

## **WCRA Chairman's Report for 2015**

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. The monthly circulation of our e-newsletter rose to over 1,500 e-mail addresses spread over an ever wider geographic area. Our total membership remained at 1,800 households thanks to the dedication of our collectors.

2015 was a very busy year for us as you can tell if we simply list all main the topics and organisations we had to grapple with over the twelve month period: Bournemouth Airport; Christchurch Council and Dorset Council Finances; Christchurch Town Centre Plan; Dorset Police; Dorset Waste Partnership; local NHS in general and Christchurch Hospital in particular; local roads in general and A338 in particular; Marsh Lane School; Navitus Bay; proposed reorganisation of all our local councils; St Catherine's Hill Management Plan and arson on the hill.

I must express my personal thanks to your committee who all worked very hard throughout 2015. Also, our thanks go to our local Councillors who helped us considerably with most of these topics, all of which and more were covered in our e-newsletters.

At [www.wcresidents.co.uk](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk) you will find an index of these topics stored with 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 and the quarterly ACRA meetings are also helpful in that respect. 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.

We also plugged in to the local crime reports and were able to alert members to scams that were being worked in our area. We were shocked by the volume and diversity. Thankfully we do have feedback that indicates we have been successful in preventing some potential frauds. We continue to work with Dorset Police, particularly on the Dorset Alert System where we hope to see a User Group established in 2016.

However, from that long list of things and organisations that we were involved with, two subjects stand out as causing us considerable concern.

### **Marsh Lane School**

The first was the School at Marsh Lane which featured throughout the year. It is always difficult 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 are for the school but with reservations.

In liaison with DCC we concentrated upon: first establishing the need for the school; second ensuring that DCC fully explored all alternative sites; third helping to organise a DCC exhibition for local residents that produced a lot of feedback to DCC Officers; fourth highlighting the shortcomings of the local roads and pressing for safety modifications. We stressed to DCC that the single topic most likely to turn the majority against the school is that question of traffic management. They failed to fully heed our warnings and as a result several hundred objections were obtained by the Marsh Lane Action Group and by residents going direct to DCC.

As we enter 2016 we now fully expect the local MP to ask the Secretary of State to "call in" the planning application. He may well have attempted that in any case because the proposal is to build

the school on green belt and he has strong opinions on that subject. However the sheer number of objections highlights the proposal as controversial and assists him in his cause. "Calling-in" refers to the power of the Secretary of State to remove decision making power on the planning application from DCC. If the planning application is "called-in", there will be a public inquiry chaired by a planning inspector, or lawyer, who will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State. He can accept the findings or alternatively choose to reject the recommendations if he wishes and take the final decision himself.

Meanwhile the school is still needed and local children continue to suffer the consequences.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The second major upheaval was the announcement of a planned merger of CBC with Bournemouth, East Dorset and Poole.

We had known for a while that DCC was considering new forms of structure and was involving other councils in those deliberations. We also knew that Central Government has been in favour of reorganisation for some time. The General Election and Council Elections in May 2015 produced Conservative outright majorities in Whitehall and locally. This gave politicians the power to push for fundamental change.

Through the medium of our e-newsletter we concentrated upon giving residents as much information as possible. We talked to: CBC Chief Executive David McIntosh; DCC Council Leader Robert Gould; other informed sources from Bournemouth and East Dorset. There is great deal of information on our website.

We anticipate this topic will keep us very busy in 2016!

### **Could You Help?**

We can't survive unless local residents help us.

Please, if you feel you could assist us in any capacity then contact us via [www.wcresidents.co.uk](http://www.wcresidents.co.uk) and click "contact us" on the front page.

Jim Biggin  
January 2016