

Hook Parish Council

Annual Report 2002-2003



Chairman's report

Thursday 1st May 2003 is election day. All twelve seats of the Parish Council are up for election. The Parish Council plays a crucial role in looking after the village on behalf of residents. It is entirely focused on the needs of our village; in particular virtually every penny it spends comes directly from the village ratepayers. All of which are very good reasons to have your say on how this should be done.

Unlike district, county and national government, parish councils tend to be mercifully free from party politics. However since we have to work within the framework of district, county and national government we cannot escape entirely.

Two clear trends have been visible over the ten years that I have been a Parish Councillor. First the increase in the amount of bureaucracy and form filling that we have to endure. Secondly there is a tendency for other layers of local government to "save" money, by passing the load directly onto Parish ratepayers. Indeed in some areas the Parish virtually pays twice for the same service.

For some time the Parish Council and the management committee of the Elizabeth Hall have been considering a proposal to extend and modernise the existing facilities. However a structural survey of the hall clearly shows that the only viable project would be to demolish the existing building and start again. This would require a major investment on behalf of the village.

The Parish Council welcomes debate on this major project. Anyone with the skills and the time to help plan such a project should contact the Elizabeth Hall Chairman or the Parish Clerk.

Everyone will be aware of the major housing development now started off Holt Lane. This will be followed later in the year by the development of the Old Foundry site in London Road. These will provide some funding for additional village facilities. Unfortunately, experience shows this is never enough to meet all the costs.

The Parish Council has particular concerns with the Foundry development. The development brief is predominantly urban and assumes a much higher standard of public transport than Hook is ever likely to enjoy. At the Public Enquiry, the Parish and District Councils put forward a strong case for change. But the inspector felt that the National Planning Guidelines should take precedence.

In last year's report we discussed the introduction of a trial scheme for Reading Road. The scheme was proposed in partnership with Hampshire Highways after specific requests from many residents. During the year the trial produced more correspondence than any other event.

Despite the fears of many, the monitoring has clearly shown a significant reduction in the benchmark speed measure. So much so that Hampshire Highways have offered to bear all the cost of introducing a permanent scheme. Following that, they expect to start the long legal process of introducing a 30 miles per hour limit to the road.

For further information about the Parish Council please visit our web site at www.hook.gov.uk. Residents are always welcome at the meetings of the Parish Council: either just to watch, or to discuss any topic of interest under our "ten minute rule." I would like to thank all those who have taken the opportunity to do just that.

Tony Taylor

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Don't miss the
Annual Village Meeting
Thursday April 24th
at 8pm in the
Elizabeth Hall

Peter Jennions and David Burke are both standing down from the Parish Council in May, each with over twenty years of service to his credit. Peter Moore is also standing down, after twelve years.

All three are former chairmen of the Parish Council. We thank them for all their hard work in the past and wish them well for the future.

Amenities Committee

The Parish Council's work is not all about planning applications, local politics and public safety. Much of its work directly affects the quality of life in Hook, and many of these items are dealt with by the Amenities Committee.

The provision and maintenance of playgrounds takes a surprising amount of time and money. In order to reduce the load on the Council - as well as to provide improved facilities - we are now looking to install better quality equipment and to maintain it more effectively. Many of you will have seen the effects of this policy in the Elizabeth Hall play area, which was officially opened in May last year. CCTV cameras were installed at the same time, not only to deter vandalism but also to try to eliminate the antisocial behaviour such areas inevitably attract. They have already proved valuable in this respect.

The Hartletts Park Play Area equipment was also replaced in March, as the old equipment was worn out and did not meet current safety standards. In line with current policy, this includes facilities for children with special needs.

The Amenities Committee is also engaged in a major project to improve the quality of the village centre. For many years, the piece of land between the Grand Parade shops and Station Road has looked more like the unmaintained end of a supermarket car park than the centrepiece of the village. This is about to change: in the autumn the entire area will be relandscaped, replanted and new paths installed. The overall design work has been done by local landscape specialist Rachel Burbidge, and the centrepiece will be a pebble mosaic.

The Amenities Committee tries to respond as quickly as possible to changing patterns in demand for Hook's facilities. To this end, one of the tennis courts near the Community Centre has been converted into a "multicourt facility" - a combined five-a-side football pitch and basketball court. A large area of hard standing has also been installed, complete with basketball nets, seating and bins.

After complaints of flooding in Rectory Road, the cause was finally traced to a blocked drain taking water off Hook Common. A barrier has been installed at the entrance to the Hartletts Park car park. Residents of Ravenscroft are sleeping better at night now that the car park is not being used as a race course and music club. The Committee is finalising new leisure maps of the Hook area, which will be posted on village notice boards

The case of the stolen dog bin on Great Sheldons Coppice remains unsolved. This is an example of a pretty rare crime, especially as the bin was full at the time.

