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ELSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

INTRODUCTION

1 This report describes the main items of business carried out by the Council during the financial year 2020/21. It is available on the Council website (www.elsteadvillage.co.uk).

COUNCIL MEMBERS

2 Following the election of May 2019, the members of the Parish Council are Mr Leif Davidsen, Mr Roger Gardner, Ms Jane Jacobs, Mr John Mathisen, Mr Patrick Murphy, Mr Richard Rees, Mr Stefan Reynolds, Mrs Diane Snape and Ms Jessica Webster.

3 At its May 2020 meeting, the Council re-elected Mr Murphy as its chairman and Mr Davidsen as its vice-chairman. Ms Jacobs was re-elected as chairman of the Planning Sub-Committee. The Council is again grateful for the regular attendance at its meetings of Councillor David Harmer (Surrey County Council) and Councillors Jenny and David Else (Waverley Borough Council).

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

4 In 2020/21 the Council received £122,656 and spent £101,490. The main items of expenditure in the year (other than administrative costs and sundry maintenance items) were: tree surgery/maintenance (£4,080), grass cutting (£7,311), the maintenance of recreational equipment (£4,800), maintenance of the recreation grounds (£11,804), further preparations for the development of the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) (£3,770), maintaining the three village defibrillators (£1,040), the installation of CCTV at the Burford Lodge Recreation Ground, and legal costs associated with the removal of an unauthorised encampment at Burford Lodge (£5,140). The Parish Council was pleased to support the following voluntary organisations this financial year: the Elstead Food bank (£1,000), Help in Elstead (£1,000) and the Clockhouse Milford and Villages Day Centre (£1,500). All these groups provide much support for Elstead residents. The Council's income was boosted by donations of a £7,220 and £500 respectively from Elstead Sharks FC and Elstead Cricket Club towards the cost of improvements to Burford Lodge and Thursley Road Recreation Grounds and a £2,000 additional grant received from The Henry Smith Charity.

5 The precept for 2020/21, at £63,500, is 6% higher than in 2019/20. The end of year balance for 2020/21 is £86,406.19 versus £67,641.09 in 2019/20.

6 The Council continues to have to take over financial commitments from both the County Council (eg rights of way maintenance) and the Borough Council, as a result of shortfalls in both authorities' budgets. In the case of the latter, our receipts from the Borough Council's compensatory grant, which

used to provide 50% of the Parish Council's expenditure on the maintenance of recreation and leisure facilities, have continued to be substantially reduced over now represent less than 3% of relevant expenditure. The result is that council tax payers in the parishes in Waverley are having to pay twice for their recreational and leisure facilities (ie in council tax payments both to Waverley and the parish) and are consequently at a significant financial disadvantage compared with their counterparts in the main towns in the borough, where recreation and leisure facilities are provided by the Borough Council. WBC has moreover decided to phase out the compensatory grant and local support grant next year. The Parish Council has raised this issue several times with officers and members of Waverley Borough Council, including the leader of the Council, but to no effect. We have also asked for a meeting with the borough leadership to discuss the matter, but owing to the coronavirus restrictions no date for this has yet been fixed.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

7 The Council's activities during the past year have been greatly affected by the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and its effects on parishioners. Council meetings have had to be conducted remotely for most of the period via Zoom and site meetings have been carried out in accordance with social distancing rules. Generally, these restrictions have not seriously disrupted Council business, although it has been impossible to arrange large public meetings to deal with key issues such as the Neighbourhood Plan. All of the Council's recreational facilities have had to be closed for organised sports and recreation between March and July and again between November and April. Even the children's play areas had to be closed during the first phase of the lockdown.

8 The Parish Council activated its emergency response arrangements to help parishioners cope with the coronavirus restrictions. These arrangements are dealt with in more detail below.

2020/1 MAIN OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE: NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

9 The Council again determined that its main priority for the coming year should be the further development and completion of the Elstead and Weyburn Neighbourhood Plan (NHP). Following Waverley Borough Council's agreement early in 2020 that the NHP could now include the allocation of sites for housing, together with adjustments to the Green Belt boundary, a second draft of the NHP was prepared with the assistance of the Council's consultants, Nexus Consulting. This was issued for regulation 14 consultation on 11 March 2020. The revised plan included the identification of housing sites sufficient to meet the target of 160 dwellings for the NHP area set out in WBC's adopted Local Plan Part 1, as well as the matters covered in the draft plan published in July 2018. It took account of a new housing needs survey, a traffic survey, detailed professional assessments of each of the identified potential housing sites (Sunray Farm, with 42 dwellings, Croft 2 with 10 dwellings and 4 Trees with 11 dwellings), and a Strategic Environmental and Habitats Directive Assessments of the NHP's proposals. The deadline for response to the consultation was extended to 8th May 2020.

