (07976 309171) or email at: bryan.sweetland@kent.gov.uk

1. **Report by Gravesham Borough Councillor for Shorne, Cobham and Luddesdown, Cllr Alex Moore**

**Local Development Framework/Greenbelt review** – The key aspect from the Local Development Framework (LDF) impacting Cobham & Sole Street has been Gravesham Borough Council’s decision to have a review of the Greenbelt. Until recently, there had been some confusion as to whether this was needed or not. A meeting between all the Chairman of the Parish Councils and leaders from rural community groups, with the Minister for Planning, left them in no doubt that it is the local councils decision should they wish to hold a review or not, the Government nor the Inspectorate could insist and or encourage a review.

A letter from the Parish Council and community groups has been sent to GBC outlining this position, and as yet, they have not received answer from GBC’s planning department.

**Council Tax** – This year, like last, and the year before, council tax has increased again, but this time by 1.97%. Since May 2011 the Council Administration has increased council tax by nearly 12%

**Car parking charges** – Car parking charges were frozen for this year and last. However, in the Council year 2011-12, car-parking charges were increased by an average of 65%. This coincided with the scrapping of the free Saturday parking, but the Council still retains free car parking in an evening and on Sunday’s.

**Thames Crossing** – It has all gone quiet on this topic and we await a Government decision. As we all know Option C, east of Gravesend, would have a disastrous social and environmental impact on this ward and many others.

**Scratton Fields** – Finally, after many years of tense negotiation, we are finally there with the Scratton Fields development. Many thanks to Alan Rowe and Bernard Glenister for their hard work on this issue.

Some Gravesend focused issues:

* **Gravesham Borough Market** – Recently the Government awarded, through a lottery fund, a £1.8m grant to redevelop the indoor market off Queen Street.
* **M&S closed down** – sad news this year as M&S closed their Gravesend store. It was not unsurprising due the company’s financial misfortunes. As yet, no-one has come forward to take-over the retail space.
* **Heritage Quarter** – Urban Gravesham took it to the High Court to challenge the Council’s final decision on the planning application. In the end the Judge upheld GBC’s decision.

Finally, it is with great sadness that this is the last APA, as I am standing down from Gravesham Borough Council at the forthcoming elections. Being the councillor for Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown since 2007 has been a very unique experience and one I will never forget! I’d like to thanks Cobham Parish Council for all their guidance and support over the years, and in particular, I’d like to thank, Alan Rowe. Chairman for so many years, and if I wanted to know what was really going on amongst the ‘rural mafia’, one call to him and I was aware of the facts! Thank you Alan, for always being on the other end of a phone and for your honest and friendly advice.

1. **Report by Chairman of Cobham Parish Council, Cllr Alan Rowe:**

Your council has met eight times for full meetings in the last year plus the annual budget meeting at which we agreed to a small increase in the precept for 2015 – 2016; the first increase for seven years.

Last June we said goodbye to Jill Beety who had been our parish clerk for 8 years. Jill was not enjoying the best of health at the time but we are all so happy so see her back to her old self now. Jill’s place was taken by Kirsty Lane who soon took up Jill’s reigns and started telling me what to do.

This council has continued to seek the help of the police to monitor speed traffic through both ends of the village and we welcome Cobham Speedwatch who came forward with a petition at our February meeting. Bryan Sweetland, our County Councillor, presented it to the Chairman of the County who, in turn, forwarded it to Kent Highways. We as a Parish Council will follow up many of the suggestions that have been put forward.

At least 10 years ago we asked Kent County Council and Gravesham to improve the access and parking for some of the residents of Scratton Fields. (I can tell you that the work was finished last month. I have always said that you have to have great patience to be a Parish Councillor!

At the end of last year yellow lines were extended in Manor Road, which I hope has solved the parking problem. Here thanks must go to Bernard Glenister for the hours of work he has put into this.

In February the Vice-Chairman, Rosemary Dymond, and I went to London with other Parish Chairmen to meet Brandon Lewis, Minister of State for Housing and Planning. We discussed the benefits of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Cobham and the other five parishes in Gravesham. This is a matter that the new council to be elected next month will have to decide. We also discussed Gravesham Council’s planned Metropolitan Green Belt Review. We were told by the minister that there is not a need for this and the four Parish Chairman have signed a letter to Gravesham asking for this review not to be taken forward.

We are concerned about the Forestry Commission’s decision to charge for car parking at Jeskyns Park that will cause parking on our country lanes.

I must thank our County Councillor, Bryan Sweetland, for all the help he gives to this council and village.