As always, if you have any concerns or ideas about Hook's leisure facilities or other amenities, email or telephone the Parish Council, or just come to any meeting.

Martin Whittaker
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Garden and Cemetery Committee

The village Garden and Cemetery continues to be a peaceful haven in which to sit, wrapped in your own thoughts, perhaps about loved ones who lie nearby.

However, we have the increasing problem of relations who dig a square of turf from their family grave to plant flowers, and who then dump the turf at the base of the hedge, not in the bins provided. The Parish Council then has to pay to have these lumps of turf taken away. Please do use the bins for any unwanted flowers, etc. They are all emptied regularly.

Gillian Morgan
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Development Strategy Committee

The Development Strategy Committee was established in 2002, in order to prepare for the adoption of the current Local Development Plan and to prepare for the next. The task of the committee is to ensure that the Parish Council has a close working relationship with Hart District Council in all aspects of planning, from the development of the Local Plan to individual planning applications.

Hart District Council finally adopted the current Local Plan in December 2002, after seven years of inquiries, meetings and discussions. The majority of the Inspector's Comments, from his Inquiry in 1998, were accepted, with the exception that the Dilly Lane site in Hartley Wintney was placed on the reserve list. Further developer-led presentations took place in February 2003 with a view to trying to change the status of the site.

However, the process does not stop. The first draft of the next Local Plan to 2011 and beyond cannot be far away. Over the past year the Development Strategy Committee has worked closely with their opposite numbers in the Hart District Council and with the developers building Holt Park. Results have been positive. The intention is to continue with this proactive approach to both planners and developers throughout the Local Plan process, to ensure that Hook benefits in the best manner possible from any development that may, or may not, arise in the future.

Nigel Carpenter
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Planning Committee

All local planning applications are sent to the Parish Council for comment. Regulations require that all planning applications are decided within a very strict timescale so as to be fair to applicants and objectors and the Committee meets every two weeks in order to provide an opinion to Hart, which is responsible for making the decision. We have reviewed over 140 applications during the past year and although the majority were straightforward extensions that would not inconvenience neighbours or the overall environment, about 25 of the total caused concern which resulted in these applications being contested and in most cases refused. The most common reasons for refusal of extensions to dwelling houses are inconvenience to neighbours, damage to the street scene and over-development of the site.

Our meetings are open to the public; dates are published in Hook Focus, and agendas are on the three Parish Council notice boards, so if you have a concern about an application please come along or ring the Parish Council as soon as possible.

Several fairly complex non-residential applications are in the course of discussion between the Parish, Hart and the applicants. These include a first floor extension to the surgery in Reading Road, a new building for the dentist's surgery on the former Woodland Café site, the reuse of old farm buildings at Titcheners Farm for light industrial purposes and a speculative application to extend Murrell Green Business Park. We are working to find satisfactory solutions for the first three cases, but oppose the extension of Murrell Green Business Park as the proposal is outside the intentions of the recently adopted Hart Local Plan.

During the year the Parish took part in three Planning Appeals. Despite massive objections from residents

and the Parish, the Planning Inspectorate allowed the appeal by One2One (now T Mobile) for a mast on the A30/B3349 roundabout. The Inspector accepted their argument that they could not cover the whole of Hook from the Osborne Way mast on which they have the lowest and poorest position because they were last to join in. Vodafone have upgraded their mast at the station, whilst Orange, Cellnet and Hutchinson 3G are now also on the Osborne Way mast. Hopefully we will now have a welcome break from mobile phone mast applications, until an operator runs out of capacity!

