

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL, 2021/22

I am delighted to be presenting my third report as Chairman of the Parish Council.

Quite clearly, Covid-19 has been a serious factor impacting on life since April 2021, when the last parish meeting was held. We have, during those 12 months, seen infection rates go up and down and been subject to a number of variants of the virus. Restrictions seem to have been gradually relaxed, to the point, now, when, in theory there are none... Yet, in the Borough of Reading, for instance, infection rates were, last week, described as the highest ever!

One of the blessings from the pandemic has been the burgeoning community spirit which the common enemy - the virus - has engendered. I paid tribute in my report last year to all those residents who had supported the communities in the Parish in so many ways since March 2020. Their actions have continued, for instance, in the development of a welcome to Ukrainian refugees into our communities. So I hope you will join me in thanking them again. But it is clear to me that the community cohesion in the 5 villages - Cane End, Chalkhouse Green, Gallowstree Common, Kidmore End and Tokers Green - has been strengthened over the past 2 years: long may it continue and thrive.

Coping with the pandemic has been an interesting exercise for your Council. The Government allowed local authorities to meet virtually during 2020. However, that was only temporary legislation, which expired in early May 2021. The law otherwise requires the Council to meet in person, and in public. So, having embraced Zoom in 2020, we had to go back to in-person meetings, once these were possible in the light of the ruling restrictions. As a result, we delegated all our powers to the Clerk in April, and did not meet in May. Your Council has met, since June 2021, in the Diamond Jubilee Pavilion at Gallowstree Common, when those premises have been available. However, I have to say that we are sailing close to the wind there, too, because the legislation does not allow your Council to meet on licensed premises (the Pavilion is licensed), unless there are no suitable premises available free or at reasonable cost. Certainly, we felt that the Parish Room, the Council's home since the 1890s, was not large enough to cope with social distancing and the like...

I stand by my comment last year, that the pandemic has not really changed the Council's priorities, or, indeed, those of residents. The top priority remains traffic management in general, and vehicle speeds in particular. Here I need to remind you that the statutory authority for roads and traffic management is the County Council: your Council itself has no powers in this arena. Any expenditure the Parish Council incurs on traffic management is limited to a finite sum.

Following securing the reduction of the speed limit in Kidmore End to 20mph, a few years ago, your Council has now achieved a similar reduction in Tokers Green. The reduction had been sought by residents of that settlement. The traffic survey, paid for by the Parish Council, demonstrated that the limit could be reduced, without the introduction of other traffic management issues. The County Council consulted on the proposal, and a huge majority of respondents supported the reduction in the limit. The limit finally went live last month. The County Council kindly subsidized the cost of making order and installing the signs, so the cost to the Parish Council was limited to £2,348, excluding VAT.

Just as it did about 25 years ago, when it introduced 30mph limits in villages, the County Council has decided to foster 20mph speed limits in rural settlements where the residents want it. We are still seeing the trials of this presently - the first in the south of the County was in Cuxham - and, indeed, the Tokers Green reduction was under way as a project before the County Council decision. It remains to be seen how the new policy pans out in due course.

I mentioned vehicle speed surveys earlier. Aside from that in Tokers Green, the Council commissioned surveys in Gallowstree Common and Cane End: there have been 2 such surveys in Horsepond Road. The

results did not match the perception of residents: in both cases, the vast majority of vehicles passed through at speeds near the present limits - 30mph in Horsepond Road, and 40 mph in Reading Road, Cane End. It is acknowledged that these are averages, and that there are undoubtedly incidents involving speeds well in excess of the limits. This is borne out by Speedwatch activities in Gallowstree Common, led by my Vice-Chairman, Trevor Perchard. The vehicle speed indicator apparatus, borrowed from the Police, has shown a number of vehicles to have passed through Gallowstree Common at speeds in excess of 40mph.

As I have said, setting limits is a matter for the County Council. Enforcement is a Police function. Sadly, we see limited, if any, enforcement activity in the Parish ...

Nevertheless, your Council's Transport Committee will continue to pursue these issues, but there does not seem to be an obvious solution which this Council can deliver. That said, my colleagues and I would welcome your views on ways forward which can be explored with the relevant authorities. There is an item on the agenda later this evening for this very purpose.

The condition of our roads is also a perennial issue. A resident, Chris Brook of Kidmore End, is a "Superuser" in respect of pot holes and other road defects. She reports those that meet the criteria for intervention direct to the County Council, who will arrange for the repair without sending a member of staff out to inspect them first. This has led to quicker repairs.

