

Jumpers and St Catherine's Hill RA: Chairman's Report for 2017

Your Association remains in sound financial condition as reported by our Treasurer David Barnett and confirmed by our monthly accounts which are posted on the website. Our membership increased to nearly 1,600 households representing around 2,800 local people. Our thanks go to our collectors without whom we would struggle to survive.

During the year we made a small monetary loss caused by the expenditure we incurred when forced to change our name and the exceptional amount of printing we were obliged to undertake. I'm not going to rerun all the circumstances behind that – you can find it all on the website www.wcresidents.co.uk in the April-May-June newsletters

We received: legal advice; marketing advice; graphic design consultancy; and computer work all free of charge in a moving display of mutual self-help. We paid to register our new name and our new logos. The logos have proved to be very popular with our members.

Keeping in Touch

The monthly circulation of our e-newsletter increased again to over 1,600 e-mail addresses spread over an ever wider geographic area. It always provokes a response from members and this enables us to engage in dialogue. Years ago, communication with members was very limited. Today we are in regular contact thanks to modern technology.

Several organisations took advantage of our circulation to reach residents. The Police, The Hospital Trust and DWP for example all ran surveys. Our link into the fight against fraud meant that our members were armed against several scams

We still have 750 households that don't take the e-mail news and we produced several versions of the paper edition during 2017. Our thanks to the tireless volunteers who help us to distribute them.

Ongoing Projects

We were involved on your behalf in various activities that didn't catch the headlines such as the ongoing management plan for St Catherine's Hill SSSI. We were asked to support a Lottery Fund bid by Friends of St Catherine's Hill to showcase the role played by residents and St Catherine's Hill in the Great War. The application was successful, and the History Day was an enormous success.

We monitored progress on several developments including: the improvements to the A338 and B3073; the Marsh Lane school; the development at Roeshot Hill; and the reorganisation of our local hospitals. These all progressed much as expected.

Local Government in Dorset

The time and energy consuming project was the reorganisation of local government in Dorset which is still not resolved as I write this summary.

It's over two years since we first learned of outline plans to reorganize local government in Dorset. From an initial reaction of distrust, we have climbed a very steep learning curve to the point where we understand the need and now can see only one viable solution to a thorny problem.

As we've said before, relying on a regressive taxation system like Council Tax is not a long-term solution to tackling the financial challenge our health and social care system faces. Forcing Local Authorities to merge and reorganise is part of the solution but sooner rather than later something more radical is needed that is funded by all tax payers according to their ability to pay.

The main issue for us has always been first to ensure that Council Tax payers continue to receive appropriate benefits at a price they can afford to pay and second to provide a suitable platform for strategic development and inward investment. The actual structure is for us secondary to those key issues.

Despite having a year in which to articulate an alternative to the Future Dorset proposals, CBC failed to produce anything until 19th December 2017. They then put forward a suggestion that if pursued would involve a new public survey across the whole of Dorset at a cost of at least £400,000 to the tax payer and a delay of about a year (which councils like DCC can ill afford). Their alternative proposal had already previously been rejected by all the other Councils in Dorset.

As we have done with all such papers we produced an independent analysis, which is available on the website. Despite its obvious shortcomings, CBC submitted their paper to the Secretary of State and requested a delay. We await the outcome.

Our Council is completely divided with the majority dictating a path that we don't understand. It seems to us to lead nowhere, particularly as far as attracting inward investment is concerned. I would hope that this time next year the whole question has been resolved and we can talk about something a bit lighter and a bit more interesting!

Committee Membership

Two of our committee have decided to stand down as they believe that the end of the reorganisation debate is in sight and in 2018 onwards we will be faced with a new beginning. John Cooper, retired Borough Treasurer, and David Barnett, our long serving Treasurer and retired Director of a multi-national insurance broker.

John was a key source of valuable information. David and I worked very well together, our skills and experience dovetailing beautifully. I shall miss their insight and financial acumen.

I must also express my personal thanks to the rest of our committee who all worked very hard throughout 2017.

This means that we have a vacancy on our committee. If you feel you could contribute and would like to discuss the matter, please get in touch. If you have an accountancy background that would be particularly useful.

2018 is likely to see a lot of work on how a local authority should be structured, how local democracy should work within that structure, and what role a Residents Association should play.

Jim Biggin
January 2018