

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ECCHINSWELL, SYDMONTON AND BISHOPS GREEN PARISH

**HELD at Ecchinswell Village Hall
WEDNESDAY 13th May 2025
AT 7.30 PM**

Present: Councillors Stamp (Chair), Debenham, Shadegg and Letch
S Jones (Parish Clerk) and 27 residents.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Sadler and Monteith, Borough Cllr Izett and County Cllr Thacker.

2. Minutes of Assembly held on 14th May 2025

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

3. Chair's Report

Good evening everyone, and welcome to the Annual General Assembly of the Ecchinswell, Sydmonton & Bishops Green Parish Council.

It's lovely to see so many familiar faces here tonight — and reassuring to know that at least some of you came voluntarily and weren't simply trapped by roadworks. As always, it's been another busy year for the Parish Council. In local government terms, "busy" generally means lots of emails, several developments, and at least one heated discussion about pot-holes.

First, some changes to the Parish Council itself.

We said goodbye this year to both Caroline and James, and I'd like to thank them sincerely for their service and contribution to the parish. Parish councils rely heavily on people willing to give up their time for the community, and we are very grateful for everything they did.

At the same time, I'm delighted to welcome Jonathan to the council. Jonathan has thrown himself enthusiastically into parish life — particularly roadworks. In fact, I'm not entirely sure whether he's monitoring the roadworks anymore, or the roadworks are monitoring him. Either way, if there's a cone out of place anywhere within a five-mile radius, Jonathan probably already knows about it.

Now, while we're talking about councillors, I do need to mention that we still have a long-term vacancy on the Parish Council. We genuinely need volunteers to step forward and get involved. Because — and this is not an exaggeration — if we cannot maintain a functioning council, there is the possibility that we could eventually be absorbed into Burghclere or Kingsclere.

And while they are both perfectly lovely neighbours... I think we can all agree we'd quite like to continue existing independently for a little while longer.

So if you've ever sat at home saying: "Honestly, I could do a better job than the Parish Council..."

This is your moment.

Please come and join us.

One person who absolutely has done a tougher job than the rest of us for many years is our Clerk, Sarah. After nine years of dedicated service, Sarah is finally leaving the Parish Council, and I'd like to thank her sincerely on behalf of everyone here tonight. Sarah has been the calm, organised and sensible presence behind the scenes — which is particularly impressive considering she has had to deal with parish councillors for nine years. Her knowledge, patience, and hard work have been invaluable, and we are enormously grateful for everything she has done for the parish community. We have recently completed a recruitment process for a new clerk, and I'm pleased to say that we have interviewed and offered the role to Amy White. Amy already has considerable experience as a Parish Clerk and currently works with three other Parish Councils, so we are very much looking forward to working with her.

One consequence of this is that future Parish Council meetings will no longer take place on Wednesdays. The new meeting day is still to be confirmed — partly because coordinating multiple parish councils appears to involve more logistics than the NATO summit.

We also now have a beautiful new Parish Council website. Unfortunately, due to some ongoing issues involving the previous supplier and our domain name, actually launching the website has proved slightly more complicated than expected. At this point I think it's fair to say the website exists in a sort of administrative limbo — like Schrödinger's homepage. Thankfully HALC are helping us untangle matters, and we hope to have it fully launched soon.

Elsewhere in the parish, the annual pond clearance was once again a success. The new weevils have apparently performed miracles, and the azolla is now under control.

I never imagined, when becoming Chair, that one day I would be publicly praising insects at an AGM — but here we are.

The Parish Council has also purchased two new speed indicator devices, and a working party will soon be installing them around the parish. The intention is to move them around regularly, partly for effectiveness, and partly because we enjoy keeping speeding drivers psychologically unsettled.

Paul will shortly speak about the review of the Neighbourhood Plan, but in the meantime I cannot stress enough how important community volunteers are in helping to protect and shape the future of our parish.

Whether it's planning matters, maintenance, litter picking, local projects, or simply helping keep the parish vibrant and connected — community involvement matters enormously.

So I'd like to thank all the volunteers who quietly help throughout the year. So much of what makes this parish special depends on people giving up their own time to help others, and it is genuinely appreciated.

