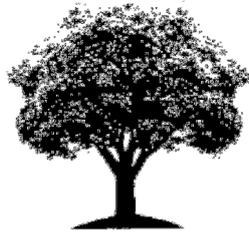


HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2021 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2020

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2021 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I hope that you are all well and have escaped the virus. When I wrote the introduction to last year's Newsletter I knew that the year was going to be different. However, I had not foreseen just how different life was going to be, and it doesn't look as if it will return to normal anytime soon.

Committee members coped well for a while with not being able to hold our meetings face-to-face in each other's homes by communicating using telephone and e-mail. One immediate problem was that the print works where our Newsletter is normally printed was in complete lockdown, but with the help of one of our members, the management of a sister company was persuaded to take on the job. Then, when some members of our delivery team were unable to carry out their normal task because of the need to self-isolate, the vacancies were easily filled by other HHRA members who were working from home and glad to have an excuse to get some exercise. We were delighted with the response of our members who renewed their subscriptions promptly and other residents who decided to join. After a while, when it was clear that life was not going to return to anything approaching normal, Committee members got to grips with modern Zoom technology and resumed holding regular meetings. Unfortunately, the AGM had to be cancelled for 2020.

The Executive Committee of the HHRA usually meets seven times each year, though since lockdowns started, the Committee has met solely by Zoom. We have avoided using reserves to pay for a subscription by limiting ourselves to (multiple) 40 minute sessions. Some of the Committee have a lot of knowledge of video conferencing – I remember my first experiences in the early 90's when we had dedicated rooms and telephone lines with six screens in each. I've used it intermittently since then, though meetings with seven different participants on different sites were a first for me. Despite the well-publicised problems at Handforth Parish Council we haven't had any issues other than with the technology. With only seven of us the system works reasonably well and apart from not being able to hold the AGM we have managed to keep the business of the HHRA moving.

There were no objections to our failure to hold an AGM but we have not been able to entice any new members to join the Executive; we recognise that can be difficult when physical meetings have not been possible but have hopes for later this year once more people have been vaccinated. I would like to think that holding an AGM will be possible this year but that depends on social distancing rules and the willingness of the Golf Club to host it.

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

Much of our time this year has again 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 published, we are now waiting for the Council to publish its responses to the last consultation.

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 took longer than we had originally anticipated.

This 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.

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND THE GREEN BELT

This time last year we were waiting for Woking Borough Council (WBC) to revise the Site Allocations Development Planning Document (SADPD) that was examined by the Planning Inspectorate at a Hearing in December 2019. Following the Hearing the Inspector wrote to say that he could not complete his report until additional material relating to progress so far on implementing the Woking Core Strategy had been incorporated into the SADPD and published for public consultation. In the meantime, in other areas where he had been able to reach a conclusion, he asked for changes to be made to parts of the SADPD. The change of most interest to us related to the land north of Hook Hill Lane designated GB9, which had been enlarged to include the area previously designated 20g. The Inspector believed the whole of the enlarged site should remain in the Green Belt.

Inevitably the long periods of lockdown imposed on all of us and the diversion of Council staff to other duties in response to the Covid-19 pandemic slowed the work on revising the SADPD. WBC duly published a paper setting out the proposed main modifications to the SADPD for public comment in September 2020. The consultation period ended on 14 December 2020.

