

Woking Association of Neighbourhood Watches (WAN) (Delayed) AGM, May 2020

Chairman's report

In the year since May 2019 there have been a number of activities to enhance the NhW support given to the co-ordinators and residents of Woking. This has not just come from WAN, but also from Woking's Community Police team, under the leadership of Insp. Andy Greaves.

In hard numbers, there has been an increase from 975 to 1072 in registrations in Woking on the NeighbourhoodAlert system. These registrations can be via number of portals, such as InTheKnow, Ourwatch, etc, but all are recorded on the Home Office-supported, and very secure, NHW IT system. This system is due to be replaced, and more on that below. The number of street/building-based Watches (called Schemes by the IT system) has remained fairly static at 161, but this is not a concern as the way forward in Surrey is seen to be the creation of larger "cover-Watches" that are social media based. Again, more on social media below.

NhW sign refresh

One SurreyNHW initiative is to provide funding to boroughs to refresh NhW signs. This is needed because many of the metal signs that were originally red/orange background have bleached in the sun. Much of the damage was done in the exceptionally hot June of 2018. It is disappointing to see the signs unable to cope with strong direct sunlight, but the suppliers will hopefully have changed their printing methods to overcome this. In Woking, we are very fortunate in that the Borough Council pays for new signs – we are the only Surrey Borough that does so. As quality metal signs are approximately £25 each, this is a big saving for new Watches. In Woking I agreed to refresh faded signs using vinyl overlays funded by SurreyNHW, but missing and damaged signs, and those that cannot be vinyl overlaid, will be replaced as a job lot by Woking BC. Unfortunately, COVID lock-down came just as the replacement plans were to start. Hopefully, Woking BC will be able to resurrect the plan towards the end of the year. 50 signs were refreshed and just 20 need replacing. Some of the replacements are needed because SurreyCC replaced lamp posts and did not transfer signs to the new ones. I lost 3 or the 4 signs for my own Watch as a result. Whilst going around the borough refreshing signs I also repositioned some to face in a better direction, or moved them to a better location. I have some vinyl overlays spare, but any further nominated signs need to be a rectangular 380x250 in size, and metal. Below is a picture of a typical sign as erected, then bleached in the sun, and refreshed with a yellow vinyl overlay.



Social media

Love it or hate it, social media is here to stay. But it has proved to be invaluable in getting important information out to residents, and to collect evidence and information (the Police use the term

“intelligence”) to the Police or Woking BC. The borough is now well covered by Facebook-based ‘cover-Watches’. Only the Knaphill and Brookwood areas do not have specific NHW social media Groups, but those areas are already well covered with ‘public’ facebook Groups. To generate specific NHW Groups for those areas would not add any value.

The plan across Surrey is for Surrey Police to integrate more with NHW social media Groups (typically using Facebook) so that there is a better passing of information. The plans had to be re-visited earlier in the year as Facebook’s rules on user identity made registration and administration of Groups more difficult for the Police to deal with as the Group had to be owned by a person and not a ‘role’. Another initiative, Prior to COVID lock-down, was for Surrey Police to have a Digital101 “desk” where social media posts (from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc) can be forwarded directly without the need to call 101, or to generate a 101 on the Police website. This was keenly anticipated by the social media administrators. It is hoped that this Digital101 desk will be in place sometime this year once the Police are back to normal following COVID.

Woking Police

Inspector Andy Greaves is a keen supporter of Neighbourhood Watch and WAN have been very supportive of him and his team. Andy’s presentations at co-ordinator’s meetings have been very well received, and his enthusiasm noted. He continues to be short of officers (like most Surrey boroughs) but this should be slowly rectified as newly trained officers join the team.

Andy is aware that the shortage of officers has not helped his and his team’s communication with the public, but WAN have agreed to send Alerts out on his behalf until the situation improves.

However, from 10th May 2020, Andy made a career transfer to a unit based in Staines Police Station. His replacement as Woking Commander is Det. Insp. Dave Bentley. We have wished Andy the best of luck with his career move and have thanked him for his support over the last 2 years.

Dave has already made an impact with useful and interesting posts to facebook’s Woking Beat. He also produced a 5-min intro video that went out to all co-ordinators. Dave is keen to improve communications between the public and the Police.

New Alert system

You all receive emails, called “Alerts” from the Police and Neighbourhood Watch. These are generated in the UK-wide system called NeighbourhoodAlert. This IT system is due to be replaced, in stages, from the autumn. This should give Neighbourhood Watch enhanced facilities when sending Alerts out, and will make Resident’s and Co-ordinator’s accounts easier to update. The current system is quite ‘clunky’ (a well know technical term) but the new one promises to be much more user-friendly and faster. We are expecting to be able to send out emails that are not just “Alerts” (not every message is an Alert!) and with better facilities to include images in the text. The contents of an ‘Alert’ will not change but the email will, hopefully, look better and be more attractive to read.

To the future

NHW expect the use of social media to increase, and be more integrated with Surrey Police. These will enhance street-based Watches as street-based ones will continue to be one of the fundamental facilities in NHW. We hope that Surrey Police will be able to introduce the Digital101 desk later this year and their use of social media will improve and be more consistent across the borough.