Kidlington Parish Council 2023 *Newsletter*

A message from the Chairman of the Parish Council, David Robey

This is the last year of the present Parish Council: our tenure ends with the local elections in May. Some of the business we have been concerned with this year has been ongoing since we started in May 2019. The District Council's Local Plans continue to be a major issue: we are currently waiting to see what intentions they have for Kidlington in the draft they are about to release of the Plan for 2040. We will be pressing for enhancements to the Village centre, and the maintenance and development of a ring of connected green spaces around the Village.

We have continued to work on the redevelopment of Exeter Close into a civic hub with new medical premises, all to be mainly funded by leasing some of the land for commercial purposes. This has progressed much slower than we had hoped, because of the impact of Covid as well as changing attitudes in the County Council.

We have continued to work hard on our environmental agenda, and to support the outstanding work of the Cherwell Collective. We were pleased that the County Council will be implementing a 20-mph limit on residential roads in Kidlington, and has adopted (but not yet found funding for) the plans for a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure. We have also worked with them over plans for improving the Sainsburys roundabout. Civil enforcement of parking restrictions, through the use of traffic wardens, has now been in place for a while, though we have yet to see significant benefits from it: parking in Kidlington remains a major problem for residents.

In the face of Network Rail's plans to close the Sandy Lane level crossing, we will continue to press for maintaining vehicular access between Yarnton and Kidlington. We shall also join with other parish councils to scrutinize the plans for a massive solar farm on Green Belt in West Oxfordshire.

We are pleased to have been able to deliver a budget for the coming year that will involve an increase of only 1.5% for council tax payers, despite the very high rate of inflation: see the separate report on our finances.

Finally, a great deal of time and energy has been spent on Oxford United's plans for a new stadium: see the separate report. The Council has done its utmost to maintain a fair and pragmatic position in very challenging circumstances, in order to represent as best we can the interests of all our 14,000 residents.

You are invited to attend Kidlington's Annual Parish Meeting
To be held at Exeter Hall
On Thursday 30 March at 7.30pm

Refreshments provided by Cherwell Larder

This is an opportunity for Kidlington residents to put questions to councillors and to let you know what the Council has been doing and how your money is spent in the community.

The meeting will be attended by Oxfordshire County Councillor Calum Miller and Oxford United's Niall McWilliams, who will be answering residents' questions about the proposals for a new football stadium in the village.
As we anticipate there may be a lot of interest, we would be grateful if you could let us have your questions in advance of the meeting by emailing them to clerk@kidlington-pc.gov.uk

Kidlington Gala Day 2022

Finance /Your Council Tax

The Parish Council has set its budget for the next financial year (April 2023 to March 2024) and has requested a precept of £797,597, which represents a 1.5% increase on last year. In order to keep the precept as low as possible for residents, the Parish Council also generates income through charges for allotments, burials, facility hire, grants and interest on savings.

This chart shows how the Council spends the precept; figures are taken from the current year's budget:

Premises – most of this part of the budget is spent on running and maintaining Exeter Hall and the Sports Pavilion at Exeter Close. In 2022 the hall was hired out for meetings and parties but the main users were Cherwell Collective, who operate the food larder and café, and have run community events throughout the year to encourage recycling, repairing and repurposing. The hall has also been the home of the Covid 19 vaccination programme, the Information Centre and a customer service point for Barclays Bank.

Recreation – this year the Council refurbished the play area at Orchard Recreation Ground and installed an outdoor gym at Ron Groves Recreation Ground. We have worked with Wild Oxfordshire to improve biodiversity at Lyne Road Community Green and St Mary's Fields. Our team maintain open spaces and verges across the village and have embarked on an ambitious tree planting scheme.

Stratfield Brake – the sports facility's core users are Gosford All Blacks Rugby Club, Kidlington Running Club and Kidlington Cricket Club, and the football pitches are used by Kidlington Youth FC. The facility is currently managed by Cherwell District Council staff.

Admin and Governance – the Council employs thirteen staff to carry out its business. There are around 30 meetings of the Council and its committees each year. This item also includes the many Council functions not covered in the rest of the chart.

ELECTIONS

Parish Council elections will be held on Thursday 4 May this year. If you are interested in making a difference in your local community by becoming a local councillor, you need to apply by 4 April. Anyone who has lived or worked in Kidlington for at least a year and is over 18 can apply (with some restrictions). The elections are organised by Cherwell District Council and you will find information about how to apply on their website. If you would like to find out more about what's, involved you can contact any of the current councillors or the Clerk.