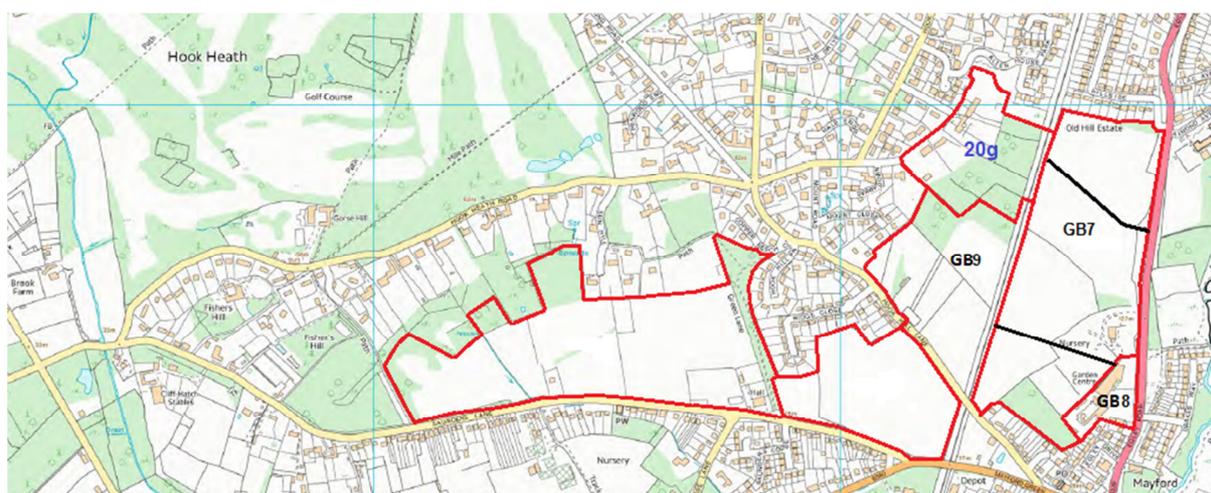


Figure 1. The Green Belt sites of interest in the vicinity of Hook Heath

The good news is that in the revised SADPD all reference to GB9 has been deleted from the section dealing with areas of land to be removed from the Green Belt for development. Since the two sites north of Saunders Lane previously under threat had been removed from

consideration at an earlier stage in the Green Belt Review, the whole of the Hook Heath Escarpment from Fishers Hill to Allen House Park will retain the protection of its Green Belt status. This is exactly the result that we had been striving to achieve for many years, and, in view of this result, the HHRA Committee decided against commenting any further on the revised SADPD.

Less good news was the revised proposal for the northern part of the Egley Road site GB7. The earlier submission had proposed removing the whole site from the Green Belt for development. The Hoe Valley School and sporting facilities now occupy the central part. The southern part was proposed for housing, while the northern part was designated for Green Infrastructure to maintain a visual break between Woking and Mayford. The Inspector declined to endorse the latter proposal. He argued that he should only rule on the proposal before him, which was to remove the whole of GB7 from the Green Belt. Once removed it would be up to WBC to develop the site as it wished.

In consequence the revised SADPD now states that a total of 118 housing units are to be built in GB7 on land north and south of the school and that *“the design, layout and landscaping of the residential development...will be required to take into account the desirability of maintaining a sense of visual separation between Mayford and the rest of the urban area. The extent to which this is achieved will be assessed through the development management process”*.

The WBC has yet to approve a final version of the SADPD for submission to the Planning Inspectorate. In the meantime a planning application was made for major redevelopment of land adjacent to Woking Football Club and, to facilitate this, a related application proposed moving the David Lloyd Club to the southern end of GB7. If these applications had been successful and the housing quota remained unchanged, the space available in the northern part of GB7 to maintain a visual separation between Mayford and Woking would have been extremely limited.

At a meeting of the WBC Planning Committee on 23 June 2020 both the applications were refused, but an appeal is pending. A Hearing is scheduled for 8 working days commencing on 5 May 2021.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM AND PLANNING APPLICATIONS

