

WCRA Chairman's Report

2013 – More of the Same

Your Association remains in sound financial condition as reported by our Treasurer David Barnett and our Auditor.

Looking back briefly at 2013 we find many topics that we started to deal with in 2012 that rumbled on throughout the year. Our free monthly e-newsletter kept over 1,300 households informed of key developments as they occurred and promoted a number of public consultations that thus received more input than they were expecting. Our website www.wcresidents.co.uk continued to be very popular.

At meetings with both DCC and CBC we learned how difficult local finances continue to be and discussed with them the many steps that are being taken to function within new and very tight financial constraints. In addition to becoming more productive Local Authorities are also being pushed by Central Government into being more entrepreneurial. We foresee potential problems looming here as Officers and Councillors are increasingly forced to weigh the interests of the local population against the need to make money.

The combining of the Christchurch and East Dorset administrations continued throughout the year and, despite the inevitable hiccups, appears to be successful both in saving money and in delivering services. We learned of proposals to substantially reduce the number of buildings occupied by DCC and anticipate more flesh being put on that scheme during 2014

The plans to build a huge wind farm off the Isle of Wight – known as Navitus Bay – were debated through a series of meetings and consultations. Our membership was much divided in its attitude with all shades of opinion from strongly for to strongly against. During the year we hardened in our view that most of the consultation is “box-ticking” and that the important decisions will be taken behind closed doors in Whitehall.

The proposal to merge Bournemouth and Poole Foundation Trusts was rejected by The Competition Commission, thereby wasting large amounts of public money and throwing local plans for our hospitals into disarray. Plans to considerably improve the facilities at Christchurch Hospital were approved and are now being implemented despite the loss of the merger proposal. At the end of the year the Quality Control Commission described our hospitals as “*dangerous and inadequate*”, so we shall be tracking developments there during 2014

The three proposals to build supermarkets at Meteor, Stony Lane and Bailey Bridge did not reach fruition in 2013. Bailey Bridge was approved in principle but Meteor and Stony Lane drag on with the potential of Morrisons at Stony Lane casting a shadow across Bailey Bridge. We fully expect to be reporting on this topic during 2014

Recycling rates in Christchurch doubled from 35% of waste to 70% - a considerable achievement.

The St Catherine's Hill Management Committee raised initial detailed plans and there should be visible evidence of active management during 2014

We met the new Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner Martyn Underhill and he then gave a presentation to our October public meeting. We hope to meet him again early in 2014 to try to get some insight into exactly what he is changing.

I must thank our collectors who managed to increase our membership over 2012. 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 Eileen Lancaster but are pleased that she will continue to assist with our website. Sadly we are also losing Roger Hamilton, our longest serving member. Roger was very helpful to me when I first joined and his experience will be missed.

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

We have one proposed new committee member in Sue Fotheringham. Sue has been attending our management meetings for the last couple of months and has already demonstrated that she will be an asset in our endeavours to keep Christchurch pleasant.

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 2014