

Warlingham Parish Council

Warlingham Village Commercial Review 2017

Report

Background and introduction

In February 2017, Councillor Robin Bloore, Chair of Warlingham Parish Council's (WPC) Commercial Review sub-group, prepared a document entitled 'Warlingham Village Shopping Review 2017' in which it is stated there is *'a need to establish, if at all possible, what particular direction Retail & Shopping may take in the village centre'*.

Several actions were identified including a survey of local owners/managers, *'to establish what plans or aspirations they may have for the short term and long term for these businesses, what barriers or difficulties they may see, and what the WPC may be able to do to support them'*. To this end, Rita Bransby, a local independent researcher, was asked to conduct a survey of the local retail shops and businesses in the village centre.

A questionnaire was developed using a relevant mix of questions in consultation with members of the WPC Commercial Review sub-group. This questionnaire formed the basis for the interviews which were undertaken by Helen Tapley, a member of the sub-group, with a little assistance from Ian Dale, another member of the sub-group, and Rita Bransby.

From the planned 40 interviews, 32 local owners/managers completed questionnaires which were analysed to produce the findings found at the end of this report, and the results and recommendations below.

Results

Local Businesses in Warlingham Village Centre

(Q 1.1 - 1.3)

The initial questions asked owners/managers about their business in order to find out the current commercial structure of the village centre and to help confirm the reliability of the information collected.

- 81% of those who took part were owners/managers, the remainder being receptionists, assistant managers, a trustee and an administrator and senior manager. For brevity in this report they are all referred to as owners/managers.

The mix of local businesses representing the village:

- 47% retail/shops; 25% catering; 12% professional services/ offices, with a garage, church hall, veterinary and waste disposal business making up the remainder.
- They are almost equally divided between those situated directly around the Green (53%) and those close to but not directly on the Green (47%).

Current Local Business Activity

(Q 2.1, 2.2, 3.1)

Owners/managers were asked about their business; was Warlingham a good place to do business, why did they like the village centre and how long had they been there? The aim of these questions was to find out the current position about trading and business in Warlingham. Their responses show that:

- 88% of owners/managers like being in Warlingham with 72% very positive and 16% quite positive and when asked what they most liked about Warlingham responded:

Feeling of being in a community:

- *love of community, everyone says hello*
- *village atmosphere, togetherness*
- *community spirit*

Facilities and amenities:

- *at the moment having all the essential businesses around*
- *versatility of shops*
- *always busy with people*
- *local events*

Friendly people:

- *the people are lovely*
- *it's good, people very nice*
- *friendly village*

Council support:

- *it's very pretty, council keeps it well and everyone would like to have a village green like this*

Other

- *free parking for customers*
- *quality customers*
- *a bit more team work amongst the traders now*

- almost two-thirds (63%) of shops and businesses have been running for 4 or more years and of these 44% are long-standing, having operated for over 10 years in the village.

Summary

Warlingham is a good place to have a shop and business, trading conditions are good, there are sufficient facilities and amenities to attract a range of 'quality customers' and owners/managers feel that the council supports them.

Shops changing hands

(Q 2.3, 2.4)

The owners/managers were then asked how they felt when shops and businesses changed hands around the Green:

- 85% are either very concerned (47%) or concerned (37%) and they then went on to give reasons:

Gives a downbeat feel around the village:

- *I don't like to see empty shops and worried in case they don't reopen*
- *you don't know what is coming*
- *long term unlet properties i.e. Garage and NatWest*

Impacts on footfall:

- *people stop coming, especially when established shops close*
- *less people coming to the green*

Sector domination:

- *one type (of business) is detrimental to the area – need to have a variety*

Summary

When retail shops and businesses close or change hands, the other owners/managers are concerned. They don't like change, and are worried about possible implications to the mix of small retail shops and businesses around the village centre and how this may affect footfall and ultimately the viability of their business.

Closure of Manor Park Garage (Q2.5,2.6)

Owners/managers were asked if the closure of Manor Park Garage in December 2016 had affected their trade and for suggestions on what should replace the vacant site.

