

MILTON ERNEST PARISH COUNCIL

Milton Ernest Parish Council will be hosting the Annual Parish meeting on Thursday, 14th May 2026 commencing at 7.30pm at the Milton Ernest Village Hall. This is a meeting hosted by the parish council on behalf of the residents of Milton Ernest. All are welcome to attend and all may speak to represent yourself or the group that you run.

No registration is required – just turn up!

Milton Ernest Parish Council Clerk – Saqhib ALI

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence and Introductions**
- 2. Chairman's Annual Report**
- 3. End of year statements from Milton Ernest Parish Councillors**
- 4. Turnor Rolt Charity Annual Report 2024/25**
- 5. Environmental Volunteer Team Annual Report 2024/25**
- 6. Neighbourhood Watch Annual Report 2024/25**
- 7. Borough Councillor Martin Towler's Annual Report**
- 8. Any other groups/individuals**

Proposed date of next Annual Parish meeting
Thursday 13th May 2027

Environmental Volunteer Team. Annual Report 2025/26

The Milton Ernest Environmental Team remains an important resource for the village. Although the Volunteer Team independently chooses which projects to work on, all their activities adhere to the agreed guidelines established by the Parish Council.



The Volunteer Group receives funding from the Parish Council, primarily allocated for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves. Although no purchases have been made this year and the budget remains unused, it is expected that the allocation be preserved for future essential PPE requirements.

209 recorded hours were worked over 48 occasions, between May 2025 and April 2026, saving the Council approximately £2552.00 at minimum wage rates. Unrecorded spontaneous hours by team members are not included in this total.

Work has involved footpath weeding, leaf clearing, trimming bushes and brambles, ditch and hedge maintenance in the playing field, tidying Riverside Meadow around the new trees, and assisting with the biannual churchyard "tidy."

The Village Garden, once covered in neglected brambles before being cleared last year, has seen remarkable improvements. Our primary school pupils contributed by planting crocus bulbs in the autumn, giving a lovely display in February. A Royal British Legion bench was donated and installed by village residents. Thanks to these efforts, the garden is now a well-kept and inviting space for everyone in the village.



More work has been done this year to enhance the old entrance to the Nursing Home by removing overgrown ivy along the wall and gate posts, to reveal the original stone work, and also enhancing the entrance to the village along the A6. This is in addition to the work achieved last year and the planting of daffodils, which has been noticeable this year.



The Team remains small in number and there have been no new recruits despite advertising, but they have made significant improvements to the look and feel of our village and in turn, have received many thanks from residents for the work achieved. The team would request that the Council would actively engage in a recruitment drive.

Neighbourhood Watch Report 2025/26

Since 2012, a Neighbourhood Watch group has operated in the village. It receives yearly funding from the parish council and is independent from the council.

The aim is to assist the residents by offering information and guidance about personal and home safety and security, as well as advising on when and how to report suspicious behaviour or criminal incidents to the police and relevant partners.



Over one third of village residents are registered on "Ourwatch," linked to Bedfordshire Police's "Beds Connect" site.

The Ourwatch platform keeps members informed about all matters related to security. Since last year's AGM, the NHW newsletter updated our local police personnel changes at the North Bedfordshire Hub located at Riseley Police station, and included advice on doorstep, telephone, and online scams, plus instructions for scam victims. It was delivered with a "See It, Report It" card from the Safer Bedford Community Safety Partnership.

As cybercrime continues to grow and impact our daily lives, affecting us at home through telephones, computers, and smart appliances, I have obtained information leaflets from Bedfordshire Police Cyber Hub. These leaflets will be sent to every household in Milton Ernest along with our next newsletter, which is scheduled for early summer.



Our village scheme works closely with local police, who note that under-reporting is still a problem. The monthly "Coffee with a Cop" at the garden center is open to everyone to discuss concerns.

Many Thanks, Hazel Snowball "Area coordinator, 703 Milton Ernest, Neighborhood Watch Scheme.

Cyber Aware

Advice on how to stay secure online.



