

Westcott Village Association

Committee Report for 2022/23

Over the last year, the Westcott Village Association Committee has continued to work diligently, fairly and enthusiastically on behalf of Westcott Residents. Our aim is to maintain and wherever possible, improve the quality of life for everyone in the village. We are a relatively small team – just seven volunteers - and whilst we have been involved and made a positive contribution in a wide range of matters, there is more that can be done - and we will come back to that point later.

In this Report, we have decided to cover just a few key matters as examples of what the Committee have done and are progressing. If you want more detail, we post any relevant communications and correspondence on the WVA website including Newsletters, back copies of the Village Magazine and representations made to public bodies relating to public consultations, planning applications and planning matters generally.

So examples of key matters - in no particular order:

As just noted, the WVA have submitted written representations with suggestions, comment and arguments in response to consultations and proposals circulated by regulatory bodies – mainly MVDC or SCC. In the last year, subject matter has included Rural Speed Limits, access to Wolvens Lane, number and location of Polling Stations, Rural Housing Allocation policy, the ongoing Local Plan Consultation and the still live AONB boundary change consultations.

One representation was a letter plus petition organised by the WVA and signed by 243 Residents which was submitted to MVDC to oppose a planning application for the Sondes Place development. You will probably be aware that on 5th June, MVDC formally refused the application. The fight isn't over as the developer is very likely to appeal the decision so we all need to continue to work together to oppose it. It is right that we acknowledge and applaud the excellent work done by James Leaver and Jo Astor in ensuring the Sondes Place representation had real bite and substance as well as the tireless efforts of Ken Hollis as he went door to door to drum up support for the objections.

The Committee also closely monitor all planning applications in Westcott to ensure compliance with the Neighbourhood Development Plan and objectively comment accordingly. In addition, we pushed MVDC into action against the former owner of the ex-Cricketers building and we are now in active dialogue with the new owner and his potential plans for the site.

Residents will also be aware that progress on the Local Plan 2020 – 2032 has been suspended by MVDC citing a national consultation and pending Government decisions on housing requirements. We continue to monitor the situation and have recently met and spoken to the newly elected District Councillors to voice our concerns about the possible implications of the delay in concluding the Plan.

[JL two minutes to speak & answer questions]

The WVA continue to try to promote and support local activities and events. This year we again supported the Village Litter Pick sponsored by James Friend, we ran tombola stalls at both the Christmas fair and Coronation WestFEST and again organised the Christmas tree and supported the carol singing on the Green. We successfully partnered with other village organisations to make these a success and we acknowledge the contribution of £400 from the Mole Valley 'Chief Executive Coronation Fund' used for materials. In addition, the WVA provided financial support for the Westcott School Open Day as the school strive to increase pupil numbers and we sponsored a First Aid Training course superbly delivered by Richard Packer on behalf of St John Ambulance reminding attendees that the public are virtually always the first responders and that prompt action can and will save lives. The WVA are proud to fund and to continue to maintain the two defibrillators available in Westcott. We are also pleased to support the Westcott Community Garden and the Community Fridge Project which Sally Hewetson and Jon Mears have championed and supervised

{Nancy Lund – two minutes on WCG}

[JM - two minutes on CFP]

Jo Astor rejoined the Committee in late 2021 and has transformed our communications reach so that in addition to the Village Magazine, she is sending out regular email newsletters and social media bulletins to ensure we reach as many residents as possible, and on a timely basis. In the last three months for instance, over 50 media posts have been shared reaching a potential 18000 people and five email newsletters have been sent to our 430 subscribers - and three quarters of those have been opened – well, why wouldn't they! There is clearly interest in what we are doing.

[JA – two minutes to speak & answer questions]

A key element of our Communications approach is to encourage Residents to use the contact@westcottvillage.com email address to advise us of problems or concerns – or indeed of support! One village led project that has arisen from this is a working group to tackle our ongoing Dog Waste problem. With Committee support, we hope to progress this soon, share the results and improve our environment.

We are also pleased to share our 'comms network' in support of the Village Hall Trust as that Committee develops its plans for the Hut & Reading Room sites. Sally Hewetson is a Trustee of both the WVA and the VHT and she will update us on the current position

[SH two minutes to speak and answer questions]

On the downside, we want to highlight some key concerns.

