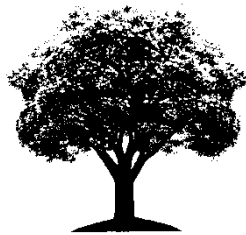


HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2024 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2023

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2024 Newsletter

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the annual Newsletter. I'm guessing that most people have read enough about Woking Borough Council's financial problems so this time I'm going to concentrate on the Neighbourhood Plan. As many of you know, this is a document that contains supplementary planning policies that only apply to Hook Heath. When the government introduced the Localism Act in 2012 it didn't allow Residents' Associations to produce Neighbourhood Plans – it had to be a separate body, either a Parish Council (where they existed), or a Neighbourhood Forum. That's why our Neighbourhood Forum was created with virtually identical membership to the Residents' Association. We wrote the current Plan about 10 years ago with a lot of input from residents and it remains in force till 2027. We're now planning to get ourselves organised for a revision – if that's what residents want – because we don't know if there will be a change of government this year, and if so, what that might mean for Neighbourhood Planning. Even without a new Government, the Council is preparing to update the Core Strategy which contains all their planning policies (the current Core Strategy also runs till 2027) and we will need to check for consistency.

At some point we will be getting in touch with Forum members to see what they think. We have had some successes with the plan but also some unexpected failures; the latter were more due to planning inspectors rather than WBC.

There are currently about 600 members of the Neighbourhood Forum (membership is on an individual basis, not household). You will know if you are a member as you receive a Quarterly Update about planning issues. If you are not a member and are at all interested in planning and the character of Hook Heath then please join. There is no limit on the number of members per household. When you join the HHRA, you automatically become a member of the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Forum (HHNF). Membership of the Forum is free and it gives you the opportunity to comment on planning policy proposals as they are being developed. Joining does not mean there is a commitment to participate further.

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

Bronwen van Strien

Daniella Lighting

WEBMASTER

Dr. Neil Cryer

Residents' Association Committee meetings have continued as normal this year. Less time has been spent on planning applications as there have been far fewer than normal, and those that have been submitted have not been controversial.

Two members of the committee, Gerald and Frances Griffiths, decided to resign this year, though Gerald remains treasurer of the Neighbourhood Forum. We thank them for their contribution.

This Newsletter covers issues which we hope are of interest to residents of Hook Heath; it is sent to every household irrespective of whether you are a member of the Residents' Association. 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

Nearly ten 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. In the last twelve months there have been 15 planning applications in Hook Heath, six applications for a Certificate of Lawful Development and one for General Permitted Development. 22 applications in total: in the first 6 months there were 15, just over half the normal rate, in the second 6 months there have only been 7.

Either nearly all the people who want to modify their houses have already done so, or financial and political uncertainty mean that people are saving their money or spending it on something else; and of course, mortgages are more expensive than they were.

All applications that have been determined have been approved, though a couple are still pending.

Having carried out a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) last year, the government issued a revised document in December. The NPPF is the document that sets out how local plans should be made and how planning applications should be determined. It is given significant weight in planning decisions, meaning that it is one of the most important planning documents for applicants to consider when devising their schemes. However, in practice a lot of the requirements of the NPPF are captured in an easier to use format in local authority documents such as the Woking Core Strategy.

A complication for WBC is that while new local authority plans and policies have to be consistent with the NPPF, regulations, policy and guidance for a new procedure for plan making have not yet been published. It takes a minimum of 30 months for a local authority to get a new plan approved so the timing is tight if WBC are going to be ready in 2027. If there is a new government later this year, they may intend making changes to the planning framework - and experience suggests that these would take some time.

We therefore plan to start our review of the Neighbourhood Plan on the basis that we will need to do something before 2027, even if we're not entirely sure what.

Much will depend on how WBC interprets the new NPPF requirements but a couple of things are worthy of note.

1. The 'standard methodology' for calculating housing need is to be seen as an advisory starting point so councils do not need to follow it slavishly when drawing up plans. WBC could therefore reduce its number of site allocations.
2. There is no requirement for green belt boundaries to be reviewed or altered. This is a controversial change, especially in Woking, where significant new developments, if not in the centre, would probably need to be on green belt land. For Hook Heath, with the exception of the Woking Golf Club land, the only green belt land not already developed is that to the north of Hook Hill Lane next to the railway line. However, there is also the large area of land south of the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Area and north of Saunders Lane, which we have tried to protect from development for many years.

