HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2022 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2021

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2022 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I hope that you are well and have avoided the worst of the virus. It's been a difficult year for many and while it looks as if things are returning to normal, I expect there are a lot of people who are still worried about catching Covid-19. As I write this the rates are moving in the wrong direction, but the Government seem unconcerned about the level of hospitalisations.

Because of Government restrictions the Committee were unable to hold meetings in person in the first part of 2021 when virus levels were low. We did however have the benefit of Committee meetings in person in October and in December, although virus levels were rising at that point. We also held an AGM and thanks are due to the people who came to the meeting – especially as the weather was terrible. At the AGM we welcomed Bronwen Diemont onto the Committee, which is now up to eight members.

The HHRA Committee held eight meetings in 2021. We have continued to avoid using HHRA funds to pay for a subscription by limiting ourselves to (multiple) 40-minute sessions on Zoom. We plan to continue to use Zoom until virus levels are lower and we feel confident about meeting in person again.

Much of our time this year has again been devoted to considering local planning applications, the Council's future plans for the Green Belt having been settled. The decision by the Inspector to keep the Green Belt boundary in Hook Heath unchanged means that there will be no building on the land north of Saunders Lane, or between Allen House Park and Hook Hill Lane, before 2040 – unless of course the Government changes the rules. There is no news about proposed changes to the planning regulations, probably because there is no political agreement as to what should be done.

The other significant issue during 2021 has been getting the new benches installed using money from the Community Infrastructure

Levy. Covid and Brexit meant that making progress in this area took longer than we had originally anticipated but the bench programme has now been completed. There have been a couple of comments (mostly positive) about the red colour but that wasn't our decision. Another success was obtaining some funds to plant daffodil bulbs on the grass triangles by Woodbank.

We have also spent some time looking into issues with trees and the enforcement of tree planting conditions. In addition, we have engaged with the Council in a discussion on where to plant more trees as the Council was given $\pounds 10,000$ by the owners of Woodbank. It's more difficult than you might think as many of the obvious places are ruled out by underground cables.

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

Chairman: Dr. Mike Cooke Tel: 01483 727832 Vice Chairman: Vacant Treasurer: Dr. David Dare Tel: 01483 764942 Secretary: Heather Mustard COMMITTEE MEMBERS Judith Oakley Ron Brandman Gerald Griffiths Frances Griffiths Bronwen Diemont WEBMASTER Dr. Neil Cryer 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.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Seven 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. Though we write letters of objection to support members of the HHRA, or when we believe applications do not comply with local policies, in most cases a decision is made by a planning officer in accordance with the policies. There are relatively few instances where local opinion can have a significant impact. This can happen when the Planning Committee decides to ignore the recommendations of the planning officer though this only works where the decision is finely balanced; and if the policies have been correctly written there will be few of those.

An example is the erection of more tower blocks in the centre of Woking. The planning officer recommended approval but the Planning Committee turned the application down. This was overturned on appeal as the development was allowed by the policies in the Woking Core Strategy. Essentially the Council were powerless to prevent the development and probably hadn't foreseen that they would want to when the Core Strategy was written ten years ago, (possibly because the officers and Council members had changed considerably in the intervening years).



Having missed out on 2020 we held an AGM in October 2021 and presented the following information on planning applications submitted in the previous two years.

Each of the six rejected applications had some aspect that the planning officer decided did not comply with the Core Strategy. Typical issues have been

- 1. Large extensions in the Green Belt. Woking Council have a rule that an extension that results in the house being more than 40% larger than its original size is very unlikely to be approved. In theory they can be allowed with very special circumstances but there have been no such cases successfully argued in Hook Heath recently. This rule has been applied irrespective of the extent to which the property is visible from the public domain, a principle that presumably has been established by appeals.
- 2. A garage directly in front of the main house and close to the road. This is unlikely to be approved. If it is offset and some distance from the road the chances are better.
- 3. Conversion of an outbuilding to separate freestanding accommodation. Any proposal that looks as if it can be interpreted in this way will be treated as an application for a new dwelling.

These three reasons have cropped up before and architects should be aware of the Council's policies in these cases.

This year has also seen the refusal of an application to replace a hedge with a wall or fence, and rejection of an application for a mobile phone mast. The former was an unusual one. Normally you can erect a wall or fence up to 1m in height without planning permission, but not if permitted development rights for the property have been removed; which often happens in the case of large houses or large extensions.

