

**Blackwater and Hawley**

**Town Council**

**Town Plan**

***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

<This page is intentionally left blank for double-sided page printing formatting>

### **Introduction**

This Town Plan document sets out the aims and objectives of Blackwater and Hawley Town Council (BHTC) for the next 3 years (April 2025 - April 2028). It has been created by the town councillors and the Town Clerk.

Its target audience is:

- BHTC itself, as a steer for their budgeting and planning in the next several years
- The residents of the town, as a statement of what the town council plan to do

As with any plan, this document will be kept under review during its lifetime, and will be updated annually in the annual Finance Meeting in November.

This document will reside on the Town Council website, and residents can ask questions, or offer comments, at the BHTC Annual Meeting (questions in advance appreciated).

### **Context**

BHTC is responsible for two wards: Blackwater, and Hawley & Minley, both situated in North East Hampshire. Each has its own elected councillors.

A Town Council (sometimes referred to as a Parish Council) is the most local level of government that represents residents and businesses in England. Where it exists, a town council works beneath a District Council or a Unitary Authority, and in BHTC's case this is currently Hart District Council, headquartered at the Harlington Centre in Fleet. Hart District Council is, in turn, part of Hampshire County Council. **NB. Hart and Hampshire are to undergo restructuring into a unitary authority as part of the government review announced in early 2025.**

A Town Council is run by the Town Clerk, who has a small team of dedicated, employed people in a variety of roles, often overlapping for efficiency. These are a mixture of full and part-time, to ensure that the business of the town council is executed effectively and efficiently.

While the Town Clerk runs the council on a day-to-day basis, they are answerable to the town councillors, a group of local volunteers who have offered themselves up, through the local election process, to steer and monitor the Town Council activities.

Town councillors do not work for the council, they are there to hold the town council to account on behalf of the residents. There are regular public council meetings held with the timetable and agendas for each meeting posted on local town council notice boards and also available on the town council website. In these meetings, town councillors will receive reports from the town clerk on a variety of issues, and will have the chance to ask questions and ask for explanations, either on their own account, or on behalf of residents who may have approached them outside of the meeting.

Each meeting includes a 'Democratic 15 minutes' slot at the start of the meeting where residents can ask questions, or provide information they think the town council should know.

## ***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

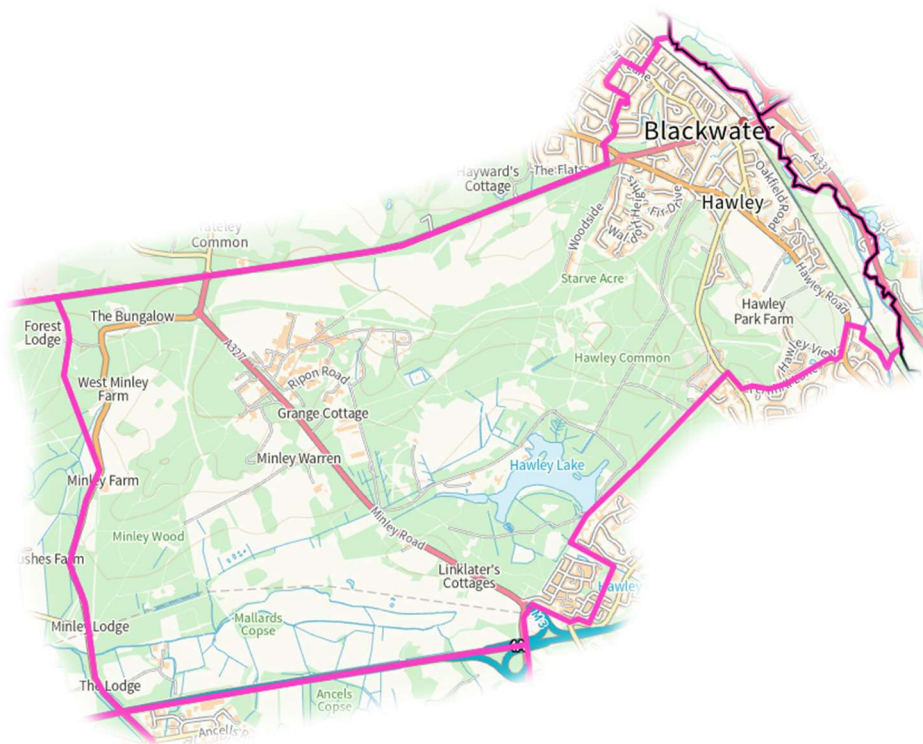
After this slot, the public are welcome to observe the remainder of the public meeting, but are not allowed to contribute.

