

Keyworth Parish Council

CHAIR'S REPORT 2020/21 Plans/Priorities for 2021/22

Foreword by Cllr Tamsin Armour, Chair of Keyworth Parish Council

This has been a year like no other. COVID-19 has completely changed, perhaps for ever, the way we all live, work and communicate. For the Parish Council this has impacted on how we hold meetings, the focus of our activities, the use of our facilities and the links and communications we have across the village and beyond. The most impressive and rewarding feature of the last year for me, has been the way residents of Keyworth have pulled together and organised themselves into a support network, extending throughout the village and operating at street-level. With initial support from a team within the Parish Council, to call for volunteers and identify those in need, this very quickly became self-supporting. We developed a phone buddy system to help combat loneliness, especially during the winter months. From this, and linking to other groups across Keyworth, has grown www.keyworth.org a resource for our village into the future.

After cancelling a couple of meetings whilst the office worked hard to ensure all Councillors and members of the public were able to access Teams meetings, we moved to online meetings. This has remained our mechanism for all meetings, whether in lockdown or not, for the past year. Most Council events and activities using our facilities have had to be cancelled during the past year and this has had a consequence for our income from hiring fees. However, many positives are also emerging. In particular I wanted to highlight partnerships with groups working to support those in need, via foodbanks, mental health awareness and support for young people, via sport, exercise, and other activities. These initiatives and programmes would not be possible without the dedication of the organisers, often volunteers, and I would like to take this opportunity to say a massive 'Thank you' on behalf of myself and the Parish Council, to all those who have given their time and energy to help others through the last year. You have been amazing and Keyworth is a safer and better place to live thanks to your wonderful teamwork.

As well as supporting those in need, there have been several initiatives to improve our environment, increasing eco-friendliness and sustainability. These include planting trees, supported by our Tree Wardens and the Tree Council 'Trees for Schools' programme; the first Community Eco Market held in Keyworth; new signage for Keyworth Meadow and regular litter picking by volunteers of all ages across the village and surrounding areas. We have also seen extensive development at sites across the village, and whilst this provides new housing, there has been damage, especially to trees and hedgerows. I have held meetings alongside other Councillors, with developers and service providers, to ensure our priorities and concerns are heard. As a Council, we have adopted a planning considerations policy that aims to limit 'infilling' and consequent destruction of the hedges and green spaces that contribute to the rural nature of the village and provide valuable habitats for birds, hedgehogs and other wildlife. On a personal note, I have absolutely loved the opportunity to explore local footpaths and the surrounding woodlands and countryside, that lockdown has afforded me.

Looking towards the future, I will continue to work with RBC and our Borough and County Councillors, to reduce the negative impact of new developments on our beautiful surroundings. Working with Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Group (RNCSIG), I have helped write The Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy and associated Action Plan for the next 5 years, which have now been adopted by RBC. This includes building and strengthening the focus on Biodiversity Net Gain and ensuring environmental priorities are factored into development across the Borough. Going forwards I am keen to grow the excellent work of those across the village and wider, who seek to protect and preserve our wonderful countryside and extend and enhance our green, eco-friendly and sustainable ways of working and living, so that the natural world can continue to delight and sustain us into the future.

Keyworth Parish Council

Council Members

- The current members of council are: Tamsin Armour (Chair), Tony Wells (Vice-Chair). Geoff Baker, Ian Bell, Mary Butler, Tom Caven-Atack, David Clarke, Kevin Fitzgerald, Tony Grice, Chris Kemp, Kev Lowe, Kath Oakley, Shelley Millband, Chris Takel, Matthew Tuttey, Brian Watts. Following the automatic disqualification of Dick Self (non-attendance) in September 2020, Samantha Kaye was co-opted to council in January 2021.

Council Staff

- The Council currently employs seven part-time staff including the Clerk to the Council who also took over the Finance Officer role following the retirement of Neil Grocock, two Clerical Officers including Michelle Law who joined the team in January 2021, Facilities Manager, Cleaner, Handyman and a person to lock and unlock the Nottingham Road Play Area. The total basic hours worked by these staff equates to the hours worked by three full time staff.

