

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL, 2016/17

I am pleased to submit this report on the work of the Parish Council in the past year. It is my 5th such report.

Once again, planning and transport issues have dominated your Council's business in the past twelve months.

As you will know, a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced by the Government a few years ago. The theory for this was to make the planning process simpler and quicker. One of the driving forces was to secure a faster rate of house building, especially at the affordable end of the spectrum.

Each planning authority - locally, ours is South Oxfordshire District Council - is expected to have a local plan, against which decisions are made on individual planning applications. The local plans are expected to conform to the NPPF. South Oxfordshire's present Local Plan was adopted in 2006, and was due to cover the period to 2011. South Oxfordshire is working on a new Local Plan, to cover the period to 2033. The core strategy was adopted in 2012. The District Council is now at the 4th stage of the plan making process, and is consulting on the "preferred second options" - ie where housing, retail and employment land should be located across the District.

Your Council continues to participate on your behalf in the local plan making process, but would urge you, as individuals, to take part, because this plan is of major importance to the future of the 5 settlements in the Parish.

Pending the adoption of the new Local Plan, the South Oxfordshire is considered to be "at the mercy" of developers, because the District Council cannot, it is alleged, demonstrate a sufficiently robust supply of land for development, going forward. In addition, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, completed a couple of years ago, suggested that the Local Plan should be geared to a much higher number of new housing units than presently forecast. This has been borne out by some decisions made by inspectors considering planning appeals, across the District, in the past year.

Your Council has been advised that the rural parishes are each expected to accept between 5% and 10% additional housing units in the period to 2033. In this Parish, that would equate to somewhere between 27 and 55 new homes. As you will appreciate, some of our "quota" has already been built, for example the 6 affordable homes in Gallowstree Common, the 4 new houses opposite them, 2 houses at Cane End and the 5 net new houses in Tokers Green.

With the exception of the affordable homes, all of these houses have been built on infill sites. What the Government and SODC would like is for all communities to adopt a neighbourhood development plan. This is a plan devised, and endorsed at a

referendum, by local people, which, fitting into the Local Plan, indicates where development will take place. You will know that such a plan was adopted for Sonning Common last year. The Government has inferred that such plans are immutable. The bottom line is, however, contained in the title - they must include land for development: plans which don't will not be approved to go to referenda.

Your Council has been discussing whether to embark on the drafting of a neighbourhood development plan or plans. It has so far decided not to proceed, for reasons which have been published in the Parish Newsletter and on the Council's website. However, the matter remains under review, and we will discuss it again further, later this evening, when one of the District Council's planners will address us on the subject at the Council meeting.

Against that background, the planning authority has consulted your Council on 43 planning applications in the past year. Most of the applications have been for extensions and the like, but some have, as I said earlier, been for new houses and some have been for quite significant development, albeit the latter have been just over our boundary. Those applications are, nevertheless, important to this Parish and to you, the residents.

Except for a couple of cases, the District Council has accepted the Parish Council's recommendations in relation to the applications. For instance, the District Council refused a number of applications relating to land at or opposite a house in Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common, as recommended by your Council. The applicant appealed against the refusal of one of those applications, and that was turned down, too.

The two major applications have been that for 95 houses to the west of Kennylands Road, Sonning Common and for 245 houses at Bryants Farm, Emmer Green. Neither site is in the Parish, but both adjoin it. The District Council recently turned down the application for the Kennylands Road site, not the least because the application did not accord with the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan. The District Council has yet to determine the Bryants Farm application, which this Council, along with Reading Borough Council (the application effectively relies on the infrastructure available in Reading), has recommended for refusal.

During the year, there were 3 appeals, against the refusal of planning permission, in respect of land or buildings in the Parish, to the Secretary of State. One was allowed, but the other 2 were dismissed.

I should also mention sites which landowners and others are seeking to develop, but for which no planning applications have yet been submitted. It has been your Council's practice to listen politely to these developers, but not to engage with them until there is a formal planning application. In this vein, the Council was aware during the year that the owner of some land off Gravel Hill, Emmer Green had sought pre-application advice from the planning authority, but is not aware of the outcome of any discussions. Similarly, the Council has recently become aware that a potential

developer has consulted residents of Tokers Green about the possible development, for housing, of land on the west side of Tokers Green Lane, just north of the boundary with Reading.

