

WICKHAM BISHOPS PARISH COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Parish Council News

The Parish Council started the year with eight Councillors but was pleased to co-opt Rhian Clarke to the Council in May. Unfortunately, Rhian found that the need to juggle work, family commitments and Council business was such that one had to go. Our thanks to Rhian for her input during her short period with us. Having ended the year with a vacancy again, we hope to fill it without too much delay. We have continued to hold our monthly surgeries in the Library, a useful opportunity for residents to speak to Councillors. The surgeries are usually held on the third Saturday of the month and two Councillors are present, occasionally with a District Councillor as well. Do drop in if you have anything to raise with the Parish Council, or come along to a full Council meeting, held on the first Tuesday of the month (except August) in the Village Hall.

The forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation does not directly affect parish councils, although there is the possibility that further responsibilities will come our way. The impact will be at District and County level, and we await the outcome when we will find out into which enlarged group of District Councils Maldon District will be subsumed. It now seems likely that Maldon, Chelmsford and Brentwood will be combined into the new unitary authority.

A team of new volunteer residents took up the responsibility of looking after the public footpaths in the village by cutting back overgrown vegetation and hedges. Many thanks to them for their efforts in maintaining the paths for the benefit of all.

Long Serving Councillor

This year Councillor Henry Bass completed 50 years of dedicated service to the community having first joined the Parish Council in 1976. At the Annual Parish Assembly on 12 May 2026, the Parish Council paid warm tribute to Cllr Bass, and he was presented with a specially framed certificate in recognition of his half century of commitment to the parish. Many thanks to him.

Digital format

This is the second year that we have published the Annual Report in a digital format, available on our website and via a link on Facebook. Some hard copies will be kept at the Library and in the Health Food shop for those who would prefer that format. The main reasons for moving to this method are the environmental impact and cost. We're keen to ensure that in going digital no-one misses out, so if you know of someone who is housebound or disabled or otherwise unable to view a copy, please contact the Parish Clerk who will arrange for one to be delivered.

Speedwatch and Highways

The Community Speedwatch (CSW) team was active throughout the year, apart from a few weeks over Christmas and New Year. On resumption in mid-January, we found that the number of vehicles being recorded as speeding had fallen substantially. Quite why this had happened is not clear; we believe our presence must have made a difference, but it seems that we are being identified on site by systems such as Waze, thus giving drivers prior notice of our presence. No matter; the important point is that fewer drivers are speeding in the village. This is borne out by the totals for the year April 2025 - March 2026, when 77 checks were carried out (88 in 2024/25) with 661 vehicles recorded over the limit (920 in 2024/25). Of those, 151 were recorded at 40 mph and above and 2 were at 50 mph and above. The average number of vehicles recorded per check was 8.6 (10.45 in 2024/25).

A major concern of the CSW team was the policy adopted by Essex Police that registered keepers of vehicles recorded as speeding by CSW teams throughout the county would not be sent warning letters if their vehicles were registered at addresses outside Essex. This is the Police 'Out of Force' policy. This is apparently because of the time and cost involved in dealing with complaints from keepers that their vehicle was nowhere near the scene at the time. Whilst undoubtedly some mistakes are made by CSW teams in recording registration numbers, the policy means that, for instance, company vehicles registered at HQs outside Essex are ignored. In 2025, nearly 5,000 vehicles recorded as speeding by CSW teams in the county were registered elsewhere and warning letters were not sent to the keepers. We believe this policy to be misguided and are pursuing the issue with Essex Police and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. The Maldon & Burnham Standard carried an article about this in March, and further publicity is being considered.

Many thanks to all the CSW team for their sterling efforts, especially when standing out for an hour at a time on some very cold occasions!

MDC's Community Engagement Team continued to be contracted by the Parish Council for 4.5 hours per month to enforce the speed limit. They concentrate their efforts in Maypole Road and Witham Road. In the year 2025/26 they reported 589 vehicles for excess speed (down slightly on the previous year). Drivers of those vehicles were then subject to normal police enforcement processes.