We are sad that our Gravesham Councillor, Alex Moore, is retiring next month. Alex has served us well for the last eight years. He will be missed by us all.

May I conclude on a personal note? I was elected as a member of this council, representing the Sole Street Ward, in May 1971, 44 years ago. There have been many changes over the years – not all for the good – but Cobham has, and always will be, a “five star village”.

It has been a great honour to serve as Parish Chairman for 25 years - being able to represent Cobham at so many functions.

I must thank Parish Council members both past and present for the support they have given me; and here I should like to mention Nigel Haig who is retiring with me. Nigel has been a councillor for 39 years. He was vice-chairman and represented us at very many public enquiries. This village has a lot to thank him for.

I must also thank my wife Su without her help, advice and support, I would not have been able to be a councillor for so long.

**Reports from Village Organisations:**

**St Mary Magdalene Church, Cobham (Revd Angela Walker was present but did not wish to present her report at the meeting. Below is her written submission:)**

This year has seen some encouragements with the start of the ‘Lunch together’, once a month at Cobham College, and the launch of the toddler group, ‘Chat and play’ each fortnight in the St Mary’s Church room. Both are in the early stages and time will tell how successful these two outreach initiatives will be.

We have continued with our parish visiting each month which still excites and blesses us as we meet some lovely people and pray for them.

There have been six weddings this year, two at Luddesdowne, two at Cobham and a further two at Cobham which were from Shorned due to building works there. I have also done one wedding blessing and taken eighteen funerals.

This year saw us commemorate the anniversary of WW1 and Veronica Rees and Sue Campbell did an excellent presentation at Luddesdowne. I also did a service of commemoration for a commonwealth grave memorial in Cobham Churchyard attended by the Mayor, RBL and our MP in October.

I have continued to take regular assemblies in the primary school and special services in the playschool. The school, playgroup and Cobham Hall girls school all held their Christmas services in Cobham Church.

All of the Christmas services were well attended again this year with a large turn out for the Christingle service at Cobham.

As a deanery we have welcomed the Revd Alison Davey at Meopham and Nursted. Ialso continue to serve as a trustee for the Dr Plume Trust, and as a member of the deanery standing committee. I have done two pulpit swaps this year, one at Fawkham and Hartley, and one at Istead Rise.

I attended the celebration of women’s ordination at Rochester in June and the Archdeaconry day to support our Church wardens when they were commissioned. I have also attended various training days with the diocese.

We have employed the services of anew gardener to cut the grass in the lower Churchyard on a more regular basis.

We continue to receive financial support at Cobham Church from the diocese which enables us to survive but it is not certain that this will continue beyond 2015.

Blessings, Revd Angela Walker.

**Friends of Cobham Church**

The Friends of Cobham Church continue to raise awareness of our Parish Church during the past year by organising a variety of events. Major events have been the August Bank holiday art show and a Bridge Drive in June followed by the popular annual Carol Concert in the College before Christmas.

There is work needed to be done on the Church building but before anything can be put in hand it has to be ratified by the Parochial Church Council and the Rochester Diocesan Advisory Committee – a process which takes a considerable length of time.

The flood lighting of the Church every evening is a feature of our village that is generously supported by many Parishioners. Anyone can sponsor the lighting and donations – however large or small – are gratefully received. We have 53 members but other folk would be most welcome to join us and participate in maintaining the historic fabric of the church. Annual membership is £15 per couple or Life membership £60.

Our next event will be over the August Bank holiday. Teas and cakes will be served in the church. We look forward to seeing you!

Eliszabeth Holland

Chairman FOCC

**St Mary’s Church Room local funding group**

**Report by Su Rowe**

The Tin tabernacle was sold in kit form at a cost of about £100 and delivered by train to Sole Street Station being constructed at weekends by the congregation. The land given by the Baker family was formerly part of Yeomans’ garden. The hall was officially opened in 1889.

The hall was modernized in the 1940/50s at a time of austerity, consequently to a very low standard, with the addition of the front porch, lean-to kitchen and toilet as well as the level of the chancel floor being raised.

The Local Funding Group wish to see the building renovated inside and out to a standard that we can be proud of. It is the responsibility of St. Mary Magdalene Church PCC to obtain grants but we have pledged to raise £20,000 in the community to illustrate village support for these applications.

We have been offered voluntary expert assistance by a Senior Construction Estimator, Bespoke Carpenter, Groundwork Company and willing hands to undertake manual labour.

We have now raised £9,456. 48p. Please continue to support our programme.

**Community Wardens represented by Steve Gray**

Here is my 1st report as KCC Community Warden for Cobham and Sole Street to the Cobham Parish Council Annual Parish Assembly.

