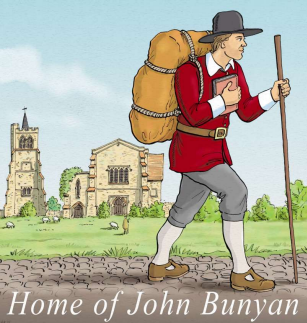
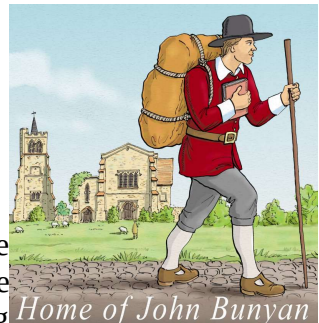




REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL 2024

The Parish Council have continued to meet regularly over the last twelve months with no meetings traditionally held in August and December. The Parish Council currently has eight serving Parish Councillors also being



supported six Borough Ward Councillor representatives. At the last AGM, Lloyd Allison was elected as Chair, and Nicola Chapman as Vice Chair.

Helen Konstantinidi resigned in early 2025, her passion, energy and dedication to the local community in Abbeyfields bought about a range of initiatives being taken forwards to benefit all Elstow residents. The Parish Council were also deeply saddened to hear of the passing of former Councillor Jackie Manners, whose commitment to promoting Elstow alongside being a real driving force for ensuring effective communications to help spread the word about just how great Elstow is, will be missed.

All eight Parish Councillors in situ offer their time voluntary, serving the local community as elected representatives who look to support Elstow in a range of different ways.

It has as always continued to be, another busy and productive time for the village on reflection of all that has been achieved with a range of different important village matters that have been dealt with. Whether it is the usual attention to detail given to planning matters looking at domestic and larger local commercial applications. The Parish Council have remained determined to stay engaged in the important public consultations surrounding key items, which have continued again to be an enormous focus at meetings.

As reported previously, the standout focus items for the Parish Council have been keeping a close eye on the Local Plan planning strategy framework document, the progression of the planned East West rail route, and the Universal Studios announcement. The Council has regularly engaged on all these items, attended meetings to ensure they receive updates first hand, as well as enabling them to share concerns and comments from the community to feed directly into those involved in these large infrastructure items.

Much of 2023 was taken with following the same robust approach in previous years when it came to again showing unwavering committent to voicing comments to any sites or proposals being allocated within the parish given the expansion of the village in recent years, most notably with the unfortunate allocation of two significant areas in the parish allocated in the Local Plan for development. EMP5 - Land at Pear Tree Farm, Elstow and HOU5 - Abbey Field, West of Elstow both within the parish, as well as HOU15 - Land South of Wixams and HOU16 - Land at East Wixams also bringing development closer to the parish border.

Remaining vigilant to these proposed developments being mindful that although site HOU5 - Abbey Field, West of Elstow was identified as the one and only site directed in the Local Plan Inspector feedback in 2023 not to be taken forwards as an allocation in the Local Plan, that with the Local Plan in a state of uncertainty flowing a government change and new national planning policies that Elstow could remain vulnerable in regards to allocated housing development and/or speculative planning applications. The local authority have been tasked with setting a revised Local Plan imminently, which the Universal Studios announcement was always pivotal on how the Local Plan next steps will be managed. The recent confirmation of the theme park coming to the local area now brings stability, in regards of local growth, however, the Parish Council will monitor these items closely as always.

In other local planning and development matters, the Parish Council continued to engage in the East West Rail Stakeholders Group, with a Council representative attending the meetings as this item is something the Parish Council continued to monitor very closely in particular with the public consultation that took place later than the expected June time period due to the government election. The Parish Council took time to consider their response to the consultation that ended in early 2025 and will continue to engage with the project as and when opportunities arise being mindful of properties in Hillesden Avenue which will be impacted by the proposals.

It has been a busy year for domestic planning applications, with the Parish Council carefully considering each application individually, with where appropriate objections being made usually with concerns such as over development or impact on street scene. Over the last year, there has again been a marked increase in planning applications in the parish looking to move boundary lines to take in open space area allocated for highways or amenity use. This remained a worry and concern to the Parish Council, who continued to reflected concerns in the objection comments made for such applications. There was also a meeting held with senior Borough Council Officers to discuss the volume of such applications and how they would be managed by the local authority, who were in full support of it not being acceptable to take allocated open space into a closed boundary for personal amenity use.

