

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ECCHINSWELL, SYDMONTON AND BISHOPS GREEN PARISH

**HELD at Bishops Green Village Hall
WEDNESDAY 14th May 2025
AT 7.30 PM**

Present: Councillors Stamp (Chair), Sadler (Vice Chair), Debenham, Parkes, Hardy-Giles, Monteith and Letch
Borough Cllr Izett, CPSO Drew Mechen
S Jones (Parish Clerk) and 8 residents.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from County Cllr Mellor.

2. Minutes of Assembly held on 8th May 2024

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Chair's Report

Chair's Report to the ESGB Parish Council AGM

Good evening everyone and thank you for attending our Annual General Meeting.

It's been a lively and productive year for Ecchinswell, Sydmonton & Bishops Green Parish Council — and I'm delighted to share some highlights (and a few potholes) from the past 12 months.

Parish Council in Full Bloom (for a bit!)

For the first time in years, we had a full complement of 7 parish councillors. Sadly, our record was short-lived as our long-standing councillor Marian Dain stepped down in December. Marian's contributions over the past decade — including four years as Chair — have been monumental. She was part councillor, part superhero, and we're very grateful for all she did. Marian, we wish you a relaxing retirement from parish politics (though we may call on you again — we know where you live!).

Website Woes Turned Web Wonders

Our website, affectionately described as "a bit 2004," is finally getting a long overdue makeover. The new version promises to be shinier, simpler and more inclusive of all three parts of our parish. If you have any scenic photos you'd like to share, send them in! Preferably ones without your thumb in the corner.

Potholes Galore — And We've Counted Them!

We've now completed a pothole audit (yes, that's a real thing). Over 130 potholes were reported — which must be some sort of record. Thanks to Cllr Sadler's dedication (and knees of steel), the whole parish has been mapped and measured, and Hampshire County Council now has a crystal-clear picture of just how bumpy our ride has become. Let's hope they agree it's time for some TLC on the tarmac.

The War on Azolla Continues

Our annual Azolla battle at the village pond continued — with the help of our little friends, the weevils. They've been munching their way through the invasive weed, and we're cautiously optimistic about their progress. Pond clearance was postponed this year so as not to disturb our six-legged allies. We'll let them finish their salad first.

Equipment Upgrades and Allotment TLC

We've invested in new gardening equipment for the allotments, including a strimmer and hedge cutter — because, let's face it, the old ones were about ready for a museum. We hope this helps keep the parish looking its best, and we're always thankful for the local volunteers who roll up their sleeves (and occasionally get stung by nettles) to help out. Speeding — Watch This Space We're in the process of replacing the broken Speed Indicator Device. A new one is on the way — and we're hoping it will encourage drivers to ease off the pedal. Or at least wave as they speed past it.

Bus Services and Mythical Creatures

Strangely, some planning documents claimed Ecchinswell has a bus service. This came as news to many of us — as mythical as the Loch Ness Monster, but less reliable. There is, however, a Dial-a-Ride service for those who qualify. Not quite the Number 9 to Basingstoke, but better than nothing!

Youth & Community Spirit

In addition to Stay & Play on Wednesdays for the under 5s, plans are afoot to reinvigorate Bishop's Green Youth Club. Grant requests have been submitted to the Shaw Trust, to support three youth workers who will be able to offer a wider range of activities for the older children. Unfortunately the planned pre-school did not go ahead due to staff shortages, but the play surfaces at Bishops Green hall will be renewed shortly.

Dog Mess and Football Fields — A Less-than-Perfect Match

We've had complaints about dog fouling on the football fields. Please remember: if your dog does its business, it's your business to pick it up. Flooding and Hedges Recent heavy rain led to some localised flooding, especially at the southern end of the parish. We'll continue working with landowners and HCC to resolve it. Also, a gentle reminder: if your hedge is trying to take over the pavement, a trim would be appreciated!

Volunteers Needed! (We Pay in Gratitude and Tea)

As volunteer numbers have dropped, our maintenance costs have risen. If you can spare even an hour now and then — for weeding, painting, or other simple tasks — please do let us know. It's a great way to contribute and stay active. No experience necessary — enthusiasm counts for more than horticultural qualifications!

Looking Ahead

As we look forward to 2025, we have a refreshed website on the horizon, a brand-new Speed Indicator Device, and a shiny new set of email addresses (yes, we're now @esbgpc.co.uk — fancy, right?). We'll continue our work on sustainability, planning, and community projects, and as always, welcome your thoughts, support, and involvement. On behalf of the council, thank you to all our residents, volunteers, and community groups. Your support keeps our parish running smoothly (well... less bumpily). Wishing you all a happy, healthy, and pot-hole-free year ahead.

