



Spring 2020 Newsletter - Contents

Chairman's welcome
Chris Harrison

A Neighbourhood Plan for Haslemere
Sonja Dullaway

Environment Group update
Howard Brown

Haslemere Biodiversity Project
Dr Philippa Guest

Herbert Hutchinson: the man who shaped Haslemere
Chris Harrison

Wilder Valewood Project
David Elliott

Lost sons of Haslemere: George Booker (1874-1918)
Shirley Harrison

The future of our High Streets
Prof David Evans

Community Rail Partnership update
Ken Griffiths

Featured local society: Introducing BLH Charity
Sue Nicholson

Haslemere Awards 2020: a call for nominations

Simon Mackie Cartoon

Chairman's welcome

[text to follow]

A Neighbourhood Plan for Haslemere

By Sonja Dullaway

As members will be aware, the Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan is currently out for consultation. Since COVID-19 has meant that the drop-in sessions providing information about the plan were mostly cancelled, we thought it might be helpful to set out some of the key facts about the Plan and the process and how members can have their say.

What are the origins of the Neighbourhood Plan?

The 2011 Localism Act gives communities the right to a greater say on developments in their area by adopting a Neighbourhood Plan. Haslemere Vision (HV) was set up to draft a Plan on behalf of the Town Council.

Over the past 7 years, HV volunteers have carried out a series of consultations among the local community to find out what people do – and don't – want from developments in the area. From this work, HV drew up a series of proposed planning policies – the Neighbourhood Plan.

The proposed Plan covers Beacon Hill, Critchmere, Grayswood and Hindhead areas.

How does it fit with existing planning rules?

If adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will become a formal part of the local planning framework. The Planning authorities at Waverley Borough Council will have to take compliance with the Plan into account when deciding planning applications. Higher level policies, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and in the Local Plan 2 (LP2), will still apply. Having an adopted Plan would also entitle Haslemere Town Council to a greater share of the Community Infrastructure Levy (paid by developers) to improve local infrastructure.

What about the requirement to build 990 dwellings by 2032?

The government set out national targets for housebuilding for the period 2013-2032 and all local authorities have been set targets under this. Haslemere's share of Waverley's housing allocation is 990 dwellings. The local authority must meet interim targets and must be able to demonstrate a pipeline of new properties. If it can't, then there is a presumption in favour of 'sustainable' development, making it difficult for Waverley to refuse applications.

It is important to note that the target for 990 new dwellings cannot be challenged through the Neighbourhood Plan. However, it will give the community more say about what types and how densely dwellings are built and where development is located.

What is the process for getting the Neighbourhood Plan in place?

The Neighbourhood Plan consultation started on 2 March and will end on 27 April. The Town Council and HV will review responses and make any appropriate changes. The Plan then has to be approved by the relevant authorities, including a government-appointed inspector. If it passes that, the final stage is a local referendum. ***In order to be adopted, at least 50% of local residents must vote to support the Plan.***

Where can I find out what is in the plan?

Everybody should have received a summary of the proposed Neighbourhood Plan by post. But you can find a copy of it on the Haslemere Town Council website, or by following this link: [the proposed Neighbourhood Plan](#). Hard copies can be obtained from the Town Hall, COVID19 permitting.

How can I have my say?

You can complete a hard-copy survey. COVID19 permitting, you can pick up a copy of the survey at:

- Grayswood All Saints Church,
- Haslemere Town Hall (please call first),
- Haslemere Station Information Hub, or
- Haslewey Centre.

Surveys must be returned to the Haslemere Town Council offices at the Town Hall, High Street, Haslemere, GU27 2HG, by 27 April.

Alternatively, you can submit your comments online:

- [Survey 1](#) - Housing policies H1 - H5 (settlement boundaries, designated land, consultation, windfall)
- [Survey 2](#) - Housing policies H6 - H10 (access and transport, design, affordable homes, housing mix)
- [Survey 3](#) - Environmental policies H11 - H14
- [Survey 4](#) - Economy policies H15 - H18

What is Haslemere Vision doing now?

While drawing up the Plan, HV identified a number of local projects that have broad community support. Volunteers from HV have taken up three of these, aiming to work proactively to deliver benefits for the local area:

1. The Wey Hill Fairground development project – focussed on getting a mixed-use development with affordable housing and parking on this town-centre site;
2. The Sustainable Transport project – to help raise the proportion of journeys around the town taken in sustainable ways e.g. on foot or by bicycle; and
3. The Haslemere Biodiversity Project – to support proposed Policy H14, which seeks to conserve and strengthen local ecological networks, including the many designated sites of importance for biodiversity, and the wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that connect them. The Haslemere Society has provided funding towards Phase 1 of this project – see the article by Dr Philippa Guest elsewhere in this newsletter for more information.