- 53% thought trade in their shop/business had remained the same and for 25% trade had declined. No-one thought trade had increased.

The site is presently derelict with railings to deter trespassers and suggestions were sought on the best way to redevelop it:

Use for commercial development:

- *another local business, Manor Park reinstated*
- *a new car garage*
- *a car parkor a crèche*
- *more business, less housing*

Use for residential development

- *not houses, flats*

Use for mixed development

- *has to have a commercial unit on the bottom then flats on top (employment and residential)*

Other

- *something in keeping with the village*

Summary

To date, there has been little effect on the level of trade in shops and businesses around the Green. However, given that owners/managers are worried when neighbouring businesses close, issues around the vacant site which was Manor Park Garage needs to be resolved swiftly and to the satisfaction of most if not all. The majority of owners/managers would like to see the site continue as a commercial venture, not residential.

Closure of Nat West Bank

(Q 2.7, 2.8)

Owners/managers were then asked about the planned closure of Nat West Bank on 28th June 2017; would this impact on their business and if so, how?

- 78% of owners/managers thought that their shop/business would be affected by the closure and a further 6% said they didn't know, indicating it might be a possibility. 16% said there would be no impact.

They went onto explain the reasons for their rating:

Having a direct effect on business

- *for us, we have to go to Caterham or Wallington; parking fees, expensive car travel, everyday banking*
- *means manager will have to travel with large quantities of cash*
- *will be unable to pay in cash*
- *it will also be a problem to get change for larger notes*
- *unable to bank cheques*

Having a direct effect on Warlingham Village Centre

- *customers who pop to the bank will no longer have a need for a visit*
- *less customers on the green*
- *customers will go to other branches & take other purchases away from local shops*
- *some people come here to buy products and then go to the bank*
- *I will lose a lot of elderly customers*

Personal inconvenience

- *it will affect me personally and our shop*

No effect

- *we don't bank with Nat west*
- *not really as I rarely visit and the post office covers my needs*

Summary

The closure of Nat West Bank is likely to have a considerable impact on shops and businesses around the Green. Although retail and business owners/managers can at times be slightly gloomy about trading conditions, individual comments made by almost 80% of them send out the same message that this a significant blow to the village centre. Owners/managers would like to feel there will be on-going support during this difficult trading period.

Several comments made note about the bank being a catalyst for customers to combine visits to the bank with local shops and offices and this may well be something for the Council to consider such as approaching smaller banks to fulfil the role lost by Nat West.

Maintaining a vibrant and attractive village centre

(Q3.2, 3.3, 3.4)

The final part of the questionnaire asked owners/managers to think about further developments that would help to attract more customers to the village centre; would staging more events increase trade and what other viable suggestions could they make?

Several community events take place on the Green each year such as the Crowning of the May Queen and the Switching on of the Christmas Lights. When asked what would happen to footfall and trade if more events were organised:

- 88% of owners/ managers said footfall would increase (50% a lot, 38% a little); on-one thought it would reduce.
- 84% of owners/managers also thought trade would increase (53% a lot, 31% a little); another 13% thought trade would decrease.

Owners/managers were then asked to give suggestions for further developing Warlingham as a vibrant and attractive centre. It is understood from WPC that they have in the past reported issues over having insufficient parking space for customers. Therefore when asked for suggestions to further develop the Green, parking was highlighted along with other ideas.

Parking and traffic:

- *more parking spaces*
- *yes parking facilities are necessary to stop clogging up our car park by shoppers so our guests can't park*
- *parking 'enforcement'*
- *pay & display parking with 1st hour free on street*
- *slow down the traffic by putting a crossing parallel to Kwiksave thus slowing down the speed of traffic*

Shops and businesses:

- *keep the bank*
- *bringing in useful businesses so people have a reason to shop*
- *more retail units not cafes, restaurants etc.*

Additional facilities and amenities

- *more cash points*
- *good public transport*

Other:

- *Warlingham must stay the same or it will lose the village feel*
- *local business networking events*

The suggestion above to having local business networking events was relevant as the survey's questionnaire concluded by inviting owners/managers to form a Commercial Focus Group to work alongside the Parish Council in developing the village centre. Twelve people came forward and their contact details were passed to the Chairman of WPC Commercial Review sub-group.

