

Kegworth Parish Council Chair's address to Annual Parish Meeting May 14th 2022.

Introduction to the Volunteering Thread

Good morning and welcome. We at Kegworth Parish Council, KPC, are pleased to have so many people and organisations represented here. Our community, like the rest of the UK, has become increasingly dependent on volunteers. You keep the village going. Thank you. Before I start, please could I ask anyone representing a voluntary group to identify themselves and their group so that anyone interested can make a bee line for you when the formal part has finished.

People

Speaking of volunteers, I turn to colleague councillors. I am indebted to all who have served on the Council, to Cllrs Martin Hawksworth, Andrew Priestley and Carol Sewell who served for the whole year and provided much needed stability, and former Cllrs Susie Priestley and Rod Pritchard who brought complementary skills and expertise at a critical time for KPC. We should have ten members, but turnover has been very high since the uncontested election in May 2019. We currently have three vacancies. Why not speak to us afterwards about what being a councillor really entails? We really are a friendly bunch!

In his absence I want to thank our locum clerk, Peter Leppard, who stepped in last May for seven months at a very challenging time. Lockdown was coming to an end and Peter enabled us to prioritise. He steadied the ship and his objectivity cut through on several issues. A Human Resource Committee was set up with four members. In January we welcomed our new clerk, Donna Griggs. Donna brings administrative experience in Education coupled with being a councillor herself in East Leake. We have been able to re-open the office again Monday to Thursday mornings. All meetings are now face to face and residents are welcome to observe or contribute in the public session each month, usually on the first Monday.

The Parish Council to be elected in May 2023, even if uncontested for lack of nominations above ten, needs to have what is known as General Power of Competence to be credible. First condition: Donna is working towards achieving the specialist clerk's qualification in time. Second condition: a minimum of seven councillors must allow themselves to be nominated. The ideal is a full ten nominations and a commitment to serve for four years. Many parishes achieve their full complement and relatively stability.

More widely new people are moving in and out of a village like this all the time. We aim to be an inclusive and welcoming Council. The newsletter has proved vital in making new residents on the Slack and Parr estate feel welcome as well as bringing openness, transparency and a common understanding across the community.

Achievements

We reintroduced a well-received quarterly newsletter. Councillors have delivered it so far, helped by our very own volunteers. However, your Summer edition will come with your 'Rural Trader'.

The Church Wall tenders came in high, but we succeeded in getting the District Council, NWLDC, to unlock money related to the SEGRO development to keep borrowing down and the Wall was completed in the Autumn. The continuation to fix more minor problems with the Nottingham Road Church Wall are in hand and we have managed our finances to cover that. The regrettable precept increase was related to the inflationary pressures we are all experiencing.

The Council has adopted a robust approach to the £1m Kegworth Public Realm Project led by NW Leicestershire District Council. The gateways and new bus shelter signify that a project that started at lockdown is just about alive. The proposed cyclist provision in London Road is held up because the County Council advises that the aqueduct supplying Leicester with water is relatively close to the surface at that point. The continuation until 2024 of the main funding for Market Place is confirmed. As in the delayed scheme in central Coalville, the key for Kegworth is to ensure that County Highways expertise and know-how is fully engaged.

We have started much needed maintenance at the office and are pleased that service providers and voluntary group meetings, like the Police are returning to make the building a focus. Peter and Donna have facilitated a fresh start for the Dr Gerard Old People's Benevolent Fund for example. Gradual restarts after Covid included one meeting of the liaison group with our Sutton Bonington student representatives and the University of Nottingham.

I was particularly pleased that we could offer a venue for meetings of a vital new strategic collaboration with local parish councils to create a united front on the preparation of the next Local Plan by District. Government and County strategies for the expansion and rollout of employment sites and housing at the East Midlands hub, that's Airport, SEGRO and more impact most obviously on Diseworth to the East of the A453.