Town councillors give up their own time to serve the community and, contrary to what many people assume, are unpaid and do not get expenses. Neither do they get any perks from the town council facilities, not even a discount in the coffee shop. Therefore, residents get the services of some talented and dedicated local people for free!

More details of how all levels of councils are structured can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-structure-and-elections>.

The BHTC area is shown on the map below. There are web resources that can help you if you need further detail. Try [www.magic.defra.gov.uk](http://www.magic.defra.gov.uk) or [www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk) .



BHTC boundaries

This area has a population of around 6,000.

There are 8 councillors, with the Blackwater ward currently having 3 councillors, and Hawley & Minley ward having 5.

The current details of current councillors can be found on the BHTC website here:

<https://www.blackwaterandhawleytowncouncil.gov.uk/uploads/files/2024-25%20parish%20cldr%20contact%20details%20v1.pdf> .

A Town Council is funded:

## **Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan**

- through the precept (or allowance) claimed from Hart DC, which is based on the number of chargeable households in BHTC area (the ‘tax base’),
- by a Town Council element paid as part of your overall council tax, and
- by any other income they are able to generate from their facilities and services offered.

Details of the town council income can be found in the annual financial statement available online.

BHTC is quite unusual within the local town councils. From the map above, it can be seen that it covers a relatively large geographical area but, because of the amount of military and agricultural land within its boundary, it has only a small population. As an area with a smaller population, the relatively modest income provided by the precept and local council tax presents some challenges to BHTC in the provision of services and facilities. Yateley Town Council, for instance, is a similar size but a population of around 17,000 and consequently has more money to support its services. This explains in some way to the weight given in the following Blackwater and Hawley Town Plan on trying to generate income from the available Town Council facilities.

Activities that the Town Council undertake, in order to serve the local community and raise income include:

- renting out **sport facilities** (football and cricket pitches, squash courts, changing facilities, and other hall space at the Leisure Centre)



- letting **the Memorial Hall** (which has a function bar) to the public for anything from exercise groups to local theatre groups, awards ceremonies and family celebrations

## Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan



- income from burials in **the town council cemetery** adjacent to the church cemetery on Fernhill Road



- social facilities (which are mainly pet-friendly) on the Leisure Centre site:

**The Inn on the Green**, which is a fully functioning pub, offering a range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic refreshments, quiz nights, karaoke, music sessions, TV screenings of sports and other events and is also available as a meeting space when the pub is closed. Food is often available from outside vendors.



**The Coffee Shop**, started from nothing only a few years ago, established itself as a popular destination during the COVID restrictions and has since gone from strength to strength. It has become a popular meet-up location for friends and clubs, and offers barista coffee and other hot and cold drinks, cakes, hot and cold snacks and ice cream.



## **Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan**

- **Letting surplus space** in the existing Town Council estate - surplus space at the leisure centre and at the Blackwater Centre is let out on a commercial basis to local concerns, and support a variety of businesses.



- The **sports fields** are also used, on an informal basis, by people such as joggers and exercisers, fitness groups, dog-walkers, kids kicking a ball about, and those just wanting a bit of fresh air.



### **Other amenities in the area**

Although not managed by the Town Council, the town also benefits from having access to several amenities managed by other agencies:

- The Hawley Woods military training area offers many acres of woodland and heathland for walking, exercising, cycling, dog walking, and fresh air.
- Hawley Meadows is a Natural Greenspace area with river walks and a variety of flora and fauna
- The North Downs railway service at Blackwater Station, giving access to the national rail network, and from which you can take advantage of the Rail to Trail scheme to walk the Blackwater Valley Path and return on the train.

## **What DON'T the Town Council look after**

It is a common misconception that there is just 'The Council' and it is a single entity and it looks after everything. If only the world was that simple! There is a long list of things that BHTC doesn't look after, these falling to higher levels of governance, to whom queries should be directed.

You can check the appropriate web site for more details but a few examples are given below:

**Hart Council** ([www.hart.gov.uk](http://www.hart.gov.uk)) look after:

Planning decisions, refuse and recycling collection, car parking, Council Tax, most leisure centres (but not ours), larger parks.

**Hampshire County Council** ([www.hants.gov.uk](http://www.hants.gov.uk)) look after:

State education, local roads and potholes, road verges, common land, transport policy, social care.

**The Highways Agency and Transport for England** look after:

Trunk roads and motorways

And, of course, because the buses and the trains are privatised, operational responsibility lies with the companies concerned and any issues should be directed to them directly.

## **The Town Council Plan**

The Town Clerk and Councillors have agreed a vision for the development of the BHTC activities over the next 3 years, aimed at revitalising the aging Leisure Centre and site.

