

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report December 2020

First, some thoughts prompted by the end of our second lockdown and an extraordinary and very difficult year. There has been great hardship and distress for many, and sadly more hardship and distress will come as the economic impact of Covid makes itself increasingly felt. Thanks to the remarkable volunteer organizations in our area, together with the services provided by the District and County Councils, there have been emergency support systems available to all, and we have done our best to publicize them. We can only hope that none of our residents have fallen through this net.

Council meetings have adapted smoothly to taking place on line, and even after the emergency some will no doubt continue in this form. But they inevitably lack the stimulus, support and give-and-take of physical presence. This has been particularly difficult for our office staff, who have valiantly ensured that all of our statutory services have continued. Our grounds staff have also ensured that our open spaces and facilities are maintained to the usual standard. The council is deeply grateful to all staff in both categories for their unfailing hard work and good will throughout this difficult time.

Covid meant that we had to cancel not only the annual Gala Day and the Fireworks Display, but also the Christmas lights Switch-On event. Nevertheless the lights are up, and there are handsome trees at the top of the High Street, Exeter Hall and the Broadway. We could not put the usual tree in the Piazza off the High Street, because a market stall has been moved there to ensure social distancing.

Covid did not prevent our contractors from completing work on the Bicester Road cemetery, though some small issues will wait for the Spring. This was the main outcome of a process that began shortly after the present Council was elected last year, well before the waterlogging problems of the winter, and has proceeded without delay thereafter. A substantial new network of drains and paths has been installed, far more extensive than anything carried out since the cemetery was first opened. This will reduce significantly the problems of waterlogging we experienced at times in the past, although it may not remove them completely in extreme weather. But the new paths will make access to graves easier whatever the condition of the ground. We are now proceeding with additional landscaping of the site.

Finally, the Council decided at its last meeting to oppose Network Rail's planned closure of the Sandy Lane level crossing. The arguments for closure mainly concern the substantial growth planned in rail traffic along the line, and the fact that new housing developments in Yarnton and Begbroke will significantly increase road traffic along the lane. But we decided that on balance these arguments should not outweigh the likely loss of business for Kidlington centre traders, not to mention the inconvenience for Kidlington residents driving to Yarnton. This is simply one issue that illustrates the urgent need for greater clarity about the impact of planned housing developments in Kidlington and surroundings as a whole.

DAVID ROBEY