

Westcott Village Association Committee Report for 2023/24 for the Annual General Meeting on 27th June 2024

Over the last year, the WVA Committee has continued to work diligently, fairly and enthusiastically on behalf of Westcott Residents within a brief to at the very least maintain and wherever possible, improve the quality of life for all of us in the village. We are proud of what our small group has been able to achieve and progress given our jobs and other commitments. If we had more volunteers we could probably make more progress, but more of that later.

In this Report, we will cover just a few key matters as examples of what the Committee have been working on. If you want more detail, we post all relevant communications and correspondence on the WVA website. This includes for example, newsletters and back copies of the village magazine, meeting minutes and all letters sent to, and representations made to, public bodies relating to public consultations, planning applications and planning matters generally. In addition social media has extensive list of posts for those using such channels.

Examples of key matters are - in no particular order:

In the last year, the Committee have submitted written representations to various bodies comprising suggestions, comment and argument to ensure Westcott interests are known and hopefully properly considered by those requesting comment. Sometimes we haven't been aware of a consultation until the last minute or even after the deadline date has passed. Representations we have made include:

- proposals relating to the Sondes Place planning application, and the subsequently successful appeal won by the developer from the Inspector following the refusal of the initial application. You will recall the petition organised by the WVA last year and signed by 243 Residents opposing this Green Belt scheme. We await the formal planning application.
- a private consultation exercise run by Thakeham on their Milton Court Lane development proposals. We subsequently sent a summary of our comments to Cllr Cooksey at MVDC and our three local Cllrs to ensure they are fully aware of our views which we believe fairly represents those Westcott residents
- continuing to monitor and question the Local Plan including for instance questioning why the Westcott housing delivery requirement has recently nearly doubled to 123 units in the revised plan period - the answer to which was unsatisfactory
- a Surrey County Council consultation on what we recommend they consider for Westcott and its environs and in particular its links to Dorking in their forthcoming update to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- ongoing input to the delayed but still live Area of Outstanding National Beauty boundary change consultations.

- the Mandatory Review of Polling Stations in which we recommended that Westcott retained two polling stations – subsequently agreed and confirmed by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC)
- The Committee also monitor all planning applications in Westcott to ensure compliance with the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP) and objectively comment accordingly. In addition, we successfully pursued MVDC to ensure appropriate enforcement action against Westcott Kitchen as we did with the former owner of the Cricketers last year.
- Liaising with MVDC to install posts around the Green to protect it from vehicle damage

Incidentally, individuals have the right to respond to consultations too and we encourage everyone to exercise that right and not solely to rely on the WVA to respond.

[JL five minutes to speak and answer questions]

We noted at the last AGM in June 2023 that ideally we needed someone to take specific responsibility for funding applications generally and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bids specifically. Whilst no one has come forward – yet - the WVA has submitted two CIL bids to date. One has been successful with £8k being agreed for the replacement of the Vehicle Activated Speed sign (VAS) on the A25 near Holy Trinity. The other one - submitted for up to £2k for a permanent metal sleeve for a Christmas tree on the Village Green plus access to an electricity supply – has yet to be determined. Along with other Resident Associations in Mole Valley we are disappointed with the CIL allocation processes / methodology being followed and that CIL allocation seems to be being used for political gain & favour. We await an update from MVDC Executives on the allocation process.

The WVA Committee continue to try to promote and support local activities and events but we have limited capacity and not enough support. Some specifics:

- We organised and ran Tombola stalls at both the 2023 Christmas fair and the latest 2024 WestFEST. The latter raised over £1100 which will be topped up to £3000 to donate to the Westcott Village Hall Trust. This will provide much needed financial support for the WVHT Team’s magnificent efforts in progressing plans to build a new village hall to replace the existing buildings
- Sponsorship of WestFEST events
- Buying and setting up the Christmas tree. We successfully partnered with the Westcott 100 Club, Holy Trinity Church and Westcott Gardeners Club to make everything associated with the tree a success
- provided direct financial support for the Westcott School concert at Holy Trinity in December 2023
- having funded the installation of the two defibrillators available in Westcott, we spent over £400 on upgrading the cabinets. We thank those who continue to maintain them so when needed, they will help save lives.

But for instance we have not been able to organise a much needed litter pick so far this year – maybe some enthusiastic residents could take this up and organise some activity on a regular basis around the village. The WVA would be very happy to support this financially and with our communications reach.

Jo Astor continues to exploit social media communications so that in addition to the Village Magazine, regular email newsletters and social media bulletins ensure we reach as many residents as possible, and on a timely basis. In the last four months for instance, 70 media posts have been shared reaching a potential 9300 people and two email newsletters have been sent to our 416 email subscribers - and three quarters of those have been opened – showing a clear interest in village matters.

A key element of our Communications approach is to continue to encourage Residents to use the contact@westcottvillage.com email address to advise us of problems or concerns. We will acknowledge these mails and do our best to progress them to a satisfactory conclusion if we are able to. Residents must appreciate though that the WVA have no right of enforcement. We can advise and recommend and alert those who can enforce but no more. Residents might need to consider involving their local Councillors and seeking their help more often.

Whilst continuing to meet data protection regulations, the WVA is pleased to share our communications network in support of any suitable Village activity.

