



Supplement for:

COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 19 JULY 2023

**Agenda No      Item**

6.      **Questions by Members**

Written responses to questions raised by Members are included within the supplement.

Members are entitled to ask a supplementary question at the meeting if desired.

7.      **Recommendations from the Executive**

The updated Recommendations from the Executive, to Council (Annex B), and supporting information relating to the Combe Village Design Statement (VDS), Annex C, are included within the supplement.

8.      **Appointment of Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer)**

The minutes of the Performance and Appointments Committee, held on Monday 17 July 2023, are included within the supplement (Annex B).



## Members Questions & Responses for WODC Full Council – 19 July 2023

Question	Raised By	Executive Member / Lead Officer	Response
<p>For some time, it has been the belief that both the play area and recreation ground on Raleigh Crescent would be transferred to Witney Town Council. It is disappointing that only the play area has been transferred. There is a significant amount of Section 106 Money from the Windrush Place development which is designated for an “Offsite MUGA” and the current location of the basketball court and green shelters would be ideal.</p> <p>Enabling Witney Town Council to undertake a design and build procurement would mean that our young people in West Witney would have a new fantastic outdoor space built reasonably quickly. Now that West Oxfordshire District Council have not transferred the land, what are the plans to procure a MUGA for Raleigh Crescent?</p>	<p>Cllr Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West.</p>	<p>Cllr Joy Aitman - Executive Member, Stronger Healthy Communities / Andrew Turner</p>	<p>Officers meet with Officers from Witney Town Council every month to monitor progress transferring playgrounds and sports facilities to the Town Council as well as using s.106 funding to deliver new facilities like the proposed MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) in West Witney.</p> <p>Because of the nature of the s.106 agreement for the proposed MUGA, Officers from the District and Town Council are working together to deliver this facility. The intention is for West Oxfordshire District Council to transfer the land of the proposed MUGA to Witney Town Council in the future.</p>

<p>Can the Executive portfolio holder for Tourism (Visitor Economy) please update the Council as to what progress is being made to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill's birth in November 2024?</p>	<p>Cllr Julian Cooper - Liberal Democrats, Woodstock and Bladon</p>	<p>Cllr Duncan Enright - Deputy Leader of the Council &amp; Executive Member, Economic Development / Chris Jackson.</p>	<p>As of yet, we are not aware of any plans to commemorate the anniversary locally or nationally.</p> <p>Blenheim Palace have indicated that they intend to run related activity - though as yet no information is available.</p> <p>The Tourism and/or Communications Teams will promote any relevant events.</p>
<p>The Town Centre office has been closed since May with no indication displayed on the window as to when the office is reopening. Please can you tell me the reopening date?, and in the meantime, what provision is being made for residents who do not have access to the internet and need to speak to an officer in customer service face to face?</p>	<p>Cllr Jane Doughty - Conservative, Witney West</p>	<p>Cllr Alaric Smith - Executive Member, Leisure and Major Projects / Lisa Cresswell.</p>	<p>Customer Services have relocated to Woodgreen whilst the work is being carried out at Welch Way, and the team are available to speak to customers face to face, do scanning of evidence/documents, collect recycling containers and provide similar services.</p> <p>Customer Services are providing the same services as at Welch Way, so there has not been any impact on the customer other than needing to visit a different location. There is a poster in the window at Welch Way advising customers that Customer Services are currently based at Woodgreen, or alternatively to telephone Customer Services to obtain help over the telephone.</p> <p>A reopening date will be made available to residents and councillors around the time of the Full Council meeting.</p>

<p>The District Council owned Kilkenny Country Park is still closed to the public. Many people used to travel to this park and it had a fantastic reputation as a great destination to visit. This has very quickly changed and is disappointing that after several site visits by officers and members, the park is still out of use. Can you give a date for when the repairs will be carried out?</p>	<p>Cllr Martin McBride - Conservative, Carterton North East</p>	<p>Cllr Joy Aitman - Executive Member, Stronger Healthy Communities / Bill Oddy.</p>	<p>Kilkenny Country Park in the Parish of Brize Norton has never been closed. An estimated 100,000 people visit the play park in the Country Park every year. A press release was published on 5 July 2023 updating Members and the Community that the Executive has committed over £80,000 of Section 106 funding for improving the play park with new equipment and the refurbishment of some of the existing apparatus.</p>
<p>Carterton has suffered with many streets not having their bins collected. This has gone on for four consecutive weeks. Why has this problem gone on for so many weeks, and what action are you taking to improve the service?</p>	<p>Cllr Michele Mead - Conservative, Carterton South</p>	<p>Cllr Lidia Arciszewska - Executive Member, Environment / Scott Williams.</p>	<p>The overall performance of the waste collection service remains very high with over 99% of household bins being collected when they are scheduled. The current collection vehicles are in the final stages of their usable life, which is leading to increased numbers of vehicle breakdowns. When this happens collection crews in the surrounding area are sent in to assist, but it's not always possible to make all of the collections on the scheduled day due to vehicle capacity and HGV driving hour restrictions - This leads to them being delayed. There has been increased oversight by the management team who recognise the issues and there were fewer service failures last week. The increased monitoring will continue.</p>

