

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

Annual report by Chairman of the Parish Council, 2013/14

I am pleased to present this, my second annual report on the work of your Council.

The focus during the past year has been on enhancing the facilities provided by your Council.

The Council was delighted that the refurbished play area in Kidmore End was opened by Rebecca Page, a young person from the village, and the opening speech was given by the Chairman of the District Council, Mrs Dorothy Brown, in September last year. The refurbishment has provided a first rate facility for younger residents of, and visitors, to the village, which facility was largely designed in response to feedback from younger residents. The Council is particularly proud that this quality feature of the village has been provided at no direct cost to the Council Tax payers of the Parish. The £33,000 project was funded entirely from grants from the District Council's Community Investment Fund, the County Council's Community Councillor Fund (courtesy of former County Councillor, Carol Viney) and the European Leader programme and donations from the Phillimore Charitable Trust, the Parochial Church Council and Empower, a charity originating from Springwater, Peppard Congregational church: many of the donors or grantors were present or represented at the opening ceremony.

Boosted by the success of the Kidmore End project, the Council has now embarked on a project to refurbish the play equipment at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground. This follows receipt of a safety inspection report suggesting that some of the equipment there was tired and/or life-expired. The first phase of the project, to repair some of the existing equipment and replace other items, should be completed by the end of this financial year. Again, your Council has been very lucky in securing a grant from County Councillor Kevin Bulmer's Councillor Community Budget, covering the cost of the new items of equipment. Your Council hopes to complete the exercise in the coming year.

On the subject of Parish-provided assets, your Council has adjusted its approach to the management of the Diamond Jubilee Pavilion at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground. In future, while the Council will service the loan charges on the building, and insure it, your Council expects all running and maintenance costs to be borne by the Kidmore End Playing Fields Committee, the charity which looks after the facility. This move is designed to encourage the Playing Fields Committee to secure regular day-time lettings of the premises, to generate greater income. Certainly, in the summer months, the premises, the primary function of which is as a sports pavilion, are heavily used during evening and at weekends by the Cricket Club.

The Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee will, of course, report later this evening, on the work of the Committee.

Similarly, the Allotments Manager will report later about the allotments at Cane End and Gallowstree Common, which were given for the "labouring poor" in the 19th Century Enclosure Awards, and which are managed by the Council. Your Council has made provision in its budget for 2014/15 for the installation of a water

supply to the Cane End allotments, something which I feel sure that the allotment holders will welcome.

Another feature of the Parish - it is probably not right to classify it as a "facility" - is Kidmore End pond, which is in the care of the Council. I reported last year that the County Council had a plan to remove silt from the pond, in order that its ability to act as a highway drain was less compromised. As you will all know, the County Council has yet to deliver... Very unfortunately, the excessive rainfall over the winter has led to frequent flooding of the roads near the pond. In fairness to officers of the County Council, they have arranged for the removal of water from the site, by tanker, from time-to-time, and they have had to cope with much worse flooding elsewhere in the County. You may rest assured, however, that your Council will continue to remind the County Council that a longer term solution - removal of the silt and better silt traps on the highway drains. That said, the Council has been informed that this work cannot be carried out until the pond water level is lower.

This winter local flooding has also brought traffic issues to the fore, with 2 local bridges across the Thames being closed. A summit, organised by local Members of Parliament, to discuss the issues and the building of a third bridge from Reading, took place on 3 March, in Westminster, where local councils were requested to share information on traffic data. A further meeting is being planned for early June. Our current understanding is that "our" County and District Councils are not in favour of a 3rd bridge, but we are staying abreast of any developments.

Whilst on the subject of roads, your Council is grateful to County Councillor Kevin Bulmer for using some of his Area Stewardship Fund to meet the cost of further roadside salt bins in the Parish. Your Council had made budgetary provision for 2 extra bins, but Mr Bulmer kindly paid for 4 new ones. There are salt bins now in all villages except Cane End (the A4074 road is a primary salting route) and most of the hills are covered: your Council would like to resite one of the bins at Kidmore End pond to Cottenden Hill, on Kidmore End Road, by the golf course, to complete coverage.

