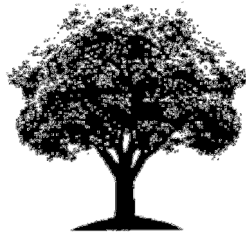


# **HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

Web Address: [www.hhra.co.uk](http://www.hhra.co.uk)

## **Spring 2018 NEWSLETTER**



**Summary of Accounts for 2017**

**&**

**Subscription Renewal**

**See final page**

# Hook Heath Residents' Association

## 2018 Newsletter

### INTRODUCTION

The workload of the HHRA Committee has changed significantly over the last year. We have spent more time than ever on dealing with planning applications, their impact on the area as a whole and on immediate neighbours. Most applications are for extensions to existing houses. In the past these have been mainly uncontroversial, but increasingly the applications are for such large extensions that they dwarf the original house and dominate adjacent properties, causing distress to neighbours, disputes between neighbours and material alterations to the street scene. Other applications involve sub-division of large leafy gardens to build a mini-estate of large houses with gardens smaller than the norm in the surrounding area. In time, if unchecked, this process would lead to the complete destruction of the semi-rural ambiance that characterises Hook Heath today, and the creation of a high density suburban estate devoid of flora and fauna.

In recent years the Committee has devoted much time and many resources to commenting on Woking Borough Council (WBC)'s review of the Green Belt, which seeks to identify sites for future development. Our particular concern has been to protect the Hook Heath escarpment that separates Hook Heath from Mayford, and which is designated "Rising Ground of Landscape Importance". The threat has not gone away, but there has been a hiatus while WBC deliberates the merits of two rival proposals: one that would concentrate development in the Martyrs Lane area north of Woking, and the other that would spread development over several sites in West Byfleet, Pyrford, Mayford and Hook Heath in the south of the Borough.

We begin this Newsletter with a review of progress on the Green Belt Review before moving on to the more immediate issues facing Hook Heath.

### ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

*Chairman: Jean Dare*  
Tel: 01483 764942

*Vice Chairman Dr. Mike Cooke*  
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### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Bridget Stoney**

**Judith Oakley**

**Ron Brandman**

**Gerald Griffiths**

### WEBMASTER

**Dr. Neil Cryer**

### GREEN BELT REVIEW

The need for a review of the Green Belt arose during preparation of the Woking Core Strategy document covering the period 2012 – 2027. The Borough is required to build an average of 292 new dwellings per year throughout the 15 year period, to identify land on which they can be built and to maintain at all times a supply of suitable land to cover the next five years. During the examination of the Core Strategy document it became apparent that sufficient land had been identified to cover the

period up to 2022, but not for the last five years up to 2027. The examiner ruled that a review of the Green Belt should be undertaken to identify suitable land.

WBC commissioned a Green Belt Review and used it to produce a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD). While doing so WBC took the opportunity to identify additional land to cover the period up to 2040. The SADPD was greeted with a storm of protest, to which the HHRA contributed, from those most affected by the proposal.

A number of councillors, perhaps realising that the SADPD would be vulnerable to legal challenge unless a wider range of options was considered, identified a new site east of Martyrs Lane that had not previously been given serious consideration. This option was put before a full Council Meeting in October 2016. The proposal was for a replacement SADPD that included consideration of the Martyrs Lane site to be prepared for a second round of public consultation.

Strong opposition from councillors who supported the original SADPD led to an amended proposal being accepted; the original SADPD would be retained, and public comment invited only on the merits of the Martyrs Lane site. When the stand alone Martyrs Lane consultation paper was published in January 2017 it specified that the site allocations identified for development up to 2027 in the original SADPD would be retained, and that the Martyrs Lane site should only be considered as a possible location for post 2027 development in place of some or all of the six sites in West Byfleet, Pyrford and Mayford previously identified for building post 2027.

This time last year we reported in our 2017 Newsletter that, after taking professional advice, we had submitted a representation to Woking Borough Council setting out our views on the suitability of directing development post 2017 to the Martyrs Lane site in preference to those previously identified Green Belt sites in West Byfleet, Pyrford, Mayford and Hook Heath. Not surprisingly the residents of Woodham and Sheerwater, who would be most directly affected by the Martyrs Lane proposal, took the opposite view. WBC was faced with about 3000 representations from organizations and individuals to analyse before a new proposal could be published for consultation.