<p>With regards to the requirement for Voter ID at last May's elections, please could the Leader of the Council provide any data obtained on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number and age profile of voters who were turned away from polling booths because they had not brought the appropriate ID with them?;</li> <li>• The proportion of those turned away who subsequently returned to vote with their ID?;</li> <li>• The number of polling stations where WODC employed somebody to address residents before they reached the polling area asking whether they had the necessary ID?;</li> <li>• How many people were turned away by these greeters before being formally registered as being without the required ID?</li> </ul>	<p>Cllr Hugo Ashton - Liberal Democrats, Burford.</p>	<p>Cllr Andy Graham - Leader of the Council / Sharon Ellison.</p>	<p>54 electors applied for a ballot paper and were initially refused, 35 of these electors later returned with accepted ID and were issued with a ballot paper. The Returning Officer is not required to record age profiles of voters, either in the polling station or by way of 'greeters'.</p> <p>The proportion of those initially turned away, who subsequently returned to vote with their ID, was 64.8%.</p> <p>The Returning Officer employed 26 additional staff members to 'greet' voters. These included all multi stations and those with a greater proportion of electors.</p> <p>The Returning Officer is not required to record the number of voters turned away by the polling station 'greeter' and therefore no information is available in this regard.</p>
---	---	---	---

## Annex A – Updated Recommendations from Executive to Council.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
21 June 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recommend that Council be invited to formally adopt the final version of the West Oxfordshire District Council Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).</li> </ol>
21 June 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Letting at Marriott's Walk, Witney.</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Recommend that Council amend the delegation arrangements to give authority to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member for Economic Development to approve future lettings at Marriott's Walk.</li> </ol>
12 July 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Financial Performance Report 2022/23 Year End (Q4).</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Recommend to Council to approve the carry forward of the Capital Budget of £2,372,557;</li> <li>4. Recommend to Council to approve the transfers to and between earmarked reserves as detailed in the report, and to include an additional adjustment from the bad debt provision of £670,207 to be placed in a budget deficit smoothing reserve as explained by the Chief Finance Officer for reasons set out at the meeting.</li> </ol>

12 July 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Combe Village Design Statement.</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <p>5. Recommend to Council to formally adopt the final version of the Combe Village Design Statement as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).</p>
12 July 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Commercial Solar Photovoltaic Installations on Council Estate.</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <p>6. Recommend to Council to agree to proceed with investment in roof mounted solar PV based on the business cases in the Executive report.</p> <p>7. Recommend to Council to agree that funding for contingency costs of £27,634 is approved, with delegation to the Section 151 Officer for expenditure of contingency subject to the business case still being viable or expenditure being unavoidable due to structural condition of the building.</p>
12 July 2023	Executive	<p><a href="#">Funding for Landlord's Works and Approval of New Lease's at Investment Property in Cumnor.</a></p> <p>Executive Resolved to:</p> <p>8. Recommend to Council to add £125,000 to the Capital Programme for this item to be financed from the Property Improvement and Incentive Reserve.</p>



**West Oxfordshire District Council  
Combe Village Design Statement  
Consultation Summary Report**

**June 2023**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A draft Village Design Statement (VDS) has been prepared by residents of Combe parish, under the auspices of the Parish Council. The purpose of the VDS is to *'provide design guidelines that can help to shape any future development so that it blends in with Combe's distinctive rural landscape and heritage'*.
- 1.2 The VDS underwent initial public consultation in 2019/2020 and was submitted to the District Council in November 2021.
- 1.3 The Council published the draft VDS for a further 6-week period of public consultation between Friday 3 February – Friday 17 March 2023.
- 1.4 The main purpose of this consultation summary report is to provide an overview of the February/March 2023 consultation: who was consulted; the main issues raised by respondents; and how those issues have been addressed in the final proposed adoption version of the SPD.
- 1.5 The responses received will now be considered and a view taken on whether the VDS should be formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and carry the weight as a 'material planning consideration' for determining planning applications within the Parish of Combe. If the VDS is taken forward for formal adoption as a SPD, this is likely to take place in July 2023.

## 2. Pre-submission consultation

- 2.1 As a community-led planning document, with the aim of reflecting the views of all local residents, the production of the VDS involved an extensive process of consultation and engagement with those living and working in the parish of Combe.
- 2.2 The first step in the process was to find out what residents felt about the character of Combe, what makes it special, and what priorities people have for the future. The consultation began with informal discussions and activities across the village, and ended with a household questionnaire survey. In June 2020 the Parish Council published a summary report of the findings from this six-month exercise which took place over the summer and autumn of 2019.
- 2.3 Appendix 1 sets out the summary report (which is also available on both the Parish Council and the West Oxfordshire District Council websites: <https://combec.org/2021/02/24/vds/> and <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/e04jzwsd/combe-vds-consultation-summary-report.pdf>)

2.4 The findings from the public consultation work fed into the draft VDS, including three main messages:

*'People told us that they loved the wide-open views across the countryside, the wooded approaches to the village, river walks, the dark night skies, and the generally well-kept appearance of Combe. The church, the stone cottages, the village green with its oak trees, and the traditional Cotswold buildings at the heart of the village stood out as particularly special.*

