

## **WEB Annual General Meeting 20 April 2010 Chairman's Report**

I have great pleasure in presenting my report for the last year of WEB activity.

### **Introduction**

Since our last AGM we have achieved all that we hoped for and more.

WEB and individual members have been directly involved in a range of projects and initiatives which can only be described as exceptional. It is no exaggeration to claim that WEB has become a working model for village business and community involvement which is the envy of everyone who knows us.

That success is attributable directly to the hard work of WEB members and to their collaboration on particular issues with other conscientious and committed individuals in the Parish Council.

Continuing this level of success will depend on maintaining our membership numbers and on broadly based collaboration, through projects and initiatives aimed at making the most of our village and everything which it has to offer. 2009 has been a tremendous year for us and our legacy for 2010 and beyond is the proof that with effort, imagination and above all community teamwork, all things are possible.

### **Our Achievements**

**WEB Meetings:** At the heart of our success are our regular and professional meetings to which all are welcome. Web remains totally inclusive, non-political and non-profit making. Our monthly business meetings at the Village Social Club have grown in numbers over the year and have become an ideal forum for inviting ideas and comment, planning and monitoring our many projects and inviting new members and guests alike to come and be involved.

Our sincere thanks once again to the Club committee and staff for their very generous hospitality.

Our monthly business networking breakfast moved to the new Hillside restaurant during the year and is attracting an average of 25 village and other local businesses to meet and work together. It is a great success and is now an established feature of local business activity. It remains friendly and informal but is based on a well proven networking format which allows everyone to promote their business and advertise the type

of clients and referrals which they require. This is the one WEB business occasion when we invite businesses from outside the village. This is to ensure more opportunities for our village businesses and to promote the village around the wider business community.

I would like to thank the Hillside management and staff for providing both an ideal environment and a great breakfast for a very reasonable £5.

The business and social opportunities arising from our meetings are genuine and very productive and I urge all those who have yet to try them to do so as soon as possible. We have strengthened our ties with the Kimpton Village Business Group, the Welwyn Garden City B49 Business breakfast Club. and we are anticipating the same cooperation with Redbourn, where a WEB style organisation is taking shape.

Networking is fun and productive and can seriously improve your contact and client base. There are numerous groups within easy travelling distance so please contact WEB for more details and explore the many possibilities.

**WEB & The Village Plan:** The Plan was published by the Parish Council and is a comprehensive blueprint of objectives and projects, across a wide range of issues, all designed to progressively improve the Village and the way we think about it's future. The preceding survey indicated the main concern of residents to be Shops and Businesses and WEB was asked to develop this major part of the Plan. The Plan is available on the Parish Council web site on [www.wheathampstead-pc.gov.uk](http://www.wheathampstead-pc.gov.uk)

The Plan was designed with crucial input from WEB and we have made great progress with our extensive responsibilities for business issues. Some examples are:

**WOW - Window On Wheathamstead:** This business directory is a major first for the Village and is the culmination of much ongoing hard work by core WEB members. It was designed, produced and delivered free by WEB, at our expense, to all 2600 homes in the parish. It represents the database of nearly 300 Parish businesses located on our web site on [www.wheathampstead.org.uk](http://www.wheathampstead.org.uk), entry to which is also free. WOW provides the means for residents to shop in the Village whenever possible and to Keep It Local, which is one of the central and most important of all WEB objectives.

WOW has been universally well received and we need to develop sponsorship and possibly advertising in order to cover the cost of producing it.

**Business Rates and Small Business Rates Relief:** We were charged in the Plan with raising awareness of the latest information and advice regarding business rates and rates reduction. This information was gathered and discussed with a range of our Village centre businesses. As a result some have benefited from Rates relief, although as business rates are controlled and dispensed by central government, local influence is severely limited.

St Albans District receives back only about 10% of the business rates gathered in the area. There is therefore an ongoing option for WEB to support the Federation of Small Business, other local business initiatives and political pressure to reduce the adverse effects of this unfair and punitive system.