We also have a number of other exciting projects underway which Sarah will speak about shortly, including support for the school. And as always, we are very interested in hearing ideas from residents about projects or initiatives that could benefit the wider community.

Finally, as we look ahead to the rest of 2026, we will continue our work on sustainability, planning, and community projects — and, as always, we welcome your thoughts, support, and involvement.

Because ultimately, the strength of this parish is not the council itself — it's the people who care enough to be part of it.

Finally, on a personal note, later this year I will be stepping down as Chair after seven years on the PC. I have genuinely enjoyed my time as Chair — although I suspect my family may simply be relieved that dinner conversations will no longer revolve entirely around potholes, planning applications, and drainage. I'm very pleased to say that Kathy has... sort of... volunteered to take over. I believe the official parish governance term is "gently cornered into agreement." In all seriousness, I know the role will be in very capable hands, and I'm delighted to be passing things on to someone so committed to the parish.

Of course, this does also mean there will now be yet another vacancy on the council — so if anyone has ever dreamed of receiving emails about hedge encroachment at 11pm, helping shape the future of the parish, and making a real difference to the community, please do come and speak to us afterwards.

Thank you all for coming this evening.

4. Parish Financial Report

Hello everyone!

As always I'll start with the precept:

For the 2025/26 financial year, this was set at £20,800. For 2026-27 Councillors agreed the precept should remain the same at £20806. Over the past few years we have seen regular increases in the precept as parish council costs have increased. These are all seriously considered and any increases kept to a minimum — this year, due to forward planning and forecasting, we were able to set the precept with no increase, so no impact on local households. The parish council spends a lot of time going over their finances and financial obligations and seriously consider any spend and budget increases.

There are numerous costs the parish council need to meet every year such as; salaries, village maintenance, insurance, website maintenance and audits.

All expenditure and related information is detailed on the website, in the monthly minutes and I prepare a bank reconciliation every month. You are very welcome to look at the papers on the website or email me if you have any questions.

With regards to income, the parish council have had good news over the past couple of years; as they have received monies from BDBC - Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL monies. The amounts received in 25-26 FY were an initial payment of £78,480 in May last year. The parish council had only just received this when the Annual Assembly took place last year, so no decisions had been made relating to spend. On 27th October a further payment of £129,540.97 was received – quite the surprise for all the councillors. It's a lot of money!

This money is allocated to Parish councils when developments are carried out within the Parish. The moneys are paid by the developers via BDBC.

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. The parish council also have to provide a report to BDBC detailing what we have spent it on.

Cllrs have discussed numerous projects over the past year and have already paid £500 for a new kissing gate, £3,800 to the school for improvements to their playground, and £11000 for x2 new Speed Indicator devices. The working party is being set up to instal these.

Some of the funds will also be used , and a payment has already been made, for professional help from consultants for the Neighbourhood Plan review . This is a vital task and you will hear more about it later in the meeting.

The parish council have also agreed spend on new parking spaces at Bishops Green Village Hall, and solar panels at Echinswell Village Hall. And finally, a warm box needs to be purchased for the defibrillator. There are numerous other ideas but no decisions as yet.

Cllrs will continue to discuss and agree upon projects and what donations can be given and to whom. As always, Cllrs welcome your thoughts and project ideas. Please bear in mind though, the council do not have 'free reign' and there are rules regarding spend.

This money also cannot be used in the day to day running and costs of the usual parish council activities such as salaries and insurance etc; the precept needs to be used for these purposes.

With the CIL monies and the budget planning, the council's finances look healthy, and the bank balanced stands at £223048.85 at 31.03.26.

That's it from me! Borough Cllr Izett is unable to be with us this evening but he has sent in a report which will be read out by Cllr Letch.

5. Borough Councillor's Report

Read out by Cllr Letch.

Good evening everyone,

Firstly, I apologise for not being present this evening. A mistake on dates on my part, but by this written report I hope to address the key matters that have arisen in my role as borough cllr serving Ecchinswell, Sydmonton and Bishops Green over the past year.