Environmental Group Update

By Howard Brown

The past 12 months has seen several initiatives to improve Haslemere's environmental position, so we have linked up with Campaign for Rural England (CPRE) and have two projects being initiated. A report on the first of these, Haslemere Biodiversity Project, appears elsewhere in this Newsletter.

A second initiative is a garden pond survey, which aims to monitor local populations of newts and other amphibians. With self-isolation this will be restricted to private gardens or estates as public ponds should not be a social meeting area.

It will provide valuable data on the location of ponds and newts in the local garden arena and we will email members with the relevant information and forms in order to complete the survey.

We believe this will provide an opportunity for 'self-educational' biology, especially for those with children who are no longer attending school due to the restriction and would like an interesting and fulfilling project.

Other items we have been pursuing are still topical. A talk was due by the Blackdown & Hindhead Supporters of the National Trust to make all Haslemere Residents aware, not just our members, of the induction of beavers into Valewood. This has been postponed.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) around key areas in Haslemere, to preserve natural characteristics such as the sunken-sands highways and tree-lined lanes around the town in places like Midhurst Road or Scotland Lane are still being sought.

Waverley Borough Council does not see this as an issue, but trees are slowly vanishing and we feel that there is a real need to seek TPOs to preserve our attractive environment.

Haslemere Biodiversity Project (HBP)

By Dr Philippa Guest, Chair of Haslemere Biodiversity Project

Haslemere Vision was originally set up to consult with the community and draft a Neighbourhood Plan to set more detailed policy guidelines for development in the area. As many members will already be aware, the Neighbourhood Plan is now out for consultation.

Among the policies it proposes is H14, which seeks to protect local ecological networks, including the many international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, and the wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them.

The policy will essentially seek to (1) prevent development that would cause reduction or outright severance of these networks, and (2), support opportunities to conserve and strengthen them via appropriate management.

Haslemere Vision's Biodiversity Project (HBP), which aims to provide detailed information to underpin this policy, was launched earlier this month with funding support provided by The Haslemere Society, Haslemere Town Council, the Lob's Charity and CPRE Surrey.

Phase 1 aims to identify and map the main wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that connect key nature conservation sites across Haslemere and to start assembling the evidence base for Policy H14. Initial output from the mapping work will be available by the end of June.

We know that Haslemere supports important populations of widespread European Protected Species, which have undergone significant decline across Europe, hence their protected status. To this end, HBP is also supporting a series of mini-projects aimed at surveying and monitoring protected, keystone species that require corridors and stepping stones in order to sustain their populations.

The first of these focuses on the hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), one of Britain's most endearing small mammals, which requires good hedgerow links between woodland sites in which they live. Dormouse numbers have dropped by 75% over the last 25 years and they are now protected by law. HBP is collaborating with the Surrey Dormouse Group (SDG) to monitor populations in and around Haslemere.

SDG monitors two sites in Haslemere as part of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP), a long-term national study of this species that has assessed the prospects of dormice over the last 20-30 years. Haslemere is fortunate in having dormouse records that extend across the Neighbourhood Plan area.

HBP aims to support SDG in monitoring sites by supplying nest boxes, which also provide a safe and secure place for dormice to rear their young. The monitoring work will also help identify important hedgerow/woodland corridors that could benefit this species and where necessary we will offer advice for landowners and householders on how this engaging woodland mammal can be encouraged.

A second mini-project is surveying wildlife in local river corridors. Otters (*Lutra lutra*) used to be widespread across the UK but numbers dropped drastically between the 1950s and 1970s due to pesticide poisoning, habitat destruction and hunting. They have disappeared entirely from large parts of the country including Surrey.

Additionally, water voles (*Arvicola amphibious*) used to be seen and heard regularly along ditches, streams and rivers across Surrey but populations have dramatically declined over recent years due mainly to the widespread destruction and degradation of their wetland habitats and predation by the non-native American mink (*Neovison vison*).

HBP is supporting local wildlife experts to monitor riparian (riverbank-dwelling) mammals, such as otters, which, in 2020, were reported 20km downstream of Haslemere on the River Wey. By collaborating with local wildlife groups and landowners, we hope to identify strategies and action plans for improving riverbank habitats for our native riparian mammals and other wildlife.

Ponds provide important stepping-stones for many wildlife species and HBP's third mini-project involves surveying local ponds for newts and other amphibians. HBP is seeking to collaborate with Waverley's Countryside Ranger Team, the National Trust, the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) and local garden owners to monitor newt populations in selected ponds across Haslemere as a basis for identifying key pond corridors and conservation strategies for these species.

We are particularly interested in any sightings of the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*) (GCN), a European Protected Species which has declined sharply across Europe. The GCN has not been recorded within the Neighbourhood Plan area, despite records within 5km north and south of the town.

Newts come to ponds from mid-March to mid-June to breed. In these difficult times of Coronavirus, Haslemere Society members can help with this project, where they or family members have a pond in their gardens, by going out to survey garden ponds after dusk with a powerful torch and recording what newts and other wildlife they can see associated with their ponds. Look out for the HBP survey and identification sheet 'In Search of the Water- Dragons', to be mailed-out to Haslemere Society members in due course.

