

## **WCRA Chairman's Report**

### **2012 - That Was A Year That Was**

Your Association remains in sound financial condition. During the year our Treasurer resigned for personal reasons and we must thank David Barnett, a retired accountant, for taking over the books in seamless fashion and our auditor for undertaking a mid-year audit with no prior notice.

Looking back briefly at 2012 we find a varied range of topics that kept us very busy at times.

We, along with many others, commented upon the local strategic plan. Perhaps the most contentious parts envisaged large scale housing developments at Parley, Marsh Lane and Roeshot Hill. We felt that the potential impact upon our roads, doctors, hospitals, schools and environment made these plans impractical.

Local residents formed an action group and were successful in getting the Marsh Lane proposals dropped from the plan. That was good news but we mustn't now ignore the remaining proposals which could cause significant damage to our locality and we will be watching for developments throughout 2013.

So far as we can tell there is little or no funding for the strategic plan. At a meeting with CBC in February (plus a public presentation given to us by DCC Councillor Spencer Flower) we learned how difficult local finances are. Later in the year we met with CBC to learn of investigations into the feasibility of combining the Christchurch and East Dorset administrations in one building specifically to save money. That project is on-going.

We attended further meetings with CBC on the topic of local government finance early in 2013 and learned that the situation has become even more difficult.

In February 2012 we learned of plans to build a huge wind farm off the Isle of Wight – known as Navitus Bay. We set about organising other local Residents Associations and that spread out to Councils, MPs, and so on. The Hengistbury Head RA has taken the lead coordinating role. We have prepared a full summary report of our Navitus Bay activities through the year which you can find at [www.wcresidents.co.uk](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk) and click on "latest updates"

Throughout 2012 we watched, commented upon, and were consulted about planned changes to our local hospitals. The proposal to merge Bournemouth and Poole Foundation Trusts is still not resolved. Plans to considerably improve the facilities at Christchurch Hospital were approved by CBC Officers but rejected by Ward Councillors. The plans have been resubmitted and will be reconsidered by Councillors in March 2013. Thanks in part to our activities the CBC Planning Department has been swamped with letters of support for the development.

We wish we could say something sensible about the strange events that unfolded relating to the application to develop the waste site at Bailey Bridge next to the Stour. We were fully engaged in consultations with the developers and did our own research into various aspects of the applications. Eventually, after a process that at times appeared to owe more to the Keystone Cops than to sensible Local Government, the application was passed by CBC and then the Local Government Minister (Eric Pickles).

All of that made something of a mockery of the Localism Act 2011 that was so talked up by our politicians. Frankly, we have yet to see any real effect of any of its main provisions.

During 2012 our waste collection systems were changed dramatically. The pilot scheme that had been operating in St Catherine's Hill for some years was used as a basis to extend the scheme across the whole of Dorset (something we had suggested to DCC some years ago when we were successfully fighting the proposal to build a huge waste plant at Hurn).

2012 finally brought to an end many years of very hard work when the St Catherine's Hill Management Plan was completed and the proper on-going management of the trees on our hill was secured. We distributed 4,000 leaflets across West Christchurch, participated in public consultations and even organised an electronic response form on our website.

We now sit on a new management committee that is tasked with implementing the plan *according to the priorities established by the public consultation*: protection of wildlife; attention to hydrology; maintaining proper access; preservation of views; no adverse impact upon local properties. Throughout 2013 we will bring you news of new planned developments.

We have recently started to talk to CBC about trees that damage roads and pavements. They have asked us to talk directly with DCC. This topic will develop through 2013.

The free monthly e-mail newsletter went from strength to strength and now goes to over 1,200 local homes. If you don't currently receive it you can enrol on the website or here tonight. The website itself continued to receive a steady stream of visitors and in conversations with various people it became clear that many are using it as a way of keeping in touch with local developments.

I must thank our collectors who despite the incessant rain managed to increase our membership over 2011. We will once again be recommending that the annual subscription remains at £1 and if any of you would like to help us by collecting from your neighbours do please speak to us at the end of the evening. Or you could assist us to distribute the half-yearly printed newsletter for those members who do not use e-mail.

I must express my personal thanks to your committee who all worked very hard throughout the year. We were very sorry to lose Janet Robson who retired for family reasons. Janet has been a great ambassador for your association and we shall miss her hard work and experience.

Other members of the committee have agreed to carry on and I am thankful for that.

In addition to David Barnett who I have already mentioned, we have another proposed new committee member in Steve Roberts. Steve organised the very successful Marsh Lane Action Group and will I think bring considerable energy as well as knowledge to your committee.

That still leaves us one person short of an ideal number on your committee so if you would like to know more about what membership entails please speak to me after the meeting.

Jim Biggin  
February 2013