We have continued to seek repairs to the road signs on the approach to Blue Mills Bridge and various potholes have been reported to ECC, with some, possibly temporary, repairs effected. The pothole at the entrance to the One Stop car park was repaired but, regrettably, it is already showing signs of damage. With parking forming a continuous line on Great Totham Road, the Parish Council added a further H-bar marking to create a passing space.

Planning

Maldon District Council consults the Parish Council on all planning applications within the parish or just outside. These are dealt with by the Parish Council or by its Planning Committee. The Parish Council only makes a recommendation as the final decision is made either by MDC planning officers or by their North-West Area Planning Committee. During the year 2025-26 WBPC has been consulted on 48 Planning Applications, 5 of which related to Tree Preservation Orders. In 4 cases MDC did not agree with our recommendation. There were 3 Appeals, one of which was the result of a 'failure to determine' by MDC. The Parish Council had expressed concern over MDC's failure to determine decisions in the prescribed timeline and MDC had referred this to their Complaints Process. There was no news on the Land to the rear of 9 Church Road development.

The Parish Council will continue to oppose development proposals on land it considers unsuitable and outside the development boundary, particularly those which may lead to coalescence between our parish and Great Totham.

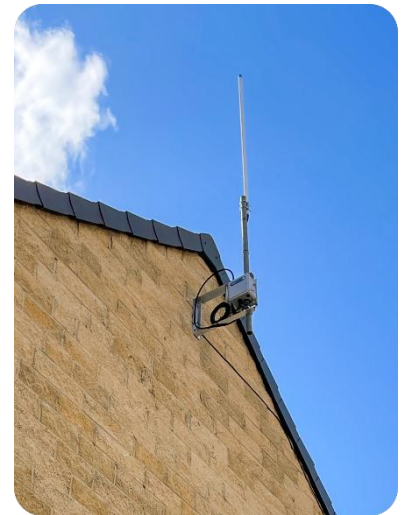
‘Internet of Things’ gateways (poles/masts)

Last year the Parish Council learned of plans to install IoT ‘gateways’ around the village to support services such as smart water meters. Letters and small ground markers appeared as part of the early rollout. In many towns these gateways are fitted to streetlights, reducing the visual impact but as Wickham Bishops has very few streetlights, the initial proposal involved installing new poles, which the Parish Council and a residents’ action group felt would be out of keeping with the village. Concerns were raised with the provider (Connexin), District and County Councils, and information shared with neighbouring parishes who were next in line for installation. After sustained communication from all parties, an in-person meeting was held in June 2025, including a village walk to demonstrate the challenges. This opened the door to more constructive discussions and alternatives to a “one size fits all” approach.

Further meetings in July explored roof and wall-mounted gateways (see image) and residents in suitable locations were contacted via Facebook and mail drops, and several gateways have now been installed at Church Green, Beacon Hill, Kelvedon Road, Heathgate and the Village Hall.

A few areas still require hosts – Wellands Close, High Hall, Buckleys Close and Byron Drive – and details will be reposted on Facebook for anyone interested.

This has been a strong example of the Parish Council and residents working together to secure a more sensitive, community-led solution and to influence how future rollouts are handled. Grateful thanks go to Mark Roberts and the members of the Action Group for their efforts in liaising with Connexin.



Biodiversity News

The Biodiversity Group continues to meet regularly in the Library and during the year has carried out works on the pond, built bat, bug and bird houses to encourage wildlife. A litter pick took place on the playing fields and around the village in March 2026 to improve the environment for both people and wildlife.

Permission has been granted by ECC to create a green living roof on the Library air raid shelter. This will create additional habitat for insects, especially bees, moths and other pollinators. The group puts a monthly challenge in the Parish magazine to encourage residents, particularly children, to add a wildlife home or space in their garden.

We were delighted to welcome back Prof Jules Pretty to our Assembly in May 2026 where he spoke on climate and nature crises and explained that through storytelling, communities had discovered their capacity to act and influence change. A most uplifting and motivating session.



Cllr Williams has attended a number of events offered by the RCCE (Rural Community Council of Essex) to develop our understanding of the BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) requirements for new developments, and the LNRS (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) in Essex, to see how we can contribute to that in Wickham Bishops.

