

Kegworth Annual Parish Meeting 2024 – District Cllr Ray Sutton

Carol Sewell and I have coordinated our speeches in an attempt to keep each other – and you – awake!

In May last year I was elected to District as an Independent for Kegworth, really Kegworth South. There are not enough electors in either Kegworth or Daleacre Hill compared to the district average. There is a boundary review ahead of the 2027 election, on which you will eventually be consulted. Based on existing numbers, it is most likely to add to my ward areas in the Long Whatton and Diseworth direction.

Being Independent gives maximum scope to challenge both major parties and officers of District and other organisations. I am free to promote my core values of openness, transparency, and accountability in all that I do. For instance, I have served on the Audit and Governance Committee, a challenge in a Council that has not yet published accounts for 2021-22 or 2022-23. I have offered myself as Chair of this committee for 2024-25 to both Conservative and Labour leaders! At Full Council I challenged the nil attendance by District representatives over a four-year period at the Airport Independent Consultative Committee. I was pleased to be nominated at a subsequent Full Council meeting as the District's representative to replace the PAIN role I have held for two years.

I joined the Parish Council in October 2020 when Market Place was a very hot topic. Since becoming Chair in May 2021, I have been a member of the Public Realm Project Board trying to deliver what Kegworth really wanted. I am proud and relieved that we have finally started the work. I am still Vice Chair of Parish and I believe Kegworth is remarkably well represented, and served, by Carol, Andrew, Donna, and me.

The members of this community can achieve a lot together by constructing a good case and making their individual voices heard. In early 2023 we faced the prospect of losing bus links into Nottinghamshire. I am proud of the way you supported the petition that I initiated and that must have been a factor in getting the Notts Bus on Demand generously extended into Leicestershire.

In the Summer of 2023, you realised that the Download festival was out of hand and joined other voices of protest across a wide area. All year I have pressed council officers for proper planning and not just better PR on the part of the new event management company. As a result, parishes and district councillors will have a chance to scrutinise the traffic management plan for 2024 and other associated arrival issues for festival-goers.

Carol alluded to the Draft Local Plan – and you should see the Parish response if you haven't already done so. Here too resident support in both written submissions and encouragement was great and Carol and I jointly hosted a well-attended workshop in this office. In lieu of a personal response to the Plan I used my increasing contacts with other District parishes surrounding the Freeport sites and eight signatories jointly endorsed and backed up the detailed arguments in the official response from 'Protect Diseworth'. I have worked with Andrew to ask whether an Additional Licensing Scheme could be introduced to cover HMOs of only 3 and 4 beds in Kegworth and/or the whole District. I listened and, as a result, fought the planning application for nine apartments with no parking provision at the former Methodist Church in the High Street: the process and decision to approve remain a concern, not least the Highways reports.

New casework, be it a personal or public matter, comes in at a rate of two cases a week. I do what I can to improve understanding of what parish, district and county are responsible for and how local government works.

With personal cases, I try to help even if the enquiry is not an obvious District matter: Housing - 'Why have some tenants got new kitchens and I haven't?' or 'How can I get to stay in Kegworth when I must leave my current accommodation?', Planning - 'How can I hurry that planning decision through because it affects me if its delayed?'. Above and beyond - supporting someone with a School Admissions Appeal. There are plenty of people who simply need support to negotiate the 'system'. I feel I must single out Sara Lovett of County Public Health, our Local Area Coordinator, for her readiness to work with individuals as and when appropriate.

Likewise thank you to Donna for sharing information about concerns being raised and for gently encouraging residents able to do so to report simple matters themselves, such as missed bin collections to District, or routine street lighting issues to County.

Public-facing issues can go on for many months and remain unresolved, but I don't let go. Many are trying to take credit for the return of Yew Lodge to hotel use later in the year after the disproportionate imposition of an asylum hotel on the parish early in 2023. I have lobbied about Yew Lodge at every level possible and I have absorbed hostility from across the political and moral spectrum.

We have some way to go before we get investment and measures to put a stop to car cruising on the A453. Residents have put their weight into reporting events on 999 as they occur. There was good support for the Village Hall meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner. I attended a meeting in February with the Assistant PCC. As recently as Saturday, bumped into the Labour PCC candidate in the street in Coalville and spoke specifically about Kegworth car cruising and Download.

Thank you to those who contributed to the waste services review about bin collection systems before the April 14th deadline. The final decision may become a politically charged issue. I believe we should choose a collection system that respects the current high levels of householder-sorted waste recycling in this district. I think we should be protecting or increasing the substantial net income we receive. The easily tracked UK-based routes for the separated products, with minimal separation to be done at the central depot put us well ahead of most authorities.

There is always more to do, but a glance at my speech to District Council last May in which I championed Kegworth's needs, will show that we have done well in 2023-24 by working together. Obvious examples of unfinished business are the shortage of parking spaces, EV charging points and inadequate leisure and recreational facilities. Across the board we need to engage young people and families in the life of the village so that we remain a commercially and culturally vibrant community, much more than a retirement or commuter village. I am pleased to say that one primary school class has taken up an offer from a school in Bois de Guillaume and the children have last week excitedly received their first letters from their peers in France.

Finally, I have an e mail list covering perhaps 1 in 7 of my ward residents and I would urge others to join it. I have a website which I try to keep up to date www.ray-sutton.webador.co.uk. Thank you to all who have put up with my attempts to get people thinking, debating openly and respectfully, and supporting good decisions for the benefit of the majority, something very important to our democracy in a general election year. We need a good MP who puts people first.