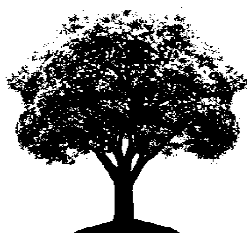


HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2020 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2019

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2020 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Whatever I write in this introduction is probably going to be out of date by the time you read it. We are a few days into the lockdown and the traffic along Hook Heath Road is barely 5% of normal; so whatever is happening elsewhere, the residents in this part of Surrey are taking the Prime Minister's words to heart. We know from the 2011 Census that there are relatively more elderly people in Hook Heath so if you fall into the 'at risk' category (as we do) please take care.

As I write this, various people and groups are trying to organise help for those who need it. By the time the newsletter is distributed I hope we will see some evidence of that.

My plan was to start this newsletter by reminding Hook Heath residents of the aims of the Residents' Association:

- To preserve the present character of Hook Heath and protect the local environment.
- 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.
- To deal with planning matters that affect the area and are against the consensus of the opinion of residents.
- 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.
- 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.
- To care for other matters of common concern which arise from time to time, e.g. traffic, public services, security, trees, etc.

This year much of the Committee's focus has been on the first item; preserving the character of Hook Heath and protecting it from those who want to build houses in what is currently the Green Belt.

There is sometimes confusion with other local groups: the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Forum has (on paper) an equally broad remit but concerns itself primarily with local planning issues, often trying to ensure that applications comply with the Neighbourhood Plan policies. Then, for those who live in private roads, there are the road maintenance bodies which are responsible for road upkeep. Finally in the last year we have seen the creation of a Hook Heath residents' Facebook page as a platform for issues that matter to Hook Heath residents. If you've not seen this, it can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HookHeath/>

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

Chairman: **Dr. Mike Cooke**
Tel: 01483 727832

Vice Chairman: **Vacant**

Treasurer: **Dr. David Dare**
Tel: 01483 764942

Secretary: **Heather Mustard**
Tel: 01483 729052

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Judith Oakley

Ron Brandman

Gerald Griffiths

Frances Griffiths

WEBMASTER

Dr. Neil Cryer

You will need to be a Facebook member to join. There are currently 158 members and numbers are increasing each week. If you have an internet connection then, even if you don't use Facebook for keeping in touch with friends, it's worth signing up. Residents' Groups seem to be relatively free of advertising as well.

The Executive Committee of the HHRA usually meets seven times each year. It also organises the Annual General Meeting in October each year. Much of our time has been devoted to considering planning issues, both local planning applications and the Council's future plans for the Green Belt. With the hearings into the Site Allocations Document over, and the Inspector's Report expected in late spring or early summer, this latter activity will (we hope) be coming to an end soon.

This year planning applications for extensions have generally been non-controversial. The biggest problem for local homeowners seems to have been attempts to obtain permission for extensions for houses in the Green Belt. For Green Belt properties, Woking Council has a rule that extensions of more than 40% are (except in very special circumstances) not allowed irrespective of other considerations.

The other significant issue this year has been the question of how the local Councillors should spend Community Infrastructure Levy funds. Making progress in this area is taking longer than we had originally anticipated.

These and other matters of concern to members 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. If you want to get involved in the activities of the Committee we have vacancies for new members so please get in touch.

TRIBUTE TO JEAN DARE

Jean Dare passed away last year after a short illness. As a founding member of the Residents' Association, and as its Chairman since 1997, she made a significant contribution in supporting all those who live in Hook Heath. She was passionate about preserving Hook Heath as an attractive, desirable, residential area. In particular, Jean was committed to protecting trees and was unstinting in her efforts to preserve them. Hook Heath owes her a huge debt of gratitude for all her work over many years. She is sorely missed.

SITE ALLOCATIONS & THE GREEN BELT

This topic has been on our agenda for many years now. At last there are signs we are moving towards a resolution, at least as far as the immediate environs of Hook Heath are concerned.

You may recall that at the time of our 2019 Spring Newsletter we were awaiting a response from Woking Borough Council (WBC) on the comments that we and many others had made to the draft Site Allocations Development Planning Document (SADPD) of November 2018. We had argued for the retention in the Green Belt of the land north of Hook Hill Lane designated GB(9) and 20g in Figure. 1. The only reason ever advanced by WBC for removing these two areas from the Green Belt and re-designation as Green Infrastructure

and urban land respectively, was that they would have become an isolated pocket of the Green Belt if the land north of Saunders Lane was developed for housing. Since the November 2018 document did not include a proposal to remove the Saunders Lane sites from the Green Belt, the argument for removing the Hook Hill Lane sites was no longer valid.