Nevertheless, I would urge residents to report the defects they see to the County Council direct, via the FixMyStreet link on the County Council's website - www.oxfordshire.gov.uk. This is for 2 reasons. The first is that the earlier the defect is reported, the sooner it is likely to be rectified. The second is that the highway authority has no legal defence, when a claim is submitted, if a defect has been previously reported to it but has not been repaired.

You will know that your Council took on maintenance of the highway verges in the Parish, with the exception of the A4074 road through Cane End, a few years ago, the work being undertaken by Ian Kendrick Ltd, a locally-based contractor. If you have concerns about the verges, please let this Council know, either via the website - www.kepc.info, to the Clerk (at clerk@kepc.info or 0118 947 3130) or any councillor (our details are on the website).

I must point out, however, that your Council does not have any duties in respect of roadside hedges. These are the responsibility of the owner or occupier of the land on which they grow, and I am grateful to those people who have cut back their hedges over the past winter. If hedges start to impede use of the road, please report them to the County Council using FixMyStreet, as mentioned above.

The footpaths and bridleways in the Parish are in good order, and firm underfoot - even restricted byway 27, from Chalkhouse Green to Rosehill, which is notorious - despite having been very muddy in parts over the winter. By paths, I mean those shown on the definitive map maintained by the County Council: there are a number of paths where the public may not have any rights to walk or ride ... While your Council has no statutory responsibility for the public rights of way, there is a Council sub-committee which keeps the paths under review. We welcome improvements to the network, and are grateful to the Chiltern Society for installing, with consent of the owners, kissing gates on footpath 10, east of Chalkhouse Green Road, in place of stiles.

In passing, while talking of transport matters, there has been no further discussion, to your Council's knowledge, of the 3rd Thames Bridge. I am sure, however, that it will resurface again - it has been a subject that recurs periodically for the last 80 years!

In some respects, planning has dropped down the pecking order of local concerns during the pandemic. Local decisions about individual applications are taken against national policy - the National Planning Policy Framework - and local policy - the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

As you know was the current Local Plan was adopted by the District Council in 2020. The District Council is already working on the next iteration of the Plan, this time jointly with the Vale of White Horse District Council. No doubt consultation on that plan will get underway soon.

You will all know about the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Sue Biggs will report separately on the draft plan and the process, shortly this evening. Your Council approved the draft Plan in July last year, at a meeting arranged specially for that purpose. An Examiner is now looking at the draft Plan, and responses made to consultation thereon. He has twice asked for clarification on certain items, which the Council has provided. We await his decision. Assuming the Examiner approves the Plan, it will then be put to a referendum of all electors in the Parish.

All that sets the scene for the Council's views on planning applications relating to the Parish. Your Council was invited to comment on 55 applications in the year ending 31 March 2022. This represented an increase of about a third compared to the number reported in 2020/21. With 12 exceptions, the applications have been for the usual fare of house extensions, new outbuildings or replacement dwellings. Notable exceptions were

An additional dwelling at Kano, Wood Lane, Kidmore End - outline application and subsequent substantive application;

Barn for storing hay at Bishopswood Farm, Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common;

Demolish part of existing dwelling and garage, and erect new dwelling at Oldfield House, Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common;

Replacement halfway hut with proposed family golf centre building, Kidmore End Road, Chalkhouse Green;

Change of use and extension of former public house to provide veterinary surgery, demolition of outbuilding and erection of 2 houses at the Reformation public house, Gallowstree Common;

Extension of cricket practice nets at Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground;

Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 2 new dwellings at Holmsdale, Tokers Green Lane, Tokers Green;

New 4-bedroomed house at Oldfield House, Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common;

Erection of 4 detached dwellings on land at Coopers Pightle, Kidmore End.

The responses of the Council to the consultation on these applications are recorded in the Minutes of meetings.

In terms of the applications, for the most part, the District Council, the planning authority, acknowledges our comments on the applications, and reacts accordingly. In some cases, however, there are instances where your Council has recommended refusal but the District Council has granted permission, eg the outline application for an additional house at Kano and the redevelopment of the Reformation.

As to planning appeals, 2 relating to the Parish were determined in the year to 31 March 2022.