The initial expectation was that planning officers would be able to submit a draft proposal for councillors to scrutinize by early summer 2017. It would be finalized during the autumn and published by the end of 2017. The timetable was ambitious and, not surprisingly, began to slip. It appears that planning officers and councillors have been unable to reach agreement on the merits of the two proposals. We understand that a group of councillors have now commissioned their own independent study into the suitability of the various sites for future residential development. The results could significantly affect the choice of sites for development, and hence the fate of the Hook Heath escarpment. Other reasons for the delay are not hard to imagine. Unexpected problems with major developments like the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme and the town centre redevelopment project must have affected the amount of time that could be devoted to a new Site Allocations DPD. If these two redevelopment schemes result in more homes being built on previously used land than was originally thought possible, then there would be a corresponding reduction in the requirement to release land from the Green Belt. A new Site Allocations DPD is unlikely to appear before the second half of 2018 at the earliest.

There are, however, dangers in delaying for too long. The Green Belt Review was meant to identify land needed for development in the last five years of the Woking Core Strategy DPD from 2022 to

2027, and until a Site Allocations DPD that covers the period up to 2027 has been formally adopted, WBC is in danger of breaching the requirement to maintain a five year supply of land. If they see a chance, developers in possession of suitable land in the Green Belt will not be slow to argue that they can fill the gap immediately. Recently announced Government proposals on fixing the broken housing market could be quoted in their support. The solution could be to divide the Site Allocations DPD into two parts: the first to cover the period up to 2027 as soon as possible, and the second to identify those sites that may be needed for post 2027 development after the additional studies and consultation have been completed.

### **THE CO-OP FOOD STORE**

Nearly three years after it was first announced, the Co-op food store on Wych Hill opened shortly before Christmas (2017)!

Back in 2014, many residents felt that an additional food store in Hook Heath was not required. They also expressed concerns for the future of the nearby established news agency and the Londis convenience store.

So, three months on from the Co-op opening, were those concerns justified? It appears so. Whilst the proprietor of the news agency has confirmed that the Co-op store has had little or no impact on his (semi-retirement) business, the owner of the Londis franchise has advised that his takings as at the end of February were down by close to 30%. This is not good news for the Londis proprietor. His business is struggling, but there are signs that some Londis customers are returning now that people have satisfied their curiosity about the Co-op offering.

Hopefully, the Co-op store will prove to be viable and useful to the Hook Heath community, but indications at the present are that this may not be the case. It is rumoured that the Co-op was projecting takings of £60,000 per week. The current weekly takings are alleged to be in the region of £15,000, so the Co-op store is underperforming by a wide margin having reportedly invested £1.7m in converting the property!

It would be a tragedy if the competition for market share between the Co-op store and the (Tesco backed) Londis store were to destroy the economic viability of both. Residents' concerns about the need for an additional food outlet may prove to have been well founded.

On a brighter note, hats off to the Co-op for preserving the architectural features of the former Star Inn and for the discreet signage of the store. Those hoping for a high-class restaurant on The Star site will be disappointed: but the Co-op food and wine offering is of good quality, so for the time being not all is lost.

Of concern, however, is the somewhat hazardous entrance/exit from the Co-op store, the exit being on the crest of the hill. So far there have been no reported accidents involving vehicles entering or leaving the store car park, but it may not be long before there is one. Possibly a mandatory "left turn only" vehicle exit from the store car park would help reduce risk both to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians!

## **WOODBANK**

It is evident to all residents that no work has begun on the proposed new Methodist Care Home in Holly Bank Road. The Methodist Homes Association (MHA) have informed the HHRA that there have been significant changes in their leadership team. A new Chairman was appointed last year and a new Chief Executive joined a few weeks ago. As a result their overall strategy and work has been under review. Andrew White, Head of Development, has now notified the HHRA that MHA has taken the difficult decision to dispose of the site, which is currently being marketed.

At this stage we do not know how prospective purchasers may want to use the site. If MHA does not see a future for retirement homes on site, others may agree and seek to develop it for other purposes even though specialist accommodation for older people is protected in the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan.

