

WCRA Chairman's Report for 2014

Your Association remains in sound financial condition as reported by our Treasurer David Barnett and confirmed by our Auditor. During the year we instigated a system of posting monthly accounts onto our website so that members can, if they wish, keep a close eye on income and receipts as well as reserves.

This development, when combined with the monthly e-newsletters that we send to over 1,400 local homes (and maintain in a library on the website), means that the actions of your Association have never been so transparent or accessible. It removes the need for the annual public meeting held in February at which we reported our activities to our members. Meeting in the depths of winter was never popular and starting in 2015 we can replace that meeting with one held in the spring.

At meetings with both DCC and CBC we tracked their financial position as they wrestled with Central Government imposed funding reductions. CBC, working closely with East Dorset, coped rather better than DCC who still need to find an additional £46 million of savings during 2015-2018. The impact of the 2015 General Election on that situation will feature strongly in our talks with DCC in 2015.

The combining of the Christchurch and East Dorset administrations is nearly complete and we anticipate that the internal focus will now switch to working methods with significant moves towards paperless operations. We have already reached a situation where those who can't utilise on-line facilities are potentially disadvantaged and that trend looks likely to extend into dealings with Local Government.

The plans to build a huge wind farm off the Isle of Wight – known as Navitus Bay – rumbled on throughout 2014 culminating in official hearings in the autumn. We lodged objections to the motorway-wide trench that it is envisaged will run from east of New Milton, across the top of Christchurch and then via Hurn Forest to the Grid at Mannington. Objections to this scheme have come from far and wide in record breaking numbers but we still expect some form of approval in due course.

Plans to considerably improve the facilities at Christchurch Hospital are now being implemented and we continue to track them.

At the end of 2013 the Quality Control Commission (QCC) described our hospitals as "*dangerous and inadequate*", so we talked to local management and arranged a presentation to residents by Chief Executive Tony Spotswood. We tracked progress through the year and were relieved to report a considerable improvement over the 12 month period. At their last visit in the autumn of 2014 the QCC declared themselves happy with current services levels.

The proposals to build supermarkets at Stony Lane and Bailey Bridge did not reach fruition in 2013 or in 2014. Bailey Bridge was approved in principle in 2013 but nothing happened in 2014. Stony Lane was again turned down by local Councillors in 2014 and then at the very last minute Beagle (Morrisons) appealed. The result of that appeal is still awaited and until then we think nothing much is likely to happen at either site.

We once again met the Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner Martyn Underhill and you can read a full report of our discussion on the website. In common with other bodies funded by local taxes the

police are undergoing considerable internal reorganization accompanied by far reaching procedural changes. The appointment of Martyn Underhill has enabled us to have a dialogue with a representative of our local police – and that is to be welcomed. We will endeavour to meet him again in 2015 and to track his progress against his objectives.

Throughout 2014 we made noises in the appropriate ears to the effect that we need a new school in West Christchurch. We made some progress in that DCC committed funds to build the school – an absolutely vital first step. Subsequently we learned and DCC confirmed that Semcorp land at the back of Marsh Lane, near to the Avon, was their favoured development site. We expect further developments in 2015.

I must thank our collectors who renewed your £1 membership. If any of you would like to help us by collecting from your neighbours do please get in touch. 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.

Jim Biggin
January 2015