Council Facilities

- The Council owns, or is responsible for:
 - The Village Hall complex – including the Village Hall, Centenary Lounge and Feignies Room
 - Rectory field
 - Keyworth Activity Park
 - Rectory field Pavilion and former Changing Rooms (occupied by Keyworth Table Tennis Club and Keyvolution/Abundance respectively)
 - Memorial Gates
 - Wysall Lane Burial Ground
 - Nottingham Road Play Area (leased from Notts County Council)
 - Platt Lane Skatepark (leased from UK Research & Innovation)
 - Keyworth Meadow (managed by the Nature Reserve Management Group)
 - Keyworth Bowls Club – clubhouse and green (managed by the club)
 - Keyworth Tennis Club – clubhouse and courts (managed by the club)

Village Hall Complex

- The Village Hall and toilets were redecorated and the wooden floor refurbished whilst the facilities were closed due to COVID restrictions.
- The Feignies Room and Centenary Lounge benefitted from new wireless access points, as did the Village Hall complex as a whole, resulting in a better Wi-Fi signal, free to use. Security on the Wi-Fi was also improved, preventing downloading or uploading of inappropriate material.
- The refurbishment of the Centenary Lounge seating was completed, with the benches being recovered to match the chairs, giving the room a fresh new look.
- The Council's Finance committee agreed to freeze the hire fees at 2020/21 rates for the Village Hall complex in 2021/22.

Keyworth Parish Council

Nottingham Road Play Area, Rectory Field, Wysall Lane Burial Ground, Activity Park, Skate Park

- No major works were needed on the play area, Rectory Field, Activity Park or Skate Park, which continue to be proactively checked and maintained by the Parish Council's Facilities Manager with repairs carried out as needed.
- New leases for both the Nottingham Road Play Area and the Skate Park have been finalised.
- The Phase 4 extension including landscaping of the Burial Ground was completed, as well as a tarmac wearing course to the car parking area. The extension will come into use once the existing plots are used. Some offers have been made to place memorial benches in the extension.
- 'French drains' have been installed in the Burial Ground to divert surface water away into ditches during the Winter when the surface can become waterlogged.
- The Council's Finance committee agreed to freeze the burial ground fees, already some of the lowest in the area, at 2020/21 rates for 2021/22.
- A number of local fitness instructors approached and were given permission by the council on a trial basis to hire the Rectory Field for outdoor fitness classes whilst indoor groups were restricted due to COVID.

Memorial Gates

- Names of the fallen from WWI, taken from the Memorial Gates, are being used to name roads in the new housing developments off Platt Lane and Bunny Lane.

Support for Local Organisations

- **The Council continued in 2020/21 to provide financial assistance to:**
 - Platt Lane Joint Management Committee (the Council has a one-third financial interest in the facilities at Platt Lane)
 - Keyworth & District Community Concern
 - Keyworth Conservation Area Advisory Group
 - Keyworth PCC (re maintenance and repair of church clock)

Donations were also made to:

- Keyworth Community Projects Food Bank
- The Table Tennis club towards a defibrillator
- RHR Cadet Corps of Drums
- The Keyworth Quiz
- Riding for the Disabled

Under normal circumstances, the Council makes its premises available at concessionary rates, and in many cases free of charge, for various community events and services such as:

Keyworth Advice Centre, Keyworth Quiz; Keyworth Allotments; Thursday coffee morning; Conservation Group; Keyworth Show; Fun on the Field; Christmas Charity Fair; Remembrance Sunday; Christmas Fair & Christmas Dinner.

However, the COVID pandemic and subsequent restrictions on activities meant that most groups were not able to use the facilities and most events could not take place in 2020/21.

The council did, however, make its facilities available free of charge as below:

- A local resident who made PPE equipment for front line staff in local hospitals, on a non-profit basis, had use of the Village Hall.

Keyworth Parish Council

- Positive Futures were given use of the Rectory Field and Village Hall in order to engage young people over the Summer.
- Keyworth's first Green Festival took place on 12th September 2020 organised by Cllr Millband; the Rectory Field and Centenary Lounge facilities were given free of charge.
- An offer was made to the health authority to use the Village Hall as a vaccination centre.

Parish Council Events/Seasonal Activities

- During the past twelve months, the Council has organised and/or sponsored the following events and activities:
 - 33 Hanging Baskets to decorate the village over the Summer months.
 - 35 Christmas trees to decorate shops and businesses, as well as lights on the trees in the church yard.
 - The Parish Council set up a COVID-19 working group in order to respond quickly to the need to help vulnerable people with shopping, collecting prescriptions and other essentials. This then linked in with street-level mutual aid groups which were spontaneously set up in the community. Reminders of the help available were published in the Keyworth News every month.
 - The council now has a COVID-specific helpline number: 0115 678 3324 and email address: COVID-19@keyworthparishcouncil.org
 - VE Day 75th Anniversary Celebrations took place on 8th May 2020 and comprised community-led 'Stay at Home Street Parties' in order to comply with social distancing regulations.
 - VJ Day 75th Anniversary 12th August 2020 took place in a similar way to the VE Day celebrations.
 - A village litter pick
 - Cllr Armour, along with Cllr Wells, represented the Parish Council at the opening of George Martyn's Barn by Keyworth Conservation Area Advisory Group. She performed the ceremonial 'cutting of the ribbon'.
 - Cllr Armour represented the Parish Council at the socially-distanced Remembrance Sunday Event held on the Rectory Field at the Memorial Gates along with representatives from Rushcliffe Borough Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Churches in Keyworth and the Royal British Legion. Memorial wreaths were laid at the gates.

