

Westerham Town Council – End of Term Report April 2023

As this Council's term comes to an end with the elections to be held on 4 May 2023, this is the opportunity for the retiring Council to report on its performance over the last four years.

It's been an eventful 4 years: 8 new Councillors elected in 2019: a pandemic: a Platinum Jubilee: the death of a well loved Monarch: the accession of a new King: political turmoil: soaring inflation: cost of living challenge. Throughout, the Council 'never closed', kept its facilities and services available to all and, in these challenging times, continues to deliver its key services, albeit in changed ways.

So it is only fitting that I start by paying tribute to my fellow Councillors and to Council staff, who continued to carry out their roles in circumstances which were unforeseeable only months earlier.

Helen Ogden
Chairman

Covid

- Remote working & Zoom meetings became the norm for Councillors and staff alike.
- Town Clerk became the coordinator for volunteers, organising shopping, collection of prescriptions for those isolating.
- Allotments, Open Spaces and public toilets remained open throughout
- As restrictions eased
 - Opportunities to 'reconnect' organised and funded: Coffee/ Tea Lunch gatherings in Westerham and Crockham Hill
 - 'All you need to survive' in a box – delivered to vulnerable residents
 - More litter bins and increased cleaning to deal with the litter

We remember all those we lost and will be forever grateful to those who went above and beyond expectations to support the community through hard times.

Throughout, work continued on your priorities:

Keeping Westerham a thriving, clean and tidy small town

Safeguarding the historic town of Westerham: its conservation area, its Green Belt and North Downs AONB setting by:

- Responding to major issues: the Local Plan, the proposed restoration of Covers Farm sandpit, the plans for the Moorhouse site.
- Submitting our views on the development of both Biggin Hill and Gatwick airports.
- Keeping track of ever-changing Planning legislation

Taking care of our environment by:

Adopting an 'Eco Plan to embrace all our activities

- Asking the community for its ideas – the 'green postcards'
- Involving our young generation in the plan: donating bird and insect boxes to our schools and at Family Fun days.
- Town centre cleanliness transformed by SDC's mini sweepers, now resident in the town,
- Organising litter picks in and around the town – including from the River Darent.
- Completing conversion of street lighting to LED
- Reducing our use of pesticide



Litter Pickers March 2023



All our efforts recognised by the accolade of the Silver Wilder Kent award

Improving Parking by providing extra spaces in:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crockham Hill Playing field car park 30 spaces • Costells Meadow car park has been extended and redesigned to provide an additional 14 spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madan and Hartley Roads 31 spaces |
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Keeping Westerham a safe town – from traffic and anti social behaviour:

Road safety:

- Establishing 20's plenty through the town
- Introducing One way round The Green
- Setting up more than 15 new sites for Speedwatch – holding regular Speedwatch campaigns
- Working with KCC to implement residents' proposals on road safety (eg double yellow lines at Westways)

Anti-social behaviour:

Our focus has been on prevention:

- Introducing Free food Friday: bringing in the Youth bus (both interrupted by Covid)
- Organising and funding Boxing / Fitness after school activity – very popular!
- Working closely with Kent County Council and Sevenoaks District Council who bring Youth Workers to the Town.

Supporting the community and the businesses which operate in Westerham:

Supporting the community by:

- Funding and running free Holiday Family Fun days. Making grants to local organisations.
- Running the Forget-me-not Café
- Organising social events for the older generation:
- Along with parents lobbying KCC to maintain school bus services.
- Funding the Friday Lunch Club

Supporting businesses by:

- Providing training in social media for retailers.
- Promoting Westerham through playing an active role in local Chamber of Commerce

The Big Project – King George's Field

Phase 1: Extending and resurfacing Costells Meadow Car Park 14 more spaces. **Complete.**

Phase 2: Refurbishing the playground. **Complete.**

Phase 3: The Skatepark. **In progress completion 2023**

Phases 4 & 5: Trim trail around the Field, Multi use games area and Pavilion. **2024 onwards**



Extra parking in Hartley Road



Refurbished playground, King George's Field

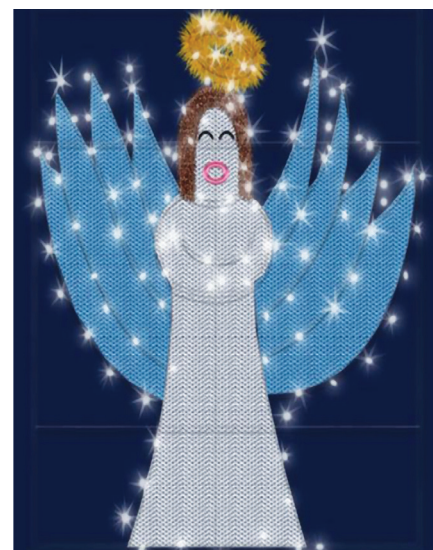
'Normal business' continues:

- three allotment sites are managed:
- Open spaces in Westerham and Crockham Hill have been maintained – and well used.
- An average of more than 100 Planning applications have been reviewed each year in the light of the Westerham Design Statement and Local and National Planning policies and comments made to SDC
- Residents' views on issues outside our remit have been put to both District and County Councils and our MP.

This report cannot conclude without a mention of **Christmas**. With the help of the Westerham Society, each year's display of the Tree, lights and the appearance of Father Christmas has improved on the last – and the plans for Christmas 2023 promise even more. Special mention should be made of the Children's Christmas Design a Light Competition, now in its second year.