MILTON ERNEST VILLAGE HALL

Parish Council annual meeting Village Hall Report for 2025/26

This year a decision was taken to change our 1945 governing document from a Charitable Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, but the village Hall will remain a charity with the same objectives. The main reason for the change is it offers limited liability for trustees, making it more attractive for future trustees.

This transition has been slower than expected, due to the complicated process set by the charity commission and other agencies . It is hoped to be completed within a year.

Throughout the past year, there have been ongoing requests and opportunities for volunteers to join the village hall committee, participate in the new charity, and help make decisions about its future. We know that some trustees are retiring this year, and we will continue to advertise in order to keep continuity for the village Hall.

For added security, the village Hall now has a key safe with a monthly number change that will be sent to our regular users by the booking secretary when needed.

The Village Hall website was successfully launched in June 2025, and we have recently added the "Hallmaster" booking programme to the website, and are in the initial phase of implementing this.

We continue to have an annual contract for use by our main users, the village primary school. Regular users have remained unchanged, with other private bookings throughout the year.

The village hall finances have stayed steady, even though there were substantial maintenance changes and projects last year. Because of this, we kept our hire rates unchanged to hopefully promote greater use.

The trustees and committee are committed to maintaining a secure and welcoming environment in the village hall for the village and its residents.

Hazel Snowball.

Chair. Milton Ernest Village Hall

Councillor Alan Dipple's review of last 12 months

I was co-opted onto the Parish Council in June 2024.

In April 2026 I resigned my position on the Parish Council due to my elderly father's ill-health and I have been asked to reflect on my involvement serving the Parishioners of Milton Ernest since last May.

Over that period, I continued with my review and advice on all Planning Applications received by MEPC for comment and where possible supported the Council in dealing with a number of issues, around the, NDP, the Playing Field and Financial control of Cash and Assets, that arose over the period, in particular:

- Resolving some Finance issues mainly around MEPC book-keeping and identifying the sum to be reclaimed for paid VAT.
- Assisting Parishioners who had been affected by the Old Maltings redevelopment ensuring the developer stopped burning rubbish on adjoining land and kept the adjoining access route clear, as well as reporting some planning infringements to the Local Planning Authority to enforce.
- Reviewed the last 20 years of MEPC minutes to identify land that was finally purchased in 2016 by MEPC.
- The Asset Register held by MEPC was significantly out of date. I updated the Asset Register along with Councillor Lane to identify all assets in the village which are now clearly marked physically and recorded on the MEPC website for public inspection as required.
- Met with MEPC's appointed NDP consultant along with Councillor Ross to initiate the first stage of updating the current NDP.
- Assisted Councillor Ross with the initial installation of the new Defib Unit on Radwell Road.
- Oversaw the repair of the Village Green low fence and more recently the brick pier replacement to the entrance of the Playing field following vehicle damage.
- Regularly maintained the Speed Indicator on Radwell Road.

Best Wishes

Alan Dipple

Over the past year, I have contributed to a range of initiatives in support of the Parish Council's objectives and the wider community.

A key focus has been the development of a Biodiversity Plan, which Rachel and I created and I presented to the Council. This has since been formally adopted and provides a structured framework to guide the parish's approach to environmental sustainability, habitat protection, and future ecological initiatives.

I have also supported the ongoing litter-picking plans within the parish. This has included helping to review and establish new collection routes to improve coverage, encourage greater output, and ensure that key areas are regularly maintained to a high standard.

In addition, I have gathered and reviewed quotations for new playground equipment, enabling the Council to consider options for enhancing local recreational facilities. This work has contributed to the longer-term planning and investment in community assets for the benefit of residents.

I have supported the preparation of monthly safety reports for the playing fields, assisting in the identification of any issues and helping to ensure that these important community spaces remain safe, accessible, and well maintained.

Throughout the year, I have also been involved in supporting community events, including assisting Pam with mainly the bar! This has helped contribute towards the smooth running and success of these events, which play an important role in fostering community engagement.

Furthermore, I joined the HR Working Group, where I have contributed advice and input on a number of key matters.

