

Minutes of Somerford Keynes Parish Council Meeting

Village Hall, 12th May 2025

Present: Cllr A. Clark (AC), Cllr M. Keegan (MK), Cllr G. Valentine (GV), Cllr J Whitwell (JW), Cllr M.H-Oldland (MHO), CC Cllr L Spivey (LS), CDC Cllr M McKeown (MM),

Also present: Clerk K. Holdsworth (KH), M Wilding (Village Lake) and four members of the public

1. Apologies

Cllr N. Hunt (NH), Hilary Collins (HC)

2. Election of Officers

It was proposed and agreed that Cllr A Clark and Cllr N Hunt would continue as Chair and Deputy Chair respectively.

3. Declaration of Interest

Cllr G Valentine (GV), Cllr M H-Oldland (MHO)

4. Public Session

- 4.1 The matter of street parking around Neigh Bridge and the associated risks was raised. This is likely to be an issue when the weather is good and has been looked at many times previously.
In terms of resolutions, LS explained the process of getting yellow lines approved by Gloucestershire Highways takes about six years and costs about £15k. Given also that many in the community do not want these (for reason including the view it would just move the problem into the village and is an unwanted form of urbanisation) this will not be pursued by the PC.
The issue would go away if the Lakes Trust provided free parking. However, they have significant financial challenges and of their car parks Neigh Bridge is understood to be one of their highest revenue generators.
Action: The PC will engage the Lakes Trust to discuss this matter.
- 4.2 A few instances of walkers not following public paths and going onto private land have been observed by a parishioner. Engagement with them revealed a majority seemed to come from Lower Mill.
Action: The PC will send a map of SK footpaths to LME and suggest that it be made available to residents and holiday makers there.

- 4.3 Temporary road signs often seem not to be collected after their use has ceased, such as diversion signs still in place when the diversion is no longer needed.

Action: LS is hoping the Liberal Democrats will take control of Gloucestershire County Council next week and if that happens then addressing this will be a priority.

5. Approval of Minutes of 14th April 2025 Meeting

Proposed AC, seconded MK

6. Report from County Cllr L. Spivey

LS's report is in Appendix One.

Of particular note is the work to install new signs at the Ewen/South Cerney crossroads. LS and MM have been lobbying for some time to get improved safety measures here including the addition of stop signs. The process for such changes is both long and complex.

7. Report from District Cllr M. McKeown

MM's report is in Appendix Two.

8. Report from Mike Wilding Village Lake

MW's report is in Appendix Three.

At the AGM the PC made its 'Big Thank You' award to Mike for his work at the Village Lake. That it is a place enjoyed by many parishioners is made possible by the efforts of Mike and his committee, without whom it would become overgrown. As well as maintenance, Mike is always looking at possible enhancements such as wild flowers as well as ecological activities.

There is always something that needs doing around the lake so if anyone can spare an hour or two to help please contact the Parish Clerk as Mike would welcome the support.

9. Actions from Previous Meeting

9.1 Extending Footpath at North End of Village

NH is still awaiting a further quote from a second provider. Any further discussion on this will be signposted in agendas published ahead of meetings to give parishioners the chance to have their say.

9.2 Lower Mill Direction Sign at Top of Mill Lane

Having chased LME again on this and had no response the suggestion is that Mill Lane residents who have an issue with this construct their own informal sign and place it in the verge, not attached to any official Highways signage.

9.3 Tree Debris on Verge Between Mill Lane and Neigh Bridge

Highways have not confirmed whether this is something it is their responsibility to address or that of land owners.

Action: KH to provide copies of mails sent to Highways to LS who will escalate..

9.4 Parish Council AGM

This was a great success with a good parishioner attendance. The Parish Council would like to give their thanks to Matt and Ruth from LME/The Baker's Arms, Joe Harris from Cotswold District Council, Katie from the Sculpture Park and Mike McKeown from Thames Head Energy for their informative talks.

10. Matters Discussed

10.1 Finance and Governance

The Annual Governance Statement and The Accounting Statements 2024/25 were approved and signed off by the Parish Council and will be published on the website.

The accounts will now be sent to the internal auditor for approval before sending onto the External Auditor.

10.2 Shorncote Flooding

MK reported no progress with clearance work and that Sam Carrier (CDC Flood Warden) is chasing.

Action: MK to retain a watching brief.

10.3 Parish Field

The rental of the Parish Field to Lake 32 is now into its 3rd year of a 5 year agreement so it seems a good time to engage with them around future plans.

Action: MK will approach Jo at Lake 32.

11. Community Infrastructure Levy Projects

11.1 Village Hall Energy and Infrastructure Upgrade

These works are now complete though the EV charger cannot be used until a couple of bits of administration are tidied up. This mainly involves paperwork to confirm the transfer of ownership to the Village Hall (necessary for insurance purposes).

Separately, funds need to be transferred from THE to the PC for payment for the chargers.