Handing on to the next Council

- Continuing to listen to our community especially on its priorities for the next four years
- Remaining vigilant around the key planning issues which may impact Westerham and its surrounding areas
- Improving facilities where we can: eg extending the paved area on The Green to accommodate accessible seating
- Completing the next stages of King George's Field Project
- Continuing to provide services and facilities for our community effectively, efficiently and economically



Winning design for 2022 Christmas Light Competition

Finance and Governance

In the year ended 31st March 2023 Council expenditure was within its authorised budget and spending powers.

All spend was in pursuance of agreed activities and priorities.

Council's accounts for 2022/23 have not yet been audited, so they are in draft form:

WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL RETURN	
Year ending 31st March 2023 *unaudited	
BALANCE B/F	£488,340
PRECEPT	£267,000
TOTAL OTHER RECEIPTS	£167,712
STAFF COSTS	£115,158
LOANS	Nil
TOTAL OTHER PAYMENTS	£271,494
BALANCE C/F	£536,400
TOTAL CASH & INVESTMENTS	£533,851
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS	£2,080,167

During this last year Council expenditure was £386,652; some £119,652 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 extend and resurface Costells Meadow Car Park and refurbish the playground, both at King George's Field.

The Council tax passed to Westerham Town Council in 2022/23 amounted to £267,000 which cost £128.40 per year or £2.47 per week, for Council tax band D houses in Westerham & Crockham Hill.

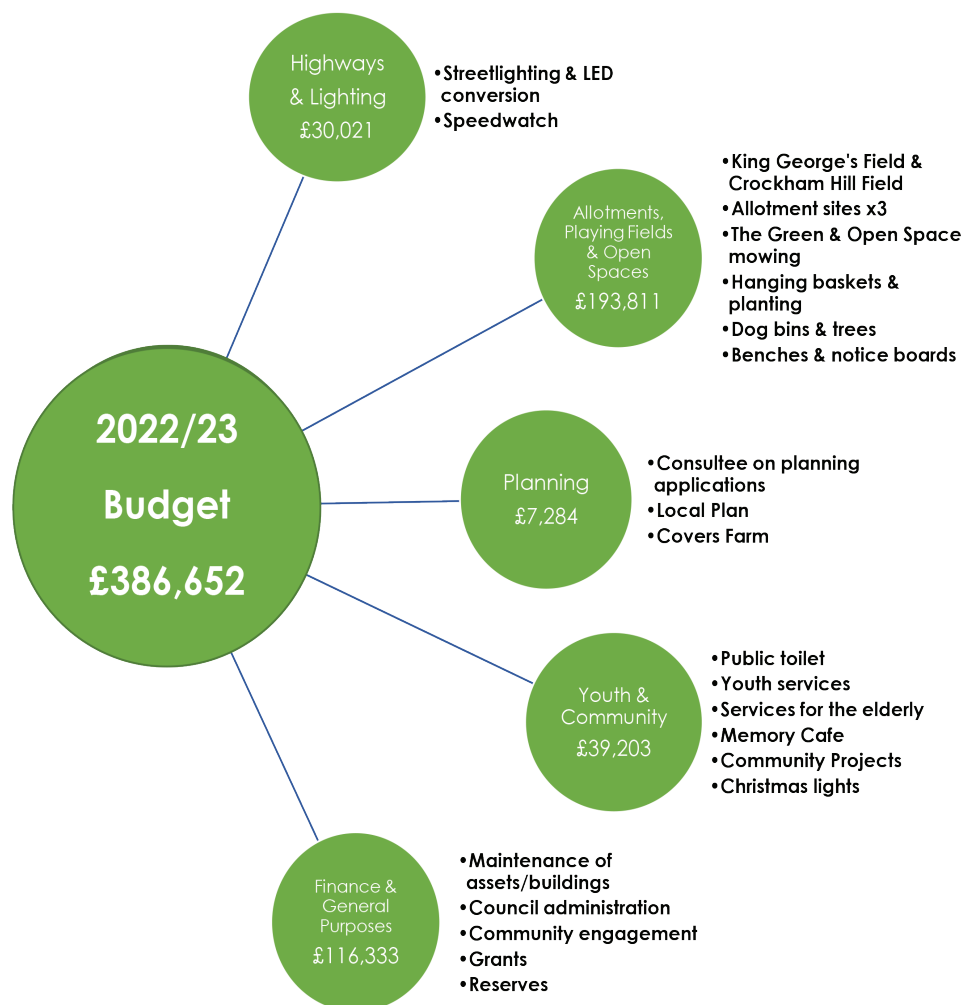
How did WTC compare with our neighbouring towns in 2022/23?

	<u>Band D charge</u>	<u>Precept generated</u>
Edenbridge Town Council	171.84	656,364
Sevenoaks Town Council	132.67	1,295,675
Westerham Town Council	128.40	267,000

Your Council believes it is able to offer residents good value for money, providing wide ranging services and facilities, 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.



Councillors:

Cllr Loretta Bird
 Cllr Eddie Boyle
 Cllr Deborah Coen
 Cllr June Davies
 Cllr Chris Elsdon-Wortley
 Cllr Stewart Kay
 Cllr Jonathan Lord
 Cllr Clive Pither
 Cllr Nick Robson
 Cllr Keith Thompson



Residents Litter Picking in Crockham Hill



The Town Clerk litter picking adjacent to the River Darent