Finance

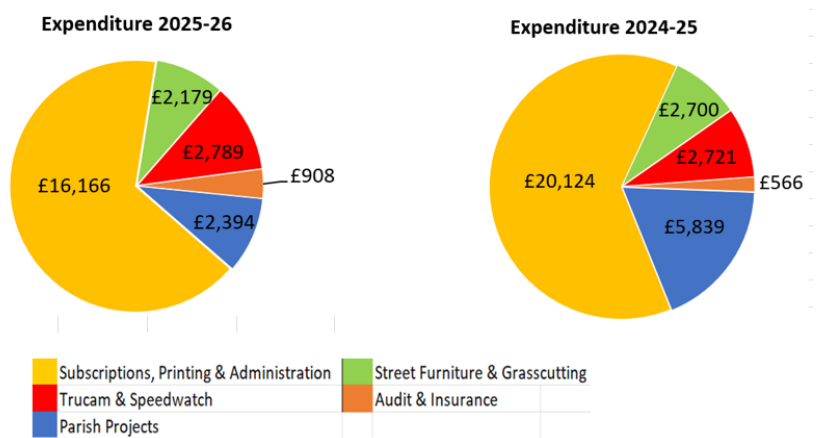
Overall expenditure for 2025/26 was lower than the previous year as that had included some relatively high one-off items, as explained in last year’s report. This year we faced the usual inflationary pressures but did however also continue to attempt to reduce costs where we could. Despite this the precept for 2026/27 had unfortunately to be increased, representing (as already explained by our Chairman in the May Parish Magazine) an increase of £1.66 p.a. per average band D property.

Apart from our usual expenditure on goods and services during this last year we provided a grant to Beacon Hill Rovers to help with start-up costs of a new girls’ team. We also published an updated version of the ever-popular Village Walks booklet, and we funded new H-bar markings on Great Totham Road to help protect driveways and provide more passing spaces.

Our accounts have once again had a clean bill of health from the auditors and we thank our Clerk, Lorraine, for her careful stewardship.

Accounting Statement 2025-26	
Opening Balance	£12,821
Precept	£24,530
Other Receipts	£2,132
Total Expenditure	-£24,436
Closing Balance	£15,047

Accounting Statement 2024-25	
Opening Balance	£20,202
Precept	£22,530
Other Receipts	£2,038
Total Expenditure	-£31,949
Closing Balance	£12,821



Volunteers required

The Parish Council is keen to hear from any residents interesting in volunteering and there are a number of ways in which you can do so.

Salt spreading during icy weather We are a member of the ECC Salt Bag Partnership (which is a way of communities helping themselves during the winter months), so if you have somewhere dry to store a sack of grit and are able to spread some, when needed, on a pavement or area near you, or clear some snow in extreme conditions, do think about volunteering.



Tree Warden Are you knowledgeable and passionate about trees? Maldon District Council ask WBPC to comment when residents apply to carry out work on trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders, and it would be useful to have the opinion of someone in the village who knows about these things.



Speedwatch Would you like to help keep our roads safe by joining our Speedwatch team? Volunteers need to be trained and authorised by Essex Police (this training is online) followed by on-site training by the current team members. There's no fixed commitment but usually an hour once a fortnight or so checking speeds at the roadside.

Public Rights of Way volunteers We already have an active group of volunteers, but there’s always room for more, the aim being to improve and maintain the footpaths around the village.

If any of the above sounds like something you’d like to get involved with, please get in touch with the Clerk (contact details on last page).

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL NEEDS YOU!

Vacancy for Parish Councillor



A vacancy exists on the Parish Council. Are you looking at new ways to get involved with your local community? Would you like a voice on some of the issues affecting Wickham Bishops and its residents? Are you interested in planning, amenities, local transport issues and the environment in and around the area?

If so, why not join Wickham Bishops Parish Council?

All you need is:

- An interest and willingness to be involved in your local community
- The time to attend meetings and a desire to serve without personal agenda
- To bring fresh enthusiasm and new ideas
- To be able to communicate appropriately, be objective and measured and to respect democratic decisions.

You don't need any special qualifications, the skills you've gained through work, caring for relatives, raising a family, volunteering or being active in the community will be enough. All you need is to be passionate about where you live. The parish council needs a wide range of skills to work as a team.

