

Westerham Town Council
 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held
 on Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 7.30 pm
 at the Council offices, Market Square, Westerham

Present: Councillors: Stewart Kay (Chairman) Eddie Boyle (Vice-Chairman),
 Deborah Coen, Jonathan Lord, Neil Proudfoot, Nick Robson,
 Linda Rodgers, Sharon Sheen and Keith Thompson

In Attendance: Town Clerk: Angela Howells
 Finance Officer: Debbie Marshall
 Deputy Clerk: Carla De Bono

Cllr Nick Chard: Kent County Council
 Mr Henry Warde – Squerryes Estate
 Mr Stuart Merrylees – Westerham Town Partnership
 Mr Peter Hills – Westerham Society
 15 members of the public

1.	<p><u>Welcome</u> Cllr Kay welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the Agenda.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Apologies for Absence</u> Mrs L Trott MP SDC Cllrs Esler and Maskell WTC Cllrs Bird, Bortolozzo and Hussain</p>	
3.	<p><u>Minutes of the meeting held on 26th April 2023</u> These were signed as a true record.</p>	
4.	<p><u>Chairman's report – Cllr Stewart Kay</u> Cllr Kay commenced the presentation by stating that that the question he was asked most frequently was 'What do the Council do'? He referred to the table showing the roles of Kent County Council (KCC), Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) and Westerham Town Council (WTC). WTC was the lowest tier of Local Government and had an important role in influencing the county and district councils and other bodies. WTC regularly asked the residents and traders of Westerham what they would like us to do, not surprisingly the wish list of Cllrs and residents was similar, after all Cllrs were also residents. The themes were fairly consistent and in no particular order were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Housing • Improving the safety of our roads • Antisocial behaviour • Protecting our environment • Supporting the community – particularly the elderly • Youth Services 	

- Keeping Westerham Attractive

There were limiting factors, mainly resources, but also physical ones. Slides were shown of old photos of The Green, London Road and one of the pinch points in the High Street.

Cllr Kay highlighted that the staff do a wonderful job in supporting the work of council committees but also in spreading information around the community and acting as a first point of contact for the community.

As individuals, Cllrs bring a diverse range of skills and experience to their roles. Cllr Kay then introduced the Cllrs who Chair the Committees to explain their roles and current issues: -

Allotments, Playing Fields and Open Spaces – Cllr Jonathan Lord

Cllr Lord began by thanking the Squerryes Estate who gifted the northern part of KGF to WTC so that the Council now owned the entire field and was able to construct a trim trail around the field.

The Committee had also improved The Green using a grant to provide two new benches and more paving, both with disability access.

Westerham was made more attractive by the popular hanging baskets which were provided in partnership with Westerham Society, retailers, businesses and resident donations.

The Wilder Kent Silver Award was renewed and this showed the Council's commitment to biodiversity and making Westerham a better and healthier place to live and work.

Planning and Development – Cllr Nick Robson

Cllr Robson explained that WTC represented everyone in the Westerham and Crockham Hill wards and the Committee supported development in a sustainable way that benefited the area.

The Committee looked at over 130 applications in the past year and reviewed many consultations from SDC, Tandridge District Council (TDC), KCC and Government. The Committee also reviewed consultations from Biggin Hill and Gatwick airports.

Covers Farm – The Committee was currently reviewing a response to a further consultation and would speak at the KCC Planning Committee when KCC discuss the application.

Highways and Lighting – Cllr Jonathan Lord on behalf of Cllr Bird

Cllr Lord explained that the Committee was responsible for the majority of the Town street lighting and lobbied KCC regarding highways issues. The Committee was delighted to report the key achievements: -

- The LED rollout for streetlights
- 20 mph zone in place. The Committee would look at extending this but enforcement was a priority and increasing the signage
- Increased Speed Watch – working with Kent Police
- Supporting community specific road issues

Youth and Community – Cllr Deborah Coen

Cllr Coen began by thanking Cllr Eddie Boyle (previous Chair) who continued to support the work of this committee and who was a vital link between the committee and the community.