Applications for phone masts crop up all the time as the phone companies try to improve their coverage and add 5G. This can be a challenge as 5G equipment is heavier making sharing a monopole impossible. Applications seem to be outsourced so it's not the network provider themselves who submit the documents. The only aspects of a proposal that the Council are allowed to consider are siting and appearance. We've taken a look at a number of proposals and it looks as if some are destined to fail. In the Hook Heath case you might think that an application to build on a local green space, directly in contravention of the Neighbourhood Plan, was not the best idea. Couple this with a failure to submit all the necessary information with the application and not supplying it when requested, then it's no surprise that the proposal was refused. It also looks as if a part of the application was a 'cut and paste' job as the letter to SCC asked them to comment to Wirral Council.

In the second half of 2021 there were four more applications for monopoles elsewhere in Woking of which two were approved. In the case of those not approved, in one case the applicant failed to supply the requested information, and in the other the applicant had apparently failed to consider a different more suitable site. There was also an application for a 20m lattice tower in Sheerwater which was rejected.

There have been a further 24 planning applications in Hook Heath since the AGM. Most are for minor (or in one case major) extensions. However, two others are worthy of note. One is a proposal to divide the Haere Mai plot in two and build a second house. Haere Mai is at the junction of Mile Path and Holly Bank Road. The other is to replace the buildings at Hook Hill Farm by two new houses; this has been refused. Reasons include the design of house 2,

the layout of the plots and the absence of a bat survey. The application was complicated by the absence of planning permission for the current house 2 as separate accommodation, and also by the Green Belt boundary which runs through the plot.

We are always happy to talk to residents about any planning issue they may have. We aren't experts but we have followed all the planning applications submitted since the Neighbourhood Plan was made so we have a fair idea of what is acceptable.

Those of you interested in planning and developments in Hook Heath can keep up to date with planning decisions in the quarterly Update from the Neighbourhood Forum. This is emailed to all members of the Residents' Association and can also be accessed on the HHRA website.

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND THE GREEN BELT

The Current Position

The latest chapter in the long running battle to save the Hook Heath Escarpment from development has closed with the publication by Woking Borough Council in 2021 of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD). The sites north of Saunders Lane and north of Hook Hill Lane that were of greatest concern to us are now excluded from the list of allocated development sites and will remain within the Green Belt. During the time that the SADPD has been in preparation a secondary school and a leisure centre had been built on the central portion of the land between Egley Road and the railway line. It was therefore unsurprising that the Planning Inspector agreed with the WBC recommendation to remove the entire site from the Green Belt and to build housing on both the north and south ends of the site. He did, however, include in his report a recommendation that planners should make endeavours to maintain a visual gap between Mayford and Woking. A building consortium has already proposed a mixed development of housing and a care home for the northern end of the site.



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

Planning History

In the post second world war period the government recognized the need to repair and replace damaged housing stock in London, and determined to "build back better". In practice this meant acquiring more land for development where the new housing would be at

lower density than had been common in much of the capital and in areas where air pollution would be less of a threat to health. The plan was to build a series of new towns away from London rather than allow existing London suburbs to continue to expand outwards. To achieve this, the Metropolitan Green Belt would be extended to enlarge the "no major development" zone, and would include undeveloped land in the Woking area.

In 1958 Martin Grant Homes Ltd. applied for planning to build on land that it owned north of Saunders Lane. Surrey County Council must have expected the application to be successful because it published a proposal to build a new primary school on a council-owned site in Hook Heath to meet the anticipated demand from the new housing estates. Residents of Mayford and Hook Heath were not in favour, and submitted objections that eventually led to an inquiry at which the application was approved. Fortunately, among local residents were a number of lawyers and planning experts who spotted flaws in some of the evidence presented at the inquiry. They had the expertise to take the matter to the High Court where they were successful. By this time several years had passed, and the Metropolitan Green Belt had been extended to include the open land north of Saunders Lane and north of Hook Hill Lane to protect them from development.

At the eastern end of Hook Heath Road many of the large houses along the ridge line had magnificent large gardens running down the escarpment. Unfortunately, their curtilages were not included in the newly designated Green Belt; so much of the escarpment between Fernhill Lane and Hook Hill Lane was vulnerable to development. Some re-development was inevitable because the staff needed to maintain such large houses and gardens had become both scarce and expensive. One by one all the houses between Fernhill Lane and Hook Hill Lane were either demolished or, more often, sub-divided. Mini estates were built in the gardens that extended down the escarpment, some as far as the railway line. In most cases staff cottages were retained as independent dwellings.

