



Beech Village Hall & Recreation Ground, 1 Wellhouse Road, Beech, Alton GU34 4AQ

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Registered Charity No. 301738

Annual report of the Chair of the Trustees

Report for the financial year ending June 30, 2024, presented to the Annual General Meeting on October 25, 2024 at Beech Village Hall

New directions for our Community Hub

Beech Village Hall had another good year of activity in 2023-24. Village events were well supported, hall hiring revenue increased and we kept the fabric of the Hall and green spaces in good shape. We have improved our connection with the community by launching a Membership Programme, and by doing more to recognise the many volunteers who support us.

Sensing a change in interests among villagers, we explored new entertainment and social options. After surveying residents, we launched a pilot 'Screen by the Green' Film Night in May 2024; the event was well received and Film Night has now become a regular feature on our calendar.

We've initiated two major projects to expand our offerings:

1. Expanding beyond Film Night to include theatre via the National Theatre's NT Live programme
2. Redesigning the Annexe to create a versatile space for specialist training and therapy sessions, both individual and small group.

We believe the improved Annexe will be an asset for villagers who want to access a smaller space. More details about both projects are available in the appendices and we welcome feedback and offers of assistance.

Our vision for the Hall and Rec is to be Beech's community hub, focusing on three areas:

- **Social Hub:** Regular social events, Bonfire Night and the coffee shop
- **Health and Wellbeing Hub:** Weekly classes in the Hall and therapy sessions in The Wellhouse.
- **Culture Hub:** Film Nights, with plans to expand to NT Live and possibly live screenings.

While we primarily serve Beech residents, we welcome participation from surrounding areas.

We continue to hire the Hall out successfully for wedding receptions and private parties; these make a big contribution to covering our running costs. Our hiring income increased by 4.3% in 2023-24 but the cost of running the Charity, excluding the cost of village events,

rose by nearly 36%, resulting in an annual deficit of £7,088 – our first for many years. Whilst we still had a healthy year-end cash balance of £67,449, including the refurbishment fund and working capital, our financial plan is designed to return the Charity to a positive cash flow over the next two years.

The Social Hub



The Friday coffee shop continued to be popular, with a lively, informal atmosphere as both regulars and occasional visitors enjoy excellent coffee, delicious cakes and pleasant conversation. Many thanks to Sarah Neish and all the volunteer cake creators and coffee grinders.

Support for the monthly Friday evening socials was excellent. During the year, we moved from volunteer cooks to a professional caterer, with all meals pre-booked via Ticketsource. The Socials provide a great opportunity for old friends to get together, and for newcomers to meet up with their neighbours, in a convivial and informal atmosphere.

Peter and Sally Cox organised a challenging but enjoyable Quiz Night in September, but the Spring

2024 Quiz Night had to be cancelled due to insufficient participation.

The turnout for Bonfire Night 2023 was magnificent, with around 300 people flocking to the Rec, many marching from the Hall with their torches, to enjoy an enormous fire, a wonderful fireworks display, and the usual burgers, sausages and drinks. Martin Littlewood and Dan Soutar led an army of volunteers to deliver this event.



The Christmas Fair, organised by Sally Cox, was once again a success, with a good variety of stalls to tempt us with interesting gift ideas. Andrea Neary organised our first Christmas wreath-making workshop in association with Willow & Sage Florist; around 30 people spread across two sessions enjoyed themselves and

gave positive feedback. We planted a young Christmas Tree on the Village Green near the Hall, now known as the Beech Family Tree, and Sarah Neish and Karen Littlewood organised an evening of Christmas carols round the tree.

Our Social team has undergone some changes, with myself, Anne Whitaker and Ingrid McCormack stepping down. Many thanks to Karen Littlewood, who has taken on the role of Chair of the social team, and the remaining members, Andrea Neary, Jo Schneider and Jo Curtis, who joined during the year. And thanks to everyone who assisted at our events and, of course, to those who came along and helped to create that special Beech atmosphere.

