



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, 2025, presented to the Annual General Meeting on October 17, 2025 at Beech Village Hall

Our Community Hub makes great strides



During 2024-25, our village community hub has continued its transformation by delivering a record amount of social, culture and health and wellbeing opportunities for those who live in our village, as well as some people from surrounding areas.

As a **Social Hub**, we enjoyed Bonfire Night, 11 monthly social evenings, Christmas activities and the weekly coffee shop.

Our **Culture Hub** took off following a successful pilot in May 2024, with nine film screenings and three National Theatre Live performances during the financial year, underpinned by a major update to our audio-visual equipment.

At our **Health and Wellbeing Hub**, our weekly classes in the Hall continued and we solidified our plans to redevelop the old Annexe into The Wellhouse; we obtained funding for the majority of the cost, and contracted with a builder to deliver the work.

As a **Celebration Hub**, we continued to hire the Hall out successfully for wedding receptions, children's parties and family celebrations. We achieved our financial objective of returning the Hall's regular operations to breakeven, with an operating surplus of £1,385.

The Social Hub

Our monthly **Friday evening Socials** each attracted around 25-40 attendees. We ran 11 socials, including eight with supper from a professional caterer, a barbecue, a pub night with nibbles, and a pub night with fish and chips. Old friends and newcomers alike enjoyed the convivial and informal atmosphere.



As usual, the Rec was packed for the annual **Bonfire Night**, with the torchlit procession, bonfire, 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 another **Christmas wreath-**

making workshop in association with Willow & Sage Florist, and Sarah Neish and Karen Littlewood organised an evening of **Christmas carols** on the Village Green around the Beech Family Tree, which is growing well.

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.

We now only have two people in our Events Team, Karen Littlewood and Jo Curtis, as Andrea Neary and Jo Schneider have stepped down. We have therefore become even more reliant upon the volunteers who help out with setup, running the bar, serving food and clearing up afterwards. Many thanks to our events team, everyone who assisted at our events and, of course, to those who came along and helped to create that special Beech atmosphere. Thanks also to Anne Moore of Plan B Catering, who has consistently delivered tasty meals at a very reasonable price.

The Culture Hub

Our community cinema initiative, the Screen by the Green, really took off in 2024-25. We screened nine movies and three National Theatre Live plays during the year. Our format of limited attendees, cabaret style seating, an open bar and a short interval in the middle makes it “more than a movie” and has generated many favourable comments. Our screenings are usually sold out in advance, and people often stay to socialise for some time after the screening.



Movies

Wicked Little Letters
Baltimore
The Fall Guy
The Critic
Small Things Like These
Gladiator II
Conclave
The Brutalist
A Complete Unknown

National Theatre Live

The Importance of Being Earnest
Dr Strangelove
A Streetcar Named Desire

In order to be accepted as a venue by the National Theatre, we needed to upgrade our audio-visual equipment, and we were fortunate to be able to finance this through a Rural Grant of £35,367 from East Hampshire County Council, funded by DEFRA's Rural England Prosperity Fund. The Hall now

has an enormous screen, a BluRay 4K UHD player, top-of-the-range projector, Dolby 5.1 surround sound and additional speakers, all of which give our screenings enormous impact.

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 dance, pilates, yoga, Baby Sensory, Toddler Sense, LittleKickers and bridge, as well as the Beech Art Group and Beech Embroiderers.

A number of additional classes started during the year, but in some cases it was difficult for class leaders to secure enough attendance to be viable. We have started to offer class leaders marketing ideas and suggestions to help them develop their attendance, and we plan to promote health and wellbeing classes more in the future.



Our plans to redevelop the Annexe into a health and wellbeing hub have moved forward dramatically. Our vision for The Wellhouse is to create a versatile, tranquil and welcoming space that can be used for social interaction, community support, wellness practices and healthy living.

The design satisfies our key physical requirements:

- Damp-proof membranes for the walls, roof repairs and new windows with trickle vents
- Lighter-weight tables and chairs and a large storage area for furniture and equipment
- Improved lighting, decoration and window blinds
- A well lit lobby/waiting area on a single level with seating and tea and coffee facilities
- Underfloor heating powered by an air-source heat pump
- A small biodiverse garden area
- Enhanced storage to replace some of the garage space which we will lose

We engaged experts to perform a dampness investigation, a roof inspection and an asbestos test (fortunately negative). Following a tender process, we contracted with Flint Construction to perform the building works, and we hope The Wellhouse will open in early 2026.

