



## **Blackwater and Hawley Town Council**

Hawley Leisure Centre, Hawley Green, Blackwater,  
Hampshire GU17 9BW Tel: (01276) 33050

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### **Minutes of The Annual Town Residents' Meeting At the Hawley Memorial Hall, Hawley Green Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at 7.00 pm.**

In Attendance:

Cllr Collett, Cllr Blewett, Cllr Hunt, Cllr Harward, Cllr Monks (Chair), Cllr Tarbet,  
Cllr Usher, Jo Shaw, Town Clerk, Ben Baldwin, Minley Mannor and 20 residents.

1. Chair's Welcome  
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies for absence  
Cllr Lister gave apologies for absence.
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 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were received and approved as a correct record. There were no matters arising.
4. Speaker – Ben Baldwin on the Future of Minley Manor  
Ben Baldwin, as Chief of Staff to the owners of Minley Manor explained that the property had been acquired by a Chinese Hong Kong family who were keen to undertake the upgrade project to provide a bespoke hotel with work for the local community.  
  
A number of planning applications had been submitted for the upgrades to Minley Manor with the most recent application receiving support from Historic England. Ben was hopeful that support for the new scheme would be received from the local community. As part of the Birch Community group, the hotel would ultimately offer accommodation in 100 rooms over the various buildings on the site. It was hoped that the project, subject to planning approval, would start in 2023 and it was expected to take approximately 4 years for completion.
5. Speaker – Adrian Collett, Hampshire County Councillor  
Cllr Collett highlighted the breadth of the responsibilities of Hampshire County Council, which included (but was not limited to) schools, care services (adults and children), roads, buses and community transport, municipal tips (collection and sorting of waste), minerals, countryside and rights of way, trading standards, libraries and museums.

Cllr Collett explained that much of the Hampshire CC (£2.3 billion) is allocated to schools, that adult care services were the fastest growing



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part of the budget, and also childrens services – the remainder (£487 million) needs to cover the remaining items detailed above. Following years of austerity and reducing government grants, Hampshire CC are left in a position where they must make £40-50 million **more cuts each year**.

Cllr Collett revealed that as a Councillor, dealing with case work (residents raising issues) was a huge but satisfying task. Many of the issues raised were connected with roads and he encouraged residents to report these issues online or with the hotline as a first point of call. The volume of reports on an issue would lead to an increase in the urgency of the problem.

Councillor Collett also reported that there were many School Governor vacancies, and asked anyone interested to contact him for further information.

As a County Councillor, Adrian was able to allocate small grants to local organisations to benefit local residents and anyone who required further information should contact him for a discussion.

#### 4. Annual Report and Accounts

### ***Report of the Chair of Council***

#### **Introduction**

I thought I would start by just quickly explaining what we are responsible for as a Town Council. This is important because I regularly see people – largely on social media – complaining about “The Council” and realise that most see (as I did before I became involved here) “The Council” as a single body, not three distinct legal entities which around here are Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council, and the Town Council.

It’s possibly easier to tell you what we are not responsible for – we don’t do roads, schools, pavements, hedges or bins – except the ones on our land. We don’t get to decide planning matters – although we are consulted and get to give opinion – and we can’t, as much as we might like to, festoon the A30 with jubilee bunting on a whim. What we do is 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 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,



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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 Consultative Committee 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 to assist. 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. 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!

So, broadly, we want to provide excellent public facilities to our community within our physical, financial and practical limitations and we can only agree with you about the state of the roads....

### Last year

Last year was strange, when the last town meeting was held, we were just coming out of lockdown and some restrictions were still in place. Our facilities were reopening but not fully open. As a council it was a difficult time. The coffee shop, newly open in September 2020 actually thrived during lockdown as there wasn't much else to do other than go for a walk and then have a coffee outside.

Once there were other options, people, naturally, wanted to go back to them, and trade suffered. However, summer came, and our beautiful outdoor space drew people back and we had a tremendous few months.

At the end of August we held a "party" to celebrate a year of the coffee shop – we had live music and a BBQ. It was – despite the weather being a bit British – a fabulous day.