The government thinks that plans under the new system will be easier to understand and use, and can be prepared and updated faster, partly because the amount of evidence needed to develop a plan and defend it at examination will be reduced.

A further issue is the introduction of National Development Policies in The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, 2023. These are policies (similar to those in local plans) written by the government, which apply to the whole country. At this time, it is not clear what policies are proposed or when the first one will be put out for consultation.

Aside from the question of planning constraints (real or imaginary) acting as a barrier to house building there are two other issues:

1. Are there sufficient builders and trades people left in the country post-Brexit to build the 300,000 houses the government wants anyway?
2. Do people have enough money to buy these new houses? There is little doubt that changes to building regulations are making houses more expensive.

I can't answer either question and have seen no useful analysis of the problems.

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.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

Most readers of this Newsletter will be aware of the parlous state of the finances of Woking Borough Council (WBC) and the effective declaration of bankruptcy by the Council on 7th June 2023. As a consequence of the June declaration, the Council's financial affairs are currently managed by three Commissioners appointed by the Government. WBC is now severely restricted in its ability to fund its activities and is largely limited to its obligations required by statute. This impacts the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Area (HHNA) CIL pot. WBC is holding large amounts of money on behalf of the HHNA as a result of its collection of funds from developers and householders in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The impact is that CIL receipts up to 7th June 2023 are effectively frozen and therefore not available to spend on projects. CIL receipts after 7th June 2023 are, we are told, available to fund current projects. This means that we may have to rely on CIL receipts since June last year to cover project future costs.

As at 31st December 2022, the amount of CIL received and earmarked for Hook Heath stood at £44,143. Since that date the pot has increased by the receipt of £7,922 (net) from the Firlands development to £52,065 as at 31st December 2023. However, it is thought that WBC should adjust a provision for CIL expenditure (made by WBC) following the completion of projects in 2023 to increase the CIL pot by the unspent £8,215 to £60,280 as at 31st December 2023.

In early 2023, CIL money was spent on the final touches to the refurbishment of the Hook Heath signs. Since then, progress has been made with regard to the costing of restoration of two footpaths on and near the Golf course. Unfortunately, the financial collapse of WBC has delayed the availability of £24,000 CIL funds required to undertake the restoration work. As said above, we have - in theory - £60,280 CIL to spend as at 31st December 2023. This would have been more than enough to cover the estimated £24,000 required for the footpaths restoration expected to be undertaken during 2024. The CIL of £60,280 is "frozen", possibly for many months if not years, so the footpaths funding must rely on CIL received since June last year.

At the time of publication, CIL receipts post 7th June 2023 amounted to £15,951 (being two of three instalments from the Quevrue development) leaving a shortfall of £8,049. However, it is expected that by the time payment is required to be made for the restoration of the footpaths in, say, September 2024, further CIL will have been received of £15,844 (from the Firlands development) thereby covering the £24,000 cost with £7,795 to spare.

There is hope for the receipt of more CIL during 2024 over and above that from Firlands. It is hoped that CIL of £26,762 will be received from developments at Derrydown, Hook Hill Farm and Quevrue (final instalment) bringing the total net potential CIL available to £94,837 after providing for the £24,000 footpaths expenditure (£34,557 available to spend and £60,280 frozen).

The next steps regarding the use of available CIL may include the installation of defibrillators. Gorse Hill, Woking Golf Club, the Tennis Club and Woodbank Apartments have all expressed an interest in having defibrillators for public use. Whilst the priority is the remediation of the footpaths, your Committee will continue to explore further projects on which to use the CIL funds. The availability of CIL funds will of course depend on the solvency of WBC.

In addition to the footpaths that we had planned to use CIL funds to repair, Surrey County Council have decided that the unsurfaced section of Pond Road is unsatisfactory and they will be repairing it at some point in the future using their own funds.

