Chairman’s Report – 11 May 2011

Good evening and thank you all for coming. Firstly allow me to do some introductions – starting with the Parish Council;

Doreen Gascoine our clerk

John Broxis Chairman

Tim Hall – Vice Chairman

Malcolm Jones (on Hoiliday)

Daniela Court

Ena Fowler

Ian Cameron

(vacancy)

And now our guest speakers;

John Izett our newly elected Borough Councillor, who is here – together with our long standing member Horace Mitchell, and our County Councillor, Tom Thacker

PC Matt Deery – the gentleman who does much to keep our Parish crime free

Carole Ruse the Community Planning Officer from the Borough, who will introduce the process for local community plans

So – as you are undoubtedly aware a Parish Council is the first tier of local government and the closest to the community. At this level our Council happens to be “A” political. That is by choice rather than by design as we see no particular benefit to support any political movement when it comes to cutting grass or mending bus shelters

The Councillors are elected for a four year term, although an actual election is only necessary if there are more people wanting to be parish councillors than there are vacancies. An unusual occurrence for this voluntary post. Unlike many other Parishes we do not have the luxury of any retirees on the committee. Consequently it is unlikely that any of the members are around to answer queries during the working day. However we are fortunate to have Doreen who is generally available to help or to give information if and when needed

Each year the councillors persuade someone to be the chairman and vice-chairman from amongst their number. The Clerk is the only paid professional and the Responsible Finance Officer.

The Parish Council has a number of required formal duties, procedural and financial - which mainly form the bureaucratic element of local government. These include:

The right to raise money by precept

Provide annual audited accounts

Publish minutes from monthly meetings & we also

Provide the allotments and an appropriate watering facility

Maintaining amenity areas, for example Digweeds and the village pond

Looking over/after rights of way

The Bus Shelters

 Public seating

Meeting places

The clearing of litter

And financially assisting local charity or volunteer groups where possible

We are also consulted on matters such as planning applications. And if the Localisation Bill is passed – maybe more power will be given to the Parish on planning matters. However neither we nor the Borough know at this time how this would work precisely as a parochial view cannot necessarily account for the wider picture – particularly the available or planned infrastructure to support any type of development. Maybe we will default back to the County Structure Plans as the only coherent method by which to make a reasoned decision.

The Parish Council meets at 7:30pm on the second Wednesday of every month excepting August here in the Ecchinswell Village Hall. If you would like to hear how we spend the small sums of your money precepted from the rates, please come along. There is a 15 minute slot at the beginning of every meeting for public participation. This is your chance to raise questions over roads, footpaths, speeding or simply to suggest an improvement item for our villages.

The agendas for the meetings and the minutes are posted on five Parish notice boards. BG Community Centre, EVH, Eagle Road, Ecchinswell Pond & the Royal Oak. And on our new Web Site

We also employ two part time litter wardens who do a splendid job clearing the detritus the more thoughtless eject from passing vehicles. Please give them a toot and a wave when passing as I’m sure they would appreciate the acknowledgement.

In the last year we have provided a new bench for pond area and are about to install a map board there also.

A replacement watering system has been installed for the allotments which includes some control to limit the possibility of vandals turning the water on just for fun.

We have organised the planting of snowdrops and bluebells at various places – which will hopefully make the Parish a little prettier during the Spring.

And are currently making sure that all the land we look after and own is registered correctly to the Parish

Concerns have been expressed over level of the brook/spring through Ecchinswell, so we have had the Environmental Agency down to look at the situation and advise. We await further information.

Potholes have been a major headache for us this year – and they are an on-going situation as our local road network gradually falls apart through many years of neglect. At least we have managed to arrange for the road near North Ecchinswell Farm to be re-surfaced. This will take place on the 31st May for two days during which time the road will be closed.

Ground maintenance has been a key issue with the Parish. Just a few years ago any grass cutting, strimming or clipping was occasionally carried out by a few kind people who borrowed equipment. Consequently we have struggled to gradually build our finances to hire professionals to do a professional job. Last year we suffered from areas which should not have been cut and areas which should have been cut, not attended to. This year we have strained the very hinges of our meagre coffers and hired, HOPEFULLY, real professionals to do the job. Your feedback on the job they do would be most welcome to enable us to improve the village maintenance programme year on year.

I now hand you over to Doreen Gascoine who will go through our meagre yet well controlled finances.