The bar and coffee shop are the hub of the community. Still people are discovering us, and the coffee shop has recently hosted a mother and toddler group, the WI, and are receiving enquiries daily from others wanting to use it. The new signage has helped enormously.

It goes without saying that – as well as providing a social space for locals to meet, these facilities bring much needed revenue to the council. Last year this revenue was surpassed that of recent years, and of course the



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more successful our commercial ventures are, the more money we will have to invest in infrastructure and future projects.

As part of our commitment to improving access and availability of sport and recreation facilities for the local community, we have identified several projects that we would like to undertake over the next few years. These have been documented within our new "Leisure Strategy" which includes things such as improving access to the sports pitches, decommissioning the current gym to provide an additional fitness / leisure space for small classes and groups, improving toilet and changing facilities for all users, upgrading the current play area and adding a space for younger children near to the coffee shop, installing a new more accessible and modern gym on the ground floor of the leisure centre, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, replacing the current mpa with an all weather 3G pitch, and developing the coffee shop to include sales of food as well as quality hot drinks.

We have now started on some of these projects, but some of these are still GRAND PLANS which have yet to get to more than a "wouldn't it be amazing" stage, but they are not unrealistic. Obviously, they all take money, which we are hoping to raise through a combination of self-funding from trading surpluses, through grants which may be available to us, or through partnership with centre users, as we have done with the FA funding obtained by Hawley Football Club which helped hugely towards paying for the sports pitch improvements.

The other thing that the Leisure Strategy will help with is if there is future housing development in the area. As some of you will know, we lost out on a significant amount of money in the form of developer contributions which were originally due from the development at Hawley Park Farm. This was - at least in part - due to the absence of a credible list of projects for which any money could be used. That wasn't the only reason, however, having a documented Leisure Strategy, and maintaining / updating it regularly should mean that won't be a factor in any future such funds. It has been amazing to see Hawley Football Club back where they belong and their awards evening was an incredible event to mark the end of a great season.

Frimley Phoenix Cricket Club continue to use our facilities as their "home" grounds, and have expanded the amount of training and number of matches they will be playing this year after the success of 2021, and it has been particularly great to see so many youth groups involved with them. We have multiple netball teams using the multi-purpose area, and we hosted the mobile Covid unit until tested ended in March this year. Plans



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are afoot to install tennis nets for the summer, for a small charge, which will be great for any budding Wimbledon stars.

Both of our halls are well used. Although we did lose some of our previous hirers over Covid times, we have attracted new users including Rock your Bod, Taekwondo, RHL, Dance Classes and LOTS of children's birthday parties! We continue to encourage new teams and groups to get in touch with us if they are looking for a space to hire.

Our squash courts – some of the only ones in the area - are busy, especially as Camberley Squash Club now use our centre as their base.

The Memorial Hall – during the last lock down we decided to upgrade the bar, however, asbestos brought that to a halt, which was a time consuming and expensive process. However, our facilities team have working to reinstalling the bar so we can reopen for parties and functions. The loss of this income was quite significant over the last two years, so it will be great to get back to it. We are also still planning to offer it as a wedding venue in the future, however, further work is required.

One of the things on our Leisure Strategy is to reduce our carbon footprint. As an old building the Leisure Centre is not efficient, and an energy consultant reviewed the buildings and identified areas requiring improvements. These ranged from no cost ideas such as setting the heating timers properly, and asking staff to turn lights off on leaving rooms, to installing a roof full of solar panels and a garage full of batteries - and everything in between. That was a great exercise to undertake, and over the next year we will be planning how to prioritise these actions and how to finance them.

The Blackwater Centre flowers are back, a different approach this year, but still significantly cheaper than previously and one which will hopefully provide a good display.

One final thing – look out for our Jubilee offerings. We will have music, BBQ and a Beacon lighting on the back field. The bar will be open lunchtime and the coffee shop open until late. Friday we have a cake sale and craft fair in the memorial hall, Saturday we are hosting an old fashioned tea dance and Sunday, we are having a GREAT BIG jubilee picnic (and a BBQ) on the field - bring your rugs, food and wear something red, white and blue and let's celebrate.

