



Beech Parish Council

Minutes - meeting with Hampshire Constabulary

Beech Village Hall - 26 August 2022

Present

Chief Inspector Habs Rahman (HR), District Commander, Hampshire Constabulary
Inspector Tony Botten (TB), East Hants Sector Commander, Hampshire Constabulary

CLlr Graham Webb (GW), Chair, Beech Parish Council
CLlr Tony Ransley (TR), Beech Parish Council
CLlr Mark Kemp-Gee (MK-G), Hampshire County Council
CLlr Tony Costigan (TC), East Hampshire District Council
Sir Charles Cockburn Bt (CC), Chair, Beech Road Safety Working Group

Introduction

CC explained that in Beech we live on a rat run with the volume of traffic increasing rapidly. There is a long-standing problem of speeding vehicles on a narrow through road with no footways and insufficient space for two vehicles and a pedestrian. Two year's operation of Community Speed Watch, from 2016 to 2018, failed to reduce the speeding problem.

Beech Parish Council is fully focussed on this issue, which always tops villagers' concerns. Currently, there are two work streams:

1. Footways.
2. Speed limitation.

We're fed up for two reasons:

1. We feel we're not receiving support for our efforts with effective police enforcement of the speed limit.
2. We believe our constructive solution, which will take pressure off police resources, is being ignored without even the courtesy of a meeting to explain why.

From what we can gather, police resource allocation is the issue - PS Jones does not have sufficient staff to deliver effective enforcement of local speed limits, though this was delivered during 2021. We want to send a clear message to those responsible that we are not getting a fair crack of the whip. We are paying through our council tax for a service that is not being delivered locally.

We believe that we have a solution which will take pressure off police resources; yet despite our best efforts, no action is being taken by Hampshire Constabulary. We welcomed this meeting and the opportunity to put our case to at least our local police management team.

Guided tour

CC and TR gave CI Rahman and Insp Botten a guided tour of the village, pointing out particularly difficult spots on Medstead Road, highlighting the camera positions and our new SID and the sections of proposed on-road and off-road footways. TB observed that he found it hard to believe the speed at which traffic was travelling through the village.

Presentation

GW reiterated the reasons why we are having the meeting, stressing that people are afraid to walk on Medstead Road and Kings Hill because of inconsiderate and dangerous speedsters. People take the car 100 yards to get to the village hall. He emphasized that traffic volumes have doubled in the last few years, most likely because of the increased housing developments in Four Marks/Medstead and the use of our road as a cut-through (avoiding Alton) between the A31 and the A339/B3349 onwards towards the M3. He emphasized that we have succeeded in bringing down speeds, but we cannot stop addicted speedsters without Police help.

GW mentioned the fact that on the Hampshire Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) league Beech does not feature, but we have regular 'near misses'. CI Rahman agreed with this point, and stated that his responsibility is to deal with the roads with the highest KSIs. GW concurred, but proposed that our efforts have shown that Beech has developed an effective tool (ASW) to deal with persistent speedsters, which we are seeking Police co-operation to perfect for our approved use. The presence of our County and District councillors indicates that this technology, once fully approved, should be beneficial to many parishes in the East Hampshire area. GW repeated our request that our community should be given the opportunity to work closer with the Police and CI Rahman committed to trying to get a meeting arranged between the Beech Team and the Community Speed Watch arm of the Community Policing Board.

CI Rahman clarified the police approach to speed limits. It is important to note that experience shows that the speed limit should reflect the way drivers view the road, enforcement is not effective nor productive if a road has the features of a National Speed Limit Road, i.e. a clear view of the road and no obvious signs of dwellings or urban areas by the side of the road. So, he considered we were fortunate to have a 30mph limit on the stretch between Kings Hill and the start of visible housing beside the road (from 100 Medstead Road). He appreciated that this section of the road provides a crucial link for pedestrians to reach different parts of the village. He suggested the best way to control traffic speed in that area would be through physical barriers along the road. He commended the use of a painted walkway. His experience had shown that road narrowing features addressing not one but both sides of the road, both physical and painted, had been effective in areas where he had seen problems.