Action: MHO to oversee from the PC's perspective.

11.2 Bus Shelter and Notice Board

Having overseen a successful and much admired implementation John Whitwell has now done work on landscaping the immediate surrounds.

11.3 Swings at Neigh Bridge

We await confirmation from the Lakes Trust on timings based on the availability of their contractor.

11.4 Church Staircase

The PCC are awaiting the results and associated feedback from the latest survey.

11.5 Village Lake

MW has been working with Made in Oak to provide a shelter over one of the benches and is seeking further quotes.

We have received confirmation that CIL money can be used for maintenance as well as new things. The Village Hall committee will look at possible projects and associated costings will be flagged to the PC for review and approval.

12. Planning

25/01099/FUL

Full Application for Variation of condition 10 (Details general (2)) of permission 02/00885/FUL - 9 holiday units, 2 communal storage barns, a gym, an open-air swimming pool, a refuse pavilion and associated landscaping at Siskin House 7 The Nine Lower Mill Lane Somerford Keynes Gloucestershire

No Objection

25/01064/FUL

Full Application for Erection of garage/workshop and addition of solar panels at The Stables Shorncote Somerford Keynes Cirencester Gloucestershire

No Objection

25/00959/FUL

Full Application for Erection of single storey and two storey extensions to rear elevation at Church Cottage Shorncote Somerford Keynes Cirencester Gloucestershire

No Objection

13. Correspondence

Parking Neigh Bridge – covered in public session

Village Charity Trust - Ahead of their next meeting on 17th July, the trustees of the Somerford Keynes Village Charity are inviting applications for financial assistance for anyone currently struggling to meet an urgent need. Enquiries for, or on behalf of residents in Somerford Keynes or Shorncote, should be made to the Reverend David Austin, and will be handled in the strictest confidence.

More information on how to do this, the charity's purpose, process and privacy notice is attached in Appendix 4 and also found on the Somerford Keynes website under notices.

14. April Income and Expenditure

<u>Income</u>	Interest Earned April 25 £251.58 1 st Precept Payment £4725.00
Total Income	£4976.58
<u>Expenditure</u>	Clerks Salary (Jan/Feb/March) £1018.40
Total Expenditure	£1018.40
Village Lake	Notice Board £100.00
VL Total Expenditure	£100.00
CIL Expenditure	Bus Shelter 2 nd Payment £3417.00 New PC Notice Board £2380.57 Bus Shelter Final Payment £683.40
Total CIL Spend	£6480.97
Transfers	None
Petty Cash Expenditure	None

15. Any Other Business

None

Meeting closed at 9.20pm

Date of next meeting Monday 9th June 2025

Appendix One

Cllr Lisa Spivey **County Councillor for the South Cerney Division** **Gloucestershire County Council** **Annual Report 2024/2025**

This year has again been a very busy time for the County Council and my focus has been taken up on local highways issues with much of the winter spent sorting out flooding as in the previous year. I have also assisted with issues on Adult social care and children's school placements, parking and lots and lots of potholes and roads queries!

I was delighted to be elected as the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group at our Group AGM in May last year and have spent my time in that position leading on the scrutiny of the Conservatives in administration and whilst also ensuring that the voices of the communities I represent as heard and considered in decision making.

Much of this happens in the larger arena of the Full Council meetings where I have put and seconded motions and asked many public questions. I also sit on various committees and use those forums to push for better services and value for money.

This year I continued to serve on the Adult Social Care and Communities scrutiny committee which looks at Adult Social Care, Public Health, Trading Standards and Coronary Services. This is a fascinating committee and we have looked at various topics including The Future of Adult Social Care commissioning in Gloucestershire, the CQC inspection of ASC, Healthy eating, hospital discharge, domiciliary care provision, suicide prevention and Adults Safeguarding. I also sat on Corporate Overview and Scrutiny which looks at the County Council's corporate remit and scrutinises performance.

Huge amounts of time at local authorities has been absorbed in Local Government reorganisation and Devolution since the publication of the government white paper on the 16th December 2024. This means in a "two-tier" area like Gloucestershire, the expectation from government is that the District/Borough/City tier of local government disappears and a unitary council/s is established to deliver all services. In Gloucestershire there are currently 3 proposals for how this might happen:

1. A single unitary authority covering the whole of Gloucestershire
2. 2 unitary authorities largely dividing the county into an East and a West Council
3. A Greater Gloucester council with either 1 or 2 councils covering the remainder of the county

Final proposals need to be submitted to MHCLG by the 28th November.

In all scenarios, there is general consensus with all councillors that delivering good quality services where communities remain in contact with their council is key and the 7 councils and their respective leaders are working to ensure that aim.

The County Council appointed a new Chief Executive, Jo Walker, who joins from North Somerset having spent part of her early career in Gloucestershire County Council. Jo brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise and is rooted in the county.

