

Blackwater and Hawley Town Council
Blackwater & Hawley Leisure Centre,
Fernhill Road, Hawley, Hampshire GU17 9BW
Tel: (01276) 33050
www.blackwaterandhawleytowncouncil.gov.uk
enquiries@blackwaterandhawleytowncouncil.gov.uk

Minutes of The Annual Town Residents' Meeting
At the Hawley Memorial Hall, Hawley Green
Wednesday 22nd March 2023 at 7.00 pm.

In Attendance:

Cllr Monks (Chair), Cllr Collett, Cllr Blewett, Cllr Harward, Cllr Usher,
Jo Shaw (Town Clerk), Lorraine Powell (Minute Taker) and 17 residents.

1. Chair's Welcome
The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies for absence
Cllr Lister, Cllr Hunt, Cllr Tarbet
3. To receive the minutes of The Annual Town Meeting and deal with matters arising
The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 26th May 2022 were received and approved as a correct record for signature by the chair.
4. There were no matters arising.
5. Nikki Jarvis did not attend due to illness
6. Ian Gough (Reduce Energy Ltd) introduced himself, explained he had carried out audits @ all Council Properties to assist in money saving ideas to reduce Council energy costs. Not a domestic company but there are lots of portals for home owners to use – Martin Lewis website recommended.
Ways to make property energy efficient are proper insulation, draught proofing, low energy lights, turn lights off when not in the room, turn standby off, turn thermostats down - told of a hotel that had items on standby in each room & by turning them off standby they saved £5000.
Solar Panels pay back within 5 years.
Boilers/Home Heaters – future decarbonising energy so aim is to get rid of gas.
Electric Storage Heaters making a comeback.
Opened up for questions – none asked.

7. Annual Reports

Chairs Annual Report:

I will admit that some of this is a repeat of last year, but I think it is important to set out our stall in terms of what we as a Town Council do.

We provide local facilities for local people, some of the money for which comes from a small portion of your council tax, called the precept.

For a small Town council – and we are – we actually own a fair bit of land, and some significant buildings. We own and manage the Memorial Hall, Leisure Centre, Bar and Coffee shop, we own the land in front and behind, including that occupied by the Bowling Club and the Scout hut. We rent out and maintain outdoor courts, football pitches and a cricket field, squash courts, party spaces and halls for leisure activities. We maintain the play park and part of the cemetery where we mow, trim, litter pick, and mend. Our jurisdiction is largely limited to our boundaries, however, as Town Councillors we are involved in many local groups such as the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, Blackbushe Consultation Group and the Hampshire Travel Forum and we attend meetings throughout the year on behalf of our residents to keep abreast of what is going on, and share our (or your) opinions where we can.

We are also happy to help point you in the right direction for help at the higher levels of council, and are fortunate to have two District Councillors and County Councillor in our number which helps with that. We meet twice a month most months with full council meetings monthly and planning meetings fortnightly. Non-confidential sections of meetings are open to the public, and we always welcome visitors - although we don't get many!

Agendas are posted on the notice boards around the parish, or information can be found on our website, so if you would like to come along to a meeting please do!

Elections are coming up in May, and as we will be losing some of current councillors we will be looking for interested and motivated local residents to step up and get involved. If you think you could be one of those people, there are some leaflets about what is involved and how to register your interest, and any one of us here will be happy to speak to you about it after the meeting.

Anyway, what have we been up to since we last met?

Well, last summer we held a fabulous weekend of activities for the Queen's Jubilee which brought many local residents together despite the typically British Weather.

That weather soon cleared up though, and summer continued long and hot this was both a blessing and a curse. We sold a lot of ice creams and beer, but sometimes it was just too hot, and both the users of our facilities and the grass wilted in the heat and struggled with the lack of rain.

As we moved into Autumn we enjoyed several large events in our Memorial Hall, a barn dance run by the Starburst Foundation, a comedy night and our first Christmas Fayre both run by enthusiastic residents. It was fabulous to see so many people getting together and doing something a bit different, and things seemed to be going well.

