

KPC Report July 19

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The most important item on the Parish Council's current agenda is the Partial Review of Cherwell District Council's Local Plan set up to deal with Oxford City's unmet housing need. At the time of writing, we still await the Inspector's response to the Cherwell proposals, which would involve building an additional 4,400 houses by 2031 in Green-Belt areas North of the city. As currently proposed, not many of these houses would be in Kidlington: 100 next to the Stratfield Brake sports grounds, and 230, strictly speaking in Gosford, surrounding the new cemetery on Bicester Road. However, Kidlington would be significantly affected by the large number of houses, a total of 2,890, proposed on either side of the A44 in Yarnton, Begbroke and Woodstock; and by a further 1,180 on either side of the Oxford Road between the A34 and Cutteslowe, which would reduce the 'Kidlington gap' between the village and Oxford to a narrow strip of land north of the A34. The Begbroke part of the plan has been complicated still further by Oxford University's recent announcement of its plans to build 2,000 houses in the area.

The Parish Council is not at all against new housing, but has followed our MP, Layla Moran, in questioning the estimated numbers. The Green Belt surrounding Kidlington is one of its major assets and it is essential to keep building on it to the minimum; most Kidlington residents also value the Kidlington gap. We are very concerned too about the impact of the proposed new developments on a transport infrastructure already under strain.

Very recently, the Inspector considering Oxford City's current local plan has responded with questions about the calculation of the need for housing provision for the city in adjacent districts, and about the estimation of the capacity for housing development within the city itself. This means that the Cherwell figure of 4,400 houses needed to meet Oxford's housing need could be revised downwards, with consequent reductions in the housing planned in and around Kidlington. We have written to the Cherwell Inspector asking him to take these questions into account before responding on the Cherwell Local Plan.

This is a matter over which, as I said in the last issue, the Parish Council has no powers except to represent the needs of Kidlington as best it can to the appropriate authorities. Areas within our powers on which we are currently engaged include the allocation of a budget of up to £100,000 to update and upgrade the play facilities at Ron Groves Park. We have also taken the first steps to decide on plans for the redevelopment of Exeter Hall and parts of Exeter Close; we shall be working with Oxford County Council to prepare a tender for an options appraisal for the site. And, mindful of the increasing pace of climate change, we have set up a group of councillors to work on the development of the Council's policy and strategy on matters of sustainability.