Summary

Most owners/managers like the idea of organising more Warlingham events in the village centre. These would need collaborative planning to ensure local retailers and businesses benefit from the increased footfall and additional revenue, for example by staging children's rides with the local shops selling food and drink and promotional and merchandising items. In another approach, providing a crèche (suggested earlier for the Manor Park site) for parents/carers to safely leave their children may also attract more customers to the village centre.

Owners/managers think parking and traffic is an issue in the village centre. They would like better parking enforcement than at present, more parking spaces and there are suggestions to charge for parking after a short free period. In another suggestion owners/managers would like to find ways of slowing down the speed of traffic such as placing one or two more pedestrian crossings around the green.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The owners/managers of shops and businesses in Warlingham are grateful to WPC for the opportunity to make comments about the village centre and to offer ideas on how it could develop in the future. In addition twelve of them have offered their support to the Council should it wish to set up a collaborative focus group.

The local climate for operating shops and businesses has been commercially stable for many years and owners/managers would like to see this continue. It doesn't appear that they have plans to move away.

At present several key changes are taking place such as planning proposals that may alter the Green and the traffic around it and the closing of Manor Park Garage and Nat West bank. All are unsettling for the shops and businesses especially when the owners/managers are unaware of any activities and progress taking place.

To help maintain the good reputation that WPC has amongst the owners/managers it is recommended that WPC could:

- 1 Send feedback on the results of this survey to all owners/managers
- 2 Set up a commercial focus group between WPC and interested owners/managers *(page 5)*.
- 3 Publish a time-line for consulting on the planning proposals to alter or not The Green and traffic flow around it *(page 5)*.
- 4 Take into account comments made by owners/managers when making changes to 'parking enforcement' arrangements around the Green *(page 5)*.
- 5 Use the statements and sentiment made by the owners/managers in this survey to help move the redevelopment of the Manor Park Garage site forward *(page 3)*.
- 6 When planning the future of the village centre consider comments made by owners/managers that more customers come to the village when the visit fulfils their 'combined shopping/business' needs *(pages 3,4)*.
- 7 Consider approaching smaller banks to fulfil the role lost by the closure of NatWest bank *(page 4)*.
- 8 Maintain and encourage a community village atmosphere that supports a mix of shops and businesses which are versatile to the needs of local people including elderly customers *(pages 2,3,4,5)*.
- 9 Support more Warlingham events with the main aim of helping shops/businesses in the village centre to thrive and do well in Warlingham *(page 5)*.

Findings

The findings are based on an analysis of the answers collected from 32 business owners, managers and others during May/early June 2017. The questions had previously been agreed by the Warlingham Parish Council Commercial Review sub-group led by its Chairman, Councillor Robin Bloore.

Findings from Q1.3 on the questionnaire have been repositioned here at the beginning to help provide greater clarity and coherence.

Part 1 Businesses in this survey

1.1 Respondents were asked for their position in the business:

Manager	Owner / Manager	Owner (not managing)	Another position*	Total
10	13	3	6	32
31%	41%	9%	19%	100%
* receptionist (2) / assistant manager (2) / trustee / administrator & senior valuer				

1.2 Owners/managers were asked for the type of business they operated:

Retail / shop	Catering / hospitality	Professional services / offices	Other *	Total
15	8	4	5	32
47%	25%	12%	16%	100%
* garage with retail / church hall / charity / veterinary / waste disposal				

1.3 Owners/managers were asked where their business was located:

Directly around The Green	Close to - not directly around The Green	Total
17	15	32
53%	47%	100%

Part 2 Current local business activity

2.1 Owners/managers were asked how long their business has been running (may also indicate business viability in Warlingham)

1-3 years	4-9 years	Over 10 years	Total
12	6	14	32
37%	19%	44%	100%

2.2 Owners/managers were asked if Warlingham was a good place for business *(may also indicate business viability in Warlingham)*