I have very much enjoyed being involved in these activities and contributing to the work of the Parish Council over the past year. I look forward to continuing to support the Council and building on this progress in the year ahead.

Thanks

Jess

Deputy Chair Report

I was delighted to be voted in as Deputy Chair and I look forward to working with and support Ali in this role as Chair going forwards, if I am selected again!

I have helped with various tasks around the village. I liaised with the Garden Centre and managed to get them to kindly donate a bench which is now located by the Bus Stop on Radwell Road. I tend to help & support where help is needed and generally try to get things done with mostly a good result.

Recently I have confirmed with BBC that it is their responsibility to collect the rubbish from the little playground on Riverside Meadow so that will now happen on a monthly basis. I am that person who doesn't give up and will persevere until I get the result I want.

Being also on the Events side of things I am happy to report that the Tree Lighting was a huge success with a big attendance and everyone had a great time. I also organised the defibrillator training which again was well attended and, as a result of that training, we now have a fully operation additional defrib on Radwell Road. I organised a first fundraiser for the playground new equipment which was a Quiz and that proved a huge hit with people who just kept on coming into the hall which was great to see. It was a real success so hope more fundraisers can be done.

All in all a good year and here's to many more positive results!

2025/2026 Chairman's Report

Overall, 2025-26 has been a similarly challenging experience to last year, mainly due to our ongoing shortage in the number of Councillors. Nevertheless, despite our relatively small number, significant progress has been made this year in several different areas which I will summarise in this report.

Councillors Update

Unfortunately, we had to say goodbye to Cllr Rachel Atkinson in November as she relocated away from the village. Rachel was serving her second term as Councillor and was greatly appreciated as our most experienced Councillor with knowledge and background in several areas.

Rachel has continued to support Jess following her departure in completion of the Biodiversity Plan which was approved during the March meeting. Many thanks to Rachel for all her good work and support to other Councillors

More recently, Cllr Alan Dipple has also had to relinquish his role in March this year for family reasons. Alan served two years on the Parish council playing key roles in both Planning and Finance working groups, as well as supporting on Playing Field topics, so our huge thanks are due to Alan for his great contribution in these areas as well as his efforts in keeping our speed indicator working with ever more frequent battery replacements (Thanks also to Jess for picking this role up moving forward)

On a more positive note, as of March, we were delighted to welcome Rob Robson to the Parish Council. The Robson family have a long history in the village, having owned the farm on Thurleigh Road, whilst Rob himself has lived in Milton Ernest with his wife Catherine since 2001 and raised their family here. Rob brings great professional experience to the Parish Council from his long career in teaching as well as leadership in a number of voluntary roles. We look forward to working with Rob, especially on Playing Fields, Planning and Finance topics where Rob has joined our working groups.

Following the above changes, we remain two councillors short of a full-strength team, so we continue to welcome new enquiries from would-be Councillors who are keen to make a difference in their local community.

Clerk Update

Following the departure of our previous Clerk last July, we were fortunate to have the support of Anne Paice, Clerk to Oakley Parish Council as a locum Clerk during the recruitment period. Anne did a terrific job of picking up and running with all the Clerking activities until September when we welcomed our current Clerk, Saqhib Ali.

Whilst Saqhib is relatively new to Parish Council Clerking, he brings to the role over 15 years' experience as a Parish Councillor in Wixams alongside his professional experience as a Chartered Accountant.

The PC notes it's huge thanks to Anne for stepping in during the 3 month vacancy period at relatively short notice and we look forward to continuing our work with Saqhib in the coming year.

