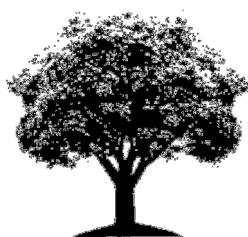


HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2023 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2022

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2023 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the annual Newsletter. The HHRA committee has been thinking about communication recently; although this Newsletter is delivered free of charge (and without advertising) to every household in Hook Heath, we know that not everyone reads it. For the benefit of those who prefer their information to be digital, we will put a link on the Facebook page. The use of Facebook seems to have settled down with over a third of residents now members.

With allocations for housing settled, this Newsletter is shorter than in previous years with nothing to report on the green belt.

Committee meetings have continued as normal with seven meetings in 2022 in addition to the AGM. We have a new member of the Committee, Daniella Lighting, who is the administrator of the Facebook page on Hook Heath.

Our time this year has mostly been split between considering local planning applications and Community Infrastructure Levy issues. There have been about the usual number of planning applications, with most being approved.

After an earlier false start, the government has made a proposal on changes to planning regulations by issuing a new draft version of the National Planning Policy Framework. The consultation on this ended early in March. If the changes are implemented, in theory it will reduce the number of housing sites in those areas with green belts; whether house builders will move their activities to other areas remains to be seen. At present the failure to build more houses is apparently being caused by lack of purchasers rather than lack of sites and some larger developers are reducing their build rates accordingly.

The other significant issue during 2022 has been the completion of our first CIL project. We have seven new benches, a new noticeboard, and four restored Hook Heath signs, all funded entirely by the Community Infrastructure Levy.

In addition, following a bid by Cllr Ayesha Azad, HHRA received £1,500 from the SCC Members' Community Allocation, and daffodils, crocuses and snowdrops have been planted in various green spaces, predominantly near the new noticeboard and outside the Woodbank Apartments.

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS
<i>Chairman:</i> Dr. Mike Cooke Tel: 01483 727832
<i>Vice Chairman:</i> Vacant
<i>Treasurer:</i> Dr. David Dare Tel: 01483 764942
<i>Secretary:</i> Heather Mustard Tel: 01483 729052
COMMITTEE MEMBERS
Judith Oakley
Ron Brandman
Gerald Griffiths
Frances Griffiths
Bronwen van Strien
Daniella Lighting
WEBMASTER
Dr. Neil Cryer

These and other matters of interest to members are described in this Newsletter. While some issues crop up again and again, and are kept under continuous review, we rely on residents to bring to our attention new local issues that they want us to consider.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Eight 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, this year has seen fewer applications where we have intervened.

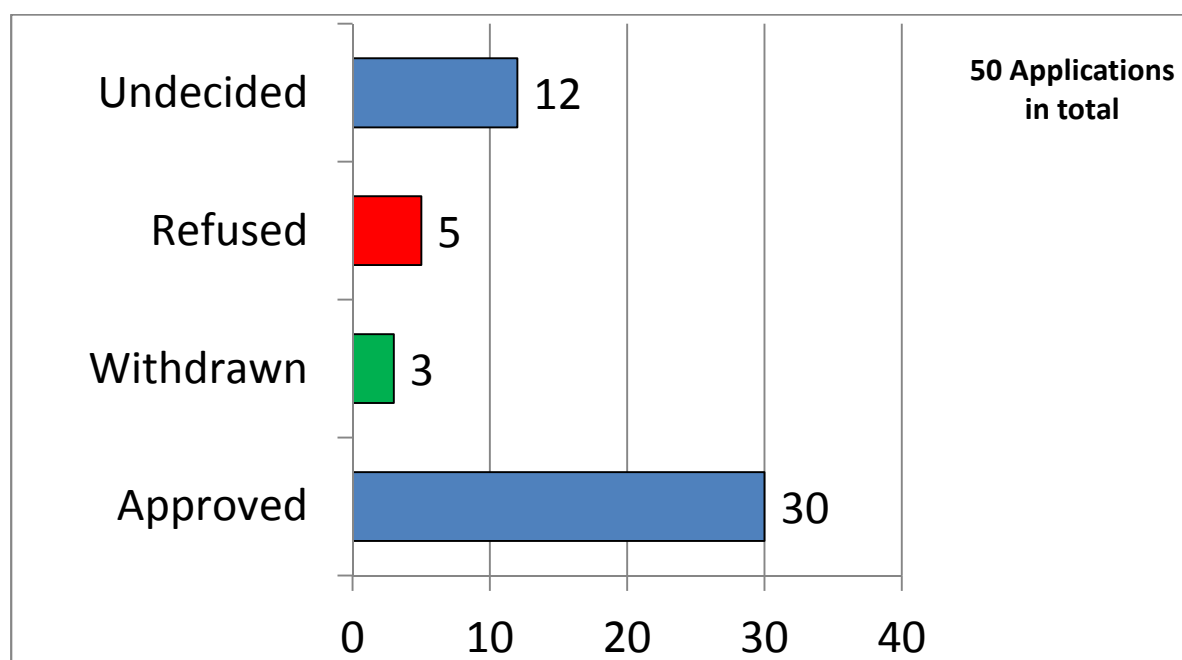
You may have read in the paper that the government proposes to make changes to the planning regulations. As noted in the introduction, they are going to do this by making changes to the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) and issued a proposal for consultation. A summary of the proposed changes can be found on the FREETHS website here:

<https://www.freeths.co.uk/2023/01/05/planning-freethinking-january-2023-nppf-revisions-consultation/>

A fuller review of the NPPF was also announced which is likely to take place following the announcement of the government's proposals for wider changes to the planning system, including the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill.

