

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: January 2024

The Parish Council has long felt that Cherwell District Council does not give enough attention to Kidlington's specific issues, even though we are the District's third largest urban centre. We have always had the sense that this was due at least in part to our Village status. Had we turned ourselves into a town, the District might take us a bit more seriously; as readers know, with 14,000 inhabitants we are larger than a good many towns in Oxfordshire—but that is another story.

More recently we have been particularly exercised by the lack of any serious exchange of views with both District and County Councils about the massive changes that will result from the new housing developments in our area in the next few years. As I have frequently noted, the present population of Kidlington plus Gosford & Water Eaton, Begbroke and Yarnton is about 20,000, and is already set to rise by well over half, even more if further new schemes for housing go ahead. At the same time the four parishes will effectively merge into a single urban area.

We have been pressing the District Council to provide greater clarity, and engage in more serious discussion with the four parishes, over the infrastructure problems that will arise as a result of these developments, most notably in respect of traffic and transport, but also education, shopping and medical facilities. Traffic problems will of course become significantly more acute if the new stadium development finally goes ahead on the Triangle site.

It is therefore very good news that the District Council seems finally to have woken up to these issues and decided to develop a Kidlington Infrastructure and Community Asset Strategy in 2024/25. What has brought them to this point is not completely clear, but it must owe a lot to an active group of District Councillors representing the Kidlington area.

The programme seems ambitious enough. It aims to develop a Kidlington Vision which, through effective coordination and prioritisation, will support the District Council's aims in respect of strong and vibrant local centres, environmental sustainability, healthy communities and housing needs. A budget of £115k has been put towards it for the next financial year, but this will only support the administrative costs: significant further funding will come from housing developer contributions, estimated at some £88m to £132m for the Kidlington area.

Stakeholders, presumably including the Parish Councils, will be involved in the programme, but a lot will depend on the degree of involvement. Rather typically, the first official news we had of this new programme was through the press release after the decision was made to go ahead with it. The District Council is not good at consultation, as illustrated by a presentation we were given very recently of a proposed Kidlington Public Realm Strategy that the District Council has commissioned. This is very welcome in a number of ways, but since the authors had failed to consult us about it, it omitted a number of major considerations that we have been putting forward for years.

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DAVID ROBEY