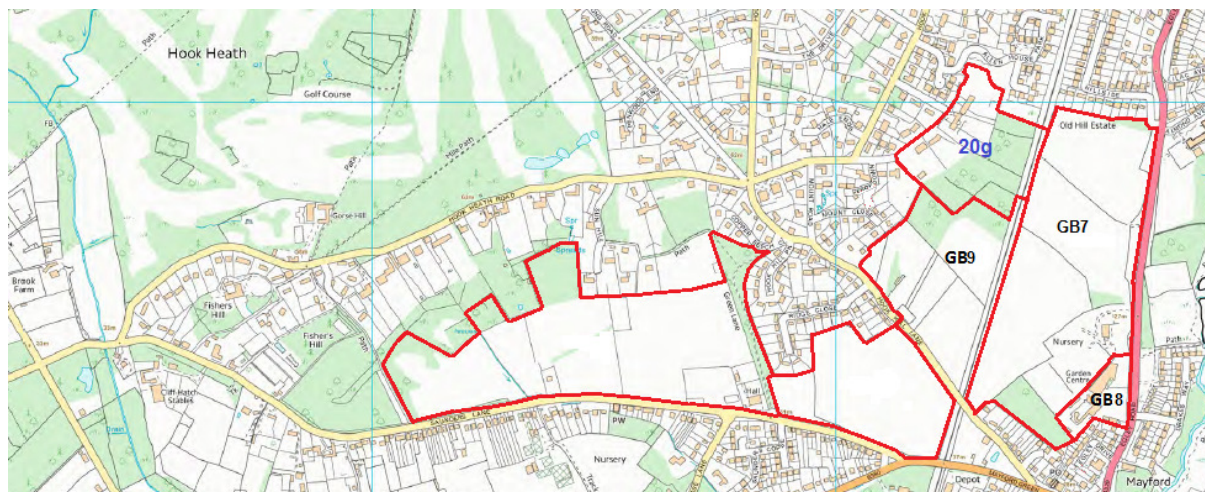


Figure 1. The Green Belt sites of interest in the vicinity of Hook Heath

The WBC response to all the comments received came at the end of July 2019 in the form of a draft submission to the Planning Inspectorate for approval of the SADPD. The surprise was that the new document was identical to the November 2018 document. It was,

