

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's Report

June 2019

The local elections at the beginning of May brought about major changes in the membership of the Parish Council. Of 15 councillors in total, no less than nine are new this time, though some (including myself) have been members of earlier Councils. The political balance of the Council has also changed significantly: 12 councillors are LibDems, two are Conservative, and one is Green. Three of the new councillors have been elected to Cherwell District Council. Political divisions don't mean that much at Parish Council level: councillors would rather work together than argue with each other. Nevertheless a LibDem-led Parish Council will be well placed to work with the two LibDem Cherwell Councillors for Kidlington and our LibDem MP, Layla Moran, who has been very active in supporting local interests.

This means that we will support Layla's position on the two major issues of new housing development and the proposed East-West Expressway. She has questioned Cherwell's figures on the need for 4,400 new houses in the District, around Oxford, and has argued for the need, among other things, for more affordable housing and improved infrastructure provision. She has also called for more public consultation on the Expressway. We shall continue the previous Council's membership of the No Expressway Alliance.

These issues illustrate one side of the Parish Council's work: matters over which the Council itself has no powers, but on which it can try to represent Kidlington interests as best it can with the bodies that do have the powers, mainly the District Council and the County Council. Traffic and parking are another such matter: we shall continue to press for better cycling provision and the improvement of parking enforcement through the transfer of responsibility for it from the police to the District Council.

Some of the points raised at the Annual Parish Meeting on 23 May came into this general category (see the report in this issue on the rest of the Meeting). Apart from housing, parking and provision for cycling came up. In reply to Chris Brennan's question about cycling and walking routes we were able to report that the County Council will be creating cycle tracks along the Oxford Road between Sainsburys and the car-wash, and that a cycle/pedestrian link is under discussion to the path from Lyne Road to Begbroke, for better access to Langford Lane. Andrew Moss expressed some well-founded concerns about traffic in the village centre, in which respect we can only try and press the other authorities to consider further action. Melvina Fawcett made an important point about the need to enhance facilities in the village centre, with which the Council fully agrees. Some years ago we developed a Kidlington Masterplan with the District Council, in which this issue features largely. The Masterplan has been formally adopted, but we will have to continue to press Cherwell to give it a more specific form and take steps to implement it.

On the other hand two further questions that Melvina raised do come within the Council's powers. One was the question of disabled access to Exeter Hall and Exeter Close. Access to Exeter Hall will shortly be much improved by the installation of a lift to the sunken floor in the Hall's main space. Other issues of access will be considered as the Council addresses, in the forthcoming months, the much broader issue of the redevelopment of Exeter Hall and the adjacent buildings. Melvina's second question was the matter of Council transparency. Council meetings are open to the public, and meeting minutes, and a great deal more information, are freely available on the Council website at <http://www.kidlington-pc.gov.uk/>. But the Council could be more open about lack of progress on key issues as well as its many positive achievements. Many of these key issues lie outside the Council's powers, as I have said, but we will nonetheless try to keep residents informed about the extent of our success in pursuing them.

David Robey