In summary, things are changing, developing and improving at your Town Council. Some of it is things you won't notice, like a new boiler, energy certificates, even the asbestos that isn't there any more – things that take



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up a lot of time for our staff, and cost money, but isn't headline grabbing. Some of it is more visible and we hope you are seeing improvements and enjoying them.

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. 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.

### ***Report of the Chair of the Finance Committee***

#### **Council Tax**

Fifteen 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 and 7% for last year to cover inflation, it would now be £126.50. Indeed, a number of parish councils around Hart already charge over £100, so that wouldn't be unusual. This year the charge is in fact just £100.28 over £25 less than it would have been.

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

The Covid-19 affected year ended 31/3/22 has 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 to 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 improve 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 the full year of £59,670 and has made an encouraging contribution and has shown continuous improvement.

#### **Balances**

Our balances at the end of this financial year have risen to £154,595 including the allocation of £25,500 to our Memorial Hall Maintenance Project. We keep our level of balances under review.

Our total income for the year was £473,032 (previous year £306,277) which includes precept of £186,321 (previous year £180,126), Business Restrictions



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Grant of £19,000 and Furlough JRS Grant of just £526. Our expenditure was £413,593 (previous year £330,204). There was a net income over expenditure of £59,439.

### **Other observations of interest**

Bar income £70,490 (previous year £21,614)

Other grants received £73,143 (including re the sports field £35,643)

Rental income £23,723

Lettings income £16,324

Energy costs £33,463 (previous year £20,835). Next years comparison will be a salient one.

Grants paid £2,600

Expenditure on unauthorised encampments £3,228

Open spaces expenditure includes clearance of fly tipping

### **Report of the Chair of the Planning and Payments Committee**

Since the report of 2021, planning applications have been steady, but numbers have greatly reduced compared to previous years. No doubt this is, in part, a result of building supplies being more difficult to come by as well and more expensive, at a time when there has been a lot of personal, financial uncertainty around.

There were just 28 planning applications submitted, compared to the 74 last year, although that was a 14-month period, not 12, because of the start of the Covid-19 restrictions being imposed. Even so, that is quite a dramatic drop.

As I explained last year, whilst Blackwater and Hawley Town Council mostly submit 'No Objection' to received applications, there are sometimes concerns which we comment on as a 'condition' if you like, of our agreement.

Potential parking issues are one example, and another which has cropped up on a few occasions this year, is the potential for a proposed extension or new garden building, to become a separate dwelling to the main house.

With many people working from home more now, a home office and/or gym is perhaps more popular than ever, which may explain the reason for this particular trend. Whilst we may have no objection to the principle of the work proposed, it is sometimes felt necessary to ensure that any development is only used for the intended purpose in the application. New, separate, residential dwellings are governed by different criteria and in some parts of the Parish, are not permitted at all.



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So, of the applications submitted for consideration, we had No Objection to 18 of them, albeit, some had conditions attached, as just mentioned, 8 we objected to, 1 we fully supported and another was a resubmission.

One of those we objected 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 had been addressed in the last application, the fundamental issues of access, during construction in particular, and the lack of attention to the parking problems in Ryecroft Gardens, were NOT addressed at all. As far as we, the Council are concerned, these are two fundamental matters that MUST be resolved before we would even consider giving our approval to any significant residential development on the site. The garage area is unsightly, unkept and known for some degree of anti-social behaviour. We would 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. It's been quiet for some times now, so we are waiting for further news on any new proposals.

On a more positive note, the application we fully supported is for the renovation of a listed barn at West Minley Farm. What was proposed is a sensible and sympathetic restoration, which is something we were keen to support, to help maintain some of the history and character of the area.