Unfortunately, the day after the Christmas Fayre our hall was vandalised. Over £20,000 worth of damage was done - mostly to the windows - for the sake of a few hundred pounds worth of booze. This was a real blow, but our team patched things up and made them safe so we could reopen and carry on. The insurance claim is ongoing, and hopefully we will be in a position to put this all right ready for the summer.

However, vandalism - like this and at a lower level - has been an issue all year. The "best" bit of our little play park was smashed last year and it has proved difficult to find a good solution so we can reopen. Replacement of the part was going to cost in excess of £10k, a whole new park (which I would like) is going to be £100k, so it didn't seem sensible to replace the slide - but we don't have a spare £100k to spend on a new park, so, we have found someone who can remove the slide, barrier off the gap and so we can reopen. Obviously because it's play equipment it needs to be super safe, that means it is quite expensive and time consuming - however, it is in progress and hopefully will be ready for Easter.

Other vandalism we suffered - motorbikes on the field, plants and flowers ripped out, smaller windows smashed, roof tiles damaged where people are climbing over the rooves, our air conditioning unit was smashed off the wall, and on and on. Some small, stupid stuff, some bigger, but all things that cost us (you) money to replace and takes our staff away from improving and developing our facilities because they have to deal with this stuff. It's tedious. Fortunately, we have engaged with the local police and they are working with us to try and engage with the groups we think are responsible, we have upgraded our CCTV and we are hoping that the busier the site becomes the less opportunity there will be for these events to happen.

It's not all doom and gloom though. Our town centre flowers were - I hope you'd agree - quite fantastic. We are going with the same arrangement again, and look forward to seeing how they turn out this year.

Hawley Football club are back on site, Frimley Phoenix Cricket club enjoyed their season here last year, and are happy to be returning and we are seeing a real upturn in booking enquiries for our halls, for our pitches and for the squash courts. Also, we have now got some tennis nets, and are hoping to offer that as an activity very soon.

Other things we are involved in includes trying to secure the ownership of the strip of land known as the Monkey Woods to protect it from any further encroachment from local residents, we are hoping to welcome the Hawley Fayre back to the site, I'm still working on the Christmas lights, we need to make decisions over the Neighbourhood Plan and we need to investigate possible funding sources to help pay for a new park.

Summary

In summary we enjoyed some fantastic events last year, however, there were many challenges which took a lot of time and energy from our staff, and money from our reserves, to maintain, repair and focus on what we have rather than making big leaps forward. But that's not a bad thing, and I don't want to make it sound like it is. Although we all like to do the big, exciting projects, we also need to make sure what we have is robust and will last us in the years to come.

What I need to do before I finish is thank our staff. They are the ones that make things happen. We - the councillors - talk about it, agree on it - and then our team actually do it. I would especially like to thank Jo, who has the vision to see where we could go and is resolute in helping us get there, and we are definitely moving forwards. Our team is small, which is the reason that sometimes things take time, and we can only ask that people try and appreciate that and work with us - and so many of you do. Anyway, thank you to Jo, Lorraine, Phillip, Alan, Steve, Marie, Dawn and all of our temporary team members - we appreciate everything you do for us here at Blackwater and Hawley Town Council.

Thank you.

Report of the Chair of the Finance Committee

Council Tax

Sixteen years ago, in 2007, the council tax levied by the Town Council for a band D house was £83.67. If that had increased by an average of 2.5% each year since then until recent rises in inflation, it would now be £139.15. Indeed, a number of parish councils around Hart already charge over £100, so that wouldn't be unusual. Last year the charge is in fact just £100.28 over £26 less than it would have been. This year our precept has increased from £186,321 to £207,829 and next year's precept will be £224,375.

Indeed, for 11 years there was no increase at all. Last year we have to increase our tiny share of the bill by £7.92, or 15p a week.

We remain cautiously optimistic about the future but are aware of the financial pressures we all face which could limit the projects we can undertake.

The Covid-19 affected year ended 31/3/22 had again not been good for people, not just because we have been struggling to emerge from Covid but also facing mounting inflation relating to the rise of energy and other costs. The Blackwater & Hawley Town Council have continued to combat this and improve Council's financial well-being in the future.

