

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

ECCHINSWELL, SYDMONTON AND BISHOPS GREEN PARISH

HELD at Ecchinswell Village Hall
WEDNESDAY 8th May 2024
AT 7.30 PM

Present: Councillors Stamp (Chair), Sadler (Vice Chair), Dain, Debenham, Parkes and Hardy-Giles
County Cllr Mellor
S Jones (Parish Clerk) and 17 residents.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies as all Cllrs were present.

2. Minutes of Assembly held on 10th May 2023

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

3. Chair's Report

ES&BG PC Chair's Report 8th May 2024

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Welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly. It is good to see so many of you here tonight. Thank you for making time to be here.

We have a full agenda for this meeting, and we hope you will find it interesting and informative. Each of our village halls has had a busy year and both have special reports for you tonight, along with the usual items.

First, I would like to inform you that I have stepped down from my role as Chair and I am pleased to say that Mark Stamp was elected as the new Chair of the Parish Council at our meeting earlier this evening. He will introduce himself and his team after my report.

I have been a member of the Parish Council since 2014 and I am looking forward to continuing on the council as part Mark's team. I took over as Chair in 2020 and now seems a good time for someone new to continue moving the parish forward.

This evening my job is to give you a roundup of the last year and a hint of what is to come from the new team.

My report last year focussed on the need for volunteers in our community and I am pleased to say that Kathy Sadler took up my challenge and has been an active member of our council since July last year. We coopted another new councillor earlier this evening so we now have 6 out of the 7 places on the council filled - now would be a great time to join the team and make your voice heard.

The Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council soon after our last assembly and this year we have made good use of it. Based on our plan we have tightened up our procedures for considering individual planning applications. We now have a checklist of our policies against which we are able to assess each application. This has led to a

more holistic and objective approach to applications and has increased councillor confidence in making recommendations.

The Neighbourhood Plan was instigated to protect the parish from speculative, inappropriate development and, so far, it is doing its job. We were pleased to see that Catesby Estates withdrew their application in Bishops Green soon after our plan was adopted. They, or another developer, may reapply in the future so it is imperative that we keep the plan up to date. This will require a review of the plan once Basingstoke's Local Plan Update is completed next year.

On the subject of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Update, we were pleased to host Councillors Harvey and Konieczko here in the autumn to explain the draft plan to us. Their presentation and the questions raised by residents helped the Parish Council respond to the Section 18 Consultation in February.

There have been two major planning applications this year – The Royal Oak alterations and the Strattons Farm Solar Farm. Both of these are still waiting for a decision by Basingstoke and Deane. The Royal Oak application was discussed at length at a well-attended extra-ordinary meeting in January.

The Strattons Farm application was only submitted in April, and we will be having another extra-ordinary meeting on the 15th of May here at Ecchinswell village hall for residents to have their say. You will get more information about this by email and on the parish website.

Over the last year we have continued to improve our financial processes and now have a robust 3 year forecast which allows us to plan for future needs. We have increased our precept this year, but we are able to assure you that all your money is needed to maintain and develop our parish assets. Our clerk will say more about how we use your money in her financial report. We are now using the funds set aside for the purpose to arrange tree inspections and remedial work. So far, the focus has been on the area around the Ecchinswell village hall, but the pond area and the allotments will be inspected soon.

The allotments have taken on a new lease of life since Cllr Debenham has taken them under his wing. All the allotments are taken, and Paul has improved the community aspect of working on an allotment by setting up a Whatsapp group and encouraging everyone to be involved in caring for the site through working party sessions. Thank you.

My report so far has been very positive but I do have a few less positive things to report. As many of you will have noticed, azolla is back in the pond. It began to appear last autumn and meant we had to cancel the annual pond clearance day. The appearance came just as any weevils there might have been, were getting less active. The cold spring has meant that the azolla has grown but any weevils have not yet become fully active. There has been some evidence of weevils in the pond, but we may have to top them up, in order to get the azolla back down to manageable levels. Rest assured that the PC is on the case!