The inland Freeport includes the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station site. Kegworth is surrounded by potential development. Although parish councils are relatively toothless, I believe they can have an influence through sound partnership, networking, and scrutiny. KPC is actively maintaining links at councillor level with Nottinghamshire and Rushcliffe, always highlighting the vital piece of countryside remaining between the M1 and the railway line. For example, the proposed cycle route from Clifton to the Airport via Kegworth looks like being a reality. It should bring modest improvements to the route into Kegworth from Ratcliffe. Likewise, we contributed to the new District Cycling and Walking Policy.

KPC's benefit to you, the volunteers, may seem minimal but we have reinstated a modest grants scheme, with grants to the Heritage Centre, the Tennis Club, the Flower Festival, the Scouts and One Kegworth. We continue to support the Kegworth Plan Group and were pleased to work together to secure the additional tree planting by County as part of the Treescapes project. Our involvement with St Andrew's speaks for itself and we have been quietly doing what we can to support the Library. We have signposted external grant opportunities to businesses and voluntary groups where we could. Donna will develop her mailing lists of businesses and organisations so make sure she has your up-to-date details.

Under 'achievements' I will add one regret: that we continue to have an oversubscribed KGV playing field owned by KPC and Martin Hawksworth's Imps Football Club are having to take on facilities elsewhere.

Forward Look

The strategic work to influence surrounding development and ensure that Kegworth retains its character and integrity as a thriving community will continue. If residents care enough to make their own responses to proposals it will add weight. Add in Cllr Sewell's involvement in relevant committees via District Council, add in the five-parish partnership, and add in my own, voluntary, and unrelated role as a member of the Airport Independent Consultative Committee and we will be noticed.

We await an expected re-routing of HS2. We have already alerted the higher level Councils to the priority for better sports field provision in Kegworth if the land towards the M1 and South of Junction 24 is released for development.

The post by-pass Public Realm Project remains our top priority and we have made our proposals as published in the recent newsletter. While County Highways still have the Market Place and London Road focus on Kegworth we will continue to lobby hard for a new look at pedestrian, cyclist, and traffic management more widely. For example, we would all agree that buses being unable to stop safely for passengers, traffic and parking on Side Ley and Station Road at peak times, and worn white lining highlight what needs to be done.

Returning to volunteering and what has been called the Big Society, where groups must bid for grants, is there anyone with the skills and time to help prepare bids for those who find it all so daunting and wasteful of their energies? I can do no more than list some questions that KPC will quietly try to address even though it has very limited power and resource to do so.

Now that we are open for business again, KPC has seen cases that lead us to ask whether 'need' in Kegworth is mapped and fully supported. That at a time when public and professional services are still often scarce, more must be paid for, and times are getting harder for many of all ages? KPC will signpost help where we can. Does Kegworth need better coordination of its volunteering week by week to act as a focus to recruit new volunteers?

If groups are struggling or ceasing to meet such as Royal British Legion, the Heritage Centre, the Methodist Church, the Library, the Gardening Club, how do we organise to either keep them or replace with tomorrow's model that younger people want to be part of? Learning and development is the key to positive change.

What about our empty buildings? Are there charitable or cooperative model that might benefit the community?

At KPC our allotments are a great focus for health and wellbeing and we will be seeking to catch up with waiting lists and make the most of them. We can use more newsletter delivery volunteers – a great way to get fresh air, meet neighbours and build community. Do we need more noticeboards? Our working groups are a great opportunity to offer expertise for a short time before the Council makes decisions. Let us know your interests and expertise. We will keep that on file ready to call on you when needed.

Finally, the Council hopes this year to replace the Church floodlighting with new LED units. Where else can we become greener and smarter and switched on to the future as well as the past?

Conclusion

We think a lot has been achieved in a year of administrative transition, the second year of Covid, and following a turnover of ten councillors in two years. Don't forget, the Annual Parish Meeting will be in March next year. If you have ideas for format, venue, time and so on, let Donna know. Then elections. Will Kegworth end up with ten councillor nominees and retain the General Power of Competence?