10 The draft plan elicited a strong response rate. 229 responses were received, representing 21% of households in the NHP area. The vast majority of these (90%) supported the policies included in the plan. In regard to probably the most sensitive issue in the plan (site allocations), 73% supported the allocation of the 3 sites mentioned above.

11 As a result of the consultation, 3 further housing sites were submitted by landowners as candidates for inclusion in the plan – Springfield (which lies within the Settlement Area and outside the Green Belt and is part of Waverley Borough Council's social housing estate), Kingsmead Park and land adjacent to Watermeadow Place. All 3 new sites were the subject of assessment and evaluation by

the professional consultancy, Aecom. In the light of the Aecom assessment, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NHPSG) concluded that a further NHP consultation exercise would be necessary in order to allow the public to comment on a revised allocation of housing sites. The NHPSG's revised proposals are that the outstanding requirement for a minimum of 62 new dwellings should be met by the allocation of 40 dwellings (plus space for a business hub) at Sunray Farm, a net 16 additional dwellings at the Springfield redevelopment, and 11 dwellings at 4 Trees. This would provide a total of 67 new dwellings, sufficient to ensure that the outstanding target of 62 dwellings would be met. As a result, only 2 of the previously allocated 3 sites (Sunray and 4 Trees) would need to be removed from the Green Belt. These sites are deemed more appropriate for development than the other sites which have been put forward.

12 The new consultation was initiated early in April and will extend over a 6-week period. The next step will be to submit the revised NHP to WBC in accordance with the Article 15 procedure early in June 2021.

CORONAVIRUS AND ELSTEAD EMERGENCY RESPONSE (EER)

13 The community in Elstead really came together during the Covid 19 pandemic. Large numbers of volunteers quickly registered with the Parish Council's Covid 19 community response team, which was supported by our ward councillors Jenny and David Else. Within a few weeks of the first lock-down the Council's Emergency response was activated and a co-ordination team was set up led by Richard Rees. The team set up a telephone hotline and distributed leaflets to all houses in the village as part of its efforts to connect those in need with volunteers and other services which would be of benefit to them. Over 200 volunteers were registered, which enabled the co-ordination team to connect those who were seeking assistance (shopping, pharmacy collections or just a listening ear) with a volunteer. The Parish Council thanks all who came forward to help out in providing support. The co-ordination team continues to meet to assess continuing need and to consider what changes may be necessary in its arrangements in order to ensure all those in need of assistance are covered.

14 The Council is also grateful to the other village voluntary organisations who came forward to help out in the pandemic over the past year. Specifically, the Council wishes to thank Help in Elstead and the Elstead Food Bank for the outstanding support they have provided throughout the parish. Many would indeed have struggled without this assistance, and it is a great credit to the village that so many parishioners were ready to come forward to help out others in need during this time.

15 In addition to the Covid 19 response, the Elstead Emergency Response (EER) team, with immediate support from Elstead's Borough Councillors, was activated on 30 May 2020 for 4 days on the occasion of the serious fire at the nearby Thursley National Nature Reserve. The pavilion at Thursley Road Recreation Ground was immediately opened as an emergency rest and recuperation centre for people who were obliged to temporarily evacuate their homes. At the same time the EER team spent much time liaising with the local authority emergency response teams and the police in order to provide regular updates to affected residents via social media. The team worked closely with Thursley Parish Council, both in dealing with the emergency and in the follow-up debrief with Waverley Borough Council, Surrey County Council, the police and the fire and rescue service, which was held to establish how similar emergencies might be dealt with more effectively in the future.

OUR ELSTEAD

16 Our Elstead (OE) is a sub-committee of the Parish Council whose objective is to improve the appearance and amenity of the village. The Covid-19 restrictions prevented the OE volunteers from continuing with the successful litter picks which were organised in 2019. This is regrettable, as the

hedgerows on the village perimeter are frequently heavily contaminated with litter. Roadside litter collection is the responsibility of Waverley Borough Council, so parishioners should contact WBC to report serious incidents of litter contamination.

17 Other initiatives again included the summer planters, managed by Di Mathisen, which were a huge success, followed for the first time by winter planters, prepared by Diane Snape and equally well received. The illuminated Christmas tree was once more installed on the Green, a much larger specimen this time, donated by Oxenford Farm. It was lifted into place by Richard Knight, who because of its huge weight designed a special lifting device to enable its erection. For Christmas 2021, the Council hopes to have installed a mains power connection so that a more comprehensive lighting display can be provided. This connection will also be useful for other community events on the Village Green. The PC would like to note its thanks to Cllr Harmer who has supported this project with £1,200 member allocation funding.