A summary of the debate within WBC on the availability of CIL funds for approved projects during a period when WBC is required to limit its expenditure to those obligations required by statute may be found on the HHRA website.

FACEBOOK

Membership of the Hook Heath Facebook page now stands at 887 members. That's pretty good coverage considering there are just over 700 properties in Hook Heath. Clearly some homes have more than one person signed up while others use one account for the whole family. In addition, some members will live outside Hook Heath and others may have lived here but moved away.

The alternative site is Nextdoor which currently has 722 members in an area it calls Hook Heath but is larger than the definition we used for the Neighbourhood Plan.

If you just use Facebook for the Hook Heath page then the information you see is limited to that posted by other Hook Heath residents; if you use the normal Facebook feed to interact with friends then you will see all sorts of other items including adverts from around the world. Apparently, it is difficult to tune the normal Facebook feed to show you just what you want.

Nextdoor only shows 'local' items but has a very strange definition of 'local'. The feed frequently includes posts from many miles away. It also has a 'local' marketplace.

There is no reason not to sign up to both since the overlap is limited; in both cases take care when replying to an advert.

ST. JOHN'S FOOTBRIDGE

For those of you who aren't on Facebook here is a summary of the situation with the footbridge that crosses the railway line by the Woking Golf Club. Structural defects were found on the footbridge in December last year and it had to be removed. The condition of the footbridge was not related to the landslip near the road bridge. The footbridge is a right of way and it is hoped that at the working level SCC are pressing to have it restored as soon as possible. Our MP, Jonathan Lord, and County Councillor, Ayesha Azad, have been in contact with Network Rail who held a Zoom meeting with residents in March. Network Rail have agreed to put in a wider bridge with the ability to look out onto the track to see passing trains. They plan to install the new bridge during their next financial year, April 2024-2025. It's not the easiest project to carry out and timing of the installation of the new bridge will be a challenge as the rail line is busy.

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS 2023

<u>Income and Expenditure</u>	2023	2022
Income:		
Subscriptions Cheques and Cash	£430.00	£540.00
Bank Transfer	£2,245.00	£2,120.00
Donations	£100.00	£100.00
Interest on Reserve Account	£878.49	£132.78
Woking BC Refund (CIL) ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£3,454.21
Surrey CC Grant	£0.00	£1,500.00
Total Income	<u>£3,653.49</u>	<u>£7,846.99</u>
Expenditure:		
CPRE		
Subscription	£36.00	£36.00
Open Spaces Society	£45.00	£45.00
Photocopying and Printing	£230.00	£230.00
AGM Costs	£100.00	£100.00
Website Fees	£68.39	£67.02
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	£0.00	£1,535.00
Sign Maintenance ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£1,295.00
Noticeboard ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£2,159.21
Funeral tributes	£0.00	£120.00
Total Expenditure	<u>£479.39</u>	<u>£5,587.23</u>
Income less expenditure	£3,174.10	£2,259.76
Fund Balance at 1 January	£47,877.84	£45,618.08
Cash Assets at 31 December	£51,051.94	<u>£47,877.84</u>
Balance Sheet at 31 December		
Current account balance	£9,411.07	£4,681.25
Reserve account balance	£41,640.87	£40,762.38
Cash assets	£51,051.94	£45,443.63
Creditors Signs and Noticeboard ⁽²⁾	£0.00	-£700.00
Bulb planting ⁽¹⁾	£0.00	-£320.00
Debtors CIL Claim ⁽²⁾	£0.00	£3,454.21
Fund Balance at 31 December	<u>£51,051.94</u>	<u>£47,877.84</u>

Note 1 In 2022 SCC gave a grant of £1500 for improving the appearance of open spaces in Hook Heath, of which £1215 was spent in 2022 and £285 in 2023, on bulb planting.

Note 2 In 2022 HHRA undertook the task of refurbishing the existing HHRA road signs and replacing the HHRA Noticeboard. WBC agreed the work would be a legitimate charge against the HHRA CIL account. Costs of £3,454.21 were incurred in 2022, of which £2,754.21 was spent in 2022 and £700.00 in 2023 to complete the work.

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 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 2024 to March 2025 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.....