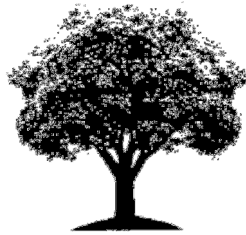


HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2019 NEWSLETTER



Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2019 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION

The Executive Committee of the HHRA meets at intervals of about six weeks throughout the year to review topics of concern to Hook Heath residents. Much of our time is devoted to considering the impact recent planning applications would have on the area. Most of the applications are for relatively modest extensions to existing houses and, unless an immediate neighbour would be seriously affected, we take no action. In cases where the proposed extension is so large that the enlarged house would dominate its neighbours, or seriously disrupt the street scene, either the Residents' Association, the Neighbourhood Forum or, on occasions, both will pass our reservations on the proposal to the WBC Planning Department.

Many other matters of concern to members are discussed at Committee meetings, some of which are described in this Newsletter. Some issues are longstanding and are kept under continuous review, but we rely on residents to bring to our attention new local issues that they want us to consider. One almost perennial issue is the preservation from development of the Green Belt land in and around Hook Heath. In the last twelve months, after taking professional advice, we have made a representation to Woking Borough Council on a revised proposal that would protect land on our southern border from development by keeping it within the Green Belt. Unfortunately the proposal would still remove land within the Hook Heath area from the Green Belt. The next step is for WBC to submit a Site Allocations Development Planning Document to the Planning Inspectorate for examination later this year.

We begin this letter with a more detailed coverage of issues involved in meeting the Woking house building quota up to 2040 while keeping to a minimum the amount of Green Belt land lost to development.

SITE ALLOCATIONS & THE GREEN BELT

Background

In April last year we reported on our response to a proposal from Woking Borough Council for meeting the house building quota post 2027 by concentrating the new house building needed in the Woking Green Belt in a single site east of Martyrs Lane rather than on several smaller sites in Byfleet, Pyrford and Mayford. Of particular interest to us was the opportunity to protect the two Mayford sites north of Saunders Lane at the foot of the Hook Heath Escarpment from being developed.

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

Chairman: Jean Dare
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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Bridget Stoney

