

Otterhampton Parish Community Plan



OTTERHAMPTON PARISH COMMUNITY PLAN

As at 1.5.19

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Welcome to our Community Plan incorporating the rural villages of Combwich, Otterhampton and Steart. This is a vibrant parish set in a lovely area with lots of activities, organisations and events going on mainly, but not exclusively, at the Village Hall and on the Common (which is a registered Village Green).
- 1.2 The purpose of the Plan is to record and implement the wishes of the community, monitor the success (or otherwise) of the Plan whilst mitigating and finding solutions to concerns, all the while, maintaining the existing and cohesive community spirit.
- 1.3 The Plan was first developed in 2011 and revised in 2012 after extensive consultations with the community. The stimulus came from the proposals to construct a new nuclear power station at nearby Hinkley Point. This incorporated a major reconstruction of Combwich wharf together with a massive laydown area north of the village for the storage and ongoing transit of abnormal indivisible loads (AILs) required for the power station construction. In addition, there was also a proposal to develop a major wetland area.
- 1.4 The redevelopment of the wharf is likely to commence during 2019/20. The planned 10-hectare laydown (as above) will not now go ahead. Instead, there will be a new vehicle holding area, circa 120m long x 7m width to provide short term storage of abnormal indivisible loads arriving at Combwich Wharf until ready to transport to Hinkley Point.
- 1.5 Since 2012, the construction of Hinkley Point C has commenced and the wetland project, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) Steart Marshes, has been completed (see 8.2). Both of these projects have provided benefits but also some problems for residents which is expanded later on in the Plan.
- 1.6 As part of the Hinkley Point C Section 106 Agreement, the parish has been allocated a minimum of £500k Hinkley Point C community funding to provide opportunities for community development and enhancement. The Otterhampton Parish Project Team (OPPT) has the responsibility of advising on the allocation of the Hinkley Point C Community Fund to suitable community projects. Funding applications must meet the relevant criteria and have the support of the parish council prior to submitting to the Somerset Community Foundation who administer the fund.



OPPT has coordinated the existing community project list following a series of public consultations. The project list (issued with this Plan May 2019) previously updated in August 2017, has been updated in parallel with this revised document following the Community Plan Open day held on 8.12.18.

2. PROGRESS SO FAR

2.1 The development of the Community Plan engendered a real community spirit revitalising the community to instigate a number of initiatives including the following:

- A monthly Combwich Market (for local food producers and crafts).
- Combwich Choir.
- Art Group.
- Weekly coffee morning.
- The Combwich buoy has been refurbished and restored to its position on the Pill.
- A vastly enhanced play and recreation area (including an outdoor gym and picnic benches).
- The Village Hall committee has been revitalised and is actively exploring refurbishment of the Hall.
- A cycle sub group was established (see 6.6).
- A housing need survey was undertaken which has demonstrated a limited need for affordable homes in the parish. A new survey will be undertaken by SDC during summer 2019.
- A working group has been convened to examine the issues relating to Combwich Ponds (see 12.4).
- Otter Tales bi-monthly newsletter was initiated after the original parish council newsletter ceased.
- A volunteer car scheme (Otter Wheels) was launched and continues to grow some two years after its formation.
- Unfortunately, an allotment group failed to materialise, mainly because of the non-availability of land, but it does remain an aspiration.

