

Chair of Kegworth Parish Council (KPC) Report to the Annual Parish Meeting March 13th 2023

Because the outgoing Council decided to call the meeting before the election period starts, this being the end of the four year 2019 – 23 cycle, the report covers just ten months: it feels much longer.

For background, I repeat a line or two from my first report as chair in 2021: “From the time the Vikings sailed down the River Soar, Kegworth has been welcoming East Winders like me and adapting to change”. I spoke then of us being canny, enterprising, fiercely caring for one another and making the most of life on a natural crossroads.

Communications

We keep every household and business updated via the quarterly newsletter. Our draft minutes and agendas continue to be available on our website, and more. We hope more people will keep up to date that way and we would be pleased to have a full house for monthly KPC meetings as we did last March, but we usually get one or two.

People

Donna Griggs, our Clerk, completed her Certificate in Local Council Administration in record time and with flying colours. We need a minimum of seven councillors nominated and elected to retain General Power of Competence and hope we will achieve that. Women are currently under-represented, as are residents living to the South of London and Derby Roads. The age profile is improving slowly but diversity in general could still be improved. For more about being a councillor and nominations for the new council, please see Donna after the meeting.

I am indebted to councillors Gatt, Hawksworth, Priestley, Sewell and Williams for seeing the whole year through with me. I am pleased to report that the parish council continues to have better retention and stability, with the number of councillors completing each of the four years from 2019 being 5, then only 2, 4, and now 6. Special thanks to Martin Hawksworth and Carol Sewell for their contribution and long service over the whole of this period and more.

Routine Council Work

This year the new Human Resource Committee became established, with Hilary Williams as Chair. Donna’s strong administrative experience has enabled us to put both policy and practice on a sound footing but there is more to catch up on yet. Getting a bank account at last where dual online bank payment authorisation is routine and affordable may not sound glamorous any more than great audit reports and renewing the office roof, but it is essential for a professional and accountable organisation.

We are indebted to our lengthsman, Stuart Cox for his work on behalf of the Council on all our sites and beyond. The Sideley Park volunteers led by Jan Barrowcliff add a dimension in the park, and more widely, that the Parish Council itself could never provide. Thank you. They have modestly declined the NWLDC suggestion that we might have a good chance of a national Green Flag award for Sideley Park. You can get involved by giving your details to Donna. Likewise, the sterling work of Kegworth litter pickers continues every day, and especially through weekend litter picks organised by Kegworth Plan Group and One Kegworth. Thank you all.

We are very grateful to our tenants at the King George the Fifth playing field in the shape of the Football, Tennis and Cricket clubs. We need more space for sport and fitness in Kegworth. We continue to do what we can to get and give the best support we can to the clubs in spite of the

complex history and tenure of the field, the low priority that NWLDC and LCC have been able to give to this agenda in what are dubbed the Norther Parishes, and the continuing HS2 planning blight.

Volatility in public life, not least post-Covid and with soaring inflation makes budget setting tricky. I see that my own Council Tax bill shows a 4.5% increase overall, but the Parish Council precept element only 0.1%.

A slight upturn this year in the number of eligible domestic properties helped us to keep the precept increase near zero. There is a lot of interest in the number of properties in Kegworth exempt from Council Tax, including Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). We are working with NWLDC to establish the facts and whether Kegworth is an outlier in the district.

Planning applications are a standing item for comment only at Parish Council meeting. Decisions, in line with planning policy and the Local Plan for NW Leicestershire, lies with District. All HMO proposals now come as planning applications thanks to Article 4. These are frequently opposed by us, often on the grounds of parking and highway, but they still end up being agreed at District with no significant interventions from County Highways.

Community and Events

Within our limited resources, we continued in an enabling role. We regret the low budget allocations to grants in recent years, not uncommon among all councils given the financial weather since 2020. We gave grants to the Bowls Club and Kegworth Plan Group and we have committed to supporting One Kegworth financially for the 2023 Christmas Market, which is a great advert for the village.

We organised the annual Kegworth Air Disaster Memorial which was well attended and worked with the Royal British Legion and partners as legal and risk management backstop to allow the traditional Remembrance Parade and Ceremony to take place for the first time since Covid.