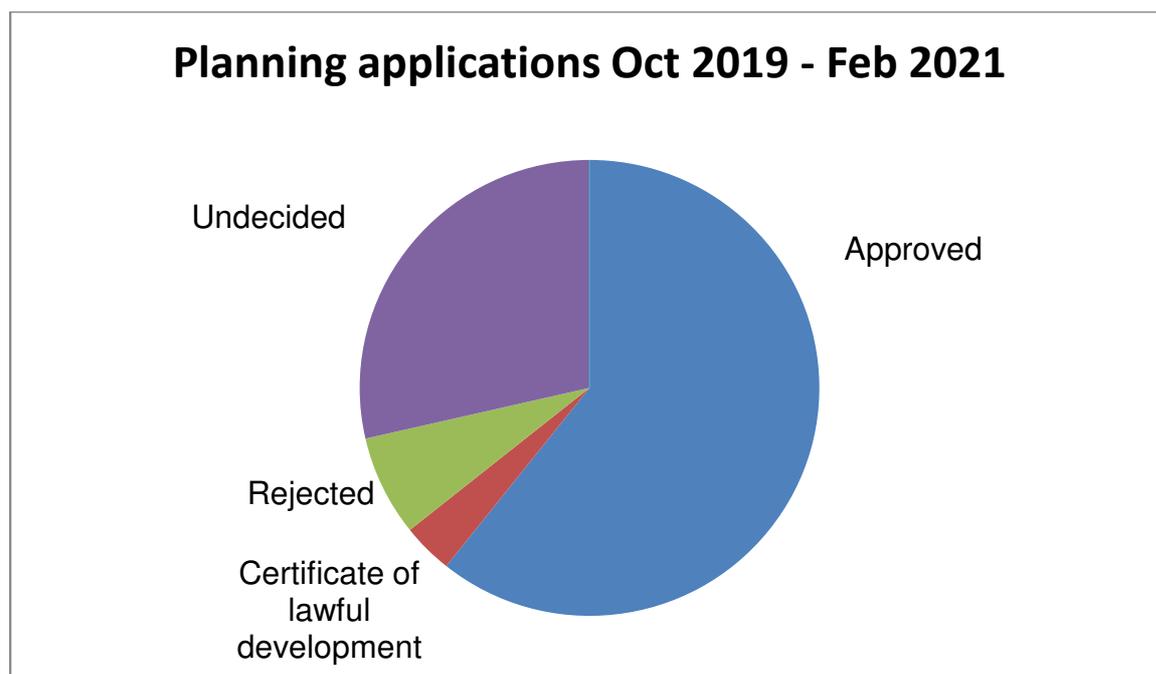
Six and a half years have elapsed since the Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by WBC, and the Forum and Residents' Association continue to examine all planning applications for compliance with the Plan and Woking Core Strategy. Most applications for extensions pass through the system with at most minor issues, but proposals to build new houses (sometimes after demolishing the original property) nearly always attract (usually but not always justified) objections from neighbours.

The Localism Act (2012) defines the rules for setting up a Neighbourhood Forum – one of these is that designation only lasts for five years. There is some logic to that as some Forums just fade away without ever producing a Neighbourhood Plan. The advantages of having the Forum designated are that it is then a statutory consultee for planning issues, and also that it can request changes to the Neighbourhood Plan.

After a three month delay due to the Council shutdown, we managed to have the Forum re-designated at the end of July. That puts us in a good position if we have to update the

Neighbourhood Plan – virtually inevitable if the Government goes through with its plans to shake up planning laws. This assumes of course that the Government does not scrap Neighbourhood Plans altogether.

Our last AGM was held at the beginning of October 2019 and between then and the end of February this year there were 56 planning applications. This is (unsurprisingly) fewer than in a normal year though numbers have already picked up again this year. Of the eleven applications that were outstanding at the 2019 AGM, one was withdrawn and all the others were eventually approved. This chart shows the status of those 56 applications as of the end of February.



Four applications were rejected:

- A new garage in Hook Heath Road because of green belt issues; a revised design was subsequently approved.
- An extension to a house in Hook Heath Road because of green belt issues; a revised design was subsequently approved.
- A non-material amendment to a design for an extension in Mile Path because the change was deemed to be material; a full planning application was subsequently approved.
- A new garage in Hook Heath Road because of its position in front of the house and proximity to the road.

It is worth pointing out that the size of an extension to a house in the green belt is normally limited to a maximum of 40% of the size of the original building. Even a strong supporter of the green belt would probably admit that this policy does not always seem sensible when dealing with houses in enormous plots.

Although numbers of applications have picked up, not all of the 16 pending applications are recent. Three of them have received a number of objections and are taking a while to work their way through the system.

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.

In the last 17 months we have seen some planning applications where the proposal did not comply with the development plan but which were approved (either by the Planning Committee or by the Inspector on appeal), essentially on the basis that they would not cause any planning harm; we had been warned that this could happen but in one case at least did not see it coming. Some people refuse to get involved with Neighbourhood Planning because they think any local Plan can just be overruled.

We have also seen a proposal for a modern style house in the Conservation Area approved. Again, we had been warned that conservation areas do not mean much anymore but this was the first evidence of that. The argument presented was that the property was not prominent in the street scene and the one it was replacing had no specific architectural significance.

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 can keep up to date with planning decisions via the quarterly Forum Update, which is published in the Neighbourhood Forum section of the HHRA website. For those who have recently moved into the area please note that membership of the Residents' Association costs £10/year and all members are automatically registered with the Neighbourhood Forum.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

Last year's Newsletter mentioned the amount of CIL received and earmarked for Hook Heath as at 29 February 2020 as £22,805. Since February last year the pot has grown by £4,939 to £27,744 as at 31 January 2021. The increase in the pot came from two developments: at South Hurstgate in Hook Heath Road and Cedar Views in Fernhill Lane.

