



CHAWTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes

Tuesday 31st May 2023 07:30 PM

The Learning Centre, J A House

1	Apologies
1.1	Present: Phillip Pascoe (Chair), Malcolm Williamson, Laura Dadswell, and Mandi Sowik (Clerk), and Ilena Allsopp and Jason Simper
1.2	Apologies: Jenny Perring
2.	Public Attendance
2.1	Introductions by the Public gallery of attendance and declared interests. Clare Klare – Neighbourhood Plan, Graham Webb (Beech PC Chairman) to give a presentation on the NP, Ian Robertson - interested in CIL projects
3.	Minutes of last Meeting
Previously approved and signed as a true and correct record by the Chairman.	
4.	Updates
District Councillors report	
No report	
5.	Planning and Development*
Current and ongoing planning applications will be discussed at the meeting and comments will be made: -	
*-The Parish Council can make observations regarding the Parish as a whole and comment on applications made but there is no guarantee that these comments will impact the ultimate decision.	
No Planning applications	
6.	General Activity
Discuss and review the ongoing objectives and activities of the Parish Council (Detailed in Appendix 1).	
6.1	–single bollard – this has been installed; however, this has been damaged and requires repair.
6.2	- Tree works phase 3 – The work has now been completed and a new tree survey will be carried out in 2024.
6.3	– Neighbourhood Plan – Graham Webb attended the meeting to give a presentation on the NP. The presentation is attached.
6.4	– New District Councillors – Cllr Ilena Allsopp has taken on the role of District Councillor as well as being the Vice Chair to PC. Ilena will be part of the Ethics Standards committee and is currently undergoing training for her role, she explained that it is a steep learning curve, however she is looking forward to serving the community.
6.5	– Councillor Vacancies – there are currently vacancies for 2 Councillors. Contact the Clerk for further details.
7.	Financial Review
To review and approve any spending and payments/requests for funding (Itemised in Appendix 2) Clerk Salary & Overtime, Semrah mowing	
8.	AOB.

Meeting closed at 20:30

Next Meeting Tuesday 18th July 2023

BEECH'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – THE PARISH COUNCIL'S EXPERIENCE

I understand that Chawton Parish Council is considering putting in place a neighbourhood plan. Beech's Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by EHDC in June 2021. I have been asked to give you my thoughts about our experience of developing the Plan, and of the benefits of having the Plan in place. From one parish, squeezed between Alton and Four Marks & Medstead, to another!

Why did Beech want a neighbourhood plan?

Beech had had a Village Design Statement since 2002. But it was only ever an 'advisory' document – it had no teeth. Although frequently referenced by EHDC planning officers, when adjudicating on planning applications, it was usually largely ignored.

A neighbourhood plan, a new type of statutory planning document introduced by the Localism Act 2011, promised to be a much more powerful tool for controlling development in the parish.

How did we go about it?

In 2016 the parish council held a public meeting and called for volunteers to form a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. I wasn't involved at the start, but about a dozen residents signed up. Over the ensuing four years there was some turnover and shrinkage in Group membership, but most of the work was done by about half a dozen people, one of whom was always a parish councillor tasked with keeping the group focussed and compliant with council procedures. The parish council was always required to give formal approval to proceed from one project stage to the next.

2017 saw full engagement of the project with EHDC Planning Policy Officers. It is necessary to work hand in glove with EHDC, as it is they who control the legal process laid down in national planning regulations. We found EHDC to be helpful and constructive throughout the entire process (as, in fact, they are obliged to be by law).

We also engaged our own independent planning consultant to help guide us through the process and to review the documentation we produced from a professional planning perspective. The cost of a consultant, plus all of the other incidental costs of developing a neighbourhood plan, can be covered by a grant available from the charity Locality. Locality also publish a series of guides on how to implement the various stages of developing a plan.

What were the stages of Neighbourhood Plan development?

The first step was to consult the village on its aspirations. In late 2017 a Questionnaire was distributed to all households seeking views on a range of topics. The likely topics of interest were gleaned from the old Village Design Statement and similar previous work. Following an analysis of the responses, by the end of 2017 there was a baseline of what residents wanted the future village to be like, enabling an initial set of plan policies to be drawn up.

2018 saw the plan policies being continually refined until signed off by the parish council at the end of the year. This work included taking into account the necessary landscape, biodiversity and environmental studies, and digesting EHDC's Land Availability Assessment (of potential development sites in the district).

One crucial decision was to press ahead with our Neighbourhood Plan despite the fact that EHDC announced it was preparing a new Local Plan, then due to be completed in Autumn 2020.

We felt too that our Plan wouldn't change much however the new Local Plan turned out. It was a wise move; we have had the benefit of an adopted Neighbourhood Plan now for two years, while EHDC's Local Plan is now due to be completed in 2025! Other parish councils who put their own neighbourhood plans on hold must be kicking themselves. My lesson is as follows: in local government there is always an excuse readily available to delay decisions and projects – to the extent that often nothing gets done at all. Resist those excuses!

2019 saw the formal legal process fully engage. We had two public consultations on the draft Plan. We ran the first (known as Regulation 14) in the Spring, after which there was a significant re-write of the Plan in light of comments received (especially from EHDC), but still maintaining the thrust of our policies. Then we handed the revised Plan to EHDC for them to put it out for a second public consultation (known as Regulation 16) in the autumn. This time the Plan and all of the Regulation 16 consultation responses were handed to the Independent Examiner, an experienced planning professional, for her to make recommendations as to any final amendments to the Plan.