I have now been your Community Warden for about 6 months and I would like to thank the Residents and Councillors for their warm welcome.

In the last 6 months I have been an active supporter of the Speed Watch scheme, helping out on many occasions and will hopefully be back on Speed Watch duty along with the other helpers next Monday, 20th April, if the equipment is repaired and available in time. It is important we closely monitor the speed though the Village to ensure safety for all residents. Also to ensure the safety of pedestrians, young and old, we must try and stop vehicles driving and parking partially on the footpaths and I know that details of offenders have already been passed to the Police.

I am also working closely with the Primary School in respect of Personal and Road Safety and have given talks to Reception, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils on these subjects. I will continue to be a visible presence outside the School particularly in the afternoon when pupils are coming out.

On Monday, 27th April, I am giving a talk to members of The Monday Club at St. Mary’s Church, Sole Street on my role as a KCC Community Warden and also home / personal security so please do come along and listen.

I have received some enquiries about the possibility of having litter picks in Cobham and Sole Street. I have been in touch with the Parish Council in this respect and it is my understanding that they are hoping to arrange a Community Clearance Day in the near future.

In closing I would like to say that I hope to maintain a regular visible presence in Cobham and Sole Street. I urge you all that if you have any concerns where you think I may be able to assist please do not hesitate to come and talk to me or you can telephone me, my mobile number is 07811271256 and is also shown on the Parish Council website.

 Thank you.

 Steve Gray, KCC Community Warden, Cobham and Sole Street

 **Cobham Community Pre-school**

 **Presented by Claire Hargrove**

For over 30years Cobham Community Pre-School has offered the youngest members of our community the best possible place to make their first independent explorations outside of the family home. There can’t be many people within the parish who do not have a child, grandchild, relative or friend who has benefitted from the excellent start the pre-school gives to children in the year or two before they start their formal education. Since it began in the early-1980s over 500\* children have attended the pre-school, today we have 38 children registered and an increasing number of second generation pre-schoolers attending, following in the footsteps of their parents, who still fondly remember their time there. Rated as ‘Good’ in all areas of its last Ofsted inspection the pre-school has an excellent reputation amongst families and childcare professionals. We have no need to advertise as we get more than enough applications not just from within the parish but also from across Gravesend, Meopham, Strood and Rochester, many families drive past a number of other pre-schools to attend ours. Currently we have a waiting list of 56 for the next academic year, and whilst all children from the parish are guaranteed a place, others will unfortunately be disappointed as we simply cannot meet the demand for places. We are restricted to 24 children per session both by our desire to maintain the small close knit environment that our families value and by Ofsted.

The pre-school is managed by a committee of volunteer, parents with sessions being run by a loyal team of experienced, well qualified and passionate practitioners most of whom have been with the pre-school for over a decade … or two. This summer we will sadly be saying goodbye to our Supervisor and Deputy Supervisor as they embark on well-earned retirements. However we are delighted that we have been able to recruit two highly qualified and experienced replacements, both of whom are very excited to be joining our pre-school. Parents highly value all the pre-school does both to settle the youngest children into what is often their first time away from their family and to prepare the older ones for starting primary school, and all stages in between. The children benefit not just from the small community environment and traditional ethos but also from a huge range of activities and learning experiences ranging from educational visits from creepy crawlies to music workshops, their annual nativity play in the church to foraging in Jeskyns Park, not to mention the gallons of paint, tonnes of play dough and bucket loads of sand they all get through.

Up until recently our basic running costs were just about covered by the Early Years Education Grant we receive from the government for children aged 3 and above, and from fees for children not yet eligible for the grant. However for everything above and beyond that, new equipment, repairs, workshops and special projects we are reliant on fundraising hence our busy diary of tried and tested, and some slightly wackier, fundraising events. We are also very grateful to have received two Community and Neighbourhood Grants from our local councillor in recognition of the work we do for our local community. We are a not-for-profit, registered charity run by local families for local families.

Unfortunately however despite this glowing report the future of the pre-school is currently a major concern. A series of well above inflation rent rises from the Meadow Room have led to an increase in our meadow room costs of 36.5% over the past two years. Despite reassurances during that time that all increases would be in line with RPI (currently 1%). We have also been informed that it is likely our rent will increase by at least 11% next year. Unfortunately we simply cannot sustain what are in our view such unreasonable rent increases. 75% of our guaranteed annual income comes from the government’s Early Years Education grant which has been frozen for 5 years and by law we are not allowed to ask for top up fees. The remaining 25% of our income is paid in fees by an average of just 9 families each year. We had already planned to increase our fees from September to afford an inflationary pay increase for our staff and increases in our other essential running costs, if we increase them any more we would be concerned that some local families would not be able to afford to attend. We therefore now find ourselves in the position of having to either use fundraised income, money we had raised to spend on new equipment, special projects and maintenance of the pre-school areas, or our limited reserves to cover the latest rent increase.

