

2017 – 2018 WTC Annual Town Meeting
18th April 2018

1.

Good evening, I'm Alan Wesley Chairman of your Council and very pleased to welcome you to the 6th Annual Meeting of Westerham Town Council and its Ward of Crockham Hill.

We have a “challengingly” large agenda to get through and I expect a lively questions session at the end.

I say questions at the end as we have thought very carefully about the content for this meeting with the emphasis on anticipating likely questions in the presentation information, so you may find the answer popping up later on.

We have a full complement of County and District Councilors, all with speaking parts this evening, welcome, and your Town Councillors are within the room and identified by name badges.

The previous years' community engagement format is repeated with my thanks to the organisations and societies represented this evening and who are keen to interact with us.

On your seats we have placed copies of tonight's slides which include the agenda. Copy of a Town Council, District Councillor collaborative letter to SDC which we will explain later and a plan extracted from the latest Which Way Westerham proposals, again its content later explained.

Also there are larger scale versions on our boards at the entrance and posted on our website.

Two apologies from me.

Firstly for the crowded arena. We were unable to book the school hall and secondly for the absence of refreshments tonight due to the consequent lack of elbow room in here.

Without more ado I declare the Town Meeting in session and turn to item one of the agenda.

I will ask our Town Clerk to report on apologies for non attendance. Angela.

Secondly to ask the meeting to approve the minutes of last year's meeting which Council have seen and made no comment.

These minutes have been on our website for some time also without comment from attendees at that meeting.

As all the matters arising have either been dealt with as promised or are on this agenda, I would ask the meeting to approve the 2017 Annual Town Meeting minutes.

IN FAVOUR AGAINST

Thank you.

I now turn to my **report to the community** for the year ended the 31st March 2018.

The issues of the Local Plan, antisocial behaviour, Covers Farm and Moorhouse will be covered in some detail later on the agenda so I won't comment on them at this stage.

First of all I would like to talk about the money we have available to spend on and in the community.

Our routine spend to provide ongoing services comes from our **precept** which in turn comes from your annual Council tax payment and in the current year is £206,000 in round figures.

For one off major projects we have had to find grants which year on year become less available.

The good news is that this year in addition to our precept we have £157,000 from our share of the **Community Infrastructure Levy** paid by the developers of the Linden Homes and Croft Road housebuilding sites in Westerham.

We will spend the £157,000 this year on infrastructure projects plus grant aid of £33,000 which we have been awarded towards the replacement costs of the antiquated playground equipment in Crockham Hill.

I reported last year on the priority projects as defined by community consultations and said they were all CIL or grant dependent.

This year we can report meaningful implementation.

Our priorities are **Parking** improvements which have been designed and priced. The designed locations are in Madan and Hartley Roads, Costells Meadow and Crockham Hill Playing Field.

We think we can achieve 45 extra spaces in Westerham and 30 in Crockham Hill at a cost of about £2000 a space.

We have contracted to replace the **Fullers Hill toilets** – 48,000. This is a substantial amount of money but responds to the clear need expressed in public consultations. The toilets should be in use by July.

The Darent bridge is falling into the river and a long walk to the playground and playing field without it. Getting installation permits and Environment Agency approval all a nightmare but the new bridge should be in place by the summer holidays at the bargain price of £22,650.

We are **keeping Westerham attractive** as an ongoing priority with grant aided £10,800 for very smart bollards around the Green. Last year I referred to the source of the grant as KCC Members grant, this year I can thank our County Councillor by name as Nick Chard is here this evening. Nick many thanks.

We have raised £33,000 in grants to **replace the playground** equipment in **Crockham Hill**. This comprises £29,000 from a BIFFA Landfill Communities Award, £2,000 each from the Crockham Hill broadband CIC and Councillor Chard's KCC Members Fund. In addition £8,000 will come from the Playing Field Trust which is funded by the Town Council and £8,000 direct from the Town Council.

The Westerham and Crockham Hill **Planning Design statement** will be a vital document in considering any future development in Westerham and CH.

It will be a guide to help us to consider, as we now must, what Westerham wants over the next 15 years and not what might be imposed upon us.

More on this later but £7,000 well spent.

We have been partners in two projects since 2016, firstly to extend the Darent Valley footpath and cycle path from Chipstead to

Westerham and Sevenoaks Greensands Commons Project to open up and better use our three local commons. We have committed financial support for a five year period to both projects.

