

KNOWSTONE PARISH COUNCIL (KPC)
Chairman's Annual Report for the Period 2016 - 17

- (1)** KPC started this year with 6 councilors John Smith, Mike Smith, John Stanbury, Tim Browse, Ian Brooks, Reg Howe, Anthony Vigus.
- (2)** Antony Vigus and John Smith resigned just after the start of the year. The two vacancies were then advertised, four applications were received, interviews held and as a result Tony Moore and Rachel Hayes were appointed as Councilors.
- (3)** Rachel Hayes recently resigned as did Ian Brooks, we thank all four for their contribution to the Parish and wish them well. The process for filling the two vacancies was commenced early May. Last week we were notified by the Returning Officer that 10 or more parishioners have requested an election. As a result, Forms of Nomination can be obtained from the Parish Clerk or from the Returning Officer. The Election Notice Form with the dates and procedure to follow are posted on the three Notice Boards and our website.
- (4)** Richard Vos, Parish Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) has also stood down and Wendy Sweet has been selected to fill these roles from April 26th, 2017.
- (5)** The precept was applied for and awarded at £3,651 and the Parish Grant of £398.00 (no change on the previous year)
- (6)** Liquid funds as at 31st March 2016 amounted to £24,574.45 (Treasurers AC £14,525.23; Business AC 10,049.22). Copies of the year's budget, payments made and end of year finance report are attached.
- (7)** KPC supported the Parish Hall with their application to the new Community Fund for financial support (which was granted in full), we have approved a supporting donation of £2,190.00 to help meet the full costs of refurbishments and new equipment.
- (8)** KPC made a donation to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of £200.00 for maintenance upkeep.
- (9)** The Oakford & Knowstone Community Bus continues with good levels of support from the community; no contribution of funds from the KPC has been requested as the service has been self-funding through the year.
- (10)** The Sidemoor picnic area on the Knowstone side of the A361 Moortown Cross junction has continued to operate with the existing contract holder (Mrs Maureen Jenkins). However, she has recently stated that she wishes to find a new lease holder. Knowstone Parish Council has had an early discussion with Mrs Jenkins about our possibly applying to take on the lease, a small committee is being formed to investigate this further.

- (11) The Batsworthy Cross Windfarm is now functioning and producing electrical power. The associated community-funding stream of £90,000 pa over 25 years has commenced and the first grants have been approved with funds awarded to the Parish Hall for refurbishment and new equipment/furnishings.
Concerns with noise produced by the wind farm and lack of acoustic testing have been raised and the Batsworthy Noise Working Group are in active discussions with North Devon Council.
- (12) East Hill Farm (i.e. the farmhouse, two barns, also a parcel of land to be used for affordable housing) was put on the market under a bid tender process. We understand there was a successful bid placed and the bidders' development plan is under discussion. We have no knowledge at this time of a Planning Application being submitted.
- (13) What are the challenges facing KPC for the coming year? There are two issues that I would highlight for immediate attention.
Firstly, looking to the immediate future, KPC still has the financial reserves available to invest substantial amounts of money (in the region of £20,000) into local projects.
Parish Councils, in general, are not encouraged/allowed to hold reserves above a certain multiple of their precept capability, therefore, KPC is likely to be challenged by the Local Authority Auditors as to why we continue to carry this level of surplus funds.
The parish council must actively search for viable, effective, and socially productive ways to use the financial surplus for the good of the community and will welcome suggestions from parishioners.
Secondly, the issue is that of local planning. Central and local government intentions, and initiatives, to increase the supply of housing nationally will create tensions within communities such as Knowstone. This includes NDC identifying 6 new Traveler Sites for the Traveler community.
We saw support for new build proposals such as that adjacent Enfield House, and applications like this may become more commonplace with a strong presumption in favour of approval.
Priority should now be given to the creation of appropriate local development plans, based on realistic understandings of population changes, so that Knowstone and adjacent communities can proactively shape planning events rather than simply react to them. Developing a new Parish Plan was considered by KPC but we felt the decision should be made after publication of the updated North Devon & Torridge Local Plan. It may also be worth considering developing a Neighbourhood Plan. Whichever is chosen (if either) this may be a sensible use for some of the surplus funds held by KPC.
Lastly, a sign of changing times is the recent introduction of the Transparency Code for local authorities. The code requires us to publish financial information on our website and compliance may possibly remove the need for future external audits. A grant has been applied for to procure a computer, scanner and printer and training in

the code for KPC. This will also enable us to have KPC files held on a dedicated computer rather than individuals' personal laptops and desktops.

- (14) A Facebook page has been added to the Parish Website and provides an easy way to have pictures and information spread to the Parish. Wendy Vigus can help you with seeing how this feature works
- (15) We have, in conjunction with the Parish Hall committee been learning about defibrillators and their benefits. A survey was conducted that demonstrated considerable interest and as part of that a very popular CPR training session was held. We are ensuring the ongoing costs of having a defibrillator are fully understood and supported before finalising the decision of how to proceed.

I would like to thank Ian Brooks for his considerable efforts, patience and dedication to this project.

- (16) At the KPC Annual General Meeting on May 30th I will stand down as Chair of Knowstone Parish Council. It has been a busy year for the KPC and one of updating our Standing Orders, Controls and Processes to meet auditing requirements.
I wish to thank Reg Howe, Vice Chair, Richard Vos, Parish Clerk and the Knowstone Parish Councilors for the support and commitment to the community.

Mike Smith, Chairman 19th May 2017.