



ECCLESHALL PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING 2024

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Chairmans Report – Eccleshall Parish Council, March 2024

This is my first year as Chairman of Eccleshall Parish Council. Generally, I have enjoyed my greater involvement in parish matters and would like to think that I have played a small part in helping to improve life for residents in and around Eccleshall.

I wish to welcome our two new Councillors: Mitchell Gosling and Daniel Feneysel. I hope that they will find their time on the Parish Council rewarding and of value.

Due to the current climate where people may be struggling to pay their bills and buy food etc, the Parish Council made the decision for the coming year, 2024/25, not to increase the precept, so residents will pay no more in Council Tax for the Parish Council than they did during the 2023/24 year.

Eccleshall Parish Council has been very busy ensuring that pavements have been cleared of overgrowth from verges, as well as keeping other areas tidy with the implementation of the successful new 'lengthsman' scheme. Anyone who has seen the 'before' and 'after' photographs will note the huge difference to the width of pavements now achieved, particularly on the Newport Road. The pavements within Eccleshall have also been kept clear by our Keep Eccleshall Tidy Team. I wish to thank all members of the KET Team for their constant vigilance and all they do to ensure that Eccleshall stays tidy and welcoming to both residents and visitors.

The Circular Walks book (available in the library, published in July 2023, has been immensely successful. The book details ten different walks with descriptions, photographs, places to park and other useful information about each walk. The walks use footpaths within the parish boundary to highlight our beautiful countryside. We are aware that people from all over the county have been using the book and walking our footpaths. The Parish Council has twenty one Footpath Marshals who regularly walk paths and report back any issues. The Footpath Maintenance Operative then remedies the issues. The result is that as many as possible of the Parish Council footpaths are kept well maintained, within the allocated budget, and accessible for everyone to enjoy.

The Circular Walks book is a companion to the Bench to Bench book designed for people in wheelchairs or with pushchairs and for those who only wish to take a short walk and need to rest from time to time.

In conjunction with the Parish Council, the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust are working on a newt pool project at Elford Heath. This initiative is pending the availability of their funding.

Councillor Debbie Hill is heading a Young People's project that will be concentrating on ASDAN projects. It is hoped that this important area of work will commence before the end of May.

I am sure many people will have taken part in the parking survey that took place in October 2023. This was to assess the times during the week when parking was most difficult on the High Street. These results are still being assessed before solutions are sought.

In January, this year, the Parish Council decided not to go ahead with the Eagle project. This decision was not easy as this matter had been pending for some seven years. It was considered that there really was no absolutely suitable place for this structure to be sited and also costs have increased considerably in the time since it was first initiated.

We are extremely pleased and fortunate to be in the process of obtaining a long lease for the Beech Road play area. It has been a long held desire by the Parish Council to update this play area, and we will be applying for grants. A working group has been set up to consider the options that might be considered to enhance the area and there will be a public consultation to assess the most suitable suggestions.

I consider that Eccleshall Parish Council works extremely hard and effectively for the community, often carrying out and organising work around the parish that is not noticed by residents. Perhaps this is how it should be. I would like to thank all our Parish Councillors for all their time, hard work and dedication to our residents. I know we are all proud to serve our community to the best of our abilities.

Ros Taylor
Chairman of Eccleshall Parish Council

March 2024

Enhancements and Preservation Committee – Annual Report 2023/2024

Assets

This includes benches, picnic benches, bus shelters, the village sign, the clock, Croxton play area, Elford Common, Copmere Picnic Site, the Wash Pits, some kissing gates:

All these items have to be checked annually by a Councillor and the condition of them reported back to the Clerk with any remedial action that is required. Repairs and refurbishment have been carried out to wooden seats where appropriate.

The bus shelter at Croxton has been scheduled for refurbishment and replacement of sections of timber . This will take place Spring/Summer 2024 dependent upon weather conditions.

The steel bench at the junction of Stone Rd and Stafford St is showing signs of paint deterioration, and costs have been agreed to refurbish it in Spring 2024.

The 'round' steel seat on Stone Rd installed by the Rotary Club has been adopted by the Parish Council, and hopefully be refurbished at the same time as the above. However, there is a tree in the centre will have to be removed, but due the close proximity to power lines, this work will have to be carried out in conjunction with National Grid.

Eyeswell

The Ecclian Society have replaced the wooden seat with a substantial steel one, accompanied by a commemorative plaque to celebrate the Coronation. The Parish Council has also replaced the information board.

Croxton Play Area

It was agreed as part of best practice to increase the number of official checks that are done on this equipment. These checks have been carried out, recommendations made and remedial repair work completed, including surface levelling around the gate.