As the plans developed, the costs reached a total of £135,000 including an allowance for marketing costs for the launch. Undeterred, our team applied for as many grants as they could, with astonishing results. We have secured a total of £113,914 in grants from the Veolia Environmental Trust, the National Lottery Community Fund, Beech Parish Council, Alton Town Council, EHDC, and the Government Boiler Upgrade Scheme; the grants from the three councils have been allocated from developer funding (the Community Infrastructure Levy). We have received some of this funding already, to allow us to make staged payments to the builders; the balance will come once the works are complete. We await decisions on some further grant applications, and we will meet any shortfall from our own financial reserves.

Towards the end of the financial year, we launched a local appeal to help with furniture and fittings for The Wellhouse. As well as helping financially, this gives villagers the opportunity to feel that they are part of the effort. We thank all those who have made donations so far.

We have started to build a community of therapists and practitioners who may consider using The Wellhouse. One such therapist is already offering a monthly foot clinic, using the lounge area of the main hall temporarily.

Thanks are due to The Wellhouse team for getting us to this point, including Kim Eakers, who leads the project; Karen Littlewood, Jo Curtis and Richard Whitaker from the Charity's management team, and Sara Varo, who has done a fantastic job of lining up interest among health and wellbeing practitioners. Nick Carey-Thomas helped a lot by preparing the architect's drawings.

The Celebration Hub

We are still busy with weddings, children's parties and family celebrations. 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.



At the start of the 2024-25 financial year, we moved to a new pricing model, increasing some prices to reflect past inflation, but also simplifying our rates and charging higher prices for periods of peak demand. This has helped us to maintain our revenues and reduce administrative costs.

Managing the Hall and green spaces

The picnic bench outside the Hall was collapsing, so we replaced it with a new bench made of recycled plastic. Beech Parish Council, which funded the original bench, kindly gave us a grant to cover the cost of the new one.

Our insurers decided that our use of key safes was no longer acceptable, so we installed a new electronic access control system which was 50% funded through a grant from our district councillor, Tony Costigan. Our regular users now have key fobs, and our occasional users are allocated an access code by the Hall booking system.



Sheila Sorby continues to make sure the green spaces remain tidy and attractive. On the Rec, Sheila regularly organises a team of volunteers to help clear brambles and weeds from Nick's Little Copse, and we have had professional help to remove sycamore saplings that threaten to take over. Outside the Hall, the planters are always full of seasonal flowers.

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

We estimate that there were about 2,650 visits to the Hall for social events during the financial year, an increase of around 30% on 2023-24 largely due to the film and National Theatre screenings. In addition, many villagers attended health and wellbeing classes in the Hall and used the Rec, Village Green and children's play equipment, and a few hired the Hall for private parties.

Our membership programme grew from 58 members to 107, including 76 full members living in Beech. They come from 60 households, more than a quarter of the village. Members receive direct email updates, as well as special rates if they hire the Hall. We conducted three online surveys of the full Members during the year, with a very high response rate. We are very grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views, which we analysed carefully and took into account.



Nothing that we do would happen without volunteers. We estimate that more than 50 volunteers contributed 1,050 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 people 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. Feedback from some of the new volunteers is that they find it very satisfying to work as a team to make something great happen for the village!

Managing the charity

As I mentioned in last year's report, rising costs led us into a financial deficit for 2023-24. For this year, we put in place a set of specific objectives, and we have performed well against them:

Year to June 30, 2025	Objective	Result
Social Hub & Culture Hub		
Attendees at events (estimated)	2,640	2,652
Surplus from events	£7,500	£10,240
Health & Wellbeing Hub		
New clubs & classes	Add new clubs & classes	Limited progress
The Wellhouse	Pursue redevelopment	Ready to start work
Managing the Charity		
Hall Hire revenue	£33,800	£30,274
Cost base*	Less than £40,000	£36,327
Surplus from normal operations	Breakeven	£1,385
Community engagement		
Active volunteers	Up from 50 to 60	50+
Volunteer hours	Up 27% to 1,080	1,052
Membership total	From 58 to 85	76
Membership – household coverage	From 17% to 25%	26%

*Cost base includes property, estate and administrative costs, but excludes the direct costs of fundraising events, preparation costs for The Wellhouse, and depreciation.

Our Statement of Financial Activities is more complicated than usual because of the grants we have received and the timing of The Wellhouse development. Grants are shown as restricted funds because they are for a specific purpose.