The removal of our offices from the town centre to our facilities in and near the Sports Centre enabled us to let the Blackwater Centre premises.

We need to make sure that facilities are looked after properly on your behalf and there are a number of things that will need doing over the next few years. We have been continuing to develop our income streams being the Coffee Shop on the Green since August 2020, the Inn on the Green, the Sports Centre, rental and letting income. The Coffee Shop enterprise has enjoyed an income for last year of £59,670 with allocated expenditure of £69,081 including the cost of year end stock. The income for YTD is £70,374.

Balances

Our balances at the end of last financial year had risen to £197,758. We keep our level of balances under review.

Our total income for the year was £473,032 (previous year £306,277) which included a precept of £186,321 (previous year £180,126), Business Restrictions Grant of £19,000 and Furlough JRS Grant of just £526. Our expenditure was £420,068 (previous year £330,203). There was a net income over expenditure of £52,964. This year we were projecting a deficit of £6,000 to be met by a transfer from reserves.

Other observations of interest

Bar income £70,490 for last year (previous year £21,614). Allocated expenditure was £74,934. The income this YTD is £95,079 exceeding the allocated expenditure of £89,055.

Other grants received £73,143 (including re the sports field £35,643) and £37,500 in respect of Hawley Meadows.

Income £8,207 YTD.

Rental income £23,723. (current YTD £15,264).

Lettings income £16,323 (current YTD £23,113).

Energy costs £33,463 (previous year £20,835). This year energy cost for YTD is £37,805.

Grants paid £2,600 (£2,500 for YTD)

Expenditure on unauthorised encampments £3,228. This YTD is £3,042.

Open spaces expenditure included clearance of fly tipping.

Report of the Chair of the Planning and Payments Committee

One project we continue to object to is the ongoing attempts to get planning permission for the garage area behind White Hart Parade, off Ryecroft Gardens.

While some of the previous concerns about the design of the structure itself have been addressed, as far as we're concerned, the STARTING point before we'd even consider giving our support to any significant residential development on the site, is to ensure there can be no negative effect on the already problematic parking issues in Kingsway and Ryecroft Gardens, and ideally, an improvement.

So far, there has been no proposal which satisfies our access concerns and the most recent proposal would mean the loss of some existing parking spaces, therefore making the parking problem, even worse.

The garage area was originally provided as an amenity to the residents of Ryecroft Gardens, and while this remains the case in principle, the unsightly and poor condition of the site, with garages unfit for purpose means it's not a viable parking option for the vast majority of the local residents.

We would happily encourage and support plans to improve the area, but plans must be right for the location and sensible solutions found to address current needs and concerns.

As you are probably aware, construction at Hawley Park Farm is well under way, and whilst the generally feeling is that the estate should never have been allowed in the first place, we do need to embrace the reality of it, and aspire to welcome new resident and help them feel as though they can engage with the Blackwater and Hawley Community they're now part of.

There was recently an application to extinguish the footpath running across the Country Park which is a conditional mitigation to offset the impact of the new development, providing a suitable alternative greenspace, or SANG. While the footpath has been in existence for many years, it was considered to be no long necessary because of the creation of the SANG. However, to protect the long term integrity of the greenspace, we felt it necessary to object to the permanent removal of the footpath. The SANG could potentially only be a permeant feature for 80 years, after which its future would automatically be open to alternative uses...such as a building development. A footpath, however, remains a public right of way until such time as an application is made to divert or extinguish it, which can then be challenged.

Thankfully, common sense prevailed and before we submitted our application, it was agreed that a footpath would remain, albeit, re-routed.

It has generally been an uneventful year when it comes to Planning matters in Blackwater and Hawley, however, I understand that the owners of Minley Manor are expecting to hear of the outcome of their latest application, in the not too distant future. The development of this site, as proposed, would mean Minley Manor would become a great asset to the area and one would hope, bring new job opportunities to our local community.

8. County Councillors Report

County Councillors Report (Adrian Collett)

Three levels of Council Town – District – County

Hart District Council (Fleet) - Planning & Planning Applications, Refuse Collection, Litter Picking, Building Control, Housing, Environmental Health, Countryside, Collecting Council Tax & much more.