## **TREES**

Trees are an integral part of the Hook Heath scene. When prospective buyers come to view houses in Hook Heath, many are attracted by the glorious tree cover throughout the area. Unfortunately, some people who move in do not appreciate the trees and their importance to the area, and immediately start to cut them down. This not only destroys the appearance of the area, but could be detrimental to the health and well-being of existing residents, some of whom have lived here for fifty years or more. Trees make an important contribution to maintaining air quality by removing pollutants such as those produced by motor vehicles. For residents with children it is particularly important to be surrounded by trees and greenery. Apart from the obvious benefits to physical health and fitness of being able to exercise in such surroundings, studies are beginning to identify benefits in intellectual development as well. A recent study conducted in Spain found that children brought up in rural areas have better memories and longer attention spans than those from areas denuded of trees and greenery. MRI scans showed the former group to have developed bigger brains.

Trees take years to grow, and the benefits they bring grow with them. It takes many years for saplings to fully replace mature specimens and to provide a suitable habitat for wild life. So please help us to retain the tree cover that still survives and remember it is not a sin to have a lovely untidy garden, but it is to destroy the wildlife that lives there. Before carrying out any work on trees residents should consult the Arboricultural Officers at [trees@woking.gov.uk](mailto:trees@woking.gov.uk) as it is likely they will be covered by a TPO.

Unfortunately not everyone coming into Hook Heath plans to stay for an extended period. Some seek to clear their gardens of trees or any other impediment as quickly as possible as a prelude to applying for permission to build additional properties in the former garden. We in the HHRA have had plenty of experience of this over the years, and have managed to keep it down, but lately it has become more frequent as houses in Hook Heath are increasingly seen as investment opportunities rather than as family homes.

## **WHERE ARE MY PROPERTY BOUNDARIES?**

The question “where are my property boundaries?” is not normally an everyday thought for most homeowners. However, the question will arise on a sale/purchase/inheritance or possibly on the making of a planning application either by the homeowner or by someone else e.g. a neighbour!

Over the last twelve months, the HHRA has seen at least three planning applications involving what may loosely be described as “boundary issues”. Each of the three applications had their own features and are worthy of comment below.

### **Case 1:**

In December 2017, and after lengthy debate at a Planning Committee meeting, the Committee deferred a decision to grant/refuse planning permission because of what councillors regarded as a “boundary dispute”. In truth the real issue was a query over the accuracy of the applicant’s site plan and the existence (or not) of a gap between the applicant’s property and a neighbouring property. Nevertheless, councillors debated the matter as if there were a boundary dispute even though such disputes are not generally a planning matter!

The planning application came back to the Planning Committee in February this year and council officers made it clear that the application could not be refused on the grounds of what councillors perceived to be a boundary dispute. Having established that boundary disputes were not grounds for refusal, the application was put to a vote. The decision made was to refuse the application (by a majority of five votes to two) because the proposed development was considered not to be compliant with the policies of the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan. If the applicant appeals to the Planning Inspectorate against the decision, it will be interesting to learn the Inspector’s view of the need for accurate plans and his interpretation of the Neighbourhood Plan and Council policies.

The case is an example of where a so-called boundary dispute was not in reality a boundary dispute at all. A great deal of time and effort was expended pursuing a red herring, rather than dealing with the real issue as to whether the applicant’s site plans were correct.

### **Case 2:**

This case, which started with an application in June 2017 and ended in December, did not reach the Planning Committee. The application was decided (refused) by means of delegated powers, the application being non-compliant with the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan as regards plot subdivision and sizes. The original application included a proposal to remove trees on a neighbour’s land! There was no exchange of correspondence between the parties disputing the boundary as such.

It emerged during the application that “development” as defined in the planning legislation does not include removal of trees and thus the applicant had not broken any rules. When submitting a planning application, an applicant normally declares that he owns all the land on which development will take place but property boundaries are not normally a planning issue. The applicant had no given right to remove the neighbour’s trees but this is a civil issue. In reality, actually building on someone else’s land does of course require the owners’ permission or the acquisition of the land by the applicant. These are civil matters to be decided by the Courts and are generally outside the remit of local planning authorities.

In this case the position of the boundary was important as it defined the width of the access road to the property.

