

KINGS CAPLE PARISH COUNCIL

IN LIEU OF A PARISH MEETING

An Annual Report to the Parish of Kings Caple

In May last year, Kings Caple Parish Council, for the first time for some years, called a Parish Meeting that was separate from, and not merely tacked on to, the Annual General Meeting of the Council. The object of this was to give an opportunity for a fuller discussion of the needs of the Parish and the aspirations of the village community. Discussion was focused on six topics.

Normally we would have expected to report back to parishioners and to answer questions at the 2020 Parish Meeting. 2020, however has not been a normal year, and because of Covid 19 restrictions, the Parish Meeting, which must be held by the end of May, had to be cancelled.

This report outlines the progress made during the year in progressing the six issues discussed last year. It will be placed on the Parish Council website and Facebook page.

Budget and Expenditure

Prior to the current financial year, Kings Caple Parish Council had not raised its precept since 2012. General inflation and the progressive withdrawal by Herefordshire Council of its contribution towards the cost of the lengthsman and footpath maintenance meant that by the end of 2019 we had to contemplate the danger of failing to balance our budget or alternatively failing fully to support facilities and services important to the community. Accordingly, a budget was set that allowed for a level of expenditure that was still 'tight' but nonetheless involved raising the parish precept by just under 20%. This represented an increase of £10.00 per year (83 pence per month) for a Band C property. The Parish Council also recommended that in future, the precept should be adjusted, appropriately but prudently, each year to avoid the need for very large increases at long intervals.

In fact, the current financial position is better than might have been anticipated. This is partly due to the fact that the Covid 19 pandemic has dictated that all meetings of the Parish Council or those called under its auspices since January have had to be conducted by means of Zoom, and so the costs of hiring the Old School have been temporarily removed. At the same time the Parish Clerk has been successful in obtaining two substantial special grants; one has been to fund additional work by the lengthsman in undertaking drainage work on roadside ditches in the parish; the other, in two tranches, has been for the benefit of those who are responsible for premises such as the Old School where the pandemic has reduced or removed altogether their normal income..

In these special and unusual circumstances, the Parish Council has decided that the current precept should not be raised during the 2021/22 financial year: this should not be taken as a precedent for future years.

Supporting the Old School

The Parish Council believes the Old School to be the principal community asset in the parish. In 2019 it established a Task and Finish group with representatives of the Old School Trustees to agree steps to regularize the means for the Parish Council providing some support for the Old School's finances.

As a result of the meeting of the Task and Finish Group and the subsequent Parish Council meeting, it was agreed the Parish Council would continue funding the broadband facility and would in future meet the costs of annual testing, including fire extinguishers, electrical and fire alarms and personal appliances. In addition, when the Old School flooring was replaced in 2018, the Parish Council had paid the cost, on the understanding the Old School trustees would make a substantial contribution towards this cost during the following financial year. The Parish Council determined at its meeting in November that it would undertake the whole cost.

Finally our Parish Clerk has been successful in accessing two tranches of grant funding designed to support the viability of such premises as the Old School whose finances may have been adversely affected by the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus lock-downs. This funding will compensate for the loss of hiring income and also permit some work designed to enhance the building's comfort and sustainability.

Protecting and Progressing the NDP

Kings Cople NDP was adopted in October 2017 after a referendum produced an affirmative vote of nearly 90% on a turnout of nearly 60%, one of the highest levels of support demonstrated in any Herefordshire parish.

In February 2019 the Government issued a second edition of the National Planning Policy Framework which stated that sections of an NDP dealing with housing would be formally considered 'out of date' two years after the date of adoption. The Kings Cople NDP, however, retains substantial protection for several reasons. It identifies a settlement boundary and has allotted sites which accommodate the number of dwellings identified as required in the Herefordshire Council Adopted Core Strategy. The parish also lies entirely within an AONB; this provides protection against the imposition of a presumption in favour of development as a result of an NDP being 'out of date'.

In March this year two parish councillors and the Parish Clerk met with the County's Neighbourhood Planning Team Leader to discuss future developments of the neighbourhood planning framework. She confirmed that the County Council was reviewing its methodology for identifying villages that were capable of supporting sustainable development of market housing. The Parish Council has repeated its criticisms of this methodology, which it made clear at the time of the examination of the County's Core Strategy in 2015. According to the County NDP Team Leader it was possible that Kings Cople would be redefined as an 'open countryside' village. The new county policies would be shaped by the priorities of the new Herefordshire County administration elected in 2019 and the Government's White Paper on planning expected later in 2020.

The consultative White Paper, 'Planning for the Future', was published in August this year. It proposes the most radical revision of planning procedures since the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. It is based on the principle of zoning and is currently the subject of scrutiny by local planning authorities and parish councils including ourselves. An emphasis on protecting areas of conservation such as AONBs remains a central tenet of the new proposals.