The Health and Wellbeing Hub



We continued to host around a dozen clubs and classes each week, catering for the wellbeing of both body and mind. These included several dance classes, pilates, yoga, Baby Sensory, Toddler Sense, LittleKickers and bridge. The Beech Art Group met in the Annexe (now known as The Wellhouse) every week, and Beech Embroiderers met every other month.

East Hampshire District Council approved our application to extend our opening hours, which means that class leaders will now be able to offer early morning classes, from 7am onwards, if they wish.

We have had some success in hiring out The Wellhouse, formerly the Annexe, for small group meetings and therapy sessions. With the demand for therapy of all types increasing, we are developing ideas for improving this space so that we can offer more.

The Culture Hub

Community cinema has become a popular concept, and we ran a pilot screening in May at Beech's Screen by the Green. This was an engaging and enjoyable evening, with the movie *One Life* moving many to tears. Nearly all the tickets were snapped up in advance and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. As a result, Film Night is now a regular feature in our calendar, and we are looking to offer more cultural events in the future.



Managing the Hall and green spaces

We are still busy with weddings and private parties. Our Hall and village remain very attractive, and we consistently receive positive feedback from hirers. We are very proud that our average review score on Google continues to be 4.7 out of 5.

Towards the end of the financial year, we reviewed our prices and hiring structure, which have been unchanged for more than 15 years. Our intention is that revenue from hiring out the Hall should cover most of our basic running costs so we can deliver community

events at an attractive price. These costs have been increasing, not only due to general inflation but also because of the need to pay contractors to do jobs which have previously been done by volunteers. At the same time, our previous pricing structure had become quite complex, with 288 different rates for hiring all or part of the Hall!



At the start of the 2024-25 financial year, we moved to a new pricing model, based on:

- Simplification - making it easier for hirers to understand how much they will pay and reducing administrative costs and errors.
- Customer value – charging higher prices for periods of peak demand
- Revenue – increasing prices to reflect past cost inflation

The inside of the Hall had a fresh coat of paint, and we installed buffer rails around the walls to prevent the paintwork being damaged by stacks of chairs knocking into it. So far, this solution has held up very well and the Hall still looks very smart. Thanks to Nick Charman for using his nautical knowledge to find a solution that's not unlike fenders on the dockside, and to Simon Hodgson for his help with this and a myriad of other, less visible maintenance and repair jobs.

Our dishwasher finally gave up the ghost, and we installed a more modern unit which is easier to use. Testing of the fire alarm and emergency lighting system revealed a number of issues and faults, which have now been addressed.

As we saw an uptick in the use of The Wellhouse, we installed new, remote-controlled heaters to help keep the damp at bay and ensure users are comfortable, while minimising energy costs.

We also installed a mirror to help drivers leaving the Hall car park to see traffic past the blind spots in both directions.



Sheila Sorby continued to make sure the green spaces remained tidy and attractive. On the Rec, Sheila periodically organised a team of volunteers to help clear brambles and weeds from Nick's Little Copse, in what she has dubbed 'Secateur Saturdays'. Sadly, the oak sign which celebrated Nick's leadership and the efforts of everyone in the village to renew this area was stolen, but it will be replaced.

Andrea Neary continues to coordinate the team who empty the dog poo bins on the Green and Rec. Many thanks to this team.

The collection bin for clothes, shoes and bed linen outside the Hall provides a useful resource for the village, while supporting the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance.

Public benefit and community engagement

Many Beech residents, as well as people from the surrounding area, enjoyed the weekly coffee shop, monthly socials, quiz night, Bonfire Night, Christmas events, and Film Night. We estimate that there were about 2,000 customer visits to the Hall for social events during the financial year, an increase of around 10% on 2022-23. In addition, many villagers attended health and wellbeing classes in the Hall and made use of our green spaces and children's play equipment, and a few hired the Hall for private parties.

