

HOOK HEATH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Web Address: www.hhra.co.uk

Spring 2013 NEWSLETTER



Summary of Accounts for 2012

&

Subscription Renewal

See final page

Hook Heath Residents' Association

2013 NEWSLETTER

The past year has been a turbulent one on the planning front. The Core Strategy Document of Woking's Local Development Framework was approved with some amendments by the Planning Inspectorate last summer and adopted by the full Council in October 2012. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into force last year, following the Localism Act of 2011. The latter gave some hope that more power was to be given to local authorities and neighbourhoods over the pace and location of developments in their areas, while the former gave the appearance of being a developers' charter to build when and wherever they choose.

Many more planning applications for major developments must be expected from developers keen to exploit the planning reforms introduced by the NPPF in England, but not in Scotland and Wales where the changes do not apply. The current difficulties in raising finance may slow down the speed with which plans can be implemented, but developers will be keen to acquire as many building permits as possible for future use. It is rumoured that the Planning Inspectorate is preparing to take on many new staff in anticipation of a deluge of planning appeals.

We must be grateful that Woking Borough Council (WBC) has a Local Development Framework in place. It should at least give a first line of defence against unsuitable applications that the Planning Inspectorate must take into account. We need to reinforce it with our own local plan to give councillors more statutory underpinning for their decisions. Hence our efforts to establish a neighbourhood forum and to prepare a neighbourhood plan as soon as possible.

ON OUR WAY TO THE FORUM

Steady progress has been made over the past twelve months towards establishing a Neighbourhood Forum for Hook Heath under the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act. In last year's Newsletter I outlined HHRA's view that, given sufficient support from members, this would be a sensible initiative for the Association to take having regard to the long term interests of residents.

Support has been forthcoming and the decision to move ahead with an application to WBC for registration of the Forum and designation of the Neighbourhood Area was endorsed at the Association's AGM in October.

The legislation is designed to enable local residents to play a more active role in

planning and development control as it affects their area by producing a neighbourhood plan which can be as general or as detailed as the community wishes. It is not, however, a vehicle for NIMBY-ism!

A requirement of the Act is that a forum must have a minimum of 21 members and to date some 59 individuals - more would be welcome - have registered their interest following an initial meeting in November last year. In the months since that meeting, the application to WBC together with a draft constitution has been written and is being circulated for comment.

Subject to approval at the next meeting of the proposed Forum on 24 April, the registration application will be submitted to WBC. Copies may also be downloaded from the HHRA Website at: www.hhra.co.uk.

This is merely the start of the exercise since the application has to be considered by the planning policy team, by the WBC Executive and by the full Council with a period for public consultation. Because of the constraints imposed by the WBC timetable, therefore, it is unlikely that a decision will be announced before autumn. I hope, however, to be able to present a positive report at the Association AGM in October.

Formal approval for the forum will enable work to go ahead with producing a neighbourhood plan. A good rapport has been established with the planning team at WBC whose support will be required since the plan will need to be robust and capable of passing scrutiny by an independent examiner. The final hurdle will be to secure a majority vote in a referendum that covers all the electors in the neighbourhood.

So why jump through all these bureaucratic hoops? Once a neighbourhood plan has been approved, the local planning authority will be obliged by law to take it into account when considering plans for development in the area. So it is an initiative eminently worth pursuing.

AND THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

While establishment of our Neighbourhood Forum proceeds, WBC is implementing the next stages of its Local Development Plan for the borough through to 2027. WBC's 'Core Strategy', which is the basis for the plan, was adopted last autumn following a public examination by a Planning Inspector.

The Inspector made two principal recommendations. First, that the housing target should reflect a planned construction of **at least** 4,964 dwellings (an annual average of **at least** 292) through to 2027. Second, the planned review of the Green Belt should be brought forward from 2016-17.

The pressures on Green Belt land is attracting much interest and controversy nationally with Ministerial localism rhetoric under attack from, among others, the

Campaign to Protect Rural England. Locally, any revision of the boundary of the Green Belt is likely to take place to the south of Woking and along Egley Road towards Mayford at the foot of the Hook Heath escarpment.