If you are interested, please email Lorraine Bailey, Parish Clerk, setting out some basic details about yourself, how long you've lived in the village, why you'd like to be a councillor, any village issues you're particularly interested in and anything else you think would be of use to the Council in making its decision.

For further information, contact one of the Councillors or the Clerk on 07542 190176 or email info@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org

To be a councillor you must be a British, Commonwealth or EU citizen; at least 18 years old; on the Electoral Register for the parish (or in the past 12 months occupied land or other premises in the parish); or worked in the parish. Those living within 3 miles of the parish boundary are also eligible.

Grant funding for community groups

Each year Wickham Bishops sets aside a small amount of money to help community groups in the village and this year we were delighted to assist Beacon Hill Rovers FC with £300 which will go towards start-up costs for a new girls' team, to help pay for a first aid kit, footballs, bibs, cones, poles and kitbag.

If you run or are involved with a group that could benefit from some extra funds, take a look at the Grants Policy on our website which explains what kind of funding we support and includes an application form: <https://www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org/assets/documents/grants-policy>

Trees and hedges

A gentle reminder - could everyone keep an eye on any trees on their property that could affect power lines or fall, or cause any other hazard, and keep them trimmed where appropriate. Please keep hedges and shrubs clipped and clear of pavements and roads for the safety of all residents. Thank you.

<p>PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS</p> <p>Listen to what goes on at the Parish Council or raise an issue that's concerning you. Everyone is welcome to come along to our meetings which take place on the first Tuesday of each month, except August, at 7.30pm. Agendas are displayed on the noticeboard by One Stop, on our website as well as on our Facebook page.</p>	<p>ROADWORKS & DIVERSIONS</p> <p>It can be a job to keep up with current and planned road works and diversions.</p> <p>If you register with one.network you'll be able to see upcoming works and keep abreast of disruptions.</p>	<p>MONTHLY SURGERIES</p> <p>If you'd like to talk to the Parish Council or raise a concern, and are unable to, or would rather not attend a meeting, feel free to come along to one of our monthly surgeries, held on the third Saturday of each month at Wickham Bishops Library from 11am - 12 noon.</p>
<p>PINK RECYCLING SACKS</p> <p>Don't forget, if you run out of recycling sacks, they're available to collect from Wickham Bishops Library</p> <p>Opening times are:</p> <p>Mondays 2pm - 5.30pm</p> <p>Wednesdays 2pm - 5.30pm</p> <p>Saturdays 9am - 5pm</p>	<p>HIGHWAYS ONLINE REPORTING</p> <p>If you spot a problem such as potholes, broken road signs, overgrown vegetation or obstructions, you can report these online at essexhighways.org/tell-us</p> <p>If there's an immediate risk to public safety, please ring 0345 603 7631</p>	<p>PLANNING APPLICATIONS</p> <p>There are several ways in which to keep up to date.</p> <p>Look out for MDC's yellow Site Notices on telegraph poles near to the site where the works are proposed.</p> <p>Planning Committee and Parish Council Meeting Agendas are posted on our Facebook page with more details and a link to the related documents, architect drawings etc on MDC's website.</p> <p>Current Planning Applications are posted on our website</p> <p>www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org</p>

Your Councillors and Clerk



Ian Wardrop, Chair



Mandy Mickelsen, Vice Chair



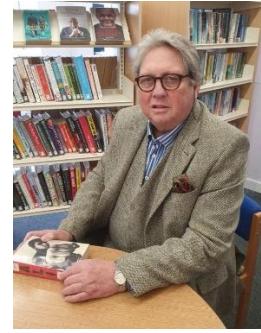
Henry Bass



Peter Bates



Pete Layley



Simon Morgan



Claudia Nappo



Jane Williams

Vacancy



Lorraine Bailey, Clerk

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

All correspondence should be addressed to the Parish Clerk.

Write to: WBPC, c/o the Village Hall, Church Road, Wickham Bishops CM8 3JZ

Call or text: 07542 190176

Email: info@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org

Website: www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org

Notice Board outside One Stop for Agendas, Minutes and other useful information

Facebook page: Wickham Bishops Parish Council