Yes very positive	Yes less positive	No not positive	Don't know / no response	Total
23	5	2	2	32
72%	16%	6%	6%	100%

2.3 Owners/managers were asked how concerned they are when shops and businesses change hands or close

Very concerned	Some concern	Not concerned	Don't know	Total
15	12	3	2	32
47%	38%	9%	6%	100%

2.4

Reasons for the ratings given in Q 2.3 <i>10 respondents gave no reply</i>	
<p>Gives a downbeat feel around the village (7) Bank closing / our main bank leaving / shame to see well established business change/close / long term unlet properties i.e. Garage and NatWest / I don't like to see empty shops and worried in case they don't reopen / you don't know what is coming / the landscape of shops changing</p> <p>Impacts on footfall (4) People stop coming, especially when established shops close / the likes of Manor Park and NatWest leaving will affect the amount of people visiting the green / less people coming to the green / obviously do not want empty shops = decreased aesthetic and trade</p> <p>Developing sector domination (4) One type is detrimental to the area – need to have a variety / the uncertainty of new businesses in the area. Only one sector of business / because most shops close down and become cafes / too many restaurants</p> <p>Economy generally (3) Dales has just had 10 years of running. I think it's the economy more than anything else / natural progression / shame local businesses can't keep going</p> <p>Need for community unity (2) We need all shops to be running businesses to support each other / you have to have community in a small village</p> <p>Other (2) Parking problem, wardens don't come regularly / not been here long enough</p>	

2.5 Owners/managers were asked about the closure of Manor Park Garage at the end of December 2016; had it affected their business and what suggestions did they have on its redevelopment.

The level of shopping/business since Manor Park Garage closed has:				
Increased	Remained the same	Declined	Don't know	Total
0	17	8	7	32
0	53%	25%	22%	100%

2.6

Suggestions on how the Manor Park Garage site should be redeveloped <i>6 respondents gave no response</i>
<p>Commercial only (15) Manor park garage or another garage / another local business, Manor Park reinstated / reliable car place again / another business – Bentley Dealership / the garage to open again / another garage / garage / a new car garage (8) Car park / a car park.... or a crèche / parking or more shops / parking!! (4) More business, less housing / shop / bank (3)</p> <p>Residential only (3) Flats / not houses, flats / flats or small cottages</p> <p>Mixed development (2) Has to have a commercial unit on the bottom then flats on top (employment and residential) / ground floor shops + flats</p> <p>Other (6) Something in keeping with the village / anything but what it is / anything apart from retirement flats! / not catering – wouldn't mind anything else (4) Not sure / not from the local area (2)</p>

2.7 Owners/managers were asked about the closure of Nat West bank on The Green on 28th June 2017; if and how their shop/business would be affected.

The likelihood of shops/business being affected by the closure:				
Very likely	Fairly likely	Have no affect	Don't know	Total
18	7	5	2	32
56%	22%	16%	6%	100%

2.8

Respondents explained how their shop/business would be affected <i>3 respondents gave no response, other respondents gave one or two replies.</i>
<p>Directly affecting their shop / business (16) For us, we have to go to Caterham or Wallington; parking fees, expensive car travel, everyday banking / means manager will have to travel with large quantities of cash / have to travel to do banking (3)</p>

Because we've got to change all our cheque books and not be able to bank locally / banking / banking / not able to bank with them / will not be able to do our daily banking (4)

It will also be a problem to get change for larger notes / change / nowhere to get change when needed / will be unable to pay in cash / banking problems with the change / banking money / unable to bank cheques / payment to us as a business (8)

Taken banking elsewhere (1)

Directly affecting Warlingham Village Centre (15)

Will affect customers coming into the village to use the bank / customers who pop to the bank will no longer have a need for a visit / customer uses / people visiting the green / less customers in the village / less customers on the green / people not popping to the banks, so less footfall / less footfall / the flow of customers will decrease (9)