In a particularly unpredictable civic year, we ran a shop window competition for Queen Elizabeth the Second's Platinum Jubilee. Sadly, we soon found ourselves organising ten days of official mourning for her death. We are grateful for the support we received from volunteers to staff the office and those who called in to sign the Book of Condolence. The Coronation weekend comes, unfortunately, straight after the local elections.

We welcomed one of the Local Area Coordinator funded by LCC Public Health and tasked to match individual personal needs with voluntary groups in the village, and we worked with her to coordinate and advertise the several 'Warm Welcome Spaces' in Kegworth. With that in mind and our plan to see steadily increasing footfall in the office, we signed up for the 'Great Winter Get Together' and saw nearly 20 different people for each of our events, all aimed at combatting the post-Christmas blues: a Tuesday afternoon Cake and Cuppa event and a Saturday morning village walk followed by refreshments. Both saw valuable networking, and the lemon curd cake and other donated goodies survived right through both.

Projects

Historic civic parish responsibility for the St Andrew's churchyard could be regarded as routine, but in recent years it has become a high profile multi-faceted project for us, and not particularly cheap. A demanding privilege you might say, but iconic for Kegworth, its beauty and its history. The New LED lighting still needs tweaking, but it is good to see the light over the front gate working. We caught up with recommended tree maintenance dating back to before lockdown. We hope that the Nottingham

Road wall maintenance will go ahead soon and apologise for the delay and the further traffic management changes, hopefully lasting weeks not months.

After a very long delay, design and implementation for the Kegworth Public Realm project is now in the hands of the County Council. The designation of Market Place is now 'highway not maintainable at public expense'. A year ago, we published the plan showing the Coop entrance reopened one way in and the loss of the herring bone parking bays. In spite of current austerity, the funders have approved a 'last chance saloon' reprieve. We aim to share more detail by the early Summer. The London Road improvements for cyclists and pedestrians have continued to be hamstrung by the problem of the underlying Derwent aqueduct. We listened to resident feedback and a compromise solution that does something, rather than nothing, is likely.

Consultations, Liaison and Campaigns – in that order of priority

Parish and town councils can be sleepy and do the minimum. Kegworth faces more issues than most, not least because of its location. In recent years we have tried to leave no stone unturned and to punch above our weight. We are so fortunate to have a Clerk who understands, tolerates, and copes with this approach. We only survive because of the unsung, skilled, and perceptive support of longer term and newer residents who make their own thought out and carefully argued contributions and generously share them with us. Our work goes well above the expectations of most English parish and town councillors who put themselves forward for public office.

We have variously been at the table for, or commented officially on, all of the following, often in great depth, sometimes at cost to additional time, e-mails and attendance at meetings online and face to face. I end with this list, long as it is, and in no particular order:

1. Rushcliffe borough's Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station site Local Development Order,
2. The Airport Future Airspace programme which will reach a public consultation phase in the next 6-12 months,
3. The Lockington-Hemington Draft Neighbourhood Plan – the newly elected Parish Council will need to decide whether the demands of producing such a plan for Kegworth would bring any planning assurance and protection proportionate to the demands and cost of the process to produce one,
4. The new emerging NWL Local Plan that will inform local commercial and residential development in the rest of the decade, working in partnership with four other parish councils surrounding the Freeport sites,
5. Strategic cycling and walking infrastructure documents from NWLDC and more – a personal passion is the reopening, in some form, of the direct Kegworth North to Lockington route which should never have been lost at an earlier stage,
6. Car cruising on the A453,
7. The future of bus services serving Kegworth, Sutton Bonington and the station, particularly Skylink – the cross boundary and Freeport links made with Notts CC can only help this Council in the future. Throughout we have seemed to be entirely in the hands of Nottinghamshire Local Transport Authority with its Enhanced Bus Partnership and active Bus Service Improvement Plan, and we hope for a good outcome for the 600 petitioners.
8. Persimmon Homes and historically unresolved matters on the Pritchard Drive development,
9. Supporting residents as far as possible, for example boarded up properties and noise associated with the railhead on the SEGRO site.
10. Most recently the use of Yew Lodge as an asylum seeker hotel.