We had two final glitches in 2020. First, due to a procedural anomaly, the Independent Examiner had to hold a physical hearing in the village hall to examine some issues raised by a potential developer. Then, after we and EHDC had agreed the final amendments with the Examiner, COVID struck and we weren't able to hold the final referendum on the Plan in May 2020 (as all elections were suspended). Fortunately Government COVID policy allowed plans awaiting only referendum to be treated as though they were fully in force, and so EHDC started to use the Plan straight away in 2020 when determining planning applications. We had to wait until May 2021 for the referendum and the subsequent formal adoption by EHDC.

So you can see it was a significant amount of work over an extended period, but it was worthwhile.

Our Neighbourhood Plan policies

The Independent Examiner called our Plan a 'protective plan' in that it contains no sites allocated for new development, and protects the village largely as it is now. But it is no less valid for that. We could legitimately take this approach (which was favoured by the village's responses to the initial Questionnaire) because EHDC had made no housing allocations in Beech in its existing Local Plan (of 2014), nor in its draft new Local Plan (published for consultation in 2019).

So our Plan policies tend to be the adaptation and tailoring of national planning policy and EHDC's Local Plan policies to suit the specific circumstances of Beech parish. They clarify how national and Local Plan policies apply to Beech. In general, neighbourhood plan policies are not supposed to be materially more restrictive of development than are national or Local Plan policies.

We have 13 Neighbourhood Plan policies, which I will list:

1. Retaining woodland, biodiversity, and the habitat corridors between Thedden Copse, Ackender Wood, Bushy Leaze Wood and Chawton Park Wood.

2. Reinforcing EHDC's Local Plan restrictions on development outside the Settlement Policy Boundary.

3. Formalising and maintaining the countryside gap between Beech and Alton, making development here more restricted than in the general countryside. This gap is not one that was already listed for protection in EHDC's current Local Plan, so it was important to formally establish it.

4. Preserving the views around Thedden Grange, making development here more restricted than in the general countryside.

5. Protecting the village green and recreation ground against any development.

6. Setting out criteria for 'Development Setting and Scale', which includes:
 - Appropriate size, height, scale and rooflines of new buildings
 - Respecting existing building lines along the village valleys
 - Appropriate plot sizes, including a minimum new plot size within Beech's pre-existing Special Housing Area (which might otherwise disappear in EHDC's new Local Plan)
 - Acceptable views of buildings on hillsides, and wooded backdrops

7. Setting out criteria for 'Building Design and Character', which includes:
 - Respecting the designs of surrounding buildings

- Respecting the privacy of neighbours
- Enclosing new plots with hedges
- Minimising light pollution
- Promoting energy efficiency measures

8. Promoting the building of new smaller (two or three bedroom) houses in a village where homes have tended to be extended and enlarged.

9. Permitting new commercial development in a specified area.

10. Specifying that additional traffic (on the dangerous main road through the village) should be an important consideration when considering new development.

11. Promoting new and improved footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths.

12. Specifying minimum on-site parking requirements at new houses (more parking spaces required than in EHDC's parking standards) so as to avoid hazardous on-road parking.

13. Promoting better broadband and mobile telecoms connectivity.

We wanted a policy on improving surface water drainage in the village but, for various reasons, the Examiner wasn't happy with it.

That gives you a flavour of the sort of ground that even a 'protective' neighbourhood plan can cover. You can see that some policies apply parish wide, and some only to specified parts of the parish. There's no bar to having significantly different policies applying to different areas within the parish.

What are the advantages of having a neighbourhood plan?

It becomes an integral part of EHDC's Local Plan and its policies are enforced rigorously alongside national and Local Plan policies. It is gratifying to see EHDC planning officers quoting, in their reports, the need for planning applications to adhere to particular neighbourhood plan policies. And to see applicants and their planning consultants referring to our policies in their application documents.

Its policies provide a solid framework against which the parish council can itself comment on planning applications. This makes the review of applications easier, more clear-cut and consistent over time – which in turn leaves the council much less open to any accusations of negligence or partiality. Also, framing our comments around our own Plan's policies (of which we are the originators and therefore the experts) gives our comments significant weight when being assessed by EHDC.

We found that the process of developing the neighbourhood plan made both the Working Group members and parish councillors much more informed about planning matters in general. Also, our dealings with EHDC officers during the process have given us a degree of credibility with EHDC on planning policy matters (e.g. when commenting on their draft Local Plans as well as on individual planning applications). With a neighbourhood plan in place, EHDC was willing to bring its planning officers en masse on a site visit to inspect the village, its topography and natural environment, so that officers could get a real knowledge of what our plan policies are striving to achieve. Finally, for us the prospect of receiving 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy associated with new developments in the parish was attractive, as we have aspirations as to new infrastructure in the parish. Without a neighbourhood plan, we would receive only 15% of Community Infrastructure Levy, capped at £100 per dwelling per annum.

In summary, I believe that EHDC now has to take planning matters in Beech very seriously and with a level of care that may not have existed before. The existence of the neighbourhood plan demonstrates that the parish council too is serious about planning matters.

What do we do next on your Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood plans should be refreshed every five years after they have been adopted. We will start to refresh ours once EHDC's new Local Plan nears adoption in 2025. The complexity of the process of revising a neighbourhood plan depends on how radical the proposed changes are. Hopefully our plan won't have to change too much, making revision a fairly simple process.



APPENDIX 2 - The following payments were approved at the May meeting.

Payments to be authorised at the meeting held on 31st May 2023

Payments to be Authorised					
No	For	Invoice No	Item/purpose	Amount	Method of Payment
1	Mandi Sowik		Salary	£300.00	BACS 1
2			Overtime 14.5 hours	£217.50	BACS 2
3	Semrah		Grass cutting	£494.40	BACS 3
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
				Total:	£1001.90

Notes:

Philip Pascoe – PP Laura Dadsworth LD
Jenny Perring – JP Ilena Allsopp - IA
Malcolm Williamson – MW
Mandi Sowik – MS