**WEB website and business database:** The database on our website is updated continuously as we discover businesses in the parish, at an average rate of two per month! The database is vital for the promotion of our businesses, to residents and outsiders alike. It is essential also for us to communicate with them, develop their participation in our activities and to recruit new WEB members. Very significant advances have been achieved this year on the database software. This is under constant review and a secure web page has been set up giving selected WEB members the ability to update the business database.

WOW is derived from the database, which remains one of our most significant and essential achievements.

**Village Business Fair:** This has long been a WEB objective and our first fair will take place as part of our Village Weekend on 10 & 11<sup>th</sup> July. Specifically it will be organised in the Memorial Hall on the afternoon of Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>. Space is limited, but on a first come first served basis, twenty of our Village businesses will be able display their services to the public and to each other. WEB members will be entitled to a discounted fee and more space will be available in the main arena outside.

**Christmas Lights Up:** We joined forces with McIntyre House and our local Rotary Club members to expand their Christmas event into our first ever proper Lights Up evening. WEB organised the fairground attractions in the Village centre and the evening was a popular and safe

success. More promotion is required to make the most of the occasion, but the objective of providing entertainment and fun for our residents and to attract them to the Village shops and businesses was achieved. Now that we know how it is done we can only go from strength to strength, like so many of our neighbours.

**High Street Premises:** We have maintained contact with all the owners of our empty premises and I believe done everything possible to expedite their useful occupation. This includes advertising the Village on local radio and through editorial coverage in the local newspaper. At the moment we have two shops empty, the chip shop and the restored shop next to the florist. Tesco insist that they are still anxious to open and the long delay caused by obtaining planning permission for the loading bay at the front is now over permission has been granted progress has been resumed. A minority, including understandably some traders, are anxious about Tesco's arrival, but the great majority are looking forward to undoubted momentum that a high profile trader will bring to the Village.

The Village Plan represents a very important on-going working project for the future of the Village and we are proud to be playing such a central role. It is testimony to our success and standing in the Village that WEB is so involved. We have many other responsibilities in the Plan which we will continue to prioritise and fulfil as time and funds allow.

**Car Boot Sale:** The Sale trial ran monthly as planned between June and December in the East Lane car park and was very successful – when the weather permitted! It proved to be a safe, fun family event which attracted sellers and buyers from both the Village and a wide surrounding area. At £5 per car and a peak attendance of around 40 cars this represents not only invaluable revenue for WEB, but exactly the right cost, size and atmosphere for many who enjoy such events but are intimidated by the huge sales elsewhere.

As with everything that we seek to do, the sale heightens interest in our Village and our High Street business. We have been given permission by the Parish Council to use the East Lane car park for the sale again this year, from May to December.

**Heritage Trail:** It was a WEB initiative which focused the need to at long last take advantage of the enormous potential of our amazing Village history. A leading member of the Parish council joined forces with WEB to harness the extensive historical knowledge which abounds in the Village and to determine which sites should be included on the Trail.

The plan is to mark places of interest in the Village centre and then in the areas just outside, with high quality commemorative plaques to form a local historical tour. WEB has obtained £4500 in grants to finance the initial location of plaques. As a direct result of close collaboration between WEB and the Parish Council, additional major funding is imminent which will enable us to finish what has become an extensive and far reaching project. Once again the emphasis is on making the Village as attractive as possible to a wide range of people in order to raise awareness and bring them here. Also to give us residents as much as possible to be proud of!

**Railway Platform:** Thanks to the initial suggestion of a WEB activist and the project leadership of one of our most hardworking members, our old station platform is being uncovered and refurbished as a local attraction and versatile amenity. It will be included in the Heritage Trail and will provide a superb site for recreation and exhibitions. The project has motivated a large number of residents to become involved, volunteer their time and labour and to work together and have fun for the benefit of the community. An amazing lesson to us all!

**Farmers Market WEB Stall:** We have continued to attend our monthly Farmers Market to promote our 300 Village businesses and especially our members. Exposure on the stall is a major benefit of WEB membership, with the public increasingly consulting us about the availability of specific local services. The stall is an on-going and invaluable opportunity to tell residents and visitors alike what is happening in the Village, to meet and register new businesses (and those we simply did not know about!) and to catch up with all the local gossip.