Planning enforcement is also an area that is important, with items being reported where necessary to the local authority, to ensure there is consistency with the local and national planning policies being applied. Encouragement is given for members of the public to share any concerns they may have with the Borough Council Officers who are best placed to follow up on such matters, reporting is quick, easy and anonymous.

Parish Councillors kindly also spend their time, to support local improvements, making sure Elstow's voice is heard, with this being done in a range of ways, such as representation at Bedford Borough Council led events like the Town and Parish Council Network meetings, and when opportunities arise, engaging with Bedfordshire Police like Coffee with Cop. The Parish Council have organised community events to allow residents to directly engage with the local community police team and local authority Officers, it is challenging in regards to attendance levels at such events, so the Parish Council continue to rely on sharing of information through a range of different platforms. The Parish Council website, noticeboards and sharing on social media continue to be key platforms to raise awareness and share useful information with the village.

Elstow is fortunate to have so many dedicated individuals who share their ideas on parish improvements, act as critical friends when needed, and enable democratic decisions to be made. With there also being welcomed residents attending Parish Council meetings, engaging in the Open Forum and raising items directly.

The Parish Council have continued to work hard for the benefit of the village, securing safer highways for road users has again been an item that is important to Councillors, residents and the local community. The Parish Council have continued to be pro-active to support improved highways safety across the whole parish. Also working to improve relationships further not only with the local authority as the highways authority, engaging with local residents, elected Borough Councillors support being sought, in particular working further alongside Elstow Primary School to improve highways safety for all users.

The Council have remained prudent with the precept calculations over the last few years, looking to maintain a low per household contribution, yet also being mindful of moving forwards with village improvements.

The following are just some of the recent achievements:

- Donations made to the British Legion for Remembrance Day, along with additional items purchased to mark this important occasion
- Cutting of the grass along the Wilstead Road rural footpath, which continues
- Continued funding of the Parish Council website which has enabled residents to receive news updates directly, in addition to an increased presence and use of social media to engage with residents
- Community safety camera scheme for the entire parish now fully operational
- Continued monitoring of highways speeds in the parish through the speed indicator devices , to ensure visual awareness and act as deterrents to motorists
- Investment in play area improvements as well as maintenance of the play area near Romsey Way carried out
- Continued contribution awarded to the May Festival
- Festive lighting decorations for the parish to enjoy, with continued investment for festive lighting purchased so the decorations were improved for the community.
- Ongoing maintenance of the War Memorial
- Grant monies awarded to Elstow Playing Field Hall for improvement works
- Financial contribution to John Bunyan signage improvements
- Funding of maintenance work at pillbox
- Development of community initiative to recognise individuals who make significant and selfless contributions to benefit the local community

The Parish Council have a formal application process for organisations requesting financial assistance which is available to anyone wishing to apply for help.

The Council is pleased with the continued success of the play area on the land between Romsey Way and former Abbey Middle School, close to the existing multi-court. The area continues to be well used regularly by many children which is great and thanks go to all those who over time have inspected the area regularly and worked on improving the facility. Thanks to Cllr Sean Hinson who carried out visual inspections and has been supporting the significant improvements works implemented over the last twelve months.

The Parish Council are continually striving to ensure Elstow remains a rural and historic village, reporting highway issues, and maintenance needs within the village, as and when they arise. The Council receives updates from the Police and works with them in efforts to reduce crime. Whilst previously at times it had been a frustrating process engaging with the Police in a way that is effective and that actually sees a direct local community impact, it is pleasing that local representatives are engaging and responsive with communications looking to support Elstow.

ELSTOW POOR CHARITY– there was an update on the work being done to alter the way in which gifts are made with support being given to families in the parish who have young children. For 2024 this was done by working alongside Elstow Primary School to assist with identification to award Christmas gifts of up to £400 in total to help local children and local families with gift vouchers for purchasing clothes.