

WCRA Chairman's Report for 2016

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. During the year we contributed to the purchase of a defibrillation unit that has now been installed at the Hall on the Hill.

The monthly circulation of our e-newsletter rose to nearly 1,600 e-mail addresses spread over an ever wider geographic area. Our readers are amongst the best informed people in Dorset and we know that a number of businesses print it and post it on their staff notice boards.

At www.wcresidents.co.uk you will find an index of the topics dealt with as well as the newsletters themselves and that is the best way to bring yourself up to date on any particular topic. The minutes of our WCRA monthly management meetings are also helpful in that respect. Thanks go to our webmaster Eileen Lancaster who maintained our website that continued to receive a lot of visitors throughout the year.

At the end of the year we took a first tentative step into social media and created a Facebook entry called West Christchurch. We hope to develop this facility further in 2017.

We also provide a six monthly paper newsletter to those of our members who do not use e-mail. Our thanks go to the small team of helpers who distribute that for us.

Our total membership fell to just over 1,500 households – our smallest for many years. Most of our collectors did their usual excellent job for which we thank them. Sadly a couple suffered ill health at inopportune times and we were let down by a small number of others. This occurred when our capacity to react was consumed by the whole business of reorganising all the councils in Dorset. We will endeavour to recover the position in 2017.

I must express my personal thanks to your committee who all worked very hard throughout 2016 but particularly to Sue Fotheringham in her first year organising our collectors. Without her efforts, often accompanied by her dog and assisted by her sister, things would have been far worse.

Marsh Lane School

As I said last year, it is always difficult for us when our membership is divided on an important issue and here we had three groupings: those totally against; those fully in favour; the majority who were for the school but with reservations. We supported the school because it is needed but endeavoured to obtain improvements to the plans and supporting road systems. We were partially successful in that objective.

Despite the attempts by our local MP to thwart the wishes of the majority the school was given a green light. We lost some members in the Marsh Lane area as a result and whilst we regret that we continue to believe that we took the correct path as far as the majority are concerned and particularly as far as our children and grandchildren are concerned.

Local Buses

During the year we had a disagreement with DCC over their unilateral decision to cancel some local buses. A report on our website dated 29th July 2016 gives full details. We were assisted in that by Councillor Margaret Phipps and Councillor Sue Spittle. We understand why DCC did what they did

but not the way they went about it, which sadly reflected the often poor quality of the dealings between Dorchester and Christchurch.

Local Government Reorganisation

This is not the place to rerun all the twists and turns that went on during the year culminating in a public consultation and then its aftermath. If I list the reports that my colleagues and I produced during the year you'll get some idea: *Non-financial Issues* June 2016; *The story to date – a summary* June 2016; *Financial Analysis* August 2016; *Special Newsletter on Public Consultation* August 2016 (also produced and distributed in paper format to members who do not receive our e-newsletters); *Discussion with Ian Milner* CBC Strategic Director October 2016; *Interpretation of Results* November 2016; *Level of Participation* November 2016; *Summary of Public Consultation Findings* December 2016; plus every *Newsletter* January to December 2016. These are all available on our website.

We also organised a public meeting in April 2016 and talked regularly throughout the year to CBC Chief Executive David McIntosh and to other informed sources from Bournemouth, Poole and East Dorset as well as meeting amongst ourselves. In that respect I must thank David Barnett our Treasurer who never failed to assist me and whose background and training were of great benefit in their own right and because they dovetailed neatly with my own skills and experience.

I would also like to thank all of you who wrote thanking us for keeping you informed and expressing your views. Here's just one typical direct quote from a member:

"Thank you for the time and effort that you put into producing understandable and above all balanced reports on some complicated and contentious subjects during the year. Let's hope for a quieter and peaceful 2017".

This story isn't over by any means and I anticipate that the January and February 2017 Newsletters will have news of yet further developments.

Could You Help?

We can't survive unless local residents help us.

Please, if you feel you could assist us in any capacity – by joining us on our committee, collecting the £1 for membership, delivering paper newsletters - then contact us via www.wcresidents.co.uk and click "contact us" on the front page.

Jim Biggin
January 2017