



WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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Westerham Town Council – Annual Report – 2021-22

2021 – 2022: the year of cautious emergence into an (almost) post-Covid world, of the gradual lifting of restrictions and of catching up on those activities necessarily paused during the height of the pandemic.

It is remarkable to look back on the changes we have lived through during the past two years: yet more remarkable that we adapted to them and made them work. We trust that now we are well on the route to the 'new normal', we will retain the spirit of community which was so valuable during the pandemic.

This will be our first face to face Annual Town Meeting since 2019: an important meeting when we report back to the community on progress in the past year and look forward to the activities of the coming year.

Key Priorities

You, our residents, set this Council's key priorities as:

- **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**

Keep Westerham a thriving, clean and tidy small town

The major planning issues which could affect the future character of our town remain unresolved:

Local Plans: following the rejection by Planning Inspectors of both Sevenoaks and Tandridge Districts' draft plans, much work has continued behind the scenes by both District Councils to update the information on which their draft Plans are based and to deal with the questions posed by the Inspectors. The intention is to re-present the plans for comment by the community during 2022 before a final draft is submitted. Currently, there is no firm timetable for these next steps.

Your Council is keeping abreast of developments in both these plans and will input when appropriate. Our stance is, as ever, to preserve the Green Belt surrounding the town and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which washes over it, while supporting development which is needed by and appropriate to our community,

Planning legislation: Government expressed its intention to reform the 'broken planning system' and had published a White Paper setting out its intentions. Following his appointment in September 2021 the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced a pause in this proposed legislation. Further news is awaited.

Covers Farm: The application by Squerryes Estate to restore Covers Farm sandpit has not yet been heard by Kent County Council's Planning Applications Committee. While in favour of the principle of restoration, your Council has vigorously opposed the method proposed in the application, as have surrounding Councils. We will present the views of the Council and the community it represents in person at the hearing, whenever it is fixed.

Clean and tidy: following the distressing scenes during the first lockdowns when litter was indiscriminately scattered around the town, your Council has worked closely with Sevenoaks District Council, which is responsible for rubbish collection, The immediate and most visible result is the mini road sweeper now positioned in Westerham. It – and its driver, Vince, - have made a marked difference to the centre of the town. Our thanks go to SDC for providing this.



Thanks too must go to all those who have litter picked over the past year. Not only have there been litter picking sessions organised by your Council and by organisations such as Keep Westerham Green, but especial thanks should also go to those individual members of the public who regularly keep 'their' part of Westerham free of litter.

Improve Parking

Last year's Annual report stated that the scheme to provide additional parking spaces in both Westerham and at Crockham Hill Playing Field had been a major casualty of the pandemic.

This year there is much better news, all four schemes: the extension of Costells Meadow, additional on street parking in both Madan and Hartley Roads and a new car park at Crockham Hill have all been



completed. Together these have provided over 70 extra spaces. This is no mean achievement in a town where space is hard to come by.

Keep Westerham a safe town – from traffic and anti social behaviour

Traffic calming: it has been a source of great satisfaction that the long campaigned-for 20mph speed limit on the A25 though the town has been introduced. Stretching from Vicarage Hill in the east to beyond Verralls Corner in the west and encompassing the roads which feed into it – notably parts of London Road and Croydon Road – this is proving to be an effective means of slowing through traffic. Taken together with the one-way system round The Green, the schemes are starting to calm and control the traffic at a speed which is acceptable and practical for the town and improve the quality of life for residents. Your Council is not so naïve as to think that all traffic will immediately obey the new restrictions, so it is reviewing, together with Kent County Council, their effectiveness to see if any additional measures are needed. It is also planning to restart Speedwatch – suspended during the pandemic.



Thanks go to County Councillor Nick Chard, whose Members' Fund made these changes possible.

Anti-social behaviour: This is a topic on which we can never become complacent and which we must continually keep under review. With the gradual relaxation of restrictions, it was possible to restart work with young people. Your Council funded contractors, Playplace, to bring a double decker bus to Westerham for 2 nights a week. Equipped with music making and gaming facilities and providing free food - a continuation of our Free Food Fridays - the bus attracted an average of 10 youths per evening.

A younger age group has enjoyed boxing sessions partially funded by your Council in Westerham Hall.

In the search for activities which engage and divert those who might otherwise indulge in anti-social behaviour, your Council is constantly evaluating alternative provision and will always seek those offering good value.

Support the community and the businesses which operate in Westerham

This has been a key focus of the last year as the pandemic restrictions

lifted, businesses sought to recover and social activities opened up again.

Your Council canvassed local retail businesses to find out what it could do to help: as a result a Social Media Skills programme was set up to help them recover from the impact of the Covid slow down. 20 businesses took up the offer of these sessions.

Aware that the pandemic had increased the level of isolation felt by many, your Council provided Christmas Hampers for people who lived alone or were in difficult circumstances.

60 hampers containing the latest Covid information, masks and

sanitisers as well as information on community activities which were resuming, were delivered: the feedback was very positive.



Both above initiatives were funded by grants from Sevenoaks District Council.

A very important role in our community is that of Community Warden, so it was a sad day at the end of March when we said 'Happy retirement' to Steve Grange. As Westerham's Community Warden over the last eight years he had built strong relationships with all parts of the community and was a much valued member of our team. He is already missed, and while a hard act to follow, we hope to welcome a new Warden before too long.

