



Annual Report

October 2023 to September 2024



View East from the Discovery Centre

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

Introduction

Our work has continued and in particular the community garden around the Discovery Centre is increasingly well established and more people have learned about the park's beauty.



The southern border of the car park in June

Events

Presentation to Councillors and Council Officers: January 27

A number of councillors in both Hastings and Rother are very active in their support of the park, but we wanted to offer others a chance to learn about the park at a special meeting. At the meeting Julie Willard provided information about Friends of Combe Valley, Emma Ramsden explained the role of Groundwork (GW) as agents of the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC (CIC) and her role as their manager in the park, Pete Hunnisett described the different habitats of the Combe Valley Park and Jamie Parsons outlined the project of Sussex Wildlife Trust to clear back the reed beds.

The Great Big Green Week – June 9

In June we had our third Great Big Green event, which increased awareness of the Park's role as a green space and its importance in developing a diverse and healthy environment, with an emphasis on preventing further climate change.



The weather was dry but windy and mainly sunny, so stalls were set up outside, with a variety of activities and games. Inside the Discovery Centre there was an excellent exhibition of wildlife photographs and documents about the Country Park plus a display of recipes for swapping and copying.

There was a good attendance with about 80 visitors and around 20 children as well as 30 people linked to stalls and 14 volunteers from the Friends: not forgetting 6 Morris dancers plus an accordionist



Open day on September 29



This successful open day was a chance to welcome people to the Discovery Centre and the park generally, to show-case what we do, encourage people to join the Friends and become volunteers in the park. About 50 people attended and we gained 7 new members, with many offering to volunteer.

Cliff with his hand made rake and on the right the exhibition inside the Discovery Centre



Nature Detectives

Emma Ramsden, who is employed by Groundwork South (GW) on behalf of the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC (the CIC) continued to provide sessions in the park for families, which she started through the Friends in the summer of 2021. In total 9 Nature Detectives days have been delivered this year, 5 with GW in collaboration with FCV and 4 by GW as stand-alone events or incorporated in the Big Green Day and the Open Day.



97 children and 67 adults have participated meaning that 164 people have engaged in these sessions in 2024.

Sessions have included nature discovery both in the Combe Valley Community Garden and on the beach at Glyne Gap. They have also included gardening for wildlife, simple herb growing and plenty of nature and seasonally focused arts and

crafts.

Ten FCV volunteers have contributed their time and effort to these sessions over the year giving 64 volunteer hours to these sessions.



Social Evenings

In January 2024 Julie Willard arranged a social evening to give people connected to the park an opportunity to get together, to relax - natter, do craft work and play board games. This has become a regular feature now the fourth Wednesday of the month and provides an informal venue for members and subscribers to get together.



Conservation work

This has been a very productive year for the FCV Volunteers, along with the support of the CIC, working alongside (GW) and ably assisted by corporate volunteers from Hastings Direct.

Highlights include:

The Community Garden

Planting of new mixed native hedging around the Community Garden, including stripping off turf and erecting stock fencing to offer protection. Subsequent mulching, weeding, watering and on-going care has enabled the whips to get established and survive the dry summer period. Hedge trees have been planted within the hedge line, with margins left uncut to help create corridors, promote bio-diversity and provide cover for small mammals and overwintering for invertebrates.



The tree line between the middle and third tier has been extended by planting additional native trees, further improving the provision of wildlife corridors. The installation of protective cages, mulching and an intensive watering programme enabled the trees to get well established through the dry summer period.

Natural meadow expansion on the newly extended Community Garden area has been encouraged and managed with the inclusion of mown winding pathways to enable visitors to appreciate the flora and fauna with minimal disturbance. An on-going meadow management plan will see rotational mowing, with “cut and clear” operations to ensure a mixed habitat is maintained whilst wildflower colonisation is promoted.

The Native Tree Nursery has been established within the Community Garden space. This area has been enclosed by stock fencing and a perimeter hedge, to provide protection and shelter for the trees, along with more diversity of habitat. The fence posts are already being adopted as perches for several species of birds.

The Friends Meadow is an on-going project which goes from strength to strength, the “cut and clear” mowing management scheme is aiding the establishment of a diversely populated meadow space, again with mown pathways to enable visitors to appreciate the space up close with minimal disturbance. Further yellow rattle seed has been dispersed to help weaken the grass and further encourage wild flower growth.



