

UPDATE:

Oaks Meadow village hall survey results and next steps

June 2022 (final v1.3)

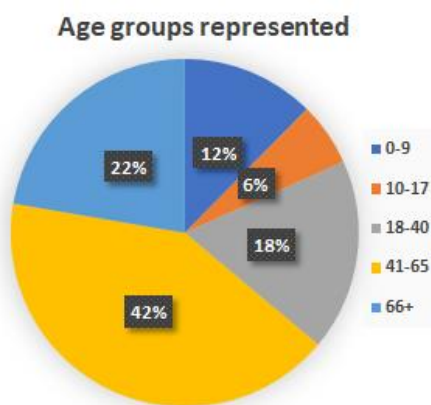
Firstly, a big thank you to the 81 households (representing 202 adults and children) who kindly responded to our village hall survey which ran until end of January 2022. You provided us with a wealth of information, innovative and practical ideas and a good deal of food for thought.

This update shares a snapshot of the data together with the Oaks Meadow Trustees' thoughts about next steps. For those of you with an appetite for detail, the full results are available on our website at: www.oaksmeadow.org.uk/survey-results

This survey asked for your views on building an eco-friendly, energy-efficient village hall on Oaks Meadow and how it might be used. It was a response to the 2019 Combs Parish Council survey, which highlighted concerns about the lack of a village hub / community space.

Survey results

The 81 household responses received were lively and enthusiastic, with some common sense caveats. There were just five households with strong objections.



The results are a fascinating and inspiring read with lots of terrific ideas. We were particularly struck by the enthusiasm for activities that link with the Oaks Meadow green spaces and initiatives related to health and wellbeing and helping our community to adapt to climate change, such as learning to cook more plant-based foods using produce from the OM vegetable garden.

For perspective, however, it is important to note that the overall response rate was 14 per cent¹, rising to 17 per cent of households in Combs Parish and Little Finborough² which means that a large majority of households did not express a view.

Next steps...

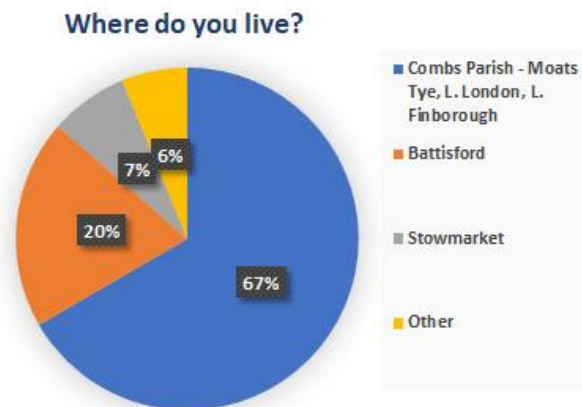
During a meeting to review the survey results, the Trustees concluded that this is not the right time to make a firm decision and that we should review our position again in a year to 18 months' time. Our reasons are as follows:

- Trustees and volunteers have a host of exciting and demanding projects to complete, all of which will need ongoing attention and a programme of maintenance. These include the orchard, vegetable patch, reflective space, sensory garden and playground to name just a few!

“Combs has an opportunity to design and build an exemplar building which will win prizes and be a source of community pride for generations”

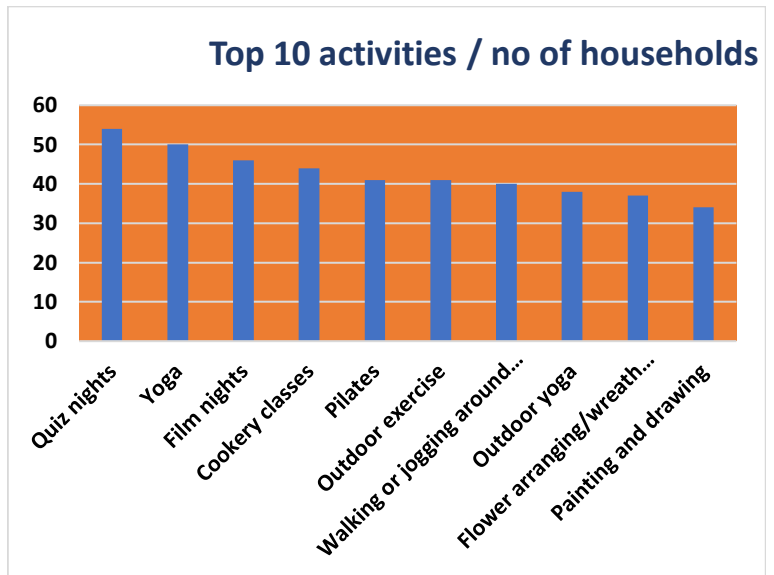
¹ Based on 560 households that received the paper survey with the Barclif newsletter

² 314 households, Combs Parish plus Little Finborough (2019-2020 electoral registers)



- The new access from Bildeston Road will soon be complete enabling us to open to the public. This will raise awareness of the meadow and enable it to be enjoyed on a daily basis as well as for more outdoor events. Our plans include a substantial gazebo in the green space which will provide a covered area for formal and informal gatherings.

This all means that we will soon start to gain valuable understanding about how our community uses Oaks Meadow and the challenges of maintaining this new village amenity – all of which will help with future planning.