Parish Council 2025/26 activities - Overview

Despite a year with it's challenges and upheavals, I'm pleased that the Parish Council, along with it's supportive working groups, have managed to maintain progress in a number of key areas as well as delivering some notable improvements to the Village:

- 1) Village maintenance & Improvements (separate to the Environmental Volunteer Team)
 - Low level fencing around the Village Green repaired
 - New Defibrillator installed and commissioned on Radwell Road
 - New Bench Installation alongside the Bus Stop in Radwell Road, with thanks to the Garden Centre for supplying the Bench and to Cllr Pam for arranging the installation

- Removal of the Tree in Marsh Lane which was blocking drains and causing flooding
- Some road and pavement repairs completed with agreement for much needed Thurleigh Road repairs to be implemented during April/May '26
- Updating PC asset register to ensure all latest assets are valued and insured correctly
- Repairs to the damaged Radwell Road entrance to the Playing Field

2) Environmental Improvements:

- Our sincere thanks to the Environmental Volunteers who have completed some excellent work as detailed in their separate report. Here are some of the highlights:
 - WI Garden – Bench Installed and plants now maturing well
 - Playing Field - further clearing of the drains to help drainage
 - Planting of additional bulbs around the village
 - Supporting the Churchyard clear-up, including some much needed cleaning of the memorial garden

3) Events:

- Once again, a successful Christmas Tree lighting event was held with communal Carols led by Rev. Jes followed by the one-voice Choir, with mince pies and mulled wine for all.
- The 'Memory Tree' also returned for the Tree lighting event before being moved to the Church for the Christmas period. g between Church and Parish Council (Cllr Pam) to raise £500 for Tibbs Dementia.
- An excellent Quiz Night to kick-off fundraising for new Playing Field equipment, with a competitive but fun atmosphere in the room and just short of £900 raised
- Support for the Garden Centre Glen Miller event was arranged once again with safe and effective overspill parking overseen by the Parish council.
- Defrib Training Event for the Village – Well attended, informative and entertaining

Further events will be planned later this year after the Fete, with the key emphasis on raising funds to replace the ageing playing field equipment as soon as possible.

4) Planning: Several planning applications were reviewed and responded to, with great support from Cllr Dipple amongst others. Some of the key responses we provided include:

- Tree Preservation Order from ME Care Home
- Maltings Development, including several concerns raised to Planning Enforcement during the build activity, with follow up ongoing.
- Twinwoods Storage Facility - change of use where we met with the developer to understand the proposal and share concerns over additional heavy goods vehicles
- Car auction site – Concerns raised with additional car transporter traffic through the village (decision pending)
- Successful enforcement challenge to over-height fencing on Marsh Lane property

We have also embarked on preparing an update to the NDP with support of Chapman Planning (as recommended by Thurleigh PC) with the key objective to ensure it remains up to date following completion of it's 5 year term in November 2026.

Whilst our update does not include any radical changes, it will reflect changes to the village since the last plan was prepared, and also the changes made in national planning policy.

5) Grants and Support: The Parish Council has continued to provide grants to support

- The Good Neighbour scheme organised by Cllr Goldwin
- Church Clock repairs and maintenance of the Church and Churchyard

6) Police Liason

- Good links established between Cllr Pam and the local Community support officer to supplement those already established by the Neighbourhood Watch team.
- We continue to inform the Police of any suspicious activity in the Village which has been successfully used to support Police investigations this year.

Looking forward, key areas of focus for this coming year will include:

- Ongoing fundraising and consultation around new playground equipment. A public event will be held in the coming weeks to share the proposed plan with villagers and gather feedback. This is one of our priorities for the coming year and we are looking to begin grant applications as soon as possible, although we are currently engaged with the landowner to establish an updated lease agreement for the site following expiry of the existing agreement some time ago. This is needed ASAP as it is expected to be a likely key factor in success of grant applications. We welcome support of any Villagers with suitable fundraising expertise who may wish to help and support in the grant application
- As mentioned, we are preparing an update to our Neighbourhood Plan which ends its current 5 year Term this November.

I would like to thank all of our Councillors for all of their great efforts this year in their respective roles, many of which can be challenging or frustrating at times but remain essential in keeping our village working well and preventing future problems arising.

As we look forward to the next year, we will continue to maintain and manage the everyday issues as best we can with our limited resource whilst also shifting our focus to more longer-term projects like the Playing Field.

Thanks to all those who support us also, whether it be through one of the Volunteer Groups, by attending meetings or surgeries, or through simply offering us your thoughts, challenges or pearls of wisdom. We greatly appreciate all such support and please do keep working with us.