During the year, we launched our membership programme to help people to connect with the Village Hall more easily. Members receive direct updates about social events and developments at the Charity, a copy of this Chair's report and the financial statement, and special rates if they hire the Hall. Membership is free and open to all adults living in Beech. Associate Membership is available for those who live outside the village but participate in our social life. As of June 30, 58 people had signed up for the programme, including 48 full members living in Beech; the latter represented 17% of the 230 households in Beech.

In the early part of the financial year, the Social Team conducted a paper survey of the village. Whilst this gave some useful insights, the response rate was relatively low. We plan to conduct future surveys online via the membership programme.

Nothing that we do would happen without volunteers. We estimate that more than 50 volunteers contributed nearly 900 hours of their time during the year to deliver the village social programme. (This doesn't include the work performed by the Management Team to

run the Charity.) We are delighted that a number of new faces are now helping out from time to time, whether it's by baking cakes, serving food or drinks, helping to set up for events, or working on our green spaces. A great camaraderie always develops as volunteers come together to support their village, and this contributes to our community spirit.

During National Volunteers Week, we hosted a coffee morning to say thank-you to our existing band of volunteers, and as an opportunity for those who may be thinking about helping to find out more. We plan to run this regularly in future.

Managing the charity

Our Management Team did not change during the financial year, but Anne Whitaker left the Management Team in August 2024 and Nick Charman intends to step down as Treasurer at the end of October. Joanna Curtis has been co-opted onto the team, and a search is underway to find a new Treasurer.

We have welcomed four newcomers to the team of contractors who help to keep the Hall running. Nicola Kitney has taken over our book-keeping, accounts preparation and overall management system from Sarah Branch, who left us during the year. Vicky Smart has taken on the new role of bookings administrator, and is responsible for working with our hirers, invoicing and chasing for payment. Debra and Dunstan Rickhaus have taken over as caretakers/cleaners from Chris Foote. Simon Hodgson continues with repairs and maintenance in the Hall and grass cutting, Lucy Loosemore and her team of Green Goddesses do the gardening work, and Stuart Lee cuts our hedges.

As I mentioned earlier, rising costs have become a source of concern and have led us into a financial deficit for the year. We have increased our use of paid contractors, including an expanded caretaker/cleaning role and a new role providing administrative support to our volunteer bookings manager. Every year comes with the need to upgrade and improve aspects of the Hall, and this year maintenance and repair costs increased by £5,500, largely due to an overhaul of the fire safety systems and a substantial internal redecoration of the Hall. Energy costs increased by £2,000 after our previous fixed-price tariff expired. We have also incurred additional expenditure in our efforts to secure future business, including advertising and applying for permission to open the Hall earlier in the morning.

Elsbeth Mackeggie has kindly reviewed our accounts on a *pro-bono* basis.

During the year, we have reviewed and formally approved all our policy documents and risk assessments, including Health & Safety, Data Protection, Safeguarding and Equal Opportunities, and we have established an annual review cycle to make sure they are always up to date. One benefit is that when we apply for grants to help fund new initiatives, the funding providers often ask to see up-to-date, approved policy documents.

Looking to the future

We have now set ourselves specific, measurable objectives for the next financial year (which, of course, is already well underway). Our overall aim, as stated in our Constitution, remains unchanged: "The provision and maintenance of a village hall and recreation ground

for the use of the inhabitants of Beech and the neighbourhood without distinction of sex, religious or other political opinions and in particular for the use of meetings, lectures and classes and for other forms of recreation (including physical recreation) and other leisure-time occupations, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitant.”