The HHRA will monitor developments closely and the importance of protecting the Green Belt will be among the features to be addressed in the proposed neighbourhood plan for Hook Heath. Other topics will include traffic issues, inappropriate development and the area's infrastructure.

Residents will undoubtedly have other issues that they would like to see tackled in the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan. If you have topics that you would like to be included, please contact Peter Hill at: vicechair@hhra.co.uk .

DIARY DATE

The next meeting of the proposed Hook Heath Neighbourhood Forum will take place at De Vere Venues, Gorse Hill on Wednesday 24 April commencing at 7.30pm. Residents are invited to attend this meeting at which approval will be sought for an application for registration of the Forum to be made to WBC.

NEW BUILDING AT GORSE HILL

Last autumn a planning application was submitted to build a four bedroom house in Hook Heath Road on land to the west of the squash courts at Gorse Hill.

The site lies within the Green Belt and has no recorded history of permanent occupation. It is believed that two huts for ammunition storage were erected there during WWII and that shortly after the war ended when the British Transport Training College was established at Gorse Hill the huts, or replacements for them, were used briefly to accommodate some staff, possibly ex-POWs. Within a few years the huts decayed to the point of collapse. In 1987 permission was granted to build a manager's house for Gorse Hill, but this was never built. All subsequent planning applications have relied on this precedent.

The last planning application was made in 2002, but was never implemented. De Vere Venues subsequently sold the plot long after planning permission had expired. HHRA believes that the current application should be treated as a new application for a house in the Green Belt. New houses within the Green Belt are normally permitted only when they are of such a size and architectural distinction that they constitute an enhancement to the local landscape. A further complication arose when a nearby resident spotted that the site sold by De Vere Venues was different from the one for which the earlier applications had been made.

The site lies within the Fishers Hill Conservation Area. Any new building should be designed to blend well into the area, not detract from it, and if possible enhance

it. On the south side of Hook Heath Road are several listed properties and houses of distinct historical interest from the Victorian, Edwardian, and later eras. The properties include locally listed houses, some designed by Lutyens, and others that are of the national Grade II status. They are in keeping with the area and serve to set the standard and tone expected of property in the locality.

With the exception of Gorse Hill, the proposed house would be the only one between Grey Walls and Saunders Lane. It would thus be a prominent feature of the street scene. The proposed design is extremely modern, and although it incorporates some eco-friendly features, the large areas of glass and white walls give it an industrial appearance.

The applicant tacitly acknowledges that the design is inappropriate to the area by pleading that the house will be hidden from view by vegetation. In practice this is unlikely to be the case since the site is easily visible from Hook Heath Road and will become more so when builders carry out necessary site clearance.

The application has not yet been determined by WBC. The reasons for delay are not known. There has been a change of case officer, but that in itself is insufficient to explain a delay of six months.

HOOK HEATH AVENUE RAILWAY BRIDGE

The temporary and unreliable traffic lights on this bridge remain in place as do the unsightly red and white striped barriers to protect the parapet and we continue to suffer the flooding they help to cause. Several permanent solutions for the bridge have been examined by Surrey County Council (SCC) in the past year. As Network Rail no longer believes that the bridge is especially dangerous, the solution favoured by the SCC traffic engineers was a reversion to the priority system that had been in use for as long as anyone could remember. The Local Committee comprising Woking and Surrey Councillors, however, decided to overrule the official recommendation. The solution favoured now is to install a permanent (and reliable) set of lights and to replace the barriers with bollards at the approaches to the bridge. Work is scheduled for the 2013/14 financial year.

NEW STREET LIGHTING IN HOOK HEATH

SCC has already replaced the streets lights in some areas of Hook Heath and the remaining lights are scheduled for replacement this year. It is part of a nationwide programme to improve visibility while reducing the amount of light spillage upwards that causes a yellow glow in the night sky over built up

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

Chairman: **Jean Dare**
Tel: 01483 764942

Vice Chairman: **Peter Hill**
Tel: 01483 720943

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

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Bridget Stoney

Arthur Craven

Dr. Neil Cryer

Judith Oakley

Ron Brandman

areas.

