

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report February-March 2021

Following the Covid roadmap, our tennis and games courts and outdoor gym are now open; playgrounds have been open for a while. But Exeter Hall remains closed to the general public, and most staff continue to work from home. At the time of writing, there is some uncertainty as to when we shall revert to formal meetings in person. For the present these are being held on-line, including the Annual Parish Meeting on the evening of Thursday 28 April. Instructions for joining this will be published one week beforehand on our website at <http://www.kidlington-pc.gov.uk/>.

The Parish Council has set its budget for the financial year starting in April, involving a precept (our share of the council tax) of £728,300, an increase of 1.6% on the previous year. Due to a reduction in the number of properties or residents eligible to pay council tax, this has resulted in a 1.9% increase in real terms, still below the projected rate of inflation. It is worth noting that over the previous ten years the overall increase in the precept has also been below the corresponding rate of inflation. We have managed to do this while at the same time maintaining and indeed increasing our range of activities and services, the most notable new addition being our environment and climate change agenda.

Following the incursion by travellers last summer and the subsequent installation of unsightly concrete blocks, the Council has been working on a project to keep Lyne Road Green safe, whilst also making it a more interesting space for local residents and more attractive to invertebrates and birds. Residents local to the green have received information about the project, and many have expressed an interest in getting involved in protecting the area. A draft plan for trees and hedging was drawn up with help from Wild Oxfordshire: you can find it on the Council website.

Residents will also soon notice tracts of uncut grass in public spaces. This is the start of the Parish Council's habitat regeneration initiative. Plants emerging from the relaxed mowing will be catalogued, and native wildflowers introduced for bees and butterflies, while longer grass helps small mammals such as shrews and voles. This will provide homes for wildlife displaced by the housing developments about to surround us.

From time to time trees have to be felled for safety reasons. This is not a decision that the Council takes lightly, and we are committed to ensuring that whenever we remove a tree, we plant at least two to replace it.

In line with a county-wide initiative, we are pressing for a 20 mph limit in residential streets. We are currently considering an ambitious walking and cycling network plan for the village, developed by the K5 Better Together health project. With the 20 mph limit, this envisages low traffic neighbourhoods and so-called quiet lanes, where the whole road space is shared by people and vehicles. For a village that likes to be family-friendly, it all makes very good sense. Implementation will depend, however, on the availability of government grants.

DAVID ROBEY