For 2024-25, we have translated this to a set of specific objectives:

- **Social Hub:** Run a great social programme including Bonfire Night. Maintain the number of annual visits for the coffee shop and social events at approximately 2,000 with an overall financial surplus of £5,000.
- **Culture Hub:** Run regular Film Nights and introduce NT Live, to achieve at least 640 customer attendances at Screen by the Green events, to deliver a financial surplus of £2,500.
- **Health & Wellbeing Hub:** Find opportunities for new clubs and classes and pursue the redevelopment of The Wellhouse.
- **Managing the Charity:** Achieve £33,800 of Hall Hire revenue and manage our cost base to less than £40,000. Along with the small surpluses from the Social Hub and Culture Hub, this should result in break-even.
- **Community engagement:** Increase our team of active and engaged volunteers from 50 to 60 and increase annual volunteer hours by 27% to 1,080, to support the increased Culture Hub activity. Increase our total membership from 58 to 85, with Beech household coverage to rise from 17% to 25%.

When the new Hall opened 16 years ago, the redevelopment of the Annexe meeting room was put on hold for financial reasons. Ideas to improve the Annexe have been considered since then, ranging from cosmetic improvements to a complete rebuild. The management team concluded that replacing the Annexe with a newly built multi-function space would be the ideal solution and began to place surplus funds retained from operations into a Refurbishment Fund, which stood at £51,661 as of June 30.

However, the Annexe replacement has proved to be challenging. It would probably require at least £250,000 at today's prices, and we are not sure the benefit to villagers would justify this even if we could secure external funding. Furthermore, this would take a few years and a massive effort to bring to fruition, and the demolition and construction would cause considerable disruption.

We have now defined two capital projects which are smaller in scale and cost and could bring benefits to the village in a relatively short period of time. Our research indicates that they are also likely to be attractive for external funding. The first project addresses the Culture Hub, and the second addresses the Health & Wellbeing Hub. The appendices contain more information about both projects.

Thank you

Our community depends on a great team of volunteers who run the Hall and the Rec. I have peppered this review with thanks, but here I must give a huge thanks to our management team, who work so hard to ensure the Hall and its surroundings are in fine fettle, and our social team, who provide a great programme of events and entertainment for villagers to

enjoy. If you would like to join us, you will find village life all the more rewarding, so please let me know if you can offer a bit of your time and expertise.

Many other people contribute to village life: baking, serving coffee, bartending, emptying dog poo bins, letting off fireworks and so on. There are way too many to name individually, but heartfelt and abundant thanks to you all.

I also want to thank our team of contractors who help us run the Hall and Rec – Nicola Kitney, Vicky Smart, Debra and Dunstan Rickhaus, Simon Hodgson, Stuart Lee and Lucy Loosemore – as well as those who left during the year, Sarah Branch and Chris Foote.

Finally, thanks to everyone in the village who uses the Hall, Village Green and Rec. You make the work that our volunteers do worthwhile! For those of you who have moved in recently, I want to welcome you to this stunning village, and I hope you enjoy living here and taking part in village life for many years to come.

Dr Jane Freeman-Hunt

Trustee and Chair, Beech Village Hall & Recreation Ground Management Committee
October 25th 2024

Appendix 1. Beech Culture Hub – NT Live

During 2023-24, we started to offer monthly film nights at Beech Village Hall, and we are now exploring exciting plans to expand our screenings to include theatre via National Theatre Live.

NT Live broadcasts exceptional theatre performances from the UK to cinemas worldwide. Recent popular productions include:

- *Prima Facie*: Jodie Comer's award-winning one-woman play
- *Nye*: Michael Sheen portraying Nye Bevan and his vision for the NHS
- *Present Laughter*: Noël Coward's classic comedy starring Andrew Scott
- *The Motive and the Cue*: Sam Mendes' new play with Mark Gatiss and Johnny Flynn
- *Dear England*: A play about Gareth Southgate with Joseph Fiennes



NT Live offers the opportunity to experience world-class theatre in the comfort and convenience of our own venue, at a very reasonable price. This will require a much better sound and vision system, which will also greatly improve the experience at our existing monthly film nights, and will open up

the possibility of other live screenings, such as sporting events.