We have seen a marked increase in the numbers of insects, small mammals, feeding birds and hunting raptors within the Community Garden Space.

Elsewhere in the Park

The Haven Copse and Combe Hedge at the eastern edge of tier three is maintained with weeding, “cut and clear” of the surrounding grass, replacement of saplings, mulching and watering. Although watering at this more remote location present logistical problems.

Work continues to manage Ash Die Back within the “Long Wood”. Periodically wind felled trees are safely lowered to the ground and local use is made of the timber within the wood as wildlife habitat piles and towers.

On-going park maintenance projects include the cutting up and removal of fallen trees on the dismantled railway, cutting up and removal of a fallen tree in the Gorringe, clearing and cutting back vegetation on footpaths, litter picks around the park and along the beach and a major clean up after an incursion by travellers, along with repairs to damaged raised beds. A group of gardeners have repaired, painted and planted up the original raised beds with a selection of flowers and herbs.

Hastings Direct volunteers joined the Friends to further extend the elevated pathway (Platform One), to enable walkers to navigate around a normally flooded section of the Dismantled Railway. Other volunteers from Hastings Direct have assisted in the digging out of the meadow/car park pathway.



Signs for the park

New park signage has been designed and purchased. The replacement of signs at various entrances to the park is being undertaken by the Friends, with just 5 left for installation. A survey is also on-going to record the condition of the existing marker posts within the park, with a view to renovating / replacing them in due course.



Furniture

The Friends have constructed and erected five new rustic benches from locally coppiced sweet chestnut. These are located throughout the Community Garden and provide a number of very



welcome places for visitors to rest a while to appreciate the beauty of the space.



Booklets



A successful application was made to the Aviva Wild Isles Fund for funding to create and publish three booklets about the flora and fauna of the park, to be given free to visitors to the park. The scheme involved crowdfunding for the project with Aviva match funding the amounts raised. East Sussex County Council also supported the project with similar match funding. 26 members of the public supported the project, raising just under £600, which with money from ESCC and Aviva took the total to just under £2000.

The first booklet on butterfly and moth species was published in August, with the other two on birds and insects were published in November. The booklets were written by Pete Hunnisett who used his photos to illustrate the text and designed by Karl Beaney.

Rainwater harvesting

In August East Sussex County Council gave us a grant to use the roof of the storage container to harvest rainwater. The design and installation of a pitched roof was started in September and has been completed since then.



Future plans

On-going and future projects by the Friends include

- Along the western edge of the Friends Meadow erection of several bays of sweet chestnut post and rail fencing in the traditional Sussex style, to create a feature.
- Between the meadow and car park continuing the pathway to enable safer movement for visitors.
- The grass area around the picnic benches in front of the Discovery Centre is to be reinforced with a rubber grid through which the grass can grow.
- In the work area to the side of the Friends storage container installing a removable shelter to provide protection from rain and sun.
- Installing water containers at Eastern end of Tier Three for localised water supply to maintain Haven Copse and Combe Hedge
- To create a vehicle entrance to tier two from the Freshfields car park to make the community garden vehicle free, whilst maintaining access for ambulance, contractor and Environment Agency vehicles.

Warden service

The warden service has continued more informally since there are fewer incidents. As has been noted in previous reports the presence of the wardens helps contribute to the peace of the park.



Making caterpillars on an open day

Volunteers

The activities outlined in this report rely on volunteers and their contribution is substantial. The following are the totals, from our records and estimates of time spent on:

- i. Conservation work about 2,200 hours, including the regular Thursday mornings and numerous other tasks around the park
- ii. Other events – about 500 hours over the events set out above, the social evenings and events in partnership with GWS for the CIC
- iii. Wardens – this has not been formally recorded: currently 6 wardens walk regularly in the park and deal, as appropriate, with any information received about the park.
- iv. Administration, including dealing with calls about security and planning issues, as well as design help from Karl amounts to about 1,200 hours during the year.

Overall about 4,100 hours during the year, with a comparatively small band of volunteers, now numbering around 50 and we continue to welcome new volunteers and all their help is much appreciated.



In addition, Hastings Direct has sent several teams of volunteers over the year to help in the park, and their help is much appreciated.

We were delighted that Julie Willard's substantial contribution to our work was recognised with her award as a volunteer of the year by Hastings Voluntary Action at their AGM in November 2023.