In principle, the current proposals benefit Woking, as councils will no longer have to remove land from the green belt to hit housing targets. However, as with all high-level changes, we will not understand the actual impact until councils (and developers) start to work with them.

At the AGM the following summary of planning applications for the previous year was presented:



Each of the rejected applications had some aspect that the planning officer decided did not comply with the Core Strategy. The issues included:

1. A proposal for full planning permission that was not consistent with the proposal for outline planning permission granted earlier. (The position of the new houses had been changed.)
2. A proposal for a side extension in the Conservation Area using a Certificate of Proposed Lawful Development which did not comply with the rules.
3. A (retrospective) proposal for storage containers in the green belt that was refused on the basis that they were unacceptable development.

All of these could have been foreseen.

There have been a further 22 planning applications in Hook Heath since the AGM. Most are for relatively minor extensions. However, four are worthy of note, with three having been decided. There are also two earlier applications that are instructive.

The first was a proposal to build a five-car garage at Haere Mai which is at the junction of Mile Path and Holly Bank Road. This was submitted as a Certificate of Proposed Lawful Development and was rejected by the planning officer as being too large while lacking any explanation as to why such a large building was required. A proposal for a three-car garage has subsequently been submitted.

The second was to build a second house on the Hook Hill Farm plot in Hook Hill Lane. This was rejected as the proposed house had a wall on the green belt boundary and WBC policies require a smooth transition between the urban and rural landscapes. The design and positioning of the house was also considered unacceptable.

The third was an application for landscaping at Little Dene, Mount Road and for a garden room in a different position to that originally proposed (currently undecided). This was unusual as it was a retrospective application in response to an enforcement notice.

The most significant recent application has been to knock down Quevrue (junction of Holly Bank Road and Hook Heath Road) and replace it with a block of seven flats. This proposal attracted over 50 objections, more than for any application since the Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by WBC. It was discussed by the Planning Committee on the 21st March. Our previous councillor, Simon Ashall, spoke against the application but despite the efforts of the two Conservative councillors on the committee to get the application rejected, the proposal was approved (subject to any bat roosting compensation or mitigation measures). No-one other than the two Conservatives voted against it. A disappointing outcome as there is no reason why planning decisions should necessarily go along party lines. This was after the committee had voted to approve the large development on Egley Road.

An extension to a house in Hook Heath was approved when the applicant demonstrated that although the proposed extension was outside the normal range for changes in the green belt, the fallback position of using permitted development rights would result in a larger and less pleasing result. Perhaps a triumph for common sense.

Finally, there was a retrospective application from Mounts Ryde in Golf Club Road for a fence and entrance gates which has been rejected because of possible damage to trees covered by a TPO. Because any damage has already been done, there will be no enforcement action from the Council for removal. However, they have been built on land that the Golf Club claim is theirs, so it is now up to the Golf Club to decide if they wish to take action.

Planning has been a contentious issue elsewhere in the borough, and not just in the centre. Recently St. Johns has been the target, with planning applications for 3-storey blocks of flats at each end of the village.

Applications for phone masts continue to crop up all the time as the phone companies try to improve their coverage and add 5G. The only aspects of a proposal that the Council are allowed to consider are siting and appearance. Of the ten proposals made in the last year only one was approved. It may be that applications are being made for unsuitable sites with better sites available but not chosen (presumably because of cost). It may be that the applications themselves are of poor quality. It may be that the Council are rejecting proposals wrongly (but this is very unlikely, not least because there have not been any appeals). Whatever the reason, nine failed applications represent a significant cost (paid for by phone users), and also a delay to rolling out 5G. However, the latest application for a mast in Clifton Way is for a position recommended by the Council in a previous rejection so perhaps there is progress.

Committee members are always happy to talk to residents about any planning issue they may have. We are not 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. To request a copy please ensure the Treasurer has your email address.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

As at 31st December 2021, the amount of CIL received and earmarked for Hook Heath stood at £53,232. Since that date the pot has reduced by £9,089 to £44,143 as at 31st December 2022. The decrease in the pot came about from a net CIL receipt of £5,911 (from the "Little Ponds" development) offset by CIL of £15,000 spent and expected to be spent on projects.

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, your Committee was committed to spend some 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 been completed. The installation of the handrail has also been completed, but not quite in the right place. It proved impossible to erect a handrail where it was needed because of the need to keep spaces free for turning vehicles. CIL has also been spent on the new HHRA noticeboard and on refurbishment of the four "Hook Heath" signs.