*One of the clearest messages from the findings was how much people value, and wish to protect, green open spaces within the village. This included not only the larger green areas, such as the village greens, Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, the church yard etc., but also the smaller spaces and verges that make up the open character of our village and provide a haven for wildlife. This links closely with people's growing concerns about protecting the countryside, the river and green spaces for the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity.*

*Residents were less happy with the impact of traffic and parked cars on the village's appearance. Overall, there was support for traffic calming measures. Respondents were realistic about the possibility of future housing development, but if this happens, most people would prefer affordable housing, built on a small scale, and in sympathy with the existing character of the village. The preservation of hedges and traditional dry-stone walls was seen as integral to the distinctive character of the parish.'*

### **3. Submission draft consultation**

3.1 The VDS was finalised in November 2021 and submitted to the District Council for consideration, with the Parish Council seeking a view on whether it would be possible for the VDS to be formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

3.2 Following internal consultation and positive feedback, the VDS was considered by the District Council's Cabinet on 12 October 2022 who agreed for the document to be published for public consultation. As part of the formal process, and in accordance with the District Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), a statutory 6-week period of consultation took place (3 February – 17 March 2023), involving the notification of a range of stakeholders and making the document available online and at 15 deposit locations at local council offices and libraries.

3.4 In response, consultation responses were received from eight organisations and individuals as follows:

- Malcolm Axtell

- Rosalind Kent
- The Coal Authority
- Wootton Parish Council
- Canal & River Trust
- Aidan Coates
- Sport England
- Historic England

3.5 Attached at Appendix 2 is a schedule of the comments received. These comments were passed on to Combe Parish Council and the second column of the schedule sets out how they were taken into account in preparing the final proposed adoption version of the VDS. . The final column in the schedule adds relevant District Council observations.

**Appendix 1 – village consultation and questionnaire survey findings - draft Combe Village Design Statement – June 2020**

# COMBE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS)

## VILLAGE CONSULTATION AND QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FINDINGS



**Steering group:**

Deborah Phillips (898627), Paul Coffey, Jen Hurst, Margaret Moore, Alan Revell, Julia Sharpe, Elena Softley.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### **Why do we need a Village Design Statement?**

Given potential threats to Combe from increasing development in West Oxfordshire, the Parish Council decided to embark upon writing a Village Design Statement (VDS). A VDS is a community-led planning document that seeks to protect and enhance the visual character of a village and its surroundings. This is achieved by devising a set of design principles that will guide future planning decisions. A VDS aims to reflect the views of all local residents.

### **This report**

The first step in this process has been to consult widely with residents to find out what they feel about the character of Combe, what makes it special, and what priorities people have for the future. This report gives a summary of the findings from a six-month period of consultation over the summer and autumn of 2019.

The consultation began with informal discussions and activities across the village, and ended with a household questionnaire survey. Over half (53 per cent) of the households in Combe responded to the survey, giving us a total of 169 questionnaires. We heard from people across different age-groups living in all areas of Combe.

### **What's next?**

The VDS Steering Group is working with West Oxfordshire District Council planners to come up with planning design principles that reflect the values and priorities of Combe residents based on these findings. These principles will be incorporated into a formal planning document.

### **Acknowledgements**

A big thank you to everyone who participated in the consultation process. We enjoyed talking to people of all ages at the cricket match barbeques held at the recreation ground, to children at Combe School, and to those walking the parish boundaries of Combe - thank you to Jonathan Ford for leading the walks and to David O'Brien for a photographic display in the Reading Room. We are also very grateful to everyone who completed the household survey and to the team of volunteers who helped to distribute and collect the questionnaires.

June 2020

## 2. CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF COMBE



**What words did residents use to describe Combe in the questionnaire?**

*peaceful*

*unspoilt*

*quintessential Cotswold village*

*picturesque*

*open spaces*

*outstanding natural beauty*

*beautiful*

*delightful*

*pretty*

*bucolic*

*charming*

*a gem*



### **How would residents describe Combe to someone who didn't know it?**

*The best of English country living. Friendly, maintained with love and pride, beautiful, sleepy (on the surface), quiet.*

*[Combe is] high above the Evenlode valley, so there are lovely views – rural, fields. Many walks towards Blenheim. Lovely river and river views. Quiet, dark and peaceful. Not too big a village.*

*Rural village in Cotswold stone, around a village green. Steep sided river valley with flat meadows to the south of the parish. Intensive arable large fields to north of parish.*

*Beautiful small Cotswold village..... set in beautiful countryside surrounded by well managed farm land and woodland.*

*Small old English Cotswold village with a medieval church and cricket grounds in the centre and quaint cottages surrounded by farmland and countryside.*

*It is a real English village wrapped inside beautiful scenery.*

### **What do people feel contributes most to the appearance and character of Combe?**

*The village green, the playfield/sports ground, the Cock Inn, the Reading Room, the way most homeowners take pride in the appearance of their homes and gardens, the spaciousness of the village (not built up), the history of the village with its old houses and buildings, the fact that it's so close to Blenheim.*