Usually I would hand over to Sarah our clerk for the finance report but we are taking Drew Mechen, our CSPO the next slot so he can get back to his shift earlier – over to Drew.

7. Report from the CSPO

This item was dealt with out of order.

CSPO Drew Mechen advised that he had been in the position of CSPO since January 2024. He described his centre and departmental remit. He explained that all areas of society are covered and they are essentially the old style 'bobby'. Their powers are limited but they can give fixed penalty notices.

From April to date there has been an marked increase in numbers of incidents. Bishops Green is the main problem area and the biggest problem is antisocial behaviour in young people.

CSPO Mechen presented the meeting with maps of the footprint of the area he covers which is large and lists of the type of crimes he is presented with including antisocial behaviour, vandalism etc. He advised there are programmes in place and community teams are working hard to improve the situation. There have been lots of videos of anti-social behaviour and this all helps; 6 new antisocial contracts have been issued on 14.5.25.

A member of the public asked if there was a likelihood of more CSPOs as he is the only one in the area; he advised there are a few more but they are being allocated to different areas.

Cllr Izett thanked CSPO Mechen for his efforts and said the area is getting more police support due to him.

The idea of a skatepark was discussed but maintenance is expensive. CSPO Mechen said changes are happening and things improving but it is slow.

He was thanked for his time in attending the meeting and his report which was very informative.

CSPO Mechen left the meeting at 8pm.

4. Parish Financial Report

Finance Report 2025

Hello everyone! As usual I get to tell you about the numbers, so I'll try not to go on for too long!

As always I'll start with the precept, which for 2024/25 was set at £19,866.

For 2025/26 financial year, this has again had a small increase to £20,800. I would mention as I do every year that when there is an increase, it is seriously considered by the parish council and hopefully the impact on any household kept to a minimum.

The parish council has spent a lot of time over the past couple of years going over their finances and financial obligations. There is now a 3 year forecast in place which is invaluable for budgeting going forward.

The parish council has numerous costs it needs to meet every year such as; salaries, village maintenance, insurance, website maintenance and audits.

Over the past few years, various un-budgeted expenses, such as maintenance of the war memorial, the purchase of weevils for the pond to , monies for consultancy work amongst other things, have arisen so we need to ensure that such unforeseen expenses, that always crop up in some form, can be catered for within the budget.

A laptop has been purchased over the past few months as until then, the parish council did not have it's own! We have also updated the email platform and are in the process of creating a new website which should be up and tun shortly and is definitely going to be an improvement.

All expenditure and related information is detailed on the website, in the monthly minutes and I prepare a bank reconciliation every month. I also provide a quarterly actual v budget view of expenditure, so if you ever want sight of anything specific you are very welcome to look at the papers on the website or email me.

With regards to income, the parish council have had good news; as they have again received some monies from BDBC - Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL monies. You may recall there was a similar but much smaller payment of CIL monies last year.

This money is allocated to Parish councils when developments are done within the Parish. The moneys are paid by the developers via BDBC. In this instance, the parish council received the sum of £78480.30. Cllrs have only known about this money for a couple of weeks and have not had a meeting in that time, so there has been no opportunity to discuss how they might allocate these funds. A couple of early ideas have been the build of more parking spaces at Bishops Green Hall and the purchase of a second SID.

Although the use of this money is at the parish council's discretion, there are many rules around what it can and can't be spent on. We also have to provide a report to BDBC detailing what we have spent it on. Cllrs will discuss and agreed upon projects and what donations can be given and to whom.

Please bear in mind this money cannot be used in the funding of the usual parish council activities such as salaries and insurance etc; the precept will continue to be used for these purposes. If you have any ideas for projects please do contact myself or your Cllrs. All ideas welcome.

With the CIL monies and the budget planning, the council's finances look healthy.

At the end of the 2024/25 financial year parish council bank accounts stood at £24,926. This has obviously now increased and stands at a very healthy £102,000. The new financial year starts very positively with the council hopefully able to progress more from their list of projects, which can also now be extended.

I trust you have found this financial review informative.

I'll now hand over to our Borough Cllr, John Izett.

Sarah Jones

Clerk to Ecchinswell, Sydmonton and Bishops Green Parish Council

5. Borough Councillor's Report

Good evening,

We live in strange, turbulent and uncertain times including at Local govt level.

Alongside my day to day work helping residents especially on planning and housing issues, my Key themes for tonight are housing and planning, Waste collection changes, a New Hospital, and LGR/ Devolution. At Basingstoke I chair one of the 2 scrutiny committees and sit on Audit and Accounts.