Contracts and outsourced work

The Lengthsman scheme has been working well, and various tasks completed, including kerb clearance, verge clearance on Stafford Rd, and general tidying of excess vegetation around the Parish as required.

Additional pavement verge clearance, a long-standing issue, was carried out by another contractor on Newport Rd between Cross Butts and Wincote Lane.

Elford Common

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust had approached us with a scheme to introduce 2 small ponds which should increase the wildlife and biodiversity, particularly to encourage Great Crested Newts. Meetings have taken place, surveys ongoing, and work can be undertaken when the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust receive the necessary funding from development activities in other areas. The carpark surface was reported to be deteriorating badly, and resurfacing was carried out in August 2023.

A drainpipe under the road into the pond was found to be obstructed and has been cleared and a new grid installed.

Telephone Boxes

A defibrillator has been installed at Fair Oak, and training is underway for local residents. The telephone box at Croxton has been refurbished and will be put into use as a 'book swap'. The Washpits box was used over the Christmas period to display a Christmas Tree, and the Parish Council is welcoming ideas for a permanent function for it.

Beech Road Play area

Following a site meeting with the Borough Council representative, it was reported that the process of leasing the site to the Parish Council was ongoing. There is access to funding in order to replace equipment and redevelop the site. However, to obtain funding, this requires a proposal from the Parish Council with specific plans on how the space will be used. It has been suggested that this plan be formed by a working group of councillors, local residents and key stakeholders and specialist advisors. This process is currently ongoing.

Report compiled by Councillor Stuart Perren, Committee Chairman.

Events Committee Annual Report 2023-24

The previous year the Events Committee were very busy with a number of national events which Eccleshall celebrated and the committee were very pleased by the success of these events.

The committee is currently considering what activities it may look to plan over the next twelve months. Consideration is also being given to future participation in events such as the Eccleshall Show, attending as an exhibitor in order to raise the profile of the parish council and its work.

It may be that the committee considers the activities of other organisations in the parish who already have regular events which the committee could support in one way or another.

The Annual Community Fayre is due to be held on Monday June 17th 2024 from 6.30-8pm. Invitations will be extended to local groups and societies in due course, to come and showcase all that is on offer in Eccleshall.

Councillor Peter Jones, Committee Chairman.

Footpaths Committee Annual Report 2023-24

The Footpaths Committee has, as always, been working hard in the past year and I am most grateful to the members of the Committee for their continued commitment.

During the year our Footpath Marshals have been as vigilant as usual and reported issues on our paths, especially those paths that form part of any of the Circular Walks. The Footpaths Maintenance Operative, Graham, will almost always remedy the issue within days of being informed. The system works very well indeed. Obviously, there is a limited budget for this work so sometimes work needs to be prioritised.

The Circular Walks booklet, published last summer, continues to be very popular and it has just been agreed by the Council to have a reprint. We are aware that people from all over Staffordshire have used the booklet. This is a companion book to the Bench to Bench booklet.

The Committee have also considered digitally lead Heritage Trails. However, after looking at two options, it was felt that the cost to value of these for Eccleshall would be prohibitive. The committee will consider whether a smaller scale option would be of use at its next meeting, or if funds would be better directed elsewhere.

Members of the Footpaths Committee met with County Council Rights of Way officers and agreed to update the signposting in Bishops Wood and use signpost discs to clarify the different footpath route numbers. This work was carried out, thanks to the Amey volunteer programme. A site visit was also held with the Forestry Commission ecologists, and as a result we are looking to produce information noticeboards that will give historical facts about Bishops Wood as well as what ecological matters of interest can be found in the woods i.e. bats and red ants.

The ongoing problems caused by heavy rain to Footpath 13 (Shaws Lane to Church Street) are now being tackled by the County Council Rights of Way Team. It is hoped that their work will remedy the issues on this well used footpath.

May I offer my sincere thanks to all our Footpath Marshals and Litter Pickers for their constant vigilance and hard work. Eccleshall and its surrounds is a much better place for us all to live thanks to such valued volunteers.

Ros Taylor
Chairman of the Footpaths Committee

March 2024

Planning Committee Annual Report – 2023-24

The Planning Committee consists of all the members of the Parish Council and the quorum for a meeting is five members. The present chairman is Councillor Bryan Delanchy, and the Vice-Chairman is Councillor Stuart Perren.

Meetings of the Planning Committee are generally held every two weeks on a Wednesday. This is because applications have to be considered by the Parish Council within 21 days of receipt. This can reduce to 14 days in the case of amended plans for a previously submitted application, because of this time constraint, and as all members make up the Planning Committee decisions are not subject to the approval of the full Council.