Planning issues have loomed large again over the past 12 months such is the pressure to build more housing.

On planning generally, the new draft Local Plan is at an advanced stage. This parish's proposed allocation to 2042 is 5 new houses. This should be seen in the context of an increase of 6000 houses across the borough required by the govt which has resulted in huge new allocations in other parts of the borough including Highclere, with a new site proposed for 500 homes.

The good work of the parish council on updating our Neighbourhood Plan is important to maintain our defences as far as possible.

However, while the new Basingstoke Local Plan is still in draft form and is not expected to be adopted until late 2027, developers continue to seek new opportunities to develop sites. The absence of a 5 year housing land supply in the borough is typically one of their chief arguments in favour of development.

Locally an application has been made for 50 homes by Catesby Estates in Bishops Green. This is a much reduced number of houses compared to the previous application Catesby withdrew but poses the threat of a huge increase for our community.

The latest application is working its way through the consultation process. There are many grounds for refusal not least it conflicts with the Neighbourhood Plan which has statutory authority. I will continue to work with the parish council in representing the concerns of local residents.

Another development has been approved in outline at Rooksfield. This site was nominated in our Neighbourhood Plan to meet the parish's housing allocation under the current Basingstoke Local Plan. Local people and the parish council have raised a number of concerns about the plans for the site including the number of units. It is proposed to discuss these concerns with the developer before a detailed application is submitted to BDBC. I have offered to participate in this dialogue.

Finally, on planning and housing, the Bewley Homes development in Bishops Green, Princess Gate clearly has some issues. The developer is seeking to vary the permission to allow the affordable units to change to market homes with a 25 % price discount. It seems that the existing planning requirement for these 13 affordable units to be transferred to a housing association cannot be delivered, according to Bewley. I am seeking clarification from Bewley

and BDBC planners.

Regrettably there have been some instances of antisocial behaviour over the year. Some good work has been done by Drew Mechen, the local officer of the Basingstoke Council Community Safety Patrol team working with the police and parish council. From contacts I receive from local people affected I know upsetting and disruptive these incidents can be. I will continue to work with our CSPO team and if anyone wishes to contact me on these or similar problems, please do so.

The major changes to how Local Govt in the area is organised are proceeding it appears. The Govt recently announced its support for a North Hampshire Unitary council covering Basingstoke, Hart and Rushmoor. This is planned to operate from May 2028 replacing BDBC and Hampshire CC at that time.

In time a single council should be more efficient than the current 2 tier structure but no doubt there will be some disruption while these huge organisational changes bed down. In the meantime the current 2 tier system will continue. The important role of parish councils will continue and probably increase but this is currently all very unclear.

Last week local elections took place. In Evingar, Cllr Carr was re-elected. Basingstoke has a system of one third of cllrs being up for election each year and it was Sam's turn this year. County elections were, in contrast, all outs.

The elections have not altered the balance of power in Basingstoke which is expected to continue in joint Independent and Lib Dem control. In Hampshire, the Conservatives lost their majority and there is now no one party in overall control. Conservatives are on 27, Libs 26, Reform 20, Green 1, Labour 1 with 3 Independents.

That concludes my report. Again it has been a pleasure to work alongside your excellent parish council in looking after our beautiful part of Hampshire.
Cllr John Izett

6. County Councillor's Report

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

7. Report from the CSPO

Unfortunately, CSPO Mechen was unable to attend the meeting so there was no report.

9. Report from Cllr Sadler re the Environmental Survey

This item would have been dealt with out of order but unfortunately Cllr Sadler was unable to

attend the meeting.

8. Report on the Neighbourhood Plan review process

Cllr Debenham reported on the NP review out of order.

10. Any Other Business

Residents raised questions relating to the pond and the cutting down of wild flowers around the pond. This should not happen and the maintenance team have a detailed plan they should follow. The clerk will follow up to ensure this is being adhered to.

The issue with sewerage tankers going through the village and draining what appears to be huge amount off many times a day was raised. This questions has been raised with Thames Water and a response is being sought. Cllr Monteith is the contact for this.

There being no further business, after questions the residents were invited to join the parish council for refreshments at 8.15 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....