Case 3:

This December 2017 application included, amongst other things, the construction of an external garage which, according to the original application, appeared to show the proposed garage to be sited (in part) on a neighbour's land. Following comment by the Neighbourhood Forum, the applicant submitted a revised site plan bringing the garage within bounds by, it seems, repositioning his/her house within the defined boundaries of the property. The application has now been withdrawn.

Summary:

If anything can be learned from the above it is the importance of the accuracy of site plans and of establishing beyond doubt your property boundaries. Were a boundary dispute to arise, it could lead to lengthy and expensive litigation, possibly at just the wrong time e.g. at a point of purchase or sale.

Better then to have a look at your Title Deeds. If in doubt, obtain information from the Land Registry to put the matter of your property boundaries beyond doubt, so as to avoid a possible dispute at a later date. Better still; reach (written) agreement with your neighbour as to where the boundaries of your/his/her property are on the ground. Do keep in mind that long established fences or hedges may suggest the boundary lines, but they may not be conclusive in the event of a dispute!

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Two and a half years of the Neighbourhood Plan and no big issues discovered so far. Those of you interested in planning and developments in Hook Heath have inevitably joined the Neighbourhood Forum and receive the quarterly newsletter, so are up to date with planning decisions.

The Neighbourhood Plan policies have been quoted in a number of planning decisions this year so the effort put into it was worthwhile. Since the plan was accepted by Woking Borough Council there has only been one planning decision that we are unhappy about, but only time will tell whether the building is attractive or an eyesore. Even now we are not sure whether any extra (legal) policy could have had any influence on the planning decision, so we should probably just write it off as one of those things. Unless of course you're a neighbour who is affected, in which case you might be disappointed in the planning process.

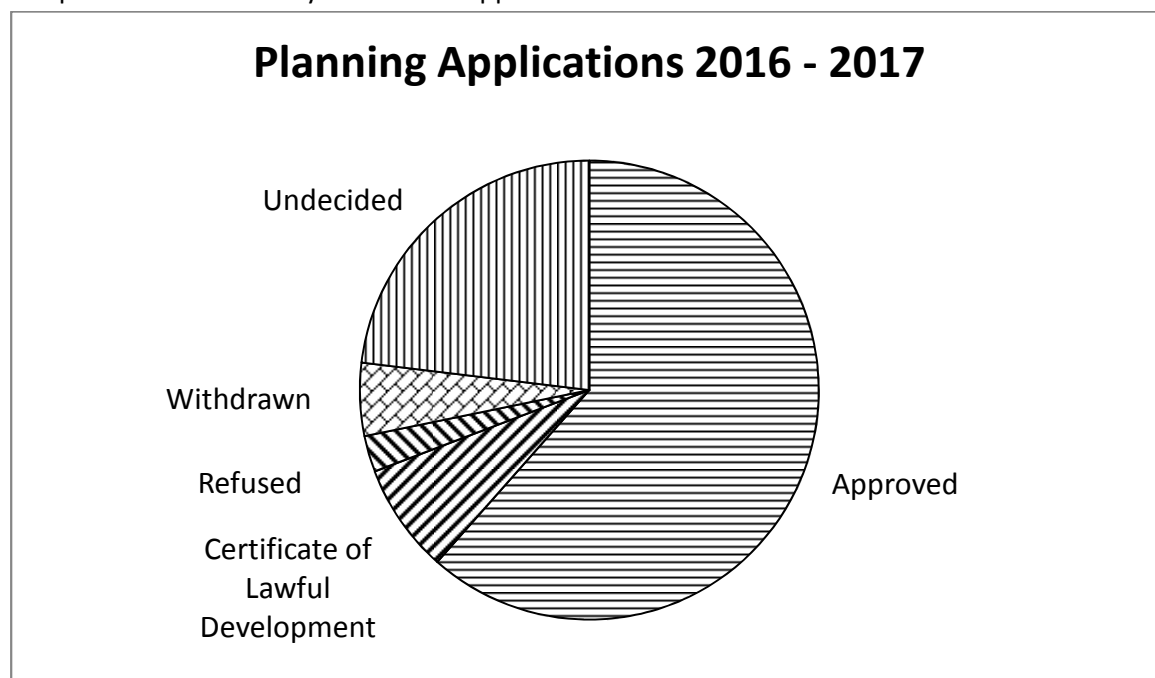
We can usually predict the outcome of a planning application, but got two wrong this year. One was for an extension that, while a little larger than others in the road, still looked as if it would get permission; it didn't, despite there being no objections. The applicant has now submitted modified plans that should be acceptable. The other one was an alleged failure by the applicant to submit accurate plans; we thought he would be asked to clarify the situation but wasn't. In the end the planning committee refused the application, quoting policy BE1 of the Neighbourhood Plan. If this goes to appeal then the decision of the Inspector will be helpful in working out how to respond to similar issues in future.