18 OE's next project for 2012 is the erection of a village sign on the Green. The aim is to raise awareness of the village for traffic passing the Green, and also to celebrate Elstead's history and its former name Helstede - the place of the elder trees. The sign will feature the village's 13th century bridge, the sheep which grazed its commons and its more recent designation as a dragonfly 'hot spot'. The Council has appointed a blacksmith/artist to design and fabricate the sign and plans to erect it later this year, with appropriate celebrations (Covid permitting). We are all grateful to the Billmeir Trust for its sponsorship of the project.

THE FORMER FEDERAL MOGUL/WEYBURN WORKS SITE - DEVELOPMENT

19 Planning consent for the building of 69 dwellings, together with a care home, on the former Federal Mogul/Weyburn Works site (located in both Peper Harow and Elstead parishes), was granted on appeal in early 2017. Construction started in 2018 and most of the homes have been completed, with the majority now occupied.

20 A number of issues have arisen over the development. First, several homes in the lower lying area of the site were effectively cut off by floodwater during the extremely wet weather of late winter/early spring 2020 and only narrowly avoided being inundated. This is a potential problem which the Parish Council made both the developers and the planning authority aware of prior to the development being authorised, but its comments, based on local knowledge of flood events over recent years, were unfortunately disregarded.

21 Second, the developer has in the Council's view failed to meet its planning obligation to provide any children's play facilities for the development, even though there is a clear planning requirement for them to do so (as set out in the report of the Inspector who granted consent for the site). We have taken this matter up with WBC's planning officers, who have accepted that the planning conditions in regard to the play area were discharged without proper compliance. The failure to provide any proper children's play facilities at such a large development reflects poorly on both WBC's planning department and on the developer, Clarion Homes, which is a registered charity and one of the government's principal suppliers of social housing.

22 The Parish Council, along with representatives of Peper Harow Parish, continue to press the developer to provide suitable play facilities at the site. So far, little progress has been achieved.

23 Other planning issues affecting the site, notably the provision of accessible Suitable Alternative Green Space (SANG) and the completion of an accessible pedestrian link between the development

and Elstead village, remain outstanding. The Council continues to seek satisfactory outcomes with the planning authority and the developer.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

24 The Parish Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications received by Waverley Borough Council. The PC's responses are dealt with by the Planning Sub-Committee, which normally meets at least monthly. The sub-committee welcomes comments from parishioners on individual applications and where appropriate will incorporate these views in its own response. It is however important that parishioners also send their comments direct to WBC to maximise their impact on the planning authority.

25 The Council notes with satisfaction that the planning authority refused a particularly sensitive application for a development of 30 dwellings on parts of Bonfire Hill, which was the subject of over 100 objections from parishioners submitted in support of the Parish Council's own objections. A further application for the development of the Croft 2 site, with 34 dwellings, was also refused, again following objections from many parishioners and the Council.

ROAD SAFETY, PARKING AND ROAD CONDITIONS

26 Over the past year the Council has received an increasing number of complaints about speeding through the village, parking problems and the condition of road surfaces. These complaints have been taken up with the relevant authorities (Surrey County Council as the highways authority and the police). Only limited progress has however been achieved. The badly eroded surface of Thursley Road is now starting to be repaired and an additional Vehicle Activated Sign is likely to be made available to the village. The Council has also invited the police to attend a forthcoming Parish Council meeting at which the issue of speeding can be addressed in more detail.

27 The parking situation outside St James School is a matter of particular concern. In order to alleviate the problem, the Council and the school have jointly approached BT with a view to securing access to part of the unused land at the nearby telephone exchange in order to provide additional parking for school staff. This would avoid the need for staff vehicles to park on the highway. The Council is grateful for the support of our MP Jeremy Hunt and our borough councillor Jenny Else in this approach. We have yet to receive a definitive response from BT on the issue.

CEMETERY

28 There have been a number of actions taken at the Cemetery on Woolfords Lane as part of a longer-term plan to ensure that it provides both a pleasant and tranquil environment, as well as sufficient capacity available for years ahead. The improvements to date have included a new composting area to be used in the disposal of flowers and wreaths. There has also been the construction and planting of new flower beds and other enhancements to the area. The building on-site has had new soffits and will also be given a new roof in 2021/2. And there will be a new finger post sign to help visitors locate it from the Thursley Road.