Hampshire County Council (Winchester) – Roads, Transport, schools, libraries, waste tips & waste disposal, births, deaths & marriage registration, care services & much more.

Countrywide News.

Hampshire & Kent wrote to Government to tell them that they are close to Bankruptcy (approx. 2-3 years away). There has been £640 million cuts so far with £132 million more in the next 2-3 years.

So much has been cut back – Youth Services, Childrens Centres, Bus Services not supported, Libraries closed & Mobile Libraries gone

HCC are lobbying to change criteria for offering transport to those outside schools catchment area – at moment if school is 2 miles away (Primary) & 3 miles away (Secondary) transport has to be provided – this costs £30 million.
HCC would like to introduce means testing.

Potholes – roads not looked after – no money available.

Roads are not maintained they just fill potholes which deteriorate because foundation is not solid – massive bill being built up – will take decades to catch up!

Traffic Management – Resident Parking Permits, Yellow Lines Management & Traffic Wardens that are currently run by HDC on behalf of HCC will be taken back in hose by HCC as from 1st April.

HCC are confident they can save money by outsourcing Parking Enforcement to a National Company.

Local Issues

Locally we have no failing schools.

BVCP (in need of Committee members and/or Trustees) have created a walk along Blackwater River also launched Rail to Trail.

Roads – any problems with potholes, pavements etc need to be reported online (HCC Website Road/Transport) or by phone (0300 555 1388)

Lorries travelling through weight restriction area (mainly Hawley Park Farm Construction Company) – signs need to be more visible – hundreds of infringements but HCC don't consider it a priority & Police won't enforce.

Hawley School Parking – lack of respect for Oakfield residents - problem arises because only half of the pupils live within the catchment area so too far to walk.
School have been told that the Council are happy for parents to park in the Leisure Centre Car Park & walk to/from the school but there seems to be very few takers.

Speeding – Speed Limit Signs are placed for two weeks at a time as a reminder.

Hawley Park Farm – wide ditch if a car crashed into it the driver/passenger couldn't open door to get out – safety people are looking into it.

Flooding in Kingsway – sewage in homes on a regular basis -Thames Water are at last engaged after a piece on Watchdog Segment of One Show visited Kingsway & spoke to one of the residents.

Tips – because of budget cuts if you go over the border you are charged.

Blackwater Town Centre – proud of what we have done so far flowers/planter brighten up the area.

Sad news is the smashed barrier after just about a year since it was damaged still nothing done to repair it.

9. Questions

- No crossing near Hawley Park Farm – safety engineers say traffic islands enough need more people crossing before lights or zebra crossing installed.
- Are the Council applying for everything they are entitled to – Town Clerk does apply for grants but isn't always successful.
- Litter Picking – Hart are responsible Trees etc – HCC are responsible
Suggestion made to set up Community Initiative to tidy up
- Why does Fleet have so much & we don't? – 2000 households (BHTC)
11000 households (Fleet)
Hart do not receive grants because we have no deprived areas whereas Rushmoor receives money from levelling up fund
- New Mums have nowhere to go, no weighing clinics, no mother/toddler groups, no youth clubs, Sure Start Closed, why is all the space Council have not used for this – Council have spaces but not enough staff to implement these various clubs. Suggested that Buzz article used to call for Volunteers to run these things – need qualified people only not just willing participants
- Hawley Lane has no pathway & no cycle lane – **bad news** is the expected half million to BHTC & half a million to HCC was due from Hawley Park Farm but when developers appealed against decision to cut amount of houses on site because no one could explain to inspectorate what the million was for he took it out of the deal – good news is there is a new initiative LCWIF (Local Cycling Walking Initiative Fund?)
- Website could all irrelevant things be removed so just relevant info shown – work on website is ongoing
- Reserves are not shown on financial paperwork – reserves policy has been implemented, responsible councils need to keep money back to cover essential expenses (wages, upkeep etc) when problems occur an example being Covid when we lost all income.

- Allotments – no land available – not cheap to set up need water supply, waste collection etc.
- Postal Delivery (lack of) – no staff – could a representative from Council complain – Yes will do

The meeting ended at