County Council Elections

The County Council elections took place on the 1st May, and I was delighted to be re-elected as your representative with a large majority.

The political make-up of the new council is:

Liberal Democrats	27
Reform UK	11
Green Party	9
Conservative	6
Labour	1
Independent	1

Here is an overview of some of the work I have been involved in as your County Councillor.

Budget for 2024/2025

Proposals put forward by the Conservative majority administration for a budget of £665million were passed in February. This represents a £49m increase in the budget compared to 23/24.

Council Tax was increased again by the maximum allowed by government. It is made up of 2.99% increase on council tax and a 2% precept for adult social care.

Amendments by all three opposition parties were put forward, some were accepted including on flooding, youth provision and libraries. Unfortunately, some of the amendments I moved were not accepted which was disappointing as they were largely for things which simply are not being addressed such as a fund for pedestrian crossings where they are requested by communities, funding to begin the overhaul of the highways drainage network which is not up to scratch and has resulted in internal property flooding over this winter, and cycling improvements to encourage active travel in local communities, not just a focus on the cycle “superhighway”.

Motions to Full Council

Over the last year, I proposed, seconded or spoke on motions on the following topics:

- Civic Pride in our Highways
- Tackling the backlog and under funding in the Criminal Justice system
- Budget amendments
- Community Cohesion

Highways Local Fund

I was delighted to support some very important schemes across the division. These included ensuring that many CCTV drainage surveys were carried out following the issues on highways flooding, extra “find and fix” team allocation to tackle potholes, securing the extensive re-surfacing in Silver Street, South Cerney and localised patching in various locations.

I will be looking at next year’s allocations shortly, so if there are any key areas you would like to see addressed, please let me know.

Build Back Better – Councillor Scheme

I received many applications for the remainder of my Build Back Better pot and was able to support many fantastic groups this year including: Down Ampney Primary School, Meysey Hampton Guides, Ampney Crucis Basketball court, Poulton Parish Council Playground, Kemble & Ewen Playground project. I spent every penny of the money allocated which has meant that over the last 4 years, so many wonderful community led projects have benefited.

Liberal Democrats committed to continuing a community fund to ensure that grass roots projects are supported. Details will follow when the new Council is formed.

This is just a brief overview of the work of the last year. Please feel free to contact me about these or any more parish specific other matters.

Lisa.spivey@gloucestershire.gov.uk / 01285 653405

Appendix Two

Kemble Ward Annual Report 2024–2025: Community, Sustainability, and Navigating Change

Kemble Ward Annual Report – Quick, Fun Summary!

Hello neighbours!

Let's face it: traditional council reports can sometimes feel about as exciting as watching paint dry—important, sure, but perhaps not something you'd choose for weekend entertainment. But don't worry, I've got you covered! Here's your annual report wrapped up neatly, briefly, and (hopefully!) entertainingly. And if you crave more detail, in a more traditional format (I admire your dedication), all the finer points are patiently waiting in the sections below.

Bikes, Floods and... Road Drama!

This year, we've tackled everything from annoying potholes to dramatic crossroads collisions—one even involving your councillor's own car (don't worry, I'm fine, but the car wasn't so lucky!). Good news though: road improvements are underway, complete with shiny new signs, better visibility, and fresh road markings. We're also addressing persistent flooding issues in Kemble Wick with a multi-agency response involving drainage upgrades, tree planting, and detailed hydrological surveys. Plus, the dream of safely cycling between Kemble and Cirencester has moved one pedal stroke closer thanks to a detailed feasibility study by Sustrans, essential for securing future funding.

Green Dreams & Solar Schemes

We've been busy turning sustainability dreams into reality. From insulating homes and installing electric car chargers, to turning community halls like Somerford Keynes Village Hall into eco-friendly havens with solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, and cosy, low-carbon heating—there's been plenty of green action! The council offices themselves are going green with solar power, saving taxpayers over £40,000 per year and significantly reducing carbon emissions. We're also helping residents retrofit their homes through free energy advice and support schemes, helping cut costs and carbon footprints at the same time.

Building Trouble and Planning Double?

Just when we thought things were settling down, the government doubled our housing targets without any warning—talk about plot twists! Now we're busy figuring out how to

manage this without opening the door to unwanted developments. It's a bit like playing planning whack-a-mole, but we're committed to ensuring that the Cotswolds stay beautiful, sustainable, and community-focused. We're actively working on updating our Local Plan, which will help us resist speculative developments and ensure new housing is appropriate, well-designed, and includes essential infrastructure.

Community Spirit & Unsung Heroes

Your community spirit shone brighter than ever, with local heroes stepping up to help neighbours, protect our environment, and enhance local facilities. We've celebrated volunteers through our new "Unsung Heroes Awards," chased away fly-tippers, and secured significant funding for local projects through Crowdfund Cotswold—raising over £1.2 million for projects like community gardens, village events, and energy-efficient community facilities.