One development that we had not expected is the decision by an applicant to go to appeal on the basis that the Council had taken too long to announce a decision on his plans. There is another application that has been in the system for six months, so that might go the same way.

Remember that the main purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is not to prevent development but to ensure new building fits into the surrounding area. Despite trying to be as precise as possible with the Plan policies, at the end of the day this can sometimes be a matter of opinion.

Our AGM was held at the beginning of October and in the 6 months since then to the end of February there had been 29 planning applications, fourteen of them this year. This represents an annual rate of nearer 60 compared to 39 in the previous 12 months. This may indicate a “stay here and extend” attitude by residents as a result of Stamp Duty increases and the crisis of housing the younger generation!

We presented a summary of these 39 applications as follows:



This year there have been fewer proposals with design statements so the issue of whether an explicit reference has been made to the Neighbourhood Plan has not been so significant. Local architects are gradually becoming aware of Neighbourhood Plans and what they mean, and are beginning to follow the policies.

In cases where we thought that the policies in the Plan had not been complied with we wrote to the planning department pointing this out. In virtually every case the planning officer agreed, and applications were modified appropriately, or in some cases rejected. We are always happy to talk to residents about any planning issues they may have.

Another aspect of Neighbourhood Planning is that the Forum will be consulted on how to spend the Community Infrastructure Levy collected in the Neighbourhood Area. So far nothing has been collected – partly a question of timing and partly because of self-build exemptions. We are however



keeping an eye on this but given the time taken to build a house, we are not expecting anything this year.

The committees of the Residents' Association and the Neighbourhood Forum agreed that from this financial year onwards, all residents who become members of the Residents' Association will automatically be enrolled as members of the Neighbourhood Forum. This will streamline administrative procedures.

Other Neighbourhood Areas in Woking Borough have continued to make progress with their plans. Pyrford Neighbourhood Plan and West Byfleet Neighbourhood Plan have both been approved by the Council. The other areas in the Borough with defined Neighbourhood Areas – Byfleet, and Brookwood & Bridley do not seem to have made as much progress though both have Neighbourhood Forums and websites to record activities.

### **NOISE AND NEIGHBOURLINESS**

Our gardens in Hook Heath are a place to rest, relax and play, and with the warmer weather arriving, many of us will be spending more time outside in the sunshine. Like our homes, gardens need maintaining, and, in summer are perfect for entertaining. However, with those activities comes an inevitable increase in noise which can drift across to neighbouring properties and bother others. Awareness of the impact of lawn mowers, power tools, loud music - the intensity of the noise, its duration and the time of day when it takes place - on those who live nearby shouldn't be forgotten. A bit of thought and consideration can reduce the impact that such activities have on those around us and ensure that we can all relax and enjoy our time outside.

For information on what constitutes a noise nuisance and useful advice on how to be a considerate neighbour, check out Woking Borough Council's website at <https://www.woking.gov.uk/planning/envhealthservice/control/noisenuisance>.

### **POLICE MATTERS**

Many of you will be aware that there have been some burglaries in the area lately. We are not the only victims. Other parts of the Borough are similarly affected, as are many other areas in the south east of England. Areas considered to be relatively wealthy are bound to be targeted by the gangs of unscrupulous individuals who take advantage of empty houses during the day and early evening when people are getting on with their work or leisure activities. Most burglaries take place between 3.00pm and 8.00pm when the presence of vehicles and "tradesmen" is unlikely to attract attention.