Judith Oakley

Ron Brandman

Gerald Griffiths

WEBMASTER

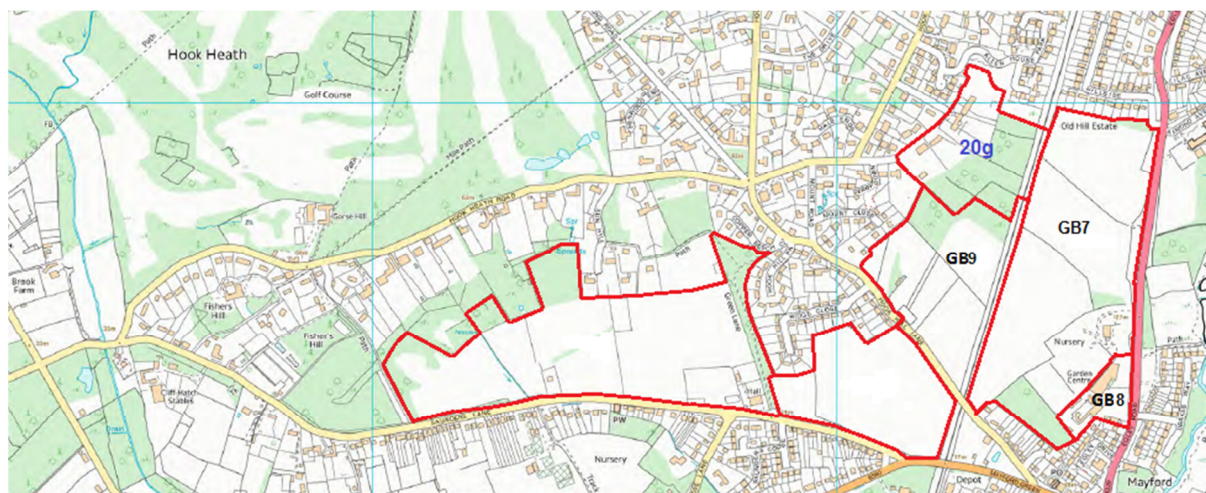
Dr. Neil Cryer

After taking professional advice we argued that the Martyrs Lane site was the obvious choice because it had so many advantages by virtue of its location north of the town centre for access to the motorway network and to both Woking and West Byfleet railway stations, as well as sufficient space for any new infrastructure needed. The WBC proposal said nothing about the site actually within the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Area, designated GB9 on the map below, previously identified for removal from the Green Belt, and classification as urban land designated for Green Infrastructure. The sole reason given previously for removing it from the Green Belt was that the previously proposed removal of the Saunders Lane sites would leave it isolated. Since this reason would no longer apply, we argued that the site should be reprieved.

At the time of our last Newsletter we were awaiting a new site allocations proposal from WBC that would take into account all the various representations made from across the Borough. There was nothing further to report by the time of our AGM in October 2018, but the new proposals were published for fresh consultation in a six week period starting on 4th November 2018.

The Site Allocations Development Planning Document 2018 (SADPD 2018)

The plan published for consultation contained both good news and bad news. The bad news was that WBC has decided to remove the entire Martyrs Lane site from further consideration. Apparently two of the major land owners, McLaren and the New Zealand Golf Club, had indicated that they would not sell their land voluntarily, and WBC accepted legal advice that a compulsory purchase order was not likely to survive legal challenge. Further bad news was that WBC proposed to go ahead, after only minor amendments, with the recommendations of the 2015 Site Allocations Document relating to the period 2012-2027.



The Green Belt sites of interest in the vicinity of Hook Heath

One amendment proposed related to the Egley Road site (GB7) where the new school and Leisure Centre have been built. The northern end of the site, previously proposed for housing, is now to be removed from the Green Belt and designated for Green Infrastructure. Welcome as this proposal is, you have to ask why, if WBC can build a school and leisure centre without having to remove the land from the Green Belt, it is necessary to remove the Green Belt designation to create Green Infrastructure?

The good news was that the very significant developments that are now under way in the town centre will provide sufficient housing to reduce the need to safeguard Green Belt land for further

housing development in the period 2027-2040. As a result, six Green Belt sites previously identified were removed from the SADPD, including the two sites north of Saunders Lane.

Unresolved was the fate of the Hook Heath site north of Hook Hill Lane (GB9) that had been designated for removal from the Green Belt to prevent it becoming isolated when the Saunders Lane sites were developed. The justification for removal is no longer relevant. The site was to be re-designated as Green Infrastructure, but even if it is still needed for this purpose, then that would be an appropriate use of Green Belt land.

Worse still, hidden away in an annex to the main paper is a single sentence stating that on approval of the Site Allocations paper the site further north, called 20g in the discredited Peter Brett report and not referred to since, would become urban land. No further explanation or justification was given. This cannot go unchallenged when there is a clear danger that any land removed from green belt protection and classified as urban land will become vulnerable to development.

The HHRA took professional advice on how to respond to the SADPD 2018 and, as a result, commissioned a comprehensive representation for submission to WBC setting out all our objections to the latest Site Allocations Development Plan Document in December 2018. We are now awaiting a response from WBC (currently scheduled for the end of July 2019) to all the representations received on the latest plan. It will probably be in the form of a submission of the final SADPD to the Planning Inspectorate without any further local consultation. It will be subject to public examination before the Inspector's decision is made and published.

It looks likely that the HHRA will need to be represented at the public examination to ensure that the case for retaining our local Green Belt is made to the Planning Inspector.

THE CO-OP FOOD STORE

The store has been up and running for over a year now and is increasingly used by local residents as well as by those from further afield. The trade must be having an impact on the Londis store and the newsagent further down Wych Hill, but both are still in business, and hopefully this will continue to be the case.

The Co-op store was closed for a brief period last summer after thieves using a JCB knocked a hole in the front wall to steal the cash dispensing machine along with some merchandise. It was too tempting a target for the criminal fraternity to ignore. The damaged area was quickly boarded up and trading resumed with the cash dispenser moved to a (hopefully) less vulnerable location. However, several months elapsed before repairs to the front wall and window were completed and the building returned to its original state.