*The mixture of houses, old and new, and how they seem to fit together. The open airy feel of the village. Hearing the trains in the distance, the planes flying overhead, the church clock and bells, the cricket in the summer, and the football in the winter.*

### **What did young people say about Combe?**

*The fields are lovely. It wouldn't be Combe without footpaths and endless fields. The wildlife in Combe plays a big role in its friendly and caring reputation ... [age 13]*

*Combe is nice, but I don't want them to build all over it. [age 12]*

*I love the surrounding unspoilt countryside, traditional buildings and the field in the middle (Alma Grove). [age 18]*

### 3. FINDINGS - WHAT DO PEOPLE VALUE ABOUT COMBE?

The people of Combe told us that they value the following aspects of Combe's character and appearance, and would like to see them preserved and/or enhanced.

#### LANDSCAPE SETTING

##### ***Rural vistas***

There was a strong desire to retain and preserve the rural integrity of the village and the surrounding landscape, with its open, uninterrupted views across the countryside. Views across the fields towards Blenheim and Long Hanborough, and across the Evenlode Valley, were particularly valued. This is captured in a quote from one survey respondent:

*[I like] the views across the playing field towards the church clock tower, with the green of the countryside beyond, together with the wide endless view of the sky.*

##### ***Approaches to the village***

The wooded approaches to the village, together with the surrounding fields, were highlighted as important to the rural feel of the village and its special character. One participant during our informal consultations described the approaches as a '*portal into paradise*' and another referred to them as '*setting the scene*' for the village.

##### ***Settlement pattern***

People would like to minimise settlement expansion in order to preserve the separate rural identity of Combe. Recurring comments highlighted the fate of surrounding villages (e.g. Stonesfield, Long Hanborough and Church Hanborough) that have succumbed to rapid development.

Survey respondents commented:

*It would be nice if Combe could avoid becoming part of the extended conurbation around Oxford - a fate rapidly overtaking places like Church Hanborough.*

*Combe is a beautiful village, largely unchanged in visual character over many decades, yet still very much a living village. The most important thing is that it doesn't lose the glorious ring of rolling fields and woodlands that surround it. And that it does not succumb to the urban/suburban creep that is changing the nature of so many surrounding villages.*

##### ***River and river walks***

The river, river valley walks and historic water meadows were valued by all age-groups.

##### ***Landscape and wildlife/biodiversity***

There was an interest in retaining and managing copses, hedgerows and field margins, using native species. This was valued for appearance and biodiversity (see section on biodiversity).

***Footpaths through the surrounding countryside***

People wanted to preserve, maintain and, where possible, extend the network of footpaths.

***Dark night skies***

With very few exceptions, people appreciated the dark skies of Combe and did not wish to see street lighting.

***Proximity to Blenheim estate***

Residents of Combe value, and are sensitive to, the role of the Blenheim estate in the surrounding landscape. The management of the estate and farmland within the parish has implications for Combe in terms of landscape appearance, traffic flows, the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and potential future housing development.

**VILLAGE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE*****Old village heart, with village green***

The heart of the village is highly prized for its history, tranquility and spaciousness, and traditional features (e.g. stone cottages, village pumps, stone trough etc.). This historic heart is regarded as generally well-maintained and the key feature contributing to the appearance and character of Combe.

92 per cent of survey respondents (Table 1, appendix) thought that it was 'very important' to preserve the village green in the future. The Green was commonly described as the '*heart of the village*' and is spoken of with affection by many residents. Respondents told us that:

*Protecting the village green and other open spaces is central to the character of the village.*

*[The village green is] essential to the character of the village - a precious resource.*

*It is a space for community events and celebrations. This helps to build relationships, unity and a sense of belonging and identity. It also brings all generations together.*

***Rurality of the village***

Combe was described as a traditional, largely unspoilt, well-kept Cotswold village, comfortably integrated into its surrounding rural landscape. One person described it as '*nestling in the landscape*'. Another commented: '*It looks like it belongs in its landscape*'.

***Green open spaces within the village***

There is a widely held desire to preserve green spaces, such as the two village greens, Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, private gardens, allotments and the few remaining orchards within the village. People valued the proximity of grazing animals to the heart of the village (especially on Alma Grove field). Children emphasised the importance of nearby woods and open green spaces for the freedom to roam and play.

In answer to the question ‘What do you like best about the appearance of Combe?’, several respondents captured wider sentiments when they referred to:

*The beautiful green open spaces in the very heart of the village; the Green, Alma Grove field and the playing field. They are like green lungs.*

*The scattered nature of the village with fields, orchards and trees interspersed between groups of buildings.*

*The open, rural aspect at the centre of the village, with its large, usually animal occupied field, village green, playing fields and the undulating countryside beyond.*

### **Density of building**

The emphasis on the importance of green spaces within the village is consistent with the traditional character of Combe as a dispersed village settlement. The importance of this characteristic is captured in the following comment:

*It is important that in small villages such as Combe, infilling is really limited. The spaces that exist between areas of residential development are just as important as the buildings themselves in their contribution to the overall character of the village. They allow glimpses between spaces, views in and out of the village and enable the countryside and large trees to penetrate into the centre of the village. Areas such as the remnants of orchards, the village pound and allotments are all part of the historical character of the village and deserve to be retained.*