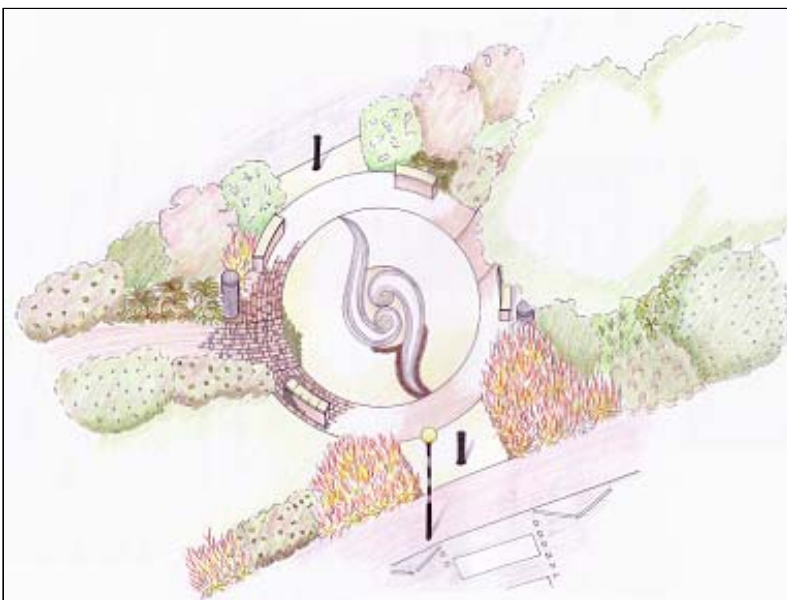
Residents and the Parish objected strongly and successfully to a particularly cramped and poorly laid out scheme which would have replaced Pinecroft and Hazelcroft in Station Road.

The third appeal which was on the Foundry site followed a different process and was decided by a two day Public Inquiry at which both the Parish and our Development Control ward member gave evidence and a detailed site visit. The Inspector accepted all the arguments against the development made by the Parish and individual objectors but did not feel they were of sufficient weight to justify withholding permission. Current government policy is firmly in favour of higher density and reduced parking coupled with the theory that if there is only one car space, residents will only have one car.

We will now look to work with the developer, Barratts, to minimise the inconvenience to residents during the construction work. The Parish meets monthly with George Wimpey and Hart to track progress on the Holt Park development and on the progress of the Country Park that will be constructed between the development and the River Whitewater.

Antony Hunter

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Grand Parade Landscaping

A pebble mosaic by Maggy Howarth forms the centrepiece of Rachel Burbidge's design for re-landscaping the area in front of Grand Parade.

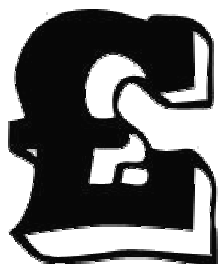
Hook Youth Council

has been formed to serve the needs of 10-19 year olds in the village.

More details can be found at www.youth.hook.gov.uk.



Money Matters



The Parish Council's share of the Community Charge for the year to April 2003 came to £189,000. This represents a charge equivalent to £1.26 per week for each band D property.

Full audited accounts will be available for inspection after the end of the financial year. These will also be available on the Parish Council web site.

The precept for the year to April 2004 has been increased by just over 3% to £195,000. This is the first increase for two years. The Parish receives virtually no assistance from central funds. Everything we spend comes directly from the residents.

As a Parish Council, we strive to maintain a balance between the need to provide facilities for all residents whilst keeping a tight control of costs. At £1.30 per week (per band D property) we believe we offer first-rate value for money.

Tony Taylor
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The money actually spent during the last year can be analysed as follows: -

Running expenses (salaries, expenses, stationery, insurance, typing, utility costs, office equipment)	£ 53,800
Youth facilities	£ 9,600
Street lighting/ security	£ 13,000
Loan repayments	£ 12,000
Gardening/ park keeping/cleansing	£ 59,400
Grants	£ 7,500
Village projects	
Playground at Hartletts Park	£ 25,000
Footpaths	£ 9,300
Leisure & community facilities	£ 44,100
Community Centre repairs	£ 4,900

Total spend	£238,600
	=====
Less other income	(£ 22,200)
Less transferred from reserves	(£ 27,400)

Precept	£189,000
	=====

Parish Personnel to May 2003



Clerk:	David Ridley	24 Bramshott Drive	01256 768573
Deputy Clerk:	Anne Atkins	1 Painters Pightle	01256 768687
Chairman	Tony Taylor	45 Middle Mead	01256 762925
Vice-chairman & Chairman of Planning Committee	Antony Hunter	Moles Meadow, Elms Road	01256 762043
Chairman of Amenity Committee	Allen Saltmarsh	119 Ravenscroft	01256 764658
Chairman of Village Garden and Cemetery Committee	Gillian Morgan	14 Garden Close	01256 764214
Chairman of Development Strategy Committee	Nigel Carpenter	27 Goose Green	01256 762936
	Jane Bonnin	Church Path Cottage, Newnham Road	01256 763287
	Colin Brown	1 Oakhanger Close	0794 1211609
	David Burke	41 Goose Green	01256 762776
	Janet Deller	9 Chalky Copse	01256 764132
	Peter Jennions	Cedar Court, Reading Road	01256 762178
	Peter Moore	69 Middle Mead	01256 764467
	Martin Whittaker	Foundry Cottage, London Road	01256 765902

The Parish Council's website is at <http://www.hook.gov.uk>



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