

Chair of Kegworth Parish Council's (KPC) Report to the Annual Parish Meeting 2021

Good evening. Our Clerk, Vicky Roe is unable to be here and we have the locum services of Peter Leppard. I will refer to Kegworth Parish Council as KPC or 'we' from now on. There is a lot to say so I need to go quickly. There are headings to help you follow. All reports will be published on our website.

Introduction

We celebrate the chance to come together as a parish after a two year gap. Thanks to the OYO Kegworth Hotel for enabling this to be a face to face meeting so soon after we all took the Road Map step 3 last Monday.

My name is Ray Sutton. I have been Chair of KPC for just a week. We are assembled to hear from, and celebrate, the rich community we all live in. It is you who make it tick, nay even chime and vibrate. I think litter is a good litmus test of a community. Our joint care and attention to this issue across the patch, from the quarry to the Notts boundary to the bypass, tells me that we pass the test with distinction. My award goes to the gentleman who slowly pushes along his walker and places the litter in the shopping compartment. What dedication and what a privilege to live in the same village as him.

From the time Vikings sailed down the River Soar under Keggi The Red Beard, Kegguth has been welcoming East Winders like me and adapting to change. The early establishment of the Derby-Leicester route ensured that in culture, business and outlook, our people have been a canny, learning and developing lot, enterprising, fiercely caring for one another, defending their community and making the most of life on a crossroads of river, road, and now rail and air. Learning and developing is the right aim for most organisations and especially for KPC just now.

People

I would like to acknowledge the time, effort and skill freely given by the ten members who have left the Council since the last parish meeting in 2019, some with a good number of years' service. Councillors Bishop, Carter, Forster, Hignett, Hirst, Hogan, Maguire, Mellan, Pendleton, Tansley thank you. In that time, four of these served as chair and it is right that we single out David Hignett's time in the 'first among equals' role. Thank you.

The council is carrying four vacancies, one unfilled on May 6th due to a lack of nominees for the by-election which will be re-run by NWLDC. Three vacancies are currently being advertised as the law requires. The six remaining councillors, myself, Martin Hawksworth, Susie Nolan, Andrew Priestley, Rod Pritchard and Carol Sewell hope for lots of interest in the vacancies from those willing to make the commitment. All of us live in Kegworth and Martin and Carol are long serving. We would like to end up with a balance across sex/gender.

We need younger people in the 18-50 bracket and there are many other under-represented groups. A Council dominated by retired white males is as ancient as Keggi himself and not fit for the 21st century and the challenges the village faces.

Public Relations

We hear you when you say that we are not listening. Please try to use our website so that you follow decisions we make. It is due for a makeover. When that happens please let us have your constructive comments and suggestions. In an area that for years has had no comprehensive local media coverage, and receives only sporadic newsletters and public briefings, we rely on just two notice boards for a village of 3000, plus word of mouth, our fantastic voluntary networks and, of course, Facebook groups, the latter an acquired taste which can often be more bitter than sweet. Communication is therefore a high priority for KPC going forwards.

Partnerships

Regardless of the 2018 by-pass, some would say it was inevitable that we now find ourselves trying to be a historic village on the very edge of a central UK airport and distribution centre, a prime development site at the power station, and the Clifton based expansion plans. The intended Freeport area embraces all of these, which, with the Toton/HS2 site, wraps around Kegworth. Therefore KPC's voice at, and work with neighbouring Parishes County and District are essential if we are to be embraced and nurtured rather than strangled.

To that end, councillors themselves have recently drafted and finalised a parish response to the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan. KPC will continue to find the best ways of advocating and influencing, so that the balance between heritage, environment, local business, housing and amenity in the village can be maintained for the well being of all. It is not all bad news, and the expected arrival of a dentist, KPC's work on cycle way development, the continued investment in this hotel and the new pet shop are all positive signs.

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order

Our understanding is that this has now lapsed. KPC is taking advice. Enquiries should be addressed in writing to the Clerk.

Project - Kegworth Public Realm

KPC continues to work in partnership with District on this £1m scheme centred on Market Place. Because of the slow start to project consultation and planning during the unexpected year of lockdown, the Local Enterprise Partnership confirmed in March a new set of milestones for their £0.5 million contribution taking us on to March 2022. Most recently, Zoom meetings were recently held with local businesses, backed up by questionnaires for those who couldn't attend, and we await the findings. Councillors attended as silent observers. Informal reports are encouraging. I wrote 'eminent common sense' by the side of my notes. Advice so far tells us that significant traffic calming and a pedestrian crossing cannot be covered within this project.

Project - Church Wall

The wall collapse in January this year confirmed the need for a rebuild and not merely maintenance. Plans aimed at a rebuild had been in hand for a year. Fortunately, attention to the complex conservation and planning issues related to a churchyard and former burial ground were all being professionally addressed by due process. For instance, tree reports, planning permission, traffic management tenders were all in place. The Council hastened its business case for borrowing, now accepted, confining the Kegworth Parish precept increase for the current year to 1% for inflation. The business case for borrowing was flagged in your February copy of the Life magazine and the full version is on our website. The minutes of several 2021 meetings refer to the Wall. Do have a look. Last week we accepted and approved a tender for the rebuild that was significantly over budget. KPC is approaching NWLDC with a view to using reserves towards the wall linked to the completion of SEGRO East Midlands Gateway. Further work on financing will, we hope, ensure that the contract can be signed soon and the work started. It would be foolish to predict an end date, given all the unknowns. We regret the disruption and the weekly cost of the traffic management system and will do all in our power to minimise both.

Normal operations

It is not widely known what the Parish Council does and doesn't do. For instance Highways, including pavements, air quality, water pollution and most street lighting are County, as are strategies for business and housing growth. Fly tipping clearance and planning permission are District. The Kegworth projects already described are bold and enterprising for a small parish. What is routine for KPC? Our KPC-owned allotments continue to be popular as 'grow your own' becomes more attractive. The work at the KPC-run Cemetery is inevitably constant. Our lengthsman, Stuart Cox, is always busy helping us to maintain a safe, tidy and healthy local environment, especially the KPC public spaces like Market Place. There is always something to do, often with legal and financial implications. This ranges from the weighty: at the King George V Playing Field keeping up to date with KPC's obligations under the 1950 Deed of Covenant set up to safeguard usage by groups in our community when we bought it and the community raised money for a Village Hall; to the more routine: deciding how much to spend on Christmas trees and lights.

The future

The last two years have not been easy for any of us, not least KPC. Immediately there are many difficult decisions to take. I hope many of you will stay for our Annual Meeting which, as always, includes up to 15 minutes' public participation. I close with edited and selected comments from a resident at weekend:

"I can't sit by any longer, moaning and whingeing about how I am unhappy with how things are being handled. The time has come to do something about it. With the above in mind, I would like to acknowledge the time and effort that all of the existing councillors have put in so far. Bolstering the existing team, restoring faith, and bringing new skills to the council which complement those of the existing council members is the answer."