This, and other comments, indicate support for maintaining low densities of building. For example, one person commented:

*Combe is the perfect balance between old buildings and newer built ones in the traditional style. It is not over dense, with green spaces and the preservation of the ‘building line’ along the main roads, avoiding a ‘closed-in’ feeling.*

### **Iconic views within the village**

Respondents cited a wide range of favourite views, both within the village and across the surrounding countryside. Iconic views (in order of popularity) were:

- the view across the recreation ground towards the church (54 per cent of respondents mentioned this);
- the view from Akeman Street, across Alma Grove field, towards the church;
- views in all directions across the village green;
- the view along Church Walk.

### **Iconic buildings**

The church and church yard, the Reading Room, the pub, the Cotswold stone cottages, Church Walk cottages, buildings clustered around the historic village green, and other historic buildings (e.g. the old chapel/Hub, the old school building, Old Vicarage and Combe House) were singled out for their contribution to the distinctive character of Combe.

### ***Boundaries - dry stone walls and hedges***

The preservation of traditional boundary walls and hedges was seen as integral to the distinctive character of the parish. Table 1 (see appendix) indicates that 75 percent of survey respondents think that it is 'very important' to preserve Combe's stone walls for the future and a similar proportion (74 per cent) regard hedgerows as 'very important'.

One respondent described the special character of the boundaries:

*[I like] the mixture of stonewalls, hedges and boundaries and the different degree of colour they give through the seasons.*

### ***Tree cover***

Trees, especially the oaks in the centre of the village, are regarded as an important visual component of Combe's landscape. The cedar tree in the grounds of the Old Vicarage is greatly admired and is felt to be integral to the landscape of the historic village centre. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondents regarded protecting trees as 'very important' for Combe's appearance (Table 1) and for wildlife. As one respondent observed:

*Trees and hedgerows help keep our wildlife and add to the beauty of Combe.*

## **ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS**

### ***Traditional vernacular buildings***

The Cotswold stone cottages and other historic vernacular buildings in the centre of Combe are highly valued for their contribution to what makes Combe special. Some people also appreciated the good mix of old and newer housing in the village, although there were some examples of newer housing developments that were less well received.

### ***Materials***

Use of materials that complement existing buildings was favoured. Table 1 indicates that 65 percent of survey respondents think that it is 'very important' to build with traditional, or similar, building materials in the future. Only 6 per cent thought it was 'unimportant'. Some people were happy to see the use of more modern materials, if of high quality.

### ***Views on new development***

People were realistic about the need for more housing, but stressed the importance of affordability and sympathetic scale and design. It was felt that any future housing development should be:

- in character/sympathetic to the existing mix of housing and historical legacy of the village;
- of modest scale, to protect the rural appearance and feel of the village.

One recent development in particular was frequently cited for its inappropriate scale and style, whilst three new houses on Akeman Street were appreciated for their sensitive design.

Tables 2 and 3 (see appendix) indicate that two-thirds of the survey respondents felt that it was 'very important' that the scale and design of any new developments should blend in with the surrounding buildings, particularly in the case of 'in-filling'. It should also be noted that, given the above comments on the importance of green spaces and low-density building, the idea of 'in-filling' in Combe is unlikely to be popular.

Comments by one respondent summed up the feelings of many people on development:

*Villages such as Combe should be treated with sensitivity so as to keep that character, not as museum pieces, but as living villages that grow and expand in a sympathetic way, so that in years to come they still represent the history of our countryside and people.*

## **HIGHWAYS**

### ***Traffic***

Many people had observed an increase in the volume and speed of traffic in recent years. Just over half of the survey respondents (52 per cent) supported additional traffic calming measures, although there was ambivalence about the addition of more street furniture.

### ***Verges***

These were regarded as important for the visual appearance of Combe and as green spaces for wildlife. 62 per cent of survey respondents felt that it was 'very important' to preserve verges (Table 1).

### ***Parking***

Parking presents many challenges in the village, especially in its historic centre, where there is little off-street parking. This drew many adverse comments about the effect of parked cars on the appearance of the village and the destruction of grass verges in particular.

### ***Pavements and footpaths***

Just over one third (35 per cent) of respondents would like to see more designated pavements and footpaths. There were particular concerns about the absence of a safe path to Combe Halt. Others would like to see existing pavements and paths better maintained.

## **BIODIVERSITY**

Although no specific questions were asked about biodiversity during the public consultations, several biodiversity-related themes emerged during informal discussions and in the questionnaire survey responses. People expressed a wish to:

### ***Preserve open spaces for biodiversity***

This was seen to be important both within the village and in the surrounding countryside areas (see comments on verges above).

### **Protect the countryside**

References were made to the importance of trees, meadows, the river, field margins and hedgerows as eco-systems for biodiversity. Three-quarters of the questionnaire respondents thought it was 'very important' to preserve hedgerows and trees, both for the village's appearance and wildlife. Hedgerows were described '*as wildlife corridors*' and '*living barriers [that] provide home and protection and food to a diverse amount of wildlife*'.