Like any army of any worth, the Friends march on their stomachs. The volunteers are very appreciative of the refreshments provided after the Thursday Volunteering sessions. All manner of culinary delights are served up by Teresa, to whom many thanks are due.

Members and Subscribers

During the year as we got used to using Mailchimp, we have divided our members into subscribers, who have not paid a subscription during the current year and members, who have paid. We have 101 subscribers, of whom 3 do not have email addresses, so contact is less regular and 74 members.

We do not want to exclude anyone because they do not have the means to contribute, so we accept £1 a year as the minimum amount for membership and we are grateful that most members pay £10 a year.

42 of our members subscribe on a direct debit through Donorbox, which is collected on line or by a standing order to our bank account (which saves on the charges of Donorbox). Altogether these contribute a regular annual payment of £376.

We are very grateful for all these contributions to our work.

Issues in Park

Unfortunately the park continues to attract problems: there is some antisocial behaviour and still too much litter is left behind, but more importantly continued pressure from development proposals threaten the park.

Bulverhythe Recreation Ground:

Last year there were plans to put a golf driving range and club house on the upper tier in front of the Discovery Centre, this was dropped, but it was followed by a proposal by Hastings And Rother Sports Trust which owns Horntye Park Sports Complex to move their grounds to the upper tier also with a clubhouse directly in front of the Discovery Centre. Both FCV and the CIC objected to this proposal and it appears that they are moving elsewhere.

In response, FCV got together with the CIC and GW to discuss a plan for the whole of the Bulverhythe Recreation Ground, to ensure that the whole area is maintained for both organised sport and informal recreation as well as enhancing the biodiversity of the whole area.



For the lower tier, which was threatened with a housing development by Hastings BC, we are working towards the possibility of creating a wet woodland which would ameliorate the regular flooding as well as providing a pleasant area for walking and indeed more active exercise. One particular proposal is to join the raised

walkways at both the western and eastern end of the bund by the Gorringe Stream, to make a path for pedestrians and cyclists which would be above the current flood levels and so accessible all the year round.



For the upper tier with the Discovery Centre, we are proposing to extend the community garden further to the east and provide an exercise track around the whole tier.

Antisocial behaviour

Reference has already been made to the problems of litter in the park.

There was again an attempt by travellers to take over the field around the Discovery Centre. They were quickly moved on, but once again they proved themselves to be very messy visitors.

Funding

Reference has already been made to the Booklet project and the grant from East Sussex County Council for the rainwater project. We also continue to work closely with the CIC and GW, in implementing funding which they obtain.

A special thanks is due to Julie Willard, who as in previous years ran a plant sale from her home raising money for Friends of Combe Valley

Conclusion

It is good to report that although there continue to be challenges, we have been able to contribute to the development of the park with the CIC and their agents GW.



Links and contacts

Friends of Combe Valley

Combe Valley Countryside Park
Café & Discovery Centre
Freshfields, Bexhill,
East Sussex, TN38 8FB
email: team@friendsofcombevalley.co.uk
website: <https://friendsofcombevalley.co.uk/>



Combe Valley Countryside Park
<https://combevalleycountrysidepark.com/>



Groundwork South
<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/hubs/south/>



correspondence to
William Ackroyd
501 Bexhill Road
St Leonards on Sea TN38 8AT
01424 539 739
07419 741266



*Bee orchids near the
Discovery Centre*



Friends of Combe Valley

Registered Charity Number: 1163581

Trustees Annual Report and Financial Statements

For the year ended

30th September 2024

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FOR PERIOD ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

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**TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024**

The committee of Friends of Combe Valley presents its annual report and financial statements for the year ended 30th September 2024.

ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Name of Charity:	Friends of Combe Valley
Principal Address:	501 Bexhill Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 8AT
Legal Status:	Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
Registered Charity Number:	1163581
Governing Document:	Constitution adopted 15/09/2015 Amended on 03/04/2019 Amended 23/02/2021
Trustees:	Peter Clarke - Chair (re-appointed 06/12/2022) William Ackroyd - Treasurer (re-appointed 05/12/2023) Christopher Dadswell - Vice Chair (re-appointed 05/12/2023) Will Kemp (re-appointed 06/12/2022) Karl Beaney (re-appointed 06/12/2022) Cliff Willard (appointed 18/12/2020) Elise Liversedge (resigned 05/12/2023) Anna Sabin (appointed 08/12/2021) Emma Ramsden (appointed 08/12/2021) Virginia Vilela (appointed 08/12/2021) Stephanne Collins - Secretary (appointed 08/12/2021) Joanna Brewerton (appointed 08/12/2021)
Bankers:	The Co-operative Bank
Independent Examiners:	Lorraine Brown Blue Ridge Accounting Services Ltd The Old Court House North Trade Road Battle East Sussex TN33 0EX