Your Committee has committed to spend an estimated £15,000 of the CIL pot on the restoration of six existing benches 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, to renovate the various Hook Heath signs and the Association's Noticeboard. We had hoped that some of these works would have been completed by now but sadly Covid-19 has delayed progress. The £15,000 CIL expenditure was approved (by Woking Joint Committee) just in time for this Newsletter, and it is hoped that the work will be completed in the summer.

As reported above, we currently have £27,744 CIL to spend less of course the £15,000 already committed to the benches and handrail. There is hope for the receipt of more CIL during the current year. Although we cannot say specifically how much additional CIL we expect to receive during 2021, we hope to receive part of some £35,000 arising from the development at Bernisdale in Hook Heath Road. This means we have a problem! The problem is how to spend a large sum of money for the benefit of the Hook Heath community; or possibly for the benefit of nearby communities. Broadly, CIL money can only be spent on

the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of community infrastructure. The benches, safety handrail and other works mentioned above are typical examples. As things stand, the HHRA is contemplating spending some of the CIL pot on improvement of the public green spaces in Hook Heath. However, if residents have some novel ideas as to how CIL funds might be better spent, we would welcome your thoughts. One possibility is the improvement and/or maintenance of drainage culverts in Hook Heath. For example, the residents of Wych Hill Rise might benefit from the better maintenance of the culvert at the junction of Orchard Mains and Wych Hill Rise. For practical reasons, expenditure on cycle lanes and additional street furniture has been put to one side for the moment.

Not all residential developments produce CIL receipts, because of exemptions e.g. “self-build”. Although only two developments yielded CIL receipts in 2020, there were in fact seventeen Hook Heath planning applications permitted in 2020 (ignoring trees and minor development applications like the erection of a greenhouse at Woodbank). There is a trend for residents to continue to “invest” in their homes rather than move away from the Hook Heath area. This trend is in a way supported by the fact that only nine existing houses in Hook Heath changed hands in 2020 based on house sale completions in the calendar year. Who would not wish to stay put in Hook Heath!

With spring in the air, you may have seen the daffodils near the Noticeboard at the end of Holly Bank Road. The daffodil bulb planting, at a cost of £160, was funded not from CIL but from a Surrey County Council grant of £490 direct to the HHRA. So a big shout out and our thanks to Councillor Azad for encouraging the HHRA to apply for the grant! Unfortunately, the planting has not been a complete success. The higher level of pedestrian traffic during lockdown has led to unwitting trampling of the planted area. The balance of the grant (£330) will be spent on more planting and repair of the trampled area in due course.

WOODBANK

Woodbank Apartments in Holly Bank Road opened officially in October 2020, just one month late despite the coronavirus pandemic. According to Honor Barrett, the managing director of Birchgrove, the company that built and runs Woodbank, they now have 25% occupancy. However, only 20% of the residents own cars so at the moment there are no issues with parking. Of the 12 residents, most have come from the local area, but some who have come from further afield have family who already live in Hook Heath. All the staff and residents were vaccinated on January 8 and have now formed a close-knit community.

It is possible for Woodbank residents to do Pilates or Yoga every morning followed by an organised walk around Hook Heath. There is a strong bridge culture and the residents have decided that they would give talks once a month on places where they have lived, worked or holidayed. So far they have had talks on Hong Kong, Spain and Prague among others. They also have movie nights when they can watch a film together. The cedar greenhouse is ready and some of the residents are planting seeds in their apartments which will be planted out in the new greenhouse when they have a gardening weekend at Easter.

The Hook Heath Residents' Association would like to welcome the residents of Woodbank to Hook Heath and hope they will enjoy living here. The Association's website has lots of information about Hook Heath that might be of interest to new residents, and our Newsletter, which comes out every April, reviews the past year on the Heath. Residents wishing to join

the HHRA will find an application form on the back of this Newsletter. The website is www.hhra.co.uk

THE HOOK HEATH ENVIRONMENT

This last year saw 52 planning applications for trees listed under Tree Preservation Orders requesting the felling of 72 trees and reductions to 128 others. No doubt there were other tree surgeries outside of the formal process. Although many of these trees may have been of low quality it is worth bearing in mind that this is of no relevance to the sequestration of carbon and to the potential of the local environment to maintain biodiversity. There has been a noticeable drop in the number of applications in the first quarter of 2021 which we presume is due to the lockdown and the very wet weather conditions keeping many of us from our gardens. However, with spring approaching we urge residents not to rush into hasty new arrangements.

