

PARISH OF KIDMORE END

Annual report by Chairman of the Parish Council, 2012/13

I am pleased to report, for the first time, on the work of your Council over the past year, a year of change.

The long term Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Giles Martin and Roddy Young, retired as members of the Council in April last year. Both had been first elected to the Council in 1991. Giles was elected Chairman in 1996 and Roddy was appointed Vice-Chairman in 1997. My colleague councillors paid tribute to Giles and Roddy, and thanked them for their service to the community, at a reception at The Reformation public house last summer.

At the Annual Meeting in May last year, I was elected Chairman by the Council, and Richard McQuillan, now the longest serving councillor, was appointed Vice-Chairman.

There have been other changes of personnel at your Council. Rupert Gutteridge ceased to be a councillor last year, while Brian Knapp resigned earlier this year: we thanked both these councillors for the work they completed while on the Parish Council. Elections have not been called for the vacancies which have arisen, so, during the year, we have co-opted Caroline Aldridge, Iain Pearson, Hugh Thresher and Jane Williams: Caroline, Iain and Jane are from Kidmore End, while Hugh is from Tokers Green. There is presently a vacancy for a councillor, so please contact the Clerk, if you are interested in serving.

So much for changes on the Council. What your Council deals with does not change, however.

When the Council last canvassed residents, 15 years ago, the top matters of concern were development and roads. Are these the same today? Perhaps it is time to find out what the community of Kidmore End Parish feels is important in 2013.

In terms of planning, the District Council, which is the local planning authority, sought the views of your Council on 51 planning applications in the past year. This figure is broadly comparable to the number for 2011/12, when comments were submitted on 46 applications. For the most part, the decisions of the planning authority have reflected the views of your Council.

There has been one notable application, which has yet to be determined by the District Council. This is the application by Soha Housing Ltd for affordable housing units in Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common, a project which your Council endorsed in general terms in 2011. That application was received in the summer last year, and your Council arranged for a public exhibition of the forms and drawings. The Council's comments on the application sought to reflect the concerns expressed by those who

attended the exhibition, which centred on road safety issues, particularly vehicle speeds in Horsepond Road.

Subsequently, the applicants arranged for a traffic volume and vehicle speed survey near the proposed access to the site. This showed that the 85th percentile speed of traffic passing the site was around 41mph, in each direction. Whilst this is somewhat lower than the perception of vehicle speeds quoted by some residents, it demonstrates a sad disregard of the speed limit through Gallowstree Common, despite the speed indicator device nearby. Aside from repeating its suggestion to the planning authority about using the development to promote traffic calming in Horsepond Road, your Council has also suggested that the Police conduct some speed enforcement there.

My predecessor mentioned changes to the general planning regime. The Localism Act 2011, which came into force last year, swept away the previous regional planning arrangements - the focus is now on local plans. In this vein, the District Council adopted the Core Strategy of its Local Development Framework towards the end of last year. The Localism Act, and the National Planning Policy Framework, has been the focus of a lot of your Council's time at meetings in the past year. The Act provides for some very local planning, at parish level. However, your Council does not, at this stage, intend to develop a neighbourhood plan, but is involved in the exercise being conducted by our neighbours in Sonning Common. Incidentally, the Council has commented that the Chiltern Edge School site, although in this Parish, should be included in Sonning Common, for the purposes of the neighbourhood plan. Details of the likely development sites in Sonning Common were published in the *Henley Standard* last month.

On this subject, the owner of a site, just in the Parish at Emmer Green, has ambitions to develop this land. The owner, and his agent, have attended many meetings of the Council, when they have sought to demonstrate that there would be significant financial advantage to the Parish if the site was developed. I think it fair to say that your Council has yet to be convinced by the owner or his agent. We have told them that we do not wish to engage with them until a formal planning application is made to the planning authority.

Aside from the issue of vehicle speeds in Horsepond Road, and the general deterioration of road surfaces following the recent severe winter, the other highways' issues have centred on flooding in the vicinity of Kidmore End pond, and snow.

The pond has, I gather, been a feature of Kidmore End for centuries. It is probably only since the 1930s that it has become a highway drainage facility. Unfortunately, the silt traps on the drainage feeds are not as efficient as they might be, as a result of which the pond has silted up. Fortunately, the County Council, as highways' authority, has agreed to work on the pond to resolve this issue - the last time the pond was cleared, your Council had to meet the cost. The County Council's contractors have yet to complete the work...

