

## **PARISH OF KIDMORE END**

### **ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

**24 MARCH 2010**

I have now lost count of the number of times that it has been my privilege to report to you on the work of the Parish Council in the past year: it is certainly many more times than I had ever expected!

I should, of course, pay tribute to my fellow members of the Council, who re-elected me as Chairman last year, and who invest so much of their time in the support of the 5 communities that make up this Parish. It is not only their attendance at 11 meetings each year, but their significant involvement in a variety of projects which have to be progressed between meetings. Unlike your county and district councillors, they receive no financial recompense for what they do on your behalf.

As has been the case for every year I have been Chairman, what I am about to report will come as no surprise to you, because so much of it has already been aired in the Parish Newsletter. This continues to go from strength to strength, although the Council appreciates that a quarterly publication does not necessarily meet the requirements for instant news in this electronic age! Nevertheless, the Council, and I, remain of the view that Newsletter provides an important source of information to you all. I am sure that you will join with me, and the Council, in thanking Brian Knapp, Sue Rowland, Derek Brown and Andy Miros for acting as the Editorial Board.

Like many parish and town councils, your Council moved into the digital age some years ago. The agenda for its meetings, and the minutes thereof, and, of course, the Parish Newsletter, are all available on [www.kepc.info](http://www.kepc.info). The Council, and you, are indebted to David King who acts as volunteer webmaster.

When the Council canvassed your views many years ago now, you told us that the most important things for you were the speed and volume of traffic through the various villages and the maintenance of the villages largely as they were at the time of the survey.

The Council has attempted to address these 2 issues, and like to think that we have had some success. Less optimistic souls might say that the success has been limited ...

Dealing first with planning, I can say that there have been no applications for significant developments in the Parish over the past year. That is probably more to do with the policies of the District Council than anything else. The District Council's Local Plan is largely predicated on there being no development in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which covers the bulk of the Parish, and certainly not outside village envelopes.

The District Council consulted your Council on 42 planning applications during the past 12 months - the Clerk tells me that this is lowest figure since 1998. Most of these have been for extensions or enhancements to existing dwellings, and most have been granted planning permission. In that respect, your Council could be said to have failed to maintain the villages as they were. Indeed, I doubt that there are any houses in the 5 villages which have not been extended in some way or other in the time that our Clerk has been in office!

Aside from development control, the District Council is working on its Local Development Framework, the successor to its Local Plan. As far as your Council is aware, its policies relevant in Kidmore End will be largely unchanged. However, part of the LDF process includes the identification of development sites, and there is one, in the deep south of the Parish, which has been put forward by its owner, and is presently under consideration, we understand.

It is difficult to keep track with the progress of the South East Plan - the regional spatial strategy - which will replace, or has replaced, the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. The last iteration of the plan of which I was aware suggested no real change to the policies prevalent in Kidmore End for the past 2 decades (and probably some before that, too!).

The other big issue for residents, when they were surveyed, was traffic volumes and vehicle speeds. Since then 30mph speed limits were introduced in all villages in Oxfordshire. Your Council has tried to help enforce these, for instance, by the installation of vehicle activated speed advisory sign in Gallowstree Common. This is said to have had some effect on eastbound traffic in Horsepond Road.

The reputation of the A4074 road through Cane End has not improved in the past year. A further serious accident earlier this year reinforces that point. There is a debate as to whether speed limits are the answer to the appalling accident record. The limit will be reduced to 40mph, through Cane End, later this year. Whether that, per se, will reduce the carnage on the road is debateable, but some more effective enforcement of the speed limit - certainly better than that observed presently - might help. After all, there is a strong rumour that the speed camera at Cane End has never been loaded with film!

What I will say is that your Council has received few observations from residents in the past year about speeding traffic in Chalkhouse Green, Kidmore End and Tokers Green, and could, therefore, conclude that the users of the minor roads through these villages, who must mostly be locals, do not abuse them.

Nevertheless, there is concern that the traffic and transport policies elsewhere could have an impact on the Parish. I mentioned last year that the Council was keeping a close eye on the Reading Travel to Work Transport Innovation Fund bid. Reading Borough Council was leading this, although its neighbouring highways authorities, including our County Council, were involved. The content of the bid seems nebulous,

and has been characterised by the many themes that are thought to be included, for instance, a third Thames Bridge and congestion charging.

On the basis that there is safety in numbers, your Council joined with other parish councils in southern South Oxfordshire to form SOTIG (South Oxfordshire Transport Innovation Group). Sue Biggs and John Swift have represented this Council at SOTIG. One of the successes of this collaboration has been to challenge the County Council's attitude to the exercise, as past experience has been the perception that the County Council takes little notice of the transport policies and ambitions of the authorities to the south. The County Council eventually decided to become a level 2 partner in the bid, which was effectively for funding for transport improvements over a wide area, but expecting the right to veto any third bridge proposal. However, as I understand it, the Transport Innovation Fund has been withdrawn, so it remains to be seen whether any new initiatives in the transport front come to fruition.

On other fronts, the Council has embarked on 3 major projects in relation to assets it owns on your behalf.

