

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

July-August 2020

I was thinking that, given the time of year, there wasn't much to report on this occasion. That all changed with the travellers' invasion of the Lyne Road green

For those that don't know it, the green is a large and pleasant open space towards the top of the village between Lyne Road and the railway line. On Friday 31 July it was reported that a small number of travellers' caravans had set up camp there, and in the next days the number increased to 13 or more. The land belongs to the Parish Council, but negotiation with travellers is in the first place the responsibility of the County Council, who have a travellers officer. He visited the site on the Monday, and was told that the caravans were there for a wedding and would leave the next day. He visited the next day and was told that the wedding celebrations were continuing and they would leave on Wednesday. On Wednesday they were still there and said they were not leaving.

There are three ways to evict trespassers of this kind. The County Council can apply for a court order, but the process is slow, probably more so during the Covid emergency. The police can evict forcibly, but will only do so if there is hard prosecutable evidence of criminality or significant harm. In this case they declined to act, perhaps partly as a matter of prioritization, partly because they knew that the Council was willing to act. This left us with the third option of calling in bailiffs to evict, which is what we did.

The bailiffs served notice of eviction on Wednesday afternoon, with a deadline for departure of 1 pm the next day. When that time came there was still no sign of departure, so the bailiffs went in and started the eviction process. By 6 pm the site had been cleared, to the credit of the bailiffs in a peaceful manner. The police were also present to prevent disturbances. We left security guards in place overnight, and from first thing on Friday we were placing concrete blocks along the roadside edge of the green as a temporary measure to prevent access. This will give us time to consider long-term measures of a less unsightly kind, such as the creation of an earth ridge, perhaps with a ditch alongside.

All this has cost the Council several thousand pounds of council-tax payers' money, but I hope residents will agree that it is money well spent. I also hope they will feel that we acted as fast as we reasonably could. It is best to try negotiation to begin with in such cases, but as soon as it was clear that negotiation would not work we resorted to other means.

The invasion caused a great deal of anxiety, distress and nuisance to residents, and I want to thank them for their forbearance in putting up with it in such a civil manner. I also want to thank the County Council travellers officer for his advice and support, and the police for theirs. Cherwell District Council sent in a cleansing team during the occupation, and they were apparently subjected to some abuse. They then cleansed the site thoroughly on Friday morning. Thanks go to them, and then particularly to Parish Councillors and staff for their help, and above all our Facilities Manger Graham Kearney and his team who remained well ahead of the game throughout.

On other matters, Exeter Hall remains closed to the public at the time of writing, apart from a few bookings. Councillors and office staff have continued to work mainly at home since the lockdown, and we shall continue with our calendar of on-line Council and committee meetings. Playgrounds, tennis courts and cemeteries are all open. Tenders for the drainage work at the Bicester Road

cemetery are now in, and we aim to start work as soon as we can once we have received planning permission.

The three main volunteer organizations active in the Village are still doing sterling work to meet Covid-related needs: Kidlington and Surrounding Areas Community Hub (KASA), the North Oxfordshire Food Bank and the Cherwell Community Larder, as well as several other smaller initiatives, all count among the heroes and heroines of the present emergency.

DAVID ROBEY