Following a public enquiry, the appeal against the enforcement notices issued by the District Council, requiring cessation of the use of the Copse, Mill Lane, Kidmore End for weddings etc, was dismissed, the inspector giving the appellants 6 months to terminate the unlawful uses. Another inspector allowed the appeal for an extension to Felix Lodge, Wood Lane, Kidmore End, an application which had been refused by the District Council.

I have mentioned the Reading Golf Club in my last 2 reports. You will know that the golf course straddles the boundary between Reading and the Parish. The Golf Club, and its partners, have submitted 3 applications to Reading Borough Council for the development of that part of the course in Reading with c250 houses. Although not approached by the Borough Council, your Council has submitted strong objections to all 3 applications. The applicants withdrew the first application, and the Borough Council refused the second application, during last year. However, perhaps unexpectedly, the Borough Council

approved the third application, at a meeting on 2 March. Your Council has supported a suggestion that the Secretary of State for Leveling Up, Housing and Communities - Michael Gove - call-in the application. There is no news yet on this, but the omens are not good.

The 2nd application made reference to that part of the golf course in the Parish. The Council is still not aware of any contact between the applicants and the District Council: certainly, there has been no contact whatsoever with this Council, a continuing sad indictment of the Golf Club and its partners.

I mentioned last year an application to the District Council by the owner to convert the 2 workshops at the Piggery, Gravel Hill, Emmer Green into 6 dwellings. He was seeking to do this without planning permission, as the rules made by Government as to permitted development were changed in 2020, to make such conversions easier to achieve. As it happens, the applicant withdrew that particular application, but he has now submitted another one, for conversion of the workshops into 2 dwellings. Your Council argues that the proposal does not meet the requirements for permitted development, and that a full planning application should be submitted. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the site already has planning permission for one dwelling. There have been similar applications for the conversion of farm buildings at Chambers Copse, Chalkhouse Green, just off Kidmore End Road at the bottom of Cottenden Hill.

These 2 sites are in that part of the Parish outside the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is the Council's ambition to secure the inclusion of the whole of the Parish in the AONB, as this, in theory, offers greater resistance to unwanted development. Following the publication of the Glover Report about national parks and AONBs, there is a consultation by Government about aspects of AONBs, and your Council hopes that this might provide some impetus to a boundary review. We are working with neighbouring parish councils about this.

Trees form an important aspect of the Chiltern dip slope scenery, and the District Council has made a few tree preservation orders in the Parish in recent year. While these protect the trees in question, it is worth recognizing that removing trees from gardens is not unlawful. So, if you see trees being felled, or gardens cleared, it is important to alert the District Council's Tree Officer immediately, as the work could in some instances be stopped.

Turning to the other infrastructure in the Parish, the Council owns the Recreation Ground at Gallowstree Common and the Play Area at Kidmore End. The Recreation Ground is managed, on the Council's behalf, by the Kidmore End Playing Fields Committee, a registered charity. The Chairman of the Committee, Iain Pearson, will report to you later in this meeting. The Council, however, directly manages the children's play area at that location, and is pleased that local residents have undertaken to repair the play railway engine soon.

The Council and the Playing Fields Committee are concerned about how to manage the Recreation Ground and Pavilion sustainably, going forward.

As a result of the investment programme of recent years, the play areas are generally in good shape. The play areas are professionally inspected annually, and the inspectors invariably make some recommendations about minor repairs. However, because of the increased use over recent years, some more major repairs have been required, at significant cost. In this vein, your Council has let the contract for the repair of the cradle swing at Kidmore End and expects the completion of the work imminently.

The Council bought the strip of woodland between the Recreation Ground and New Copse last year. A survey has been undertaken on the trees on the strip, and I expect the Council to make plans soon to implement the recommendations in the report.

Your Council also owns the wells at Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End, the ponds at Kidmore End

and Tokers Green, and the former telephone kiosks at Cane End, Chalkhouse Green and Kidmore End. Some repair works were undertaken at the Gallowstree Common well this year, which had revealed that more serious works will need to be scheduled in the medium term. Both well head structures are listed buildings, so the Council has the duty to maintain them in good order. Works have been undertaken at the ponds, largely by volunteers at Tokers Green, to keep the areas tidy. Bulbs have been planted at Tokers Green, and a bench installed, together with a marker which, it is hoped, will reduce the erosion of the green by vehicles.

Mr & Mrs Alistair McAslan kindly repaired and repainted the former telephone kiosk at Cane End, which, it is planned, will house a defibrillator. There is an ongoing debate about the future of the Chalkhouse Green kiosk. It was intended to move it so that visitors did not have to wade through puddle in the road, but others suggest that its present position is a good directional aid for their visitors!