Streetlights over 15 years old will be replaced completely, while only the lantern will be replaced on newer columns. Replacement columns are of a standard design. Other designs are available, but if residents request them they will have to pay for them. The new lights will be white rather than yellow and will be dimmed between 11.30 pm and 5.30 am.

THE GAS MAN COMETH (again)

We have been advised by Southern Gas Networks (SGN) of further extensive works planned for the Hook Heath area. The works will be an extension of those carried out last year in Hook Hill Lane and will involve Holly Bank Road, Hook Heath Road and several of the private roads including Pond Road, Mile Path and Golf Club Road. Planning is still in progress, but SGN have aspirations to begin the work soon, possibly as early as April. No closures of public roads are planned.

SMC GARAGE

SMC have recently expanded their operation on this site at the top of Wych Hill by adding the SEAT dealership to their existing Renault dealership. In December 2012 they applied for planning permission to erect a double-sided illuminated sign mounted on a single pole. On its own a single sign to advertise the Renault dealership would not be a cause for objection, but the work carried out shortly before Christmas in anticipation of a favourable decision by WBC included many other additions and alterations. While the latter works may not have required planning permission, the cumulative effect is rather different from that implied in the application.

The application showed the new sign as the only item on an otherwise empty forecourt. This gave a misleading impression by omitting existing items on the forecourt. These included the previous tall advertising column, which now advertises the SEAT brand, an archway in front of the main entrance and several new signs on the face of the garage building all bearing the SEAT name. In addition a number of flags and other signs advertising services on offer were placed on various parts of the forecourt. Unfortunately the stretch of footpath in Wych Hill outside the garage is also the location of a bus stop, a pub sign and a lamp post bearing a direction sign.

While recognising the legitimate commercial need to advertise products and services, HHRA felt that WBC, when considering the application to erect a new Renault sign, should take the opportunity to negotiate a reduction in some of the other clutter. The Council's decision was to refuse the application, and SMC have, not unexpectedly, chosen to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. We must now await the Inspector's decision.

FOOTPATH ACROSS GOLF CLUB CAR PARK

The original route of this path across the Golf Club car park has now been restored and the gate near the railway footbridge unlocked.

HHRA WEBSITE

Our Association website, www.hhra.co.uk, has been operational for several years. Its aim has been, and still is, to display news that might be of interest to residents, such as planning applications, changes in planning laws, new road lighting and even missing pets. A popular section on the menu bar, "History and Houses" carries articles on some of the houses in Hook Heath where the houses, or their former owners, are in some way unique. Another well viewed section, "What's on," lists forthcoming events. It has become quite extensive and is worth visiting.

We now have an additional website, www.hookheathforum.hhra.co.uk. This is because, as you will see elsewhere in this Newsletter, we are seeking to set up a neighbourhood forum. The new website is dedicated to keeping residents informed of developments with this HHRA initiative.

Both websites are for you, which means not only for you to read, but also for you to help write. Please send your contributions to our webmaster. News snippets are always welcome, as are pieces about houses and forthcoming local events, etc. Contact details will be found on both websites.

BONFIRES

Bonfires are not banned in Hook Heath provided they are not dangerous or toxic, but it is common courtesy to ensure that a bonfire does not inconvenience neighbours who have a right to enjoy their gardens. Before lighting a bonfire please check the wind direction and be careful what you burn. Danger can occur if smoke drifts across a public road and creates a driving hazard, or if toxic chemicals in the smoke constitute a health hazard. There are always the alternative ways of disposing of rubbish by using green wheelie bins or by taking it to the local tip (Household Refuse Disposal Site).

TREES AND TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

Please do not remove trees unnecessarily. The character of Hook Heath is both defined and enhanced by its many mature trees. Not only do they introduce colour, shape, form and texture into the area, but also bring practical and natural benefits such as absorbing water from heavy rainfall, producing oxygen, and providing important wildlife habitats. Many of the trees in Hook Heath are covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) issued by WBC; the purpose of TPOs is to protect trees that make a significant impact on their local surroundings. In April 2012 changes were introduced to the TPO system in England of which residents should

be aware.