DEFIBRILLATOR at BG

Glad to contribute funding from my cllr grant

A) Housing & planning

The boro has no up to date Local Plan. It should have been in place by now BUT the new Labour Govt upended the process by changing the NPPF in Dec as part of its policy of building 1.5m new homes over 5 years to tackle the housing crisis. This resulted in BDBC's housing target increasing 36% from 828 homes pa to 1127. The LP process had to re-start with a new spatial strategy and finding more sites to deliver the housing. The current programme is

Public Consult- Late 25

Publish Draft LP – Summer 26

Submit to SoS Winter 26

Public Examination- Spring 27

Adoption Late 27

In the absence of an up to date LP the boro is vulnerable FOR YEARS TO COME to spec dev of sites not allocated under a LP. To ward off devers the NPPF requires a 5 YHLS- the boro's is currently about 2.76 yrs. A New LP is likely to impose more housing on rural areas like Ecchinswell.

ROOKSFIELD- outline application for 18 houses submitted April. Aware of the number of objectors. Want to discuss with parish council and case officer.

Royal Oak PUB– revised planning application- 2 and single storey extensions and 1 new build.

Removal of tourist bloc.

I am hopeful this time it will receive the planning dept's support

B) ASB Problems in Bishops Green

I am aware of and have been liaising with the CSPO and the Police and affected residents about the ongoing problems of youth ASB which are causing some residents a lot of distress and inconvenience. This behaviour cannot be allowed to continue and I know that serious, direct action has been taken on 26th April and is ongoing
(26th April 7 police 4 cars and CSPO Drew Mechen. Op Ferna now initiated. Today- 5 addresses issue 6 ASB Contracts to 6 people)

C) Waste collection / recycling Changes

The administration has decided to increase recycling rates by introducing weekly food waste collections from Sept if all goes to plan. Free small indoor caddies with a roll of liners will be provided PLUS a large secureable caddy for outside to be collected by specialist food waste vehicles now being acquired. Grey bin collection will move to fortnightly alternating with green and glass collections, also fortnightly. The Council is due to decide next month to go or not to go ahead

D) A New hospital

Plans for a new hospital on the existing Basingstoke site or near J7 of the M3 have been pushed back from 2030 to 2037/39 at the earliest because of lack of funding. Recently it was announced that money to buy the land at J7 would be provided but the overall prognosis is not good and is long term and uncertain

E) LGR/ Devo

Big change is afoot in Local Govt. The Govt's plan is that 2026 there will be a directly elected mayor for Hampshire, with strategic powers and by 2028 new unitary councils across the county in place of the current 2 tier system of HCC and district councils like Basingstoke.

The Govt has decided that 2 tier local Govt is inefficient. In response to the Govt proposals late last year, HCC along with the existing city unitaries, Southampton & Portsmouth and IOW applied to be in the early wave. Govt has approved and set a timetable of Sept 25 for final submissions by the Hampshire councils. The 11 boroughs in Hampshire are now allowed to participate in the process.

Govt will decide how many unitary councils but is seeking consensus by Sept on this from the existing 15 councils on boundaries. Basingstoke as a council has voted on its preferred outcome. All political groups voted in favour of a 4 unitary reorganisation with a North Hants Unitary consisting of Basingstoke, and Hart, centred on Fleet, and Rushmoor, centred Aldershot & Farnborough. The other 3 unitaries preferred would be Central/ Southern Hampshire consisting of Winchester, Test Valley, East Hants and New Forest, Plus the 2 Solent unitaries of Southampton & Portsmouth taking in adjoining districts.

To be of sufficient scale to provide the full range of services including adult social care and children's education the Govt says new unitaries should have populations of around 500,000

but this is a guide not a hard target. North Hants would be around 400,000, with Basingstoke just under 50%.

The 15 councils are now examining the options measured against their and the govt's criteria including financial and democratic representation. Agreement between the councils may not be achievable. HCC and East Hants seem to favour a 3 unitary option, essentially the existing HCC boundary and the 2 Solent City Councils. But Angela Rayner will decide early in 2026 if all goes to plan.

My view is that in time single tier local govt should be more efficient both operationally and financially but the upheaval in terms of reorganisation of services and staff will be painful and expensive, with higher council taxes a certainty. The Govt is saying the costs of reorganisation have

to be met by the councils and their residents with no extra govt money. Given the system of Local Govt in this country is broke more money will have to come from somewhere.

