

Somerford Keynes and Shorncote Annual Parish Meeting 2017 - Chairman's Report

It is with sadness that I start this report with reflection on the deaths of two great contributors to Parish life. Firstly, Councillor John Brailey passed away in January. John had been a Parish Councillor since 2010 and contributed greatly to its work, most noticeably in managing the works at the Village Lake. Secondly, John Sweet, who was the driving force behind the 2012 Parish Plan and an energetic contributor to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, died last August. Both are dearly missed and our thoughts are with their families. Following Muriel's retirement from the position of Parish Clerk, we appointed Wendy Cartwright in January. In a very short space of time, Wendy has competently learned all the nuances of this role.

Village Lake

After many years of negotiation, planning and groundworks, the Parish Council officially opened the Village Lake (Lake 99) on Sunday 22nd May with a lunchtime picnic celebration with the rain just about holding off. The site is accessible on foot or by bike, with a public right of way established around the lake. Residents, and visitors, are now able to enjoy the tranquillity of the lake and picnic on the surrounding grass area. Again, I would like to thank the Lake 99 sub-committee for its efforts in moving this project forward despite all the bureaucratic hurdles placed in its path. The Parish Council will be shortly setting up a small committee to oversee the management of this site. LME has kindly offered to cut the grass around the lake and we are grateful for this kind contribution.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The Neighbourhood Development Plan is getting nearer to completion. An NDP is a legal document that states what a community would like to happen in their area regarding matters relating to land use and must be taken into consideration whenever planning decisions are made. During late Spring, we consulted with local businesses and the public on the draft Plan document, through a series of consultations. Following the consultations, we have spent a considerable amount of time considering all of the responses and modified the Plan accordingly. The consideration of the responses and the updated Plan will be shortly reviewed by the full Parish Council and then published. The Plan will then be at the point at which it will be passed to CDC for further consultation and various statutory procedures before being put to a referendum.

Cllr Mogridge, and her team, has completed its work on the creation of an Emergency Plan for the Parish. I would like to thank Karen, her team and all those people who have volunteered to help out in the event of an emergency, of whatever kind, in the Parish.

Keynes Country Park and Neigh Bridge

The current lease of KCP to Watermark terminated in December 2016 and the Park is currently closed to vehicles. The CWPT has recently announced that Planning Solutions Ltd has been appointed to manage and operate the site. PSL, who currently operates another outdoor visitor attraction in Leicestershire, will reopen the Park over the Spring Bank holiday weekend. Both CWPT and GCC have assured us that there will be no barrier, in principle, to our application to have the footpaths into and around KCP designation as public rights of way. We hope to meet PSL shortly to discuss with them their plans for the Park.

As many of you aware, the CWPT has introduced parking charges for the car park at Neigh Bridge. The Parish Council has expressed our concerns over the implications of this decision on the roads surrounding Neigh Bridge. Whilst, we recognise that the CWPT has a right to introduce parking charges and that it is not illegal to park on surrounding roads, we will continue to monitor the situation and report any concerns that we have.

Cotswold Community

Amita, the owners of the former Cotswold Community site, submitted a planning application to extract gravel and then build 75 dwellings on the site in May last year. At this stage, there is no news on the outcome of these applications.

Cullimore Gravel Extraction

Cullimore has now extracted the gravel from phases 1 & 2 at the Shorncote site and has proposed a further water management scheme (WMS). The PC continues to voice its concerns about increased water flows towards Shorncote and Somerford Keynes and is working with GCC to ensure that the WMS is satisfactory to the Parish. Following a dry winter, there have been no concerns over water! The PC is very grateful for the on-going maintenance of ditches by riparian land owners. CDC has agreed, in principle, to install a new culvert from the Spratsgate Lane ditch but it didn't happen in Spring 2016.

Highways

The state of our highways, not just in our Parish, is of increasing concern to the PC. Our list of missing 'Give Way' signs, incorrect signs, battered signs and potholes continues to grow. Unfortunately, items are not addressed, so the list does not get shorter, despite escalating our frustration to GCC. Our concern is that many of the items that need addressing impact on the safety of our roads.

The Telephone Box

As usage of public telephones has diminished rapidly, BT offered us the opportunity to buy the telephone box in the village for £1! Rather than lose this useful landmark, the PC has accepted this offer. It is our understanding BT will also hand us a complementary tin of red paint.

Thanks

As always, our Parish Councillors have worked extremely hard this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our Councillors and the Clerk. I would like to thank all those Parishioners who have offered us help and support over the past year. Finally, I wish to thank and express our gratitude to Muriel for her 17 years of service to the Parish Council.

Sarah Powell