

## REPORT FROM ECCHINSWELL, SYDMONTON AND BISHOPS GREEN PARISH COUNCIL MEETING & ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Your parish council held another virtual meeting on the 5th May 2021 and also the annual parish assembly.

Due to pre-election rules both the borough and county councillors were unable to attend, however they sent in written reports that were read out on their behalf:

- Bin collections, BDBC's principal service, reverted to normal after a period of going from weekly to fortnightly collections and remarkably the service held up reasonably well overall, with a few exceptions locally, in the face of crew numbers being impacted by Covid
- The local Household Waste Recycling issue was resolved temporarily by Basingstoke and Deane BC and Hants CC jointly funding the cost of using West Berks facilities for another year. A long-term solution is needed, and HCC, as the responsible body, are investigating local site options, but a renewal of the arrangement with West Berks will be required, something that the borough councillor will support
- HCC approves £2.1 billion spending on local services in 2021/22 - plans for the next financial year focus on the county's ongoing work associated with the pandemic, support for vulnerable children and adults, investment in Hampshire's roads and infrastructure to support economic recovery, as well as climate change mitigation.
- The annual council tax charge for a Band D property will be £1,350.45 – an increase of £1.23 per week, equating to 4.99%, of which 3% is for adults' social care – a Government request. The budget includes £13 million for the maintenance of 5,500 miles of roads and an extra £1.2 million in carbon reduction measures across the County Council. HCC's four-year capital programme of £744 million is one of the largest in the country.

It is two years since we had our last Parish Assembly so there are several items to talk about.

### **Summer/Autumn 2019 highlights:**

- We undertook an audit of parish land since the historical parish documentation was not as clear as it might be. After some digging in the land registry, we are now clear on what land the PC owns, what it leases and what it just takes care of.
  - We own Ecchinswell Village Hall, the Ecchinswell playing fields, and The War Memorial.
  - We lease the allotments from The Sydmonton Court Estate and now have an updated lease agreement – rather more 21st century wording than the original 1978 document.
  - We take care of Digweeds, the area around the War memorial and the area opposite the school.
- We made some improvements to two of these areas:
  - After a long battle with British Telecom the old phone boxes in Bishops Green and Ecchinswell were removed. The Bishops Green box area was made good by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council as it was on their land but the

Ecchinswell box left a very untidy area alongside the parking opposite the school. We led a team of volunteers to create a gravelled area with raised beds. This improves the area significantly and is enjoyed by parents waiting to pick up their children and others who use that parking area.

- We also used a grant allocation from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council to improve the fencing at the allotments and install a back gate into the playing fields.

## **2020/1 highlights**

- The first lockdown of the Covid pandemic took us all by surprise but it was pleasing to see how quickly support networks emerged – both formal and informal. Like most parishes around the country, we set up a Helpline for residents. For the most part we were able to match residents who were shielding and needed help with residents who lived close by. Our telephone service dealt with one-off requests. A big thank you goes to all the volunteers who made this support of our community possible.
- The other main invasion of 2020 was the Azolla attack on the pond at the end of Hyde Lane. Our Victorian forebears have a great deal to answer for. Avid plant collectors admired this water fern in South America and brought it back to the UK where it wreaks havoc in ponds, displacing native plants and deoxygenating the water. The only solution was to introduce a tiny South American weevil to the pond to gorge on the fern! These must be hatched and raised carefully. We put in an order for 2000 (pinhead sized!) and while we waited for them to mature our only option was to dredge the pond regularly to keep the growth level down. A determined team of volunteers kept this up for four months and removed several tons of Azolla. We are pleased to say that the tiny weevils have done their job and the pond is back to normal – just waiting for the autumn pond clearance event.
- In November the Parish Council received an email from a land promoter with a proposal to build 400 homes on a farm in Bishops Green. We publicised this information and held an Extraordinary Meeting on 15th December 2020 to gauge the views of the community. This was very well attended. We also conducted an online survey about the development. The response of residents was overwhelmingly against the proposed development and a summary can be seen on our website. Since January all has gone quiet on this proposal but we cannot assume that it has gone away. The Parish Council is still monitoring the situation and is ready to act when needed.
- The stimulus of a potential large development in Bishops Green has spurred the Parish Council to make a Neighbourhood Plan. A group of volunteers is working to produce a variety of initial consultation opportunities as Covid restrictions are loosened.
- Traffic issues and speeding are perennial problems in the parish. Earlier this year we conducted a survey to gauge strength of feeling of residents. We were pleased with the level of response and a Traffic/Speeding Working Party has grown from this.
- Despite having fibre to the cabinets in Bishops Green and Ecchinswell, broadband access is still a big issue in the parish. We are currently undertaking an audit of the provision and have some links with a group looking to improve the situation for outlying homes. Please complete the survey on our website to help with this audit.
- We are pleased to announce the completion of a countryside access project in the area west of Ratts Cottages. Thanks to a grant from Hampshire County Council and a generous donation from the Ecchinswell Panto Group you can now walk a route from Kingsclere to Burghclere without having to go over a single stile.

Finally, thanks to those that attended the online assembly. We really appreciated your time and, if you would like to become a Parish Councillor, we do have one vacancy. We would very much welcome anyone who puts themselves forward so if you are interested, please contact the parish clerk at [clerk@ecchinswell-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@ecchinswell-pc.gov.uk) or via the website.

Please contact us if you have questions concerning the work of the parish council, if you have any concerns that you feel the council should be aware of or where it can help or support you.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 7.30pm at Bishops Green Village Hall. It will be our first physical meeting in quite a while, so we are looking forward to seeing some of you there.

Cllr Mark Stamp