Looking to the future, one survey respondent commented:

*It will be important to retain the green and semi-wild spaces in order to maintain the range of wildlife (birds and mammals) that are so much a part of the magic of the village.*

Younger residents showed particular concern for Combe's environmental wellbeing in their comments:

*The fields are lovely. It wouldn't be Combe without footpaths and endless fields. The wildlife in Combe plays a big role in its friendly and caring reputation. It would be nice to add information boards in the woods to explain the wildlife and what grows. [age 13]*

*The environment of Combe is of unrivalled importance in this modern age of climate change. [age 15]*

### **Enhance the river and river walks**

There was some concern over the loss of water quality in the Evenlode river following adverse media reports, and a desire to enhance both the quality of the river and river walks.

### **Restore lost habitats**

There was regret over certain habitat losses, particularly in areas of surrounding farmland. A few people favoured a policy of 'rewilding' and minimal trimming of verges.

### **Reduce lighting at night**

Although many praised Combe's dark night skies, there were some who would like to see lighting levels reduced further, both for reasons of appearance and nocturnal wildlife. The light pollution from LED lighting at Combe Halt was singled out for particular criticism, and some would also like to see people's domestic external lighting arrangements moderated.

In summary, these concerns fit with Blenheim Estate's stated policy commitment to enhancing the area's 'natural capital' (i.e. nature, with its social, economic and cultural benefits) and biodiversity. This is encapsulated in Blenheim's 'Land Strategy' (launched in 2019), which has implications for the evolving landscape in and around Combe.

## **CONCLUSION – WHAT WERE THE MAIN MESSAGES?**

People told us that they loved the wide-open views across the countryside, the wooded approaches to the village, river walks, the dark night skies, and the generally well-kept appearance of Combe. The church, the stone cottages, the village green with its oak trees, and the traditional Cotswold buildings at the heart of the village stood out as particularly special.

One of the clearest messages from the findings was how much people value, and wish to protect, green open spaces within the village. This included not only the larger green areas, such as the village greens, Alma Grove field, the recreation ground, the church yard etc., but also the smaller spaces and verges that make up the open character of our village and provide a haven for wildlife. This links closely with people's growing concerns about protecting the countryside, the river and green spaces for the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Residents were less happy with the impact of traffic and parked cars on the village's appearance. Overall, there was support for traffic calming measures. Respondents were realistic about the possibility of future housing development, but if this happens, most people would prefer affordable housing, built on a small scale, and in sympathy with the existing character of the village. The preservation of hedges and traditional dry-stone walls was seen as integral to the distinctive character of the parish.



## APPENDIX

**Table 1 Looking to the future, how important do you think it is to .....**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
Protect verges	62%	21%	12%	4%	1%
Protect the village green	92%	6%	2%	<1%	-
Preserve traditional stone walls	75%	19%	4%	1%	<1%
Protect hedgerows	74%	20%	5%	1%	<1%
Protect existing trees	74%	20%	5%	1%	<1%
Build with traditional, or similar, building materials	65%	19%	9%	6%	1%

### Which of these, if any, is the most important?

95 respondents picked out one of the above as particularly important to them, as follows:

Verges	9
Village green	48 - commonly described as the 'heart of the village'
Stone walls	2
Hedgerows	8
Existing trees	14
Traditional materials	14

**Table 2 Where new housing is built between existing houses (so called in-filling), how important do you feel it is that the new housing blends in with the surrounding houses in terms of (i) design and (ii) scale?**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
(i) Design	66%	20%	9%	4%	<1%
(ii) Scale	63%	22%	11%	4%	<1%

**Table 3 Where new housing is built at the edge of the village (so called linear development), how important do you feel it is that the new housing blends in with the surrounding houses in terms of (i) design and (ii) scale?**

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Unsure
(i) Design	66%	20%	9%	4%	<1%
(ii) Scale	60%	22%	11%	5%	1%

**Appendix 2 – consultation responses received in response to the draft Combe Village Design Statement – March 2023**

Name	Representation	Combe Parish Council response and amendments to the draft VDS	District Council Comment
Malcolm Axtell	<p>This is an impressive work which captures the essence of this special village environment. It emphasises the importance of appreciating and protecting the multitude of invaluable historic and natural features of a typical Cotswold area settlement which can so easily be threatened by unattractive and unwelcome development trends of today.</p> <p>This same study could equally apply to a large number of similar village locations throughout the WODC area and beyond.</p>		Support noted.
Rosalind Kent	<p>Any buildings built in Combe need to be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Net Zero construction</li> <li>2. South facing or larger windows on the south</li> <li>3. Photovoltaic panels on roofs.</li> <li>4. Generated electricity fed into a local grid, supplying local people first.</li> <li>5. Houses in small groups, not long rows.</li> <li>6. At least 50% affordable houses.</li> </ol>	<p>The revised draft VDS has been amended to include reference to the District Council’s Net Zero Carbon Toolkit on p.39, column 2, fourth bullet point; and again on p.41, Reference list, with link to the: <a href="https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/how-to-achieve-net-zero-carbon-homes/">https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/how-to-achieve-net-zero-carbon-homes/</a></p>	<p>The adopted Local Plan Policy H3 (Affordable housing) requires schemes of 11 or more homes to provide 50% as affordable housing on-site.</p>
Deb Roberts, Planning & Development	<p>As West Oxfordshire District Council lies outside the defined coalfield, the Coal Authority has no specific comments to make.</p>		<p>The Coal Authority is a non-departmental public body sponsored</p>