Remember that you will need to bring photo ID when you vote in this year's election

Cherwell Local Plan - Cherwell District Council is responsible for developing Local Plans, which set the broad framework for future planning decisions. A partial review of the current Local Plan was finalized in 2020 in order to accommodate Oxford City's unmet housing need. This will have a major impact on Kidlington and the three adjacent parishes with the construction in the next few years of 4,400 new houses, in the areas marked in pink on the map on the next page. While only one of these is in Kidlington proper, they will raise the population of the four parishes by about half, and remove much of the Green Belt gap between Kidlington and Oxford. We are in continuing discussion with the County Council about traffic and other infrastructural problems that will result.

A new Local Plan is currently under development up to the year 2040. What we have seen of this most recently proposes 300 new houses in the Kidlington Green Belt on the North-East edge of the Moors, and 450 houses on the South-East edge of Woodstock. At the time of writing we do not know if these proposals will be included in the revised draft plan that will shortly go out for consultation. Both proposed sites would create significant further problems of traffic congestion; the first would also further reduce the Green Belt around the Village.

UPDATE ON OUFC'S STADIUM PLANS FOR KIDLINGTON

Background: Stratfield Brake
Oxford United Football Club's proposal to relocate their stadium to Stratfield Brake came to the Parish Council out of the blue just before Christmas 2021. It put the Council in an extremely difficult position. The land is owned by the County Council, but since we hold a 100-year lease on the site, we were being asked to decide whether or not the proposal could go ahead to the next stage. We also knew that the Village was deeply divided on the issue, though we did not know in what proportion.

The decision the Parish Council took was to remain neutral on the issue for the time being. This was because the Club's plans were at that stage very general and subject to change, and we could not decide on them until we knew exactly what they were. Until we had detailed, specific and concrete information it would clearly have been foolish to say yes, and it would equally have been unfair, given the many Kidlington residents who support the plans, to say no. The recent report by the Club went some way towards answering the questions we had about the plans, but much remained unanswered.

The Triangle: The County Council's latest decision
However, the County Council no longer considers the Stratfield Brake proposal to be a suitable or deliverable proposition and therefore, does not plan to progress with it. Instead at its meeting on 24 January the Cabinet agreed to enter into non-binding negotiations with Oxford United on plans to build a new stadium on the land it owns known as the Triangle, South of the Sainsburys roundabout and across Frieze Way from Stratfield Brake (the green triangle marked **T** in the map). Negotiations will be for the development of a stadium with no significant additional development except within the stadium footprint. The decision includes a number of significant conditions concerning the objectives that have to be met by the Club before a final agreement is made. These include maintaining a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington, transport issues, benefits for the community, and green or net zero objectives.

The Triangle: Kidlington Parish Council's position
Kidlington Parish Council's status in this new development is quite different from the case of Stratfield Brake. The Triangle site is in Kidlington, but we have no rights over it. We cannot decide whether or not the scheme goes ahead: we are only consultees. Nevertheless, as with Stratfield Brake, we will for the time being take a neutral position on the Triangle project. We recognize that there are strong arguments for and against it, and that views in the Village are deeply divided. As discussions develop and full details emerge we will be able to reconsider our position. In the meantime, we will do the following.

- Consult with stakeholders and residents on their needs and concerns relating to the project. In particular we will meet with Kidlington Sports Clubs and local schools to gain a full picture of their aspirations; we will also hold a question-and-answer session at the Annual Parish Meeting.
- Engage with Oxford United and the County Council in order to ensure, as far as we can, that Kidlington's needs and concerns are met as fully as possible if the development is to go ahead. In particular we will press for more details on:
    - transport, traffic congestion and parking;
    - the number and frequency of major events;
    - benefits to the local community (sporting and otherwise);
    - the long-term dependability of commitments entered into by the club.
- Pay close attention to the issue of the green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington, and the cost of a further incursion into the Green Belt. As the map shows, after the planned new housing developments around the Triangle (all in pink), building on the Triangle could effectively remove the green barrier.

Keeping Kidlington Green

Kidlington Eco Group

The Kidlington Eco Group (KEG) formed in 2021 and works closely with the Parish Council on environmental and wildlife projects across the village. The group comprises representatives from the Council, Wild Oxfordshire, Cherwell Collective, St Mary's Management Group and Churches Together, as well as interested members of the public.

All are welcome to join the group which meets monthly at Exeter Hall. You can find out more about how to get involved on the KEG website www.kidlingtonecogroup.co.uk.