In summary, the key points are as follows:

- All new TPOs come into effect immediately for six months. Once the Council has considered any objections, long-term protection will be confirmed.
- New orders will be sent to those who have a right to prune or fell trees covered by the order; other residents need now only be informed at the discretion of the Council.
- Consent is now needed to carry out work on dying trees. However, consent is not necessary to remove dead branches from a living tree.
- Five days' written notice must be given of proposed work on dead trees by the tree owner.
- The Council can no longer revoke consent to do specific work on trees once it has been granted.
- The Council will set a period during which work, once consent is given, is completed or the consent lapses.
- Conditions will be set for replanting when deemed necessary.
- A compensation framework applies to all orders.

Full details of the new TPO system can be found online at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6076/2127685.pdf .

If you have questions about trees in your own garden, useful information can be found on WBC's website at:

<http://www.woking.gov.uk/planning/trees/advice/protected>.

If you see trees being felled that you suspect may be the subject of a TPO, please call the WBC Tree Officer on 01483 743739. If he is out, then call the WBC on 01483 755855 and ask to speak to the Planning Department. Unfortunately WBC does not offer an out of hours service. At weekends you should record details of the site concerned including the species of trees affected, the registration number of the contractor's vehicle, and, if possible, any name on the side of the vehicle. Photographic evidence of the work in progress is also very useful, but in no circumstances should you get involved in an altercation with the contractor or put yourself in danger in any way.

NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE TEAM

The Team hold regular panel meetings at which residents can raise issues that concern them, hear the latest crime statistics, and debate the future priorities for the Team. The planned dates for the St Johns and Hook Heath Panel are:

Wednesday 5 June 2013

Wednesday 25 September 2013

Wednesday 16 December 2013

All meetings will be held at St Johns Church, Church Road, St Johns, and commence at 7.30pm

Between meetings members of the Team may be contacted by e-mail, or by calling the non-emergency number 01483 571212.

**NEIGHBOURHOOD
POLICE TEAM**

WPC Clare Leggat

Email: woking@surrey.police.uk

PCSO Craig Hawkes

Email: woking@surrey.pnn.police.uk

PCSO Gemma Henty

Email: woking@surrey.pnn.police.uk

HHRA NEEDS YOU!

The strength of any organisation depends entirely on its members and the extent to which they are able to support its activities. The Committee is grateful to all of you who help by distributing this Newsletter and other letters from time to time, or who support us in other ways. I am especially grateful to those of you who have helped us in our major current endeavour to establish a Neighbourhood Forum for Hook Heath. You have devoted a great deal of time to this project as well as contributing your expertise. Of course, if we are successful in establishing the Forum the work will not be finished, for we must then begin a new phase of work in developing a Neighbourhood Plan to guide future development within Hook Heath.

If you would like to help with any of our activities, please contact the chairman, Jean Dare, at: chairman@hhra.co.uk , or to help with the Neighbourhood Forum, please contact the vice-chairman, Peter Hill, at: vicechair@hhra.co.uk .



**Jean Dare
Chairman**

Aims of the Association

1. To preserve the present character of Hook Heath and protect the local environment.
2. To provide members with help and assistance on matters affecting them, particularly in relation to letters of objection to the local council or public enquiries.
3. To deal with planning matters that affect the area and are against the consensus of the opinion of residents.
4. To liaise with the council and all political parties to achieve an agreed status for Hook Heath which reflects the consensus of the opinion of the residents.
5. To be aware of local issues in adjoining areas, which may have repercussions for Hook Heath, and to provide mutual support to adjacent Residents' Associations to fight plans which could be detrimental to the surrounding environment.
6. To care for other matters of common concern which arise from time to time, e.g. traffic, public services, security, trees, etc.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for the year 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 are now due.

Existing members may renew their membership in one of the following ways:

1) By direct inter bank 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.

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 2013 to March 2014 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.....
.....Post Code.....
Signature.....Tel No:.....
E-mail Address.....