I believe at times its mistakenly thought that town councils, such as ours, are the decision makers when it comes to planning matters. However, we are just consultants in the process. As a Community council mainly made up of local residents who may understand the nuances of living in a particular area, we are usually in a more knowledgeable position to comment on planning submissions, with some degree of how it may affect the area. We do take notice of any comments made by neighbours and residents, be it in writing or voiced at Planning meetings, and collectively, we may or may not agree with any points made, but it's important that we listen as impartially as we can, to give fair representation in our submission to Hart. Everyone has the right to improve their home or business premises, but not to the unfair detriment of their surroundings, and this, in part, is what we try to view, in balance.

This also applies to some other matters we are consulted on, such as opening or delivery hours for retail stores and businesses in the parish, or Licence applications, for the sale of alcohol.

While we like to support and promote business in Blackwater & Hawley, when Grandma Buggins, the food outlet in the White Hart Parade applied





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to sell alcohol, until 2am during the week and 3am at weekends, we felt quite strongly, that this wasn't an appropriate location for such activity, nor a benefit to the community. As a result, we submitted our objection based on the principles considered by the Licensing committee. Councillor Andy Tarbet represented Blackwater and Hawley Town Council at a License hearing, after which the application was refused. We feel this was the correct decision given the particular set of circumstances, although the applicants do have the right to appeal.

Last year, Hawley Park Farm was the hot topic. Despite the overwhelming local opposition to the development, progress is well under way with homeowners already taking up residence. We do, of course, still take an interest in progress, but in the overall scheme of things, while there are still some issues to address, the estate is here to stay so we may as well embrace it, and welcome those who move to the area. As a matter of interest, we were asked to suggest names for the roads on the new estate. In keeping with Blackwaters equestrian links and former owners of the land where the estate is being built, we submitted a number of equestrian related road names, which are being adopted

I would like to touch on potted history of Blackbushe Airport, which many people will aware, operates on Registered Common Land. This has been the case since it was built under wartime, emergency powers, as such a development would not ordinarily be permitted on common land. The law required that the airport should have been demolished after the war...but never was.

The history is quite convoluted, but the airport has, over the years, become accepted, in many respects, as part of the landscape and the community.

However, the airport wishes to improve their facilities, particularly for passengers, so the operation can become more viable, but because of the restrictions of what is allowed on common land, such improvements can't take place. In order to find a solution, the airport operators applied to have the whole of the airfield de-registered as common land.

Arguments for and against this idea have been made but fundamentally, the acceptance of de-registration would set a dangerous precedent whereby thousands of acres of common land across the country could be lost. and also, the land associated with Blackbushe would become far more valuable than it is now...which is fairly worthless in financial terms, and in the event that the airport ceased to operate, the land could be sold, for millions, to developers of industrial sites, as it couldn't be used for housing . So both national and local concerns there.



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Following a major enquiry in April 2019, attended by Councillor Adrian Collette as a witness against the proposal, the Inspector decided to approve the application.

However, Hampshire Council were then called upon by supporters of common land, to challenge this decision. As you may be aware, the case was fully argued out in the High Court, with the end result being that the decision of the planning inspector was reversed.

Blackbushe has challenged the reversal in the Supreme Court, with the outcome being, the decision of the High Court should stand.

So that's where we are today. It's something of a stalemate for Blackbushe at the moment, but it is understood that they are exploring other options, including a transfer of common land status on to other land of equal value. To my knowledge, no formal application has been made as yet. So while we are keen to support Blackbushe, which has become very much part of our landscape, the priority MUST go to protecting the site from any other development in the future if the airport ceases to operate as it is, and indeed, helping to ensure the protection of common land status, across the country.

Finally, as you may or may not be aware, the Neighbourhood Plan was put on ice, in part, because of the Covid-19 lockdown.

It is our intention to discuss the plan in the near future, to consider the merits of resurrecting work on the plan, or if it's something which is now redundant. A fair amount of time has already been given by former Councillors and local residents, over a few years, however, in order to continue, it would require a significant amount of input from Blackwater and Hawley residents, as this is not and never was, a Council run project.

If you would like to be involved or have any thoughts on the subject, we would be only too glad to hear them.

### 5. Residents Questions and Points Raised

There were no matters raised by residents.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm