

Hook Parish Council



Annual Report 2013 – 2014

Chairman's Report

As we settle into 2014, there is a lot to reflect on from the last year. The Parish Council's workload has increased significantly, primarily in coordinating the Community Centre refurbishment project, in dealing with the implications of the new planning regulations and increase in development applications, and in managing the village estate.

After many years of discussion on the refurbishment of the Community Centre it was a great relief to see the work start in December. At the time of writing nearly all the internal walls have been demolished and the concrete floors are being dug up to re-lay pipes and other services. By the time you read this, the contractors should have started work on the new internal layout. Completion is still scheduled for September 2014, and has not yet been affected by the floods or Hook's notorious groundwater problems.

There is currently much debate in the village about the implications of the new planning regulations, and the lack of a Local Plan. This has resulted in a series of unexpected planning applications from developers, causing local concern. The Parish Council will continue to object to these new applications, while at the same time continuing its work to ensure that any application that is granted comes with benefit to residents of the village. This issue will be high on our priority list for many months to come.

The recent bad weather has reminded us of how quickly even the best-kept areas can become unsightly or even dangerous. As you will read, the Amenities Committee have been keeping on top of these issues during the year, looking after both the natural and man-made environments. All of these actions, which largely go unseen, are essential to keep Hook a village we can all be proud to live in.

Lastly, I am delighted to report that the provision of transport in Hook has taken a step forward. The Circular Route 1 Taxi Bus service started operation this month, and will allow residents to access the village centre with ease. This service is a testament to the hard work of the Transport Working Group.

The Council is always pleased to hear from residents with ways in which we can improve the quality of our village and its environs – so please do keep in touch. In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Village Meeting on the 23rd of April.

Iain Chalmers
chairman@hook.gov.uk

Bus Services

The availability of public transport is a life-line for many people and the new Taxi Bus, Circular Route 1, run by Capital Cars with Hook Parish Council support, was launched in February. The service runs to a timetable, eight times a day, six days a week, aiming to connect residents to existing public transport and other amenities. The service will be tailored to meet need and the aim is that it will run with little or no subsidy. Timetables are in village shops, on the Capital Cars website, and businesses. Fares are:-

- 9 a.m. & before 6 p.m. - £1.20 per trip.
- Before 9 a.m. & after 6 p.m. - £1.50 per trip.

Concessionary passes can be used after 9 a.m.

Fleet Buzz (now owned by Stagecoach) operates the Number 30 route which is doing particularly well for passenger numbers and is mainly run commercially. The journey time to Basingstoke Bus Station is now only 15 minutes. In the other direction, it is now possible to travel, via Odiham, Crookham Village, Redfields Garden Centre, Fleet and Cove, to Farnborough. Some trips give a guaranteed connection with the 31 to Frimley Park Hospital. The new timetable, from 23rd February, is available from the Fleet Buzz website, local shops and businesses.

Hampshire County Council is conducting a consultation about bus services. Details should be available from Post Offices, Newsagents & the HCC website. We encourage all interested parties to let their views be known.

Mandy Butler
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The Taxi Bus at Hook Station, with Parish Council Chairman Iain Chalmers & Capital Cars proprietor Mr Giri.

Development Update

This time last year the Hart Local Plan was progressing towards the public examination. The Parish Council would have been represented at two of the sessions. However, the inspector rejected the District Council's proposals and the plan had to be abandoned. A new plan is currently in preparation. Hook Parish Council will be involved in its preparation as appropriate. The first public consultation is due to take place summer 2014. There are currently no definite dates as to when the new plan will be subject to public examination and then adoption. When it is finally adopted it will then set out the main planning policies up to 2032/33.

The most critical elements will be the overall numbers of dwellings for which provision will have to be made and then how those dwellings will be distributed around the District. The potential impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) will be one of the important factors in arriving at the final proposals. Notwithstanding that, however, it is possible that the overall numbers for the District will be higher than those set out in the draft local plan.

The indications are that further development will be directed towards Hook including North East Hook. In the meantime the Parish Council has been working with the District Council and Sainsbury's particularly to secure car parking improvements in the village centre and will also resume discussions in respect of the housing proposed for North East Hook.

