

**KEMPLEY VILLAGE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
CHAIRMANS OPENING REMARKS  
BY MARTIN BROCKLEHURST  
Chairman Kempley Parish Council**

**7th June 2022**

**INTRODUCTION**

What a difference a year makes. Today the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are waning though the risks of the disease remains. We are slowly learning to live with Covid – 19 and case numbers in the Forest of Dean are now rapidly dropping after hitting a horrendous peak in February of this year. The implications of the disease, whilst still serious for some are now thankfully less significant for the majority who have been vaccinated.

It has meant that your Parish Council has been able to resume its bi-monthly face to face meetings and focus its efforts in areas not directly linked to the pandemic. We have been joined in our meetings by our new County Councillor Gill Moseley who has attended all our Parish meetings since she was elected and has supported many of the projects in which we are engaged.

Some of the systems we put in place during the pandemic remain and I would highlight the village What's App Groups for both social engagement and more formal emergency messages. If you are not a member of the two groups may I urge you to join by contacting the Clerk and use the opportunity the groups present. The two groups are:

- Kempley Keeping in Touch – for social interaction; and
- Kempley Emergency Plan – for urgent official messages particularly during any emergency events such as power outages or flooding.

We still have a village Zoom Account that is also available to any groups that might want to use it for meetings – simply contact the Parish Clerk to book its use.

A number of village delivery services from the Newent Co-operative, the Newent GP practise and the Community Shop, have also continued post the pandemic as new services for the village.

We have also continued to use our village green for community events. The Christmas Tree on the village green, with a formal lighting ceremony with hot mince pies and carols continued in 2021 and of course the Platinum Jubilee Party both organised jointly with the village hall and local volunteers and supported by the Parish Council. Hopefully we will continue to use the village green for community events on a regular basis.

**1. The Work of the Parish Council**

You Council has continued to work on the issues raised at our last village meeting. Just some of them are:-

## **Highways**

We have been relentless in our efforts to get the County Council to recognise the problem of low standards of highway maintenance on the C class roads in our Parish and spend money on effective maintenance. We have continued to argue that simple pothole repairs are not enough and that the Highway Authority should repair and re-install sections the micro asphalt surface in our Parish.

Your Council predicted in 2019 that public spending cuts would place our highway network at risk. We argued that the experimental micro-asphalt surface installed in Kempley had reached the end of its economic life. We said then that the surface was failing and that it would be a major challenge to encourage the Highways Authority to re-invest in our roads. We remain clear that renewing this surface is a critical requirement for our village to prevent further deterioration. It cannot be right that we can expect re-surfacing only once in 75 years on a C class road according to National Surveys, when other EU countries typically undertake this task once in 7 years,

## **Broadband**

We still do not have superfast broadband for all our village, years after it was promised. This year we had the disastrous cancellation at Christmas of the planned Gigaclear fibre to the premises contract for our Parish, just after negotiations for wayleaves had started.

As a Parish Council we reacted quickly and tonight you heard about the results of our discussions with Fastershire and the potential for the Kempley Community Scheme to finally bring fibre and superfast broadband to every remaining property in the Parish that does not have this service.

We continue to stand out as a Parish prepared to find solutions to the lack of superfast broadband in remote rural areas and will continue to work in your interests to get the job finished.

## **External Grants**

This year we secured an external grant from Gloucestershire County Council to support re-starting the Daffodil Weekend. The Parish Council put together the bid and implemented a programme of work to support one of the most successful Daffodil Weekends in recent memory. Yes the weather was kind, and we also benefited from the work of DyFRA and Forestry England in enhancing the daffodil display, but ultimately it was the work of our whole community that resulted in the success of this event. Your Parish Council was just grateful that we could in effect more than double the value of the Parish Precept (circa £5-6000) and leverage in additional funds for Kempley. We were the only Parish Council to do so locally.