Felling of trees under a TPO normally requires replanting within the same growing season but not all replanting needs to be of large species. Smaller garden species and fruit trees are all helpful. Advice can be sort as to suitability of species from the Council's arboreal specialist at trees@woking.gov.uk. If in doubt, taking a look around at what already thrives in the immediate environment would be helpful. Heathland adapted varieties such as Scots pine, birch, oak and holly do well here. Laurel, although popular, is best avoided as the slight toxicity of its leaves discourages birds and nothing prospers within its close environs. If left unattended it can become invasive.

Crown reductions and branch removals from trees take insect life and countless micro-organisms out of the environment especially when older specimens are involved. We all love to see birds, bees and butterflies and other garden visitors but removing mature habitat is leading to a decline in populations of these animals and we need to consider the preservation of species lower in the ecosystem. We urge residents to think carefully about tree pruning and, where it is regarded as essential, to retain some of the wood removed to decay naturally in a neglected area of the garden. Leaving an undisturbed patch where weeds, nettles and grasses can 'do their thing' would be no bad idea either.

WEBSITE

Our website at www.hhra.co.uk has 40 pages, the most visited being: *The History of Hook Heath, Planning Applications, What's On* and *Allen House Park*. The *Planning Applications* page is updated weekly and holds historical data for the last 18 months or so.

The *What's On* page is about current events of interest. It has struggled somewhat with the ever-changing open/closed situation of events in the area. Fortunately, a number of residents have helped with ideas and events they know about which has been really helpful and obviously appreciated. So please keep this up!

SOCIAL MEDIA – A PERSONAL VIEW BY THE CHAIRMAN

So here's something different. Having mentioned the Hook Heath Residents' Facebook page last year, I started out writing an article with the thought that I could say something helpful about all types of social media for those who weren't using it daily and perhaps flag

up some of the possibilities. There is a degree of inevitability in the increasing need to use IT and looking at social media can be a good introduction. When I thought a bit further I realised there are so many social media internet applications that even a cursory review would take pages. Whatever you personally may think of them, social media play an increasingly large role in many people's lives and it can only increase. Definitions of social media vary but the key feature is that content is user-generated. I suspect that in Hook Heath there are a number of experts in this area, so if anyone would like to write an article for the HHRA website or Forum Update, that would probably be useful and interesting for some of our residents. In the meantime what follows is an inexpert personal partial overview.

I think the most well-known applications are probably Facebook, Tik Tok (if you're young), Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest and LinkedIn. Depending on interpretation there is a long list of others of which WhatsApp (which I use as a messaging app, more sophisticated than a text message) is the most common. The other, possibly less obvious, way of participating is via the comments pages on online newspapers. The top ten applications are all US or Chinese owned and about 4 billion people use at least one. Typically, people spend nearly 25% of their online time on a social media platform.

Of the older applications that are still in existence, **LinkedIn** is probably the best known. It's a business networking website where you can connect with colleagues and others that you come into contact with in a working environment. It's particularly useful for getting a job or finding someone to fill a vacancy. I know a number of people who have found a job through LinkedIn (not just junior ones) – essentially by posting a CV and then waiting for recruiters to get in touch. With its associated messaging system, it is also a good way of keeping in touch with (ex-)colleagues and following their careers.

Facebook has more users than anything else. People use it for different things; a lot of youngsters join because their friends have joined. My daughter used it to keep in touch with friends when working overseas and I joined so we could see her photos. However, times move on and we both only post occasionally now. Hook Heath Residents' Facebook page came along recently 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/>

You will need to be a Facebook member to join and see posts. There are currently over 520 members and numbers continue to increase 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 considering signing up. Residents' groups seem to be relatively free of advertising though lately there have been some members advertising their services. Recent posts have been photos of Hook Heath, complaints about dog mess, lost and found – often pets, and people seeking advice. Most villages have their own Facebook page now, and unlike some other local areas, Hook Heath posts have generally been relevant and non-political. If you have a hobby, there may well be a Facebook page which covers it. There are also school and university alumni groups.