However, despite feeling more vulnerable than ever before we remain committed to ensuring that the young children of our area continue to enjoy and benefit from the fact that we are all lucky enough to have such a well-respected pre-school in our parish.

**Cobham Primary School**

**Report by Steve Dyer, read by Julian Giles in his absence**

SCHOOL GOVERNOR’S REPORT – April 2015

Here is my report on some of the highlights at Cobham Primary School in the past year.

ATTENDANCE - The current roll is 218 children, with attendance at 95.1%.

For our Year 6 children, over half the class have secured places at Grammar schools for September 2015 – an excellent achievement.

SCHOOL TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

In the last term Year 2 have visited the London Museum and the Key Stage 2 Choir performed at Young Voices held at the O2.

EVENTS & AFTER SCHOOL CLUBS

A varied range of activities is on offer to the children including Art Club, Netball, Football, Choir, Boom Academy, Swimming, Book Club, Running Club and Gymnastics.

Archery, Rugby & Dance will be offered later in the school year.

Years 4, 5 & 6 Violinists gave a superb performance to parents to demonstrate their amazing progress and talents.

Year 5 & 6 experienced an E Safety talk present by our local police officers.

One of the teachers has also led an E Safety talk for parents, which was well attended.

The Police also provided Year 6 with a session explaining Anti-Social Behaviour, which the children found very thought provoking.

Our local vicar, Reverend Angela Walker, leads a school assembly every term.

PTA Fundraising

The PTA continues to work extremely hard to support the school.

The Christmas Fayre raised over £2,300. The Valentine’s Ball held at Cobham Hall was also a big success.

It is a pleasure to be associated with the school and to see how much the children get from this lovely school.

This concludes my report.

**Speedwatch Group**

Vicky Goodin spoke in absence for Gay Grimes who was on Holiday & sent her apologies. Vicky summarised the activities of Cobham Speedwatch Group over the last 12 Months:

·       Cobham Speedwatch Group was established at the end of 2013. This was set up to improve the Road Safety within our Village.

·       Volunteers made up by Villagers, School Parents & our local Community Warden give their time in order to "man" a Speed Camera identifying Vehicles Speeds as they travel along "The Street". The Volunteers are trained and supported by Kent Police

·       This is an educational initiative as the Group have no powers to prosecute, however, all data is fed back to Kent Police & those caught offending two or more times or those of excessive Speed will be written to/visited by the Police.

·       During the last 12 Months 354 Drivers were recorded driving in excess of 25mph. The Speed Limit at the point of detection being 20mph. It should be noted that the Camera is on average used only 5 Hours per Month as the Camera is shared with other local Villages. Currently the Camera is broken and awaiting repair.

·       When the Camera is repaired it would be very useful for us to have more volunteers to enable us to collate more data. If interested please email cobhamspeedwatch@gmail.com or you can find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/Cobhamspeedwatch

·       Not only is Speeding an issue throughout  the Village but also "Pavement Mounting." One of the major concerns of the Group is that someone is going to get seriously injured or worse unless pro-active action is taken.

·       2 Recent incidents of Vehicles Driving along the pavement with near misses to pedestrians walking have been taken forward by the Police & are being prosecuted

·       Cobham Speedwatch Group launched a Petition to as many People in the area gaining their support for our actions. There was a very good response, reporting "near misses" and being hit by Cars on the Pavement. Many of these incidences go unreported to the Police. The findings of this Petition were presented to the Parish Council. Bryan Sweetland duly presented the findings of the petition to the Chairman of KCC, he in turn forwarded to the Director of Kent Highways.

·       Gay Grimes & Vicky Goodin met with representatives from the PCC, Councillor Bryan Sweetland & Kent Highways and did a walk through the Village. Several areas for improvement were identified. Both Councillor Sweetland and Cobham PCC have pledged Money towards the Cost of improving the Safety of "The Street" for which we are very grateful. Highways are to report back by the end of April with details of what can be achieved and Costings.

·       At the Council Assembly it was mentioned by a Parishioner that Sole Street may benefit also from alike wise Group. If there are any Volunteers from the Sole Street area looking to set up a Group please contact us and I am sure we can discuss options.

