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ELSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the main items of business carried out by the Council during the financial year 2022/23. 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 Gardiner, Ms Jane Jacobs, Mr John Mathisen, Mr Patrick Murphy, Mr Richard Rees, Mr Stefan Reynolds, Mrs Diane Snape. Ms Jessica Webster was also elected in 2019, but resigned in early 2023 owing to ill health.

3 At its May 2022 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).

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

4 In 2022/23 the Council received £119,803.16 and spent £125,142.13. In addition the PC has transferred £50,000 into its' deposit account where it will benefit from a higher rate of interest. The Parish Council is expected to hold 50-100% in reserve hence why these funds have been moved.

5. The main items of expenditure in the year (other than one-off pension contributions (see para 8 below), administrative costs and sundry maintenance items) were:

- Grass cutting (£6,671.30). Due to the hot summer it is noted that the grass needed less cutting and the council spent £2,500 less on this item versus FY21/22.
- Tree surgery/maintenance (£3,705). To uphold its duty of care the Parish Council must conduct a biennial survey of all of its trees and undertake works as required. Works were completed in the Spring with a quarter of the work invoiced in March and rest invoiced in April the latter will therefore fall into FY23/24 expenditure.
- Maintenance of the recreation grounds (£6,065)
- Hire of marquee for platinum jubilee celebrations (£3,775)

6 The Parish Council was pleased to support the following voluntary organisations this financial year (Elstead Food Bank £1,000 and Help in Elstead £500): All of these organisations provide much support for Elstead residents and the Parish Council is grateful for all they do.

7 This year the amount that Elstead Parish Council receives from the Henry Smith Charity was increased by the fund managers by 10% taking the new annual total to £3,300. The clerk also successfully applied for additional funding of £2,500 from The Henry Smith Charity which Elstead Parish Council will receive for the next three years.

8 Clerk's pension contributions: the clerk's contribution towards the pension had been taken out of the clerk's monthly salary since the pension had been set up in November 2019, but it was not being paid into the pension. The Parish Council's contribution had also not been paid into the pension. This was an issue that had been raised at previous audits with the Council's accountants. The clerk had previously contacted SCC (the pension fund administrator) but the issue had not been resolved. The clerk contacted SCC again who asked the clerk to refer the matter to the PC's payroll provider who have been able to work with SCC to resolve the matter. This meant that there was a one-off amount of £18,500 of unpaid pension which needed to be paid by 21st March 2023. It was noted that £6k pension contributions for 2023/2024 had not been budgeted for and that councillors would need to allow for this in determining expenditure during the coming year.

9 The precept for 2022/23, at £70,750, is +4.8% higher than in 2021/22. The end of year balance for 2022/23 is £71,219 versus £76,601 in 2021/22.

10 The Council continues to have to take over financial commitments from both the County Council (eg verge cutting and clearing rights of way) 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 now ceased. 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. The Parish Council has again raised this issue with officers and members of Waverley Borough Council, including the leader of the Council, who kindly attended the January 2023 PC meeting, but to no effect.

2022/3 MAIN OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE:

11 The Council determined that its objectives for the coming year should be:

- The completion of the Elstead and Weyburn Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) and the associated updating of the Village Design Statement.
- Public consultation on the proposed village co-working hub,
- Removal of dead trees and tidying up the verges alongside Staceys Farm Road
- Complete the redraft the Elstead Emergency Response (EER) plan
- Complete the refurbishment of the cemetery building
- Remove the concrete foundations of the former floodlights at Burford Lodge Recreation Ground

Neighbourhood Plan (NHP)

12 The Regulation 15 draft of the plan was submitted to WBC for examination in early October 2021. The examiner, Mr Jeremy Edge, was appointed by WBC in December 2021. The following month, January 2022, Mr Edge raised three procedural issues relating to the draft NHP, concerning the Basic Conditions Statement, the Consultation Statement and whether or not Peper Harow Parish Meeting had the necessary powers to agree to the inclusion of part of the parish in a NHP area. The Elstead and Weyburn NHP Steering Group, through the Parish Council, responded to the first two points in March 2022, following a request from WBC,

which agreed to respond to the third issue about the competence of Peper Harow Parish Meeting. WBC took advice from learned Counsel on this point, whose opinion confirmed that Elstead Parish Council, on behalf of and with the agreement of Peper Harow Parish Meeting, were entitled under section 61(F) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to act in relation to the relevant neighbourhood plan area. For reasons which Elstead Parish Council is unaware of, and in spite of our several requests for urgent action, this advice to the examiner was not conveyed by WBC until 11 August 2022.