CI Rahman suggested that we should follow up with Hampshire Highways, but before that Beech should survey and get most of its people to approve any works. Additionally, the Parish Council should provide a clear timeline for any proposed changes. GW updated the meeting on our progress with Hampshire Highways and the results of a village-wide consultation held in Q3 2021 (follow link: <https://www.beechpc.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Footway-consultation-results-final-report.pdf>) and agreed to provide a project timeline. HR stated that he had cases where the 30mph speed limit was raised once the 85percentile speed was closer to 40. TR showed the 85-percentile curve on our SID. This indicated that the 85-percentile at 100 Medstead Road was now 29mph and asked if this was a valid reason to lower the speed limit to 25mph through the village? HR questioned the validity of a 25mph limit. TR committed to forward an e-mail from the Home Office stating that 25 mph limits are a legal limit in England and are enforceable. GW/CC said they were happier to await the outcome of the Hampshire County Council 20mph review before considering a 25mph limit.

TR then presented the volunteer interface to the computer application that interfaces with our AutoSpeedWatch cameras. He explained the background in terms of the approval from the Police Community board to set up the cameras in Conjunction with Hampshire Highways Special Project team. He thanked M K-G for his support in enabling that, and both M K-G and TC for the funding that contributed to the camera purchases.

TR explained that the cameras had Home Office approval for use as Speed Watch cameras. He explained that the system was secure. (NB - All non-police attendees had signed a confidentiality agreement regarding the data displayed in the presentation and were registered as such with AutoSpeedWatch). He stressed the security and access restrictions of the system.

He explained how the camera locations were registered in the system and how the heat map for each location showed the period when most speed infringements occurred. TR subsequently showed how each speeding infringement was manually checked for accuracy and verified by an approved volunteer. Camera records that did not clearly verify a vehicle's VRN were deleted.

The real power of the system lies in the data analysis. This enables the Police to control the volume of data to match the resources available to them to follow up infringers. At each location, or all locations, persistent speedsters can be identified. For example, the system showed one vehicle had been verified as speeding 102 times this year to date, while 21 vehicles were registered as speeding over 40 times during the same period. Sixty repeat offenders had recorded speeds over 50 mph. Each can be identified individually with a heat map clearly showing his/her speeding habit over time.

TR then set out the opportunity offered by the use of three AutoSpeedWatch cameras in providing average speed data. This system demonstrated that in the last month 24 drivers clocked an average speed from Kings Hill through the village in excess of 36 mph, while 64 traversed the village centre from 106 Medstead Road to 7 Medstead road at over 36 mph!

We again made that argument that our system could help police 'educate' drivers with benefits for long-term enforcement of the speed limit in the same way that regular Speed Watch does. TR believed letters sent out from Speed Watch detection which therefor appeared on the police computer on the driver's record, would lead to more severe penalties if the driver was stopped or caught on an official speeding camera at some later date and fined for speeding. HR liked the idea but explained, "We're not there yet."

Looking at the system set out in our presentation, HR was impressed by the identification of persistent offenders, heat maps, etc. His concern is that trying to get Government to agree to the use of the system for prosecution could take as long as 10 years, and then implementing it would more than likely involve a lengthy process for each prosecution. He cited his experience in taking 18 months to get average speed cameras in Shoreham, and a year of planning to put average speed cameras on a section of road where repairs were taking place. However, he did concede that the approval of camera systems to support SpeedWatch-style education should not be such a lengthy process.

HR set out his background working with Sussex Safer Roads Partnership. He has a strong interest in speed enforcement believes that average speed systems have a real impact of driver behaviour. He expressed admiration for the job that Beech PC is doing having gone through all the steps he would recommend to help drive down speeds.

