

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: April 2024

This is the 55th and last report I have written since becoming Chair of the Parish Council in May 2019. It therefore seems the moment to review the main activities of the Council over the past 5 years.

In my first report I said that working with Kidlington District Councillors was vital for the Parish Council. As I've often noted, communications with the District Council are not always good, but they have steadily become better. My successor as Chair, Lesley McLean, is a prominent District Councillor and now a member of the largest party group in the Council, the LibDems. Our work on the proposed Kidlington Infrastructure scheme, and on other major matters, will be greatly strengthened by this.

Of the other things I mentioned in my first report as work-in-progress, we have achieved the civic enforcement of parking restrictions, though residents may wonder if that has made very much difference, as traffic wardens have not been much in evidence. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan has been adopted, and will be implemented progressively with new road improvements and the new housing developments. Enhancement of the Village Centre remains a central ambition. Little progress has been made so far, but this should accelerate with the new Infrastructure scheme.

Redeveloping Exeter Hall with a new civic centre including the present library is still very much on the agenda, but has not progressed much because of Covid, changing attitudes in the County Council, and changing requirements for the redevelopment of the doctors' surgery. The ongoing tale of the bollard in the High Street has also not progressed much. It has not been working for some time, but we are in discussion with the County Council to replace it with an automatic number-plate recognition system.

On the positive side, the work we have done on the environmental side has been a major source of satisfaction, with the Kidlington Eco Group, the Cherwell Collective, and other outside parties. This will remain a major focus of the Council's activities. We have also made a major investment in the upgrading of the Bicester Road Cemetery. This will not remove completely the risk of occasional waterlogging, but it has kept it to a reasonable minimum even in the heavy rainfall of the last months.

The biggest challenges have been Covid and the OUFC stadium plans. During Covid we kept going online, and tried to provide what support we could for residents, but in addition to our hard-working and dedicated council staff, the most credit should go to the North Oxfordshire Community Foodbank and the Cherwell Larder for the substantial material help that they provided.

The stadium scheme has not been a happy story. It was sprung on us unawares by the County Council, and with some difficulty we remained neutral on it for a good while on the basis that we did not have enough information to judge. Since this information never came, we opposed the scheme when the County Council made its in-principle decision to go ahead, and we have now put in strong objections (see our website) to the current planning application, mainly on the basis that so much information is still lacking. We hope our objections will help residents, whether or not the scheme goes ahead, and whether or not they support it.

Trying as far as we can to serve the interests of all residents on this issue has not been an easy position to maintain. We have been accused by some stadium supporters of being too close to the Friends of Stratfield Brake, and by some opponents of being too close to the Club. But then, I suppose, that might even suggest that we have got it right.

DAVID ROBEY