Big Changes Ahead – Devolution Drama!

And if that wasn't enough excitement, big changes are coming to local government! The government is pushing forward plans for devolution, which basically means our familiar Cotswold District Council could soon become part of a bigger unitary authority covering all or part of Gloucestershire. It's a bit like turning several smaller teams into one big team—which means lots of behind-the-scenes discussions, planning, and ensuring we don't lose our voice or the things that make our community special. We're proactively involved to make sure Kemble and the wider Cotswolds keep their unique character, local control, and high standards throughout these changes.

Ready for more detail? Pour yourself a cup of tea, settle down comfortably, and dive into the three detailed sections below. There's plenty more where this came from!

Warm regards,

Mike McKeown

Your friendly neighbourhood councillor

Mike.McKeown@cotswold.gov.uk

Kemble Ward – Local Work and Initiatives

As the District Councillor for Kemble Ward, I have focused on addressing local issues, supporting community projects, and being a responsive link between residents, parish councils and the District Council. Key activities and outcomes in Kemble Ward over the past year include:

- **Planning and Development:** I worked closely with Somerford Keynes Parish Council and residents to oppose an inappropriate development *Land to the South East of Ashland House*. Cotswold District Council had refused this application as it conflicted with the village's Neighbourhood Development Plan. The applicant's appeal was ultimately **rejected by the national inspector**, upholding the Council's decision and the community's wishes. This success was the result of strong local objections and evidence, demonstrating the value of our community-led planning policies.
- **Flooding in Kemble Wick:** Severe winter storms caused significant surface water flooding in Kemble Wick, with one home flooded and others at risk. I convened a multi-agency response to tackle this urgent issue. Together with Cotswold DC's Flood Risk team and Gloucestershire County Council (the Lead Local Flood Authority), we held site visits and a dedicated flood mitigation meeting with all stakeholders – including the Kemble & Ewen Parish Council, **Aura Power** (the local solar farm operator), and the **Bathurst Estate** (landowner). We agreed on a joined-up action plan: the solar farm has implemented additional drainage swales and tree planting to slow runoff, the Bathurst Estate is adjusting farming practices to reduce field runoff, and we are commissioning professional hydrological surveys to design long-term defences. I have obtained quotes from specialist consultants to develop flood prevention measures and am working with County and District flood officers on funding for these works. Going forward, we will ensure clarity on drainage responsibilities (highway drains vs. landowner ditches) and keep residents informed with regular updates on progress. This collaborative approach will help protect Kemble Wick from future flooding.
- **Highways and Road Safety:** I responded to residents' concerns about road conditions and safety. For example, residents of West Lane in Kemble raised issues about poor road surface, pavement finish, a faulty street light, and speeding traffic. I reported these to Gloucestershire Highways; they acknowledged the issues and have since marked the road for repair works. I have also been in dialogue with County Cllr. Lisa Spivey regarding recurring **flooding under the old railway bridge** on the Ewen road. After a particularly

- vehicle damage, we pressed highways to improve the drainage and consider installing depth marker posts to warn drivers.
- Additionally, I have been working with Lisa and Highways to get improvements made to the **Spratsgate Lane / Ewen Lane crossroads**, where there have been numerous accidents – including one where my own car was written off after another vehicle pulled out in front of me. So far, road markings and visibility have been improved, and new signage, rumble strips, and 'slow down' signs have been promised for installation later this year. These efforts are ongoing, with the goal of safer travel through our villages.
- **Community Facilities and Grants:** Supporting our local community spaces has been a priority. I assisted the **Somerford Keynes Village Hall** committee in developing a grant bid to the Council's Community Infrastructure Capital Grant Scheme to upgrade the hall's heating system to a low-carbon alternative and modernise its electrical systems. I also sit on the District's **Village Halls & Community Buildings Grant Panel**, which focuses on climate-friendly improvements. In that role I recused myself to avoid conflict, but I helped Somerford Keynes Village Hall prepare a successful application for ~£10,000 to install infrared heating panels, LED lighting, and even an electric vehicle charging point. This will significantly lower the hall's running costs and carbon footprint, benefiting everyone who uses it. Big thanks to Nick Cartwright who did a lot of work on this as part of our community energy initiative.

Residents' Casework – Noise and Nuisance: I have worked to resolve several local nuisance issues balancing residents' needs with supporting local businesses: In **Ewen**, a wedding venue's extended hours raised noise concerns. I discussed mitigation measures with CDC's planners and the owners. As a result, the planning approval for their operation now **requires a noise-limiting device** on their sound system to ensure music stays within permitted levels. This condition protects neighbours from disturbance while allowing the business to continue.

I also advised the same Ewen venue on reducing its environmental impact. I pointed the owners to a CDC grant scheme for renewable energy; they successfully obtained funding and have installed solar panels, which will cut their energy bills and CO2 emissions.