Our Mission Statement:

**To provide local residents with cost effective services, and to create a community hub to foster a sense of belonging in our area.**

The Leisure Centre site, with its extensive and green open space, offers an excellent opportunity for visitors and residents, young and old, to enjoy facilities in a more relaxed environment.

While Blackwater and Hawley town centre area along the London Road which also has some excellent shops and some leisure options, is a busy main road location and perhaps does not appeal to everyone for recreational activities.

The site, along with the Coffee Shop and Inn on The Green, have seen an uptick in footfall in the last couple of years, and they are becoming increasingly popular as a recreational destination.

These facilities already run at no cost to the Council Tax payers of the town, and an opportunity is seen to improve the offering of these facilities and create a healthy community-focused community resource, with any profits being reinvested into the Town Council.

The Town Clerk has the full backing of the town councillors in seeking to implement this plan, which is summarised as follows:

## **Underpinning Objectives**

There are certain things that underpin everything that the BHTC and its councillors do. These are summarised as:

### **Maintain the basic services they must support**

These are:

- To provide support to residents for any local issues that they wish to raise. While the Town Council may not be the agency to resolve these issues, they are often the most accessible face of the system, and it is important that residents are signposted to find the right channel for their concerns and issues.
- To ensure its ageing building stock is in good repair for the benefit and safety of everyone.
- To provide input into the Hart DC planning process. Town Councils do not make planning decisions but are a statutory consultee, and their comments are an important part of the District planning process.
- To provide cemetery services - BHTC runs the northern section of the graveyard neighbouring Holy Trinity Church (Holy Trinity Church manages the remainder), an important facility for those who wish to see their loved ones at rest within the community.
- To maintain their playground. The Town Council responsible for the Hawley Green playground (the new playground on Fernhurst is managed by Hart DC).

### **Provide best value to the local tax payer**

- all services and facilities should be delivered with fiscal responsibility.

### **Sustainability**

- lead by example, implementing green and climate-friendly solutions wherever judicious.

## **Maintenance of Town Council Buildings**

The town council are responsible for an ageing site built in the last century, where the materials and facilities used in the original build are showing their age. Running repairs are a constant drain on resources, and limit the development of the site. The layout in some areas is also inefficient and needs revamping.

The areas identified identified for attention are:

### **Weather proofing buildings**

- The roofs of all buildings (the Leisure Centre, the Memorial Hall, and the coffee shop) are past their sell-by-date and have suffered from repeated leaks

## ***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

for several years, with each repair only seeming to encourage another leak nearby. A more durable solution is overdue.

### **Electrics**

- Many buildings require rewiring, but particularly the coffee shop building. Even the current modest usage of the existing kitchen in the coffee shop is resulting in frequent trip-outs of the 1960's domestic electrical installation. A modern, upgraded electrical system will not only benefit the existing services but capacity can be increased to allow for future development.

### **Toilets**

Most of the toilet facilities on-site require modernising. The different parts of the site have different priorities:

- Memorial Hall - if the Town Council is to successfully market the Memorial Hall as a venue for entertainment and celebratory events, the toilet facilities must be modernised
- Bar toilets - accessibility issues aside (covered below), existing facilities are just about adequate but improvements need to be addressed within the timeline of this plan.

### **Accessibility**

- It is recognised that accessibility across the site requires some work. This will be addressed on a case by case basis as other other work proceeds.

### **Office facilities**

- The site requires proper office space for the council admin staff, who are currently working in sub-optimal spaces. The LC building contains a number of under-used areas which could be remodelled to be more ergonomic and offer a professional experience for the public.

## **Other Leisure Centre estate considerations**

### **Site IT infra-structure:**

- IT redesign to utilise up-to-date facilities e.g. replacing the existing old laptop (yes - currently just one!), soon out of support, with sufficient current models for the staff who need them.
- Whole site wi-fi to replace existing inefficient network architecture
- Official Town Council email accounts for Town Council personnel and councillors.

### **Public visibility**

- Find ways to improve the public visibility of the town council presence, to make residents more aware of the existence and extent of the council.

## ***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

### **Access from the front car park through the main building**

- There should be access to the bar and sports fields directly from the main entrance rather than requiring people to work out the circuitous route around the side of the building .

### **Access from the car park to the sports field/coffee shop/bar**

- An obvious walkway from the front car park to the rear of the buildings is required, to replace the existing narrow steps and unmade slope.

### **Improve the Inn on The Green outdoor area**

- A larger covered patio area outside of the bar could be created to complement the existing small bar area.

### **Hawley Green kids play area**

- Replacement required. Having been installed several years ago, the playground equipment has reached the end of its life and renovation is not possible.