In 1983, perhaps encouraged by the steady expansion of housing on the escarpment, Martin Grant Homes Ltd again applied for planning permission to build on the Saunders Lane sites, but was again unsuccessful. Serious opposition to building on what remained of the eastern end of the escarpment began when Allen House School closed and the land was sold to McAlpine for development. The Allen House Action Group (forerunner to the HHRA) was formed by local residents in an attempt to amend the developer's plans to reduce the impact on the Hook Heath street scene of a proposed "barrack block", to preserve some of the woodland, and to keep the steepest part of the escarpment open.

The latest phase of the battle began in 2012 when Woking Borough Council, struggling to meet a housing target imposed by central government, concluded that some land would have to be removed from the Green Belt. At the Public Examination of the Woking Core Strategy the Inspector agreed that additional land was needed to meet the housing target and directed WBC to conduct a review of the Woking Green Belt to identify the sites most suitable for development. From this point on progress towards the adoption of the Woking Site Allocations Development Plan Document has been reported in successive HHRA Newsletters and Annual General Meetings, and will not be repeated in detail here. There are, however, some interesting parallels with the earlier campaigns to save the Green Belt in the Hook Heath area. For instance:

a) Surrey County Council published a proposal to build a new primary school on part of a site that it owned at Hale End in Hook Heath at about the same time as the 1958 application by Martin Grant Homes Ltd to build housing north of Saunders Lane was under

consideration. The justification for the school was that it would be needed to serve the educational needs arising from the new housing estates planned for the area. A key feature of the most recent review of the Green Belt was a proposal for a secondary school linked to a sports/leisure complex on Green Belt land in Mayford between Egley Road and the railway track. While sports facilities are a permitted development within the Green Belt, a school is not except in very special circumstances. It cannot have escaped the notice of those tasked with reviewing the Green Belt that the proposed Egley Road development would considerably enhance the suitability of nearby escarpment land for housing.

b) The Green Belt Review was fundamentally flawed because it did not cover all areas of the Green Belt within the Borough, but only a pre-selected list of sites favoured by WBC planners. Some sites had to be selected even though they were of low suitability for development. HHRA was fortunate to obtain the services of a senior planning consultant who provided us with a comprehensive critique of serious flaws in the Green Belt Review and the evidence underpinning the WBC draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document. Along with many other organizations and individuals HHRA submitted objections to the draft SADPD at the public consultation phase, where they were ignored, and again to the Planning Inspector at the public examination. The Inspector ruled that the draft SADPD was unsound because of the flawed nature of the evidence on which it was based. The Site Allocation process had to be repeated, causing a delay during which other solutions were explored.

Councillors came up with two alternative plans. The first was to develop land east of Martyrs Lane on the north side of Woking to relieve the pressure to build on other sites in the Green Belt. A long period of analysis produced a proposal that caused an even greater volume of protest, and was anyway doomed when two major land owners in the area refused to co-operate. The delay, however, allowed time for the second alternative to prove its viability. That was to build upward in the town centre. Opinions may vary, but evidence of progress was there by then for everyone to see.

As a result, a revised version of the SADPD included fewer Green Belt sites. In our area the two sites north of Saunders Lane were dropped from consideration. They have not been reinstated despite intensive lobbying by the building industry. Thus, as with the 1958 application, the submission of flawed evidence in support of an application resulted in delay, during which circumstances changed to the disadvantage of the applicant.

c) Once the Saunders Lane sites were removed from consideration, the only reason put forward by WBC for removing the Hook Hill Lane sites from the GB (that they would become an isolated pocket of GB) was no longer valid, and there was nothing in the draft SADPD to say what was planned except that part of the site was to be designated Green Infrastructure. With the help of our planning consultant HHRA argued that the land would be better protected, and the proposed use of the land for Green Infrastructure could equally well be implemented, if it stayed in the Green Belt. Our submission was clearly noted because, prior to the Public Examination, the appointed Inspector challenged WBC to provide more detail on what was actually planned. After a series of exchanges it eventually transpired that the plan was to offer the entire site for general development after the site had been removed from the Green Belt under the guise of designating it for Green Infrastructure. The Inspector was not impressed, and ruled that the land north of Saunders Lane should remain in the Green Belt. Again, an example of the perils of submitting flawed or misleading evidence!

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

As at 31st January 2021, the amount of CIL received and earmarked for Hook Heath amounted to £27,744. Since that date the pot has grown by £25,488 to £53,232 as at 31st

December 2021. The increase in the pot came from two developments; at South Hurstgate (third tranche) and Bernisdale in Hook Heath Road.

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, your Committee was committed to spend an estimated £15,000 of the CIL pot on the restoration and installation of benches around Hook Heath and the installation of a safety handrail on the steep slope from the railway bridge to St John's Lye. The bench installation and renovation work has finally been completed and the installation of the handrail partly completed; but not quite in the right place! The handrail will need to be extended if it is to achieve its purpose.