Some of you will have noticed that the Speed Indicator Device has not been seen about for quite a while. I am sad to say that early on in its use there were a number of incidences of minor vandalism and the device may now not be repairable. We are looking at buying a replacement device, but we would not buy the same type. We now know much more about the type of device which would work well in our setting.

On the topic of speeding, we are still battling to get the Bishops Green speed limit reduced to 30mph. Hampshire County Council refused our request to make the change; our county

councillor for that part of the parish (Derek Mellor) asked for a review which came to the same decision – a refusal. We are now working with our MP (Kit Malthouse) to see if anything more can be done.

Over the last few months, councillors have reviewed our future areas of focus. Neighbourhood Planning, which encompasses both planning and traffic issues will stay as a focus. We will be adding another focus around the environment and sustainability. We hope you will give these areas your support and consider joining one of the wider groups related to them. Look out for messages about how you can get involved soon.

I would now like to hand over to Mark to introduce the councillors and say a few words.

Thank you.

Marian Dain
Retiring Chair ES&BG Parish Council
8 May 2024

Cllr Mark Stamp's Report:

Hello everyone, for those that don't know me, my name is Mark Stamp and I live in Brocks Green. I have been on the PC since 2019...

I would like to thank Marian for her time as Chair.

I would like to introduce the PC team this year:

- Kathy Sadler vice chair
- Sarah Jones
- Marian Dain
- Paul Debenham
- Caroline Parkes
- And finally a big welcome to James Hardy-Giles who was co-opted onto the council this evening at our AGM.

We are still looking for 1 more Parish Councillor, so if you are interested please reach out tonight to one of us or contact the Clerk.

So just to give you some idea of the things that I and the team would like to focus on this year coming:

- New website;
- New phone handling system for the clerk;
- Traffic issues throughout the parish, including our continued issues with speeding and speed limits;
- An Environmental working party;
- An obviously continued improvements to our overall planning process;

I will now hand over to Sarah to give the financial report.

4. Parish Financial Report

Finance Report 2024

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

Starting with the precept, which for 2023/24 was set at £18900.

For 2024/25 financial year, this has again had a small increase to £19866. I would reiterate as I do every year when there is an increase, all increases are seriously considered by the PC 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. As Marian mentioned, there is a 3-year plan in place which will be invaluable for budgeting going forward. Important items and necessary sections such as tree survey and maintenance costs have added to the budget. This is vital work and you may have noticed the first tranche of tree work has been carried out around the playing fields behind EVH. Working with the tree surgeon, the parish council have a plan for the tree maintenance and have included the costs within the budget. It is clearly vital that the parish council have enough money to be able to carry out work which needs to take place on a regular basis, such as village maintenance but also ensure the parish land is safe and secure and the funding is there so accidents, which can be expensive, can be avoided as much as possible.

The parish council has numerous costs it needs to meet every year which includes salaries, village maintenance, insurance, website maintenance and audits. Over the past few years, various expenses that were not in the budget such as maintenance of the war memorial, monies for consultancy work for advice in relation to large development proposals, have been included. A new laptop and mobile phone has been budgeted for this year. At the moment I use my own and have since 2017 when I joined the council. My laptop is on its last legs but more importantly the parish council need to own one that can be handed on to the next clerk with all the relevant information on it. This will all be taking place and being purchased over the next couple of months.

All expenses and numbers are detailed on the website, in the monthly minutes and I prepare a bank reconciliation every month, as well as an actual/against budget, 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 had some good news this last financial year as they received some monies from BDBC which amounted to £13k. These are CIL – or Community Infrastructure Levy monies. Although the spending of this money is at the parish council's discretion, it is from a fairly prescriptive set of rules. Councillors have 2 proposed projects, firstly using some £3k to upgrade the website, which is desperately needed. The 2nd proposal is for a 2nd SID. As Marian mentioned, the original SID has been damaged and is not very well at the moment but the parish council are hoping it can be fixed. Speeding is such a problem throughout the parish, councillors think it would be beneficial to all residents to spend some CIL

money on this proposal which would benefit lots of residents. Once the final decision is made on these two important projects, Councillors can look into other projects to benefit the parish.