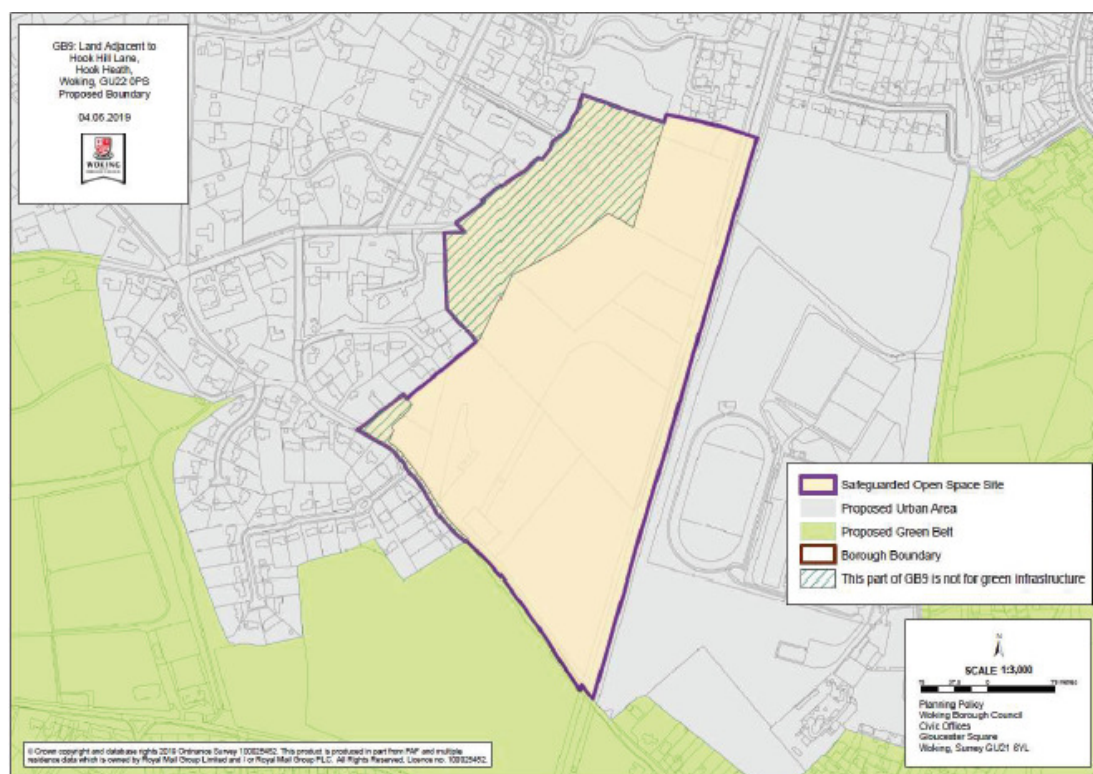


Figure 2. The new GB9 including the former 20g

however, to be accompanied by a summary of the comments made by the public prepared by the WBC planning staff. The comments themselves were considered to be too many and various to be sent to the Inspectorate in printed or digital form, but would be available for

viewing at the Council Offices. A further accompanying paper, extending to 65 pages, listed minor modifications that WBC intended to make if the Inspector decided to approve the submission document.

The modification of interest to us was the expansion of GB9 to include the land previously designated 20g. (See Fig. 2). The land at the top of the escarpment that includes the curtilages of existing housing was included, but shown shaded. All of the extended GB9 was to be removed from the Green Belt and designated for Green Infrastructure (the nature of which was unspecified), but the shaded area could not be developed as Green Infrastructure, because it contained houses. It would be treated for planning purposes as if it were still in the Green Belt until the end of the period of the current Woking Core Strategy in 2027. Thereafter the whole of GB9 would be offered for development (again unspecified).

The revised statement on the proposed use of GB9, seems to have been made deliberately confusing, but it appears to have been contrived as a way of removing GB9 from the Green Belt now and allowing development of the land post 2027 without the need to make a formal proposal and exposing it to public consultation. There would be little point in making any investment in Green Infrastructure on GB9, whatever its nature, if development were planned post 2027.

The submission documents were approved by councillors at a meeting of the full Council and the documents were immediately submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. An Inspector was appointed and the Hearing set for a two week period in December 2019. Before the Hearing the Inspector wrote to WBC to say if that if he was asked to approve the unmodified version of the November 2018 SADPD and subsequently did so, then that is what WBC would have to implement without the proposed modifications. If WBC wished to make the intended modifications, some of which he considered to be substantial rather than minor, then they should be included in the SADPD prior to the Hearing and subjected to critical examination at the Hearing.

WBC did as requested by the simple expedient of striking through parts of the original text and adding new text to reflect the modifications. The result was a much longer paper with different page and paragraph numbers. The problem of relating the comments made by the public on the earlier version of the document to the revised text must have strained the patience of the Inspector.

With the help of our regular planning consultant the HHRA exercised its right as an interested party to submit a written Hearing Statement to the Planning Inspectorate setting out the general objections we had made over the years to the unsatisfactory way the Green Belt Review had been conducted and in particular to stress the need to retain the land north of Hook Hill Lane in the Green Belt along with the rest of the Hook Heath Escarpment. Unfortunately, our consultant was not able to be present at the Hearing on the day GB9 was considered, but he supplied speaking notes that your Treasurer relied on to represent HHRA interests at the Hearing.

On completion of the Hearing, the Inspector retired to compile his report, a process that normally takes a minimum of about six weeks. In February of this year he wrote to WBC to say that his report was not yet complete, and could not be completed until some information submitted by WBC at the Hearing on progress so far in implementing the 2012 Woking Core Strategy had been published for consultation. In the meantime he has asked WBC to make various changes to the submission document as a result of his Examination. Of particular interest to us is his statement on the future of GB9, which he recommends should be kept in

the Green Belt since the proposed use as Green Infrastructure would be entirely compatible with its current status. He asked for the text and related policy maps to be so amended.