The Parish Council considers planning applications submitted to Stafford Borough Council, which fall within the boundary of the parish. The Borough Council is the local planning authority for this area and it has no statutory obligation to consult the Parish Council on planning applications. It has, however, a policy of consulting widely on applications made to it and the Parish Council is afforded the opportunity of making its opinions known and bringing to the attention of the Borough Council, local issues of which they may not be aware. It is the duty of those of us on the Parish Council to raise the views and concerns of the residents of the Parish of Eccleshall, both the town and the surrounding area. As Parish Councillors, we draw on our local knowledge and our awareness of your concerns and opinions, to fulfil our obligations, not least of all with regard to planning matters.

If you have a concern about an issue or a specific planning application, please raise the matter with your local Parish Councillor who will be able to raise your concerns at the meeting when the application is discussed. Alternatively, you may attend the meeting yourself and raise your concerns during the public participation session at the start of the meeting. It must be pointed out, however, that any concerns that parishioners have with regard to a specific planning application must also be made directly to the Borough Council, as it is this body that finally determines the application. The Parish Council works closely with the Borough Councilors who represent Eccleshall. These councillors are able to “call in” applications for determination by the Development Control Sub-Committee. Otherwise, most applications are determined by the officers of the council, who interpret the requirements of the Local Plan. During 2023, the Parish Council considered 61 applications compared to 2022 when there were 50 applications.

Most applications are for small domestic extensions, agricultural buildings and barn conversions.

In July 2016 the Neighborhood Plan for Eccleshall Parish was formally adopted after successfully being approved by a referendum and became an integral part of the plan for Stafford Borough defining the residential boundary and the extent of housing.

The plan for Stafford Borough named Eccleshall as one of 11 key service villages which would deliver 1200 houses for the 2011 to 2031 development strategy. An ‘Issues and Options’ document published by Stafford Borough Council in February 2020 acknowledged that Eccleshall has experienced a 23.8% increase in the number of dwellings since 2011.

Work is ongoing within Stafford Borough Council to produce a draft of the new Local Plan for Stafford Borough, following responses received at the end of 2022 in relation to Local

Plan 'Preferred Options' Consultation. which included a proposal for Meecebrook garden community, which had many implications for the surrounding area. There have been a number of changes since the latest consultation, including the cancelling of the proposed HS2 line north of Birmingham, which may have implications for the proposed transport options for Meecebrook.

Councillor Bryan Delanchy, Committee Chairman.

Policy and Resources Committee Annual Report 2023/2024

The committee is traditionally chaired by the chairman of the full council and this year this is Councillor Ros Taylor.

The committee meets on all matters financial and policy and makes recommendations to the full council on those matters. Main tasks include:

- Budget proposals and precept requirements
- Consideration of new policies and amendments
- Review of Deeds and insurances
- Updates to the Forward plan
- Grant applications
- Monitoring of any investments

Throughout the year the P&R committee receives budget updates, ensuring planned expenditure is on track. Staffing updates are also provided to the committee as required.

Applications for grants come first to the Policy and Resources Committee and are considered against the available funding that is specifically allocated for this purpose. The council considers grants to organisations within the parish of Eccleshall or ones that provide a service for the Eccleshall community. Sometimes the grant is minimal and other times larger depending on the application needs and the remaining budget allocation. This year, grants were given to:

- Bishops Lonsdale PTA – contribution to new play area
- YEP (youth enterprise project)
- Eccleshall Community Lounge
- Eccleshall Community Amateur Dramatics
- Katharine House Hospice
- Eccleshall Football Club

Councillor Ros Taylor, Committee Chairman.

Traffic Management Committee – Annual Report 2021/2022

The Traffic Management Committee has been one of the major committees of the Council for over 25 years looking into the overall safety of residents and visitors to the parish, and working with the County Council Highways Department regarding parking and the condition of the roads.

Like most towns 'pot holes', the name commonly used for any damage to roads, is high on the list of concerns for residents and visitors alike. The council encourages residents to use the 'Report it' system on the Staffordshire County Council website and also uses it to ensure damage to roads is regularly reported.

Eccleshall is a victim of its own popularity as a visiting venue for its historical sites etc. causing a shortage of parking places in the town centre. This does not stop the parish council from looking into possible parking sites.

Surveys of parking places and the vehicles that use them has been the subject of time and effort over the years, to discover who using the limited places. Traders in the town centre seem to use on-street parking which could be used for shoppers and visitors.

Some days are less popular than others for parking in the centre, leaving on-street parking places available. With Eccleshall being a popular place for more new homes, spaces for parking are in short supply. Trying to find a parking place outside the business of their choice will never be easy and although parking places can be found, a short walk is often the answer.