13 Mr Edge responded to WBC's letter on 9 September 2022, disagreeing with the advice given by learned Counsel on the competence issue. WBC replied by sending the full text of the advice on 28 September. In spite of WBC sending several reminder messages and phone calls, Mr Edge did not respond to this latest letter until 20 December 2022 (10 weeks later), when he again rejected Counsel's advice.

14 WBC have now sought further advice from Counsel on the issues raised by Mr Edge Counsel's full opinion has (April 2023) yet to be received although his initial response is that Mr Edge appears to have misdirected himself in regard to the meaning of section 61 (F) of the TCPA 1990.

15 The position we now find ourselves in therefore is that our carefully designed NHP has been held up for the last 18 months or so as a result of a procedural dispute between the Examiner and WBC, which as matters stand at present shows little sign of resolution. For its part, Elstead Parish Council has lost confidence in the ability of the Examiner to conclude the examination, owing both to his reluctance to accept legal advice and the delay in responding to WBC's comments (although WBC has itself been extremely tardy in dealing with the issues raised). We have suggested therefore that the way forward would be to appoint a different examiner, but WBC appear reluctant to go down this route.

16 The extended delay in the NHP examination, which is entirely outside the Parish Council's control and has no relation to the substance of the plan, is causing real concern. We are left with no adopted plan, which means that the housing sites identified within the area cannot be progressed and the homes involved cannot be delivered. At the same time, the NHP area is at risk from speculative development proposals which do not comply with the policies set out in the draft plan. Furthermore, many in the village, particularly those who have been heavily involved in the development of the NHP, are perplexed and outraged at the 'angels on pinheads' arguments which appear to be frustrating the successful completion of a project in which they have invested so much of their time. This does nothing to promote confidence in the current planning system.

17 The Parish Council will maintain its pressure on WBC to seek an early resolution of the impasse with the Examiner, if necessary through the appointment of a replacement Examiner. It has already raised the issue with our constituency MP, Mr Hunt, who passed on our concerns to the relevant Secretary of State, Mr Gove, who sent a helpful response.

18 In parallel with the development of the NHP, a sub-group of the NHPSG started work on updating the Elstead Village Design Statement (VDS), originally drafted in the early 1990s. But this work has since been discontinued owing to staff shortages in WBC's planning department, which has indicated that VDS's now have a low work priority.

Village Co-Working Hub

19 The proposals in the NHP for the development of the Sunray Farm site include plans for a village business co-working hub. The Parish Council has accordingly entered into discussions with the site developer to establish what could be provided in terms of accommodation and how the facility might be configured. The Council has also concluded that it should own and

manage the site in the interests of the local community and that it should include a Parish Council office. These proposals are planned to be the subject of local consultations once the examination of the NHP has been completed (see above)

Verges at Staceys Farm Road

20 A major storm in February 2022 brought down several dead or dying trees on the strip of land between Staceys Farm Road and Thursley Road, opposite the Village Hall. Most of these were juvenile elms. One fell on to the adjacent BT cables and others remained in a hazardous condition. The PC commissioned a survey of the trees owing to the risks to persons and property. The survey recommended the removal of a number of additional dead and dying trees, along with those already brought down and resting at dangerous angles. The necessary works were carried out in March 2023. The 'Our Elstead' committee has agreed to develop a replanting programme to fill in any gaps created by the removal of the dead trees and to enhance the interest of the site. A large amount of accumulated litter has also been removed.

Redraft of the Elstead Emergency Response Plan

21 A simplified Emergency Response Plan was adopted by the Council during the year. This recognises the primary role played by the statutory emergency response bodies (SCC and WBC, in support of the Fire and Police services), with the Parish Council acting in a supportive and information role within the limited resources available to it.

Refurbishment of the Cemetery Building

22 The works to complete the refurbishment of the cemetery building were completed during the year. The building now has a new roof, together with new door and window surrounds.

Removal of Concrete Foundations to Old Floodlights at Burford Lodge Recreation Ground

23 The old concrete foundations were removed by the PC's contractor, Richard Knight, in May 2022. This has removed potential hazards and made more space available for recreational use.

PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

24 The Parish Council helped to promote the 4-day celebrations of the late Queen's platinum jubilee in June 2022. The PC agreed to fund the provision of a large marquee at the Thursley Rd Recreation Ground and secured additional generous sponsorship from a range of local donors, including the Billmeir Trust, Hey Broadband and the Elstead Sports Bar. Many local organisations participated in the events, including the Women's Institute, the British Legion, PETS, the Elstead Belly Dancers and Elstead Scouts. The events included a large tea party in the marquee on the Thursday, a band night featuring local bands on the Friday evening, a children's fun day on the Saturday afternoon, a barn dance and BBQ on the Saturday evening and a village picnic and vintage car and vehicle display on the Sunday. All the events attracted a large attendance and tickets for the band night and barn dance were sold out. Financially, the occasion generated a surplus of nearly £3,000, which the Parish Council has set aside to help fund future similar events – including the King's coronation in May 2023.

HANKLEY COMMON WILDFIRE

25 The summer of 2022 was exceptionally hot and dry. Unsurprisingly, several wildfires broke out on the nearby commons, one of which on the Hankley military training area in late July

proved to be particularly serious. The fire, fanned by strong winds, threatened local properties and only a last minute change in the wind direction prevented serious damage.

26 Local concern about the response to the fire prompted WBC ward Cllrs Jenny and David Else to organise two public meetings to review the emergency response to the fire and the precautions and other measures which needed to be put in place to prevent a recurrence and to mitigate the risk to neighbouring properties, persons and livestock. Concern was expressed at the lack of reliable information during the emergency and the adequacy of the fire precautions on military land, including the use of incendiary ammunition and pyrotechnics, which many felt may have been the origin of the fire.

27 These meetings were followed by a briefing from SCC's Emergency Response Team on their updated plans for responding to wildfires, together with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's explanation of their own wildfire control initiatives, in particular their liaison with the Ministry of Defence on plans to prevent a recurrence. Further information from SCC on their wildfire emergency plans is expected shortly.

THURSLEY NNR FIRE AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BOARDWALK

28 The large wildfire the end of May 2020 on Thursley National Nature Reserve destroyed the extensive and widely used boardwalk, which provided access to areas of the reserve which would otherwise be inaccessible.

29 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 £55,000. This is a remarkable achievement and is testimony to the importance which the public attaches to the reserve.

30 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 produced 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 proved to be successful and a further £98,000 was allocated towards the project. Together with NE's own funds, the amounts raised were sufficient for the boardwalk restoration to be completed.

31 The restoration project required planning consent, which was obtained in Autumn 2022. Work on the new boardwalk started in late 2022 and was completed in March 2023. A formal opening of the new structure by the 'Preserve Our Reserve' patron, the RT Hon Jeremy Hunt, took place on 1 April 2023.

THURSLEY RD RECREATION GROUND BOREHOLE AND IRRIGATION SYSTEM

32 The borehole at the Thursley Rd Recreation Ground, funded largely by public donation, was successfully completed in late 2021. During the dry summer of 2022, it proved its worth with the help of a temporary manually operated irrigation system which helped to maintain a reasonable coverage of grass at a time when other local grounds were deep brown. During 2022, the Parish Council and the Elstead Recreational Trust were jointly successful in securing a £15,000 grant from Surrey County Council for the installation of a semi-automatic irrigation system, which became operational at the end of the summer.

OUR ELSTEAD

33 Our Elstead is a sub-committee of the Parish Council, chaired by Cllr Mathisen and including a number of co-opted members, the aim of which is to improve the environment and attractiveness of Elstead village.

34 over the past year, the committee has achieved several positive results. In early April 2022, a mains power cabinet was installed on the Village Green by local company DJK Electrical Ltd funded by Elstead Parish Council with a grant from Surrey County Council. The new village sign was unveiled on April 30, 2022, using the public address system connected to the new power cabinet. The sign was designed by blacksmith Nick Bates, briefed by a small group from Our Elstead and funded by the Billmeir Trust. It symbolises the villages 12th century connection to Waverley Abbey whose monks built St James's Church and Elstead Bridge and established the wool industry. A bouquet of leaves and berries with dragon flies represent our fortunate natural environment today. The sign was highly recommended in the 2023 Waverley Design Awards.

35 The 2022 Christmas Tree lighting event was the most successful so far. Oxenford Farm gave a 24ft tree, mulled wine was again donated by Spar and served by the Scouts with mince pies from St James's PTA. The tree was professionally lit with mains power also used for the public address system for local famous actress Lady Anita May to switch the lights on and for youth groups to sing. Many others contributed to a memorable evening including Elstead Parish Council who funded the lights.