Of course we cannot be certain of anything until the final report is published, but it looks as though we have been successful in convincing the Inspector of the merits of protecting the openness of the Hook Heath Escarpment by retaining all of it within the Green Belt.

WOODBANK

The latest information we have on the progress of the Birchgrove Assisted Living Apartments at Woodbank in Holly Bank Road is that the builders, Castleoak, lost two weeks of planned work due to extremely wet conditions this winter. They decided to wrap the building in polythene and then used industrial driers to dry out the inside, which allowed them to continue work installing plasterboard in the last few weeks. They are now back on track to complete the project by August 15th 2020, subject of course to the Corona virus crisis.

The first residents are expected to move in by mid September. At present 10% of the apartments have been reserved mostly on the ground floor where the occupants will have a small outside space.

At the top of Holly Bank Road the fence was removed and a concrete base built fronting onto the pavement. This is for an electricity substation which the company has been told is essential.

The parking of contractors' cars along a large part of Holly Bank Road is very frustrating for residents, as leaving their drives has become quite dangerous. Birchgrove are very aware of this problem but have been unable to find anywhere else for the contractors to park. It is quite legal for anyone to park on a road with no parking restrictions so nothing can be done about this situation. Residents can only look forward to August 2020!

TREES

In 2018 and 2019, 48 applications to fell trees in Hook Heath were submitted to WBC resulting in permission being given for the felling of 197 trees – ash, oak, larch, pine, rowan, sycamore, willow, beech, sweet chestnut and other species. It is possible that additional trees, for which permission was not necessary or perhaps not sought, were also lost to the chain saw. This is a sad loss to a community which, back in 2013 in response to a questionnaire informing the Neighbourhood Plan, had identified trees and greenery as the number one most appealing feature of Hook Heath. In addition, the 2014 Hook Heath Character Study, written as one of the supporting documents for the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan, noted that 'the area has a special character which is dominated by large mature trees in a sylvan setting'.

There are of course many valid reasons why trees sometimes need to be felled, perhaps due to safety issues, disease, damage to property, house extensions, or garden redesign. In many instances when permission is given by WBC, a requirement is made that a specified number of replacement trees, usually of a stated species and size, be planted within the next growing season. In the years 2018 and 2019 WBC required a total of 56 replacement trees

be planted. WBC has the authority to check that the required replacements have been planted, and that they are maintained for a period of five years.

Few of us now are in any doubt that trees, as the biggest plants on our planet, are one of the most powerful weapons, the ultimate multi-taskers, in the fight against climate change. They benefit the environment enormously, absorbing carbon dioxide, storing the carbon in their wood, reducing wind speed, cooling the air with shade and with moisture released from their leaves. Trees also help prevent flooding and soil erosion, provide habitats for our wildlife, enhance our physical and mental wellbeing and may well boost the financial value of our property.

Trees are our allies in the fight against climate change and the bottom line is that we need more trees, not fewer. Indeed, the Woodland Trust advocates that every felled tree should ideally be replaced by a ratio of at least 3 to 1. Such a target may not be viable, even in large Hook Heath gardens, but many of us could add one tree, carefully selected to suit the available space, thus contributing to the fight against climate change.

If you have any questions about the trees in your garden and are considering felling one, a wise first step is to consult the arboriculturalist at WBC who will be able to advise whether a tree is covered by a tree protection order. He will be happy to visit and offer advice on how to proceed and, should permission be granted, on which replacement trees will need to be planted. He can be contacted at trees@woking.gov.uk.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Five 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. Most applications for extensions pass through the system with at most minor issues, but proposals to build new houses (sometimes after demolishing the original property) nearly always attract (justified) objections from neighbours.

