

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of BEECH held on Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2025

**PRESENT:** Councillor Kim Eakers - Chairman Hampshire County Councillor Mark Kemp-Gee  
Councillor Alana Coombes  
Councillor Tony Ransley Members of the Public  
Councillor Ruth Duffin  
Councillor Nikki Pickard Louisa Thomson - Clerk

**OPEN MEETING** -The Chairman welcomed everyone and declared the meeting open.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor Ingrid McCormack and District Councillor Tony Costigan.

**2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024, copies of which had previously been circulated, **were proposed as a true record by Councillor Ruth Duffin, Seconded by Councillor Tony Ransley, agreed and signed by Chairman Kim Eakers.**

**3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT**

### Beech Parish Council Annual Report 2024-25

Here is my first annual report on the council's activities for the fiscal year April 2024 to March 2025.

#### Our Council

In April 2024 we started with a full complement of seven Parish Councillors. In June of 2024 our Chairman, Graham Webb stood down after seven years of service and leadership as a councillor and I was duly elected as Chair.

The council has held 12 meetings through the year, and currently consists of six Parish Councillors and one vacancy.

#### Planning applications in Beech

The Council has reviewed and commented on 13 planning applications through the year. This compares to 14 that were reviewed in the previous year.

The year was marked by a very significant change in national planning policy with East Hants District Council (EHDC) receiving an approximate 100% increase in the required housing allocation for the district which has led EHDC to give the Beech Parish an indicative allocation of over 90 houses over the next 20 years.

It is worth reflecting that our current neighbourhood plan does not have a housing allocation and the indicative increase in the number of houses is over 40% within the next 20 years.

The Council took the decision to review our neighbourhood plan. This will give us greater protection from unplanned development, but we will need to address policies and allocations to meet our identified housing requirement.

The team have launched a community consultation on potential housing developments sites.

## Roads and footways

### On road footway

In collaboration with EHDC and Hampshire CC (HCC) we completed an on-road footway through the village in November 2024. It's still quite early to judge the impact but anecdotally we have observed increased pedestrian usage and driver 'respect' for pedestrians.

It is worth pausing to reflect and recognise the time, effort, and innovation of the team that have led this nearly 5 year project.

The work started in 2019 when the Council established the Beech Road Safety Working Group (BRSWG) to explore ways of improving the safety and confidence of pedestrians in Beech. The team led the community consultation and design and worked closely with HCC in turning the design into reality.

### AutoSpeedWatch

My colleague Councillor Tony Ransley and the team of community speedwatch volunteers have continued to manage our cameras and collect and analyse the data. We now have average speed cameras and a speed indicator device in both directions of Medstead Road.

During the last 12 months the percentage of vehicles passing through the village exceeding the 30 mph speed limit detected by our AutoSpeedWatch group has dropped from 3.3% to 2.7%.

The average speed of drivers passing through Beech has continued to drop during the last 12 months, so much so that Beech is now eligible to implement a 20-mph speed limit.

There are 40 vehicles that regularly speed through the village. The team are sharing this information with the enforcement agencies and the Council is now following up with the owners of speeding commercial vehicles.

More statistics on speeding at <https://www.beechpc.com/vehicle-speed-limit-reminder-data/>

### Water supply

Due to the nature of our 'topography' and the current South East Water (SEW) infrastructure, residents at the lower end of Medstead Road and Wellhouse Road can experience very high water pressure.

The Council formed the Water Supply working group in 2023 to investigate the extent of the problem and lobby SEW for a solution. SEW have shared their long term plan to address the issue but in the interim have now agreed a process whereby affected householders will be able to get support. SEW have agreed to write to the affected households.

### Climate Action

Over the last 3 years we have run a voluntary CO2 Home Energy Self-Assessment so that householders can track and compare their CO2 emissions from home energy. The programme has led to increased awareness and sharing of best practice.

## Broadband

Residents of 'lower' Beech do not currently have access to Fibre to the Property (FTTP) which would enable higher internet connection speeds.

We have reached out to EHDC to understand the plan. Openreach have indicated that the upgrade to their infrastructure to enable FTTP is planned by December 2026 but they have not, as yet, communicated a detailed plan to EHDC.