**Bell Ringers**

Tower Report

At Cobham Church in 2014 we continued to ring the bells for Sunday morning services. Occasionally we were unable to ring all six bells and sometimes we had to miss a Sunday. We would very much appreciate more help with the ringing but our band are very loyal. Practices are on Wednesdays from 7.30 pm to 9.00 pm.

Ringers from the Open University and our Kent County Association of Change Ringers rang three quarter peals at Cobham during the year. We tolled for one funeral at the request of the family and rang at four weddings. Two of the weddings were transferred from Shorne Church where repair work was being undertaken and the bells there could not be rung for several months during the project. Our new bell ropes, costing over £1,000, came into use in 2014 and it is the bell fees for weddings which help meet such expenses.

On the 4th August ringing marked the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War and then on the 6th August the bells rang out celebrating the birth of Charles Alexander Haig.

‘The art of change ringing is peculiar to the English, and, like most English peculiarities, unintelligible to the rest of the world’ wrote Dorothy L. Sayers in her Lord Peter Wimsey detective story ‘The Nine Tailors’. Hopefully, in a general interest way, the monthly Bell Ringing article in the Cobham and Luddesdown News sheds a little light onto the art and science of campanology and conveys the enjoyment and pleasure experienced in the ringing of bells.

Peter Hartley
Tower Captain

**The Meadow Rooms**

**Presented by Anthony Silk on behalf of the Meadow Rooms Committee**

Dear Parish Councillors, committee etc.

Over the past years The Meadow Room has increased its focus on becoming a focal point that benefits not just its regular and parish users but also the surrounding community, residents and businesses of Cobham.

We have done this through events that: - partner with local charities by providing a free platform for them to connect to the community

- align with local businesses to help support us whilst showcasing their community credentials

- introduce the wider community and residents to the Meadow Room and the clubs, societies and facilities it has at their disposal.

This is in addition to ensuring that the Meadow Room is financially sound for the future so our regular users, clubs and societies have a suitable, safe and secure environment to call home.

The above has not been without its issues.  Our focus for 2015 is to raise the £40,000 required to replace the roof, a huge amount of money which will need increased effort from our small committee and a large amount of support from all here and in the parish.

**The National Trust**

**Presented by Jonathan Ireland**

The preceding year in Cobham wood has been our best yet.

My primary focus has been to press on with the restoration of the wood, with a view to re establishing a wood pasture regime which prevailed whilst the Darnleys managed the land.

* Early in the year we continued to thin the regenerative growth which is back filling the previously more open landscape.
* Gradually we are joining more open areas with others. I have endeavoured to undertake this work either side of the track to the Mausoleum so that less adventurous visitors & those primarily concerned with a mausoleum visit also experience a little of this attractive landscape which also serves as an historic back drop to the Mausoleum
* We have retained much dead wood as future habitat whilst extracting the remainder & converting it to firewood. The sale of this by product of our conservation work has been fed directly back into my conservation budget. This has enabled us to bring forward projects & accelerate restoration.
* We have continued to pollard young trees, an essential element of any wood pasture restoration. So far this has largely been a success. This treatment if maintained at regular intervals over a number of lifetimes could lead to Cobham Wood increasing its stock of 6/7/800 year old trees. At present we are doing our best to look after the couple of hand fulls of truly old trees left in the wood.
* Wood pasture as the term suggests is a home to grazing animals. Whilst I manage the trees we have been very fortunate in engaging a small herd of Highland Cattle to manage the understorey. Highlands are particularly suited to this conservation grazing as they browse the un desirables like bramble & thistle rather than graze the grass. In addition they can graze/browse all year around unlike other domestic cattle. This is particularly valuable as it prevents new plants coming through whilst gradually reducing the more established swathes. It seems to be working.
* Over last summer I engaged the services of a member of the National Trusts Bio survey team. Together over a period of a few months trapped invertebrates inhabiting the mature trees of cobham wood. Cobham Wood is a SSSI because of these inverts which can only find homes in very old trees.
* He is currently writing a report but from preliminary results I understand we have a number of nationally & internationally rare species.
* We have just wrapped up the felling season for another year & this has enabled me to recently transfer my attentions to improving the appearance of the property for the visitor by replacing fencing & gates / signage & a commencement of mowing. Spring & summer is mostly concerned with maintain rights of way & managing pasture.
* Tree safety work is about to be started at Cobham Wood ensuring that all visitor routes are free from tree hazards. This work is also going to take place down at Owletts where probably the most notable trees to be worked on will be the cedars at the end of the Rookery ave. These trees have concerned me for a while given the propensity of cedars to shed limbs. Together with my tree surgeon we have agreed that given their proximity to the road we will sympathetically reduce some of the more significant limbs over hanging the carriageway.
* Owletts orchards have been thoroughly re fenced & this has enabled us to graze the whole property. Sheep are due to be reintroduced in a few weeks time.
* I will get someone to take a look at Tudor yeomans hedge to ensure that it doesn’t out grow its location again.
* The mausoleum has opened again on Sundays between mid day & 5pm. I understand that it was busy at Easter with approximately 170 visitors.
* I believe that it received in excess of 2000 visitors last year.
* So another busy & productive year ahead