In October, the District Council issued an Interim Housing Delivery Strategy. In that it has, however, not been subject to any public consultation or examination, it carries very little weight. In these circumstances considerable weight has to be given to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which contains amongst other things "a presumption in favour of sustainable development." Given the lack of an adopted local plan and given the Government's policies directed towards increasing substantially the numbers of new houses being built, developers have taken advantage and submitted planning applications on additional sites not yet proposed to be allocated. The Parish Council has objected to these applications but, as with the District Council, cannot override the Government's objectives.

Anthony Hawkins
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Planning Committee

The role of the Planning Committee is to make comments on planning applications once they have been submitted and in the last year we have seen several major applications which caused great concern both to the council and to residents.

First came the Sainsbury's application. The Parish Council opposed this on a number of grounds, but it was granted subject to most of the modifications and conditions we had requested. It now remains to be seen if Sainsbury's will proceed with building it.

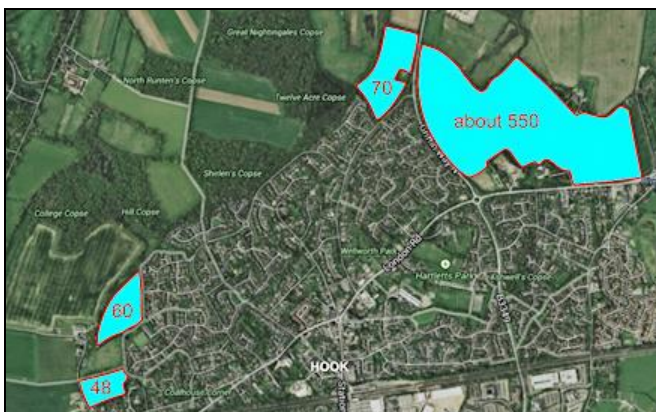
Tesco also submitted an application for a larger store on their existing site. The Parish Council were unhappy with both the siting of the proposed store and the access arrangements. While it seems obvious to many residents that there isn't enough trade in the Hook area for both stores, that may not constitute a reason for refusal. Market forces will probably dictate which of the two stores gets built.

Applications for housing at Reading Road and Brown Croft had to be approved by Hart District Council against objections by residents, Hook Parish Council and even many of the District Council's own members. In the absence of a Local Plan, no planning policies could be invoked to turn them down. A further application is expected shortly for land off Hop Garden Road, which will face similar difficulties. Applications for other sites may follow.

The Parish Council is delighted that action groups are forming up to resist these applications. The problem now is to try to obtain a modification to government planning policy. A pressure group of concerned residents has a far greater chance of achieving this than a Parish Council whose actions are legally and constitutionally constrained. The Council will attempt to support such groups towards that end. It is worth noting, though, that housing requirements are being increased and a new Local Plan will inevitably contain more sites for housing than the failed one did. The Reading Road, Brown Croft and Hop Garden Road sites would have been leading contenders to be included for the Hook area.

Finally, if you are worried about a neighbour's planning application, or you want to make one yourself, please talk to us – we may be able to advise.

Jane Bonnin
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Sites for housing development already approved or in prospect on greenfield sites around the outskirts of Hook.

From left to right, Hop Garden Road (Charles Church), Brown Croft (Taylor Wimpey), Reading Road (Banner Gleeson) and North East Hook (David Wilson Homes / Croudace)

Money Matters

The Parish Council Precept (our share of the Community Charge) for **2013-14** was set at £320,000. This would normally have represented a cost equivalent to £1.83 per week for each property in the benchmark Council Tax Band D household - an increase of £0.04 per household over the previous year.

However, the way the Council Tax Benefit is funded changed last year, with the cost being borne locally in future. Hart District Council agreed to pass on the government grant of £10,000. This helped mitigate some of the impact of the reduced number of households (the Tax Base) now sharing the cost of the precept. As a result the actual amount of precept collected from residents was £310,000 – a small reduction on 2012/13.

Despite this lowered precept, residents received Council Tax bills showing a 4.2% increase for Hook, due to the reduced tax base. This was out of the Parish Council's control and most parishes were adversely affected to varying degrees, depending on the number of households qualifying for Council Tax Benefit in their area.

Full audited accounts for 2013-14 will be available for inspection at the Parish Council office and on our website later in the year.