Finally, the Haslemere Vision greatly appreciates the Haslemere Society's involvement in this project and we look forward to providing an update on the Phase 1 work in the next newsletter.

Herbert Hutchinson: the man who shaped Haslemere

By Chris Harrison

Whether or not, as a resident of Haslemere, you are familiar with the name Herbert Hutchinson, as this picture of "Broadway", the gabled and timber framed shops with turreted orioles in the High Street illustrates, you will be familiar with his work.

What was once known as Hut's Corner at Hindhead, an alteration of a pre-existing building, most of the houses on the so-called Half-Moon Estate, the backcloth to our High Street, the larger houses in the Inval area, houses in Marley Heights: these are all the work of Herbert Hutchinson.

To understand how Hutchinson came to have such an important impact on the townscape, we need tell something of the story of his father, Sir Jonathan Hutchinson. Born in 1828, the son of a prosperous businessman in Selby in Yorkshire, Jonathan Hutchinson rose to become one of the most prominent surgeons of his day.

Described in later life as an almost legendary figure, he turned his hand to many areas of practice, but it was as a dermatologist, venereologist, ophthalmologist and pathologist that he achieved world fame.

In 1872, at the age of 44, he inherited his share of his father's fortune and, taking advantage of the accessibility afforded by the arrival of the railway some 13 years earlier, he purchased 200 acres of land around Inval, building the now demolished house one year later. This became a holiday home for his expanding family and, being averse to investment in anything other than property, with the passage of time he acquired more and more land in the local area.

From 1878 onwards, Inval was increasingly let, and while the family returned to it from time to time, he continued to acquire more land, build more houses, and live in many of them for a time before they were either let or sold. He also encouraged the extended family to come and live in the area: many of the large houses above Inval, together with Great Stroatley (now demolished and the site of Stroatley Rise) were at some point occupied by members of the family.

Herbert was Jonathan's fifth son, born in 1868. After attending University College School London, and the Slade School of Art, he was articled in the London office of WC Marshall, the architect who built what is now the Hindhead School of Music as his own residence and who is commemorated in one of The Society's blue plaques as a runner-up of the first Wimbledon tennis final.

Herbert was a talented architect and quickly developed his own style, a derivative of the Arts & Crafts Movement. He was also a gifted designer as demonstrated by the beautiful woodwork in some of his interiors. He was also a talented illustrator as demonstrated by the portfolio of painted elevations of over 70 of his buildings held by the Hutchinson family.

It was these skills, together with his father's voracious appetite for acquiring land for investment that enabled him to have such a significant impact on the local townscape. His father employed him as his agent for the last 20 years of his life, acquiring, developing and managing his property assets over this time.

Without question, Herbert's most significant impact on our townscape was in the development of the Half-Moon estate: the area of Hill Road, Museum Hill, College Hill, College Hill Terrace, Park Road, Old Haslemere Road and part of Scotland's Lane. The Haslemere local survey conducted in 2013 concluded that all the houses in this area, apart from Broad Dene had been designed by Herbert Hutchinson.

His father bought the Half-Moon farmhouse (Today the building at the top of the High Street occupied by Headcase) and all its land in 1894. Herbert immediately began construction of the roads, installed the water supply from Tower Field and began construction of the houses, targeting affluent middle-class Londoners drawn to the area on account of its natural attractions and ready accessibility to London by rail.

Some of the houses were sold, others rented and retained for investment. Marley Heights and Marley Lane Estate were also developed in a similar manner. On Sir Jonathan's death in 1913, both estates together with Hill and Parsons Farms in Hawksley, a total of 344 acres, were sold by auction.

At this point, the estate was generating an annual income of £830, equivalent to £96,000 in today's money. The Half Moon estate was not fully developed, and with the onset of war, Herbert moved his large family to Somerset. However, he returned to Haslemere in 1923, and continued to develop the estate. He set up a construction company which survived as a family business until the 1980s, and was involved in significant further developments within the town.

Herbert Hutchinson was not alone amongst the late Victorian and early Edwardian developers who shaped so much of our townscape. However, no other developer was so prolific and his unique love of Tudor style wooden frames, turreted orioles are such a distinctive feature of our town today.

As a final point of appreciation, but beyond the scope of this article, it is of course worth reminding readers that the contribution of the Hutchinson family extended far beyond creating buildings. We owe our Museum to Sir Jonathan, and a less well-known fact is that the Bright Horizons day nursery in College Hill, designed by Herbert and funded by his father, was originally a day centre for women and girls in service.

Wilder Valewood Project: a progress update

By David Elliott, Lead Ranger-Blackdown

It is an uncertain and difficult time for everyone at the moment, and it is no different on the Blackdown Estate where we are doing our best to look after the countryside in our care and to look after visitor infrastructure across that countryside.