Residents can do something to protect their possessions by installing alarms, security lights, CCTV systems etc., but remember that an ostentatious display of security furniture is an indication that you have something worth stealing. It is as important to secure the rear of your house as the front. Entry is usually forced from the rear. Security lights should only come on when triggered by an intruder because, if they are regularly on for long periods, neighbours will not be alerted to the presence of burglars and may possibly become more than a little annoyed by the constant light pollution. Similarly, CCTV cameras should only cover your own property and not intrude on the privacy of nearby private or public areas. With the launch of battery-operated wireless CCTV, it has become possible for individuals to install their own systems at relatively low cost.

Working police have suffered cuts to staff numbers that result in reports of burglaries only being followed up slowly. Their priorities are cases of child abuse, domestic abuse, drug dealing and other crimes where lives are in danger. So if you see anything suspicious take a note of registration numbers, and the appearance of any individuals you can see and tell the police by dialling 101.

#### **TRAFFIC AND PARKING**

As the volume of traffic on the public roads in Hook Heath continues to increase so do the dangers, particularly when the speed limit is ignored. In the absence of police on the streets, speeding can be discouraged by volunteers using speed guns to measure speed and record registration numbers and then reporting offenders to the police who will take action against repeat offenders. We have the speed guns but need more volunteers!

On the road parking is the other major hazard on our roads. Residents generally do their best to park their own vehicles off the road; the main problems arise in the vicinity of commercial activities or where there is building work in progress. The eastern end of Hook Heath Road is a prime example where at times parking on both sides leaves only a single useable traffic lane. A recent accident at the junction of Hurst Close and Hook Heath Road was probably due in large part to a combination of parked cars and speeding.

#### **WEBSITE**

Our website aims to keep residents updated on matters of interest to our area, and seems to be very well received with an average of 21 pages viewed each day. The most popular page is the home/index page, followed by the history of Hook Heath and the list of planning applications. The website address is [www.hhra.co.uk](http://www.hhra.co.uk).

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership of the HHRA is open to all residents of the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Area. Without your support we could not act on your behalf or have any influence on matters that concern our community and environment. To become a member, we ask for an annual fee of just £10 per household. As you will see from the Summary of Accounts (see next page), we had a deficit of nearly £1000 in 2017. This occurred because we needed professional advice in January 2017 before responding to the Martyrs Lane paper referred to on page 3. WBC is currently engaged in preparing a new version of the Site Allocations DPD that should appear later this year. Depending on its content, we may need to seek further professional advice before commenting on the revised draft.

In order that we may keep you fully informed of any important issues which arise over the coming membership year, please ensure that you provide the treasurer with your email address either by completing the renewal membership form overleaf or by emailing [treasurer@hhra.co.uk](mailto:treasurer@hhra.co.uk). We will only use your personal contact details for the purpose of informing you of matters relating to activities of the Hook Heath Residents' Association or the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Forum. We will never pass personal information to a third party without your permission. Residents who join the HHRA will automatically become members of the HHNF.

**SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**

Membership subscriptions for the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 are now due.

**Existing members** may renew their membership in one of the following ways:

1) By direct interbank transfer to the HHRA account, details of which are:

Account Name: Hook Heath Residents' Association,

Sort Code: 30 - 99 - 80

Account Number: 00376381

Reference: This is your membership number. It is important to include this.

(If you are unsure of your membership number, please contact the Treasurer.)

2) By cheque - please complete the form printed below and send to the Treasurer

3) By standing order - you may set this up yourself using method (1) above or by completing the form below.

**Residents wishing to join the Association should complete the form below. They will automatically be enrolled in the Neighbourhood Forum.**

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**Subscription Renewal Form**

To: David Dare, Treasurer HHRA, Fair Ling, Hook Heath Road, Woking GU22 0DT  
(Tel: 01483 764942, e-mail: [treasurer@hhra.co.uk](mailto:treasurer@hhra.co.uk) )

- (a) I/We wish to renew my/our membership of / join the HHRA for the period April 2018 to March 2019 and enclose the subscription of £10.00.   
(Please make cheques payable to the Hook Heath Residents' Association)
- (b) I/We wish to pay by standing order. Please deliver a suitable form.

Name.....  
 Address.....  
 .....Post Code.....  
 Signature.....Tel No.....  
 E-mail Address.....