'Normal business'

Against this background, the normal day to day business of your Council continues. The three allotment sites in the town are managed: it has been noticeable that during the pandemic the demand for allotments has increased. Open spaces in the town have been well used – and appreciated – and are now needing extra care and remedial work to ensure they remain spaces we can be proud of. Unusually, your Council provides much of the street lighting in the town and has continued to convert its lighting to LED. More than 120 Planning applications were reviewed and commented on during the year and the work of representing the views of our residents with both District and County Councils and our MP on issues outside our remit does not cease.

Elected by you, the residents, your Councillors always remember that they are here to represent your views and to deal with your queries. We are thus always pleased to hear from you; we welcome your attendance at any of our meetings and will always try to deal promptly with your emails, phone calls or personal visits.

Looking forward

The coming year, 2022-2023, will be the last of this Council's term of office: elections will be held in May 2023. During this year the focus will be on:

- The redevelopment of King George's Field: consultation with you in the autumn of 2021 gave a clear steer on your priorities and the project is starting with the refurbishment of the playground and the specification of the 'skatepark'.
- Eco policy: the theme of this year's Annual Town Meeting. It has never been more important to think of the climate implications of our activities and over the next year your Council will be working through its activities to determine how it can become 'greener'
- Resumption of the community activities – lunch clubs, hearing aid clinics etc which are so valued by our residents

Finance and Governance

In the year ended 31st March 2022 Council expenditure was within its authorised budget and spending powers. All spend was in pursuance of agreed activities and priorities. Council's accounts for 2021/22 have not yet been audited, so they are in draft form:

WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL RETURN	
Year ending 31st March 2022 *unaudited	
BALANCE B/F	£534,914
PRECEPT	£252,000
TOTAL OTHER RECEIPTS	£118,081
STAFF COSTS	£107,993
LOANS	Nil
TOTAL OTHER PAYMENTS	£308,662
BALANCE C/F	£488,340
TOTAL CASH & INVESTMENTS	£472,023
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS	£2,054,532

During this last year Council expenditure either made or committed was £416,655; some £164,655 in excess of the precept (the Town Council's share of your Council Tax). Council's ability to raise additional funds through rents, leases, accessing grants and other external sources of funding means that it can spend more on our community than it asks the community to contribute. This included using Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies, held in reserves, to create over 70 additional parking spaces around the town.

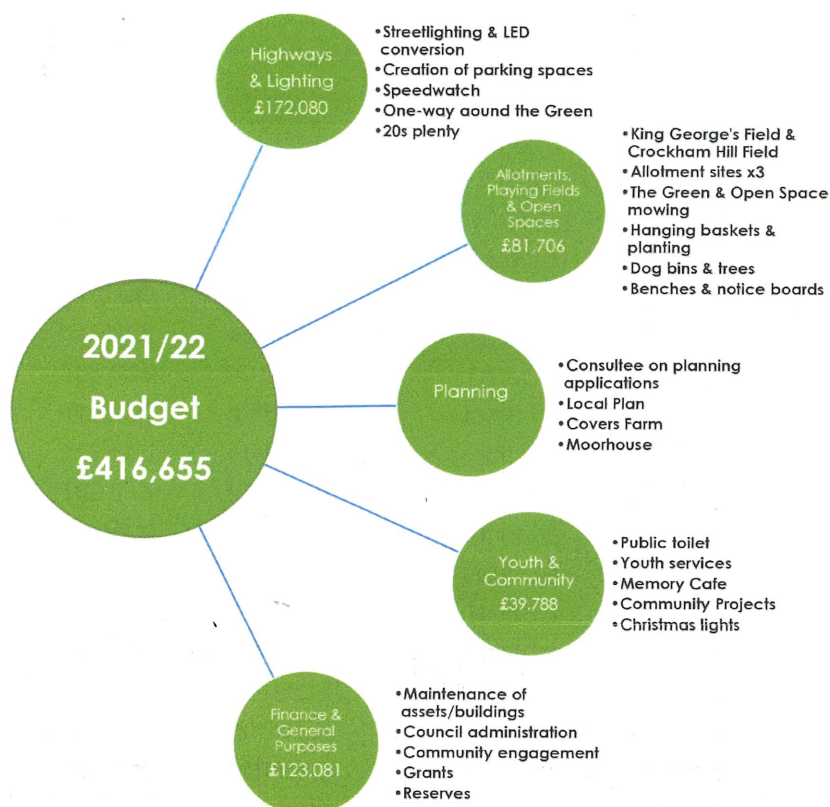
The Council tax passed to Westerham Town Council amounted to £252,000 in 2021/22, which cost £123.68 per year or £2.38 per week, for Council tax band D houses in Westerham/Crockham Hill.

How did WTC compare with our neighbouring towns in 2020/21?

	<u>Band D charge</u>	<u>Precept generated</u>
Edenbridge Town Council	156.22	582,722
Sevenoaks Town Council	128.50	1,239,898
Westerham Town Council	123.68	252,000

We believe that Westerham Town Council is able to offer residents good value for money, providing wide ranging services and facilities, albeit with a vastly lower income than our neighbouring towns. The diagram below shows how your money is spent.

Council reserves monies to cover anticipated spend and identified risks, such as the replacement and repair of assets, together with a general reserve of three months expenditure.



Thank you

None of this could happen without the efforts of our Council Officers who continued to adapt to an ever-changing context while maintaining services and making progress on key priorities. On behalf of both the Councillors and you our residents, I would like to record our sincere thanks to them. Thanks must also be recorded to all 13 volunteer Councillors who both individually and as a team give their time to making Westerham a great place to live work and visit.