GW responded that we see this as joint approach with the police but again expressed frustration that when raising the opportunities offered by our ASW system. When we first requested recognition as a SpeedWatch group, the head of the Community Policing Group CI Michael Bettington's initial response (for the CSW Governance Board) was dismissive.

He suggested that the use of ASW would not entail the desired community involvement in the process, and would result in the police having to handle very large volumes of data themselves. This would, in fact, not be the case, as was clearly set out in the report on our ASW trial conducted in November 2021. Follow link: <https://www.beechpc.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Beech-Parish-Council-Traffic-Speed-Volume-report-Nov-Dec-2021-V2.1-with-appendixes.pdf>

We had in early May 2022 received a note from the PCC's office advising that Hampshire police are assessing the ASW system, but Beech has received no contact from the police on this subject, despite having 9 months of usage data and being the only parish in Hampshire to be operating the more effective 'average speed' mode.

HR agreed that he could see massive potential, and then pointed out that the best villages he had worked with had designed out speed.

GW responded that we're working on that, with our on-road footway plan.

HR suggested that it would help if we could provide a clear plan with objectives and timelines. He agreed that the two work streams involving footway infrastructure and technology made sense. However, he is constrained by resources, stating that of Hampshire PCC Donna Jones' high priorities, speed enforcement was not one of them. (NB The PCC does, however, identify speeding as one of the Constabulary's priorities - see p 23 ref <https://www.hampshire-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Police-and-Crime-Plan-Donna-Jones-2021-DRAFT09-Spreads.pdf>)

Nevertheless, HR was supportive of our approach, though short on resources to turn that support into delivery.

TB agreed that while education works better in the long term, in the short-term enforcement can work. However, he explained that Alton, including Four Marks and Ropley and overseen by PS Rob Jones, should have four PCs and four PCSOs. With some members of the workforce still undergoing training, it is likely to be early 2023 before the numbers are up to target. So, they are stretched.

GW raised the possibility of using intelligence from the ASW system to direct speed enforcement officers to certain locations at times when persistent offenders are highly likely to be present - a more targeted approach.

HR indicated that in his experience drivers who speed also tend to ignore vehicle insurance and MoT requirements. They are also known to be more likely to drive under the influence of drink or drugs. He gave an example of a roadside officer stopping a speeding vehicle which led to the driver's arrest for multiple offences.

HR expressed his wish to set up a 'steel barrier' around North Hampshire. TR/GW argued that AutoSpeedWatch could play a key role in that intelligence gathering operation. HR said he had to be sure of the "solidity" of the AutoSpeedWatch (ASW) operation and requested TR set up a meeting between himself and an ASW representative before mid-October 2022. He emphasized that he would require a timeline of past and future development of the system and wanted information on the solidity of the Company that created and marketed the ASW product at that meeting.

HR pointed out that in Kent, Community Safety Officers are employed by District Councils and not the Police. CSO officers can operate speed guns under delegated powers from the Chief Constable. HR said it would be best if we followed this up with Kent County Council. MK-G said it might be worth pressing for in East Hampshire and he would take it as an action to follow up jointly with TC.

The meeting ended and HR agreed to meet again in February 2023.

Actions agreed

GW to provide a plan and timeline for Beech PC's two workstreams regarding road safety.

TR to agree a date and arrange with HR to meet the ASW representative with a view to arrange a meeting to discuss the opportunities offered by the ASW system.

TR to forward Home Office e-mail and letter re 25 mph speed limit to BH.

HR to act as champion on Beech's behalf and arrange a meeting with the Community Policing Board (specifically CI Michael Bettington) for GW and TR.

TB to approach the central team responsible for speed enforcement in North Hampshire, based in Whitchurch to request more regular enforcement visits across East Hampshire, including Beech.

MK-G/TC to keep Beech Parish Council up to date re the possibility of EHDC employing CSOs.

CC to circulate minutes, along with copies of the slides, and propose dates for a follow-up meeting in February 2023.

Ends