

THE WARNHAM, SOCIETY 1985–2010

A Brief History

The Warnham Society was formed in 1985. The need for a local society had become apparent to a group of Warnham residents who were opposed to a proposed development that was not in keeping with the character of the parish. It was felt that a society could provide a collective voice in dealing with future threats and opportunities. The outcome of a meeting of this group was the formation of a Steering Committee which culminated in a public meeting on 29th March 1985 in the Village Hall, attended by some 120 people. There was unanimous agreement to the formation of The Warnham Society, to be run by a Committee on behalf of paid-up members under a provisional constitution, which set out the following objectives:

"The objects of the Society shall be to safeguard the character of the parish, to ensure that any development which takes place is in keeping with that character and to do so in close co-operation with other organisations having similar interests and in as friendly a liaison as possible with local authorities."

The First Year

The committee was quickly into its stride, with meetings being held in members' homes. The minutes of past committee meetings have provided the main source of information for this history. We have focused on some of the first year's activities as they typify the range of issues addressed by the Society. These include traffic management and planning, which remain matters of major concern. For example:

- Roger Purcell, soon to join the committee, alerted it to traffic using the village as a shortcut as an alternative to the A24, something likely to increase with the building of Horsham's Northern Bypass. He identified some possible remedies and within a year the Society's first traffic survey was organised.
- The Planning sub-committee foresaw the need not only to evaluate planning applications but also to prepare a detailed statement of the sort of development which would be acceptable to Warnham and might act as guidelines for the planning authorities. This anticipated the need for the Parish Design Statement, published in 2008.
- Warnham won a Certificate of Merit in the County's Best Kept Village Competition, the initiative being led by Olive Thornton. We were also awarded £150 for the most litter free village, the money being used to provide seats for the cricket ground.
- We joined the Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies which helped us get started and to which we still belong.
- The Society secured the refurbishment of the letter box at the corner of Mayes Lane and Northlands Road.
- The Society took steps to safeguard paths and bridleways. In 2010 the Society published its map 'Footpaths and Walks around Warnham'.

The first Annual General Meeting was held in October 1985 at which an amended Constitution was approved and a committee was elected. In March 1986 the first Spring Meeting discussed the setting up of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme which was set up later in the year.

And then...

Looking back, two kinds of activity present themselves. First there are long-term issues, largely encompassed by traffic management and planning that are important to the well-being of the parish. Secondly, there are shorter term activities which the Society supports or initiates to benefit the parish. However, despite concerted and sustained effort, not all of our endeavours bear fruit. In 2008, in conjunction with the Parish Council, Horsham District Council and many others, including our MP, we sought, without success, to retain the village Post Office. Its closure represents a significant loss, especially to our older residents. What follows is the briefest summary of dedicated and prolonged effort by members of the Society and its committee, past and present, often in

partnership with others.

Traffic Management

The increasing speed and volume of traffic in and around the village were, and are, matters of concern, especially the use of the village as a short cut. This led the committee to respond to successive building and road development proposals in an attempt to mitigate their effect on Warnham. Examples include the current plans for a major housing development at Broadbridge Heath and, earlier, the dualling of the A24 between Great Daux and Capel, a scheme pursued by the County Council but now in abeyance. The Society was a member of a joint working party with Warnham Parish Council and the Kingsfold Residents' Association which responded imaginatively and vigorously to the County's proposals. Jointly, we pursued an alternative alignment which routed the new road away from the village. The success of those separate efforts is difficult to gauge but there has been one notable success in the traffic management measures introduced to the village in 2008, of which the Society had been a long-time proponent. Joint action with Warnham Parish Council, inaugurated in 2002, led to their coming to implementation. Nonetheless, other traffic calming concerns outside the village centre remain.

Planning

From the start the Society has examined planning applications to decide whether it wished to comment and, if so, has done so formally to the planning authorities. Although individual planning applications have been considered, attention has been focused on larger scale applications which could adversely affect the parish. Sometimes development might be supported but the proposed building density or materials would be questioned. The materials used in new or existing buildings should be sympathetic to that which exists, but until recently there was little formal guidance by which their suitability could be judged or challenged. But help came in the shape of a government White Paper which launched the concept of the parish plan to help local communities have greater control over their own development. In 2007 the Warnham Parish Plan was published, supported by Society members on its Steering Group. In 2008 the Warnham Parish Design Statement was published, which focused on the style and design of any future construction within the parish. It was prepared by a Steering Group of volunteers most of whom were Society members. At its heart are the Design Guidelines to be used as a checklist against which a proposal's design and realisation will be assessed by planning authorities. It has local support and is recognised by Horsham District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document which incorporates HDC's policies for conservation areas and listed buildings. The Society has long supported the provision of affordable housing in the parish and was delighted to see its provision enshrined in the Parish Plan.