- **The upgrade of the audio-visual equipment for the Culture Hub** was funded by a grant from EHDC. We are depreciating this over three years, starting half-way through this financial year, in line with the warranty. This results in an accounting surplus but has no impact on our cash position.
- **For the Wellhouse**, we received £51,172 in grants during the financial year; an initial stage payment from Veolia and the grant from the National Lottery. A condition of the grant from Veolia was that we had to pay them 10% of the value of their grant up front as a Contributing Third Party Payment, and this is shown as a cost of £6,828. At the end of the financial year, building work had yet to start on The Wellhouse, so the account is in surplus and we are carrying more cash than usual. The cost of the project will be borne in the 2025-26 financial year, when further grant payments will also be received.
- The other grants were for **the keyless entry system** and the new **picnic bench**.
- **“Restricted Funds: other”** refers to funds received in prior years which must be spent on projects and assets for children; the only such expense in 2024-25 was the annual inspection of the play equipment on the Village Green.

Our Constitution

When we were applying for grants for The Wellhouse, some of the funding organisations required our Constitution to have a Dissolution Clause, to specify what would happen to the Charity's assets if it had to be wound up. We therefore added the standard clause recommended by the Charity Commission, with its approval. At the same time, we made some further updates to the Constitution. These changes were approved at an extraordinary general meeting held in late December, 2024.

At this meeting, it was pointed out that the overall "Objects" in our constitution were out of date in some respects, so we consulted with the village about a redrafted version. We sent a new draft to the Charity Commission for approval. Unfortunately, they were not willing to consent to this, so our overall objects remain 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."

Our Management Team

We are delighted that Cheryl Fisher has been co-opted onto our Management Team as our Finance Lead. Her initial task has been to document our financial processes, following a recommendation from Elspeth Mackeggie, who has kindly reviewed our accounts. Cheryl is now working closely with Nicola Kitney, our financial controller, and will stand for election as a trustee at the AGM.

Kim Eakers and Richard Whitaker have reached the end of their current three-year terms as trustees, and will be standing for re-election at the AGM. I have decided to step down as Chair at the AGM, and the management team has elected Richard Whitaker to succeed me.

Thank you

Many thanks to our management team – Jo Curtis, Kim Eakers, Cheryl Fisher, Karen Littlewood, Dan Soutar and Richard Whitaker. They work so hard to make sure we have one of the best village halls in the country, with an amazing programme of events and entertainment for villagers to enjoy. I also want to thank our team of contractors who help us with finance, admin, cleaning and maintenance – Nicola Kitney, Vicky Smart, Debra and Dunstan Rickhaus, Simon Hodgson, Stuart Lee and Lucy Loosemore.

We depend very heavily on our volunteers; many thanks to everyone who helps: baking, serving coffee, bartending, emptying dog poo bins, letting off fireworks, shifting tables and

chairs around, putting the marquee up, and so on. If you would like to take part from time to time, please get in touch.

Finally, thanks to everyone in the village who uses the Hall, Village Green and Rec. You make our volunteers' efforts worthwhile!

On a personal note . . .

As I retire from the team, I find myself reflecting on the extraordinary journey I've had as both Social Chair and Chair of Beech Village Hall. What began as a commitment to serve has grown into something far richer—a tapestry of shared moments, meaningful connections, and joyful memories that I will carry with me always.

Beech Village Hall has never been just bricks and mortar. It has been a living, breathing space where laughter echoed through the rafters, friendships blossomed over cups of tea and glasses of wine, and the spirit of community came alive in every event, meeting, and celebration. From summer fêtes to quiz nights, from quiet planning sessions to bustling gatherings, I've had the privilege of witnessing how a simple idea—bringing people together—can transform lives.

I've been humbled by the generosity, creativity, and warmth of those who've volunteered, participated, and supported our efforts. Together, we've built more than a calendar of events—we've built a culture of belonging. Whether it was dancing under fairy lights or sharing stories by the fire, the joy we created was always rooted in togetherness.

To my fellow committee members, volunteers, and neighbours: thank you for your trust, your humour, and your unwavering support. You've made the role not just fulfilling, but fun. I've learned that leadership isn't about titles—it's about listening, laughing, and lifting others up. And I've been lifted, time and again, by this wonderful community.

As I step back, I do so with deep gratitude and great hope. Beech Village Hall will continue to thrive, evolve, and welcome new voices. I'll be cheering from the sidelines, knowing that the friendships and laughter we've shared will echo long into the future.

With heartfelt thanks,

Dr Jane Freeman-Hunt

Trustee and Chair, Beech Village Hall & Recreation Ground
Management Committee
October 17, 2025