We have spoken at length at recent AGMs and Open Meetings about needing to mobilise a group of Residents to identify and document viable village improvement projects, to apply for funding – principally from the Community Infrastructure Fund (CIL) though we believe other funds are available – and then manage the works to completion. The present WVA Committee does not have the bandwidth to take this

on although it will give the necessary support and advice. Ideally we need someone or better still a group of people, to work with the Committee with this brief. The funds are available – including funds generated by Westcott developments - but they will be allocated elsewhere if Westcott doesn't apply for them. We urge you to give this matter some thought and to get involved.

A second area of concern is the continuing menace of speeding and noisy traffic through the Village. Last year Speedwatch reported nearly 700 speeding vehicles to the police but in a comparative period this year, we have reported less than 10% of that number. This isn't because traffic speeds are lower – anecdotally they remain as high as ever – but it is because volunteer participation has fallen significantly. Participation has never been good – now it is almost nothing. Speedwatch reporting is the most direct and factual way of providing evidence of the 'speed problem' and therefore prompting the Police to take notice and deploy their mobile cameras. Please consider volunteering for even a few hours a month – either tonight or via our email address. Though not a Committee Member, we are pleased that Ben Fisher is now administering the Speedwatch programme and can be contacted via the Westcott village email.

[Does Ben want to attend and make himself known?]

Progress on Highways changes to improve road safety with signage and road markings for instance is proving difficult and ongoing vandalism doesn't help at all. but Nick Lund has a meeting scheduled with a SCC Highways Officer in early July to discuss potential improvements.

[NL two minutes to speak & answer questions]

We said at the beginning of this report that more that can be done in the village. Resource for the funding application process is urgent now but in addition we do need more volunteers for general Committee duties.

We have not replaced Tim Way since he stepped down as Chair last December and whilst we have absorbed his specific duties within the current Committee, we need new Committee Members to help now and critically to ensure continuity when current Committee members stand down. All seven current members are willing to stand for re-election for another year but at least two have indicated it could be their final year. The WVA Constitution allows for up to twelve Committee Members and we need others to step forward and make a contribution, preferably now, but certainly in the near future. It should not be time consuming and as six of the Committee can demonstrate, being in paid employment does not preclude anyone.

One project that has been assessed and been shelved for the present is about Westcott becoming a Parish Council. An assessment of key success criteria showed they were unlikely to be met over the next year or two and therefore we should wait and see how Westcott is represented at District Council level following the May elections before devoting any more time to it.

As referred to earlier, a quorum of the Committee and two of the three elected Councillors for the new district – Abhiram and Leah – met recently and enjoyed an

open and productive discussion. I am pleased that they are here tonight and they will stay for drinks afterwards.

[Councillors introduce themselves]

On behalf of the WVA, the Committee would like to formally thank James Friend for his significant contribution to Westcott life as District Councillor. We wish him well in new ventures and hope he will continue to use his experience and knowledge to support village life and activities.

Turning to the year ahead, the likely focus of the WVA will include the following:

- The Local Plan and planning applications generally
- Establishing the resource needed to apply for project funding and then submitting viable worthwhile projects for consideration
- Continuing to support other Village organisations and activities with advice, active support and funding where possible
- Monitoring the loss of retail outlets in the village and researching what options / requirements are available for the use of this space
- Considering how to update the Neighbourhood Development Plan which is required by end of 2025
- Researching options to ease parking pressures and other related matters such as EV charging and a car club
- Building on the success of the March 23 Open Meeting format of informal discussions and conversations and facilitating residents talking to each other

Edwin will present the Accounts as part of the Agenda, which show that membership subscriptions and donations have fallen by over 20% year on year following the withdrawal of Street Stewards and changing our membership criteria. Edwin will comment further but the Committee urge everyone to donate to the WVA – with Gift Aid if possible - so we are in the best possible position to support activities which are of benefit to our community.

Our thanks go to Hugh Parry for examining the 2022/23 Accounts and for agreeing to continue as the Independent Examiner for another year. For information, we have also prepared our Trustee Report and confirmed compliance with Charity Commission guidelines. All these documents are on the WVA website.

Thank you on behalf of the Westcott Village Association Committee

Jo Astor
Paul Goddard
Edwin Harland
Sally Hewetson,
James Leaver,
Nick Lund,
Jon Mears

June 2023