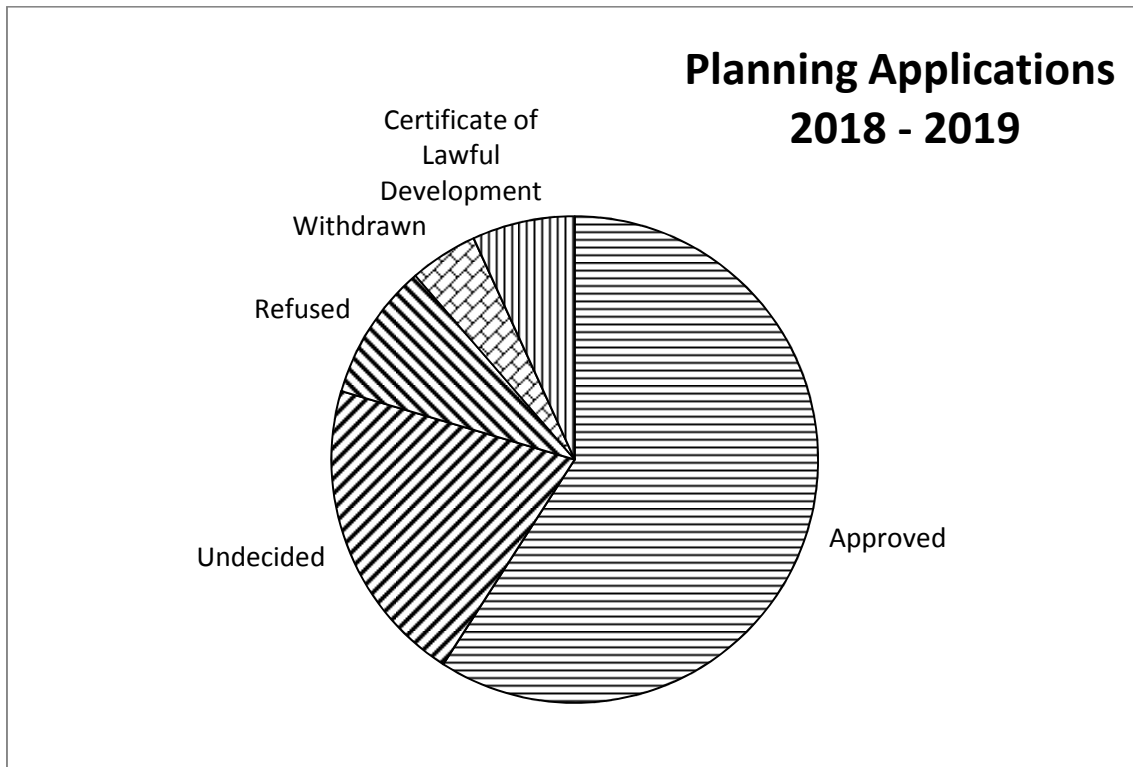
Our last AGM was held at the beginning of October 2019 and in the 6 months since then to the end of February there had been 15 planning applications, three fewer than during the same period last year. None of these was for a new house and the only one to be refused was for a new garage in the green belt.

There were 44 planning applications in the 2018 – 2019 period. At the AGM we presented a summary of these applications.

Four applications were rejected:

- A new house in Hook Heath Road which was subsequently approved on appeal
- Replacement of a bungalow in Pond Road by two houses; rejected on appeal
- Replacement of a bungalow in Cedar Road by two houses; also rejected on appeal
- Extension of a house in the green belt by more than 40%; a subsequent proposal for a smaller extension was approved.

The reason the planning inspector gave for rejecting the applications to replace the bungalows was the same in each case and unrelated to the Council's arguments. It was to



do with the possible harm to the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area which is less than 5km from the sites. Both applications have been resubmitted.

Of the nine applications that were undecided at the time of the AGM, seven were subsequently approved and one withdrawn. That leaves one still undecided.

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.

Those of you interested in planning and developments in Hook Heath will have joined the Neighbourhood Forum as well as the Residents' Association; members receive the quarterly newsletter, so are up to date with planning decisions. Joining the Neighbourhood Forum is possible at any time, is free and is automatic when you join the Residents' Association.

The Localism Act (2012) defines the rules for setting up a Neighbourhood Forum – one of these is that designation only lasts for five years. The advantages of having the Forum designated are that it is a statutory consultee for planning issues, and also that it can request changes to the Neighbourhood Plan. We have therefore applied to Woking Borough Council for redesignation and all Hook Heath residents should have received a circular from the Council. The decision would have been made at a Council meeting at the beginning of April but the meeting was cancelled.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

Last year's Newsletter included a piece on CIL and the benefits of CIL to the Neighbourhood Area. We take the opportunity this time to let you know the amount of CIL received and earmarked for Hook Heath and the progress made in spending it!