The Council manages the allotments in the Parish, at Cane End and Gallowstree Common, provided in the 19th century Enclosure Awards. Tony Bowley, who took over as Allotments' Manager last year, will report on the allotments later.

Residents of Gallowstree Common are keen to improve the look of the area of land south east of the junction of Wood Lane and Horsepond Road. This is not owned by your Council. The owners are the County Council who have agreed to volunteers removing the brambles. We will then need to approach the County about any "improvement" scheme. It will, nevertheless, be great to be able to see the Charles Paddick memorial seat again, when the brambles are removed!

As I mentioned last year, the Council will have extra funds to help improve the infrastructure in the Parish as the years go by, as it receives 15% of the Community Infrastructure Levy raised by the District Council from new houses built in the Parish. That percentage will rise to 25% when the NDP is adopted. £48,928 is presently due to the Council from this source, although it is being held for the Council by the District Council for the time being.

The Council cannot use the money to reduce the Council Tax - it has to be spent on improvements to the infrastructure of the Parish, or nearby. I told you last year that we had reviewed the list of some 28 projects identified by Members and you and had selected 5. We have now ruled 2 of these out, and there is a further review in hand on a third. That leaves 2 schemes

the provision of bus shelter(s) at Cane End;
improving the driveway at Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground.

That said, the Council decided, at its last meeting to go through a scheme selection process again. This is being undertaken by Jeffrey Almond, Jim Ducker and Andrew Harland. Please let them know of any further schemes that occur to you.

Aside from the CIL, all of your Council's activities are funded from the Council Tax, collected by the District Council. The Parish Council's element of the Tax is £60.01 this year for an average (Band D) dwelling - just over £1.15 per week. This is an increase of 1.73% over 2021/22, although the precept (the figure requested of the District Council) went up by 1.96%. Your Council's element of the Tax is just over half of the average figure raised by parish and town councils in South Oxfordshire, which is £104.06 this year. I hope you will agree with me that this represents excellent value for money.

I recognize, of course, that little of what I have written above will be new to you, because of the excellent communication links we have in the Parish. Although I have the honour to be the Editor of the Parish Newsletter, it is only possible to publish it with the support of Sue Remenyi, and distribute it to all households (except those in Cane End, who, for road safety reasons, rely on the on-line version) with the support of volunteers. Similarly the Council's website - kepc.info - has always been run by volunteers. Ana O'Reilly retired from the role of Webmaster in December, after many years, and Tony

Bowley has taken over that mantle. You will have seen the survey about the website - I hope you will take the time to complete it, as your feedback is vital. And finally, although nothing to do with the Council, there is a network of social media groups, many of which sprang up during the pandemic, and have been maintained by yet more volunteers.

The past year has seen a number of changes to personnel at the Council, to the extent that only 3 councillors elected in May 2019 remain in office. John Swift and Alastair McAslan resigned in June and Adrian Whyles in October last year. John had been a councillor since 2008, and was an influential figure at our meetings.

Sadly, Sarah Hall, who stood down as a councilor in April 2021, passed away on 10 May last year. The crowd that turned out for her funeral at St John the Baptist was testament to the esteem with which she was held in the Parish.

We have recruited 3 new Members in the same period - Jeffrey Almond from Chalkhouse Green, Sarah Bew from Cane End and Tony Bowley from Gallowstree Common. There are, therefore, councilors resident in every village in the Parish, for the first time for many years. There is one vacancy for councillor remaining to be filled. Would you like to help your communities by becoming a councillor? If so, look out for the notice of vacancy on the Council's website and noticeboards. There will, in any event, be an election next year for all 10 councillors.

I should like to thank my fellow councilors for their unstinting support for you and the 5 communities in the Parish over the past 12 months. They are all volunteers, receiving no payments whatsoever, unlike their counterparts at the County and District Councils. They are vital to help sustain the buoyant communities in the Parish.

May I also thank, on your behalf, our County and District counterparts, Kevin Bulmer, the county councilor, and Peter Dragonetti, the district councillor. Peter is a huge supporter of our council, and I appreciate his attendance at meetings, and the support that he gives to us at district level. I would like to finish this report by extending my gratitude and thanks to Mr Penfold. He has been a huge support to me, and I appreciate his words of wisdom, professionalism and patience, so thank you.

Caroline Aldridge
Chairman of the Parish Council
April 2022