As we continue to do our best, our thoughts are very much with those in the local community who are unable to get out and about at the moment to enjoy the countryside. We hope that, at the very least, you have some space at home to enjoy the spring sunshine and wish all the best to everyone reading this update.

On the *Wilder Valewood* project we have had a busy winter. Our new herd of Longhorn Cattle are one of the key management tools we have for the future management of the property and are there as our extensive grazing force. They are hardy traditional native breed cattle, and we are grazing them extensively across the property. This means they graze at a low stocking density over wider areas throughout the year.

The action of this type of grazing creates diversity in the sward structure, meaning that we get a wide range of habitats developing, all the way from short lawns to scrubby areas. This complex mix of habitats is really important for wildlife. We currently have 11 animals in the herd, and will be monitoring effect and numbers over time to get the stocking level right.

Meanwhile in the wetlands our beaver reintroduction project has been moving forward as well. We have to put up a fence to keep the beavers in so that they can carry out their habitat engineering within the 17.5 hectare enclosure where they will live.

Over the winter one of our jobs has been working in our coppice woodlands creating the timber materials for the fence, all of the trees for this have been cut and we are now in the process of peeling and pointing the fence posts, to make them more rot resistant. Our coppice woodland is a fantastic naturally sustainable source of naturally durable hardwood, so this is a win all round, as the coppicing also makes the woods better for wildlife.

On site we have been removing the old cattle fences around the enclosure and clearing fence-lines so that we have room for our new beaver-proof fence. We have done about two-thirds of this work now and will complete the rest of it as soon as the fencing work on site starts.

There has been a lot of work done, but we still have some way to go. We are doing our best though and are really grateful for all of the fantastic support we have had in the local community.

Supporting the National Trust's work on Blackdown

By Nigel Quick

The Blackdown & Hindhead Supporters have embraced the National Trust's aim of allowing nature, with little human intervention, to transform marginal land into an ecological haven for species of insects, birds, small mammals, amphibians, wild flowers and plants that are increasingly under threat.

A first step by the Supporters in 2019 was to purchase six Longhorn Cattle and their five calves, and give them to the National Trust to begin an extensive grazing regime.

The overall project budget is set at £142,000, of which the BD&HH Supporters agreed to contribute £50,000. In November we launched the Wilder Valewood Appeal to our members, and no less than 48 of our 170 members have made substantial donations to amass over £33,000 towards our target.

The BD&HH agreed contribution facilitated a match-funding grant of £68,866 from Viridor Environmental Limited and that meant that the Trust has sufficient funds to fence the Beaver Enclosure, as soon as the Chase Lane Valley is sufficiently dry.

As the Supporters are still short of their £50,000 target, if any Haslemere Society member feels able to, please make a donation by contacting the Treasurer, Philip.Currie1@btopenworld.com or chairman nigeljquick@gmail.com. In the coming months we will widen our campaign and seek donations from local businesses, local government, and charitable trusts.

Lost sons of Haslemere: Chief Stoker George Lewis Booker (13 May 1874–31 July 1918)

By Shirley Harrison

George was born in East Street (now Petworth Road), Haslemere on 13th May 1874, to Elizabeth (nee Boxall) and James Booker, a labourer. He was the second of eight children, with an older sister, four younger sisters and two younger brothers. His brother Charles died in 1886, aged only seven. George's father became a baker, and the family lived near his work in the High Street.

After he left school, George went to work as a domestic servant at Lythe Hill House for James Stewart Hodgson and his family. There were seven other indoor, live-in, servants and George was probably at the bottom of the pile being the "house boy".

Stewart Hodgson was the largest landowner in the vicinity with about 3000 acres. He was a partner in Barings Bank, an art collector, and philanthropist. Haslemere owed much to his generosity, including the gas lighting, the fire brigade, the water supply and the Workman's Club. He lost a great deal of his fortune in the Barings collapse of 1890, was forced to sell Lythe Hill and his art collection and moved to the much smaller Manor House in Three Gates Lane.

George did not continue in a life of domestic service, but instead, joined the navy at the relatively late age of 26. We cannot know what prompted this drastic career change; whether it was the result of a particular event, or maybe he was yearning for a bit of excitement rather than domestic drudgery, but he travelled to Portsmouth and enlisted as a Stoker, 2nd Class in on 27th August 1900. The first ship he served on was HMS "Gibralta", a newly refitted cruiser with a complement of 544 officers and men.

She became the flagship of Rear-Admiral Arthur Moore, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief on the Cape Station in South Africa, and sailed into Durban in early September 1901, during the Boer War. The following year she led seven Royal Navy ships

into Zanzibar for a show of force following the death of the sultan, and George also visited Beira in Mozambique and Kenya, before the "Gibralta" returned to South Africa. George's first experience with submarines came in 1904 aboard HMS "Thames" which had been converted into a submarine depot ship.