As said above, we currently have £53,232 CIL to spend, less of course the money already spent on the benches and handrail. There is hope for the receipt of at least £3,195 more CIL during the current year bringing the net potential CIL available to £41,427. As things stand, the HHRA is contemplating spending some of the CIL pot on improvement of the public green spaces in Hook Heath and improvement of the rutted path to St John's Lye by the golf course to facilitate push-chair/ wheel chair access. There are technical difficulties to overcome with both ideas, but we remain hopeful that we will achieve our ambitions. If residents have some novel ideas as to how CIL funds might be spent, we would welcome your thoughts. For practical reasons, expenditure on footpaths 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. "selfbuild". Although only two developments yielded CIL receipts in 2021, there were in fact more than forty Hook Heath planning applications permitted in 2021 (ignoring tree and minor development applications). The number of applications suggests a trend for residents to continue to "invest" in their homes rather than move away from the Hook Heath area. On the other hand, approximately thirty existing houses in the Hook Heath area changed hands based on sale completions in the calendar year 2021. This is a significant increase in the number of "Covid restricted" house sales in 2020 when there were just nine sales.

TREE PLANTING IN HOOK HEATH

When planning permission was granted for the Woodbank Residential Home, the developer, Birchgrove, gave £10,000 to be spent on planting mature trees in Hook Heath to compensate for tree loss at Woodbank. In 2021 a HHRA Committee member walked Hook Heath with Woking Borough Council's arboriculturalist, James Veats, and his colleague to identify suitable places to plant new trees. They also discussed possible unusual species.

HHRA had hoped to plant a tree on each side of Holly Bank Road outside Woodbank and another by the seat at the junction with Mile Path. Unfortunately investigations by Serco showed that not to be possible because of all the underground services, as is also the case in Hook Heath Road.

Early in 2022 HHRA heard from James Veats that some planting was about to begin, just at the end of the planting season. Trees have now been planted on council-owned land in Hook Heath Avenue. They are: 1 x Acer Freemanii Autumn Blaze, 1 x Betula utilis Jermyns, 1 x Liquid Amber St. Worplesdon, and 2 x Gringko Biloba. Also, at the junction of Wych Hill and Orchard Mains 1 x Prunus Avium Plena has been planted. The Council team will be looking for additional locations in readiness for next year's planting season.

It will be really refreshing to see new trees on Hook Heath and to watch them growing. We need as many trees as possible to preserve the Arcadian nature of Hook Heath, which is one of the reasons people give for wanting to live here.

A few residents have lost trees in the recent storm Eunice. They have mostly been very old pine trees that were part of the original heathland. Unfortunately, we continue to see a steady stream of applications for tree felling, crown reductions and limb removal. Reasons are not always clear but they are usually where tree branches are close to buildings or overhanging roads and pathways. The thinning of our immediate sylvan landscape is becoming ever more noticeable with not only a reduction in wildlife habitat but also erosion of the aesthetic value of our neighbourhood. Seemingly our convenience is more valued than a green environment that is, bit by bit, becoming marginalized. Trees that place unwelcome shadow over our homes and gardens today will become increasingly welcome in years to come in providing cooling shade and help to drink up excess rainfall. Tree surgery decisions should not be taken lightly as the process mars the natural beauty of a tree's outline, but more palpably upsets the natural balance of its lifecycle, making it more vulnerable to disease. Trees with an artificially reduced capacity to grow leaves have to work harder to sustain the same root and trunk structure with the ultimate effect of a reduced lifespan. Where tree surgery is considered essential, please add planting without delay whether this is with replacement trees or just to thicken existing hedges. You can find valuable advice on smaller trees and shrubs that will benefit wildlife on websites of organisations such as the RSPB and the Woodland Trust.

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP

The first Hook Heath Community Clean-up, organised by WBC, took place last September. The event was well supported by local residents happy to volunteer their time to walk along the many paths and roads of Hook Heath, collecting litter as they went. Litter picking devices, high vis jackets and black waste bags were provided by WBC, and by the end of the morning the waste bags were filled with rubbish and stacked high ready for collection by Serco.

A second Hook Heath Community Clean-up is now planned for Saturday 23 April. If you are interested in taking part and would like more information, further details about the event can be found on the HHRA website and the Hook Heath Facebook site.