The first is the replacement of the Pavilion at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground. Since the 2009 Annual Parish Meeting, a grant of £200,000 has been promised by the District Council, the Parish Council has agreed to increase its commitment to the scheme to a maximum of £200,000 and tenders have been received. The Council is ready to sign a contract for the works, as soon as the England & Wales Cricket Board gives a firm commitment to funding the project to the tune of £100,000 or thereabouts. Ideally, a start would be made on the project this Spring, to satisfy the planning permission conditions and the grant from the District Council, although works will not start in earnest until the Autumn. I expect that Roddy Young, the Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee, will report further on the project, later in the meeting.

The next project is also in the recreation arena. Largely through the efforts of Sue Biggs, the Council has received a Play Builder grant of £2,000 to redesign the children's play areas in Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End. The design work, undertaken by Anthony Stiff Associates, has involved local people, especially children. This has led to the submission of an application for a capital grant, to refurbish the Kidmore End Play Area. It is an ambitious scheme - the bid is for £60,000 - which your Council hopes will come to fruition during 2010/11.

Finally, the Council has decided, in the light of a fairly lengthy waiting list of potential tenants, to reopen the allotments at Cane End. These allotments, granted to the labouring poor in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, have not been used as such for at least 60 years. All being well, by this time next year, tenants will be cultivating them. Sue Rowlands, the Allotments' Manager, will no doubt mention this project in her report.

Towards the end of the year under review, the Council was approached by the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, on behalf of the Diocese of Oxford, about the possible use of part of the market garden in Wood Lane, Kidmore End for affordable

housing, as an exception site. The Council has decided to undertake a housing needs' survey, to establish whether there is a demonstrable need for affordable housing, either for rent or shared ownership, in the Parish. If the outcome of the survey so indicates, the Council will consider the suggestion of the diocesan authorities further.

What I would say is that the Council is taking a step-by-step approach to a possible scheme. Assuming it approves the survey questionnaire at its meeting later this evening, the Council is unlikely to discuss the matter again until after the survey results are known. My guess is that that will be at its July meeting at the earliest, but more likely the September meeting. I would expect that the results of the survey to be widely publicised. I cannot personally commit the Council - I may not be re-elected as Chairman - but I would expect there to be an opportunity for wider public discussion after the results of the survey are published.

Certainly, in my view, until then everything is a matter of speculation. Your Council certainly has no idea how many housing units might be provided, or where on the Diocese's land they might be sited. If, indeed, a scheme proceeds.

What other things has your Council done in the past year? It has kept the footpaths and bridleways under review. None have been reported as impassable, although some improvements were attempted to the surface of path 8 - the Church Path - at its Hazelmoor Lane end. The only other significant matter in respect of rights of way was the approved diversion of footpath 3, which now runs diagonally from the woods to Park Lane, Cane End, through the paddocks.

The Council has noted that the new refuse collection contract and regime came into operation with little fuss in this Parish, unlike the ructions reported in the "Henley Standard", in Henley.

Refuse collection is, of course, a service provided by the District Council. Your Council is delighted that one of the district councillors for the Shiplake Ward, Robert Peasgood (a resident of the Parish), is able quite often to attend the Council's meetings, to keep councillors up to date with things and thinking at Crowmarsh. Likewise, we are lucky that our county councillor, Carol Viney, is able regularly to attend our meetings, despite the much larger area she covers, and brings us insight into the machinations of the County Council. We are grateful to them both for their support.

It would be nice if I was able to say that we enjoy similar relations with the Police. I am not able to report to you whether there are any trends relating to crime in Kidmore End, as the Police have not let us have any quarterly figures since June last year. It is true that Sergeant Pink has tried to keep us, and the other parish councils in his sizeable area, up to speed with the resources he is able to deploy. PCSO Lisa Wallman has attended one of our meetings and sent us a written report at another. We know, however, that she and her colleagues patrol the area.

The Police are re-organising their neighbourhood action groups (NAGs), the vehicles by which they connect with communities to establish local policing priorities. However, aside from knowing that there is to be a re-organisation, I am afraid that they have yet to enlighten your Council as to what the new pattern of NAGs will be.

You will all have now received your Council Tax bills for 2010/11. No doubt you will have noticed that this Council's precept has fallen from £29,000 this year to £23,500 next year, despite the ambitious plans and expensive projects expecting to come on stream next year. This reduction in precept, by nearly 20%, means that the cost of your Council to the average household, in a Band D property, will be about £35.60 next year: it was £44 this year. That is less than £3 per month. You may also have spotted, from the leaflets with your bill, that the cost of your Council is just over half of the district-wide average parish council cost - £67.66. I like to think that this demonstrates that we provide some very cost effective services ...

We welcomed a new member to the Council this year. We co-opted - you did not call for an election - Nic Topham of Mill Lane to succeed the late Trevor Morris. Nic's family have lived in the Parish for many years. Incidentally, on the theme of elections, the quadrennial election of parish councils will take place in May 2011. I would like to think that there would be sufficient interest amongst the populace to prompt a contested election. If so, that would be about only the third one, certainly since 1969!

Finally, may I once again thank my fellow Councillors, on your behalf, for their unstinting support of you and your communities.

As always, may I say a very big thank you personally and on your behalf to our Clerk, Roger Penfold, for his unstinting service to the Parish Council. He always ensures that the business that we conduct is done correctly within the framework of local governance, irrespective of the actual decisions we make - thank you, Roger.

Giles Martin  
Chairman