Both contributions enable the release of sizeable lottery funding and support our “**improving green spaces**” priority. We are pleased to see WWW engaging more recently in these ongoing projects as well.

We are also pleased to be getting on with some meaningful project implementation and not just talking about it.

The getting on with it enables me to tell you what great value for money WTC is. This year we will spend more than £450,000 in the communities of Westerham and Crockham Hill set against your Council tax payment of £206,000.

Last year we spent 285,000 set against tax receipts of 196,000. Definitely value for money as I am sure you will agree!

Youth Antisocial Behaviour and Vandalism

We have invested £7,000 in a state of the art mobile CCTV and our lamp posts in suitable locations are being altered to provide bases for electrical attachment.

The performance, if it can be called that, by the police in stopping or even diminishing the level of antisocial activity has been poor.

We have put in a lot of effort to get the CSP to put on the 23rd May Community event.

Whilst we will advertise the meeting widely can I please impress upon residents the need to attend in large and angry numbers so that the CSP leaves Westerham in no doubt about the adverse impact the behaviour is having on the wellbeing of so many people.

Can I also emphasise the importance of reporting this behavior to the police as the community anger and concern we hear about is not reflected in the numbers of reported incidents.

My final point is confirmation that our independently examined regulatory and audit performance is without criticism.

We have operated within our budget and our reserves remain adequate.

Agenda item 3.

I ask County **Councillor Nick Chard** to address the meeting.

Agenda item 4

Both our District Councilors are pleased to be here but only one can speak and **Councillor Maskell** WON the toss of a coin and therefore will address the meeting.

Item 5

So what is the Town Council's position and perspective with regard to where we are at in respect of the Local Plan and the Which Way Westerham exceptional circumstances proposal?

Well first of all the Local Plan process is in "limbo" as far as new information and public consultations are concerned.

SDC are not publishing the draft Local Plan or anything else for public consultation until Summer this year preceded by a Planning Advisory Committee meeting on the 19th June when the draft Local Plan will be seen for the first time.

We need to use the intervening time wisely to consider what Westerham wants to do as a community as opposed to what we don't want and I will come on to that shortly.

Before we go any further I want to make clear our policy regarding the **Green Belt**.

Westerham is a defined area, known as an inset in planning terms. The inset boundary was last reviewed and confirmed in the 2015 Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document.

ADMDPD to you and apologies for planners' love of long plan descriptions.

The function of the inset is to exclude the built up area of Westerham from the surrounding greenbelt. The inset has a boundary which can be seen on the relevant SDC map.

We have placed a large scale clear map of the inset and its boundaries on our boards at the entrance as it won't project visibly.

It allows a modest degree of new development and in the existing Local Plan provisions were made for 65 dwellings and a small business site.

However the Kent Downs AONB covers both the surrounding countryside and Westerham itself.

SDC have said the greenbelt will continue to be protected by them but because of the AONB status there is a further layer of planning protection.

None of the 4 WWW proposed housing locations that you see on the plans we have provided are within the inset.

They are therefore in both Greenbelt and AONB.

The last slide sentence confirms SDC's intention to investigate the use of the "exceptional circumstances" argument for new housing.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE WWW PROPOSAL.

These are the constituent parts of the WWW offering as seen in their drop in sessions in December and January and extend the more general description we saw in the SDC survey last year and on which you voted in our Council vote.

I will come back to our views on the content of the WWW exceptional circumstances in a moment.

Next to remind you of **your decision** in last year's vote.

741 households voted which is 37% of the 2016 households, 86% were against. Of the 105 in support many were qualified e.g. 600 houses too many and infrastructure first.

The SDC survey, of Westerham and Crockham Hill with results extracted from their District wide survey recorded 73% opposed to the WWW concept.

Both the Town Council vote and the SDC survey reflected very clearly the views of Westerham and Crockham Hill.

What are our concerns and questions regarding the WWW proposals?

One of the documents you have is a copy letter jointly produced by WTC and our DCLLRS and sent to SDC planners.

This sets out our factual and technical challenges to what we have seen in the latest WWW proposals.

Suffice it to say we are unconvinced that all the queries set out in the letter can be resolved in time for a clear judgement to be made as to whether to include the WWW proposals in the draft Local plan.