Incidentally, under the terms of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) scheme, the Parish Council will receive 15% of the CIL receipts for qualifying development in the Parish. As the scheme only started in April 2016, no sums have yet been received. When the funds do come in, they are to be spent on improving the infrastructure in the Parish, within the terms of the Council's statutory duties.

Much of the Parish lies in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The District Council's policies are in general opposed to development in the AONB. However, the land east of Tokers Green and south of Chalkhouse Green is outside the AONB, and the Council is seeking a review of the boundary to include the entire Parish in the AONB. Your Council is working with other parish councils who are similarly seeking to extend the AONB, for example Binfield Heath and Shiplake. As we understand it, Natural England, the agency which deals with these matters on behalf of Government, would be able to process an application for a review in 2018.

As I said earlier, the other major issue which has faced the Council relates to transport and roads.

Residents have expressed concerns about the speed of traffic in Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End during the past year. In the case of Kidmore End, residents have suggested that the speed limit be reduced to 20mph. Your Council asked the County Council, as transport/highways' authority, to look into this. The County Council responded that it had no money for such an exercise, but would carry out a review, if the Parish Council paid. The cost is expected to be the best part of £5,000. Your Council has included provision for this in the budget for 2017/18. The first stage is to survey vehicle speeds, to see whether a lower speed limit would be enforceable. This survey has been carried out, and your Council expects to hear the results at its meeting later this evening. I anticipate that the scheme will proceed to statutory public consultation.

In the case of Gallowstree Common, the perception is that vehicles drive through Horsepond Road well in excess of the present 30mph speed limit. At this stage, your Council is in contact with the Police about more enforcement activity: there has been no sighting of the speed cameras in Gallowstree Common for some years.

Another significant issue in the Parish over the past 12 months has been the condition of the highway verges. The County Council, which is responsible for the condition of the verges, has been reducing its spending on this work over recent years. This has been reflected in the height of the grass, a particular poor spot being the Horsepond Road/Wyfold Lane/Wood Lane junction at Gallowstree Common.

The County Council has been keen to offload responsibility for the verges to parish councils, arguing that the parishes would be better placed to secure the conditions which local residents would like. Your Council decided last year that it would be interested to take the work on. However, it has taken the best part of a year to get clarity from the County Council about what is required and the grant which might be forthcoming from that Council. Your Council has finally entered into an agreement with the County Council for the Parish Council to arrange for the verge cutting with effect from the coming season. We are presently seeking tenders for 2 cuts of all the verges in the Parish during 2018, except along the A4074 road, as the County Council will retain responsibility for those.

I sincerely hope that, under our management, the verges, especially those at junctions, will give you no cause for concern this summer.

Your Council often reminds the County Council about defects to the highway, for example potholes in the carriageway or damaged signs. What I would urge is that you report defects to the County Council when you spot them: although the County Council carries out periodic inspections, in these days of municipal frugality we cannot expect the inspections to be frequent! I suggest you use the [FixMyStreet link on the County Council's website \(www.oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk).

Your Council is keen to ensure that those parts of the infrastructure of the Parish it owns are kept in good order. Principal among these assets are the Recreation Ground at Gallowstree Common and the Play Area at Kidmore End. The Council has entered into an agreement with the Kidmore End Playing Fields Committee to manage the Recreation Ground, except for the children's play area there, but, of course, including the Diamond Jubilee Pavilion. The Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee will report to you later this evening. It is pleasing, however, that the Committee is virtually self-sufficient, receiving a grant of just £1,000 from the Council to run the facilities.

We are presently engaged in a project to replace a major item of equipment at the Gallowstree Common play area, and improve the safety surfaces at both sites. This is an expensive project, and it has taken the Council a year to amass the necessary funds. Your Council has placed an order with the supplier, Playdale, and we have recruited local tradesmen to undertake some of the ancillary works, like removal of the old equipment, providing topsoil and laying turf. The installation is scheduled to take place at the end of May.

On the subject of sport and exercise, the District Council has provided some sessions under the Go Active Gold scheme, designed to provide exercise for the over 60s. Tai Chi, senior circuits and Nordic walking are being provided at the Diamond Jubilee Pavilion in Gallowstree Common regularly over the next couple of months. These classes could be continued, on a self-funding basis, if there is demand.

