

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF PARISH COUNCIL TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

23 MARCH 2011

I am afraid that I am unable to be present at the Annual Parish Meeting, as I am attending a conference in New Zealand.

As I looked back over the activities of the Parish Council, in the past year, with a view to writing this report, I was struck by the similarity of what has gone on from year to year. This is now my 15th annual report, I think. Those of you who have heard or read my previous reports will, perhaps, wonder if anything changes in the Parish from year to year.

This year, however, there is a significant difference. Following many years of discussion and preparation, the project to replace the Pavilion at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground is now well underway. Indeed, the new premises should be in use in a couple of months' time.

Without doubt, this is the most significant project ever undertaken by your Council. The contract figure is close to £600,000. Your Council has raised a loan of £200,000, to be paid over many years. Other agencies, like the District Council and the England & Wales Cricket Board have given significant grants towards the project: if it was not for those grants, the old Pavilion built in the early 1950s would still be gracing the Recreation Ground. As it is, later this year, we will be able to bring into use premises fit for the twenty-first century, which will be accessible to all, which will have changing facilities for both genders to use simultaneously, which will enjoy modern standards of thermal efficiency and which we will be lit and heated, at least in part, by sustainable means.

Frankly, I am proud that your Council has achieved this. Here, I must pay tribute to the driving force behind the project, my Vice-Chairman, Roddy Young. He felt, many years ago, that the former Pavilion was reaching the end of its useful life, and his enthusiasm for replacing the structure has been signally instrumental in taking the project forward. I must also recognise the very real support for the project from our partners, the Cricket and Football Clubs, with particular reference to the dogged determination of John Sheldon, the Chairman of the Cricket Club. Roddy and I, and other Members, appreciate the traumas of securing funding for a project, and the apparently ceaseless succession of hoops through which one has to jump. Fortunately, John was on hand to jump through many of them, to save us the effort!

I know that, when completed, the new Pavilion will be a landmark asset to the Parish. The trick will be that we keep it in good order.

Responsibility for that will largely rest with the Playing Fields Committee, a registered charity established some years ago to manage the Council's recreation facilities. Roddy chairs that Committee, and he will report further, later in this meeting.

During this year, the Council returned to the subject of affordable housing, a subject which had caused some feeling in the Parish for a few years in the last decade. This time, the consideration of the matter was provoked by the Diocesan Board of Finance, who, having discussed the matter with officers of the District Council, had reached the conclusion that a part of the glebe land in Kidmore End could be identified as a rural exception site for affordable housing. Many of you will not have failed to notice that the choice of site, presently used as a market garden, was not greeted with enthusiasm by the residents of the village ...

Your Council decided to test the market, to establish whether there was housing need in the Parish. This had been the case in 2004, but it was felt that the matter should be researched again - if there was no housing need, there would be no case for affordable housing. Your Council also decided to test reaction to the possible use of part of the glebe land for this purpose.

The outcome of the survey was that there was demonstrable housing need, but that there was little support for use of the glebe land for that purpose. Your Council decided, therefore, to advise the diocesan authorities that it did not support the use of the glebe land for that purpose.

However, during the process of the survey, 2 other potential sites had been offered or identified - land in Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common (the preferred site for the exercise earlier in this century) and land opposite Butlers Orchard in Kidmore End. Officers of the County or District Council ruled out the site in Kidmore End.

Soha Ltd have produced drawings of 3 potential schemes on the site at Gallowstree Common, to meet the demand suggested by the housing needs survey. These schemes have been considered by the Council's Affordable Housing Sub-Committee, and I believe we will hear further from them at the Council meeting, later this evening. In the meantime, may I pay tribute to the work of the sub-committee - John Swift, Sue Biggs and Brian Knapp - who have tackled this potentially emotive subject with great care?

The Council started another project this year - to bring the Cane End allotments back into use. They have lain dormant for over 60 years, having been let, latterly to Vines Farm, as a grazing field. Vines Farm kindly gave up possession of the land last year, foregoing the requisite period of notice. Planning permission has now been granted for the provision of a new entrance to the land, which is off Park Lane. However, although some preparatory works had been undertaken before the planning permission was granted, unfortunately, the Council's target, to enable cultivation by this Friday, will not be achieved. The Allotments Manager, Sarah Hall (she took over from Sue

Rowland during the year), will report about the allotments generally later this evening.

The most significant issues in my report in the past have been in connection with planning and highways.

In terms of planning, the District Council sought the Council's views on 34 applications during the past 12 months. That is probably the lowest number of applications considered for many years, and, it has to be said, some were merely renewals of existing permissions. Undoubtedly, this drop in activity is a reflection of the present economic situation. In general terms, the decisions of the planning authority have accorded with the views expressed by your Council. What I would emphasise, however, is the importance of affected residents making their views on applications known to the District Council - do not rely necessarily on the Parish Council representing your opinions.

There was one planning appeal during the year. The inspector dismissed that appeal, against the decision of the District Council to refuse permission for development at Hillside and The Bungalow, Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common.

In terms of the wider planning scene, the new Government has made it plain that the previous arrangements for planning will be swept aside. The regional spatial strategy - the South East Plan - with its target figures for housing numbers and the like, will, once the legislation has been adopted by Parliament, be no more. Planning authorities like the District Council are still pushing ahead with local development frameworks, however, although their future will be affected by the Localism Bill. The South Oxfordshire LDF contains policies and proposals which are not far from identical to the existing South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

What the Government is proposing is that planning decisions may be taken at a much more local level than at the District Council, and perhaps more locally than the Parish Council. Given the generally conservative nature of the Parish - there was, in the Parish Appraisal at the beginning of the century, apparently no appetite for change - that would presumably mean no development in the Parish. On the other hand, the Government intends to relax the planning regime in terms of permitted development, ie development which does not need planning permission. It will be interesting to see what the framework for the future looks like, once the Bill has the Royal Assent.

