

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

April 2021

With the easing of lockdown, the Parish Council is partly moving back to physical meetings: we have just held the statutory Annual Meeting face-to-face in Exeter Hall. We shall also hold our next full Council meeting there on 24 June, if current expectations are confirmed of the end of work-from-home on 21 June. Between now and then, however, we shall continue to hold our Standing Committee meetings on-line, with the public invited to attend as before. We also held our Annual Parish Meeting on-line on 29 April and were very pleased with the way it went, with some 40 participants, including our MP Layla Moran.

Overall in terms of efficiency on-line meetings have worked well, and will no doubt continue for some of our activities from now on into the future. But they do lack much of the stimulus and interchange that face-to-face meetings produce. Not all the future is on-line.

We are taking bookings in Exeter Hall again, subject to Covid precautions. I'm pleased to say that an NHS vaccination service will be operating there from later this month, and also that the seniors' lunch club will be resuming. In future all our catering will be provided from surplus or locally produced food by the remarkable Cherwell Collective, who run the Cherwell Larder and much else from Exeter Hall, and whose Emily Connally made an impressive presentation at the Annual Parish Meeting. Cherwell Collective were the recent UK winners of the European Economic and Social Committee's Civic Solidarity prize for their ground-breaking work, combining food distribution and support services with an educational programme to help residents grow their own food and reduce waste: see <https://www.cherwellcollective.com/>.

Assuming that the return to normal life continues according to plan, we shall hold our annual Gala Day in Exeter Close on Saturday 24 July. This is mainly an outdoors event with a variety of free activities including a Children's Petting Zoo, Donkey Rides, Climbing Wall, Drumming Workshop. In 2019 we introduced the 'Green Road' to the day's activities, featuring organisations such as Wild Oxfordshire, the Canal and River Trust, K5 Better Together, and St Mary's Fields. We also hope to have the annual fireworks at Stratfield Brake, currently planned for 5 November, and the switching on of the Christmas Lights in early December.

Ongoing activities include the options appraisal which is about to be initiated for the redevelopment of Exeter Close, including Exeter Hall, the medical and related practices, and the Forum building. We have commissioned a design for the extension of the Bicester Road Cemetery, since space in the existing burial area will run out in a few years' time. Management of the Stratfield Brake sports facilities has now been taken over by Cherwell District Council, which has meant some saving in time and money for the Parish Council, though the long-term arrangements have yet to be decided. We have written to Oxford County Council about the closure of the Glebe House care home, requesting further access to the data on which the decision was based, and urging that the building should be reserved for community use; we have not yet had a reply. And finally, we await the outcome of the judicial review of Cherwell's plans to allow 4,400 new houses in our area. The hearing of the challenge by the admirable Cherwell Development Watch will be in late June.

DAVID ROBEY