<p>Manager, The Coal Authority</p>			<p>by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. As a statutory consultee, the Coal Authority has a duty to respond to planning applications and development plans in order to protect the public and the environment in mining areas.</p>
<p>John Harwood Chair, Wootton Parish Council</p>	<p>Following the circulation of the draft Combe VDS by the Council and the invitation to comment, the consultation documents were discussed by Wootton Parish Council at its meeting on Monday 13 February.</p> <p>Village Design Statements are an important way in which local residents are able to exert some influence over building development in their local area. The Parish Council supports the adoption of VDSs, thanks Combe PC for taking the initiative and drafting one for their parish, and urges WODC both to approve the Combe VDS and encourage and help other parishes to develop their own Statements.</p>		<p>Support noted.</p>
<p>Jane Hennell, Area Planner, Canal &amp; River Trust</p>	<p>Based on the information available, the Trust has no comment to make on the design statement as we do not own or maintain any canals within the plan area.</p>		<p>The Canal &amp; River Trust is a statutory consultee in the Development Management process. It is a charity who looks after and brings life to 2000 miles of canals and rivers.</p>

Aidan Coates, local resident	<p>I would like to express support for the Combe Village Design Statement, agreeing with the content and thinking it is important for the feel of the village to be protected (particularly against aggressive developers).</p> <p>I would also like to be notified when the council has adopted the VDS as a supplementary planning document.</p>		<p>Support noted.</p> <p>A wide range of organisation are notified when a SPD is adopted, as are those who responded during the formal consultation period.</p>
Bob Sharples, Principal Planning Manager - South Team, Sport England	<p>I note that the village cricket pitch appears several times in the document, which highlights the importance of cricket to the village. The West Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy identifies Combe cricket club's facilities as in need of improvement and there is a requirement for some fixed lane cricket nets.</p> <p>The cricket nets, if provided, may benefit from limited sports lighting. Sport England would advise that these improvements are taken into consideration within the VDS and the parish council should weigh up the social and health benefits, in particular to young people, when any planning applications come forth.</p> <p>I would be happy to discuss my comments with the authors of the draft VDS if that was helpful.</p>		<p>Bob Sharples' contact details have been shared with Combe Parish Council.</p> <p>Sport England's comments have been passed on to the District Council's Leisure Team.</p> <p>Local Plan Policies EH2 (Landscape character) and EH8 (Environmental protection) address lighting.</p>
Guy Robinson, Historic Environment Planning Adviser, Development	As the Government's adviser on the historic environment, Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. We applaud the work done to draft the Village Design Statement, and offer a small number of comments below, which we hope are useful.	Thanks to Guy Robinson (Historic England) for the helpful comments.	Support noted.

<p>Advice – London and the South East Region, Historic England</p>	<p>Page 11: reference is made to the Blenheim Palace as a World Heritage Site. For completeness it should also be mentioned that area is designated as a Registered Park and Garden (GI). We suggest the following wording for consideration:</p> <p><u>“The panoramic view over the countryside from Combe Lodge Gate, and the remnants of ancient woodlands to the east and south of the parish, are highlighted as particularly special. In addition to its designation as a World Heritage Site, Blenheim Palace is also a Registered Park and Garden (GI).”</u></p> <p>Page 19: we suggest minor changes to the sentence that includes reference to “Historic England’s Listed Buildings” as follows:</p> <p>a) The phrase “Historic England’s Listed Buildings” could mistakenly imply that the Listed Buildings belong to Historic England in some way. So, we advise this reference is changed to the National Heritage List for England.</p> <p>b) We suggest adding the year which relates to the number of Listed Buildings, reflecting the fact that the ‘List’ changes over time.</p> <p>c) While protection (of significance) is important, designations also provide a stimulus for proposals, encouraging the design of a scheme to respond positively in a manner informed by that significance.</p> <p>Taking the above points together, we propose revised wording for consideration: <u>“Combe has 38 Listed Buildings on the National Heritage List for England (I’d suggest breaking this down in parenthesis in terms of the number of GI, GII* and GII and include the year this was checked). <del>entries in Historic England’s Listed Buildings, which Designated status</del> affords protection when development is proposed and is based on heritage significance.”</u></p> <p>Page 24: the text on green spaces and green infrastructure offers another opportunity to mention that Blenheim Palace is also a RPG i.e. “..., and the</p>	<p>All but one of the suggested amendments have been incorporated into the revised VDS on the pages indicated in the representation.</p> <p>The only exception is the insertion suggested for p11. It was felt that reference to the Blenheim Palace’s ‘Registered Park and Garden’ status did not contribute anything to an understanding of Combe’s iconic views. Reference is made on p.24 to Blenheim Palace’s designation as a Registered Park and Garden (GI), as suggested by Historic England.</p>	
--	---	--	--