The work of the Committee was hugely impacted by the pandemic as so much of it does relied on face-to-face contact and live events such as the Youth Club, Family Fun Sessions and Coffee mornings. However, we were

now back to operating as before the pandemic and the coming year was already planned and the diary was full.

One ongoing concern was how we were tackling Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) and levels of crime in the town. We were delighted to have a designated PC and the presence of PC Pete Wilson has had a positive impact in terms of reassuring the community. However, Cllr Coen said that he and his colleagues can only react to events that are reported, if you take one thing away from this evening it is the importance of reporting episodes of ASB or crime that you witness. Cllr Coen explained that reporting can be done online or by calling 101. If the police have the data they will deploy resources. We worked closely with the Community Safety Unit in Sevenoaks and the Independent Advisory Group.

Cllr Coen went on to highlight the second area where the Committee could be more effective is in how we communicate what we do. WTC provided wonderful activities for the youngsters and community coffee mornings and lunch clubs but unless these were publicised in an effective and timely fashion WTC was missing a trick. Not everyone had access to social media so we also used TN16, the Crockham Hill Newsletter, posters on noticeboards and banners. Cllr Coen requested that if there were any other suggestions then please let us know.

Finance and General Purposes – Cllr Sharon Sheen

Cllr Sheen began by explaining that the Committee was made up with a representative from each of the other Committees to ensure transparency and joined up thinking.

In the past year Council had achieved the Gold Award for our sector which showed we met the high standards set by the sector and recognised councils that were at the cutting edge of the sector.

Cllr Sheen expressed her thanks to the Finance Officer, Debbie Marshall, who in the 16 years she had worked for WTC had always achieved clean audits due to her diligent financial management.

The Annual Report showed how WTC spent its budget, in the sector standard layout required. Cllr Sheen explained that the Council derived its income from the Precept, the share of the Council Tax from SDC and some rental income and grants. Last year the Council spent over £400,000 and the breakdown of that expenditure was included in the report. However, as well as day to day expenditure WTC was responsible for about £2 million assets ranging from benches to streetlights, all the facilities on King George's Field (KGF), Crockham Hill Field and Russell House and all these assets needed maintaining into the future; so an important aspect of budgeting was to ensure sufficient funds were reserved each year.

Cllr Sheen invited questions and confirmed the cost to residents represented value for money.

King George's Field

Cllr Kay continued with some facts about King George's Field. These fields were a memorial to King George V, who died in 1935, Open land was purchased to be used as playing fields for recreational and sporting activities with the financing and maintenance given to the Playing Fields Association, which became Fields in Trust.

There were 471 in the UK from 126 acres to ¼ of an acre.

	<p>At weekends you could see the success of youth football on the Field. In 2015 WTC carried out a community consultation and improving KGF was top of the consultation.</p> <p>Cllr Kay thanked Henry Warde for gifting the Northern part of the Field to WTC, he presented a slide which showed the current map of KGF.</p> <p>Cllr Kay outlined the completed phases, the car park extension, the playground refurbishment, installing a new skatepark and installation of a trim trail around the Field. He expressed a big thank you to the pupils of Churchill and Valance Schools for their invaluable input on how the skatepark should look. Also thanks to Dale Shorey who campaigned for and advised on the new skatepark.</p> <p>There was a lack of grants post Covid for the work on the Multi Games Use Area (MUGA) and Pavilion and this would now be the final phase when funds allowed.</p> <p>Drone footage was played of the work carried out on KGF courtesy of Ivan Smith.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Kent Police</u></p> <p>PC Peter Wilson informed the meeting that he had been carrying out Speed Enforcement, most recently in London Road. Four vehicles were doing over 40mph in a 30mph zone and received a ticket. Drivers going between 30 and 40 mph were pulled over and spoken to.</p> <p>PC Wilson stated that he had not yet undertaken the training required for him to carry out 20mph speed enforcement.</p> <p>He reported that ASB was low currently but this was seasonal. The quarry at Covers Farm attracted ASB when the weather was good.</p> <p>He also requested that all incidents were reported, however small, as reports built up a picture of what was happening.</p> <p>He encouraged residents to sign up to My Community Voice to keep informed of local incidents and advice.</p> <p>Residents could also report incidents anonymously through Crimestoppers.</p>	
6.	<p><u>Citizens Advice</u></p> <p>Cllr Kay stated that WTC had a small budget for providing grants to organisations which supported our community, one such was Citizens Advice and he introduced Ms Sian Hiller, Chief Officer.</p> <p>Ms Hiller informed the meeting that pre Covid, all consultations were face-to-face. Consultations then became telephone calls and these calls had been maintained in addition to face-to-face consultations after Covid.</p> <p>A National Lottery bid had resulted in a weekly Westerham Advisor; thanks were expressed to the Town Council for use of an office each week.</p> <p>The three most common issues raised were debt, benefits and housing.</p> <p>CA also gathers information locally and this is used to campaign nationally to the Government.</p> <p>It was a shock when SDC slashed the CA funding by a third, a grant had been found for one year but funding was uncertain after this.</p>	
7.	<p><u>Kent County Councillor</u></p> <p>KCC Cllr Nick Chard reported collaboration had been the theme for dealing with the Thames Water closure of Westerham Hill and for the</p>	