### **Site housekeeping**

- Parts of the site require some simple, regular housekeeping to keep them appealing. Regular review of things like waste/litter bin provision and gardening around the buildings.

### **Sauna facility**

- Perhaps surprisingly, the leisure centre has a sauna (long unused but serviceable). Saunas are once again in demand - the town council will review its potential for creating an additional income stream.

### **Renovate the multi-purpose area**

- This area (where the tennis courts once were) has degraded in recent times, in part due to the cost of maintaining aging infrastructure such as the lights, and is now little used. The town council will investigate the feasibility of restoring this area to create a new income stream.

## **The Town Council Cemetery**

The cemetery is an important facility within the area, and creates a useful income for the Town Council.

### **Landscaping**

- Maintain the cemetery to provide a pleasant and tidy location. Planting to replace the Leylandii felled in 2024 is high on the list

### **Memorial Garden**

- The town council will investigate the possibility of providing a memorial garden area for as an alternative to burials.

## **The Coffee Shop**

The success of the coffee shop is seen as an opportunity to develop a useful community facility, and generate income for the Town Council.

The following objectives will be pursued:

### **Kitchen facilities**

- Once the wiring is upgraded, an overhaul of the kitchen equipment is required to bring up to modern standards.

### **Counter area**

- Install a professional counter to replace the existing informal free-standing tables.

### **Coffee shop offering**

- Continuous review of the offering to encourage customer retention.

### **Coffee shop layout**

- While it has a certain cosiness, the coffee shop has some layout issues and would benefit from some improvements. These will be continuously assessed and sensitive changes introduced, to not disrupt the character of the space.

### **Coffee shop outdoor play area**

- A toddler play area for smaller children in the coffee shop apron to attract extra business.

## **The Memorial Hall**

### **Fire Risk Assessment required**

- This is a prerequisite for any improvements.

### **Hall redecoration**

- The overall aesthetics of the hall needs improving to attract private hire business for an increasingly wide range of events.

### **Broaden the scope of events that could be accommodated**

## ***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

- With some investment, the MH could be hired out for a wider range of events (e.g. as a licenced wedding venue, a more sophisticated theatre/concert venue). Updates to services such as lighting and audio/visual provision will be considered.

### **Town events and upkeep**

#### **Community Events Committee**

- Establish a volunteer committee to organise events such as the Annual Town Fayre and Christmas Lights.

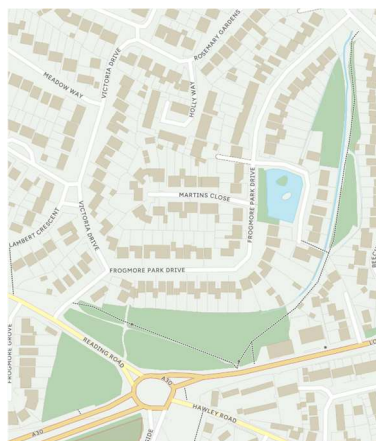
#### **Street furniture**

- Audit and maintenance of the Town Council furniture (e.g. street benches) which we have responsibility for.

#### **The “Monkey Woods”**

- Maintenance plan is required for this area which, following the emergence of some historical documentation provided by Yateley town council, has only recently been recognised as belonging to BHTC.

*On the map below, the woods run from the west side of the A30 roundabout bottom left, then behind Tesco Express and Parkhill Road, through to Rosemary Lane top right (although this end also has a privately owned area behind Frogmore Park Drive which isn't part of the BHTC land). If anyone knows why they are called The Monkey Woods, or if they know they have another name, please let the town clerk know.*



### **Marketing**

#### **Business development**

- Introduce a new role and establish procedures to promote the facilities of the Town Council, and to ensure any potential business is captured and nurtured professionally.

## ***Blackwater and Hawley Town Council Plan***

### **Social media presence**

- Improve the visibility of facilities on all relevant social media platforms.

### **Town neighbourhood signage**

- Review and upgrade the wayside signage for the Town Council area and the facilities available at the town council site.

**Online enquiry system** for selected facilities.

### **Playgroups and youth clubs**

- Promote facilities to local groups to attract new business.

## **Staffing**

**Review of roles and responsibilities** - as the Town Council develops its activities, new roles and responsibilities are emerging. New and adjusted roles to be identified and accommodated.

## **Updating the Town Plan**

The town plan is a living document and will be updated from time to time, as things get completed, circumstances change, and ideas evolve.

Please check regularly for updates, which will be tracked in the revision table in the appendix.

**Appendix**

**Revision History**

<b><u>Version</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Change summary</u></b>
Draft 0.9	14 May 2025	Draft offered to council for approval
Draft 0.10	21 May 2025	Typos and formatting changes only