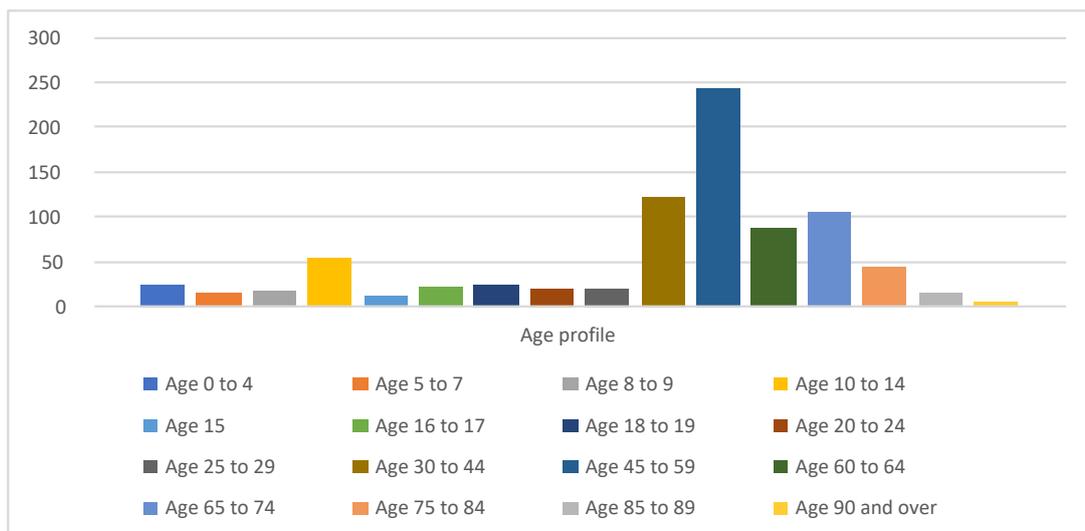


3. OTTERHAMPTON PARISH

3.1 The ancient parish of Otterhampton dates back to at least the 11th Century but has been more or less in its present form since 1886 when Otterhampton acquired Steart and other detached areas from Stockland and exchanged lands with Cannington, bringing the whole of Combwich into the Otterhampton Civil Parish which in 1891 was said to measure 2308 acres.

3.2 There are 365 households and 831 inhabitants in the parish (as per 2011 Census).

3.3 The age profile of residents is as follows:



3.4 The parish consists of three settlements; Combwich, Otterhampton and Steart. All are rural and peaceful communities; the homes of people who chose to live here for these qualities. These days many people have to travel to towns and cities in the south west for work although there are a high proportion of residents who work at the Hinkley Point Power Stations - Hinkley A, currently in the process of being decommissioned and Hinkley B which currently has a life expectancy until 2023. Agriculture and the environment still feature heavily in the parish.

3.5 The sole point of access for all three settlements is the Hinkley Point road (C182)

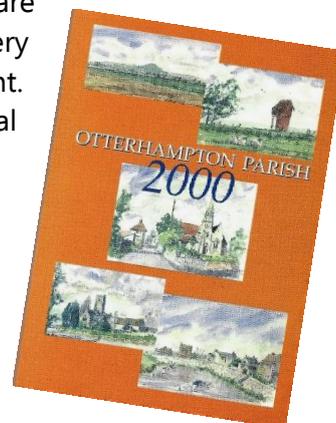
3.6 A large percentage of the parish falls within flood zone 3 and is therefore at high risk of flooding.

3.7 The creation of the WWT Steart Marshes wetland project which sits amongst the three settlements in the parish (with direct access from all three) is a popular addition to local amenities and provides walking and cycling paths and the opportunity for quiet recreation, bird watching and other environmental pursuits. Another planned wetland scheme by The Bristol Port Company, that although adjacent to WWT Steart Marshes, is in fact part of the neighbouring parish of Stogursey under the remit of Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council.

3.8 There is a good community spirit with many activities organised or supported by the Otterhampton Parish Recreation Association (OPRA) the Village Hall, parish council and other organisations all working together for an inclusive and cohesive approach to community life, which is considered very important.

3.9 Though accepting the need for change, our communities are anxious to preserve the rural nature of the area and are very much opposed to any large-scale industrial development. They value the nationally recognised environmental designations and diversity of wildlife.

3.10 A small book "Otterhampton Parish 2000" was written by a well-known Combwich resident Bill Johnson, in 1999 to commemorate the Millennium. A local history project group formed in March 2019 and it is hoped an updated and recorded history of the parish will evolve from this group.



3.11 Combwich

- Combwich is a small rural cul-de-sac village on the estuary of the River Parrett with well defined boundaries. Its history as a settlement and port dating back to Roman times is well documented.
- There are 324 households and 740 residents in the village (as per 2011 Census).
- It has a small wharf, extensively refurbished by the nuclear industry around 30 years ago and will be rebuilt during 2019/20 (see 1.4 above). The wharf and nearby Pill areas have been mainly used for leisure pursuits by the Combwich Motor Boat and Sailing Club, which has created new interest in the recreational use of the river by the purchase of a Cornish gig using Hinkley Point C community funding.



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- The village boasts a common which is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Adjacent areas of the river are included in the Bridgwater Bay National Nature

Reserve. The common is adjacent to the river which adds to the appeal of the village, particularly when the tide is in and various boats and craft are sailing on the river.

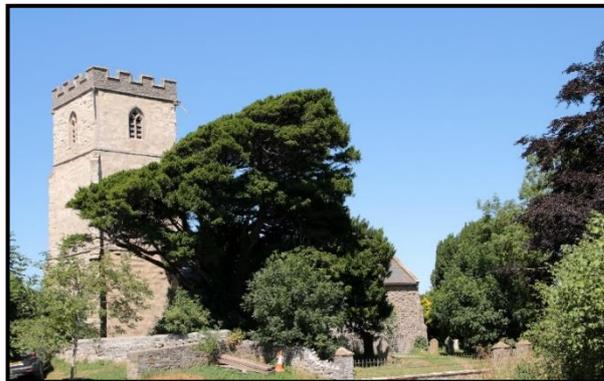


Within the village is a public house, shop/post office, village hall, primary school, Church, an historic fives wall, and a large new play and recreation area.

- The Village Hall with Harbour View Bar, which is well used, is currently in the process of developing plans to refurbish the building.

3.12 Otterhampton

Otterhampton (mentioned in the Domesday Book) is a small scattered village which includes All Saints Church and cemetery (which dates from the 14th century) a former rectory, farms and a number of cottages along a narrow country lane leading from the Hinkley Point road to Stockland Bristol and Steart.



- There are 27 households and 65 residents in the village (as per 2011 Census)

3.13 Steart

- Steart (also mentioned in the Domesday Book) is located approximately 3.5 miles from the Hinkley Point road through Otterhampton along a single-track no through road to the end of the peninsula. It is very rural, largely encompassing WWT Steart Marshes, the Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve and other agricultural land and farms. In addition, there is the small Church of St Andrews which occasionally holds services and small community events.



- The creation of WWT Steart Marshes enhances the importance of the area as a special site of conservation and its popularity as a visitor attraction. However, this scheme was cautiously welcomed by residents with concerns regarding the impact of increasing numbers of visitors on the tranquillity of the area.
- There are 14 households and 26 residents in the village (as at March 2019)

4. THE VISION FOR OUR PARISH

- 4.1 All the evidence from consultations, public meetings, two open days, the recent Community Plan Open Day in December 2018 and representations to the parish council indicates that most residents are very happy with where they live; many chose to do so because of the existing nature of the area and its surrounding environment. Whilst it is recognised that change is inevitable, residents are determined to influence future changes in favour of, and in harmony with, the existing environment, the peaceful nature of the area and their way of life.

- 4.2 Therefore, most residents wish their communities to remain rural in nature and for impacts of current and future development proposals to be carefully mitigated. There is also an identified need for certain community infrastructure such as a redeveloped village hall and affordable housing.
- 4.3 Any changes should be managed sensitively and with wide consultation with the community.

5. HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 Sedgemoor District Council's (SDC) Local Plan designates Combwich as a Tier 3 Settlement. Tier 3 settlements generally have a more basic level of local services than Tier 2 (e.g. Cannington) but still provide a local service centre function. They remain appropriate locations for local growth that will support the priorities of local communities, improve self-containment and respect environmental limits. As set out under Policy S2 they are not expected to accommodate strategic growth, the focus will be on smaller scale housing opportunities to meet identified local needs.
- 5.2 Both Otterhampton and Steart are designated as "Countryside". These small villages have extremely limited facilities and not considered to be sustainable locations for growth. However, there may be situations where exceptionally the consideration of small-scale infill or redevelopment might be appropriate where there is clear and demonstrable local support. Such situations might include for example growth that supported or promoted additional community infrastructure.
- 5.3 Development will be supported only where it accords with relevant policies in the SDC Local Plan which provide for sustainable and appropriate scales of development in the Countryside, including where such a location is essential. To meet the needs of rural communities' consideration will be given to appropriate small scale residential infill opportunities within smaller villages and hamlets, the appropriate expansion and remodelling of existing businesses, and the appropriate reuse of brownfield sites. Unless special circumstances apply isolated homes in the countryside will be resisted, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 5.4 SDC's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) identifies an "opportunity site" for the development of 150 houses on a 7-hectare area to the west of School Lane in Combwich. Residents were invited to attend a parish council meeting on 16.2.17 to discuss the proposals. Those present believed such a development would fundamentally change the nature of the village and were against such a development. On behalf of the residents, the parish council formally advised SDC on 10.3.17 of this view for the following reasons:



- 5.4.1 A development of this size increasing the village households by circa 50% would swamp the village.
- 5.4.2 It would be difficult to integrate so many people into the village which would put at risk the existing community spirit.
- 5.4.3 Concerns of flooding; run-off from the top of the hill into the brook which has already over-topped during heavy rainfall threatening houses in Estuary Park. Also, drainage issues, already a problem in Brookside Road.
- 5.4.4 Lack of public transport which could lead to isolation.
- 5.4.5 Unless adequate parking is provided as part of the development, it would lead to further congestion in the village.
- 5.4.6 Urbanisation of the rural community and loss of green and open space.
- 5.4.7 Increased traffic on the badly congested Hinkley Point road with the only access via the busy Combwich junction. The access issue would need to be addressed.

However, residents agreed there would be some potential advantages to a smaller development:

- 5.4.8 The opportunity to provide some affordable housing to meet the needs of local people, young and old. A housing needs survey conducted a few years ago produced 6 responses, and a further 2 requests for affordable homes has been identified by SDC. SDC will conduct a new Housing Needs Survey during 2019.



- 5.4.9 Housing would hopefully attract more families which could help the School and businesses in the village.
- 5.4.10 The opportunity to create an additional, and safe access to the School.
- 5.5 The construction of Hinkley Point C, adding considerable pressure on the rented housing sector in terms of increased rents and the affordability of homes for local people is likely to continue for some years.
- 5.6 The Bridgwater Barrier planned to be operational in 2024 will deliver new secondary inland flood defences to provide a 1 in 200 standard protection against flooding from a tidal surge in the River Parrett.

6. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

- 6.1 Safety on our roads is a major issue for the parish, exacerbated by the construction of Hinkley Point C and the volumes and size of the HGVs and bus traffic travelling on the Hinkley Point road. We have seen an increase in road traffic accidents since the commencement of the new build. The parish council campaigned relentlessly for safety enhancements. A series of safety measures, including improved signage and a 50mph speed limit between Rodway Hill and beyond Biffens' Corner was implemented during 2018. The Biffen's Corner junction still remains a major safety concern and the parish council will continue to work with partners to seek a solution.



- 6.2 A small scheme to widen the layby adjacent to the cottages on Dame Withycombe Hill instigated by the parish council should make it safer for residents and road users alike. The work was completed in 2018.



- 6.3 Public transport to and from the village stopped in 2017 due to cuts in Somerset County Council funding. However, a limited free service has been introduced by EDF which allows passengers from Combwich and surrounding villages to travel to Bridgwater and Minehead, Monday-Friday. The "Slinky" bus run by Mendip Community Transport operates on a Tuesday to Bridgwater at a small cost.

6.4 In the spring of 2016 a volunteer car scheme "Otter Wheels" was successfully introduced providing door to door transport for those without access to a private car. Those with a bus pass can travel at half price. The service is very popular; some 500 journeys completed as at March 2019.



- 6.5 Pavements – Due to the nature of the village, large areas of Combwich are poorly served by pavements. Those on the main thoroughfare are very narrow and others on the estates are often used to park cars making it difficult for pedestrians particularly those with pushchairs and the disabled users of wheelchairs and scooters. There appears to be no scope for improvement.



- 6.6 Cycling provision has improved enormously. Several miles of safe footpaths and cycle paths have been introduced by WWT Steart Marshes linking the communities of Combwich, Otterhampton and Steart without the need to use the Hinkley Point road. A new cycle path (with major input from the Combwich cycling group) linking Combwich to Cannington and onwards to Wembdon (then into the existing network to Bridgwater) has provided more opportunities for safe cycling. However, a campaign to continue the cycle path from Combwich to Hinkley Point was unsuccessful.

- 6.7 There are several Public Rights of Way throughout the parish.

7. GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

7.1 Village Hall

7.1.1 The Village Hall is over 100 years old and was kindly donated to the parish by a group of 4 trustees in 1944. Originally a malt house the building has been upgraded a few times and now provides a large hall with stage, the Harbour View Bar, a skittle alley, a short mat bowls room, darts area and a kitchen.



7.1.2 The Hall is run as a charity by a group of volunteers who are Trustees. The Trustees run one-off events to publicise and raise money for the general running of the Hall. The Trustees are planning to extensively renovate and refurbish the Hall during 2019 using Hinkley Point C community funding and other external match funding.

7.1.3 The Hall is used for parties, social events, entertainment, official meetings, as a polling station, fortnightly Police Community Support Officer surgery and it is also a designated emergency evacuation centre in the event of a local emergency.

7.1.4 Social Events during the week are detailed in the parish Welcome Information Sheet.

7.2 Other Organisations, Groups, Activities and Services

7.2.1 Otterhampton Parish Council (OPC)

7.2.2 Otterhampton CP School and Pre-School

7.2.3 Otterhampton Parish Recreation Association (OPRA)

7.2.4 Otter Tales parish newsletter (bi-monthly)

7.2.5 Otter Wheels volunteer car scheme

7.2.6 Otterhampton Parish Project Team (OPPT)

7.2.7 Combwich Brownies

7.2.8 Combwich Motor Boat and Sailing Club (including the Gigs)

7.2.9 Women's Institute

7.2.10 Village Agent

7.2.11 Mobile Library

7.2.12 Churches – St Peters, Combwich; All Saints in Otterhampton (closed) and cemetery; St Andrews, Steart

7.2.13 Tree Maintenance and Open Spaces Strategy Group

7.2.14 Steart Residents Group

7.2.15 Steart Forum

7.2.16 Play and Recreation Area (including outdoor gym)

7.2.17 Monthly village market

7.2.18 Harbour View Bar



8. THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 Steart Peninsula contains extensive areas of conservation importance holding various national and international designations. The northern part of the Peninsula and adjacent Parrett Estuary lie within the Bridgwater Bay SSSI, which includes the Natural England Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve. As part of the Severn Estuary SSSI, the area is recognised under European Directives as a Special Protected Area (SPA), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and as a significant wetland site under the international Ramsar convention.



- 8.2 In 2014, the WWT Steart Marshes was completed creating a 500-hectare area of wetland habitat on the Peninsula. This area of intertidal and freshwater marshland with its evolving habitats has become a source of scientific research and an amenity for local communities, whilst maintaining an agricultural value.
- 8.3 The coastal and estuarine habitats include areas of threatened coastal marsh, the inter-tidal zones support nationally important populations of wintering waders and waterfowl and the hinterland holds many protected species of fauna and flora.

9. COMMUNICATIONS

- 9.1 The parish has its own website, www.combwich.org.uk, a bi-monthly parish magazine (Otter Tales) and notice boards in Combwich and Steart, to keep the community informed.
- 9.2 Broadband coverage in Combwich is reasonable but is poor in outlying parts of the parish. It is however expected to be improved under the final phase of the Connecting Devon and Somerset Government programme in 2019/20.
- 9.3 Mobile reception is poorly serviced in large parts of the parish. It may be worthwhile researching any new initiatives that could improve the situation.



10. HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 10.1 The parish has an Emergency Plan, produced in 2019. Steart has its own Flood Plan and its residents are members of the Police Farm and Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.
- 10.2 There are two public defibrillators in the parish; one in Combwich located at the junction of Brookside Rd/Wharf Rd in the centre of the village and the other in Steart on the wall of the old Chapel adjacent to Channel View. Subject to a suitable location and an electricity supply it may be be pertinent to obtain a further defibrillator(s) for the parish.



11. EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

- 11.1 Hinkley Point C is the largest employer in the area so provides many opportunities for parish residents together with the Hinkley Point A and B Power Stations. Some employment opportunities exist in Combwich, mostly on a part-time or casual basis. Employment then extends further afield to Bridgwater and beyond.
- 11.2 WWT Steart Marshes and the Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve provide volunteering opportunities.

12. CHALLENGES FOR THE PARISH

12.1 Hinkley Point C

The parish is currently experiencing the impact of the HPC construction, reputed to be the largest construction site in Europe. Much of the impact (mentioned throughout the Plan) surrounds housing (including houses of multiple occupation) and accommodation shortages, fly parking, general parking, the Hinkley Point road (and the potential for an incident to close the road for several hours preventing access to the parish) and the refurbishment of Combwich Wharf (potential disruption and noise levels). The parish council will need to monitor the actions to ensure EDF is compliant with the Development Consent Order conditions.

12.2 Parking

Parking in Combwich is an ever-increasing problem because of expanding car ownership, large numbers of Hinkley Point C contractors with cars who are lodging in the village and those seeking to enjoy access to WWT Steart Marshes. The village was not designed to accommodate as many vehicles as there are now. Infill for homes and various small estates have been built which has reduced any opportunities to purchase land for parking. The parish council will pursue any opportunities if they arise.

12.3 Speeding

Speeding vehicles through the village is an issue that is raised periodically. Speed Indication Devices from SCC have been used to monitor speeds, but the speeds recorded have not exceeded the median speed required for action. The major concerns are at school times as children and parents encouraged to walk to school on very narrow roads, are competing with vehicles coming into the village taking

children to and from school, often appearing to drive too fast. The parish council will continue to investigate speed reduction measures commensurate with the problem.

12.4 **Combwich Ponds**

A 9-acre lake known as Combwich Ponds was a very popular area for walkers and families until the landowner restricted access in May 2007. This area is very important to local people who have expressed the need to have the paths designated as a Right of Way as a matter of priority. An application for designation was made to Somerset County Council (SCC) in May 2008 but is still awaiting adjudication. A second application to the Secretary of State to



intervene resulted in an instruction to SCC to decide on the application during 2019.

12.5 **Otterhampton CP School**

Pupil numbers attending the School are in decline. During 2018, Bridgwater College assumed responsibility for the School and it received Academy status. The School is an essential element of the community, so we hope that the new status and organisation will once more see the School thrive and prosper.



12.6 **Stear**

The major challenges to the Steart community are those controlling tidal flooding caused by a tidal surge, maintaining access to the village and managing the impact of visitor numbers.

12.6.1 The Environment Agency (EA) predicts an annual increase in sea levels of 2.0-2.5mm and by 2110 a rise of 0.7m. The risk of a flooding event on the Peninsula is predicted to be 1 in 20 until 2030, then 1 in 5 up to 2110 and then onwards, possibly annually. Under the EA flood alleviation strategy, the coastal footage at Steart village will be maintained until 2030 after which, flood defences will be left to natural processes. The Steart Residents' Group has its own Flood Plan.

12.6.2 The only road to the village is across Wall Common. 24-hour access to the village is essential for commercial, private and emergency vehicles. Protection to the road is therefore a priority requiring regular monitoring, maintenance and when necessary, enhancement of flood defences.

- 12.6.3 Increased visitor numbers and associated traffic using the single tracked lane through Otterhampton to WWT Steart Marshes are creating concerns. The road surface and verges are deteriorating, mostly due to insufficient passing places. Dialogue between the local community and owners and managers of the conservation schemes has emphasised the concern of the loss of tranquillity and sense of isolation held by Steart residents. As a focal point for discussion of these and a wide range of local issues the Steart Forum was created in 2014. Attendees at the quarterly meetings include local residents, the farming community, local government, statutory bodies and non-government agencies.

13 GOING FORWARD

The Plan will continue to evolve as progress is monitored and new developments and challenges arise. Residents will continue to be kept informed and involved as we are anxious that all residents young and old have the opportunity to contribute their vision and ideas to ensure our parish remains the place we enjoy, love and value.

- 13.1 If you have any comments or updates on this document please contact the parish clerk otterhamptonpcclerk@gmail.com in the first instance.
- 13.2 Updates to this community plan will be provided in the parish newsletter, Otter Tales, which is distributed to every household in the parish every two months (January, March, May, July, September and November). Information and updates will also be uploaded to the parish website www.combwich.org.uk on a regular basis.



We hope you have enjoyed reading this document and learning a little more about our parish and the villages of Combwich, Otterhampton and Steart.