## **Public Rights of Way**

This year we started a joint programme of work with the Gloucestershire County Council Public Rights of Way team to ease some of the burdens on our local farmers in maintaining one of the densest networks of public footpaths in England. Local farmers are responsible for maintaining stiles on our public rights of way and on heavily used routes they can wear out quickly. To resolve the issue we set up a jointly funded programme with the County Council to replace wooden stiles with metal kissing gates on our most heavily used public rights of way. This programme made many of the Daffodil walks must easier to navigate. We also took the opportunity to re-open a footpath with the support of our local farmer, that has not followed its legal route for nearly 40 years, with a new footbridge, kissing gates and signs. We were grateful for the financial support from our County Councillor Gill Moseley who also financially contributed from her Highways Small Projects Fund. This opened up new local walks from the village and encourages users to stay on the correct right of way. We are also shortly to issue details on the local rights of way to every household in the Parish along with guidance from the County Council on how to use public footpaths responsibly. We are the only local parish council locally operating a scheme such as this and it is worth an additional £2-3,000 of investment to our parish.

## **Climate Change & Biodiversity loss**

Now that the pandemic is easing we are returning to focus on Climate Change and biodiversity loss. Recent events in Ukraine have shown us just how vulnerable we are through our continued use of fossil fuels. Not only do they add to pollution problems in our cities through air pollution but they continue to increase global carbon levels. It now makes sense to make the energy transition away from fossil fuels and into renewable energy sources. Not only will this be crucial to our children's and grand children's futures but it will save us all cash.

We have put our plans in place, identified our local carbon footprint and we are now clear where local reductions are required. We continue working with Town and Parish Councils across the Forest of Dean to support the Forest of Dean District Council to achieve massive carbon reductions in all our communities. We have also supported the successful bid to the European Union Horizon Europe research fund for a project "Achieving a new European Energy Awareness (AURORA)". This project is bringing over half a million euros into the Forest of Dean to provide support for efforts to reduce carbon emissions and usher in a new fossil fuel free era for our community. The Forest of Dean District Council are the only Local Authority in the UK to take part in this research project which is 100% funded by the EU. They are engaged in this scheme because of our activities and the leadership of key individuals on the District Council. Details on this 3.5 years scheme can now be found on the project website at <https://www.aurora-h2020.eu/fod-home/> Please follow the website and sign up to take part in the project and do your part to reduce your own personal carbon footprint and save cash as a consequence. You will also get the opportunity to take part in a demonstration community solar energy project in the Forest of Dean that is being set up to be run by the community, for

the benefit of the community. It will offer investment opportunities for everyone in our community that will cost substantially less than filling up your car with fossil fuels.

In respect of Biodiversity we were the first local Parish Council to adopt a Biodiversity Strategy after discussions with DyFRA. This builds on earlier work with DyFRA when the Parish Council negotiated an agreement with the County Council back in 2013 that allowed DyFRA and local volunteers to manage selected road-side verges to encourage the return of wild daffodils through local planting scheme. We look forward to continued work with DyFRA and local volunteers to see the strategy implemented across the parish. We are fortunate to live in an area with rich wildlife and need to do all we can to expand and deepen this valuable local resource which makes our area such an attractive one in which to live and work.

## **Conclusion**

I am immensely proud of the work that the Parish Council continues to undertake and I want to put on record my thanks to the current Councillors still serving you, without whom this work could not be undertaken. We operate as a team so let me name my fellow Cllrs as:

Tom Jackson;

Stafford Cruse;

Edward Lewis;

Robert Howson; and

Kim O'Rourke

Please give them a round of applause.

Lastly I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to our outgoing Parish Clerk Arin Spencer who steered us through the pandemic and who made such a fundamental difference to the effectiveness of the Parish Council. It only then remains for me to ask you to also welcome our new Parish Clerk Tim Dain and wish him well in the years ahead. Tim please stand up.

**You have now heard enough from me and it is time we heard your thoughts on what you see as priorities for the year ahead.**

**Martin Brocklehurst  
Chair Kempley Parish Council  
07<sup>th</sup> June 2021**