

# BEECH PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk to the Council: Mrs Louisa Thomson  
Old Stables, Wield Road, Medstead, Alton, Hampshire GU34 5NJ  
Telephone 01420 562130 e-mail: [clerk@beechpc.com](mailto:clerk@beechpc.com)

---

24 August 2021

Donna Jones  
Police and Crime Commissioner – Hampshire & Isle of Wight  
St George's Chambers  
St George's Street  
Winchester  
SO23 8AJ  
[opcc@hampshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:opcc@hampshire.pnn.police.uk)

Dear Donna,

Many thanks for your recent letter seeking Beech Parish Council's views on policing issues in our area.

Three topics stand out for us:

- Speeding and road safety
- Response to low-level crime
- Online and telephone fraud

As background, Beech is a small village (pop. c.600) just outside Alton, in a rural area close to numerous other villages. The police units responsible for looking after us are based in Alton, part of the East Hampshire division.

## **Speeding and Road Safety**

This is the biggest issue for Beech residents. Beech village is strung out along a classified C-class road (i.e. a well-used rural through-route). It's a 1.25 mile long hill running up from Alton to the top of the downland plateau. The road is winding, with high banks (and no verges) in most places, and virtually no roadside pavements. Traffic speeds consistently exceed the 30mph limit, often well over it. Result: the road is extremely hazardous for pedestrians, and people don't walk even 150m to the village hall for fear of injury. The lack of accidents is a function of fear of walking, rather than the safety of the road!

Our local police acknowledge the road safety and speeding problem, and regularly (but infrequently, due to resource constraints) deploy officers with speed guns. Yes, some tickets are issued, but their deployment is inevitably too infrequent to be a real deterrent.

Beech used to have a Community SpeedWatch (CSW) team of volunteers. They disbanded for two main reasons:

1. Driver behaviour was not improving. No doubt this was because the CSW team was deployed for short periods of time (like the current officers with speed guns) and were not an effective deterrent.
2. Driver abuse towards them. With Beech having no pavements, the CSW team were on the side of the road and felt particularly unsafe; there were even instances of vehicles being driven towards them.

Recently we have attempted to overcome the above two problems by proposing to Hampshire Constabulary (via Belinda Kinsley, Citizens in Policing Supervisor) that we adopt the AutoSpeedWatch system. This consists of one or two fixed-position speed and ANPR recording cameras, specifically designed to automate CSW operations, with the usual CSW enforcement of escalating warning letters etc. issued by the police. AutoSpeedWatch's advantage, other than removing the human volunteers out of harm's way, is that it is permanently in position (although it can be periodically moved, for tactical purposes) and so can pick up all speeding offenders. In particular, the data collected will identify the most **serious and persistent** offenders, who are the most dangerous for other road users and the ones we really need to educate. The CSW volunteer aspect survives, but instead of standing on the roadside with clipboards, the volunteers download and analyse the data from the cameras, and identify the subset of most serious and/or persistent offenders that they wish the police to contact.

Although AutoSpeedWatch is being trialled in Kent and a similar system in Norfolk, Hampshire Constabulary's CSW oversight board has refused point-blank to authorise even the pilot scheme that we (together with neighbouring parishes Bentworth and Froyle) proposed to them. The fear, by all accounts, is that our automated CSW could swamp local police with data from cameras, expecting written follow-up to all offenders – a step change in volume from normal CSW operations. Well, as described above, in reality it would be the responsibility of our CSW volunteers to restrict the weekly number of cases to be pursued to the number agreed with local officers.

We feel Hampshire Constabulary is missing a real trick here, a potential step change in the effectiveness of CSW operations. We would like you to use your influence to change their stance on AutoSpeedWatch, to permit (as a minimum) us to run a pilot scheme for Hampshire. We would be delighted to discuss our proposals with you in more detail.

### **Response to low-level crime**

Beech, like most of rural Hampshire, very rarely experiences any truly serious crime. But there are spates of thefts from sheds, aggressive doorstep callers, the odd burglary, and occasional serious anti-social behaviour (e.g. the recent spreading of broken glass and nails on the village green in an attempt to get an outdoor social event cancelled). The village, via the Neighbourhood Watch, used to have a named police officer contact until about four years ago, who could be contacted about such problems and who would do what he could to follow up as appropriate. But, more recently, the only recourse for such crimes has been to discuss with an anonymous call handler at the police call centre, i.e. someone with no local knowledge. A recent discussion with the local community policing sergeant in Alton suggests that arrangements **may** be returning to having a local designated officer, which we would much prefer, but we have no certainty of this. This, I am sure, will be a recurring theme in the feedback you receive from rural communities.

### **Online and telephone fraud**

This type of fraud is, quite simply, a nationwide criminal epidemic. It is the attempted crime that everyone is most likely to experience, and the crime that people probably fear most being the unwitting victim of. Quite what you, or Hampshire Constabulary, can do at a county level is unclear to us, as it is a crime that is perpetrated across police force borders, and even across national borders. But at the very least we might expect our local force to follow up cases of actual fraud that are reported to it, providing victims (where necessary) with the case information they need in order to recover from banks etc. the funds stolen, and forward on the case information to whichever national agency is tasked with busting the fraudster gangs.

More generally, we know that in recent years the priorities of Hampshire Constabulary have dictated concentrating resources on cities and the largest towns, with a concurrent reduction in resources for smaller towns and rural areas, such as Alton and its surrounding villages. We know that there are specialist rural crime units, but from the publicity around them one might think that they only deal with stereotypical rural crimes such as stealing tractors; no, rural areas suffer the full panoply of crime, it's just

that the really serious crimes are infrequent. A rebalancing of resources towards more rural areas is required.

Thank you again for inviting us to share our thoughts on policing with you. The real 'live' issue for us is getting the opportunity to trial the AutoSpeedWatch system, as detailed above. Your assistance with that would be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Webb', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Graham Webb  
Chairman  
Beech Parish Council