**Chairman’s Report – 9 May 2012**

The Chairman introduced Doreen Gascoine - Clerk to the Council the only paid professional on the team, and the Responsible Finance Officer.

And the other Councillors, all of whom give their time freely for the benefit of the Parish.

**Tim Hall** – Vice Chairman

**Malcolm Jones** – Allotments and Footpaths

**Daniela Court** – Neighbourhood Watch

**Ian Cameron**

**Alan Meredith**

**Margaret Curtis**

He then introduced:

Our Borough Councillor; John Izett

Our County Councillor; Tom Thacker

PC Matt Deery (keeping the neighbourhood safe)

And last but not least from Hampshire Highways Phil Yexley and Chris Giles

The Chairman explained that the Parish Council is the first tier of local government and its intention is to serve the local community. But how?

Firstly, the elected Councillors together with our Clerk, are required to carry out formal and procedural duties, for example;

1. Raising money by precept
2. Providing annual audited accounts
3. Publishing minutes from monthly meetings

These activities are largely transparent to those outside the Council, can be eye wateringly boring at times, but are necessary to make sure we operate in a professional manner and take proper care of local residents' money.

Then there are the more interesting elements and, whilst what we do is not always instantly apparent, we do try very hard to make a positive difference for our community.

For example:

Having suffered large water bills through leaks, we invested in having the pipe work in the allotments replaced. This has reduced our bills by about one third; a worthwhile investment. Additionally we are in the process of having a redundant allotment made into two half units but are currently hampered by the monsoon season we are all enjoying.

We take care of the bus shelters, hardly exciting, but if we didn’t have them repaired if and when vandalised – as happens occasionally at Bishops Green - the Parish would look a mess.

Together with the Borough we have found around £40,000 of 106 money (that is money given by developers for their house building) for projects at Bishops Green and the sports changing rooms at the Ecchinswell Village Hall.

We employ two litter wardens who certainly help to keep our villages tidy. Although sometimes it seems a losing battle. Not long ago someone ejected a McDonald’s family meal wrapper and associated detritus from his vehicle, together with his mobile phone bill. Quite useful for identification purposes. We had a word.

However we are not always successful with our good intentions. We thought it reasonable to make sure that all the land we look after is correctly registered to the Parish. Our Clerk invested many hours to achieve this worthwhile aim. However, some bureaucracy observed by people at the Land Registry made quite sure that we could not achieve this sensible ambition.

Parish Councils are also the focal point for matters such as planning applications, on which we are entitled to be consulted. Recently with the support from Horace Mitchell, our Borough Councillor, we fought an application for a residential site in an area of countryside. We lost our case as the applicant claimed to be a gypsy and thus was allowed the privilege of residence under the current law.

Activities such as this one are rarely seen. But it is important for the Parish to continue to work on such issues albeit transparently. Talking of which, recently a draft Local Plan was published. Horace Mitchell put many hours into editing this document to transform its content into something meaningful for his Ward. Few will ever recognise his work as the benefit will only come in the fullness of time. On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to thank him sincerely for his excellent work, as it really should be recognised.

One of our next challenges is to see if there is any practical way to support Greenham Parish Council and others to fight the proposal in West Berkshire over the development of 2,000 houses in the Sandford area. This is in addition to the Race Course development and the ongoing Pro Logis activity. The A339 is the road south from Newbury – so be assured, these development will affect us all – badly.

This year in line with the Borough, we have frozen our precept. This action has made us look very hard at our maintenance budget, which accounts for the majority of our expenditure. Following negotiation by our Clerk and members of the Council the church has now taken over responsibility for keeping the old grave yard in good order, with the Parish council contributing half the fees. The United Reformed Church (whose grave yard is opposite the village pond) has agreed to take over the care of this area – which we have cared for in recent times following many years of neglect. And the Borough has agreed to maintain the banking at Palmers Yard. Naturally we will be monitoring these matters. All in all our financial load has been marginally lightened which helps our slim coffers.

On the subject of maintenance, as you are probably aware the village pond is where crested newts, a protected species, are resident. Thus the work we do there is taken following advice from a licensed and qualified person.

Recently our attention has been drawn to finding ways to minimise the undoubted effect of traffic through the village when the extended works on the A339 at Knightsbridge begin on the 21st May. I will leave Phil Yexley and John Izett to update you on the matter. John Izett, by the way, has been impressively active on this issue and totally supportive to the Parish Council. I do believe that we have the two best Borough Councillors ever in this area who work tirelessly for you behind the scenes. And it should be recognised.

Finally, just as a reminder, the Parish Council meets at 7:30pm on the second Wednesday of every month excepting August. The meetings are here at Ecchinswell Village Hall. There is a 15 minute slot at the beginning of every meeting for public participation. This is your chance to raise local matters with the council, which we welcome.

The agendas for the meetings and the minutes are posted on Parish notice boards located at Bishops Green Community Centre, Ecchinswell Village Hall, the Royal Oak, Eagle Road and at the Ecchinswell Village Pond. Also on the parish council website at www.ecchinswell-pc.gov.uk.

So please do come in to see us at our monthly meetings. We welcome your participation.

Thank you.