

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

18 MARCH 2009

It is my privilege to present the annual report of the work of the Parish Council for the past year. This is the 13th time that I have had the honour to present the report. My fellow members of the Parish Council have been so kind as to re-elect me as their Chairman on, perhaps, now too many occasions...

It is always a poignant occasion when a Member of the Council dies in office. The Council was saddened, therefore, earlier this year, when Professor Trevor Morris, who had served as a councillor since March 2005, passed away. Apart from his enthusiasm for the work of the Council, and his involvement in the local community, Professor Morris was very much a stalwart of the Editorial Board of the Parish Newsletter. During his time on the Board, the Newsletter had grown in volume, and Professor Morris had just embarked on the writing of reports about Council meetings to go on the Council's website.

This a good moment to thank the Editorial Board for their excellent works on the Newsletter, which is delivered to every household in the Parish, 4 times a year. Your Council and, I believe, you, are indebted to Sue Rowland, Derek Brown and Andy Miros for their endeavours with the Newsletter. Dr Brian Knapp has recently joined them. I should also here pay tribute to David King who very kindly looks after the Council's website, www.kepc.info. He has been instrumental in expanding the content of the site during the past year.

Returning to membership of your Council, Malcolm Naish and Claire Toms left the Council during the year. You did not call for an election to fill either vacancy, so your Council co-opted John Swift of Chalkhouse Green and Brian Knapp of Kidmore End to succeed them.

Certainly, there is plenty to keep your councillors busy. Possibly the highest profile issue is the replacement of the Pavilion at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground. The Council has established 2 project groups to look after aspects of this exercise - one to look after the design and build, led by my Vice-Chairman, Roddy Young, and the other, led by John Sheldon of the Kidmore End Cricket Club, to raise the funds to deliver the new premises.

Mr Young, in his guise as Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee, will be able to tell you later how much money has already been accumulated, mostly from generous donations by local residents or fund raising exercises, like the log splitting competition earlier this month. Much more needs to be raised, however. On the design side, your Council is almost in a position to go out to tender, as the specification, built around the drawings which you all had an opportunity to see a couple of years ago, is virtually complete.

Mr Young will, of course, report to you later on the work of the Playing Fields Committee, the registered charity which looks after the Recreation Ground at Gallowstree Common and the Kidmore End Play Area, both assets owned by the Council.

Other properties owned or managed by the Council are the allotments at Gallowstree Common (and at Cane End), the ponds at Kidmore End and Tokers Green and the wells at Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End. Sue Rowland, the Manager, will report later on the allotments. The

Council monitors regularly the other assets I have mentioned, and feels that they are all presently in good order. Given the recent highway flooding in Kidmore End, after, it must be said, exceptional rainfall, we will probably need to look at Kidmore End pond, or more pertinently, the highway silt traps, leading into the pond.

It is now getting on for 10 years since your Council surveyed the populace in connection with the Parish Appraisal. That exercise confirmed what many people had suggested - that the subject which mattered most then to residents of the Parish was traffic volumes and traffic speeds, followed by a desire to resist development.

Since the Parish Appraisal, we have seen the introduction of 30mph speed limits in the villages (except Cane End) and various other attempts to moderate driver behaviour, for instance the "gates" at each end of Kidmore End and the vehicle activated speed indicator at Gallowstree Common. Traffic related issues still seem to be of concern, for example vehicles and parking associated with the very successful primary school and the equally popular pre school. Your Council fears that, certainly as far as the School is concerned, many of those issues will only be alleviated when some form of communal transport is available to pupils coming from Caversham. Your Council has been in contact with the relevant Cabinet Member of Oxfordshire County Council about this, and took some hope from his reply that there might be movement on that front.

The accident record of the A4074 road through Cane End has equally exercised your Council. In this case, the Council approached the County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Implementation, Councillor Ian Hudspeth. His reply again gave some room for hope, in that he hinted that the County Council was considering a reduced speed limit on the road through Cane End. However, nothing further has yet materialised in that respect, and, very sadly, your Council fears that this is endemic of the County Council's apparent reluctance to spend any money south of Wallingford. You may, for instance, recall that the A4074 was closed for 2 whole weekends during 2008, to facilitate improvements through Greendene Bottom. Most people find it hard to identify those improvements...

On the traffic front, what may or may not happen in Reading is of significant interest to residents of the Parish. Last year, Reading Borough Council established an independent Transport commission. Aside from recommending that the proposal for a one-way system on the inner distribution road should be abandoned, the Commission pointed out that problems in Reading could only be alleviated by the neighbouring highway authorities - West Berkshire, Wokingham and Oxfordshire - working with Reading. Reading Borough Council has indicated that it wishes to work with those 3 other councils to submit a bid to Government for funding from the Transport Innovation Fund, to cover what it describes as the Reading Travel-to-Work Area.

There is widespread expectation that the bid may encompass projects like an additional bridge over the River Thames and park and ride schemes on roads leading into Reading from the north. Such projects could have a significant environmental impact, and your Council is committed to keep a watching brief on what is happening. To that end, meetings of representatives of parishes in southern South Oxfordshire have been arranged. John Swift represents your Council at these meetings. The relevant Lead Councillor from Reading is attending the next such meeting, tomorrow, and so we may learn more of what is proposed then.

As I mentioned earlier, in 2000 residents were not supportive of further development in the Parish, and, indeed, there have been no significant developments in the intervening years. However, that does not mean that the Parish is a planning backwater. Your Council was consulted on some 51 planning applications over the past year. This is a lower figure than I reported last year - 67 - which was itself close to the highest figure ever, of 70. Although there were very few applications in December and January, the numbers are picking up again, and that despite the relaxation of the planning rules, which means that, say, some house extensions do not require planning permission in some parts of the Parish.

