

MINUTES FOR ETCHILHAMPTON PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2026 AT 6.30pm IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present Mr. P. Hanson (Chairman), Mrs. L. Clark (Vice-Chairman), Mr. M. Harris (RFO), and Mrs. C. Wimble (Clerk)

In attendance: Mr. Philip Whitehead (Wilts Councillor) and Mr. Richard Rodgers (Engagement & Partnership Manager – Area Board)

Mr. Rogers introduced himself and explained his role for the Devizes Area Board in the Engagement and Partnership Team working closely with residents and councillors to facilitate community led action and to fund local projects. Mr. Whitehead talked about the 20 councils of very different sizes that make up the Devizes area. It was important parishioners felt they were listened to and communities whether big or small were not all merged. There were financial pressures on councils, and he advocated attending the Area Board meetings but there was no obligation to do so. PH asked that if an important issue arose, he could contact Wiltshire and ask to come to a meeting. Mr. Whitehead confirmed this would be OK. Mr. Whitehead stated that Devizes Gateway station is still a possibility linking Devizes to Reading. If approved residents might rightly be concerned about the levels of traffic and a meeting with the Area Board would be useful. Area Board can also fund items that parish councils on small precepts might find difficult. PH asked why Etchilhampton Parish Council was charged £250 for an election cost where there was no contest and nothing done by Wiltshire Council. Mr. Whitehead said the cost was probably a financial measure from Wilts Council and confirmed the figure was calculated according to the number of residents in Etchilhampton. He advises councils not to have elections but to wait and co-opt members onto councils when they have availability. He also stated it was important to increase precept with inflation.

PH mentioned the Parish Steward had only half a day a month, and Mr. Whitehead confirmed that if the Steward needed extra help for a larger project, he could enlist the help of another steward. Mr. Whitehead felt the Steward would not be back before April, however if there was a pothole problem in the village PH should message the Steward. Mr. Whitehead said it was important to contact Wilts Council and report the pothole on My Wilts. Once registered the pothole will be put on a list to be done, and once on that list if someone has a flat tyre they can claim back the costs. Potholes in the village are still waiting to be filled. Mr. Whitehead confirmed that Wiltshire were on target to complete all work according to their schedule.

Flooding in the middle path was mentioned as the small drain down the footpath in the middle of the village cannot be reached by the gulley tanker and has not been cleared. There is a possibility that tree roots were also causing a problem. Everyone agreed it would be better to get the drains sorted before work on the planned resurfacing of the road at the other end of the village was started. LC to email P. Whitehead.

PH mentioned the street light in the village which had not been working for months and was therefore a danger to residents. MH had written to Wilts Council and had sent a chasing email in January but still heard nothing. All the other lights in the village have been upgraded to LED but not this one. The electricity company have even cleared the branches around the light but have done nothing to upgrade it. Mr. Whitehead asked that MH forward the correspondence and he would deal with the situation. MH stated that the precept for Etchilhampton would be going up but he was concerned the residents are not seeing any improvement for their money.

PH asked if Etchilhampton was likely to be affected by the Government Review and Philip Whitehead did not think so. He stated most of the houses in Bishops Cannings parish were

close to Devizes. Of the 2,500 houses within the Bishops Cannings boundaries, only about 500 are situated in or around Bishops Cannings, with most on Cannings Hill. He felt that these changes were financially driven as Devizes would receive more in council taxes if they were moved within the Devizes boundary. Etchilhampton was unlikely to be affected. Philip Whitehead reiterated his view that it was a good idea to maintain small parishes rather than merge into one huge community. LC asked if other things impact boundary changes other than monetary. Philip Whitehead replied it was usually driven by business ideas.

At 7.30 Philip Whitehead and Richard Rodgers left the meeting.

- 1 Declarations of Interests and Dispensations: none.
- 2 Apologies for Absence: no apologies.
- 3 The Minutes of the last meeting on 8 December, 2025 were approved.
- 4 Matters Arising
 - a) Parish Steward: the Parish Steward would not return till April.
 - b) Precept: this had been done.
 - c) Update of EPC email address: MH stated that although it had been advised to change to a .gov email address for security and professional reasons, this was not a legal obligation. He was quoted £300 p.a. for website and £300 p.a. for a .gov email. Ionos charges EPC £172 p.a. for the website. All agreed that it would not be changed at present and to defer for a year.
 - d) LC reported that Brenda Smith had received no reply from Mr. Butler when his 25 escaped cows trampled both her and Shirley Saunder's gardens. (Henry Butler did come out to see Shirley).
- 5 Questions/Points from the Public: None
- 6 Treasurer's Report
 - a) The EPC noted the bank balance stood at £825.84 and ratified the following payments totalling £937.95:

		£
15.12.25	Ionos Cloud Ltd	14.40
16.12.25	Bank Charges Lloyds (monthly)	4.25
14.01.26	Ionos Cloud Ltd (monthly)	14.40
19.01.26	Bank Charges Lloyds (monthly)	4.25
12.02.26	Ionos Cloud Ltd (monthly)	14.40
17.02.26	Bank Charles Lloyds (monthly)	4.25
	Mark Goddard Grass Cutting	<u>882.00</u>
	TOTAL	937.95

MH reported that the invoice for Mark Goddard at £882.00 had just been received and would take the bank balance below £1000. He also reported that Mark Goddard had not increased his fees for 2026. Parish Council Members approved the quote from Mark Goddard for grass cutting during the 2026/2027 period.
- 7 Correspondence and consultations: none.
- 8 Planning Applications: None.
- 9 Reports of Meetings: None.

- 10 Any Other Business: LC reported that the defibrillator was now 12 years old and normally these were replaced after 10 years. The battery needs replacing at a cost of £360 + VAT in September. LC questioned whether it was worth buying a battery for such an old defibrillator. The cost of a new one is £1400 + VAT. It had originally been purchased by the Social Committee (before it was disbanded) with proceeds from fund raising in the village. It was noted that Amanda Wood-Woolley regularly checks the defibrillator, and both she and LC report the checks on the Webnos and The Circuit websites to show the machine is operational. MH to speak to Cathy Charles to gain the opinion of the Village Hall Committee. Etchilhampton Parish Council is not responsible for the defibrillator but currently agree, on a discretionary basis, to approve and pay for consumables when necessary. PH felt the village would find it difficult to raise the money, and perhaps the village could apply for a grant from the Area Board. All agreed this was too expensive for Etchilhampton Parish Council. If no funds are forthcoming the defibrillator would most likely be decommissioned in September 2026 when the current battery expires.

CW asked if it would be helpful for a member of the Bobby Van Trust to come and talk to residents about measures for computer security and being aware of scams, as well as safety in the home – windows and doors. PH felt this was a good idea and all agreed CW to contact Bobby Van and get them to speak before the Annual Parish Meeting but not part of the meeting.

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 20.20 hrs.

C Wimble, Clerk