We have built a specification for the new sound and vision equipment, including a larger screen, BluRay 4K UHD player, Digital 5.1 surround sound, a new projector and additional speakers. The investment required will exceed £30,000 and we have applied for grant funding to help us to realise this opportunity.

A survey of Beech Village Hall Members and Film Night attendees conducted in early September 2024 demonstrated strong support for NT Live performances being shown in Beech. We are delighted to have secured letters of support from Arts Society Alton, the Alton Society, Community First (East Hants) and the Alton U3A to support our application for funding.

With NT Live, we plan to deliver a similar experience to our Film Nights, with the cultural performance supported by an open bar and limited cabaret-style seating to encourage conversation and create a welcoming atmosphere. We anticipate these events will attract a diverse audience of all ages, not only from Beech, but also from the surrounding areas. However, we will continue to prioritise Beech Village Hall Members by offering them first access to performance tickets.

Research indicates that of the population of over 32,000 living within 5 miles of the Hall, approximately 658 would be interested in attending a theatre performance monthly. If we can secure even a small share of this potential audience, this initiative will not only make a

valuable social contribution to Beech and its surrounding communities, but also provide a financial boost to the Hall.

Delivering the Culture Hub will rely heavily on volunteers. The social team will need support with promoting the evenings, and on each film or theatre night we will need a projectionist (training available!), a “front of house” manager to welcome the audience, and bar stewards. Any offers of help will be greatly appreciated!

Appendix 2. Health & Wellbeing – The Wellhouse

For years, Beech Village Hall has prioritized health and wellbeing, offering regular classes and clubs that enhance both physical and mental health, including yoga, dance, pilates, bridge, and art.

Local demand and vision

Out of a population of 32,700 people living within a 5-mile radius of Beech Village Hall, research indicates that around 4,000 may be receiving some form of therapy to improve their wellbeing. This highlights significant local demand for therapy and for other personal development offerings.

Our vision for the Annexe is to create a versatile space that can easily be adapted for various purposes, such as one-to-one therapy sessions, art classes or meetings for up to 12 people.

Types of therapy and personal development

Therapy and personal development include various approaches:

- Talking therapies (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, hypnotherapy)
- Physical therapies (e.g. physiotherapy)
- Complementary and alternative therapies (e.g. massage, acupuncture, aromatherapy)
- Coaching and specialised training
- Creative therapies (e.g. music and art therapy)

These services are typically provided one-on-one or in small group settings.

The Wellhouse: current status and future plans

We have renamed the Annexe “The Wellhouse” and are now assessing how to make this space more suitable for therapists to hire without undergoing a prohibitively expensive redevelopment. Villagers would benefit from local access to therapies, and from the availability of a flexible, refurbished space that they could use for small-group activities (e.g., music practice, games).

A specialist training provider has been successfully using The Wellhouse on a regular basis, appreciating its privacy, tranquillity, and location. We have partially addressed the persistent damp, musty smell by implementing regular cleaning routines and upgrading the heating system.

Key features and requirements

To create an ideal space, we envision the following key features:

- Flexible seating and lighting arrangements
- Optional tables, projector, and network connectivity
- Accommodation for specialist equipment (e.g., massage tables)
- Essential soundproofing

The key physical requirements for this upgrade include:

- Damp-proof membranes for the walls, roof repairs and new windows with trickle vents
- A large storage area to store tables and chairs when they are not being used; we would achieve this by knocking into the garage next door
- Lighter-weight tables and chairs which can easily be moved in and out of storage
- Improved lighting, decoration and window blinds to create a more relaxing space
- A lobby/waiting area on a single level with better lighting, a chair and tea and coffee facilities

Cost and funding

We estimate that these changes will cost more than £50,000. We will be able to cover some of this using our Refurbishment Fund, but we will be reliant on grant funding. We anticipate that it will take several months, and possibly longer, to secure this.

These changes aim to enhance The Wellhouse's value to both professional hirers and community members, creating a versatile and welcoming space for various wellbeing activities.