The picture above shows a tiny "A" class submarine moored next to her. The "A" class were some of the earliest submarines, were only 105ft long and 12ft wide, and were propelled by a petrol engine while afloat with battery propulsion while submerged. They had a crew of eleven men. A depot ship acted as a mobile or fixed base for submarines, providing space and services not available on the submarine itself.

On 6th October 1906, at the age of 33, George came home and married Agnes Swains, a parlour maid, at the Parish Church in Farncombe. Agnes already had a fourteen year old daughter, Ethel, who had been born out of wedlock and was being brought up by foster parents. George and Agnes had two daughters of their own, Agnes (born in 1908) and Eileen (born 1911).

George helped to support his stepdaughter Ethel financially when she was growing up, so was Ethel actually George's biological child? Most likely not; at the time she was conceived Agnes was living in Chelsea, while George was working at Lythe Hill. It seems unlikely that George and Agnes had even met at that time. George probably helped Ethel simply because he was a generous hearted man.

By February 1911 George was a Stoker Petty Officer, and for over a year was part of the crew of the newly completed HMS "Indefatigable", one of the fastest, largest, most powerful ships in the world at the time. There were 31 coal burning boilers on board, and George would have been involved in the ship's sea trials. Infamously, she was sunk with the loss of 1,017 lives, during the Battle of Jutland on 31st May 1916. The ship was based at Devonport in 1911, and George and Agnes lived at 6 Eliot Street, in St Budeaux, just outside Devonport.

George and Agnes had to spend many months, if not years apart. By 1913 he was serving in Malta on another depot ship, HMS "Egmont". He was still in Malta when the Great War broke out in August 1914. A letter survives, written by Agnes in Devonport to her daughter Ethel, in which she sounds quite worried and lonely:

"Dear Ethel, you will be glad to know that I had a letter from my dear George yesterday to say that he was feeling much better in himself but his poor fingers that he smashed was not quite right yet, and I am thankful to say that he has got safely back to Malta again, so he is able to get better food that will help to build him up again, for I feel sure he has been nearly starved where he has been poor dear. So now I hope they will soon send him home as his two years will be up 3 of Oct: and that will soon be here now. I am beginning to get excited already, I hope I shan't get disappointed."

In February 1915 he was promoted to Chief Stoker, and served on a battleship, HMS "Queen", for a few months. He then transferred to the submarine service in 1916, and first served on the rather unimaginatively named HMS "B11". The B class submarines were slightly enlarged and improved version of the A class. They were 142 feet long and 12 feet 7 inches wide, carrying a crew of 2 officers and 13 men. Like the A class, on the surface they were powered by a petrol engine driving one propeller and, when submerged, used battery power. She could remain submerged for nine hours.

It must have taken a special kind of courage to serve on these early submarines; the heat, fumes, overcrowding, and sense of being trapped in a vulnerable metal box must have been quite intense. The B11 served on patrol in the Mediterranean, and was based in Venice during 1916, which sounds delightful, but I suspect it wasn't.

Fortunately, during George's time aboard, the B11 came into contact with an enemy only twice: once to capture the crew of an Austrian flying boat after it had suffered engine failure, and secondly when it was nearly hit by a torpedo from an unknown source. The addition of the rescued Austrian crew must have made the B11 feel even more claustrophobic than ever.

George's final posting was to the 12th Submarine Flotilla attached to the Grand Fleet, based at Rosyth, in June 1917. With the Scout Cruiser HMS "Fearless" he served on the submarine HMS "K5". The K class of submarines were the biggest and fastest in the world, and designed to operate with the main battle fleet as submersible destroyers. To say that they had a bad reputation would be an understatement of vast proportions.

They became so notorious for accidents that they were nicknamed the "Kalamity Class", and even the "Suicide Club". Eighteen were built, and they were involved in sixteen major accidents, one sank on her trials, three were lost after collisions, one disappeared and another sank in harbour. Several hundred crewmen were lost in these accidents, but not one man was lost to enemy action.

The boats were 339 feet long and 26 feet 6 inches wide. They needed to be able to reach a speed of 24 knots to keep up with the fleet, so had to be steam powered, using oil-fired steam turbines driving twin screws. Their two 5 foot high funnels were raised and lowered by an electric motor, and could be folded down into watertight compartments. They were slow to submerge and very difficult to detect once they were under water, hence the high number of collisions.

The danger in a submarine was at its most acute when submerged, but George lost his life in an accident while on the surface. In a perilously rough sea on 31st July 1918 he and another crewman were swept from the deck of the K5 into the North Sea and never seen again. He was 44 years old, which makes him the oldest man whose name is on the Haslemere Memorial. His name is also on the Grayswood Memorial and on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.