I would have to say that highways matters have generally taken a lower priority for your Council over the last year. Aside from the atrocious potholes which have followed the severe winters, which potholes may well have a traffic calming effect until repaired, your Council has not been inundated with requests for traffic calming measures or further reduced speed limits etc. The accident record of the A4074 road, through the Parish, continues to be a cause for concern, an issue which the County Councillor for the Sonning Common division, Carol Viney, has taken up with her colleagues, and officers, at County Hall and with the Police. Incidentally, it seems

mildly ironic that the only speed camera in the Parish was demolished by a vehicle earlier this year!

Your Council did, however, submit copious and well argued comments to the County Council about the Local Transport Plan 3, the document which will guide the County Council policies and practices in terms of highways and traffic over the next 19 years. These comments included the following

“But the draft LTP3 is deficient in barely recognising the existence of parishes, such as Kidmore End, which lie close to the borders with the county of Berkshire and thus adjacent to the major conurbation of the town of Reading. Thus, there is no reference in the voluminous documentation forming the draft LTP 3 to any of the parishes and villages that lie within the boundaries formed by the A 4074 to the West and the B 481 to the East or between the B 481 and the A 4155 (Henley to Reading) roads. That is a serious error and should be addressed in any future iteration of LTP 3.”

The observation by your Council is an all too often reflection of the County Council's approach to the deep south of the County. We are, I fear, the forgotten part of Oxfordshire, and certainly too far from Oxford to attract any investment.

In the meantime, while we wait for the County Council's reactions to our comments, I should like to pay tribute to the members of our Transport Sub-Committee - Sue Biggs and John Swift - who drafted the comments.

Those of you who use the service will know that the County Council subsidy for Motts Travel service M1, through the Parish, and into Caversham and Reading, runs out this summer. The contract is up for review, and your Council has urged the County Council to maintain subsidy, so that residents without cars have a means of reaching the various service offered by Reading. These were very eloquently put, if I may say so, but I am not at all sure that our entreaties will be listened to. The statistics for usage, quoted by County Council officers, were very low, although regular users of the service question the validity of the statistics. Be that as it may, those are the statistics being put to the councillor taking the decision. I did warn, when the contract was last renewed, “Use it or lose it”. It does seem that we may well not have used the service enough ...

You may be interested to hear that your Council has decided to acquire the 3 red telephone kiosks in the Parish - at Cane End, Chalkhouse Green and Kidmore End - when BT remove the telephony from them. Again, the usage statistics for the kiosks are so low in this day of almost ubiquitous mobile phone coverage in the Parish. So, for the total cost of £3, the Council will take ownership of these items of the street furniture that have graced the Parish for a good many years. They will still be lit, but beyond that, the Council has yet to come up with a practical use for them, save, perhaps, sheltering from the elements!

Other local services and features seem to be in reasonable order. The Council arranged for the trees around the pond at Kidmore End to be trimmed back. It has kept the pond at Tokers Green, and the wells at Gallowstree Common and Kidmore End, under review. It has arranged, recently, for the barrier on the Church path, Footpath 8, to be replaced, so that the path will be less easily misused. The Chiltern Society has replaced the stiles on Footpath 11 with kissing gates, to make the route more accessible to those with mobility difficulties.

You will have received your Council Tax bills for the coming financial year. After very careful consideration of its budget, your Council decided to put up its precept to £27,000 next year, an increase from £23,500 in the current year. This is to cover a range of potential increased costs, for an example, if the Parish Council election this year is contested, the cost will be met from the precept. The increase equates to £5.31 for a band D household - about 45p per month. You will have noted, I am sure that the precept was even higher in 2009/10, at £29,000.

In total, the Council's precept costs £41 per Band D household - less than £1 per week. This is below the District-wide arithmetic average, which is £46.25: I expect that the actual average will be much higher, around £65.

The Council's expenditure includes very modest sums for keeping you abreast of its activities. The quarterly Parish Newsletter is, I believe, still well received by residents of the Parish. I am sure that you will join me in thanking the Editorial Board - Brian Knapp and Sue Rowland (until her resignation from the Council), and Derek Brown and Andy Miros - for their efforts on your behalf, and the larger group of residents who distribute the Newsletter to all households. May I also pay tribute to David King, who looks after www.kepc.info, our website which I hope you all find useful. Certainly, the minutes, which record all that I am reporting, can be easily found on the website.

We have been grateful, through the year, for the regular attendance of Carol Viney, "our" County Councillor, who has kept us up to date with what has been happening at County Hall. Rob Peasgood, "our" District Councillor (he lives in the Parish), has been able to attend occasionally - our meetings often clash with the District Council's Planning Committee, of which he is a member. Rob is not standing for re-election this year, so we wish him well for the future.

In the past I have been able to report regular attendance at our meetings of police officers, or PCSOs. Sadly, the appearance of an officer at our meetings is now a rare occurrence. We do hear reports, however, that the PCSOs are active in the Parish.

During the course of the past year one councillor, Sue Rowland, resigned, Sue had served for some 11 years, and was Allotments Manager, a member of the Newsletter Editorial Board and a member of the Plans Sub-Committee, at the time of her resignation. No election was called to fill the vacancy, so we co-opted Trevor Perchard of Tokers Green - one of 2 volunteers from that village - to join the Council. We are, of course, all up for election on 5 May 2011. It could be a different Chairman

reporting on the activities of totally changed Council, next March. Somehow, however, I suspect that there will be many familiar faces ...

All that is left is for me to thank my fellow councillors for their support and their untiring work on your behalf, over the past 12 months.

Giles Martin
March 2011