Meanwhile planning applications have been received in respect of the two sites allotted for residential development in the Kings Cagle NDP. These are outline applications with many details of each development to be determined as a result of further applications to discharge conditions. Despite the community's support for the NDP at the referendum, some local residents have expressed objections to these proposals, particularly on account of their density. The Parish Council has supported the outline applications as conforming to its NDP, though it has noted that the density of housing on the allotted sites is as a consequence of the decisions of the External Examiner, who increased the densities which had originally been recommended by the NDP Steering Group. The final section of the Parish Council's representation on application 202070 (Lightfields) is attached as an appendix to this report; it sets out our view of the planning limitations of the NDP process and in particular what we regard as misguided strategies on rural housing development in the County's Adopted Core Strategy.

This Parish Council has adopted the practice of commenting on all planning applications, attempting always to express a clear judgment and to support applications which conform to the NDP and object to those which do not.

Highways

The deteriorating condition of adopted roads in the parish prompted the Parish Council to convene a Task and Finish Group meeting to put in place mechanisms to improve the situation. This group included four current councillors, each with responsibility for keeping particular stretches of the village's road network under close scrutiny and two former councillors with detailed experience of identifying points of the network with recurrent problems.

As a result of this meeting Harry Waymouth accepted the role of Highways Liaison Officer. The map and the spreadsheet earlier prepared by him and Russell Nunn identifying 54 locations subject to recurrent problems were resuscitated as an aide to focusing the work of the lengthsman. A strategic document on the village's roads has been produced, describing the network, analysing the differing levels of usage of the various stretches of road and describing particular areas of difficulty. This paper is intended for use in briefing the Locality Steward and in preparing representations concerning planning applications. The Parish Council has also had the benefit this year of receiving two traffic surveys conducted by planning agents in relation to the two planning applications dealing with the NDP allotted sites; these supply useful data about the volume of road use and mean speed of vehicles on the U71004 and U71005.

Contacts and working relationships with the lengthsman and the Locality Steward have been strengthened. Pot-holes are now being regularly reported. We have highlighted the section of the C1262 between Lightfields and The Clusters and the U71005 between The Clusters and the Old School as requiring ongoing attention

both because of historical disturbance due to the laying of services and the heavy usage they receive. The line of pot-holes on the U71005 have been repaired, but the stretch of the C1262 requires major resurfacing and this has not been done.

The early months of this year saw exceptionally wet weather which led to flooding and serious degradation of some stretches of road such as the U71005 between Willow Cottage and the main drive to Poulstone House. The Parish Clerk achieved a notable success in obtaining a substantial drainage grant which has allowed the Highways Liaison Officer to design a programme of additional work for the lengthsman to address some of the longer-term problems of roadside ditches.

It is clear from discussion with other parish councils that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the under-resourcing of road maintenance. We have made it clear to the County Council that, particularly if it intends to expect small and relatively isolated villages served primarily by unclassified roads to accept the development of market housing, it has a duty to maintain a commensurately adequate road system.

Public Transport

At the time Kings Caple began work on the process of creating an NDP, the village, had only three buses per week actually passing through the parish (return shopping buses, to Hereford on Wednesdays and Saturdays and to Ross on Thursdays). However, there was a relatively good service within reasonable distance (up to 1 ½ km from the western and central settlement of Kings Caple), operating from Ross to Hereford via Hoarwithy and Little Dewchurch. This provided at least four buses each weekday including at peak hours. This service has been progressively downgraded; it only travels to Kingsthorpe in the direction of Hereford, necessitating a change to the main road Ross to Hereford service and doubling the length of time the journey takes. There are now only two journeys each way, in mid-morning and at lunch-time. This service has become relatively unusable and largely unused. The Thursday service through Kings Caple to Ross has also been discontinued. In September last year the John Kyrle school bus was made accessible to members of the general public, though of course the return journey was not at a peak time and it only operated in term time. However, this service did not run after the beginning of the lockdown, and when school was re-opened this September, access to the service by the general public was understandably withdrawn.

In February this year, we were asked by Herefordshire Council to complete a very comprehensive facilities questionnaire. We completed this with great care and have updated it to note the loss of access to the school bus. We believed that some of the information about our facilities contained in the *Rural Settlement Hierarchy Background Paper* and the *Rural Housing Background Paper* was inaccurate at the outset and became increasingly out of date. We have made it clear to the planning authority that we believe rural planning policies must be shaped by a recognition of local facilities and infrastructure. No rural settlement is in our view capable of sustainable development without a properly maintained road system and access to public transport.

There is now some cause for guarded optimism. The new County Council administration seems to have realised that, if its green agenda is to mean

anything, it must address the absence of public transport in rural areas and reverse some of the service cuts of recent years; this will, of course, mean expenditure on subsidizing provision at a time of severe financial stringency.

