

Chairman's Report including Financial Summary 2019-2020

This is the first report from your new Council, elected in May 2019. In a 'normal' year we would have held an Annual Town Meeting and invited you all to come, hear what your Council has been doing during the year and hold us to account.

But this has turned out to be no normal year. So we have prepared an abbreviated report of the year which, through the means of TN16 will be delivered to all those who live in our town. Should you have any questions or need further information, on it, then do please email or phone the office.

Strategic objectives and priorities

As a new Council, we consulted with our residents about their priorities for our four year term. The themes which emerged have been adopted as Council's priorities:

- **Keep Westerham a thriving, clean and tidy small town**
- **Improve Parking**
- **Keep Westerham a safe town – from traffic and anti social behaviour**
- **Support the community and the businesses which operate in Westerham**

These are in addition to Council's ongoing responsibilities as consultee for all Planning applications, for managing our allotments, playing fields and open spaces for the benefit of the community, for providing and supporting activities for children, young people and the elderly, for much of the lighting in the town and for representing the views of our residents with both District and County Councils and our MP on issues outside our remit.

Progress against the key priorities in this first year of the Council is as follows:

Keep Westerham a thriving, clean and tidy small town

- We have continued to represent our residents' views on the major planning issues which could affect the character of the town:
 - **SDC's Local Plan 2015-2035:** Following the exclusion of the Which Way Westerham proposals from the draft Local Plan, Councillors attended the public hearings held by the Inspector in autumn 2019, at which many of the developers whose plans had been omitted (including WWW) put forward their objections to exclusion. The Inspector halted these hearings in October 2019 on the grounds that insufficient consultation with neighbouring Councils had taken place, a view disputed by SDC who launched a Judicial Review of the process. Our MP Laura Trott, together with neighbouring MPs has now written to the Secretary of State asking him 'to use his powers to ensure that the recommendation from the Planning Inspectorate is reconsidered' Your Council is keeping abreast of developments and will continue to Keep You Informed.
 - **Moorhouse:** DPD walked away from their application to develop the site as a distribution hub in July 2019. However, Tandridge District Council included the site as suitable for development as a 'Strategic Employment Site' in their draft Local Plan. The Chairman spoke to oppose this at the

Public Hearing in October 2019. The Inspector's report is yet to be delivered.

- **Covers Farm:** further information was provided to KCC by the applicant (Morants Promotions) during the year and a further application to extend the date by which the work should be completed was made. Council continued its objection to the proposal which the advice it has received considers unnecessary, It would involve some 5-6 years of HGV traffic to the site, detracting from our ambition to be a thriving clean and tidy town and would adversely affect our school. The consideration of this application by KCC's Planning Committee has been delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- We continue to manage our open spaces to make them attractive to residents and visitors alike and have increased the frequency of litter bin emptying on our playing fields.
- We have continued to support financially both the Sevenoaks Greensand Commons Project and the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership. The former, to which a number of Councillors gave their physical effort, is designed to make our three commons more accessible: the latter aims to extend the Darent Valley footpath from Chipstead to Westerham. The Council has been disappointed with the progress of this latter project and is discussing with SDC how it might be moved forward.

Improve Parking

The Council was delighted that its application for top-up funding from Sevenoaks District Council's CIL fund was successful. Presentations by District Councillor Kevin Maskell and the Chairman to the CIL Board in December 2019 resulted in a grant of £49,975 to complete the overall cost of £185,926 for an extension to Costells Meadow Car Park, an on-field car park at Crockham Hill Playing Field and additional spaces in Hartley and Madan Roads in Westerham.

It had been hoped to complete this work prior to this summer, but again, this has been delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Keeping Westerham a safe town

Traffic: Council has had initial discussions with KCC about restricting speed on certain roads in the town. These are at a very early stage and the outcome as yet uncertain.

Anti social behaviour and vandalism: while maintaining its insistence that those who behave in an anti-social way should be dealt with appropriately, Council has focussed this year on prevention. A meeting in July 2019, sponsored by SDC's Community Support Unit, enabled us to ask our residents for their views. Many of the ideas have been incorporated into our priority to:

Support the community and the businesses which operate in Westerham

The Youth Club run at Churchill School attracts attendance of 24. A new approach – a youth bus – with an inaugural 'Free Food Friday' held on 28 February was successful in attracting young people and some of their families. A promising start

was brought to a premature halt by the coronavirus pandemic but will be revived as soon as this is possible.

Our major ambition for this four year term is to begin the **redevelopment of King George's Field and Pavilion** for the community. A challenging project which will demand extensive external funding in addition to the reserve of £95,000 which the Council has already created. At this stage we had hoped to be beginning consultation with the school, organisations and clubs about how they would like to see this wonderful playing field developed. Once more the pandemic has upset our intentions. We will return to this once we are able.

