

Westerham Town Council
Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held
on Wednesday 14th May 2025 at 7.30 pm
at Westerham Hall, Westerham

Present: Councillors: Jonathan Lord (Chair),
Loretta Bird, Ian Breminer,
Deborah Coen, Clare Dicker,
Amran Hussain, Nick Robson,
Sharon Sheen and Keith Thompson

In Attendance: Town Clerk: Angela Howells
Finance Officer: Debbie Marshall
Deputy Clerk: Carla De Bono
Assistant Clerk: Jo O'Sullivan

KCC Cllr Nigel Williams
SDC Cllr Roddy Hogarth
SDC Cllr Diana Esler
SDC Cllr Kevin Maskell
45 members of the public

1.	<u>Welcome</u> Cllr Lord welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the Agenda.	
2.	<u>Apologies for Absence</u> Mr H Warde. WTC Cllrs Bortolozzo, Boyle, Proudfoot and Rodgers.	
3.	<u>Minutes of the meeting held on 8th May 2024</u> These were signed as a true record.	
4.	<u>Chair's report – Cllr Jonathan Lord</u> Cllr Lord reported that we lived in challenging times and many of us were struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, seeing businesses facing increasing National Insurance contributions and Business Rates. We were all concerned about world affairs with worries about wars, international relationships, trade and climate change This meant that we do not always have time to think about and appreciate where we live. Westerham Town Council (WTC) could not solve these major and important issues but would strive to make Westerham and Crockham Hill better places to live in, work in and visit. We do this by using our limited resources to maintain and enhance the Town, ensuring good value for money, as well as working closely with both Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) and Kent County Council (KCC) to ensure that the issues that affect Westerham are heard and addressed. Cllr Lord was immensely proud to be part of a team of councillors who were passionate about the Town. We all shared a wish to make Westerham somewhere where people	

wanted to live, work and visit. Cllrs were all volunteers who put in considerable time and effort to support the council vision working with our fantastic officers who put cllr ideas into action.

Vision Statement - 'The aims of the Council were to maintain Westerham and Crockham Hill Parish as a thriving, attractive community, to improve the quality of life for residents in the area, and to enable local businesses and other key stakeholders to provide opportunities and community activities for the benefit of residents and tourists.'

The Youth and Community Committee was chaired by Cllr Coen and was committed to listening to the residents of Westerham and Crockham Hill and providing a close link between the public and Town, District and County Councillors. The Committee worked closely with youth and community focused organisations in Westerham and promoted age-appropriate activities for everyone. Some highlights of this work over the past year were:

- The continued success of the monthly Crockham Hill Drop-in Coffee sessions, a useful forum to highlight community issues.
- Responding to Churchill Primary School's request for more arts related activities with Art Taster sessions booked for the Easter holidays with a professional artist.
- Developing a strong relationship with Crockham Hill Primary School through the Create a Garden Scheme.
- Supporting the King George's Field redevelopment project by providing 8 more free skateboard lessons in the Easter holidays with 8 more planned for the summer holidays.
- Continuing to provide Free Family Fun Sessions in the February, Easter and October half terms and the long summer break.
- Continuing to address crime and anti-social behaviour and in particular taking a proactive approach bringing the pubs/wine bars/ hospitality venues together to share good practice after the Fullers Hill assault with the hope of developing a Pub Watch Scheme.

The Highways and Lighting Committee was currently chaired by Cllr Bortolozzo who took over from Cllr Bird this year and I would like to thank her for all the tireless work she had put into this committee. The committee discussed, reported and took appropriate action on highway issues in the Town, they managed the Highways Improvement Plan for Westerham and also facilitated community led highways issues such as our community Speedwatch campaigns. In addition, they managed the streetlights owned by WTC. Over the past year they had:

- Continued to work with residents in Pootings and KCC had now agreed to introduce a new 30mph speed limit
- Worked to improve signage of the 20mph zone in Westerham and continued to lobby KCC to extend the 20mph zone in Westerham
- Continued and extended Speedwatch in Westerham and Crockham Hill as part of effort to enforce speed limits.
- Worked with residents and KCC looking to make Marlborough Court slip road one way to improved access and road safety
- Were looking at providing a bus shelter in London Road