Some comments on the slide headings.

Data, sources, validity.

We do not recognize many of the statistics but understand SDC will independently validate these areas.

SHELAA and sustainability.

SHELAA is a planning acronym for Strategic Housing Economic Land Availability Assessment.

The assessment of land availability is an important step in the preparation of Local Plans.

The National Planning Policy Framework – NPPF – identifies the advantages of carrying out land assessments for housing and economic development as part of developing Local Plans so that sites may be allocated for the use which is most appropriate.

The process under this heading principally appraises Achievability Suitability and Availability of the submitted sites into the Local Plan process.

The house building sites within the WWW proposal were appraised under these headings in 2017.

The plans on your seats show the location of the sites

Only the land either side of Farley Lane was deemed developable with a maximum of 88 units but nevertheless is in the greenbelt. All other sites were assessed as unsuitable because of AONB and other reasons e.g access and flood zone.

We BELIEVE that the previous assessments OF THE 4 SITES cannot be changed.

A final point with regard to the Nation Planning Policy Framework.

Proposed changes to the NPPF are out for consultation closing 10/5. One change is that Exceptional Circumstances arguments need to include the proposal being near a transport hub. Westerham is not.

Greenbelt

NPPF para 79 states “The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.”

Para 83 states “Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the local plan. At that time authorities should consider the Green belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period”

Given that 93% of SDC is greenbelt they cannot meet their increased housing need from the remaining 7% so need to consider whether there are exceptional circumstances which would justify alterations to green belt boundaries to accommodate new development.

This brings me on to Exceptional circumstances.

WWW are using this approach to justify building 600 houses.

In the NPPF and guidelines there are no definitions of “exceptional circumstances”.

It is our view that neither the exceptional circumstances case has been proven nor the public interest argument that is needed where AONB is concerned.

The argument that the WWW development can work in favour of the AONB by building housing on it is hard to understand given the purpose of AONB designation.

Many of the AONB improvements proposed by WWW such as tree planting, access improvements, habitat restoration, flood risk mitigation are initiatives that a landowner could undertake as a responsible landowner and probably get Government grant aid to do it.

What isn't needed is a change to green belt boundaries or a major housing development to do it.

ADDITIONAL HOUSING

We need to be careful in thinking ONLY about the 600 houses in the WWW proposal.

BECAUSE, SDC's 2017 Issues and Options Consultation Page 76 identifies 156 units from permissions already given, increasing density and from brownfield sites

In addition experience indicates that some additional 10 dwellings per annum will be built through judicious infill of spaces and or change of use e.g former Avant Homes building 14 units and the NatWest building 3 flats.

Over the 20 years of the New Local Plan this would build some 150 to 200 units.

So this adds up to another 300 to 350 units in addition to WWW's 600.

Also, I should mention, we do not know if other sites have come forward in Westerham or Crockham Hill as the call for sites is still open and SDC has not updated this information for a year.

Air Quality

We cannot see how a relief road running parallel with the M25 with a section of the highest levels of toxic gas in the country can do other than adversely affect Churchill School or the obvious increase from vehicles attached to the 600 houses.

Recently published High Court judgements support this argument that objects to increased pollution from additional housing. Swale Borough Council versus I can't remember who and the CPRE was firmly engaged in this action.

Parking

The proposed usage of the surgery and council offices site for car parking and housing has no support from WTC who own the land nor on enquiry from the GP partners.

We have over a number of years and very recently offered the council office space to the practice for surgery and parking expansion which would be an increase of over 40%.

As an aside the entire site is in a conservation area so multi storey car parking is entirely inappropriate.

Relief Road.

You have heard from Cllr Chard the latest situation on the restoration and pre application.

The restoration will appear as a Planning Application with the usual opportunities to comment.

What is clear from a recent “on the record” exchange of correspondence between ourselves and Highways England is that they have no concerns over stability relevant to Covers Farm sand pit.

They comment that stability issues were considered at the time of the recent expansion of running to the hard shoulder.

They do however “require to approve any restoration of the land adjacent to the M25 and any relief road plans as these may impact on stability”.

Highways England views and requirements would override any KCC proposals in the event of planning or other disagreements.

Infill quantities.

Over time these have varied from nil to four million metric tonnes.