Still of concern is the danger from/to traffic entering and leaving the store at the top of Wych Hill opposite a garage forecourt and near the junction with Hook Heath Road. There are frequent near misses but, so far at least, no serious accidents. When visibility is restricted, cautious drivers avoid turning right on leaving the carpark, and instead turn left and use the roundabout at the bottom of Wych Hill to come back up safely.

WOODBANK

Work has now commenced at the Woodbank site. The new Birchgrove assisted living apartments will consist of one and two bedroom apartments for rent. This new development will provide 51 apartments for people over the age of 65. More information can be found about Birchgrove on their website www.birchgrove.life.

The completion date for the building work is August 14th 2020. A show apartment should be available for viewing from early 2020.

Although the site is owned by Birchgrove Ltd., the construction work is being undertaken by Castleoak. Castleoak has been established for 30 years and has delivered over 200 care homes and over 200 assisted living apartments across the UK. Their website is www.castleoak.co.uk.

The building work started in January with the carpark areas. Construction of the three storey main building commenced in March 2019. The construction site is registered with the UK-wide Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS) and is regularly inspected by industry professionals. More information about CCS can be found at www.CCScheme.org.uk. Birchgrove has planning permission for the hoardings advertising the new apartments.

Should there be any problems with construction traffic parking on Holly Bank Road and causing residents to have difficulty driving in and out of their properties, the contract manager, Paul Evans, assures the HHRA he will be on site most days and is contactable on his mobile: 07736 456993.

TREES

All over the world countries are realising the vital role trees play in our ecosystem, and are planting them in great numbers to repair the damage caused by past deforestation. Trees make a major contribution in removing pollutants from the air we breathe, much of it caused by internal combustion engines. People are wisely moving out of towns and cities to escape the high levels of pollution and into more rural areas for the sake of their children's health. Hook Heath was always considered to be such a healthy area because of its trees, shrubs, and hedges. The operative word is 'was', because in recent years many new residents seem not to like the greenery that a survey carried out a few years ago was cited as a key factor in attracting residents to the area. Trees and hedges are disappearing at an alarming rate.

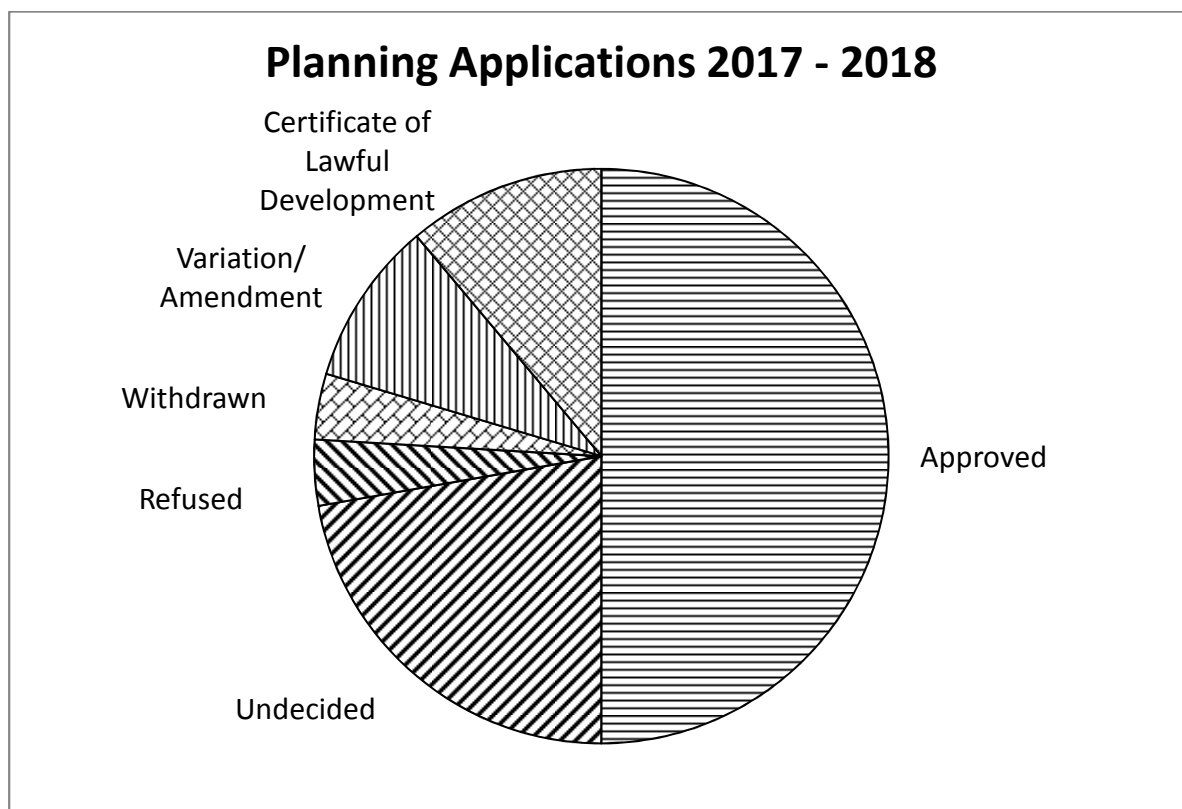
As well as being damaging to our health, taking out hedges, trees and shrubs also destroys the habitat for wild life. Birds need not only somewhere to nest, but also food to eat. A bird box is of little use if the insects and seeds on which they feed are nowhere to be found once the greenery has been removed. So when planning a beautiful garden please consider the whole ecosystem and remember that insects also play a major role in pollination. It is always wise to work with nature rather than against it. If you are thinking about felling a tree that does not fit in with your plan for a perfect garden, you should consult the arboriculturalist at WBC whether or not it is covered by a tree preservation order. He will advise you on how to proceed and how to replace any trees you remove. He can be found at trees@woking.gov.uk.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Three and a half years have elapsed since the Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by WBC, and the Forum continues to examine all planning applications for compliance with the Plan. Many applications for extensions pass through the system without issue but proposals to build new houses (sometimes after demolishing the original property) nearly always attract objections. There has been more action on this front than in previous years and since our 2017 AGM there have been eight buildings approved (in five cases after modifications to the original plans), three rejected, and one is outstanding. Of the approved applications, there are three new buildings and five replacements.