The Allotments Playing Fields and Open Spaces Committee was chaired by

	Cllr Rogers and their primary role was to ensure that allotments and open spaces owned or leased by the council were maintained and improved for the benefit and enjoyment of residents and visitors to Westerham and Crockham Hill. Over the past year they had: • Ensured that WTC Green Spaces continued to be maintained and managed in an ecologically sound manner with minimal use of harmful chemicals • Worked in partnership with the Westerham Society to supply and maintain the summer and winter hanging baskets that made our town so attractive • Worked in partnership with WTC allotment leads to improve and maintain the allotments. This had included replacing leaking plumbing and clearing more sites for cultivation. • Replaced broken fencing in King George's Field. • Been working towards finding a solution to prevent vehicles damaging Granville Green. • Been looking at developing plans to encourage insects and bees with appropriate planting in key areas. The Planning and Development Committee was chaired by Cllr Robson and their remit was to consider and make representations on planning applications and planning appeals. This included the Conservation Area, listed buildings, advertising and agricultural consent. Over the past year they had: • Dealt with over 100 planning applications. Whilst the final decision was made by SDC or KCC, WTC was consulted on every application and they worked hard to respond accordingly on behalf of all the residents of Westerham and Crockham Hill. • They continued to be involved with the Planning Application associated with restoring the Covers Farm Quarry to its original state. The Application was refused by KCC in July 2024 and the Applicant had appealed with the Appeal due to be heard in June 2025. Like the neighbouring councils, WTC opposed the proposed scheme due to its anticipated adverse impacts upon Westerham as a whole. • They continued to keep a watching brief on the ongoing work to produce new Local Plans for both the Sevenoaks and Tandridge Districts. These Local Plans, especially the Sevenoaks Plan, had the potential to impose significant change upon the Westerham Ward. Both plans should be going out for public consultation towards the end of 2025 and WTC would be looking to comment on both. • Continued to attend meetings associated with areas such as Rural Planning, the Green Belt, National Landscapes, etc to remain abreast of developments with both local and national significance that could impact the community. The Finance and General Purposes Committee was chaired by Cllr Sheen. This committee was the glue that held together all WTC work. Their key responsibilities were all matters that related to financial control, property and leases, policies & procedures, staffing and ongoing maintenance of Council assets. Over the past year they had: • Been responsible for financial management of public money which	
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	enabled WTC to serve the Community through the delivery of its services, evidenced value for money and reserved funds adequately for the ongoing maintenance of WTC assets in the future. • Ensured continual compliance with all relevant legislation and best practice to maintain the Council's Gold Standard. • Ensured the Council continued to act as a Good Employer by recruiting, training, rewarding and managing employees effectively and in compliance with employment legislation. • Ensured that WTC kept residents informed of Council initiatives/local matters through WTC website, social media, newsletters & Annual Town Meeting and held consultations on key matters of public interest. Full Council allowed all councillors to discuss and comment on the work of individual committees as well having direct oversight of major projects. Currently WTC major project was the continuing redevelopment of King Georges Field as an attractive and valuable community asset. So far we had: • Completed the updating of the Costells Meadow car Park. This was the only public car park run by WTC and it was the only free car park and public car park that provided electric vehicle charging points. • Updated the playground – enhancing the equipment provided and ensured it was accessible for children of all abilities. • Completed the new skate park which had just had its formal opening. In conjunction with the Youth and Community Committee WTC also provided free lessons for the young people. • Completed the fitness path around the field. Over the coming year WTC would be consulting on a new Multiuse Games Area and the refurbishment of the Memorial Pavillion to complete this project. The Annual Report contained a finance report from our Finance Officer In which WTC remained as in previous years on budget and provided good value for money, including making sure WTC adequately reserved. The costs to a band D Council taxpayer was £151.32 per year or £2.91 per week. I would like to close with a huge personal thank you to all our councillors and the council officers who have worked so hard over the past year to not just keep but improve Westerham and Crockham Hill as better places to live in, work in and visit and invited any questions. Newly elected KCC Cllr Nigel Williams was introduced to the meeting by Cllr Lord.	
5.	<u>SDC Cllr Roddy Hogarth – Local Government Reorganisation</u> SDC Cllr Hogarth gave a presentation on Local Government Reorganisation and started with how we got to this stage, he highlighted the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024. There were to be elected Mayors and Strategic Combined Authorities for all parts	

	of the country with Unitary Councils for all parts of the country, which was to be implemented as quickly as possible. KCC proposed to join the Devolution Priority Programme, but this was declined by Government. Kent and Medway were made up of 1.9 million people and the proposal would be 3 or 4 Unitary Councils as the minimum population for a unitary was 500,000. The population of West Kent was approximately 551,000. A single-tier local authority would be responsible for all local government services in an area, and combined the functions of a county and district council. The timeline was business as usual in 2025 with a full proposal for LGR in Kent to Government by 28th November 2025. The assessment criteria for the LGR final proposals included size of area to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks; to prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services; to meet local needs and be informed by local views; to support devolution arrangements and to enable stronger community engagement and Neighbourhood empowerment. The views of residents and other public sector providers would be important and consultation would take place. It was hoped a Government decision on LGR in Kent would be known by quarter 2 2026. In 2027 it would be business as usual plus formal preparation for LGR. The possible timeline was that SDC would cease to exist on 31st March 2028. There were a number of variables and residents would be kept updated.	
6.	<u>Dementia 'Start the Conversation' Elaine Murray – Trustee of Sevenoaks Area Dementia Friendly Community</u> Elaine gave an excellent presentation on 'Start the Conversation'. The first steps would be go to your GP, they should be the first point of contact but there were other resources available such as Practice Nurse, Age UK and Dementia UK. Build a toolkit to avoid poor decisions made in a crisis, ensure everyone was involved and informed especially the person with cognitive impairment. Elaine gave two examples, one where a will and Power of Attorney were in place and one where nothing was in place. Consideration of legal matters was very important and should be in place long before it was needed but you needed to ensure that you involved everyone appropriate in the decision making process and discussions. Elaine outlined the types of care available (links were given) and gave some considerations to think about when making this decision.	
7.	<u>Questions</u> Q – A member of WTP stated that a social media presence was vital. Q – A resident asked if there was anything that residents could do before the upcoming Covers Farm Appeal? A – Cllr Lord responded not at the moment but WTC would keep residents informed. Q -A resident asked Cllr Hogarth if it meant that KCC would be abolished? A – Yes, that was correct however the problem was funding as a high percentage of the budget was spent on Adult Social Care. Q – A resident asked what other issues had there been in other areas? A – Cllr Hogarth replied that other areas were being monitored and the	

	most important issue was to come up with a sustainable plan. Q – A member of WTP stated that residents felt a disconnect with SDC and felt more affinity with Oxted areas and increasing car parking charges for example did not help this matter. Q – A resident asked if Medway had town and parish councils and what will happen to town and parish councils? A – Medway did not have town and parish councils as it was a unitary council. Cllr Hogarth believed strongly that town and parish councils had a important community role to play. Q - A resident stated that GP's did not know their patients as well as they used to and other health care professional could also help signpost Dementia care.	
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The meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.

Signed as a correct record

Chairman