In the incessant winter rains Westerham suffered badly from **flooding**, especially in the Croydon Road, Rysted Lane, South Bank and Industrial Estate areas. Especial thanks are due to the efforts of Cllr Alex Bates our Flood Warden, who worked with the emergency services and agencies to mitigate the effects. Council's intention to meet all relevant groups to identify and plan for preventative action is another issue which will need to be revived post pandemic.

Looking forward

As we enter into the 'new normal', your Council will need not only to complete those actions which have been put on hold, but also to support and facilitate the town, its residents and businesses in whatever way it can to thrive and prosper in the new world. Working in conjunction with the Economic Recovery Plan being developed by Sevenoaks District Council and businesses in the town, we will look for practical ways in which we can help.

Keeping in Touch and Keeping You Informed

Throughout the year, we have kept in touch through our regular item in TN16, through our website and Facebook pages, by noticeboards and by personal contacts by Councillors and staff. We will continue to do so and in the light of experience through the pandemic, will look for further ways of communication between Councillors and those it represents.

Finances

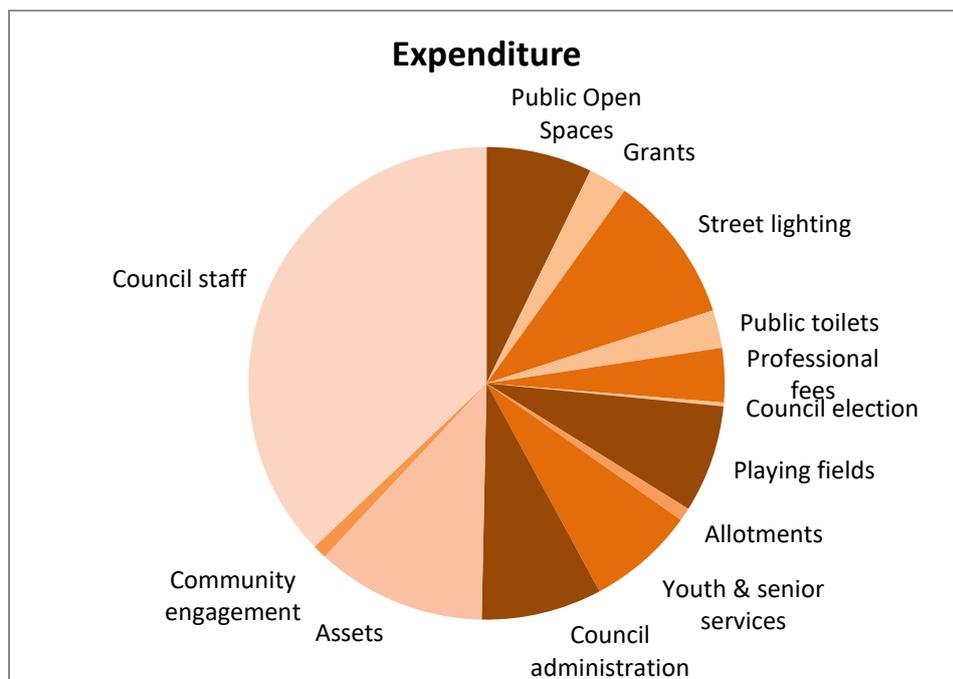
The audit of our accounts has been delayed by the pandemic, so we publish below our unaudited accounts for the year 2019-20. We do not expect any significant query when the audit finally does take place.

WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL RETURN	
Year ending 31st March 2020 *Unaudited	
BALANCE B/F	£380,040
PRECEPT	£226,720
TOTAL OTHER RECEIPTS	£58,730
STAFF COSTS	£99,615
LOANS	Nil
TOTAL OTHER PAYMENTS	£163,244
BALANCE C/F	£402,632
TOTAL CASH & INVESTMENTS	£398,661
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS	2,053,844

Income

The Council generates its income from rents, leases, grants and contributions (Christmas lights/hanging baskets etc). The balance of our income –the 'precept' paid as part of their Council Tax by local tax payers amounted to £226,720: £109.59 or £2.11 per week from Council tax band D houses in Westerham/Crockham Hill

Our total spend for the year was some £260,000, split as shown in the pie chart below.



Any balance of income over expenditure, and any Community Infrastructure Levy income (the levy paid by developers once their developments are built and occupied) are channelled to our reserves. Although our General Reserve is slightly below the level of 30% of precept recommended, our Specific Reserves more than offset that shortfall

Councillors and the Council Staff Team

None of the activity outlined in this report would be possible without the commitment and dedication of Councillors, all of whom are volunteers, and of our well qualified and highly motivated staff team. It is impossible to overstate the efforts made by all in responding to the changes necessitated by the pandemic. From coordinating volunteers, to running on line meetings, from working from home to communication mainly via remote means, all have risen to the challenge and have remained committed to representing and serving their community.

As we move into the future, we will all work to continue the community spirit and effort which has been so evident in Westerham and Crockham Hill while learning to live in the new normal.