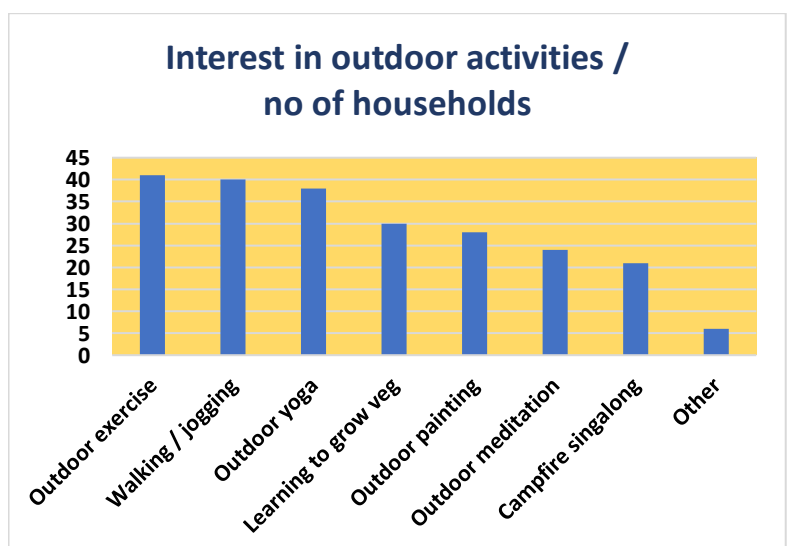
- These remain difficult times for village halls as they try to get back on track after two years of Covid. Some now face serious deficits of tens of thousands of pounds as well as continuing uncertainties about the how the pandemic and cost of living crisis may impact on community activities in future. The essential next steps in planning for any kind of new community building must be to develop a watertight business / sustainability plan and it would be difficult to gather the robust evidence needed right now with so many uncertainties ahead of us.
- As a matter of principle we feel that that any future plans we propose must be sustainable and address unmet needs without impacting negatively on existing businesses or community facilities such as St Mary’s Church Hall, Battisford Community Hall and The Punch Bowl.
- Scarff’s Vineyard is building a ‘wine-tasting centre’ with 50 car parking places opposite the entrance to Oaks Meadow. This has recently received approval from the Mid Suffolk Licensing Committee and they plan to host wine tastings, tours, weddings and other events. It will be interesting to see how this new business develops - there may be opportunities to work together and/or share facilities.

“For anyone wanting a venue for creative activities as the environment around would be very appealing.

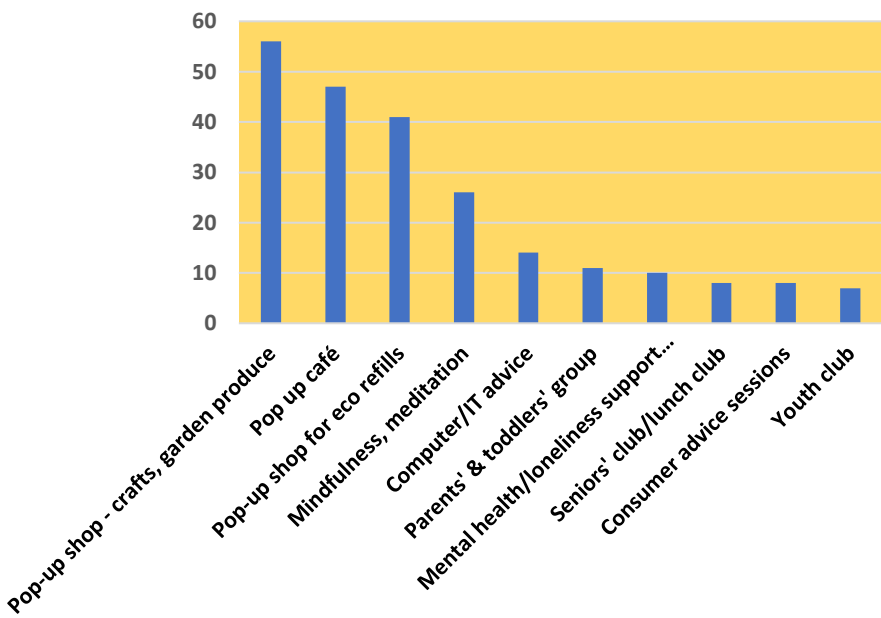
“Local schools and colleges particularly for nature related activities such as Forest School”

- We are not excluding anything at this stage but with more experience under our belt, we feel it may be useful to open up a discussion about whether, initially, a small building or even a simple covered area to enable all weather community / learning activities on the meadow might be a practical alternative to a full scale village hall. Or perhaps a modular approach, starting small but in such a way that extra rooms and facilities could be added later.

We could also consider alternative uses for the allocated space should we decide not to build on it.



Top 10 community services / no of households

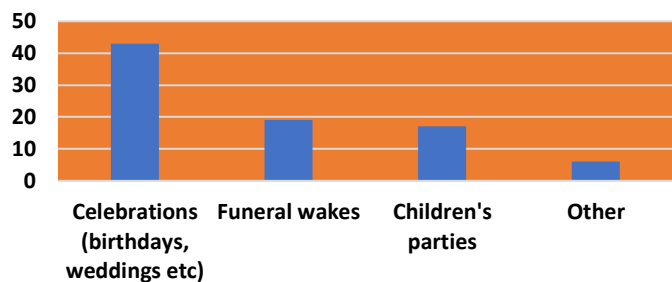


“Pop up repairs like Woodbridge has to repair electrical items rather than disposal”

“The hall could be used as a business hub for people working remotely/at home”

“We would be happy to pay a membership fee to help with the upkeep of a village hall.”

Interest in hiring hall for social activities / no of households



Thank you once again for taking the time to respond to our survey. We will let you know as soon as Oaks Meadow is officially open to the public and hope you and your family will visit and enjoy the woodlands and gardens and get involved as much as you can.

Oaks Meadow Trustees

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“This would be a great project, especially for the children in the village, but also for adults to get to know each other better, and to have a focal point to the village.”