Other Activities. Examples include :

Amenities

In 1998 two red telephone boxes were repainted under the Society's supervision, which probably led to their retention.

Community Events

In 1991 the Society ran a stall in the Street Fayre and raised £580 towards repairing the church roof. In 1995 the Society was active in the parish's commemoration of the 50th anniversaries of VE and VJ Days

Stewardship

In 1994 Warnham won the Large Village Category of the County's Best Kept Village Competition.

Security

In 1986 the Society inaugurated Neighbourhood Watch.

Working with Others The Society has sought to liaise constructively with other organisations. These include Warnham Parish Council, Horsham District Council and West Sussex County Council. All are elected bodies whose decisions we may seek to question or to influence in the

interests of the village or wider parish. They, in turn, have acknowledged our potential contribution and we are recognised as non-statutory consultees on a number of matters. The Society also maintains membership of the following bodies which represent local interests in a wider sphere;

- The Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies
- The Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign
- The Campaign to Protect Rural England

The Society has enjoyed a close relationship with the Warnham Historical Society and in 2007 the two Societies merged as The Warnham Society. Our Constitution was amended to reflect the widened remit and the Society was strengthened by securing the Historical Society archive and its residual funds.

The Future

We expect Traffic and Planning to remain major issues with focus on the need to control the speed and size of vehicles using local roads. The planned nature reserve to the west of Tilletts Lane will come to fruition in the near future. The Society is active with others in supporting this project which will provide an excellent habitat for rare butterflies and represent an important educational resource. As in the past, The Society will continue to face challenges and grasp opportunities as yet unknown. However, our ability to do so will depend on maintaining and building a strong and active membership. The support that The Society has received over the past twenty five years is a privilege that we recognise and value as an asset for the future.

Governance

The Society's operations have been guided by its Constitution which has been revised over time to reflect changed circumstances, Clause 2 of the latest version, (2007), reads as follows:

"The Aims of the Society shall be:

- to safeguard the character of Warnham parish
- to foster any activity beneficial to the parish
- to promote the study and dissemination of the history of the parish

The Society shall work with like-minded organisations and local authorities in achieving these aims"

The Committee structure has worked effectively. The Committee has met over 150 times and has accounted to members at each Annual General Meeting, when a new Committee has been elected, the audited accounts approved and the highlights of the past year reviewed. Spring and Autumn Meetings have been used to invite guest speakers to inform on a range of subjects, including the Red Deer of Warnham Park, Rural Policing, the Parish Design Statement and Waste Management. Membership has remained at approximately a hundred which, despite constant effort to attract new members, is sufficient to allow the election of officers and provide subscriptions to meet operating costs.

A Tribute

The Committee would like to thank members and officers, past and present, for their contributions over the past 25 years by quoting from the last paragraph of George Eliot's Middlemarch "...the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life,.....".

Listed below are the names of the 1985 Steering Committee and the Society's past Chairmen:

The 1985 Steering Committee Members:

Mr R B Bensted-Smith, Chairman

Mrs A E Cox

Mr R H Courtier

Brig. M C Hall

Mrs R R McLaughlin

Mr G. P. McMullen

Mrs J. M. McMullen

Mr R C Overton, Secretary

Mr H J Parr, Treasurer

Mrs LP Parr

Mrs O Thornton

Mrs P N White

Mr C J Williams

The Society Chairmen:

1985. Mr C J Williams

1985–1987 Mr G. P. McMullen

1987-1992 Mr R H Melhuish

1992-1994 Sir J Dalrymple-Hay

1994–1998 Mr P M Lee, CBE

1998–2003 Mrs ME Dales

2003-2005 Meetings chaired by Committee Members

2005-2008 Mr W. Bousfield & Mr B King

2008 to date Mr J Hamer & Mr B King

Published by:

The Committee of the Warnham Society to celebrate the Silver Jubilee in 2010 of the Society's formation in 1985.

George Brand

Elizabeth Bridges

George Elliott

John Hamer, Joint Chairman

Brian King, Joint Chairman

Quintin Knight

Roger Purcell

Jeremy Thompson