Agnes and the children had moved to Grayswood by the end of the war and were living at 5 Klondyke Villas in Clammer Hill Road when the news of George's fatal accident reached them. Agnes did not remarry and stayed in Grayswood for the rest of her life. She lived until 1950 and is buried in Grayswood Churchyard. Daughters Agnes and Eileen married and also remained in the Haslemere area. Eileen died aged 95 in 2006, having lived at 89 Fieldway for many years. George's mother Elizabeth lived at 21 Shepherd's Hill (Sunny Side) for the rest of her life, until 1941.

A happy footnote: George's brother, Flight Sergeant Arthur Booker, who had joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1913, survived the entire war.

The future of our High Streets

At the Society's AGM in November, PROFESSOR DAVID EVANS, a Trustee and former Chairman of Civic Voice, shared his perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for High Streets. This is an abridged version of his address to us.

"I am a trustee of Civic Voice, which is the umbrella organisation for civic societies like yours across the country. I said like yours, but all civic societies are very different. They all share the same common theme, which is that they care about the place they live in and want to make it better, but they vary enormously in size, in wealth and in the things that they do.

"One of the things that has become a particularly concern in recent years has been the issue of high streets and what is happening in them. Comments people are likely to make are those blaming the council, but still ordering books from Amazon. I should make it clear that in my view high streets have been changing ever since the industrial revolution. Before that you literally had butchers, bakers, cobblers who plied their trade in a workshop and then sold from the workshop in a high street.

"After the industrial revolution you had a change, with people coming in to sell goods that others had produced, and then you had specialist retailers arriving and department stores opening up. Gradually, they expanded and chain stores started taking over high streets. So the fact that high streets are changing is nothing new, but I do think that high streets have changed enormously over the past 40 years and even more over the past 20 years. A lot of people feel a great deal of nostalgia for shops like butchers, and fishmongers.

Retail moves out of town

"Then there has been the growth in out-of-town retailing. When I moved to Chester there were shops like Halfords, Currys and an electricity board and gas board shop in the main street, but they all moved out of town to places where the parking was easier. Change in the high street is nothing new and has always gone, but something more fundamental does seem to be happening now than what has gone before. Those changes were all about expansion, and maybe these now are about decline.

"Some big names have gone completely, names like Karen Millen (now online only) Toys R' Us, House of Fraser is not what it was and Debenhams is in deep trouble. So lots of big name stores are closing and we tend to have a sense of doom and gloom about this, but you do have to remember that other things are opening on our high streets such as coffee bars and gyms. Aldi and Lidl are thriving and expanding; Primark is growing too and has no online presence at all. Then there are nail bars and tattoo parlours, and vape stores, so things are happening and they are changing.

Online retailing arrives

"This all arguably started in 1984 when a pensioner from Gateshead made the first ever online purchase, using the former Ceefax service! It has gone on from there and you can argue that it is the big problem for our high streets at the moment. In 2007 2.5% of retailing was online, but by 2019 it was 20%, so a huge proportion of goods not being sold the high street. Everything suggests that this trend is going to continue. The Office of National Statistics says that this trend will continue, and the proportion of retailing that is online will increase to 40% of total spending.

"In 1950 we had nearly 60,000 stores nationwide, now we are down to just over 30,000, so just over half the number in 1950 and by 2022 that figure is forecast to have fallen below

30,000. But there are big regional differences - London and the South East have seen far fewer store closures than the rest of the country, including my patch in the North-West, which is one of the highest.

"Retailing has lost over 100,000 jobs in the past few years and the British Retail Consortium suggests that there could well be nearly 1m fewer jobs in retail over the next decade. That is not just store closures, but also automation like self-service tills, that will reduce the need for retail workers. We are also not going to high streets as much as we did. There is a decline in footfall, so if people are not coming past your door, they are not going to come into your shop. That is another area for concern.

Government concern

"Government has realised that this is becoming a major issue and earlier in 2019 there was a House of Commons select committee report which looked at what is going to happen in high streets and town centres by 2030. "There have been a number of initiatives arising out of this. The Government's future high street fund potentially has around £1 billion of expenditure in it. Historic England has produced heritage action zone funding, aimed at shopping centres in conservation areas. Heritage lottery funds will also support retailing in areas that have heritage significance.

"The future high streets plan has about £1 billion available and 100 areas have been allocated seed-corn funding of around £150,000 to work up a bid that will be in the region of £25-50 million then that funding will be made available, possibly in April/May 2020. There are also 69 areas that have been awarded funding from Historic England for heritage action zones funding, which can be up to £1 million, and Chester is one of those places to be allocated funding. There were over 300 expressions of interest in this high street fund, of which 100 were short-listed.

Portas Pilots

"Mary Portas was appointed some years ago to look at way of transforming high streets and it can be argued that her attempt was pretty unsuccessful. It was good PR but apart from making a television programme, most of the pilot towns don't seem to have progressed very far. "However, there are some honourable exceptions to that. Broadstairs, for instance, was an original "Portas Pilot" and set up what was called a "town team" using volunteers to try to revive the town centre and that pilot project is still running today, despite the fact that the funding has ended.