	<p>cutting of school buses last August, which had been resolved. Potholes were an issue for Highways. The average speed camera along the A25 in partnership with Kent Police had also reduced burglary and fly tipping in the area. Covers Farm application had been ongoing for many years as KCC were taking independent advice and reviewing all the data from the applicant. This application was currently out for consultation.</p>	
8.	<p><u>Questions</u></p> <p>Q - A question had been received from Keep Westerham Green (KWG) regarding the purpose of the activity on the field, the entrance of which is opposite Croft Road, off Farley Lane. A lot of hardcore had been put down just inside the entrance and the soil had been stripped and piled up for storage.</p> <p>A – Henry Warde responded that this was nothing untoward, a resident was installing a swimming pool and the soil was being stored temporarily. The gas station would also be undergoing work on the bank for about two years.</p> <p>Q – A question had been received from KWG regarding the health of Westerham High Street and parking charges in the Darent Car Park. With traders closing or relocating to smaller premises, and other traders reporting little recovery since the Pandemic, could Sevenoaks District Council consider offering a first free hour (or longer) in the Darent Car Park, just as Tandridge District Council do in the Ellis Road car park?</p> <p>A - Cllr Kay responded that WTC had submitted a strong objection to SDC introducing Sunday charges and taking away free parking at the Darent car park at a meeting as well as responding to the consultation. Cllr Kay would raise this with SDC again.</p> <p>Q – Cllr Proudfoot raised a query on behalf of a resident regarding the speeding of roads coming into Westerham, particularly Croydon Road.</p> <p>A – The Town Clerk responded that there was a community Speedwatch next week in Croydon Road. More speed watch volunteers were needed so that this could be carried out more frequently to act as a deterrent and build up a record for Kent Police and KCC. PC Wilson would add Croydon Road to his list for speed enforcement.</p> <p>Q – Cllr Rodgers asked if the average speed cameras could come to Westerham as they had been very effective further along the A25. Where did the money go from the fines?</p> <p>A – KCC Cllr Chard responded that the current technology works on longer stretches of road; he hoped that technology would be available in the future for these cameras to work on shorter stretches of road. PC Wilson responded that the fines were used for Police staffing costs, postage, court fees etc., a profit was not made.</p> <p>Q – John Bryant asked if the pavements around The Green could be investigated as they were very uneven.</p> <p>A – Cllr Kay would pass this query on to the H&L Committee.</p> <p>Q – John Bryant asked when pavement parking was going to be banned?</p> <p>A - KCC Cllr Chard responded that this was not known and enforcement</p>	

	<p>would be the issue. Stuart Merrylees, Director of WTP reported that the WTP were very upset about the Sunday parking charges. He stated that all organisations worked together for the benefit of the community. Henry Warde stated that fly tipping costs thousands of pounds to clear up and asked the meeting to report any issues.</p>	
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The meeting closed at 9.40 p.m.

Signed as a correct record

Chairman