

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report May 2021

In the first week of June there were fewer than three new Covid cases in Kidlington North and Kidlington South respectively, but sadly rather more in the surrounding areas. On 24 June the Parish Council will be holding its second physical meeting since lockdown, but we are prepared if necessary to revert to meeting on-line. If we do, we will continue to follow our published calendar and arrange for public participation. Let's hope it won't be necessary.

The recent local elections produced some notable changes. We have a new Green Party County Councillor for Kidlington South, Ian Middleton, who is also a Kidlington Parish Councillor. We also have a new Conservative County Councillor for Kidlington North and Kirtlington, Nigel Simpson, who was my predecessor as Chair of the Parish Council. We look forward to working closely with both of them. Cherwell District Council has a new LibDem member in the person of Dorothy Walker, who represents Kidlington West along with two existing LibDem members, Conrad Copeland and Katherine Tyson, both also Parish Councillors.

Kidlington Parish Council has a majority of LibDem members, but I don't want to make too much of that. Councillors work well together regardless of party, and it is very rare indeed for divisions to arise along party lines. The important thing for us is to have good working relations with District and County Councillors, because much of our agenda is to represent Kidlington interests with the next two levels of local government. This is also achieved, of course, by our Council officers working closely, as they do, with officers at the next two levels.

Nevertheless there are times when Kidlington's voice is not heard as clearly in Cherwell as we might wish. To counter this, we are negotiating with the District Council for the establishment of a permanent Kidlington work group, with a designated liaison officer. Progress on this front has been slow, however. While we are the third largest urban centre in the District, I sometimes think that being termed a village means that we are not taken quite as seriously as we would be if we were a town—though it would make no difference to our powers. But we remain mindful of the experience of our predecessors many years ago, who redesignated Kidlington as a town, and were forced to reverse the decision by the resulting public outcry.

We had a good relationship with Ian Hudspeth, the former Leader of the County Council who lost his seat to a LibDem in the May elections. We shall see what difference a LibDem-led County Council will make to us. One potential area of common interest is the so called Arc development scheme that still plans a massive increase in the population of Oxfordshire, although the associated plans for an Oxford-Cambridge Expressway seem to be on ice. We view with concern the scale of population increase that is envisaged, and we hope that the new County Council will too.

DAVID ROBEY