"Barnes, in South West London, also had a Portas Pilot, and instead of spending the money on external consultants they actually decided to have a community workshop to bring local people together and ask them about what they should do. So there was a team made up of businesses, residents, community groups and councillors and they planned a visioning event to create a vision for the town that was led by the residents.

"They held a workshop called the "Big Barnes Ponder" in October 2013, which attracted 350 local residents. They grouped their ideas and from that devised six projects and they got 60 volunteers to help implement those projects. Since then, it's kept going and volunteers have been campaigning and lobbying from the bottom up to try and make their high street a more interesting and refreshing place.

"The difference between these two and most of the other Portas Pilots has been that they didn't concentrate on trying to bring retail back in, but instead to make their town centres an interesting and lively place where people could congregate and felt a sense of belonging and could carry out community activities.

Success in Barnes

"That has led to some spectacular successes. Civic Voice held a workshop in Aldershot to look into a similar project there and, in response to Aldershot Civic Society's Tweet, they got one back from someone in Barnes, telling them that the footfall there since the start of its project had actually doubled. The project in Barnes succeeded in bringing people back there, and if you can bring people back to your town centre, then you have a better hope of keeping retail alive. But you also have to provide people with other reasons to come.

"So where do we start if we want to revive high streets? The Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University came up with a model where they looked at the factors affecting towns, shopping centres and high streets. There are some things – called spatial – which you can't do anything about, so you are where you are, you have no influence over where the town is located, and whether it has a big city nearby. There are also macro factors, political and economic, social and environmental factors which an individual high street cannot do much about.

"There are factors about competition – maybe you can do something about those, internet shopping, out-of-town retailers – the high street can have limited influence on those, but actually there are examples where high street retailers are succeeding. But it is the factors in the high street itself that you can influence most. Individual retailers – how the transport system works, whether you can park, how you can encourage regular customers, those are all things that you can do. So the message is basically to *focus on the things that you can change, not on the things that you can't*.

Success factors

"The IPM came up with 201 factors that influence vitality and viability in the high street. They start with footfall at number one, accessibility, types of retailers, convenience, and they go right the way down to cycling, land contamination, and healthcare, so a huge range of factors. You are civic society and we are an organisation of civic societies, what can we do about it? Well lots of civic societies are doing things about it. Meetings such as this are taking place all over the country. You are asking questions and thinking about what you can do and what your influence might be.

"To give you some examples of things that are happening, Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust has succeeded in buying up properties in the town centre, renovating them and then renting them out to independent retailers at reasonable rents, to try to encourage development of the town centre. Nantwich Civic Society has managed to set up a town centre partnership, including the council and local businesses and the civic society is chairing it, so is in the driving seat.

"Bradford Civic Society is involved with the Business Improvement District (BID) – an initiative that has been discussed for Haslemere, where businesses in an area agree to pay an increased business rate in order to fund activities that will boost retail and footfall in the town centre. In Chester, the BID employs local "ambassadors" who are present in the high street to help and guide people and deal with any problems they may have.

The role of civic societies

"Local people have a much better chance of understanding their area, particularly when they get to act collectively. The national level is important too, and that's where Civic Voice comes in, because we are representing you at a national level. Civic societies in general need a national body to press their case at the national level. We are getting somewhere. The House of Commons Select Committee, which I mentioned earlier is very much in line

with what Civic Voice is saying, namely that local plans need to be living documents and BIDs need to have community representation on them, not just business representation.

“It is no good harking back to the mass retail-led model that has been the norm, town centres and high streets need to become activity-based community-gathering places and retail is just one part of the range of offers and activities, along with green space, leisure, arts and culture, social services and housing all have a place in town centres. My message to you is that anywhere anyone can be part of this change. It is happening in communities across the country where local people are taking the lead in trying to revive their town centres and high streets, and civic societies are an invaluable mechanism in helping to make this happen.”

Community Rail Partnership Update

By Ken Griffiths

Before being forced to temporarily close its doors due to the Coronavirus, the information hub at Haslemere station has been going from strength to strength, with the newly refurbished space attracting ever increasing numbers of visitors during the extended hours it was open during the 2019 season.

The Surrey Hill-South Downs Community Rail Partnership (SH-SD CRP) now comprises five stations, Haslemere, Witley, Milford, Godalming & Farncombe. However, when it comes to funding from South Western Railway (SWR) & the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), Haslemere Community Station is in a position to run separate projects exclusive to Haslemere.

Now that the SH-SD CRP has been officially recognised by SWR, a grant of £15,000 has been secured for the recruitment of a Line Officer to cover all stations along the line. This person would work 2/3 days a week. In addition, Narn McHugh will continue as the Information Hub Manager, with a grant from SWR of £5,000 allocated to her employment.

Thanks to funding from SWR and ACoRP, the Hub at Haslemere station has been renovated to a very high standard and is now probably the best Information Hub on the SWR network. It is now brighter, warmer and for the first time remained open throughout the winter months.