Proposed Conservation Area

The Kings Capse Parish Plan (2006) proposed a conservation area for the village including the line of buildings and heritage assets along the ridge extending west from the cross-roads at the Old School and including the prominent and sensitive land sloping down from the north and south of this ridge. This area and its features had been identified from the responses submitted by villagers in the Parish Plan questionnaire. At this time the County's Conservation Manager stated that the Council did not have the staffing resources to complete work for designating any conservation areas.

Policies to protect a similar conservation and heritage area were included in the NDP submitted to the External Examiner in 2017. He was sympathetic to the aspiration and included one of the policies proposed (CH1) in his amended text of the NDP, but he noted an NDP was not the appropriate mechanism formally to designate a conservation area, and he suggested the matter should be independently pursued with the County Council as a community aspiration.

We had discussions with the Historic Buildings Conservation Officer after the adoption of the NDP. He was very supportive, but his senior manager, the Service Manager for Conservation warned that there were still inadequate staffing resources for the Council to develop the idea. A further contact with her, however, a year later established she would look at the idea again particularly as there was a possibility of some expert input from the local community to support officers. At our meeting with the Neighbourhood Development Team Leader in March this year we learned that the Historic Buildings Conservation Officer with whom the matter had been discussed two years earlier was now the Principal Officer for Historic Buildings and there were resources available for this area of work; we were advised to get in touch with him. However, we learn that both he and the Conservation Service Manager have left the employment of the Council. We are in touch with the new Conservation Service Manager and have undertaken to provide her with a brief written outline of our proposal.

Finally.....

This has been a difficult year. The Parish Council regrets that unprecedented events have impeded the full delivery of the action plan we set out in May 2019, but we hope some objectives have been achieved. We are very conscious of the strong sense of community which has motivated the many voluntary support systems that have sprung up to help those who are at risk and vulnerable. We are grateful to our Ward Councillor for his continuing support and particularly to our Parish Clerk, whose knowledge of a wide range of grants and whose skills in accessing these have been invaluable to the village.

Let us hope for a better year in 2021.

Adrian Harvey
Chair, Kings Capse Parish Council

APPENDIX

KCPC Representation Application 202070

KINGS CAPLE PARISH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATION 202070 – LAND ADJACENT TO LIGHTFIELDS

KINGS CAPLE AND THE ADOPTED CORE STRATEGY

This is the first proposal to be processed through and in accordance with the parish NDP. The Parish Council is conscious of the internal policy tensions that the application has exposed and it believes these arise primarily from a serious defect in the methodology used in framing the Herefordshire Council Adopted Core Strategy. It therefore wishes to make the following statement.

In Herefordshire Council's predecessor Local Plan, the Unitary Development Plan, the focus for development of market housing in rural areas was 48 so-called main villages, defined by virtue of their size and the extent of their facilities. In the process of the generation of the successor Local Plan, the Adopted Core Strategy, the Local Authority appeared to begin by a similar exercise in its Rural Settlement Hierarchy Background Paper (2010). This again followed a principle of selecting settlements by substantial size and range of facilities.

Between 2010 and 2013, however, two developments appeared to co-incide in overturning the previous methodology.

- First, the Council consistently kept its preferred new housing target for the period 2011 – 2031 substantially above that suggested as required to meet local need by the Local Housing Market Assessment it had commissioned. Of the total target of 16500 nearly one third was allocated to rural villages.
- Second, in the Rural Housing Background Paper of 2013 it replaced the concept of main villages as previously designed. Instead the settlements in each rural housing market area were arranged in order of their number of dwellings, and all settlements with a number of houses above the median in their area were designated as settlements for proportionate development of market housing. Although facilities were listed and scored, the resulting scores were only used to elevate a smaller settlement into the proportionate development category when high, never to remove a settlement from this category when low. Additionally, though the constraints that might limit development in a settlement, such as flood risk and location within an AONB, were noted, no reduction or removal of the required target was ever allowed in these circumstances.

The result of this was that 119 villages were identified for the kind of development which had been previously envisaged for 48. Some of these, like Kings Caple, were relatively isolated, served primarily by C and unclassified roads, with very limited facilities and substantially without public transport. Moreover, this methodology

has arguably failed to deliver housing at the speed required by the Government or which truly satisfies local needs. To identify such villages as capable of sustainable development strains the definition of the term 'sustainable'.

Kings Caple Parish Council has done its very best to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan which resolves the tensions as far as possible between the aspirations of the village community, the landscape qualities of the Wye Valley AONB which are so important to that village community and the policies of the Government and particularly of Herefordshire Council. Without conforming to these national and Local Planning Authority policies a Neighbourhood Development Plan cannot satisfy the external examination process and be adopted.