36 The PA System has also been used for the 2022 Elstead Marathon and Elstead Churches at Easter 2023.

37 Our Elstead continued to provide colourful displays in the planters on the village and Church Greens. Wild flowers and numerous bulbs planted in 2022 giving a joyful display of daffodils this Spring. Finally, Our Elstead took part in organising a village litter pick as part of Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean campaign.

'NO MOW MAY'

38 In early 2021, WBC introduced its 'No Mow May' policy, under which it planned not to cut roadside verges and amenity grassed areas on its own estates during the month of May in order (it claimed) to encourage biodiversity. The policy was introduced in haste, without any consultation with Parish Councils. In the event, the policy was maintained until late summer, with the verges and grassed areas in Elstead not being cut until mid-August. When at last WBC's contractors attempted to cut the tall vegetation they found their machinery was unable to cope effectively – demonstrating a lack of planning and foresight.

39 The Parish Council received many complaints from parishioners about the uncut grass, which became unsightly and a hazard to pedestrians owing to the encroachment of nettles and brambles and the risk of tick bites. The Council eventually managed to secure a meeting with the new WBC portfolio holder, Cllr Mirylees which proved to be constructive. Cllr Mirylees understood our concerns about a repetition of the policy and indicated that a programme of grass cutting would be reinstated in 2022, in consultations with parishes.

40 In the event, the verges were not cut in 2022 for a period of nearly 8 weeks between mid April and mid June, which led to a recurrence of some of the problems of the previous year. The Parish Council therefore plans to monitor WBC's performance in 2023, although it notes that SCC has now terminated its contract with WBC for the cutting of roadside verges.

ELSTEAD VILLAGE ROAD SAFETY

41 Despite all the recent road disruption, from various utility companies throughout the village, it is a pleasure to report the past year has seen several key projects finally gaining momentum or completing successfully.

Thursley Road Maintenance - we have campaigned relentlessly for several years for a total resurface of the Thursley Road as this had been promised before covid struck. We are delighted that the work has finally happened. Our thanks to Surrey County Councillor David Harmer and the SCC team for all their support in achieving this successful outcome.

Speed Survey - in answer to the speeding concerns raised by villagers a short survey was created and distributed during April 2023. The data collected will provide clarity on your perception of speeding throughout the village, the key issues and enable us to share focused resident perception with WBC and SCC.

Zebra Crossing Improvements - the recent accident and subsequent near-miss on the Milford Road crossing have obviously caused grave concern. Discussions have taken place with SCC Highways to determine what interim measures can be implemented ahead of a wider village traffic calming review (we understand this is scheduled for Elstead in the near future). Meanwhile we have requested LED beacon lighting, repair to the stick lighting and re-painting of the road hazard markings.

Community Speed Watch - having planned to launch this activity last year (a minimum of 6 participants are required to form a team), we are delighted that a full quota of volunteers have now been identified and actions to enable training have commenced. The data captured through this campaign will further support the future traffic calming discussions with SCC.

VAS - Our VAS machines continue to provide traffic and speed data throughout the village.

Psychological Deterrents – during 2022 we piloted the ‘Eyes’ stickers, (similar to posters used by Waverley BC to highlighted dog waste) specifically designed to deter people from committing crimes. Unfortunately, although many residents accepted the free stickers, we were disappointed by the actual usage.

Village Green & St James Parking, Milford and Thursley Road Speeding and 20’s Plenty National Campaign (including Surrey Rural Roads Project) remain under consideration for future projects.

TRANSFER OF FREEHOLDS OF VILLAGE GREENS

42 The freeholds of the two village greens in Elstead (at the junction of the Milford and Thursley Rds and by St James Church) have been owned by Waverley BC, although the Parish Council has accepted responsibility for their maintenance over the last 100 years or so. This arrangement made little practical sense, so the Parish Council asked WBC to agree to the transfer of the freeholds in order to reduce bureaucracy and to allow the parish to exercise full control over the management of the greens. WBC agreed and the freeholds were transferred to the Parish Council in early 2023.

PARISH COUNCIL OBJECTIVES FOR 2023/4

43 The Parish Council’s objectives for 2023/4 will be determined by the new Council after the election of 4 May 2023.

PARISH COUNCIL CONTRACTOR

44 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. Without exception, Richard's work continues to be carried out promptly, effectively and economically.

PARISH CLERK

45 The Parish Council is fortunate to have available to it the services of our Parish Clerk, Juliet (Jules) Williams. 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 2023