

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

March 2020

The recent exceptional rainfall has made the Parish Council's Climate Emergency statement particularly timely. We have now set up a Climate Change Working Group, headed by Neil Prestidge, to lead on the development of the Council's climate change agenda. It will cover a wide range of activities: community engagement, to connect with environmentalists, involve organizations such as schools, and hold public events; open space management, to develop the green spaces we manage in the best interests of the environment; procurement, to reduce the environmental impact of the things we buy; and buildings, to make them more sustainable and environmentally friendly. We are only just beginning this programme of activities, but it will be a major part of the Council's work over the next few years, and we hope for a high degree of community involvement. For a start, we are reviewing the potential for substantially more tree-planting in the land that we own and more generally within the village.

The heavy rainfall, and some unfounded comments made in the media, take me back once again to the subject of the Bicester Road cemetery. Even after the last months' continued rains, the degree of waterlogging has not become significantly worse: other places in Kidlington and nearby have been much more badly affected. We do regret the distress that this has caused some bereaved families, but we are doing our best to make conditions better, and unfortunately there are no quick solutions. The ditch along the Northern side of the cemetery has now been cleared and regraded, and is running freely. This enables us to move on to the next stage of work, to implement additional drainage and other measures in the burial area itself. While we will never be able to prevent altogether the waterlogging that comes after exceptional rainfall, we will take whatever steps we can to ensure that it clears away more quickly.

I would like to reiterate three points that we have made before. First, cost is not and has not been an issue: we have earmarked very substantial sums of money for possible works on the cemetery, and we will spend whatever proves to be necessary. Second, one feature that makes the site suitable for a cemetery unfortunately contributes significantly to the waterlogging: there is a thick layer of clay a little below the surface which protects the graves from water seepage, but this also has the effect of preventing the water from draining easily. Third, while the site is suitable for a cemetery, it is not for this reason ideal; it was, however, the only site available within the village, and the only alternative would have been no cemetery at all. We still believe that once we have carried out further works it will be a pleasant, attractive and appropriate location. A full statement on the establishment and development of the cemetery is available on the Parish Council website at http://www.kidlington-pc.gov.uk/Cemeteries_22861.aspx.

DAVID ROBEY