**Market Attendance & Entertainment:** The Farmers Market, for some people, is still not attracting the number of visitors which we would all like to see. WEB has been arranging entertainment to attract visitors and funds and sponsorship will be urgently required for this to continue. The Market has been running for some time now and is probably in need of review. WEB and the Parish Council will at some stage need to assess what is a very important event for the Village and our High Street businesses.

**Wheathampstead 10k Race:** In the interests of local promotion for WEB we donated The WEB Trophy last year for the winning team. WEB entered a team to try winning it, but failed heroically. Our team did however win our other donated prize of six bottles of wine to the team making the most sponsorship money, so justice was done and very much enjoyed. WEB will donate the same for this year's race.

**Village Pump Advertising:** It was decided for the time being not to include Village business advertising in WOW due to the increased publishing cost. Instead it was agreed to continue with the four page spread in the Village Pump, for WEB members only.

However, in order to provide coverage for as many businesses as possible, we have reduced advert size to allow 24. Last year it was 15 and before that only 12. Fees have been maintained at the very reasonable level of last year and WEB revenue overall will remain the same.

**WEB Financial Planning:** We agreed during the year that WEB has grown, both in size and stature, to the point that a structured operational and financial policy is necessary. We have grown fast this year and there has been little time to think about such formalities but we are unanimous that we should now do so. We need to be clear about what we are trying to achieve and for whom, how much funding will be required and where it will come from, and what we must do to obtain it.

A financial planning group of members has been formed and has met to begin considering our needs. Initial suggestions include categorising our many activities into no more than three main groups. Each will have different and well defined objectives and financial requirements. Such a structure would allow for much clearer financial, management and volunteer planning. It will also facilitate more objective decisions about what we should be involved in! This a major and essential development for us and the group will report back as soon as possible.

**WEB Equipment Storage:** We have a significant amount display and promotional material, which needed to be located independently and accessible to any of us. Arrangements were made during the year to store everything in the The Forge, the council owned bunker style building at the end of East Meads, off East Lane. The building is leased to our local scouts and they have kindly consented to allow us to store there. We have our own key which is kept at the parish council office and which can be collected any weekday morning from the parish clerk. It should always be returned immediately for safe keeping.

**WEB Membership:** We were very successful last year in recruiting new members. This must be continued not only to provide revenue, but because members, existing and new, are the lifeblood of any organisation. Members provide the ideas and stimulus for action and the manpower to carry them to fruition. The more members we have, the more active participants and the greater share of the workload. The more

that we can share the workload, the more that we can accomplish. Also the more candidates we can generate to hold office and carry WEB forward with fresh energy and appeal.

For this reason we need a Membership Coordinator who can concentrate on recruiting and enabling members. Also on ensuring that subscriptions are paid and member benefits in return are sufficiently attractive and well managed.

### **The Future For WEB**

WEB is now firmly established as a leading community organisation with the people, connections and local status to go on to even greater things. We have literally given concrete form to the notion of Community and this is just the beginning. We have discovered how much can be done, but also that we cannot achieve anything without individuals stepping up and making it happen. Work is involved. May I as a parting request exhort everyone to **do** something, either with WEB or some other local cause, no matter how small or infrequent? You will benefit from the experience more than anyone.

I will step down as Chairman on 20 April after two and a half very full and productive years. It has been an amazing experience. I happen to believe that one very good and simple reason for doing almost anything (legal and harmless) is not having done it before. Why not? We only live once. That was one of my main reasons for getting involved and for that reason also it is time for me to try something else.

I wish our new chairman the very best of luck and look forward to a different style and emphasis. I know that I will leave WEB in very good hands. As far as I know I am not going anywhere and I will be very much around to help.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me and the whole idea and purpose of WEB, especially those who have been at the centre of things and know themselves how very much they have contributed.

Together we have achieved something extraordinary.

My sincere thanks and very warm regards

Norman