With the CIL monies and the increased budget, the council's finances look healthy. As I have said before, the parish council do not have any means to earn money, and are reliant on BDBC and grants. The only other income comes from the allotment rents, which is £40 each allotment per annum.

At the end of the 2023/24 financial year parish council bank accounts stand at £27265.82. The new financial starts with a list of projects and also trying to ensure that all extra and unusual costs which may arise can be accommodated.

I trust you have found this financial review informative.

Unfortunately Our Borough Cllr John Izett is unable to be present so I'll now hand over to Cllr Parkes to read the report he has sent in.

Sarah Jones

Clerk to Ecchinswell, Sydmonton and Bishops Green Parish Council

5. Borough Councillor's Report

Dear Councillors and parish residents, I am sorry not to be present tonight, but I am in Scotland attending a friend's special birthday. I think this is the first time as your borough Cllr that I've missed an Annual Meeting.

The first matter to highlight is the recent borough elections held on 2nd May. In the case of Evingar Ward in which this parish sits, Conservative candidate Johanna Perry was elected to represent you. She joins Cllr Sam Carr and myself as your united team of borough Cllrs. She won with over 50 per cent of the vote and now succeeds Cllr Graham Falconer who retired and stood down at this election. She lives in Egbury, near St Mary Bourne and will focus on that area of Evingar in particular. Although all 3 cllrs are of course elected to represent Evingar as a whole, I will continue to lead on Ecchinswell, Sydmonton and Bishops Green.

The overall position on Basingstoke Council is as follows-

Conservatives 16

Labour 11

Liberal Democrats 11

Basingstoke Independents 10

Independents 3

Greens 2

Women's Equality Party 1

The effect of this is that the current coalition of Lib Dems and all of the Independents will

continue to form the administration, supported when required on key votes, by the Labour group.

Onto issues that have affected this parish directly over the past year; 42 homes were approved last year at Woodside View, Bishops Green, in direct conflict with your new approved Neighbourhood Plan. This decision by the borough's Development Control Committee was very disappointing and difficult to comprehend in planning terms in view of the Neighbourhood Plan having got to an advanced stage.

More positively, the massive threat to the parish posed by the application for 350 homes at Bishops Green Farm has receded with the withdrawal by the developer, Catesby. I worked closely with your parish council and many residents to make representations to the borough's planning team to point out the many flaws and problems posed by this highly inappropriate application.

More broadly on planning and preventing developers from bringing forward speculative housing developments, it is important that a new up-to-date borough Local Plan is brought forward as soon as possible. As Conservatives we have concerns about the approach being taken by the administration, particularly on high annual housing numbers around 850 new homes per year, because we believe there are good planning grounds to contend for lower numbers. However the key priority is to obtain the protection as soon as possible of a completed Local Plan for our rural areas and therefore we will of course adopt a constructive approach as an opposition party.

I have continued to support the priorities of your excellent parish council. In particular highways issues such as vehicles speeding through the parish, pot holes and permitted speed limits. I understand local concerns and will continue to work with your county cllrs, Derek Mellor and Tom Thacker, as highways are a Hampshire County Council responsibility. Our MP Kit Malthouse is, I know, doing what he can to bring pressure to bear on the highways department.

Unfortunately, there have been some recent incidents of anti-social behaviour locally in Bishops Green. With the parish council I have done my best to help residents impacted by this problem by encouraging interventions by Vivid Housing Association, the local police officer, PC Simon Denton and the borough's own Community Safety Patrol Officer, Drew Mechen. I hope that these interventions will prove successful.