Our last AGM was held at the beginning of October 2018 and in the 6 months since then to the end of February there had been 18 planning applications, compared with 29 for the same period last year. This is also lower than in previous years.

There were 54 planning applications in the 2017 – 2018 period. At the AGM we presented a summary of these applications as follows:



Only two applications were rejected; one was for a garage and the other was replaced by a modified proposal that was approved. Of the twelve applications that were undecided at the time of the AGM, eight were subsequently approved and one rejected (though in this case the applicant has appealed). That leaves three still undecided: one is connected to the rejected application, one relates to a new dwelling, and the third is a significant extension.

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 most cases our aim was to get the application modified to something we thought was more suitable. We are always happy to talk to residents about any planning issue they may have.

There have been some road traffic problems caused by the parking of vans associated with building work on new dwellings and the modifications at Gorse Hill. However, these have only been temporary (though will inevitably be replaced by more issues as other houses are built).

Those of you interested in planning and developments in Hook Heath will probably have joined the Neighbourhood Forum as well as the Residents' Association; members receive the quarterly newsletter, so are up to date with planning decisions. Many residents joined in 2013, but a lot of people have moved into Hook Heath since then. Joining the Neighbourhood Forum is possible at any time, is free and is automatic when you join the Residents' Association.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is now an important aspect of the planning process. Despite CIL being adopted by the Council on 23rd October 2014 and coming into effect on 1st April 2015, Woking Joint Committee (who have the responsibility) have only just established a process for disbursement of the funds. We included a list of projects put forward by residents in the Neighbourhood Plan. Since then we have asked (and continue to ask) for new ideas; if there is any infrastructure project you would like included on the list please tell the Secretary.

Other Neighbourhood Areas in Woking Borough have continued to make progress with their plans. Pyrford and West Byfleet Neighbourhood Forums are both active. Byfleet Neighbourhood Forum hopes to have prepared a draft plan by the middle of the year. However looking at their website, Brookwood & Bridley Neighbourhood Forum does not appear to have been active during 2018. A new development is the proposed creation of a Neighbourhood Forum for Hoe Valley, covering the same area as the Hoe Valley Ward. This is presumably driven in part by the desire to give local residents a say in the proposed redevelopment of the Woking football ground site.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

What is it and how does it benefit residents?