[JA two minutes to speak and answer questions]

On the downside, and just for comment, it is very disappointing that there has been no more SpeedWatch activity in the last year. We made a very good case – we thought – at the last AGM in June 2023 for Residents to volunteer for SpeedWatch duties but no-one has come forward. A great opportunity missed given that speeding and noisy traffic continues to blight the Village. The WVA still regard SpeedWatch activity and reporting as 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 camera. The good news is that we do have a new Coordinator. Please reconsider giving your time to restart this valuable activity when it is re-launched again.

Progress on Highways changes to improve road safety with signage and road markings for instance is proving difficult but some good progress has been made in addition to the VAS replacement.

[NL two minutes to speak on SpeedWatch particularly & answer questions]

We said at the beginning of this report that more that can be done in the village but we need more volunteers for general Committee duties.

After starting the year with seven Committee members, one soon resigned due to work commitments leaving the six we have today. At this AGM only four have put themselves forward for re-election with two resigning for valid reasons. With the full support of the Committee, we have Magesh Ramakrishnan standing for election as Treasurer which is great news but this is tempered by three of the other four committing only to serve for one more year at the very most.

At this point, on behalf of all of residents, thanks are due to Sally Hewetson and Edwin Harland who are the Committee Members and Trustees who are standing down this evening.. Both have contributed much to WVA and village affairs whilst on the Committee and I know both are continuing to do so in other important roles.

So a plea - again - for new Committee Members to help now and critically to ensure continuity when current Committee members stand down. Without new talent coming forward, the prospects for the WVA are not bright. The WVA Constitution allows for up to twelve Committee Members but with a meeting quorum of five.

But - we recognise that there is so much going on that volunteer resource is spread thinly across many worthy and active charitable and social activities both in and outside the Village. Many volunteers wear several hats.

So the WVA Committee are wondering whether it is time to think more strategically as a village to better co ordinate and streamline our organisations to reduce overlap and duplication, and use our limited volunteer resource more effectively and efficiently. Is there a way to achieve this whilst still respecting the different goals and ambitions of these individual organisations? Do volunteers and residents / members want this? Idea to be put forward for discussion at the AGM..

Briefly looking at what we specified last year as areas of focus for 23/24 comments *in italics* on the status are:

- The Local Plan and planning applications generally:
 - *As noted above we continue to follow these closely – see also meeting slides*

- Establishing the resource needed to apply for project funding and then submitting viable worthwhile projects for consideration
 - *Within existing Committee resource we have submitted two CIL bids as noted already and supported a third put together and submitted by volunteers helping All Saints School. The CIL bid assessment process is still not clear and transparent enough to the public. Dedicated resource to cover this and funding sources generally would be extremely useful - Volunteers welcome.*

- Continuing to support other Village organisations and activities with advice, active support and funding where possible
 - *Achieved – several specifics noted in the Report*

- Monitoring the loss of retail outlets in the village and researching what options / requirements are available for the use of this space
 - *No specific works done here. We have established that the village will not have a replacement counter Post Office service. Policy treatment of former retail sites will be reconsidered as part of the updated WNDP*

- Considering how to update the Neighbourhood Development Plan which is required by end of 2025
 - *As noted in the main Report – progressed and now requires a Village Forum to be convened and a leadership group to be established.*

- Researching options to ease parking pressures and other related matters such as EV charging and a car club
 - *Some investigation that concluded little can be achieved short term. Will be a matter to consider for the updated WNDP.*

- Building on the success of the March 23 Open Meeting format of informal discussions and conversations and facilitating residents talking to each other
 - *Informal Open Meetings held successfully in December 2023 at St Johns and in March 2024 at the Prince of Wales. A range of topics were discussed and a number of relevant Speakers attended. Attendances numbers were good and resulting feedback has been very positive. We will continue with this format.*

At this stage, the Committee are not in a position to be specific about what might be areas of focus in 2024 / 25 other than

1. concluding existing projects and lines of enquiry
2. continuing financial and practical support of village events and
3. considering how to progress the update that is required to the WNDP – as it becomes out of time in March 2026 - which will be covered separately as part of the AGM Agenda
4. reacting to planning applications and developments particularly at Sondes Place and Milton Court Lane

We will participate in any discussions that might arise from the Committee's view that voluntary and other resources of village organisations might be used / made available more efficiently and effectively.

A question to ask residents is – what do you think the WVA should focus its limited time and resources on?

Please let us know if you have any views – email: contact@westcottvillage.com

We will continue to work to a brief that is to at least maintain and wherever possible, improve the quality of life for everyone in the village.

Edwin will present the Accounts as part of the Agenda – please see the financial review included as part of the Trustees' Report for the year ended 31st March 2024. In summary we are still have funds with which the WVA can continue to support activities which are of benefit to our community. Our thanks go to Hugh Parry for examining the 2023/24 Accounts and for agreeing to continue as the Independent Examiner for another year.

Note that the Trustees' Report and Annual Accounts are on the WVA website if you want to read them in full.

Thank you on behalf of the Westcott Village Association Committee

Jo Astor, Paul Goddard, Edwin Harland, Sally Hewetson, James Leaver, Nick Lund.
27th June 2024