## Finance

The Council has managed the financial year within budget and its reserves stand at £46,772 including £21,360 of Neighbourhood CIL funds.

The Council received funding within the year from EHDC S106 and CIL funds for:

1. The additional AutoSpeedWatch cameras and radar Speed Indicator Device.
2. The work by HCC to implement the on-road footway

## Our plan for April 2025 to March 2026.

The Council has had to increase its Council Tax precept from £18,900 to £20,262 for the financial year starting April 2025. The 7.2% increase is primarily driven by increased National Insurance Contributions.

The Council plans to continue with the key areas outlined above and will also work on the following initiatives:

1. Neighbourhood plan review
  - The work has already started with our community consultation.
2. Footpaths and rights of way
  - Beech is blessed with a wide range of footpaths and bridleways. They do need looking after.
  - The Road Safety working group plans an overall review of the state of our footpaths and rights of way in collaboration with the Alton Ramblers and our HCC Warden.
3. 20 mph
  - The Council has initiated the process to implement a 20 mph limit through the village. We have been advised that the full legal process to implement this could cost up to £30,000. The Council has more work to do in understanding the process and our options on funding this.
4. Beech Village Hall
  - The Council has agreed in principle to fund up to £11,669 from its reserves towards the costs of the refurbishment of the Wellhouse, part of the village hall.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks once again to all the people who have contributed positively to Beech parish council matters:

- Our district councillor, Tony Costigan, who is very responsive to, and supportive of, Beech's interests
- Our county councillor, Mark Kemp-Gee, who is equally responsive and supportive.
- Our invaluable volunteers on the Road Safety Working Group, the AutoSpeedWatch team, the Water Supply Working Group and the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group;
- Our volunteer internal auditor, Nigel Sillick;
- Our parish clerk, Louisa Thomson, who keeps us all in order; and finally

- My fellow parish councillors.

## QUESTIONS ON REPORT

- Kim Eakers further updated that South East Water have a long term solution in their 5 year plan and the letter to be sent to effected residents has been agreed and will be sent by South East Water.
- Q – Will there be a review of the on road footway and how successful it is?  
A – Kim Eakers updated the final safety audit has been completed and there will be a follow up safety review in the next 12 months, Kim will follow this up with the Beech Road Safety Working Group.

## 4. REPORT FROM HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARK KEMP-GEE

### Devolution

- Local Government reorganisation into 3 or 4 Unitary Authorities.
- Hampshire County Council (HCC) and East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) will not exist.
- Election of a Mayor will take place in May 2026.
- EHDC will need to decide which Unitary Authority to join; Portsmouth; Southampton; Basingstoke or Winchester.
- HCC Councillors want to align with whatever EHDC Councillors choose.
- Government don't want Districts to be split but if the District Councils can't decide which Authority to join the Government will decide.
- Not sure what will happen to Parish Council, they may be given more enhanced powers.
- Hopefully more information will be available soon.

### Hampshire County Council

- HCC services have been deteriorating due to a cap in council tax.
- The Council is having to spend more on adult and children social care and other services are suffering.
- HCC current income is £1.3 billion of which over £800 million will be spent on adult and children social care.
- The Council is currently running at a deficit of over £100 million which will use all it's reserves within two years.

### Beech Matters

- Virtual Footway through the village, thanks to Ian Janes from Hampshire Highways for keeping the job going even though he moved to a new area.
- Support the Parish Councils objection to the proposed development at Ackender Wood, highways have objections to this as it will cause major traffic problems.
- Proposed 20mph zone is expensive and its unclear what the parish will get for their money.  
**Councillor Ransley** – Damien Hinds MP is trying to find if there's any funding the Parish Council can apply for, most of the cost is the bureaucracy not the implementation.

I would like to thank all the Parish Councillors for their hard work and for inviting me to attend.

**Councillor Alana Coombes thanked Mark on behalf of the Parish Council.**

**Councillor Ruth Duffin thanks to Kim Eakers for becoming Chair.**

## THERE WERE NO MATTERS TO BE REFERRED TO PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

CLOSE OF MEETING -There being no further questions from the Public, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and formally closed the meeting at 7.47pm.

Signed:.....  
Kim Eakers  
Chairman Beech Parish Council  
Date: 2026