We believe that the need for infill in large quantities is unproven unless to create an engineered base for a relief road.

The need for the relief road is also unproven and no exceptional circumstances argument stands scrutiny for routing over green belt. The permission for this use of the green belt rests with SDC and should be within the SHELAA assessment I have spoken about already. In any event SDC would be consultees to Kent Highways on green belt issues.

Please note that KCC do not have a relief road for Westerham as an existing requirement nor would they for the building of 600 houses.

Timescale

The WWW project says it would be built by 2025. Given that the Local Plan might be approved by the end of 2019 at the earliest and the timescale is also dependent upon inert landfill availability, we feel 2025 is unrealistic.

More to the point is traffic volume from lorries affecting the area and that volume is a Kent Highways planning issue.

One scoping report in 2017 relevant to the restoration requires 800,000 cu metres which is 150 lorry movements a day for 5 years.

A 2016 report requires vastly more infill which would result in one lorry movement every minute for 5 years.
The burden on surrounding communities is likely to be intolerable.

Financing and Liabilities.

The restoration liability appears to have been transferred to a company with limited assets.

The financial capability for the restoration is a planning consideration.

DPD AND MOORHOUSE.

The plan you have shows an area of search for an exit onto the A25 west of Westerham.

This area of search is within metres of any potential exit to a DPD transport depot and existing Moorhouse site activity.

We are uncertain how the two Highways Authorities of Kent and Surrey would view this prospect.

In addition the concept of all DPD/Moorhouse site traffic using the relief road and the pollution impact on Churchill school as a result is a major concern.

Although the DPD website says the application to build on the Moorhouse site is still a current ambition, it would be submitted first on a pre application basis having been refused twice.

To date no application has been made.

Westerham's Future.

We have responded to the WWW proposal in line with the community vote. Our SDC Cllrs also.

There will be more housing in any event in the same way as we have had over the last 10 years notwithstanding the WWW proposals.

Future dwellings built will generate CIL payments and that creates an opportunity to improve the infrastructure in Westerham and Crockham Hill.

We intend to use our new design statement as a basis for developing the key points that might otherwise be in a Neighbourhood Plan and with the object of protecting the green belt and AONB.

SDC has approved our Village Design statement.

We had hoped by this stage it would have been released for consultation into the community and we have been pressing them to do so.

In the absence of its release let me share some of its main points and where clear planning guidance is given.

Firstly it was written and researched by the local communities with only advisory input from the District Council and so represents a community view of how new development should be designed in order to retain a sense of place.

Future development to the North of the Town towards the motorway should have regard to air quality regulation.

Views to the AONB give relief from the built form and offer a reminder of the rural setting of the Town.

Protection of the historic setting of Westerham within the Darent Valley.

Protection of the Parish heritage assets including listed buildings.

Setting design principles for new developments to preserve the character of the Parish.

Protecting and enhancing the special and rural setting of the settlements within the AONB.

A new build technology park with a mix of unit sizes would be a welcome addition IN THE RIGHT LOCATION.

SO WHAT NEXT?

We need to get the VDS into the community for local consultation and to gain the involvement of local groups and residents.

We will call a Public meeting in the short term to focus progressing “what Westerham wants”

WHAT DO OUR NEIGHBOURS THINK?

Any restoration application will reveal the extent of infill proposed – not necessarily the extent agreed, the timescale to infill, its sources and thereby work out vehicle movement frequency and routes.

Cllr Chard is on the ball over these issues and we will keep our neighbours informed.

Biggin Hill airport has grand expansion plans which look to require substantial construction work which entails substantial HGV movements before we can enjoy substantial numbers of aircraft movements.

Another watch closely local happening.

Whilst all this goes on the area crisis over an all round parking problem gets worse.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

We have engaged a planning consultant specializing in Local Government planning activities to advise us.

We are being advised on **the practical and monetary aspects** of implementing major housebuilding and infrastructure projects.

We have identified a **transport consultant** for purposes of numerical analysis of movement data in respect of any DPD developments and to respond to Westerham Issues in the draft Local Plan.

Cllr Chard supports the view that **KCC should engage independent technical assessment** in respect of the restoration application for Covers Farm.

Our panel is the speakers plus Councillor Helen Ogden our vice chairman and Councillor Philip Ashley who chairs our planning committee.