As stated above, we have £44,143 CIL to spend as at 31st December 2022. There is hope for the receipt of £26,962 more CIL during the current year (from developments at Firlands

and Derrydown) bringing the net potential CIL available to £71,105. The next steps regarding the use of available CIL include improvement of walking routes in Hook Heath, investigating the possibility of a pedestrian crossing on Hook Heath Avenue/Wych Hill and installation of publicly accessible defibrillators. The priority is the remediation of paths near and across the Golf Club as some of the rights of way are impassable when it is wet. Cllr Azad has put the HHRA in touch with the relevant individuals at SCC who are responsible for such matters so that progress may be made. Gorse Hill, Woking Golf Club, the Tennis Club and Woodbank Apartments are prepared to consider having a defibrillator installed for public use.

Lastly, not all residential developments produce CIL receipts, because of exemptions, e.g. self-build. Although only one development yielded CIL receipts in 2022, there were in fact more than twenty-seven Hook Heath planning applications permitted in the calendar year (ignoring tree and minor development applications). The number of applications suggests that residents continue to invest in their homes rather than move away from the Hook Heath area. Based on reported sale completions, only five existing houses in the Hook Heath area changed hands in 2022.

TREES IN HOOK HEATH

As we reported last year, Birchgrove, the developer of Woodbank Residential Home, gave £10,000 to Woking Borough Council for the planting of mature trees in Hook Heath. Seven specimen trees were planted, two of which died in last summer's drought. According to WBC's senior arboricultural officer, James Veats, these trees, which were due to be replaced in the winter planting season, will be planted by Serco before the end of March.

Further planting will now no longer be done by WBC as all the highway verges return to the management of Surrey County Council in April. SCC will also be responsible for the management of the planted roundabouts. James Veats has suggested that we might approach residents groups in Hook Heath with a view to planting in the grass verges in some of the private roads. A member of the HHRA committee is meeting with James Veats to walk some of the private roads with a view to identifying suitable places to plant.

We are very fortunate in Hook Heath to have so many large trees and they need protecting. These ancient trees provide habitat for wildlife and in particular for a wide variety of birds. They provide oxygen for us and our children, absorb heavy rainfall and muffle traffic noise. Probably their most important function is to provide screening between our houses allowing us to experience privacy in our gardens. It is so important that residents protect these trees so Hook Heath remains an area of large houses in a Sylvan setting. Their presence is a major reason people want to live here, and why houses sell at a premium.

FACEBOOK PAGE

We have been running a local Hook Heath Facebook page for the last few years with great success and currently have 789 members. We encourage all residents to join as there are many informative posts sharing contractor information, power outages and road work issues. There is zero tolerance for abusive messages and the page should only be used for locals and not for contractors to advertise their own skills. We hope that everyone has found the page useful. If you have not yet joined, please follow this link:

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

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2022

<u>Income and Expenditure</u>	2022	2021
Income:		
Subscriptions	£540.00	£590.00
Cheques and Cash		
Bank Transfer	£2,120.00	£2,180.00
Donations	£100.00	£45.00
Interest on Reserve Account	£132.78	£11.71
Woking BC Refund (CIL) ⁽²⁾	£3,454.21	£0.00
Surrey CC Grant ⁽¹⁾	£1,500.00	£0.00
Total Income	<u>£7,846.99</u>	<u>£2,826.71</u>
Expenditure:		
CPRE Subscription	£36.00	£36.00
Open Spaces Society	£45.00	£45.00
Photocopying and printing	£230.00	£270.20
AGM costs	£100.00	£100.00
Website renewal fee	£67.02	£55.01
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	£1,535.00	£465.00
Sign maintenance ⁽²⁾	£1,295.00	£0.00
Noticeboard ⁽²⁾	£2,159.21	£0.00
Funeral tributes	£120.00	
Total Expenditure:	<u>£5,587.23</u>	<u>£971.21</u>
Income less expenditure	£2,259.76	£1,855.50
Fund balance at 1 January	£45,618.08	£43,762.58
Fund balance at 31 December	<u>£47,877.84</u>	£45,618.08

Balance Sheet (at 31 December)

Current account balance	£4,681.25	£5,113.48
Reserve account balance	£40,762.38	£40,629.60
Cash assets	£45,443.63	£45,743.08
Creditors		
Signs and Noticeboard ⁽²⁾	-£700.00	£125.00
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	-£320.00	
Debtors - CIL Claim ⁽²⁾	£3,454.21	£0.00
Net Assets at 31 December	<u>£47,877.84</u>	<u>£45,618.08</u>

Note 1 SCC gave a grant of £1500 for improving the appearance of open spaces in Hook Heath. £1215 was spent on planting bulbs in 2022, and the remaining £285 was put towards the cost (£320) of further planting early in 2023.

Note 2 WBC agreed that refurbishment of the existing HHRA road signs and replacement of the HHRA Noticeboard would be a legitimate charge against the HHRA CIL account. The total cost was £3,454.21.

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 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 below 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.

New members are always welcome. 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 2023 to March 2024 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.....