In **Somerford Keynes**, residents living near the "Tap Room" raised concerns about noise from events. I joined the Parish Council in meeting the venue's owner, and we agreed on practical steps to reduce the noise

music by a set time).

A **traffic pollution** concern was brought to me by a Kemble resident with asthma, worried about air quality near the A429. I have been working with our new MP, **Roz Savage**, our County Councillor, and Kemble Parish Council on this issue. We secured a commitment from CDC to install an air quality monitor at the problematic junction (installed spring 2025). This collaborative effort will help identify any pollution hotspots and possible solutions (such as tree planting or traffic calming) to ensure our village air remains clean.

- **Kemble–Cirencester Cycle Path:** I've been working closely with Kemble & Ewen Parish Council and Sustrans, and I'm pleased to report that Sustrans is now undertaking the **detailed feasibility study** for the proposed cycle path linking Kemble to Cirencester. This is a key step required before Gloucestershire County Council can submit a national funding application to support its construction.
- **Community Engagement:** Throughout the year I have attended parish council meetings in Kemble & Ewen, Somerford Keynes, Coates, and Rodmartn & Talton (Poole Keynes does not have parish meetings but I remain in contact with them), providing updates and listening to local concerns. I've also engaged with residents via email and in person, handling issues ranging from missed bin collections to planning enforcement. In addition, I volunteered as a **"Fly-Tipping Signage Guardian"** for the ward – placing warning signs in known fly-tipping spots to deter illegal dumping. (The Council has been active in prosecuting fly-tippers, recently issuing fines to offenders, and the signs together with mobile CCTV cameras are helping to reduce incidents.) By staying visible and active in the community, I aim to make sure residents' voices are heard at the District level and that problems are resolved quickly.

Cabinet Portfolio – Climate Change and Sustainability

In my role as Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Sustainability, I have led Cotswold District Council's efforts to tackle the climate emergency and build a more sustainable Cotswold's. Over the past year, we have made significant progress on multiple fronts:

- **Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure:** Transport is the largest source of CO₂ emissions in the Cotswolds, with cars alone accounting for over half. To encourage the shift to cleaner vehicles, we secured a government grant (matched by the Council) to install new EV charging points across additional Council-owned car parks. This is part of our “**Charge in 10**” initiative – aiming for all residents, especially the ~30 without off-street parking, to be within a 10-minute walk of a charging facility. Installation of these chargers is underway in towns like Cirencester, Tetbury, Stow-on-the-Wold and Moreton, making it much easier for people to go electric. I also worked with **Thames Head Community Energy** to add a public EV charging station at Somerford Keynes Village Hall.
- **Renewable Energy and Carbon Reduction:** We have taken bold steps to cut the Council's own carbon footprint and support community renewable energy. A major project this year was the installation of **solar panels and battery storage at the Council's Trinity Road HQ offices** in Cirencester. This system is complete and will generate enough green electricity to save taxpayers over £40,000 per year in energy costs, with a payback period of only ~5 years. It will also reduce carbon emissions by an estimated **30 tonnes annually** (approximately the weight of two double-decker buses). This project demonstrates the viability of solar – and through the Council's **Cotswold Solar Initiative**, residents can get help to do the same on their homes. In the wider district, **community-owned renewable energy** is being fostered: Thames Head Community Energy (the local community energy co-operative which I co-founded) converted into a Community Benefit Society this year, and we won a **£40,000 grant** from the Southwest Net Zero Hub to identify potential sites for a new community solar farm in the Cotswold District. We have begun working with a specialist consultancy and local landowners on this, and are even considering innovative “agrivoltaics” approaches (combining farming with solar panels). Additionally, through government funding like the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Council has helped village halls and community buildings across the district invest in solar panels, efficient heating, and insulation measures – reducing running costs and carbon emissions for these crucial community hubs.

- **Home Energy Retrofit Program:** Improving the energy efficiency of our housing is essential for lowering bills and cutting emissions. I'm pleased to report that Cotswold District Council, in partnership with **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire** and neighbouring councils (Cheltenham and Forest of Dean), secured funding from the government's Net Zero Hub to launch a new **Home Retrofit Programme**. This programme, rolled out from autumn 2024, offers residents practical support to retrofit their homes – from insulation and heat pumps to solar panels. A dedicated Retrofit Officer, Justine Mallingson, has been hired to drive this work. She provides free home energy surveys and advice, and through our contractor Furbnow even a service to help homeowners project-manage improvements using vetted contractors. Importantly, for lower-income households, grants and the existing **Warm and Well** scheme will be leveraged so that upgrades can be made at little or no cost. To promote these opportunities, we scheduled a series of public **"Home Energy Efficiency" events** across the district. With input from parish councils, we focused on effective ways to reach people – community newsletters, social media, and in-person workshops – highlighting the benefits of retrofitting (lower bills, cosier homes, and reduced CO₂). One flagship event, a **"Drive and Thrive" on 7th March 2025**, was run in Cirencester, bringing together demonstrations of home energy tech (insulation, heat pumps, solar) and electric vehicles, showing residents how going green can save money. There will be a local event in Kemble Village hall 7-9pm on 22 May. This collaborative approach via Climate Leadership Gloucestershire – which I had the privilege to **chair for a six-month term** – ensures we share expertise county-wide. By pooling resources, we can tackle common challenges more effectively.