Anyone undertaking residential development leading to an increase of 100 sq. meters or more floor space is liable for CIL unless exemptions are claimed. The most common exemption is a "self-build" exemption.

In Woking, the levy is at the rate of £125 per square meter, so an increase of 200 square meters could lead to a liability of £25,000. A fraction (25%) of the CIL raised can be used to improve the Hook Heath Area. Improvements could include the renovation of public benches, the installation of new ones, the planting of shrubs on public green spaces, new road markings & signs and pathway safety handrails. Local Councillors are required to take the lead role in deciding how CIL money should be used, working in partnership with the Residents' Association and Neighbourhood Forum. All projects will require broad local community support and approval by Surrey Joint Committee before CIL funds can be used for projects.

At the date of publication, the Neighbourhood Area has identified a potential CIL pot of approximately £57,000. Woking Borough Council has recently published their processes for accounting for CIL receipts. In broad terms, a separate account will be maintained by WBC for each and every Local Community; the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Area will have its own account. Local Ward Councillors will be able to request monthly CIL receipts updates of Local Community individual accounts. It is expected that Local Ward Councillors will advise Hook Heath of accretions to its account on a regular basis.

Residents may be reassured to know that the Residents' Association keeps an eye on developments that give rise to CIL due and keeps updated records of our potential share as CIL arises; it does not restrict its records solely to the amounts of CIL actually received at any given date.

As far as it can, the Residents' Association intends to watch out for "exemption defaults": exemptions can be lost where developers do not adhere to the strict compliance procedures laid down by WBC. Perhaps the most relevant "exemption default" is the requirement (for self-build exemption to be preserved) that home owners remain in occupation of developed property for three years from the date of completion of the development. In other words, completion of sale within three years of first occupation could lead to a CIL liability arising to the vendor. It is expected that conveyancers and WBC will be alert to such circumstances. So if you have claimed self-build exemption, do make sure you do not fall foul of this requirement!

HOOK HEATH SIGNS

Over 10 years have elapsed since the HHRA erected signs to designate the boundaries of the Hook Heath Residents' Association area, and prior to that we had erected the noticeboard at the approximate centre of the area. All are now in need of some refurbishment. The Committee was prompted to act when the sign at the junction of Hook Heath Road was broken, probably by a reversing vehicle.

It seemed wrong to re-erect the restored sign in exactly the same place now that the HHRA area has been extended to match that covered by the Neighbourhood Plan. Accordingly, with the permission of Woking Borough Council and of the landowner the sign was renovated and re-positioned at the junction of Wych Hill and Orchard Mains.

The noticeboard is next on our list for renovation this summer. In particular, the Perspex glass needs replacing because the original has deteriorated to the point that to read anything other than large print has become difficult. All the remaining signs will then be renovated in due course to prolong their life and improve visibility in their current locations.

NOISE AND NEIGHBOURLINESS

Neighbourhood noise – it comes in many forms: road traffic, planes flying overhead, rattling manhole covers, leaf blowers, lawn mowers, construction noise, DIY, music, shouts and laughter from children playing, adults socialising, barking dogs and chirping birds. Surrounded as we are by neighbours, it is inevitable that some noise will drift across boundaries into our private space. In the colder months when we venture less outside we are shielded from the worst of it behind solid brick walls and double glazing. However, as warmer weather entices us into the fresh air to relax and enjoy our gardens, neighbourhood noise can prove to be an irritant. While noise for one household can represent a job crossed off the list or an enjoyable social get-together, for others nearby it is solely an annoyance. Awareness of the impact of garden machinery, power tools and social noise – the intensity of the noise, the time of day it takes place and its duration – on those living nearby should not be forgotten. A bit of thought and consideration can limit the impact of such activities on our neighbours thus alleviating their distress and ensuring we can all relax and enjoy our time outside.

For information on noise nuisance, construction site noise control and other pollution issues, check out Woking Borough Council's website at <https://www.woking.gov.uk/environmental-services/pollution>.

