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## Town awards for pandemic volunteers and incinerator campaigner

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Story posted on January 20, 2021

### THE winners of Westbury's Group of the Year and Person of the Year 2020 have been revealed!

The Group of the Year award went to Open Westbury, which brought the community together to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic while member of local campaign group, WGAG/No Westbury Incinerator, Dan Gmaj, has been chosen as Person of the Year. The winners of the competitions, run by *White Horse News*, were chosen by Westbury's mayor cllr Mike Sutton and *White Horse News* editor, Ian Drew following nominations made by local people.

Open Westbury – a collective group of like-minded organisations and volunteers who came together for the benefit and good of Westbury – was nominated for its efforts to support vulnerable residents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The group brings together volunteers, Westbury Town Council, local groups such as Crosspoint, Westbury Lions and Westbury Rotary, local schools, businesses, and local health services, to help vulnerable residents and those feeling lonely or isolated with food, shopping, prescription pick-ups and deliveries, dog walking, and friendly phonecalls. Accepting the award on behalf of Open Westbury and its volunteers, Westbury Town Council's events manager Ryan Child – who played an instrumental role in organising the pandemic response – told *White Horse News*, "This has been a massive team effort, many people have done loads of little things that have contributed to a big difference.

"I think the best thing about the Open Westbury group is that it is quite informal, which has allowed people, individuals, volunteers, the person who turns up with a bag of shopping, to the business that turns up with 50 items of food, to work together on one common goal, to help others during the Coronavirus pandemic.

"Open Westbury has been an 'umbrella' for people to get together, which was a real benefit – we could just get on with helping others, which was pretty amazing – everybody did their bit. Open Westbury has brought people together, and I hope that this can continue after the pandemic to support the town through its recovery from the impact of the pandemic."

Person of the Year, **Dan Gmaj**, was nominated for his involvement in WGAG/No Westbury Incinerator, which has led the campaign to stop plans to build an incinerator in the town. Dan is also involved in Westbury Shed – he was the founder in 2015 – and in 2020 was involved in the Shed Happens radio show for lockdown; and also co-founded 'Sheds Sans Frontières', an online global community intended to unite Men's Shed and Shed groups around the world post Covid-19.

"I don't really know what to say!" said Dan. "When I get a phone call from the *White Horse News*, it would most likely be for comment on, or provide copy for the WGAG/No Westbury Incinerator campaign, so when I was told about the 'person of the year thing' and that was it, I was utterly shocked. I wasn't even aware that I had been nominated! "We all try our best to do right by our town (I have lived in Westbury since 1998) and being nominated a few years ago for my work with Westbury Shed was truly lovely but this is currently just a shock, and a beautiful one at that!

"This recognition, is for the power of community and all involved with the WGAG/No Westbury Incinerator campaign. Great people, respectfully working together.

"Increasingly I am referring to this too as 'Shed Community' because we all (virtually or otherwise) live in the same garden of 'Westbury' and have a duty to look after it while contemplating and putting the world to rights from the 'safe place' of our community shed.

"Our community's continuing campaign to stop private industry from profiting from our Council Tax payments while polluting our climate and building a retrograde monstrosity right on the edge of our town is at a critical phase and we must all be alert to how we can continue to help at every stage along the way."

### Runners up

The other nominees for Person of the Year 2020 were: **Ian Cunningham** for his volunteer roles in the community; **Radek Evans** for his support of the community fridge and his lockdown food deliveries; **Sarah Bec** for her work feeding and clothing the homeless in west Wiltshire and Bath; and **Ryan Child** for his role with Open Westbury, and his community engagement work