In January, Hook Parish Council considered the level of precept for **2014-15**. Hart District Council had agreed to pass on the government grant again, but at a lower figure. To maintain an income of £320,000 a precept of £313,000 was set for 2014-15. There has been a slight change again in the Tax Base, so the overall average increase will be just over £0.01p per week.

Demands on the Parish Council increase every year and we do not receive any assistance from central government to meet the duties placed upon us.

The largest cost area for the Parish Council is the cleaning and maintenance of our parks, open spaces and play areas. Hook residents expect high standards and 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 £1.88 per week (per band D property) we believe we offer first-rate value for money.

The major project for the coming year will be the refurbishment of the Community Centre. The £1.6m cost will be met 50/50 from reserves and a loan at preferential rates from the Public Works Loan Board. Until the loan is repaid the Council will set aside £60,000 pa from the precept.

We continue to offer grants to support youth provision and a wide range of local voluntary groups. Many are struggling as the economic climate has dried up some of their normal funding sources. As a result grant support remained at £30,000 this year, including youth provision. Details of how to apply for a grant are on our website at www.hook.gov.uk.

Precept spent in 2013/14 can be analysed as follows:

Expenditure	£'000
Recreation and the Environment	80
Youth Provision	15
Cemetery	4
Street Lighting	4
Grants to local voluntary organisations	15
Office & Admin	21
Professional Fees	11
Wages & Salaries	72
Project & Capital Costs	42
Elections	2
CCTV	5
Gross Expenditure	<u>271</u>
Less Income	
Fees and Charges (Cemetery)	-3
Contribution from Hart	0
Interest, Capital Payments and other Income	<u>-18</u>
Net Expenditure	<u>250</u>
Transfer to reserves –	
Community Centre	<u>60</u>
Precept for 2012/13	<u>310</u>

Anne Atkins - Parish Clerk
 clerk@hook.gov.uk

Don't forget to come to the
Annual Village Meeting
Wednesday 23rd April 2014
Elizabeth Hall
from 8pm

Hart District Council Corporate Director
 Daryl Phillips will speak about the
 failure of the Local Plan and what that
 means for Hook.

Amenities Committee

This year we have reviewed our maintenance contracts and divided these into four areas - pitch maintenance, litter picking, grass cutting and general grounds maintenance, and playground inspections. This has enabled us to find a more cost effective way to manage contracts.

In 2013 a survey of the trees on Parish Council land was carried out. All work identified has either been undertaken or has been scheduled to be done. With all the windy weather and the very wet ground luckily we were ahead of the game on storm damage, and have also budgeted for any future tree work required.

The footpath running adjacent to the Varndell play area, past Brown Croft and along the rear of the houses in Painters Pightle, has recently been passed to the Parish Council from Hart. We have made improvements here which include widening and resurfacing the path as it had become rather overgrown.

In Holt Park, some dead trees have been replaced with native species suitable for the type of soil here. The Anne Pitcher play area is scheduled to have a new soak-away and the safety surface repaired; ironically this cannot be done whilst it is so wet.

Juliet Henham

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Could You Make a Difference?

The strength of a Parish Council depends on the diversity of skills and expertise of the Councillors. The focus and priorities of the Council are also influenced by the individual interests of elected members. Of the twelve councillors elected in 2011, eight were new to Council work.

Three years ago, few of the councillors were expecting the degree of development pressure we are now experiencing. This coincides with the urgent need for refurbishing the Community Centre. It was very timely that transport was a priority for some members, who have worked tirelessly to retain our bus service. Other members have professional expertise in planning, construction and management.

Planning is always high on the agenda, but with growth will come new opportunities for recreational facilities to be managed, along with other challenges.

The next Parish Council elections are in May 2015. We would welcome the opportunity to chat with you about becoming a Councillor or helping in other ways.

For the latest information about Hook go to www.hook.gov.uk, follow @Hookpc on Twitter, like Hook Parish Council on Facebook or join the **Hook Announcements Mailing List**



Parish Council Personnel: 2013 – 2014



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Vice-chairman of Council	Robert Leppard	11 Brown Croft	01256 761297
Chairman of Amenities Committee	Juliet Henham	15 Pexalls Close	01256 766343
Chairman of Planning Committee	Jane Bonnin	Church Path Cottage, Newnham Road	01256 763287
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Hook Parish Council's website is at www.hook.gov.uk

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