Publicity/Information

- The Council website (www.keyworthparishcouncil.org) is updated regularly.
- We also keep residents informed through news items and the Keyworth Diary (in the Keyworth News), distribution of which, to all households in Keyworth, is financed by the Council. (The Keyworth Diary can also be found on the Council website.)
- The Online Keyworth Guide, which can be found on the Council website, is a useful source of information about local organisations, although we are reliant on the relevant organisations to provide us with updates.
- Due to the outbreak of coronavirus and subsequent lockdown restrictions, the council office and Village Hall complex were closed on 16th March, in line with government guidance. Staff continued to work from home and take it in turns to collect mail and phone messages from the office. Council meetings were cancelled until video and audio conferencing facilities were up and running, and a full schedule of meetings resumed from May onwards, via videoconference meetings.

Finance

- At the time of writing, the Council's accounts for 2020/21 have not yet been finalised. The figures to hand suggest that a budget deficit is likely because of the loss of income due to COVID restrictions.
- Closure of the Village Hall complex due to COVID restrictions has meant a significant loss of income. However, due to prudent management of finances in previous years, the council has been able to use some reserves to cushion the financial effects of COVID-19 in 2020/21 in order to keep the 2021/22 precept increase modest.

Keyworth Parish Council

- The Parish Council would also like to thank Rushcliffe Borough Council for making available a £10,000 small business rates tax relief which offset a significant proportion of our losses and contributed towards keeping the precept increase modest.
- The Council reviewed its reserves policy as usual in January. On the face of it, the level of the Council's uncommitted reserves (reserves not set aside to fund specific commitments or long-term development plans) might seem high, but it should be borne in mind that the Council owns, and is responsible for maintaining, fixed assets valued at around £1.8 million, and it follows that it needs to set aside substantial funds for emergency/contingency purposes, the pandemic being a current, although non-tangible, example. Uncommitted reserves will be used in 2020/21 and potentially 2020/22 to cushion the financial effects of the pandemic so as to keep increases to the precept modest.
- As for 2021/22, the Council has set its precept at a level resulting in the Parish Council portion of the council tax increasing by 5% for a Band D property.

Planning

- The council has held 12 planning meetings, reviewing a total of 69 planning applications in the period and has worked with the community and with Rushcliffe Borough Council to ensure the new housing developments on Platt Lane, north of Bunny Lane, South of Bunny Lane and Nicker Hill are appropriate to the area.
- Names of the fallen from WWI from the War Memorial Gates are already being used for road names in the new housing developments, as an appropriate tribute to those who gave their lives for our country.

Other Items

- The fund set up earlier in the year was used to install a defibrillator in the K6 phone kiosk outside the Pear Tree pub on Nottingham Road, serving an area of the village which didn't have a defibrillator. The council's handyman refurbished the phone kiosk which has brightened up this corner of the village.

Plans and Priorities for 2021/22

In my view, the Parish Council's most important priorities in **2021/22** will be:

- To continue to support those in need across Keyworth, in particular looking to focus on those who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This will include continuing to ensure food and other essentials are available, finding ways to support those in financial hardship, and ensuring mental health guidance and support are accessible to all those who may need it.
- To work with RBC and planning enforcement to ensure that the housing developers stick to their planning conditions and are held to account if any are breached. In particular, this will be important in maintaining road and pedestrian safety where development work is ongoing and making good any damage to pavements, verges and hedgerows.
- To work with residents and local groups to continue to enhance our environment, finding ways to reduce litter, dog fouling, vandalism and ways to enhance and protect the wildlife in and around the village.
- To work with sports leaders, schools, clubs and other local groups, to create an inclusive and accessible activity and wellbeing framework, linking Parish Council facilities with developments at Platt Lane, and other venues, providing sports, exercise and recreational opportunities for all.

Tamsin Armour

Chair of Keyworth Parish Council

16 April 2021