While it is excellent to have the bins in place, and to have a supply of salt from the County Council, it does require residents to apply the salt to the highways. We have not actually had to test the arrangements this winter, it having been so mild. However, I hope that, during times of hard weather in the future, we will all rally round. In this connection, may I remind you of the article in the last edition of the Parish newsletter about the winter plan, details of which can be found on the website, www.kepc.info. Thank you, incidentally, for offers of help and support already made.

This is probably an opportune moment to thank the Editorial Board of the Parish Newsletter, led by Dr Brian Knapp, and the webmaster, David King, for their support of the community and the Parish. There is also a team of volunteers who distribute the newsletter whom we would like to thank. There are people within our community who help and support throughout the year and we would like to thank you.

As some of you will know, there is a link from the Council's website to that of the planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council, so that you can look at planning applications submitted for premises in the Parish. The District Council seeks views from your Council on all applications relating to the Parish. There have been 41 such applications in the past year. Interestingly, despite the gathering

optimism about the economy, this is down on the figures for 2012/13 - 51 applications and 2011/12 - 46 applications. It might, of course, be due to the relaxation of the planning laws by the Government: permitted development rights - covering works not requiring planning permission - have been expanded. Having said that, there is no evidence of building works not covered by planning permissions, and, where this does rarely occur, you tend to alert parish councillors to the activity!

In broad terms, the decisions of the planning authority have reflected your Council's comments on the applications. That said, the general ethos of development control, as engendered by the Government, is these days to grant permission...

As I have said, the general field of planning has changed quite dramatically over recent years. There are no longer regional or county structure plans and local development frameworks. The focus is now on local plans, but these have to reflect the National Planning Policy Framework, whereby the Government has given further impetus to presumption for development. The District Council has adopted a Core Strategy, which has been tested and endorsed by a Government-appointed inspector. Your Council has been regularly told, from the public gallery at meetings, that the Core Strategy is no barrier to developers. It is interesting to note that a planning appeal for development in Benson was turned down because of the Core Strategy...

Nevertheless, the District Council, and the other planning authorities in Oxfordshire, have undertaken a joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), the purpose of which is to measure future housing demand in the area. Local plans will need to reflect the outcome of that assessment. It is possible that, across Oxfordshire as a whole, more new housing units - I say this because flats, of course, count - will be required in the next 15 years than are presently forecast in local plans. The District Council will need to decide where any extra units should go in South Oxfordshire. Your Council will be watching this carefully. The report of the findings of the SHMA is expected to be available at the end of this month.

It is against this background that a resident of Emmer Green has regularly spoken at meetings of the Council during the past year in connection with his desire to develop his land, in the Parish, and just over the border from Reading. The Council has told him that we will engage further with him over this if and when he submits a planning application.

I have no doubt that many of you will have read in the local media about the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan. Your Council has agreed that 2 parcels of land in this Parish - part of the site of Chiltern Edge School and some fields adjacent to the parish boundary south east of Kidmore Lane - should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan area. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to establish where housing development, required to be delivered in Sonning Common, will be sited. The exercise is being driven by a working group established by Sonning Common Parish Council. Your Council is involved in this process and attends some of the planning meetings, because of the sites included from this parish.

The whole ethos of neighbourhood planning is that local people take the decisions. Ultimately, therefore, people living within the Neighbourhood Plan area will be polled, in a referendum, on the proposals in the draft plan. The plan has to be

broadly complicit with any local plan. If a majority of those taking part in the referendum support it, the plan will be almost certainly be adopted. Development of sites not approved in the plan can be strongly resisted, thereafter. There is already an approved neighbourhood plan for Thame, and the similar plan for Woodcote was recently approved by the Government's Planning Inspectorate, for submission to a referendum.