Customers will go to other branches & take other purchases away from local shops / will have a knock on effect on the village all money will go elsewhere for everyone / some people come here to buy products and then go to the bank / people will travel to other areas to bank so will shop there too / would stop our clients as many people from Warlingham, bank with Nat west (5)

I will lose a lot of elderly customers (1)

Personal inconvenience (4)

Handy for banking / loss of cash point / use it myself as a bank – so inconvenient / it will affect me personally and our shop

Other comments (4) Warlingham needs bank / here for 40 odd years / hard to tell because it's already affecting the green / full trade

No affect (4) Don't bank with them / we don't bank with Nat west / we are a pub that serves food and drink – Nat West bank isn't really related to our business / not really as I rarely visit and the post office covers my needs

Part 3 Maintaining a vibrant and attractive centre

3.1 Owners/managers were asked what they most liked about being in Warlingham

Most liked: *1 respondent gave no response, many gave two replies*

Community feel (14)

Love of community, everyone says hello / the friendly village atmosphere / a lovely small community / the village community / village atmosphere, togetherness / people of Warlingham pull together / the feel of a community / a good sense of community / community spirit / community spirit / community spirit / community feel / community / community

Facilities and amenities (15)

At the moment having all the essential businesses around / versatility of shops / lots of passing trade / always busy with people / local events / good local amenities / facilities / the social atmosphere / pretty little village / beautiful green / greenery / in the town centre and lovely green / village setting / nice mixture of town/country / the Green is a lovely place

Friendly people (9)

People / people / people / the people are lovely / lovely people / it's good, people very nice / friendly people / friendly village / I like the population

Council support (3)

Parish council has been good / nice village, well cared for / it's very pretty, council keeps it well and everyone would like to have a village green like this.

Other (8)

Free parking for customers / easy parking / increase parking and warden
Affluent area / quality customers / central from London / convenient for my home & train to London / a bit more team work amongst the traders now

3.2 Owners/managers were asked about the effect on footfall and trade for local businesses if more events were held in Warlingham.

If more events were held footfall and trade would:	Footfall		Trade for local business	
	No.	%	No.	%
Increase a lot	16	50%	17	53%
Increase a little	12	38%	10	31%
Stay the same	4	12%	1	3%
Reduce	0	0	4	13%
Total	32	100%	32	100%

3.3 Owners/managers were invited to make suggestions for further developing Warlingham as a vibrant and attractive centre.

Suggestions for further developing Warlingham as a vibrant and attractive centre <i>8 respondents gave no response, others gave one or two replies</i>
<p>Parking and Traffic (15) Must improve parking / better parking / parking...parking...parking / more parking spaces / car park / More free parking / yes parking facilities are necessary to stop clogging up our car park by shoppers so our guests can't park Parking 'enforcement' / traffic wardens more often / shopkeepers parking around the green... maybe get someone to remind them everyday and slap 'em with a £10 fine / free parking meters for 30mins - 1hr, to prevent all day parking / pay & display parking with 1st hour free on street Slow down the traffic by putting a crossing parallel to Kwiksave thus slowing down the speed of traffic / possibility of extra crossings around The Green / the plan to change to two ways is madness</p> <p>Shops and businesses (9) Keep the bank / bank / a bank ! / better variety of shops / bringing in useful businesses so people have a reason to shop / having a god selection of shops and services Have restaurant, bar and nice café shops / more retail units not cafes, restaurants etc. / stop food outlets</p> <p>Additional facilities and amenities (5) Toilets / market / more cash points / more seating / good public transport</p> <p>Other (5) Warlingham must stay the same or it will lose the village feel / if more people walked around / needs a bigger development like flats and houses / close (a business) / local business networking events</p>

3.4 Twelve respondents would like to join a Commercial Focus Group and completed a separate sheet, which has been passed to Councillor Bloore, Chair of the WPC Commercial Review sub-group.

3.5

Additional comments (4)
<p>We love Warlingham. Look after it. Stop building houses / Closing of bank not beneficial to increasing retirement homes/folk / email my manager for more details (Baron pubs) Yes, Thank you.</p>