	<p>backdrop of the dense woodlands of the Blenheim Palace Great Park to the north (<u>which is also a GI Registered Park and Garden</u>)”.</p> <p>Page 27: we anticipate it would be more helpful to state that Fern Cottage, Rose Cottage and End Cottage are highlighted in their List entries by Historic England as a group of dwellings that form an integral part of the historic centre of the village and strongly define Combe’s vernacular tradition. “By Historic England” could be deleted if space is tight and to avoid re-setting the page.</p> <p>Pages 32-35: we welcome the section on the public realm. As the Council may know, a source of relevant advice on development in the public realm is ‘Streets for All’. The Village Design Statement could include a reference to this advice, if appropriate: <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/streets-for-all/">https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/streets-for-all/</a></p> <p>Page 34: reference is made to further cabling being “placed under ground”. We acknowledge the importance of avoiding further “blight” as referenced in the draft VDS and simply would flag the potential to impact on the historic environment below ground too, if further cabling were proposed in an area of archaeological potential. This may merit a minor tweak such as: “Further cabling should be placed under ground, <u>where appropriate</u>”. If further advice is needed on this matter, we would suggest liaison with the Council’s archaeological adviser.</p> <p>Page 37: for completeness, we suggest reference is made also to the landscape’s contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets e.g. adding a new bullet such as: “New development should respond sensitively to nearby designated heritage assets, avoiding unacceptable harm to their significance (and taking into account the contribution to that significance made by their setting)”.</p> <p>Page 37: it would strengthen the section on the historic core to refer to the village’s designated and non-designated heritage assets e.g.</p>		
--	---	--	--

	<p>“Development within the Conservation Area should adhere to the pattern and character of existing settlement, and respect the historic heart of Combe <u>and conserve or enhance the village’s heritage assets</u>”.</p> <p>This response is based on the information provided by you in the document dated November 2021 and, for the avoidance of doubt, does not affect our obligation to advise you on, and potentially object to any specific development proposal which may subsequently arise from this or later versions of the Design Statement which is the subject to consultation, and which may have adverse effects on the environment.</p> <p>If you have any queries about any of the matters raised above or would like to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.</p>		
--	---	--	--



## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Performance and Appointments Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB at 9.00am on **Monday, 17 July 2023.**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham (Chair), Duncan Enright (Vice-Chair), Dan Levy, Michele Mead and Liam Walker.

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Kathryn Dowell (HR Business Partner).

Other Councillors in attendance: Nil.

#### **20 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

There were no Apologies for Absence from Members of the Committee.

Councillor Duncan Enright arrived at 9.25am.

#### **21 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest received by Members of the Committee.

#### **22 Matters Exempt from Publication**

Councillor Andy Graham, Chair of the Committee, proposed that the Committee agree to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining items of business. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote and agreed unanimously by the Committee.

The Committee **Resolved** in accordance with the provisions in Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to:

1. Exclude the press and public from the meeting in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to candidates for interview as defined in Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

#### **23 Selection of a Preferred Candidate for the Role of Director of Finance**

Kathryn Dowell, HR Business Partner, gave the Committee a detailed and in-depth overview of the prior selection process, before highlighting the skills and attributes that the Subject Candidate (SC) brought to both the selection process and Committee interview. The HR Business partner gave the Committee a further overview of the behavioural characteristics that the SC showed during an exercise carried out during the main selection process.

In debate, the Committee discussed at length the interview undertaken, and also the skills & characteristics the SC brought to the interview, including strong decision making skills, respect and competence. The Committee also made reference to the SC's local knowledge having worked within the Local Government sector previously in Oxfordshire.

## Performance and Appointments Committee

17/July2023

The Committee also noted the time taken by the SC to prepare a presentation for the Committee with only 2 days' notice from the prior interview.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed that the SC be recommended to Council for appointment, and authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to have oversight of the remainder of the appointment process. This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead, was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Agree the selection of the Subject Candidate for the post of Director of Finance.
2. Delegate the making of a conditional offer and the agreement of all terms and conditions, to the Chief Executive Officer, subject to confirmation within a time period set by the Monitoring Officer that no member of the Executive has an objection to the proposed appointment, or the Performance and Appointments Committee being satisfied that any objection is not material or well-founded;

And **Resolved** to Recommend to Council to:

3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Performance and Appointments Committee, to appoint Madhu Richards, to the role of Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), subject to two references, medical clearance and eligibility check (BPSS check) in accordance with the Council's policies;
4. Agree that the appointment will be made on a salary of up to £85,000 per annum plus pending pay award;
5. Agree the appointment commences on a date to be mutually agreed between the Chief Executive and the successful candidate;
6. Confirm the appointment of an Interim Director of Finance, James Howse, who will undertake the role of Section 151 Officer, until the appointed, permanent Director of Finance is able to take up post.

## 24 Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the date of the next meeting on Friday 13 October 2023 at 2.00pm, to conduct the Chief Executive's appraisal.

The Meeting closed at 11.00 am

CHAIR