There is a link, albeit tenuous, between the Neighbourhood Plan and the District Council's Community Governance Review. This is a review of parish boundaries and parish electoral arrangements which the District Council may do from time to time: it used to have to undertake a review every 10 years. Anyway, the District Council has started such a review, and is now consulting on some changes to boundaries. In this Parish, the District Council is intending that Chiltern Edge School should transfer to Sonning Common. Your Council can see the logic of this, but is reluctant to see the school fields in Reades Lane transferring, as this could, in the longer term, lead to the erosion of the "open country" between Sonning Common and Gallowstree Common. The consultation on this is open until 31 May 2014, so, if you have a view, please make it known to the District Council, either via the SODC website or in hard copy to CGR at the District Council's offices.

One significant development in the Parish, which your Council expects will start before the end of the financial year, will be the 6 units of affordable housing off Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common. Planning permission was granted for the development in November last year. Your Council has suggested the name "Paddick Close" for the development, in recognition of the Paddick family who had strong links to the Parish and the Parish Council going back into the 19th century. The District Council has accepted that suggestion.

These houses and flats are being built to meet some of the demand for housing demonstrated in the housing needs surveys undertaken in the Parish in 2004 and 2010. Preference for the properties will be given to residents of the Parish or people with links to Parish. If you responded to the surveys that you were in housing need, and remain in that position, please contact the District Council, to get on the Council's housing list. You must be on that list to qualify for one of the houses or flats, either to rent or on a shared-equity basis.

As you will have noted during this report, most of the local government services in the Parish are provided by the County and District Councils. I have already mentioned Kevin Bulmer, who was elected as county councillor for the Goring Division in May last year, and who have very generously supported projects in this Parish from funds at his disposal. We are delighted to welcome Mr Bulmer, and Robert Simister, one of "our" district councillors, to our meetings, when they report to us on the activities of their Councils, with particular reference to the Parish. Mr Bulmer succeeded Carol Viney as "our" county councillor, a role Mrs Viney had held since June 2001. The Council thanked her for her service to the community as county councillor.

On the subject of regular visitors, although PCSO Colin Boyes of the Thames Valley Police has not been able to attend our meetings very often, he does provide reports most months on crimes and other matters of interest. We are fortunate that there do not seem to be many crimes reported in the Parish. PCSO Boyes has been busy, however, dealing with some of the tensions arising from parking issues near Kidmore End School. This, of course, is an ongoing saga, involving your Council, the

Police and the school authorities: regular meetings take place involving council members, PCSO Boyce and the headteacher to discuss parking.

May I also thank, on behalf of the Council, the parishioners who have taken the time to come to meetings throughout the year. We very much appreciate hearing the views of those who live in the Parish and would like to hear your views at the meetings in the coming year. You can also contact the Council via its website.

During the year, Katrina Foxton of Tokers Green joined the Council. However, because she was offered a post at York University, she resigned shortly afterwards. Richard McQuillan, who had been Vice-Chairman of the Council since June 2012, retired just before Christmas. Richard had been a Member of the Council since May 2001, and a member of the Playing Fields Committee since May 2001, its Vice-Chairman from July 2001 to July 2012 and its Chairman since then. May I add your thanks, to those of the Council, for Richard's service to the community.

There are, therefore, 2 vacancies for councillors. We would welcome expressions of interest from residents - please contact the Clerk if you are interested in serving as a councillor.

Turning to matters financial, the Council's external auditors gave our accounts for 2012/13 an unconditional certificate. We have changed the presentation of the accounts to "receipts and payments", which is a much simplified format and more easily understood, in these days of expected transparency on the part of public bodies.

You will shortly receive your Council Tax bills for 2014/15. Part of that bill covers the cost of the Parish Council. The Council's budget covers all its routine expenditure and allows for some additional projects, too, like the water supply to the allotments which I mentioned earlier. I noted, with some pride and pleasure, that while the average parish/town council precept across South Oxfordshire has gone up by nearly £2 to £75.16 in 2014/15, ours remains at £52.00. I hope that you will agree that your Council's charge for 2014/15, at a £1 a week for the average household, represents good value for money.

In conclusion, may I take the opportunity to thank my fellow councillors. Without their dedication to our community, the Council would not be able to provide the services which it delivers. Their voluntary role is not restricted to the monthly meetings of the Council: all of them support the Council through its committees and sub-committees, and keep a watchful eye on what is happening in their home areas.

Sue Biggs

Chairman of the Council