It was during a visit by an officer in a cold snap, following flooding, that the County Council decided to provide 2 further salt or grit bins near the pond, an action for which we are most grateful. There are now 4 bins in the Parish. The Council is presently drafting a winter conditions' plan, which focuses on gritting the roads to help clear them in time of snow, as the County Council only routinely grits the A4074 and Horsepond Road. Your Council has made provision in its budget for additional grit bins, which will be placed at junctions in Chalkhouse Green, Gallowstree Common and Tokers Green.

Your Council keeps the footpaths and bridleways in the Parish under review, through another sub-committee. The Council reports any issues on them to the County Council. There is a good network of paths in the Parish, but we will be exploring improvements to that network over coming months.

Most of the local government services in the Parish are provided by the County and District Councils. We are fortunate that Carol Viney, the county councillor, and Robert Simister, the district councillor, regularly attend our meetings and report to us on the activities of their Councils, with particular reference to the Parish. At this point, I should pay tribute to Mrs Viney, who will not be standing at the County Council elections next month. She has been "our" county councillor since June 2001.

This Parish will form part of the new Goring electoral division of the County Council from next month, following an electoral review. Similarly, the Local Government Boundary Commission has recently announced the new arrangements for electing district councillors, with effect from the next election. Kidmore End will move from the present Shiplake ward into a new ward comprising this Parish, Goring Heath, Mapledurham and Whitchurch.

On the subject of regular visitors, although PCSO Colin Boyes of the Thames Valley Police has not been able to attend our meetings very often, he does provide reports each month on crimes and other matters of interest. It has to be said that the Parish is relatively crime free, but, nevertheless, those residents who suffer crimes find the experience disturbing. It is interesting to note that the new Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner intends to give higher priority to what he describes as "rural crime".

Many thanks, also, to the parishioners who have come to meetings throughout the year. We very much appreciate hearing the views of those who live in the Parish and would like to hear your views at the meetings in the coming year, especially about any projects that you would like the Council to consider. You can also contact the Council via its website. Incidentally, I should thank David King, our volunteer webmaster, on your behalf.

Turning now to Parish assets, the Council decided, last year, to rename the new pavilion at the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. Your Council, and the Playing Fields Committee,

are still getting to grips with the operation of the facility. The Chairman of the Playing Fields Committee will, no doubt, cover this subject in his report, later.

Aside from the Gallowstree Common Recreation Ground, your Council also owns the Kidmore End Play Area. This is about to have a major refit, on the basis of a scheme designed with the support of local residents, particularly children and young people, over recent years. The refurbishment has only been possible because of the support of many grant aiding organisations, charities and benefactors, starting with the District Council, who are meeting 60% of the £35,000 cost from their Community Grants scheme. Indeed, the whole cost will be met without any direct contribution from the Council Tax payers of the Parish.

The Council also contributes to the costs incurred by Mapledurham Parish Council in maintaining the Rokeby Recreation Ground, a facility enjoyed by the residents of Tokers Green.

That leads nicely to matters of finance. My predecessor reported last year about the difficulties posed by a decision by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs in 2011, in respect of VAT paid out on the Pavilion contract. Because of the ruling, your Council was unable to reclaim some £11,000 of VAT, which led to the Council "overspending" at the end of the 2011/12 financial year. However, the Council did not go into the red at the bank, due to judicious management of funds and payments. Nevertheless, the external auditors, BDO LLP, issued a critical report after their audit. The Council pointed out the difficulties it faced because of the in-year decision of HMRC. BDO subsequently issued a report, which, whilst pointing out the theoretical overspend, was written in less critical terms.

You will have received your Council Tax bills for 2013/14, and seen that the Council reduced its share of the bill by 2.9%. The Council's budget covers all its routine expenditure and allows for some additional projects, too, like the salt bins I mentioned earlier. I noted, with some pride and pleasure, that the average parish/town council precept across South Oxfordshire is £73.61, while ours is much lower at £52.02. I understand that, across the country, the average increase of parish council precepts was 5.4% on an average property (Band D), giving a national average charge of £58.33 for the year. I hope that you will agree that your Council's charge for 2013/14, at a £1 a week for the average household, represents good value for money.

In conclusion, may I take the opportunity to thank my fellow councillors. Without their dedication to our community, the Council would not be able to provide the services, which it delivers. Their voluntary role is not restricted to the monthly meetings of the Council: all of them support the Council through its committees and sub-committees, and keep a watchful eye on what is happening in their home areas. Also I would like to thank the Clerk, Mr Penfold, for his support and work over the last year.