At a meeting to update stakeholders on 27 February, Narn told attendees that the information hub had been open daily, except Sundays, from April 2019, and was attracting a visible increase in the number of walking groups visiting the town, with the hub being staffed by a total of almost 30 volunteers.

After securing financial assistance from the Surrey Hills and South Downs National Park, two CRP walking leaflets have produced and published, with others currently being surveyed and written. If additional funding can be secured there are plans to update a number of earlier, but now out-of-date, Surrey Hills walking guides into the “Rail to Ramble” branding.

To increase awareness of the CRP, a bid has been submitted for a Rural Development grant of £36,000. If successful, this would allow for the installation of SH-SD CRP ‘running in boards’ at all five stations, as well as the provision of new information boards at stations, waymarks and countryside access works.

One initiative put forward by the CRP to help visitors to the town was the provision of "Hoppa" buses to link the station to Black Down, the Devil's Punch Bowl and Frensham Ponds at weekends. This has not been successful in securing finance from SWR's Customers & Communities Improvement Funds (CCIF), so further working is taking place to fund an alternative source of funding.

Besides its activities within the Hub, a number of initiatives have been agreed to enhance the station environment, including maintenance of its flower beds. Bespoke artwork has been had been commissioned to be positioned beneath the Hub windows, while installation artwork in the old footbridge has been agreed in principle with SWR, together with seating outside the station concourse and additional waiting room seating.

In addition to its role in assisting visitors to the town, the Hub was also selected as one of the venues where the local people could come and talk about the Neighbourhood Plan with representatives from Haslemere Vision. This event took place on 16 March, with the Hub then holding hard copies of the Plan throughout the six week consultation period.

Introducing BLH Charity

By Sue Nicholson, BLH Charity Manager

The Bordon Liphook Haslemere (BLH) Charity was founded in 1992 by local man Carl Tantum who was later awarded an MBE for his charitable work. Carl's vision was for a local charity which would support the local community; in spite of the obvious and increasing need for such an organisation in every town in the country, the BLH Charity is, so far as we are aware, unique in being the only one of its kind.

Over 99% of the funds we raise are generated through sales in our four charity shops in Bordon, Liphook, Haslemere and Grayshott. We are also fortunate to benefit from occasional generous donations received from benefactors. The profits are used to give grants and to assist those in need in a defined area of North East Hampshire and South West Surrey.

These awards are made to people who have been referred to the Charity by professional organisations such as the CAB, housing agencies and health visitors. All information provided is handled with the strictest confidentiality and the Trustees, whose role it is to approve applications, do not have access to personal details such as name, address etc.

Grants are also given to local organisations and charities. As well as making their profit available for the local community, the shops also provide affordable clothes, toys and household items. The Charity thus fulfils not one, but two essential roles for the local community.

We also work with Furniture Helpline, a Bordon-based partnership which enables us to help those who find themselves in need of furniture or white goods. Quite often people are given a fresh start in a housing association or private rental property, but do not have the funds to buy the essential items needed to furnish their home.

Like all charity shops throughout the country, the current state of trading is difficult but, despite this, in 2018-19 the Charity gave in excess of £42,500 in grants to local people in

need. This is an increase of around 20% on the previous year. Since its inception, the Charity has now awarded over £1.2 million in grants and donations.

Volunteers are now becoming harder to find, given the increase to pension age and with relatively high levels of employment locally. We always require additional volunteers in our shops and, of course, donations of good quality clothing, toys and other items; we can also accept small electrical items.

So, if you feel you have time to give, or goods to donate to help your fellow local residents, please do visit or contact one of our shops and offer either time or goods to help our cause. For further information, please visit our website at www.blhcharity.co.uk.

Nominations wanted for Haslemere Volunteer Awards

Have you ever thought that one of your friends or neighbours in the town deserves proper recognition for all the voluntary work they have been quietly undertaking for many years?

If your answer is yes, then you should consider putting that person forward for a *Haslemere Volunteer Award*. These are awarded twice yearly, in March and November, and recognise an individual's outstanding voluntary service, usually for more than one organisation.

The Awards are sponsored by *Haslemere Herald* proprietor Sir Ray Tindle and the process for suggesting recipients is very straightforward. All you need to do is complete a nomination form, which can be obtained from the Town Hall or downloaded from www.Haslemere.com/awards.

These awards are for individuals, not groups, although there have been cases when a husband and wife have been jointly recognised, when each has given exemplary service, and other cases when two friends who have undertaken the same voluntary work are honoured together.

Individuals who have received another honour, such as an MBE for services to Haslemere, are not usually considered, and any nominations should be supported by two independent proposers, rather than by a husband and wife.

Once completed, nomination forms can be handed in at the Town Hall, posted through the letterbox, or scanned and emailed to Fay Foster (theforsters@haslemere.com). You have until 30 September to propose someone for the next Awards event in November, with a 31 January deadline for the March Awards.