- **Community Engagement on Climate:** Engaging communities and young people in climate action has been another focus. I helped establish the **Cotswold Climate Action Network (Cotswold CAN)** – a forum for environmentally-minded residents to come together, share ideas and volunteer on projects like tree planting and community energy. We launched Cotswold CAN with open invitations for locals to join. I also participated in educational outreach: in July 2024, I presented Cotswold District's innovative climate initiatives (such as our successful Climate Investment Bond and the retrofit project plans) at a **Climate Academy** workshop series for local councils, organized by Climate Emergency UK. Furthermore, I have been in dialogue with national policymakers – writing to the new government ministers at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, and the Department for Transport, to advocate for faster action on EV charging infrastructure and support for rural decarbonisation. By raising the Cotswolds' voice at the national level, and by empowering our communities at

- the Cotswold District.
- **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire:** As mentioned, Cotswold District is a key member of **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire (CLG)** – a county-wide partnership of all seven councils (county and districts), plus NHS, police, and academia, working together on climate change. This year, the chairmanship of CLG rotated to Cotswold District and I took on the **Chair** role for a six-month period. Through CLG, we raised the profile of climate action in the county and shared best practices. For instance, CLG supported the rollout of the retrofit scheme and coordinated county-wide campaigns on tree planting and sustainable transport. This collective approach strengthens our ability to secure funding and influence regional strategies. It also ensures that district-level projects (like ours in Cotswold) contribute to Gloucestershire’s broader climate goals, avoiding duplication of effort. Going forward, I will continue to collaborate with my counterparts in other councils so that we tackle this challenge unified – because climate change doesn’t stop at our district borders.

In summary, the past year has seen Cotswold District Council firmly establish itself as a **leader in local climate action**. As the Cabinet Member, I will strive to build on this momentum – cutting our carbon emissions, adapting to climate impacts, and enabling our residents to live more sustainably, all while saving money for both the Council and the community.

Cotswold District Council – Key Updates (District-wide)

Beyond the Kemble Ward and my portfolio area, the Cotswold District Council as a whole has been very active this year. Here are some of the **key developments and initiatives** from May 2024 to May 2025 that affect residents across the district:

In May 2025, **Councillor Joe Harris** is stepping down as Leader of Cotswold District Council after six impactful years at the helm. Joe made this decision to focus on his growing national responsibilities as Vice Chair and Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group at the Local Government Association, where he will help shape the future of local government across the country. Importantly, Joe continues to serve as both a **Cotswold District Councillor and a Gloucestershire County Councillor**, ensuring his deep local knowledge and commitment remain a key part of our community's voice. Joe's tenure was marked by his passion for affordable housing, sustainability, and strong community engagement. He guided the council through unprecedented challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, and has been a tireless advocate for fairer funding and rural communities. We thank Joe for his outstanding leadership and service.

He is succeeded by **Councillor Mike Evemy**, elected as the new Leader at the Council's Annual General Meeting in May. Mike has served with distinction as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, and brings a wealth of experience and calm, thoughtful leadership. We look forward to continuing our progress under Mike's guidance and building on the strong foundations laid during Joe's leadership.

Future Governance – Towards a Unitary Authority: A major change on the horizon is the Government's plan for local government reorganisation. The new English Devolution White Paper (published 16 December 2024) set out a direction for "two-tier" areas like Gloucestershire to **move to unitary authorities**, abolishing district councils. In all proposed scenarios being discussed, Cotswold District Council would be merged into a larger unitary council covering either all of Gloucestershire or a significant part of it. This means that within the next 2–3 years, *Cotswold District Council in its current form will cease to exist*. Gloucestershire councils (districts and county) are now working together on possible structures to put forward (options include a single county-wide authority or splitting into East/West units). **What does this mean for residents?** In the short term, nothing changes – we continue to deliver services as normal. But we are actively engaging in the planning process to ensure that any new council setup will maintain local accountability and quality

- develops. Rest assured, all councillors – whatever the eventual structure – are committed to keeping our services accessible and responsive to you throughout this transition.

Planning Reform and the Local Plan Challenge - In December 2024, the new government made sudden changes to national planning policy which had significant implications for the Cotswolds. Without consultation or notice, it **doubled the housing targets for Cotswold District**, placing considerable pressure on our planning system and land supply. The immediate consequence of this change is that Cotswold District Council no longer has a five-year housing land supply as required under national planning rules. This weakens our ability to resist **speculative developments**—especially in areas not previously identified for large-scale housing. It means developers are more likely to exploit this shortfall by submitting applications on land outside of planned growth areas, which risks undermining our communities’ wishes and the principles of sustainable development.

We are actively working on how to respond to this challenge. Our planning team and Cabinet are urgently reviewing how best to restore a defensible land supply position while ensuring new homes are built in the right places, with the right infrastructure. This includes accelerating work to **update the Cotswold Local Plan**, taking into account both the increased housing target and the anticipated move towards **local government reorganisation**.

As Gloucestershire prepares for unitary local government, there will likely be one, or two, new planning authorities for the county. We must therefore ensure that our revised Local Plan both responds to local priorities and aligns with the emerging regional picture. Our goal is to maintain high design and sustainability standards, protect the Cotswolds’ unique landscape and heritage, and deliver genuinely affordable homes that meet local need—not just meet targets.

Residents and parish councils will be kept informed and involved as the process moves forward. We remain committed to transparent planning and community-led decision making, even in the face of top-down pressures from national government.

Financial Stewardship and Staffing: Like many councils, Cotswold District has faced budget pressures (rising costs and limited funding). However, we took proactive steps to protect frontline services and taxpayers. One significant project was the **repatriation of council services from Publica** (the company that has been jointly delivering services for Cotswold and some other councils).

- began bringing staff back under direct council employment. On 1 November 2024, we transferred the first group of Publica staff – including the Planning, Democratic Services, Communications, and HR teams – back to CDC management. More staff will return by summer 2025. This change is aimed at improving efficiency and tailoring services more closely to local needs. Affected employees have been consulted and retained their terms, ensuring continuity of their work. In addition, the Council made some tough decisions to strengthen finances: for example, it approved the sale of two long-disused heritage properties in Cirencester (the Old Station building and Old Memorial Hospital) because restoration costs were beyond our means. We also made a successful trial permanent by **adjusting Customer Service call centre hours** to 9am–2pm (while keeping face-to-face offices open all day). This saved around £125,000 a year and actually improved customer satisfaction by focusing staff at peak times. By embracing digital channels (over 90% of garden waste renewals are now done online) and smarter working, the Council has continued to live within its budget. Unlike some authorities, we did *not* need any emergency financial support – a testament to prudent management in challenging times.

- **Community Recognition – Unsung Heroes:** This year the Council launched the “**Unsung Heroes Awards**” to celebrate the amazing volunteers in our district’s towns and villages. We asked the public and parish councils to nominate individuals who go above and beyond for their community. The response was fantastic. At a Full Council ceremony, **15 outstanding volunteers** were officially recognized as “Unsung Heroes” for their service to Cotswold. Their contributions ranged from running youth clubs and caring for the elderly, to maintaining community facilities and organizing local events – the often unseen, but vital, work that makes our community special. The awards event was a heartfelt thank-you, and it’s something we hope to continue annually. I encourage all residents to consider who might be an “unsung hero” in your area for future nominations.

- **Supporting Residents Through the Cost of Living Crisis:** The Council has prioritized helping those in need. In January 2025, we introduced a new data tool called the **Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)** to identify households who may be missing out on financial support. By proactively using LIFT, the Council has already helped vulnerable residents claim over **£1.3 million in unclaimed benefits** that they were entitled to. This is life-changing support for many low-income families and pensioners, boosting their incomes and ensuring they can afford essentials. Alongside this, our team organized numerous **Cost of Living support events** across the district. These drop-in events (often in partnership with charities and advice agencies) provided guidance on energy bills, debt,

- – a one-stop shop to get help. We also supported the Government-funded **HAF (Holiday Activities and Food)** programme during school holidays, which provided free holiday clubs with meals for children of eligible families at various locations in the Cotswold's. This not only gave children fun and nutritious activities, but also eased the burden on parents during school breaks. Supporting our residents through difficult times will remain a core mission of the Council.
- **Investing in Communities – Crowdfund Cotswold:** An online crowdfunding platform to help local community projects raise money. I'm delighted to report that this initiative has now **surpassed £1 million** in total funding for local projects, showcasing the tremendous community spirit in our district. To date, the Council itself has pledged over £180,000 (via our Community Fund) to 42 projects, which in turn unlocked over *£1.2 million* from business and resident backers news.cotswold.gov.uk. In this ward alone, projects like the **Kemble Community Gardens**, a **King's Coronation street party** in Somerford Keynes, and the **Thames Head Energy Community Energy** venture have received support through Crowdfund Cotswold. Recently, the Council pledged an additional £30,000 to a batch of new projects. These are grassroots ideas that might not have happened otherwise. I encourage any group in Kemble Ward with a great community idea (be it improving a play area, starting a community enterprise, etc.) to consider using Crowdfund Cotswold – small contributions from many people can really add up, especially with the Council match-funding the effort. It's a fantastic way for us all to invest in our neighbourhoods and bring positive change.
- **Greener and Cleaner Cotswolds:** Environmental quality has been a big theme in council work this year. In addition to the climate initiatives detailed earlier, the Council under the leadership of Cllr Lisa Spivey (Cabinet Member for Communities until recently) took on issues of **sewage pollution and flood resilience**. In July 2024, CDC hosted a high-profile **"Sewage Summit"** in Cirencester, bringing together Thames Water, Wessex Water, the Environment Agency, and local campaign groups like Windrush Against Sewage Pollution. This event – attended by many concerned residents – put a spotlight on the unacceptable sewage discharges into our rivers. It resulted in a set of recommendations which the Council formally adopted in September, strengthening our push for cleaner rivers. We also formed a multi-agency group focused on flooding in vulnerable areas (Fairford and surrounds, initially). On a district-wide level, the **Flood Risk team** at CDC has been exceptionally proactive – they **visited every home that suffered flooding** during the winter storms to offer assistance and gather data. Plans are being drawn up to alleviate repeat flood problems in various hotspots. Our experiences in Kemble Wick,

