

Somerford Keynes and Shorncote Annual Parish Meeting 2014 - Chairman's Report

This report gives a flavour of major activities and challenges that the Parish Council has been involved with during this past year.

Water

Once again, the weather presented us many challenges. The incredibly wet winter meant huge volumes of water flowing down the Spratsgate Lane ditch, again overflowing into Cokes Pit resulting in a very high water table on the northern side of Water Lane. Fortunately, no properties suffered water ingress but many properties along Water Lane endured septic tanks backing up due to the water levels. The Parish Council has met with the Flood Engineer from Cotswold District Council to discuss possible solutions for diverting water away from the Spratsgate Lane ditch and hence away from the village. As presented at the meeting in February for Water Lane residents, three solutions have been suggested. The Parish Council is continuing to work with CDC on proceeding with one of these options and is prepared to commit some of its funds. The parish is, however, lower priority, for CDC, than other parishes within the district.

During the hot summer months, the Parish Council met with the Environment Agency to look at the maintenance of the River Thames and our flood defences, and what work landowners can do on the river and its banks. We are pleased to report that the flood defences were well managed this year and that they handled the excessive rains extremely well. This was further helped by Lower Mill Estate creating a second spillway.

The Parish Council fully appreciates the work that riparian land owners do to maintain their ditches that keeps the water flowing.

Lake 99

The site, known as Lake 99, was transferred to the Parish Council in May. However, bureaucratic ineptitude from the Water Park local authorities meant the promised funding was delayed for over six months. After the rains stopped, it was possible for work to begin and the work to create an outdoor recreational area for the village is currently on-going. We hope to hold a launch event in the summer to mark the opening of the area. I would like to thank the Lake 99 sub-committee for its efforts in achieving the transfer and obtaining the funding, and Cllr Brailey for managing the work.

Keynes Country Park (now known as Cotswold Country Park and Beach)

The hot, sunny days resulted in parking chaos around KCP. However, things improved after a visit from APCOA, the traffic wardens. Should similar problems occur in the future, it is beneficial to know that the Parish Council can contact APCOA directly. Alternatively, residents can contact the police on the non-emergency number 101.

The after-effects of the excessive infill continue to be a concern as well as the water levels of the two lakes, especially as these can have an impact on the water table around the village. The Parish Council continues to apply pressure to the relevant authorities on these matters.

Parish and Emergency Plans

The Parish Plan was completed in June and the Action Plan was formally adopted by the Parish Council in July. Our thanks go to John Sweet for leading the Parish Plan project to a successful conclusion.

The Localism Act of 2011 encourages local communities to develop Neighbourhood Development Plans. An NDP is a legal document that sets out the vision for the community and contains policies that should allow the community to achieve its vision. The plan has to be consulted during the evaluation of all planning applications in the Parish. Throughout the year, the Parish Council has researched the merits of NDPs and investigated the work involved to create one. We have been advised that as our recent Parish Plan was a result of extensive public consultation, it can be used as a basis for our NDP.

A group, consisting of the Chair, Cllr Munroe and John Sweet, has been established to create an NDP and the project was given the go-ahead this week with the aim of completion in May 2015.

As part of the evolving emergency plan and, as a result of the Parish Action Plan, the Parish Council has committed to provide a defibrillator for the Parish, located at the Village Hall. Negotiations are currently underway for its purchase. Our thanks go to the Village Hall Committee for its offered contribution.

Cotswold Community

The former Cotswold Community site has been acquired by Amita Business Ltd. The site resides in the Parish of Ashton Keynes in Wiltshire. The Parish Council has had discussions with Ashton Keynes Parish Council as well as Amita and its planning consultants. Amita's initial plans are to extract gravel from parts of the site and then develop it with permanent housing. Plans are very sketchy at the moment and the Parish Council will continue to consult with both Amita and Ashton Keynes Parish Council.

Other Planning matters

The PC has reviewed all planning applications made within the Parish. The following are noteworthy:

- Cullimore / CWPT application to extract gravel on land adjacent to KCP. This continues to drag on and the PC maintains its opposition due to the increased risk of flooding. It is currently on hold as the Cotswold Water Park Trust and Cullimore, the joint applicants, have not reached an agreement on the site's after-use.
- Many LME applications. The most significant of which is the proposed new entrance onto Minety Lane. This was refused by CDC but is currently being appealed.

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. Finally, I'd like to thank all those Parishioners who have offered us help and support over the past year.

Sarah Powell