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

The trustees submit their annual report and financial statements for Friends of Combe Valley for the period ended 30th September 2024.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Friends of Combe Valley (FCV) has a committee of Trustees governed by a constitution adopted 19/09/2015, Amended 03/04/2019 and 23/02/2021. Day to day management of the Charity is vested in the Trustees, who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the constitution.

The Committee of Trustees shall have no less than three and no more than twelve members. Trustees are appointed on a 3-year rotational basis at the Annual General Meeting. The names of the Trustees are shown on page 2 of this document.

The method adopted for the recruitment and appointment of new trustees is contained within the constitution.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

The objects of FCV are to work within the Combe Haven Valley and in particular within the boundaries of the Combe Valley Countryside Park:

- a. To promote the conservation, protection, and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity. In particular but not exclusively by, encouraging the public to use and enjoy the area and its fauna and flora.
- b. To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection, and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

PUBLIC BENEFIT

The Trustees have considered their duty to have due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission, and in their opinion the enclosed report on the achievements and performance demonstrates that they have complied therewith.

BACKGROUND

FCV was registered as a charity with Trustees in 2015, it became inactive for a number of years, after which it was restructured in the Spring of 2019 and became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, a membership association with limited liability for its members.

In May 2019 FCV took over the running of the café at the Discovery Centre in the Combe Valley Countryside Park. The café closed in March 2020. It re-opened for nearly three months in the spring of 2022 but was forced to close because of the lack of volunteers. Currently it is open for special events.

The Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC is responsible for the management of the park and does that through Groundwork South CIC (GWS), who are their agents under a Service Level Agreement.

**TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024(Cont'd...)**

ACHIEVEMENTS, PERFORMANCE AND FUTURE PLANS

FCV's work and activities have continued to expand. Membership have increased to 175, including both active members who are able to offer direct assistance with the work and informal members who offer support and assistance as and when they can.

This year it has continued to consolidate the work being done with the benefit of existing funding. In particular in the development and expansion of the community garden with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and their agents Groundwork South CIC.

It did receive a grant from the East Sussex County Council for £2,230 to buy materials for a rainwater harvesting system on the roof of the storage container, which is owned and managed by FCV.

Future Plans

1. Continue to develop the relationship with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and Groundwork South CIC in expanding its work in the park.
2. To continue conservation work within the park, in conjunction with Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and Groundwork South CIC.
3. Continue discussions on the future development of the park, to protect its environment and as appropriate enable access, working with the Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC and Groundwork South CIC.
4. More information is contained in our full Annual Report for the year.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial Position

FCV reported that the finances are in a stable and creditable condition.

Receipts in the year were £8,824 (2023 £5,985) and payments were £6,066 (2023 £8,751) resulting in a surplus of £2,759 (2023 £2,766 deficit) for the year. The net fund reserve at 30th September 2024 totalled £9,759 (2023 £7,000), of which £6,446 are protected funds.

RISKS, POLICIES AND SAFEGUARDS

The Trustees have considered the major risks faced by the organisation to establish policies and systems to mitigate those risks.

RESERVES AND INVESTMENT POLICIES

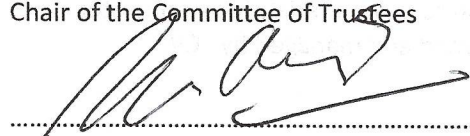
In line with guidance by the Charity Commission, the trustees endeavour to build up its reserves to enable the charity to fulfil its objectives and financial plans.

**TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024 (Cont'd...)**

This report was approved by the Board of Trustees on and signed
on its behalf by:



.....
Pete Clarke
Chair of the Committee of Trustees



.....
William Ackroyd
Trustee and Treasurer

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF FRIENDS OF COMBE VALLEY CIO
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024**

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of Friends of Combe Valley Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) for the year ended 30 September 2024.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Charities Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011,
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act 2011, and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with General Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair' view and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

1. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:
 - to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act 2011; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act

have not been met; or

2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Lorraine Brown
Blue Ridge Accounting Services Ltd
The Old Court House
North Trade Road
Battle
East Sussex TN33 0EX

Date: 12/02/2025

Receipts and Payments account
For the year ended 30th September 2024

		Unrestricted	Restricted	2024	2023
		Funds	Funds	Total	Total
	Note	£	£	Funds	Funds
				£	£
RECEIPTS					
Grants	4	-	4,137	4,137	500
Beach Hut	4	-	2,566	2,566	2,165
Membership & donations		2,121	-	2,121	1,026
Events		-	-	-	157
Rec'd from CIC		-	-	-	1,991
Sundry/Misc		-	-	-	145
Total Receipts		2,121	6,703	8,824	5,984
PAYMENTS					
Grant disbursements	4	1,255	1,328	2,583	5,611
Beach Hut		-	2,443	2,443	2,287
Food		89	-	89	12
Administrative expenditure:					
Misc expenses		143	-	143	100
Stationery		9	-	9	-
Website		60	-	60	-
Insurance		157	-	157	157
Professional fees		350	-	350	350
Bank charges		25	-	25	29
Activities		125	-	125	79
Equipment costs		82	-	82	125
Total Payments		2,294	3,771	6,066	8,751
Net receipts/(payments)		(173)	2,932	2,759	(2,766)
Funds at start of this period		3,441	3,559	7,000	9,766
Transfers between funds		45	(45)	-	-
Funds at end of this period		3,313	6,446	9,759	7,000

**Statement of assets and liabilities
at 30th September 2024**

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 Total Funds £	2023 Total Funds £
Cash funds				
Bank account	2,799	6,446	9,245	6,555
Cash in hand	489	-	489	420
Cash float at café	25	-	25	25
Total cash funds	3,313	6,446	9,759	7,000

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 Total Funds £	2023 Total Funds £
Other monetary assets				
Debts owed to the charity				
Groundworks CIC	-	-	-	-

	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost	Current value
Assets retained for the charity's own use			
Equipment / Tools	Various	11,995	3,267

	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due	When due
Current Liabilities			
Debts owed by the charity	-	-	-

These financial statements are approved by the Board of Trustees on
and signed on its behalf by:

P. K. Clarke

Pete Clarke
Chair of the Committee of Trustees

William Ackroyd
William Ackroyd
Trustee and Treasurer

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

1. Receipts and Payments accounts

Receipts and payments accounts are statements that summarise the movement of cash into and out of the organisation during the financial year. In this context "cash" includes cash equivalents, for example, bank accounts where cash can be readily withdrawn to pay for debts as they become due.

2. Trustees' remuneration and benefits

Trustees received no remuneration or benefits in this period.

Trustees' expenses

During the year reimbursable expenses totalling £1,758 were paid to 3 Trustees for out-of-pocket expenses relating to purchases made on the Charity's behalf.

3. Staff Costs

The Charity had no staff costs in the year.

4. Previous period comparison

The financial year end of the charity is 30th September 2024. The previous period's figures have been included for comparison.

5. Restricted fund

These are funds given to the charity, subject to specific restrictions set by the donor, but still within the general objects of the charity.

	2024			
Grants	Bfwd	Incoming	Outgoing	Bal cfwd
Hastings Direct	1,585	0	-85	1,500
Art Project	400	0	0	400
Beach Hut Project	387	2,566	-2,443	510
Bexhill Town Council	1,000	0	0	1,000
Wild Isles Crowdfunder	0	1,907	-577	1,330
ESCC	0	2,230	-524	1,706
Chalk Cliff CIC	187	0	-187	0
Total	3,559	6,703	-3,816	6,446

6. Governance Costs

Independent Examination fee for year-end accounts 2024 £350; (2023 £350).

**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024**

7. Assets retained for the charity's own use

	Equipment/Tools £
COST	
Bfwd at 1st October 2023	11,995
Additions	-
At 30th September 2024	<u>11,995</u>
REDUCTION IN VALUE	
Bfwd at 1st October 2023	(5,061)
Charge for the year	<u>(3,667)</u>
At 30th September 2024	<u>(8,728)</u>
CURRENT VALUE	
At 30th September 2024	<u>3,267</u>
At 30th September 2023	<u>6,934</u>