There have been few occasions when the decision of the planning authority, South Oxfordshire District Council, differed from that of your Council, although, inevitably there are one or two. In most instances these are because the District Council may only take planning considerations into account, a stricture that sometimes your Council does not feel it has to follow.

Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State have, in the past 2 years, determined 2 appeals against the refusal of planning permission by the District Council. The appeal for a pair of semidetached bungalows behind Felix Lodge, Wood Lane, Kidmore End was dismissed, while that for replacement garaging and ancillary accommodation at Lavender Cottage, Reading Road, Cane End was allowed.

Your Council was relieved, in the main, with the outcome of the Examination in Public (EiP) of the South East Plan. The inspectors proposed no changes to the Plan relevant to the parish: it remains outside any designated growth areas, and housing growth in southern South Oxfordshire is generally likely to be limited. Of course, the EiP is not the last stage in this exercise - the final decision lies with the Secretary of State.

In a similar vein, the District Council is presently formulating its Local Development Framework, to sit under the South East Plan. The District Council is about to consult on the core strategy, and your Council will have to give this serious consideration: all of you should take the opportunity to respond to the consultation, too. There are a number of scares circulating in the area about sites which will be developed. I think it fair to say that such concerns are largely premature, because the District Council will not consider individual sites until it has the core strategy approved.

Fear of crime did not feature in the Parish Appraisal, all those years ago. It is, however, high in the public psyche. Your Council is, therefore, interested in recorded crime and policing. There is no evidence that the Parish is a hot bed of criminal activity. That said, everyone who is a victim of crime will be traumatised in some degree by it. Comparing 2007/8 to 2006/7 - we do not yet have the 2008/9 figures - recorded crime fell by 18%. 39 crimes were recorded - less than 1 per week.

A Police Community Support Officers from Sonning Common attended one of your Council's meetings to report the role and activities of the Henley Rural Policing Team. In addition, the parish council representative on the Police Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG), Jane Bowen from Mapledurham, attended one of the Council's meetings to explain what the NAG was about. I think it fair to say that both the Police and the NAG have higher priorities than Kidmore End, based on criminal activity.

An imminent major change to the local services will coincide with the award by the District Council of a new contract for waste collection. From June this year this will entail

- Weekly separate food waste collections in kerbside bins
- Fortnightly residual waste collections in wheeled bins
- At least fortnightly collections for dry recyclables (including glass)
- Continuation of the subscription collection of garden waste in wheeled bins.

The new colour coded bins will be delivered later this month or early next month.

Many of you will know that the cemetery in Kidmore End is owned and managed by the District Council. The District Council has acknowledged that it has a role in the maintenance of the access road, Coopers Pightle, although it intends to remind other frontages to that road of their maintenance obligations, too. Your Council has decided, in the absence of any other body or authority taking responsibility for it, to keep the path between Tokers Green Lane and the cemetery free of obstructions.

There are a number of other matters over which your Council keeps a watching brief, on your behalf, for instance:

- the footpaths and bridleways in the Parish, which, in the main, are kept in good order;
- the proposals for the future delivery of health services at the Townlands Hospital site, in Henley;
- the strategies of the health Primary Care Trust.

Before concluding with largely “domestic” issues, I should thank the County Councillor for the Sonning Common Division, Carol Viney, and one of the District Councillors for the Shiplake Ward, Robert Peasgood, for regularly attending the Council’s meetings. Despite the relative ease with which information can be accessed today, it is interesting and helpful to hear from them on what is happening in County Hall and at Crowmarsh, and their take on the impact locally of County and District Council action. Incidentally, the other District Councillor for the Shiplake Ward, Malcolm Leonard, is presently Vice-Chairman of South Oxfordshire District Council, and should be elected as Chairman in May. Mrs Viney faces the ballot box in June, when the County Council elections will be held.

You will already have received your Council Tax bills for 2009/10, and will probably have noticed that the Parish Council element of your bill has increased significantly. Your Council fixed its budget for the coming year at its meeting in December. Aside from the routine expenditure, which does not vary much from year to year, except in respect of inflation, the Council recognised that it had to face some significant financial outlay imminently. The Council will need to accumulate significant funds to proceed with the project to replace the Pavilion. However, apart from that, the play equipment at the Kidmore End Play Area, for instance, requires revitalising, while that at Gallowstree Common will need attention in the not too distant future.

Against that background, your Council decided to add provision of £20,000 for capital projects to its budget for next year. Its precept will, therefore, be £29,000 in 2009/10, which means that the [national] average household - in Band D - will pay c£44 for your Council in 2009/10, compared to £20 this year. This is undoubtedly a very significant increase, in percentage terms, and was not a decision which your Council took lightly. However, the Council notes that the cost to you is still less than a £1 per week, and is still appreciably below the average

parish council Council Tax bill for South Oxfordshire in the current year - £63. Your Council considers this to represent excellent value for money.

It only remains for me to thank my fellow parish councillors for all they do for the communities in the 5 villages which make up the Parish. They give of their time freely, and receive no financial recompense whatsoever, except when they travel beyond the confines of the Parish on council business. I feel sure that you will join with me in thanking them for their unselfish support of your community.

Finally as always, my extreme thanks must go to our good Clerk Roger Penfold, for his services to us, by keeping us on the straight and narrow, advising us on very many or most matters before we take any collective decisions. He did mention the other day that he has given us 35.5 years of unbroken service - so again thank you Roger.

Giles Martin
Chairman of the Parish Council