I have been in contact with the owner of the Royal Oak about his planning application to extend and improve the facilities offered at the pub. At a time when rural pubs are closing down it is important our local pub is given support. I have made my position clear to senior planning officers and hope that good sense will prevail while respecting the village's conservation area.

I apologise I'm not around to answer any questions or points from residents but if there are any I would be grateful if the Clerk would take a note and allow me to respond when I return from

Scotland on Friday.

Cllr John Izett

6. County Councillor's Report

County Councillor Mellor stepped in as Cllr Thacker was unable to attend.

Cllr Mellor thanked Cllr Dain for her time and hard work as Chair.

Due to stepping in at short notice Cllr Mellor gave a brief report on the main issues residents may find of interest, as follows:

- HCC's financial position - they are forecasting a deficit of £130m at the end of the 2026 financial year, so action needs to be taken. Hampshire still has one of the lowest council taxes in the UK.
- A financial consultation has been sent to the public but there was a low level of response.
- Cllr Mellor reported that children's services and adult social care are the most expensive items and are currently running well. Last year the county was classed as 'outstanding' for children's services performance.
- 17 new care homes and 12 new schools are planned to be built.
- One main problem in the rural areas is potholes and the state of the roads. Focus has been on the A and B roads, and smaller roads have been largely ignored.
- A further expense is transport of children to schools; the number of children eligible for this has increased over recent years and costs HCC some £70m per annum, which is not sustainable and a solution needs to be sought.

Cllr Mellor had nothing further to report but said he would take any questions after the meeting.

7. Report from the new CPSO

Unfortunately, the new CPSO was unable to attend the meeting, but it is hoped we will meet him soon at an ordinary meeting.

8. Report from Ecchinswell Village Hall Committee

Allan Unnuk, the current treasurer of the EVH Committee reported the following:

- The village hall was set up as a charity and was set up to try and improve quality of life for residents. The committee are responsible for keeping the hall well maintained so people want to come.
- The events held at the hall need to be good and improve quality of life for residents.
- The hall costs approximately £14k to run for a year. Events run should try to raise money for the village hall.
- The facilities are excellent at the hall with the wooden floor, sprung floor and new lights.
- There are various new assets and the changing room roof was changed last year; a grant from BDBC covered some of this expense.

- The hall is being used regularly; there are several weekly bookings and a number of annual events such as the Race Night, Barn Dance and craft evenings. There is also an annual Pantomime.
- EVH stands on parish council land, and pay a peppercorn rent of £0.05p annually; this was paid in cash to the clerk at this meeting.
- At present there is some £20k in the bank.
- Challenges ahead are that the boiler will soon need to be replaced, and it is hoped solar panels will be installed. Another big challenge is the maintenance of the fields as regular users are needed.
- It would be beneficial for some younger people to join the committee.

Allan was thanked for providing this report.

9. Report from Bishops Green Community Association

Ronnie Slatter, the BGCA Chair, started his report by advising the same as the EVH report, that the hall is there to support local residents and the committee run the hall.

- Cllrs Dain and Sadler are on the committee.
- Ronnie reported that it has been an exciting year. One year ago, when he joined, the hall was in some difficulties and in danger of having to be handed back to BDBC. A new centre co-ordinator has been appointed who is helping organise bookings and plan events.
- A new preschool will start using the hall in September which is good news.
- Work is currently taking place to set up a new youth group, a youth worker needs to be hired. BGCA are being supported by Berkshire Youth in this endeavour.
- A grant from BDBC will allow funding to change one meeting room into a multi-purpose health room.
- New events taking place include Bingo which had a large take up last month.
- The baby weight station is being set up and it is hoped a Table Top Sale can start.
- Lots of plans for events including an over 50s brunch, Clubbercise and Sensory play to name a few are in place.
- As usual, volunteers are needed!

Ronnie was thanked for his report.

10. Any Other Business

There being no further business, the residents were invited to join the parish council for refreshments at 8.23pm.

Chair.....

Date.....