More and more homes are having EV points at their homes but public use points are still not available.

The Co-op supermarket provides a limited number of disabled parking places on its car park which is useful when shopping at the Co-op, but requires a walk for other business destinations. Whether additional disabled car parking place(s) are required, and the best location, is a subject of consideration.

Councillor Peter Jones, Committee Chairman.

Eccleshall Parish Council Financial Summary – March 2024.

Budget Summary as of 6th March 2024

06/03/2024	Eccleshall Parish Council					Page 1	
12:49	Summary Receipts & Payments by Budget Heading 06/03/2024						
	Cost Centre Report						
		Actual Year To Date	Current Annual Bud	Variance Annual Total	Committed Expenditure	Funds Av available	% Spent
100 Administration	Receipts	92,344	87,683	(4,661)			105.3%
	Payments	47,840	54,012	6,172		6,172	88.6%
	Net Receipts over Payments	<u>44,504</u>	<u>33,671</u>	<u>(10,833)</u>			
	plus Transfer from EMR	4,384					
	less Transfer to EMR	3,733					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>45,155</u>					
110 Open Spaces	Payments	26,712	32,916	6,204		6,204	81.2%
	plus Transfer from EMR	4,406					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(22,306)</u>					
120 Projects	Payments	3,322	6,750	3,428		3,428	49.2%
	plus Transfer from EMR	0					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(3,322)</u>					
130 Traffic Management	Payments	3,193	2,585	(608)		(608)	123.5%
	plus Transfer from EMR	1,023					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(2,170)</u>					
140 Highw ays Maintenance	Payments	4,300	2,000	(2,300)		(2,300)	215.0%
	plus Transfer from EMR	2,300					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(2,000)</u>					
150 Events	Payments	6,109	8,000	1,891		1,891	76.4%
160 Village Halls	Payments	1,105	1,105	0		0	100.0%
199 Contingencies	Payments	286	500	214		214	57.2%
	plus Transfer from EMR	0					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>(286)</u>					
999 VAT Data	Payments	165	0	(165)		(165)	0.0%
	Grand Totals:- Receipts	92,344	87,683	(4,661)			105.3%
	Payments	93,033	107,868	14,835	0	14,835	86.2%
	Net Receipts over Payments	<u>(689)</u>	<u>(20,185)</u>	<u>(19,496)</u>			
	plus Transfer from EMR	12,113					
	less Transfer to EMR	3,733					
	Movement to/(from) Gen Reserve	<u>7,691</u>					

Bank Reconciliation as of 29th February 2024

Eccleshall Parish Council

Bank - Cash and Investment Reconciliation as at 29 February 2024

Confirmed Bank & Investment Balances

Bank Statement Balances

29/02/2024	Public Sector Deposit Fund	26,825.54
29/02/2024	Unity Current	5,424.59
29/02/2024	Unity Deposit	78,407.67

110,657.80

Receipts not on Bank Statement

0.00

Closing Balance

110,657.80

Earmarked Reserves

These are ringfenced funds identified in addition to the annual budget, needed for activities that:

- May stretch over a longer period than the 12 month budget plan (e.g. longer term projects and funding that is allocated over a number of years)
- Allow for a planned build-up of reserves over a number of years for future expenditure (e.g. 4 yearly elections expenses)
- Form part of the financial planning for ongoing maintenance of assets and covers expenditure that may be unplanned (e.g. additional maintenance of open spaces, repairs/replacements of play equipment).

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Eccleshall Parish Council
Earmarked Reserves

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<u>Account</u>	<u>Opening Balance</u>	<u>Net Transfers</u>	<u>Closing Balance</u>
320 EMR - Clock Maintenance	1,100.00		1,100.00
321 EMR - Community Centre	10,000.00		10,000.00
322 EMR - Croxton Play Area	1,370.79	-613.00	757.79
323 EMR - Traffic Calming	1,518.00	-1,023.26	494.74
324 EMR - Highways/ex CC Duties	6,889.58	-2,300.00	4,589.58
326 EMR - Training	3,605.25		3,605.25
327 EMR - Allotments	2,344.14		2,344.14
328 EMR - Elections	4,384.01	-4,384.01	0.00
329 EMR - Eagle Street Art	9,618.00		9,618.00
330 EMR - IT	2,169.96		2,169.96
331 EMR - Elford Heath Management	5,906.78	-60.00	5,846.78
332 EMR - Flood Works	405.00		405.00
333 EMR - Copmere Picnic Site	1,260.00		1,260.00
335 EMR - Beech Road	9,000.00		9,000.00
	59,571.51	-8,380.27	51,191.24