SCAN ME

Join the Earth Hour Nature Walk

Join us to celebrate Earth Hour on Saturday 25 March. We will be meeting at St Mary's in the car park at 8pm for a wildlife walk followed by hot chocolate and marshmallows around a fire pit. You can find out more by contacting Rhiannon at kidlington@wildoxfordshire.org.uk, or visit www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk

Earth Hour is a worldwide movement organized by the World Wildlife Fund. The event is held annually, encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights for one hour, from 8.30 to 9.30pm, as a symbol of commitment to the planet.

Hedgehog Highways Project and Wildlife Talk

Come along and meet wildlife conservationist and photographer, Stephen Powles who will be helping us to make our gardens more hedgehog friendly. This fascinating talk will take place at Exeter Hall on Monday 10 July at 7.30pm. You can find out how your garden can be part of a Hedgehog Highway linking green spaces so that they don't end up on dangerous roads. Book on Eventbrite or via the KEG website. If you want to get involved in Kidlington's Hedgehog Highway, please contact Rhiannon at kidlington@wildoxfordshire.org.uk or call 07856 24149.

Earth Day Celebrations

Come and join us for the celebrations.

We'll be planting dozens of plants in a permanent living sculpture at Park Hill recreation ground in honour of the climate legacy of HM King Charles III. You also won't want to miss the sculpture's unveiling at the 'Big Help Out' on 8 May at Park Hill or the 'Coronation Big Lunch' on 7 May at Exeter Hall. More information from Cherwell Collective - email cherwellcollective@gmail.com or call 01865 817676

St Mary's Fields

The year got off to a great start in the Parish's District Wildlife Site with the pair of Tawny owls returning to the nest box, hopefully to breed again. Our management plan has been refreshed with expert input from BBOWT and we will be opening up a new butterfly ride through the dense blackthorn next to the main footpath. The ponds need constant attention as does the ever-encroaching scrub. Protection of the veteran oak tree is important so paths in that area are being diverted and the tree has been added to Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory.

We're also planning to get the accessible paths resurfaced this year as well as creating new habitats for reptiles and birds. The number of bird species seen continues to grow. Events we hope to hold this year will include Nature Walks, Bat Walks, Dawn Chorus walk, plant surveys and the annual Big Hay rake in August. New volunteers are always welcome on the first Saturday of the month at 10am in St Mary's car park.

Volunteering Opportunities in your Local Green Spaces

Park Hill Copse

The copse is ready for a volunteer work party later this year. This will include coppicing the hazel to increase the light getting into the area and we'll also be creating a small, accessible community glade so that everyone can enjoy the bird song. If you would like to get involved, please contact Rhiannon at Kidlington@wildoxfordshire.org.uk or phone 07585424149.

Stratfield Brake

The Woodland Trust are looking for volunteers to help with woodland management and species surveying at Stratfield Brake. If you'd like to help out this amazing wildlife site please contact site manager James Stevenson, telephone: 03432484053, email: JamesStevenson@woodlandtrust.org.uk.

Greenspace Gardening

Join Harvest at Home for our green space open days at a number of different green locations across the village. Details below and on the KEG website or feel free to contact Harvest at Home (harvestathomeuk@gmail.com). Also a big thank you to all the Lyne Road Green volunteers who have transformed this valuable green space.

A Big Thank You from Cherwell Larder and Climatarian Kitchen

Thank you for supporting sustainable food by attending and supporting our Cherwell Larder and Climatarian Kitchen. We provide food, other essentials and have a lunch time café using only surplus food. Together we've saved the emissions equivalent of 31 million car miles in the last year! We're thrilled everyone's shopping surplus first and supporting our work and the planet.

Events and Dates for your diary

Annual Parish Meeting at Exeter Hall – 7.30pm on Thursday 30 March
Earth Day – Saturday 22 April – join volunteers at Park Hill Rec (Benmead) to plant a living sculpture to celebrate the King's Coronation
Parish Council Elections – Thursday 4 May
Big Lunch Celebrations for the King's Coronation – Sunday 7 May
WISH Well Being Fair at Exeter Hall - Saturday 20 May
Kidlington Gala Day – Saturday 22 July
Kidlington Fireworks – Friday 3 November
Remembrance Sunday – Sunday 12 November
Christmas Lights Switch On – Thursday 30 November

We are taking part in "No-Mow-May" in a number of green spaces throughout Kidlington to help our pollinators.

Why not join us from your garden?

Lock up your mower for wildlife this May

Your Kidlington Parish Councillors

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This QR code will take you straight to the Kidlington Parish Council Website. Just point your smartphone at it (as if you were taking a photograph) and follow the instructions.

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www.kidlington-pc.gov.uk