CCTV AT BURFORD LODGE RECREATION GROUND

29 Following a number of incidents of anti-social behaviour, vandalism and theft at the Burford Lodge Recreation Ground, the Council decided to install CCTV in order to improve security for the user groups and parishioners generally. The installation included coverage of the Tennis Club and the Sharks FC storage facility, for which the clubs contributed an appropriate share of the costs. The Council is

grateful for the co-operation of the clubs in this venture and in particular to the Tennis Club for agreeing to accommodate the control unit.

THURSLEY NNR FIRE

30 As reported above in para 15, at the end of May a large wildfire destroyed much of the nearby Thursley National Nature Reserve, a site of international wildlife importance and a popular recreation area enjoyed by many local residents. One of the consequences of the fire was the destruction of an extensive and widely used boardwalk, which provided access to areas of the reserve which would otherwise be inaccessible.

31 Following the fire, both Elstead and Thursley Parish Councils received a large number of enquiries from the general public – both local and from further afield – asking what could be done to help restore the reserve and in particular to reinstate the boardwalk. As a result, the two councils agreed jointly to establish a fund for this purpose and to solicit donations from the public. Within a matter of days, significant sums had been contributed and currently the amount in the fund stands at over £52,000. This is a remarkable achievement and is testimony to the importance which the public attaches to the reserve.

32 At the same time, the two Parish Councils established a joint sub-committee, consisting of members of both Councils, the public and Natural England (NE, the owners and managers of the site) to advise on how best the funds might be used in the restoration process – the ‘Preserve our Reserve Committee’. NE have since produced initial plans for the boardwalk reinstatement and the Councils, together with NE, lodged an application with Waverley Borough Council for the use of Community Infrastructure Levy funds to assist with the funding of the restoration. This has proved to be successful and a further £98,000 has been allocated towards the project.

BOREHOLE AT THURSLEY ROAD RECREATION GROUND

33 The playing surfaces at the Thursley Road Recreation Ground have in recent years been subject to increasing erosion owing to a succession of dry summers and greater intensity of use for both football and cricket. The main problem has been the greater frequency of drought periods, exacerbated by the poor water holding capacity of the soil.

34 To address these problems, the Elstead Recreational Trust, together with the Cricket and Football Clubs, have launched a campaign to raise funds for the installation of a borehole at the Recreation Ground. The objective is to provide a plentiful supply of irrigation water to help maintain the playing surfaces and at the same time reduce recourse to potable mains water for this purpose. So far, over £15,000 of the estimated total cost of £25-30,000 has been raised. It is hoped the balance will be forthcoming in the form of a grant from Surrey County Council’s new community grants programme. The Parish Council, as the owner of the land and the ultimate owner of the borehole, fully supports the project in view of its benefits to the local community. It has allocated £1,000 of its own funds towards its completion.

HENRY SMITH CHARITY

35 The Parish Council acts as Trustee for the Henry Smith Charity in Elstead. Trustees meet once a year in November and in 2020 distributed £3,000 to a number of families before Christmas. The Clerk again successfully applied for additional funding from Charity. As a result, the Parish Council has been awarded a further £2,000 for distribution this year. £1,000 of this was allocated to the Elstead Food

bank and £500 to Help in Elstead. The Council is extremely grateful for this support from the Henry Smith Charity.

PARISH COUNCIL OBJECTIVES FOR 2021/2

36 At its February 2021 meeting, the Parish Council agreed that its principal objectives for 2021/2 should be:

- Completion of the NHP and the associated revision of the Village Design Statement
- Installation of the village sign and electricity point on the green
- Improvement of Burford Lodge access road and resurfacing of car park
- Revision of Emergency Plan
- Improvement works to the cemetery and its building
- Assessment of effects of Coronavirus pandemic on the village
- Completion of the Elstead - Milford cycleway
- Public consultation on the potential for a village business hub and its design and management

PARISH COUNCIL CONTRACTOR

37 The Council's contractor, Richard Knight, continues to carry out minor maintenance and renovation works to its property in the village and to undertake other minor works of importance to parishioners and associated with the Our Elstead sub-committee. Richard has now received the necessary accreditation to carry out minor works adjacent to the highway. Without exception, Richard's work continues to be carried out promptly, effectively and economically.

PARISH CLERK

37 The Parish Council is fortunate to have available to it the services of our Parish Clerk, Juliet (Jules) Williams. Jules continues to provide excellent support to the Council and in the light of the substantially increased workload arising both from work on the NHP and the coronavirus pandemic, the Council concluded that it needed to increase the Clerk agreed hours accordingly. I wish again to record our recognition of Jules' efforts over the past year and her role in helping to deal with the many challenges which have faced the Council over this difficult time.

P W Murphy
Chairman, Elstead Parish Council
April 2021