Basingstoke Council is due to be abolished around 2028 and my objective as your cllr is really to ensure continuity of boro services, to assist the transition to the new local govt unitary council due to be operational from 2028 and to fight for sufficient numbers of cllrs so residents are properly democratically represented- one of my big worries about LGR. These will be huge changes to important local services and I am concerned about the haste with which this is being pushed through.

To conclude, Echinswell & Bishops Green continues to be fortunate to have an excellent group of parish cllrs with whom it is a pleasure to work alongside as I have done since 2011 in representing the interests of the good people of this beautiful village.
Cllr John Izett

6. County Councillor's Report

Unfortunately, County Councillors Thacker and Mellor were unable to attend the meeting.

8. Report on the Neighbourhood Plan review process

WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN?

It is our collective view of the way forward for the parish.

In 2020 proposals for 400+ houses in Bishops Green created widespread alarm in the community. The Parish Council initiated work on the plan in 2021 as a means of ensuring appropriate development in the parish.

Our plan was "made" 2 years ago in May 2023 via referendum after nearly 2 years work involving many people in the community.

B&D BC "adopted" and should now use our plan as the basis for their decisions on development in the parish.

I was asked to talk today as one of the team that worked on the plan. (point out Marian/Paul/Charles)

WHAT DID OUR PLAN SAY? DOES ANYONE KNOW OR REMEMBER??

What we value:

- Our rural setting,
- Access to green spaces,
- Our heritage assets.

What we want to do:

- Protect our rural environment & heritage assets,
- Improve sustainability,
- Improve biodiversity.

Any more homes should be:

- In limited numbers based on modest local growth,
- Affordable to buy,
- In keeping with rural setting,
- Providing more options for young families, the elderly & less mobile.

OUR PLAN HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE

Catesby withdrew their application for 300+ houses and well-advanced work by Sedas on a plan for another 50+ houses seems to be on hold.

The PC uses the plan to respond to planning applications made to B&D BC

WHY AM I TALKING TO YOU NOW?

Originally the plan had a 2 year life before it had to be “reviewed/updated” to remain effective (by NOW)

Rules changed – giving a 5 year life – in theory BUT

An NP is meant to work alongside a valid Local Plan for the Borough

Current B&D Local Plan is nearly 10 yrs old and no longer effective because housing targets not being met

An Update for the Local Plan has been underway since 2020 but suffered big setback last year after targets reset by Central Gov

Update will not complete before end 2027 – so there is no valid Local Plan

AND

Proposed Hampshire reorganisation (a Mayor) and proposed creation of a Unitary Authority replacing and expanding B&D BC may impact/delay an updated Local Plan.

Huge pressure from Central Government for more housing...new targets

Latest official Land Availability Assessment identifies potential for around 500 houses in the parish. These are beyond those proposed in the NP or already under construction – most of these are the Catesby/Sedas proposals currently on hold.
Promoters and developers are ready to exploit this situation.

HENCE

Risk that with no effective Local Plan and an aging NP, major development proposals may be tabled and perhaps approved even if contrary to our plan and community wishes.

SO

PC believes we should start work on an update of our NP to maximise its power
Update needs to align with latest National and Borough policies/targets and adjust detail in line with planning decisions made since late 2022. Would expect core principles/elements to be maintained.

Cannot wait for update of Local Plan to complete – but when it does, may need a further update....

WHAT NEXT?

Volunteers are required to develop the update. This is a 12-15 months task as there is a strict multi-stage process and format.

Need a small core team including one or two PC members to do the detailed work

An extended team is required to ensure wide thinking and lead the essential community engagement.

So...on behalf of the PC am asking people to step forward!

Happy to take any immediate questions now ... and discuss with me/others over refreshments

9. Report on the Environmental and Sustainability Survey

Our environmental survey will be extended for another month to allow more people time to respond, however a few early indicators are:

Responses so far indicate

- 33% have adopted EVs or hybrid vehicles with a further 47% planning an EV or hybrid as their next vehicle.
- Only 6% have installed solar panels so far but nearly half would consider them.
- Domestic heating appears to be the greatest challenge, with 86% of us still reliant on fossil

fuels (gas or oil) for our heating, and few plans to switch to GSHPs or ASHPs.

We will publish the final statistics in the July newsletter.

Another idea for using our windfall. I was talking to Zac and a couple of his friends when I got home last night, and they think something everyone would use, is a cycle path or safe cycle route to get them to the A339. From there, they can cross into the business park which has a cycle path, and then across the common and down the side of Stroud Green into Newbury town centre.

They say if they cycle on the pavement past mine and up the hill, adults give them grief. So either make it legal for cyclists to use the pavement, or give them a safe way up the hill.

10. Any Other Business

There being no further business, the residents were invited to join the parish council for refreshments at 00.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....