Twitter has become notorious because of its use by President Trump to communicate directly with his followers. On a more mundane level, it can be used to get a different take on the news, the Archers, or simply learn more about celebrities' lives. Due to its immediate nature, you can also find out what other people are saying about a sports match, or even a television show as you watch it live. My guess is that if you haven't had a use for it so far then it's probably not a priority.

YouTube is a platform for posting videos; you don't need to join just to look at them. I've never felt a need to post anything but if you need to know how to do something there's a fair chance that someone has posted a video explaining it. It has been good for finding workouts during lockdown and there are plenty of lectures, documentaries and art videos too, beyond the obvious music – you can find almost any song you can think of there.

Pinterest is a platform for loading or finding images. If you're looking for inspiration for redecorating a room, this could be worth exploring.

Instagram is full of pictures and short videos. Lots of Tik Tok videos get reposted on Instagram or Twitter. Some people use software to manage their social media so that any Facebook post is copied across to Twitter and Instagram too. It can give you a view into the carefully curated lives of celebrities, be used to find jokes, inspirational quotes, or even new books and poetry.

My latest foray is to join **Nextdoor**. In concept it's a bit like an Area Facebook Group but the area covered is broader, though you can focus down just to Hook Heath; having said that there isn't much 'Hook Heath only' content. Good for finding out what's going on in a wider area though occasionally posts degenerate into slanging matches. Posts tend to lead to longer conversations than on Facebook. Recent activity has included questions about vaccination and missing cats. https://nextdoor.co.uk/neighborhood_feed/

Finally, whether you use social media or not, on-line fraud is a real issue. There are plenty of guides available. The following is a link to the Surrey Police fraud and cyber-crime webpage: <https://www.surrey.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/fa/fraud/online-fraud/>

My personal rule is never to buy anything via a social media website – but if you do then I suggest you see it first and pay cash on collection. And if it sounds too good to be true then it probably is.

MEMBERSHIP

You will see from the Summary of Accounts (see facing page) that we finished 2020 with a surplus of a little over £2700. This was a welcome change from many recent years when we have posted substantial deficits in our accounts, resulting from the need for professional advice in responding to successive stages in the development of the Woking Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

Membership of the Hook Heath Residents' Association (HHRA) is open to all residents of Hook Heath. Residents who join the HHRA will automatically become members of the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Forum (HHNF). Annual membership costs just £10 per annum per household. 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 HHRA or the HHNF. We will never pass personal information to a third party without your permission.

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2020

<u>Income and Expenditure</u>	2020	2019
Income:		
Subs and Donations	£650.00	£895.00
Cheques and Cash		
Direct Transfer	£2,030.00	£1,870.10
Cash donation	£5.00	£1.13
Interest on Reserve Account	£68.52	£228.35
Surrey CC Grant ⁽¹⁾	£490.00	£0.00
Total Income:	<u>£3,243.52</u>	<u>£2,994.58</u>
Expenditure:		
CPRE Subscription	£36.00	£36.00
Open Spaces Society	£45.00	£45.00
Photocopying and printing	£235.00	£182.00
AGM costs	£0.00	£105.00
Website renewal fee	£49.01	£42.75
Consultancy ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£3,906.00
Sign repairs	£0.00	£0.00
Funeral wreath	£0.00	£50.00
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	£160.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure:	<u>£525.01</u>	<u>£4,366.75</u>
Income less expenditure	£2,718.51	-£1,372.17
Fund balance at 01/01/2020	£41,044.07	£42,416.24
Fund balance at 31/12/2020	<u>£43,762.58</u>	<u>£41,044.07</u>
<u>Balance Sheet (at 31 December 2020)</u>		
Net current balance	£13,144.69	£14,400.70
Reserve account balance	£30,617.89	£30,549.07
Net gross assets at 31 December	£43,762.58	£44,950.07
Creditors ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£3,906.00
Debtors	£0.00	£0.00
Net Assets at 31 December	<u>£43,762.58</u>	<u>£41,044.07</u>

Notes to Summary of Accounts 2020

Note 1 SCC Grant of £490 is for the purpose of improving the appearance of open spaces in Hook Heath. £160 was spent in 2020. The remaining £330 is ring-fenced for further planting in spring 2021.

Note 2 Consultancy costs relating to the HHRA response to the Woking Site Allocations DPD in late 2019 were not invoiced until February 2020. These amounted to £3,906, and were charged in the 2019 accounts.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 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 2021 to March 2022 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.....