

Breaking News – Beech Neighbourhood Plan

At the beginning of May East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) and the Parish Council received the Independent Examiner's report on the draft Beech Neighbourhood Plan. EHDC has decided to accept in full the Examiner's recommendations on how the Plan should be amended in order to comply fully with the relevant statutory criteria, and the Parish Council has concurred.

EHDC has now published its Decision Notice, with the amended Neighbourhood Plan, on its website at www.easthants.gov.uk/beece-neighbourhood-plan and it can also be found at www.beechpc.com.

The next stage is for the village to vote on accepting the Neighbourhood Plan at a referendum. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Government has postponed all elections and referenda until May 2021 (this date may change). But, in the meantime, local government planners have been instructed to give 'significant weight' to neighbourhood plans that are just awaiting permission to hold a referendum – so **our Neighbourhood Plan is effectively in force already**. (I'm discounting the possibility that the Plan will be voted down by the village in a future referendum!)

Overall, the Parish Council is pleased with the Examiner's conclusions about our Neighbourhood Plan. Highlights are:-

- The Plan retains the key aspects of our 2002 Village Design Statement.
- The Plan retains the proposed non-coalescence 'gap' with Alton, with an effectively unchanged map. Unfortunately the proposed mapped 'gap' to Medstead has been deleted, but this area is still protected by firm restrictions on development outside the Settlement Policy Boundary.
- The Plan retains the Special Housing Area with its presumption against creating new plot sizes of less than 0.2 hectare.
- The Plan preserves the setting of Thedden Grange and its parkland.

Our Neighbourhood Plan will need to be revised following EHDC's adoption of its new Local Plan 2017-2036, but that won't occur until sometime in 2021. At that revision we will be able to think again about the two policies removed by the Examiner (the Beech-Medstead 'gap' and the issue of controlling surface water drainage).

This seems to be an appropriate time to thank every single one of the many Beech residents who have been involved in producing the Neighbourhood Plan, from the very start of the process in 2016. You know who you are!

Graham Webb
Chairman, Beech Parish Council

18 May 2020