IT MATTERS – A VIEW BY THE CHAIRMAN

Both the Hook Heath Facebook page and Nextdoor continue to be used extensively. There seems to be little overlap of posts; perhaps the disadvantage of the Facebook page is that you have to join Facebook as well... but you don't need to read the main feed if you don't want to. Nextdoor has adverts (I seem to get a lot of Verisure) but the Facebook page is advert free – except for local people who are also members.

Having written about social media last year I thought it worth saying a few things about fraud and internet scams. This is estimated to account for 40% of all crime in the UK, has a very low clear up rate and rarely hits the headlines. You tend to think it won't happen to you but one of my friends was caught out when she was sent a WhatsApp claiming (falsely) that her

son was in difficulties and needed £2,000. A combination of circumstances meant that she fell for it and though her bank eventually refunded the money it was an unpleasant incident.

This is a well-known, increasingly common trick. Over two thirds of IT frauds are impersonation scams with fraudsters most commonly pretending to be from banks, household brands (e.g. Amazon and PayPal), the NHS and government departments. Phone, text and email were the preferred methods used by scammers to con victims.

There are many different variations but the main ones and the best responses are:

- Amazon prime account problems: don't respond to any cold call from Amazon but log into your account or phone them directly using the number on the web-site.
- National Crime Agency/HMRC: the NCA does not contact members of the public directly and HMRC will usually write. Again contact HMRC directly.
- DPD/UPS/Royal Mail 'you've missed a delivery' texts: don't click on links.
- NHS/Covid payment requests: ignore I see someone on Nextdoor got caught out recently.
- On-line ads, particularly those embedded in social media: many are genuine but some are not remember that if it looks too good to be true then it probably is.

The important thing is not to panic and react quickly; if you're not sure then talk it over with someone who isn't emotionally involved and then get in touch with the organisation directly.

WEBSITE MATTERS

The HHRA website continues to be popular among Hook Heath Residents.

The page about the general history of Hook Heath is the most accessed of the 30 pages, followed by the pages on planning applications and named houses. This said, visitors to the website clearly spend considerable time browsing around the other pages.

If you ever wonder what to do to fill your spare time, then try the page on 'Events and activities' for ideas. It deserves attention.

Contributions are always welcome. Send to webmaster@hhra.co.uk

MEMBERSHIP

The number of residents renewing their membership or joining the Association in 2021 showed a welcome increase over the level achieved in the last few years. There were no new threats of major development in or near Hook Heath last year to cause the Association to employ professional help in combatting them. As a result the accounts for 2021 (see page 10) show a surplus of income over expenditure of over £1,800.

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2021

Income and Expenditure	2021	2020
Income:		
Subscriptions Cheques and Cash	£590.00	£650.00
Bank Transfer	£2,180.00	£2,030.00
Donations	£45.00	£5.00
Interest on Reserve Account	£11.71	£68.52
Surrey CC Grant ⁽¹⁾	£0.00	£490.00
Total Income	£2,826.71	£3,243.52
Expenditure:		
CPRE Subscription	£36.00	£36.00
Open Spaces Society	£45.00	£45.00
Photocopying and printing	£270.20	£235.00
AGM costs	£100.00	£0.00
Website renewal fee	£55.01	£49.01
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	£465.00	£160.00
Total Expenditure:	<u>£971.21</u>	<u>£525.01</u>
Income less expediture	£1,855.50	£2,718.51
Fund balance at 1 January	£43,762.58	£41,044.07
Fund balance at 31 December	<u>£45,618.08</u>	<u>£43,762.58</u>
Balance Sheet (at 31 December)		
Net current account balance	£5,113.48	£13,144.69
Reserve account balance	£40,629.60	£30,617.89
Net gross assets at 31 December	£45,743.08	£43,762.58
Creditors ⁽²⁾	£125.00	£0.00
Debtors	£0.00	£0.00
Net Assets at 31 December	<u>£45,618.08</u>	<u>£43,762.58</u>

Notes to Summary of Accounts

- **Note 1** SCC gave a grant of £490 for improving the appearance of open spaces in Hook Heath. £160 was spent on planting bulbs in 2020, and the remaining £330 was put towards the cost (£465) of further planting in spring 2021.
- Note 2 On 31/12/2021 an Association member requested repayment of £125 that had been inadvertently paid to the HHRA. Repayment was made on 4/1/2022 and is shown as a creditor in the 2021 accounts. A repayment of £10 was also made to a member who had mistakenly paid his subscription twice.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 are now due.

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 membership renewal 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.

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: <u>treasurer@hhra.co.uk</u>)		
	(a)	I/We wish to renew my/our membership of / join the HHRA for the period April 2022 to March 2023 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	
Signatu	ıre	Tel No	
E-mail /	Address		