As of 29th February 2020, the Neighbourhood Area CIL pot stood at £22,805, with an additional amount in the pipeline likely to be received later this year. Your Committee has considered in depth how best to spend the money. We have thought about “big and bold” projects, but have decided to spend the currently available money on rather less exciting but nevertheless useful projects that seemed to have broad support.

These include the restoration of six existing benches dotted around Hook Heath and the installation of two new ones to be situated at “viewpoints” overlooking the escarpment. In addition, we hope to install a footpath safety handrail on the steep slope from the railway bridge to St John’s Lye and plant bulbs and shrubs on the numerous green spaces around the area e.g. at the green space near Woodbank at the end of Holly Bank Road by the noticeboard; the noticeboard is to be refurbished in the process. There are also plans to “spruce up” the Hook Heath signs at the western end of Hook Heath Road and at Orchard Mains. These projects are intended to smarten up the area for the benefit of all and sundry and will use up much of our current CIL money.

As said above, we currently have £22,805 to spend but there is hope for the receipt of more CIL during the current year (to replenish the planned expenditure). Although we cannot say specifically how much additional CIL we expect to receive during 2020, we hope for at least £7,390 (from the second and third tranches from South Hurstgate and the last tranche from Cedars View). Then there is the Bernisdale development! CIL from Bernisdale may cause us to think “big and bold” as to how to spend a large sum of money possibly coming our way!

BURGLARIES

There were a number of burglaries and attempted burglaries in Hook Heath at the end of last year. Crime data are available on the web at:

<https://www.police.uk/surrey/WKMH/>

This year there has been a couple more including one in Fernhill Lane in March. Advice on how to prevent burglaries is also available on the web:

<https://www.police.uk/crime-prevention-advice/burglary/>

The only other thing we can add is that if you can’t afford a burglar alarm you can get dummy alarm boxes quite cheaply; police have been known to recommend using one of these, though alarm companies argue that they are useless. We regularly read the summary crime reports and none mentions burglar alarms, which leads us to think that real alarms are generally effective.

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 in Autumn 2018. 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 at www.hhra.co.uk has 34 pages designed to keep residents informed of local matters. Particularly popular is the page of area planning applications, followed closely by the history of Hook Heath and then by the What's On page of forthcoming events. There are also news items supplied by residents. More are always welcome.

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 £1400 in 2019. This occurred because we needed professional advice before submitting a Hearing Statement to the Inspector in response to the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (referred to on page 5) submitted by Woking Borough Council to the Planning Inspectorate for approval. We also sought help in preparing speaking notes for use at the Hearing in December 2019.

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.

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2019

<u>Income and Expenditure</u>	2019	2018
Income:		
Subs and donations		
- Cheques and Cash	£895.00	£1,272.00
Direct Transfer	£1,870.10	£1,710.00
Cash donation	£1.13	
Interest on Reserve Account	£228.35	£196.82
Total Income:	<u>£2,994.58</u>	<u>£3,178.82</u>
Expenditure:		
CPRE Subscription	£36.00	£36.00
Open Spaces Society	£45.00	£45.00
Photocopying and printing	£182.00	£160.00
AGM costs	£105.00	£160.00
Website renewal fee	£42.75	£42.75
Consultancy ⁽¹⁾	£3,906.00	£3,906.00
Sign repairs	£0.00	£260.00
Funeral wreath	£50.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure:	<u>£4,366.75</u>	<u>£4,609.75</u>
Income less expenditure	-£1,372.17	-£1,430.93
Fund balance at 01/01/2019	£42,416.24	£43,847.17
Fund balance at 31/12/2019	<u>£41,044.07</u>	<u>£42,416.24</u>
<u>Balance Sheet (at 31 December 2019)</u>		
Net current balance	£14,400.70	£12,095.22
Reserve account balance	£30,549.37	£30,321.02
Net gross assets at 31 December	£44,950.07	£42,416.24
Creditors ⁽¹⁾	£3,906.00	£0.00
Debtors	£0.00	£0.00
Net Assets at 31 December	<u>£41,044.07</u>	<u>£42,416.24</u>

Note 1 Consultancy costs of £3,906 incurred in responding to the Woking Site Allocations DPD.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 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 2020 to March 2021 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.....

.....PostCode.....

Signature.....Tel No.....

E-mail Address.....