POLICE MATTERS

The Surrey Police Force is one of the busiest in the country after the Met. It is under great pressure dealing with the many different aspects of crime that affect our safety and with limited resources. Woking in particular poses a great challenge. Its location, close to the motorway network and international airports at Heathrow and Gatwick and served by a mainline railway station, makes it a major communications hub. Unfortunately, this makes it attractive to drug gangs looking for somewhere to receive drugs from abroad and to distribute them nationwide as well as locally. For instance, we have all read about 'County Lines' - children being used to deliver drugs to gangs by train after school.

Other problems arise from the practice of laundering the proceeds of crime, e.g. drug trafficking, through the purchase of large properties in respectable residential areas for cash. The properties are then left empty except for occasional 'wild' parties, or occupied by unwelcome characters who annoy the neighbours!

In recent years burglaries have increased twofold in surrounding areas. The burglars are not the usual types who break in to steal some goods and then run. Rather, they delight in doing as much damage as possible so that the owners have to move out to allow professional cleaners and decorators to make the house habitable again. Alarms do not seem to deter the burglars. They watch and wait for an opportunity and know when you are in or out. So be careful at all times.

There is a plan to close the police station in Woking. It is supposedly to be replaced by a police desk in the Council Offices where crimes can be reported and advice sought (in office hours). Given that Woking is one of the largest towns in Surrey and our council tax payments contribute a substantial proportion of the police budget in Surrey, we should have a local headquarters here, housed in a dedicated building where residents can feel safe reporting activities that concern them. Local intelligence and locally based officers are vital when only a rapid response will prevent a crime.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

There does not seem to be any easy answer to the parking problems particularly in Hook Heath Road near the SEAT Garage and the Tennis Club. The police point out that as it is a public road, one has to depend on the intelligence of the driver not to park in front of drives and to make sure that there is a line of sight for oncoming traffic and for residents to exit safely from their houses. Unfortunately, the pattern of parking on both sides of the road seems to suggest a shortage of brains. The parkers would surely recognise the problem instantly if it occurred outside their own properties.

In addition to the locally generated parking, more drivers have been observed recently who park their cars in the same places daily and, after unfolding a bicycle, they cycle off to work, and return in the evening. Presumably they object to the high cost of parking in Woking. An unusual case was that of an almost new motor cycle parked in Hook Heath Road for several months last Autumn. It was protected by a black plastic cover that made it almost invisible at night. It was moved very occasionally after dark and returned to exactly the same spot with only a few extra miles on the clock. The police investigated and reported that the vehicle was legally parked on a public road and was taxed and insured, so no action could be taken. Only when a number of motorists reported near accidents did the police accept that it was a hazard to traffic and have it moved.

At present we are investigating the possibility of getting the road markings improved to discourage parking in the vicinity of driveways so that drivers will have a clear line of sight when entering Hook Heath Road.

WEBSITE

Our website is designed to keep residents informed of local matters. Fortunately residents continue to help from time to time by sending in matters they consider would be of interest to other residents. As always, the pages on both planning applications and forthcoming events are the most popular. The website address is 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 over £1400 in 2018. This occurred because we needed professional advice in November/December 2018 before responding to the Site Allocations proposal referred to on page 3. WBC is currently engaged in preparing a final version of the Site Allocations DPD for submission to the Planning Inspectorate. We shall almost certainly need professional help to argue our case for preserving our local Green Belt Land at the subsequent Public Examination.

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. 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.

Aims of the Association

1. To preserve the present character of Hook Heath and protect the local environment.
2. To provide members with help and assistance on matters affecting them, particularly in relation to letters of objection to the local Council or public enquiries.
3. To deal with planning matters that affect the area and are against the consensus of the opinion of residents.
4. To liaise with the Council and all political parties to achieve an agreed status for Hook Heath which reflects the consensus of the opinion of the residents.
5. To be aware of local issues in adjoining areas, which may have repercussions for Hook Heath, and to provide mutual support to adjacent Residents' Associations to fight plans which could be detrimental to the surrounding environment.
6. To care for other matters of common concern which arise from time to time, e.g. traffic, public services,

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 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.

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)

- (a) I/We wish to renew my/our membership of / join the HHRA for the period April 2019 to March 2020 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.....