**Friends of Cobham Hall Heritage Trust**

Report given by Rosemary Dymond

Cobham Hall is one of England’s finest historic country houses. It dates back to 1208 when the manor was granted by the King to the De Cobham family. Through the centuries additions have been added to the Norman Manor House to present the beautiful Tudor building we see today. On the death of the 9th Earl Darnley, in 1955, the Hall was sold and the Government bought it to protect it for the nation. Finally it was adopted by an educational trust to be used as an independent public school for girls that opened in 1962. Thirty years later the Cobham Hall Heritage Trust decided that this splendid house should also be used more by us, the local community, on days when it wasn’t open to the public or at weekend and school holidays. So it was that the ‘Friends of Cobham Hall Heritage Trust’ was formed with the present Earl of Darnley as its patron.

The organisation has been functioning now for over 20 years and its membership has gradually grown and broadened, but its nucleus is very much the local community who make up the bulk of its 300 members. Members have access to a varied programme of events throughout the year, all of which are held in Cobham Hall, as well as free access to the hall and gardens when it’s open to the public. The events are monthly and held on Friday evenings beginning with a buffet and wine at 7.30pm and the entertainment starting at 8pm. Events include talks of a topical or local interest and two spectacular music evenings in the beautiful Gilt Hall.

The Hall was the present Lord Darnley’s childhood home and he remains the patron of the Friend’s organisation as it was his proposal that the Hall was to be used and enjoyed by the local community and indeed it is.

**WI Cobham & Luddesdown**

Our membership has remained fairly constant over the past year and, despite losing a few valued members, we have been pleased to welcome a number of new ones. We were particularly saddened to lose Mrs Dorothy Kemp, who had been such an active, enthusiastic, and much loved member.

Last year we celebrated our 95th birthday with a birthday lunch at Bartellas and, along with other local organisations, we remembered those who had fallen in the First World War. Some of the ladies in the craft group decorated linen shopping bags with their interpretations of the Great War, and these have been much admired where they have been on display.

Our committee has been reduced to four, but despite this, we have some extremely helpful and enthusiastic ladies who continue to contribute to the smooth running of the institute. Last week, for instance, we held our annual Spring Show, where members have an opportunity to display their skills in craft, art, cooking, photography and floral displays. One of the judges commented on how well organised the event was.

Our craft group meets twice a month in the National Trust barn and have been working on a number of projects, including peg loom weaving, pulled thread embroidery and crochet and our new bunting banner, made by them, has been proudly displayed on a number of occasions. The art group, although quite small, meets in members’ houses every Monday morning and is choosing a different subject each month. The two book groups have been reading a variety of books, and meet to discuss them once a month.

We are a happy and friendly group, which meets on the first Wednesday afternoon of each month, except August, when we usually organise a fundraising activity, last year’s being a Beetle Drive. We always welcome new members and visitors, who can enjoy our monthly meetings which have recently included talks about “My Life in Books“, “mud larking” in the Thames, “The Crop Circle Mystery”, which provided evidence that these are not all produced by drunken students! And a charity called “Bless the Children”, that helps Romanians in their country by providing a day centre and working with a charity that supplies artificial limbs. We have also made Christmas angels, had an enjoyable Festive Tea in December, when Mrs Elizabeth Holland displayed her skill in floral arrangement and we were able to invite members from the other WIs in the Thameside District to enjoy our superb array of home-made food.

Our members continue to attend various meetings, workshops and other activities organised by the Kent-West-Kent Federation of which our Institute is part. These have included Home Economics and Art and Craft Annual Days where speakers give talks about various subjects and there are stalls selling related items.

The Kent-West-Kent Annual Council Meeting, held at The Assembly Rooms, Tunbridge Wells is always an enjoyable day. We send a delegate and tickets are available for anyone else who wishes to attend. The speakers are always entertaining and this year we enjoyed talks from Julie Summers, who has writteen a book entitled “Jambusters” about how the WI pulled rural Britain through the war with pots of jam and an indomitable spirit of make-do-and mend. This book has inspired the ITV drama “Home Fires”, which is soon to be screened on Sunday evenings. The other inspiring lady was an ex Tornado fighter pilot who had served in Afghanistan and Iraq and who now inspires others.

