**Chairman’s Report – 12 May 2010**

The Chairman (Cllr Broxis) introduced the Parish Clerk and the members of the Parish Council, along with County Councillor Tom Thacker, Mike Norman from Basingstoke Conservation Volunteers and David O'Brien, Head Teacher of Ecchinswell School.

He explained that, 120 years ago,theaffairs of the parishes had been administered by a vestry. Inevitably these meetings were dominated by the squire, the parson and the principal ratepayers and thus it became a coterie only open to those people deemed ‘suitable’ to serve. In many parishes, particularly rural ones, the system was inefficient and certainly not democratic.

For a variety of reasons, and a desire to break the power of the Church of England over the lives of nonconformists, a Bill was promoted to create Parish Councils. This Bill became an Act in 1894. Its effect was to transfer all non ecclesiastical functions from the church to the elected Parish Councils.

So **the** Parish Council became the first tier of local government. It may be “Local Government” but this Parish is “A” political. Wherever our sympathies may lie we unanimously believe that there is no room for party political activity at this level. We are here quite simply to serve the local needs to the best of our ability.

Councillors are elected for a four year term, although an election is only necessary if there are more people wanting to be parish councillors than there are vacancies. A very rare occurrence in our parish

From a procedural point the Council has the right to, and is required to

Raise money by precept from the rates
Provide audited accounts
Publish minutes from monthly meetings

and to use one power; that is to provide allotments for the labouring poor - although I’m quite sure that the allotment holders of today do not fall in this bracket! Apart from this requirement all other powers are voluntary and we are not actually required to do anything else other than to raise money & hold meetings.

However in the real world the Council does try to achieve - and during the past year we have been aiming to make the allotment facility better by tidying, providing a burn area, clipping back hedges and allowing the erection of sheds for the allotment holders. We now have 100% occupancy for the first time in many years.

Through contractors we maintain amenity areas such as Digweeds and the pond, although disappointingly our contractors have again been over enthusiastic with their strimming around the pond and issue has been taken with them over this matter. We also provide public seating and have installed a new bench at Digweeds and are replacing the rotting seat at the village pond.

For those who enjoy using our footpaths, we have provided a map board which is sited at Digweeds and are planning another near Bishops Green. Early this year with some S106 money, grants and help from many volunteers a new bridge over the stream - a splendid looking affair – was erected on footpath 13 near Kisby’s Farm.

Road gritting has been a major source of concern this winter. We have had many discussions with the Borough on this matter and believe that we now have a commitment for gritting during icy conditions throughout the C155 road. That is from Bishops Green to Ecchinswell and on to Kingsclere. As you know there is a small section of road between Bishops Green and the A339 which is the responsibility of the West Berkshire Council – we also keep in contact with West Berks to maintain the road and footpath between Bishops Green and the A339. On the icy road subject, you may have read from our copy in the Parish Magazine that the Borough are planning to double their reserves of salt and have also offered the Parish salt bins to place in areas where gritting is not carried out. We have earmarked positions in Ecchinswell and Bishops Green for these bins.

Whilst on the subject of Highways, we are talking to the County about the flooding across the road in Bishops Green. Basically there is an old drainage system which is no longer fit for purpose and needs replacing. But of course the old hackneyed phrase of “we don’t have the money” is the easy answer not to do anything. But we are hoping that with the good offices of our County Councillor – Tom Thacker – we can have this matter addressed in a timely manner.

We even managed to have the de-restricted signs re-sited in Hyde Lane so as not to encourage drivers to enter the road a injudicious speed.

A new litter warden was hired at the beginning of April to cover Ecchinswell. We think he is doing a good job. If you agree, (or not) please let us know.

After a very long gestation period, during which time we scraped together the necessary funds, the re-pointing of the Old Churchyard wall has now been completed.

Finally, we have been looking into replacing the railings surrounding the War Memorial which were removed during the Second World War. Details were published in the Parish Magazine and the Parish web site, where you can see from an old photograph what the memorial looked like originally. We would dearly like your feedback on whether we should replace the railings or not.

We try to be as effective as possible but we do need your ideas and your input. So please come along to the monthly meetings occasionally and give us your comments.

The Chairman then dealt with questions from residents.