Your Council looks after the ponds at Kidmore End and Tokers Green and the visible wells at Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End. We have recently arranged some major work to the golden weeping willow tree at the Kidmore End pond, and will coppice the withies in the usual way. Residents are presently undertaking tidying and cleaning work at the Tokers Green pond, under the aegis of the Council. Local residents very kindly repaired the winding wheel of the Kidmore End well, when it was damaged during the year.

As you may have read in the Parish Newsletter, your Council is looking into the repair of the war memorial, which has a slight lean. The Council is permitted by the law to pay for repairs, even if it does not own the memorial. The Council is working with the Parochial Church Council and the Royal British Legion on this issue.

Finally, in respect of tangible assets, the Council owns the redundant telephone kiosks at Chalkhouse Green and Kidmore End, and has applied to take over the kiosk at Cane End when BT decommission it - only 3 calls were made from that box in the year ended October 2016. The kiosk at Chalkhouse Green was refurbished by my councillor colleagues Hugh Thresher and Trevor Perchard during the year, and the Council has decided that it should be used for the provision of information about local history. The Council wants to re-orientate the Kidmore End kiosk, and move it slightly. It is to be used, after that, for the provision of local information.

As to the more general infrastructure, this appears to be dwindling. There is no longer a mobile library service, and the County Council decided to curtail all bus subsidies during the past year. As a result the M1 bus service, which connected Gallowstree Common, Kidmore End and Chalkhouse Green with Reading, was axed. At the instigation of your Council, FISH in Sonning Common provide a periodic minibus service by way of replacement. Fortunately, the interval X39/X40 services continue to run though Cane End, connecting that settlement with Reading and Oxford. That said, the restaurant at Cane End appears to be moribund.

We are pleased with the faster Broadband that is gradually being rolled out in the Parish. It reached Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End during the last year, and BT Openreach have plans to extend it to Cane End, Chalkhouse Green and Tokers Green during the next 12 months. Your Council has a contingency sum in its budget, if, for instance, it is necessary to make special arrangements for more remote dwellings.

Some of you will be aware of the possible changes to the structure of local government in the County. Your Council has observed that, until fairly recently, there were 2 opposing plans - the County Council's, for one unitary council covering Oxfordshire, and that of the Oxford City Council and the districts, for a number of unitary councils. I think it fair to say that your Council has avoided coming out in favour of either of those earlier solutions, and has been critical of the opposing sides for their spending with expensive consultants to prove their cases. It now seems that the County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council agree on a unitary solution - ie one council, delivering all local government services, supported by a range of

geographically based area boards. That said, the City Council and 2 of the other district councils do not agree with this, so the matter will inevitably drag on. Any changes will fall to be made by the Government, in any event.

All local government services, and the Police, are paid for by the Council Tax. This is a bill which, unfortunately, despite declining services, goes up each year. Your Council raises its funds via the Council Tax, although what you pay for its services is quite small compared to the cost of the County and District Councils. We like to feel that we offer you value for money - all the Parish Council's services were delivered to you for an average payment of £53 during 2016/17 - a shade over £1 per house a week. This, for instance, allowed us to make a grant of £1,000 to the First Responders last year, so that they could acquire their new vehicle.

As you will have seen from the Council Tax bills you have recently received, we have increased the precept for 2017/18, and the average household will pay £54 this year. This is much lower than the average bill from parish and town councils across the District, which is nearly £84 for the year.

In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to thank, on your behalf, my fellow councillors. They give their time, for the benefit of our communities. There are 10 of us: there should be 12. Your Council has rarely had its full complement of councillors during the past 6 years. As a result, we have asked the District Council officially to reduce the number of councillors to 10. Unfortunately, there are some bureaucratic processes to go through, but I expect, when elections are next held in 2019, you will be voting for 10 councillors rather than 12.

No councillors resigned or retired during the year, but we were pleased to co-opt Ana O'Reilly from Kidmore End as a councillor. Ana is already busy revamping the Council's website, making it more "mobile friendly". Which reminds me that I should thank David King, the present webmaster, on your and the Council's behalf, for his support of our web presence over many years. Thanks also to the Parish Newsletter editorial team and those who deliver the Newsletter around the Parish - all your support is greatly appreciated.

Sue Biggs
Chairman of Kidmore End Parish Council
17 April 2017