We look forward this year to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, which will include a number of events, such as a Special WI Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on 2nd June, the Annual Meeting at The Royal Albert Hall on 4th June, a Centenary Celebration at Lullingstone Castle on 1st July and a District Show in September.

**WI Sole Street**

Sole Street WI has 23 members, who live in Sole Street, Cobham, Gravesend, Higham and Northfleet. Sole Street WI meets every fourth Tuesday in St Mary’s Church rooms, Sole Street. Visiting speakers talk about a wide range of subjects each month, including natural science, fashion, art, history, investigative journalism and home economics. The Book Club and the Art and Craft Group also meet monthly in each other’s homes or sometimes the Church Room. Social events such as coffee mornings, meals out and theatre visits take place throughout the year. Visitors and new members are always welcome at WI meetings and activities.

Sole Street WI is celebrating its 31st anniversary this year on 28th April with a meal at the Railway Inn. Some members first joined twenty or thirty years ago and are still actively involved. Sole Street WI organised the Thameside WI District WI Quiz on 24th September 2014 in the Meadow Room and its members also participate in various District WI events, as well as West Kent Federation activities and meetings.

There members of Sole Street WI are on the Local Fundraising Group Committee for the refurbishment of the St Mary’s Church Room in Sole Street and members of the WI have supported various events, including the Saturday Coffee Mornings held jointly with the Monday Club. We look forward to seeing the St Mary’s Church room refurbished, so that it can become an even more welcoming community space for the residents of Sole Street and surrounding villages.

**Monday Club**

The Monday Club meets from 1.30-3.30 with 42 meetings in 2014. The group is made up mainly of widows and widowers and retired people. The average member age is 83. It only costs £1 per week (£2 when we have speakers or go out on visits) Tea and biscuits provided and transport provided. Free subsidised lunches are also sometimes provided. Numbers are dwindling and there are now only 12 members. New members are always welcome.

**Sports Association**

Cobham Sports Association raises funds for Sports facilities in Cobham. The majority of the funds are generated from the August Bank Holiday Fete. We have recently repaired the ceiling in the pavilion at the recreation ground and carpeted and re-floored the bar area. Over the years the Association has extended the pavilion substantially, obtained the use of the meadow behind the Darnley Arms and raised funds for the multi-purpose tennis courts.
The Cricket Club currently run four senior teams and a successful Colts section. The Football Club run a senior side and Colts teams ranging from aged 8 to 16. The Tennis Club is also well supported.
A substantial number of children from the local school partake in the sports clubs and we endeavour to maintain the facilities and playing areas to a very high standard. In fact the facilities are without doubt the best in the area. We always welcome newcomers and continue to be an important part of the village.
Thank you,
Regards,
Chris Broadley.
Hon Secretary, Cobham Sports Association.

**Jeskyns**

The last year has seen many changes and new developments at Jeskyns.

Jeskyns Cafe

Our café businesses tenants Churchill Catering Ltd completed their first year of trading in Jeskyns café in Feb of this year. Business has been steady and whilst the busiest times have been during school holidays and bank holidays, Marianne and Sarah are now beginning to establish a regular clientele which they hope will continue to grow to sustain the business throughout the whole year.

New Staff member

Alison Atkins joined myself as a new Asst Ranger in March of last year. Over the past year her role has been helping to maintain and monitor the site and its facilities, assist in conservation mgt, encourage community involvement and generally provide a more visible Ranger site presence.

She has worked with many local primary and secondary schools including Cobham preschool and has set up a weekly work experience placement for two students from Ifield School, a week long work placement for another local student and delivered a range of public session environmental activities such pond dipping, bug hunting and bat spotting.

One of her most notable achievements is the creation of a brand new Jeskyns Young Farmers Club - they meet weekly to learn about the environment and farming via a range of activities on and off site. She plans to establish a dormouse conservation project on site in the coming months.

New Dogs on Leads Zone

Following considerable consultation and a busy online public discussion a Dogs on leads Zone was introduced into part of Jeskyns in June of last year. This has settled in well and most visitors with dogs are now complying by keeping their dogs on leads in the busiest part of the site. We will be conducting a formal review in June of this year to see how the new zoning has impacted upon the number of dog related complaints and incidents, but initial findings suggest that it has already had a very positive impact.

Car Park Charges

In response to reduced government funding and following in depth consultation back in 2012, car park charges were introduced on the 1st March this year. Over 700 annual passes have already been sold and there has generally been very good compliance with daily ticket purchases. The new charges are already providing a very welcome source of income to help towards the financial costs of continuing to manage Jeskyns sensitively for both people and wildlife to the high standards that we constantly strive to maintain.

2015/16

It has been a busy few years and so we view the next year primarily as a time for allowing all the new facilities and features to embed and establish.

However, we do hope to begin an exciting new project establishing a Jeskyns Community Orchard Management group and project. We have 3000 traditional variety apples, pears, plums, cherries, cobnuts and walnuts growing at Jeskyns. They are a very special collection and an important demonstration of our country's fruit growing heritage. It is important that we safeguard them for the future.. Therefore over the next year we will be working in partnership with the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) to set up this very special project which will be kick started on the 26th and 27th of September with a two day Jeskyns Orchard festival.

**CADs**

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

In May 2014 the society produced a programme of two one act plays. The first play “Mrs Noah” by David Wilson dealt with the relationship between Noah and his wife during the construction of the Ark and gave an opportunity for CADS younger members to take to the stage.

The second play “Acting – It’s not Plumbing” by Cheryl Barrett focused on the interaction between a group of Adult Education students attending a drama class in the local village hall.

The November Production, a full length comedy, “A Very Roman Family” ( in a similar style to “Up Pompeii” was written and produced by CADS Chairman, Roger Hodge, every performance being well received by the audience.

Looking forward to May this year, CADS next production is a Murder Mystery with supper. Written by Chris Martin it is entitled “Who Killed the Director” In view of the popularity of this type of evening, there will be four performances from Wednesday 20th to Saturday23rd May.

Tickets costing £12 and including supper will be on sale from the end of this week from the Box Office 07785 182 319.

CADS enjoy local support and appreciate rehearsing and performing and the recently redecorated Meadow Room.

**Gardeners Society**

The Cobham Gardeners’ Society, originally named ‘Meadow Room Cottage Gardeners Association’ is arguably one of the oldest clubs in Cobham. We have a ‘Schedule’, the Society diary, dated 1904 which shows a committee member at that time to be a Miss C Stevens; one of the three Stevens sisters who financed the building of the Meadow Room in 1898. There are also records of the Society from the Rochester Journal and Gravesend Reporter dating back to 1901.

Membership of the Gardeners’ Society is increasing and currently is approaching 80 and we have increasing numbers of children exhibiting at the shows. The village school has participated as have the Cobham Brownies. Currently the Society is helping the Sole Street railway station ticket office lady, Jan, organise gardening sessions to return the station and surrounds to its previous award winning standard. We actively advertise across the Borough by poster, local press and Facebook.

As with all organisations our costs, Third Party Insurance, cost of speakers and Judges and the hire of the Meadow Room, are rising annually but we have maintained the current subscription fee of £8 for the last several years. For that small amount members are entertained, for free, with four expert speaker talks, free access to three Flower and Vegetable Shows, affiliation and free advice from the Royal Horticultural Society and Kent Federation of Horticultural Societies not to mention excellent discounts at local plant nurseries, and a Christmas Get Together – so there is even a party thrown in for free! ***How can anyone living in Sole Street and Cobham afford not to be a member!***

One new member has commented, ‘How do you do everything for only £8’? The simple answer is by the excellent work of our committee. 8 people work hard at organising the shows, raffles, selling teas and coffees and we now have organised regular, professional quality, plant sales at all Shows. In addition the membership offer time and help.

Cobham Gardeners’ Society is flourishing and growing, we aim to be at the Parish Assembly in 2115 with a membership exceeding 100, but the fee may have increased by then.

Mike Shipway

Chair – Cobham Gardeners’ Society

www.cobhamgardeners.weebly.com

**Any other Business**

As there was no other business, Cllr Rowe concluded the meeting by posing the question ‘Has it all been worth it?’ He was of course referring to his time spent on the Parish Council. He ran through some of the major developments that Cobham and Sole Street have seen over the years, and was pleased to be able to say that Sole Street had managed to resist any major development over the past 40 years. He also mentioned many of the successes that the Parish Council had achieved over the years, including footpaths, particularly what was achieved in the Street, Cobham.

Cllr Rowe reminded those present that there were still vacancies on the Parish Council for anyone who wanted to represent our ‘5\* village’ as a Parish Councillor!

Finally, Alan Holland thanked Cllr Rowe on behalf of the parishioners, for all his work within the village.

Cllr Rowe said he was proud that the Parish Council always worked as a team and was non-political.

Cllr Rowe closed the meeting at 8.55pm.