- techniques, we can better protect all our villages from extreme weather which is sadly becoming more frequent. Meanwhile, the Council's **Waste and Recycling service** continued to perform well, and we maintained our position as one of the top recyclers in the country (over 60% recycling rate). Fly-tipping enforcement was stepped up in coordination with the police – as noted, fines have been issued and covert cameras deployed, leading to a deterrence in some known dumping areas.

- **Leisure, Culture and Wellbeing:** The Council adopted a brand new **Cotswold Cultural Strategy**, highlighting the rich heritage, arts, and tourism offerings in our area. This strategy will guide how we support museums, theatres, festivals and historic sites to thrive and how we engage volunteers and young people in culture. In practical terms, the Council secured grant funding to support events like the Phoenix Festival in Cirencester and local creative projects via Crowdfund (mentioned above). Additionally, community wellbeing events were held – from **health & wellbeing fairs to community “bring and share” days** – often led by our Communities team in partnership with town councils and charities. These events aimed to rebuild community connections post-Covid and to make sure people know what support networks are available, whether it's mental health, loneliness, or physical activity groups. Our leisure centres have also seen investment in new equipment and classes, thanks in part to council grants and developer contributions – ensuring residents have quality facilities to stay active.

- **Efficient and Responsive Services:** Despite financial challenges, Cotswold District Council has worked hard to maintain and improve its services to residents. One headline achievement was in our **Planning Department** – by early 2025, the team had overcome the backlog of applications and was determining **95% of planning applications on time**, well above national averages. This is crucial for residents and local businesses awaiting decisions, and it was achieved by bringing in extra planners (as contractors) and streamlining processes. Our customer services also remained top-notch; even with shorter phone hours, satisfaction ratings climbed and we were ranked in the top 3 councils nationally for customer satisfaction in March 2024. The **garden waste collection service** was renewed with 90% of customers managing their renewal online, showing the success of our digital push. Meanwhile, **street cleaning and grounds maintenance** crews kept our public spaces looking tidy – there was praise from several parishes for the improved schedule of road sweeping and gully clearing this year. And importantly, the Council continued to deliver its core services – from emptying **bins** (over 5

- **food businesses for hygiene, to enforcing planning rules** – on budget and without major disruption.
- In the May 2025 **Gloucestershire County Council elections**, the Liberal Democrats made significant gains, increasing their seats from 16 to 27. This shift positions us as the largest party on the council. I'm pleased to share that **Lisa Spivey** was re-elected as our Gloucestershire County Councillor. With the **Liberal Democrats now leading the council**, a new cabinet will be announced soon, setting the stage for fresh leadership and direction in our county.

In closing, Cotswold District Council has had a productive year with many positive outcomes for our communities. As your local member, I have endeavoured to ensure Kemble Ward's needs are represented in all these broader initiatives. Whether it's fighting for fair funding, shaping new policies, or simply making sure the voice of our villages is heard, I remain committed to serving you.

Thank you for the support and engagement over the past year. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions or concerns, or if you have ideas for making our community even better. Together, we have achieved a lot in 2024/25 – and together we can look forward to the year ahead with confidence.

Councillor Mike McKeown

Kemble Ward Councillor

Cabinet Lead for Climate Change and Sustainability

Mike.McKeown@cotswold.gov.uk

Appendix Three

SOMERFORD KEYNES VILLAGE LAKE

Report for Parish Meeting 12 May 2025

The Lake subcommittee consists of 5 members: Chairman (Mike Wilding), 1 parish councillor (Graham Valentine), plus Lisa Willis, Jane Hayman, Nick Cartwright. We meet at regular intervals, manage the Lake, and carry out monthly Lake inspections, & manage volunteer mornings.

1. **CALOR RURAL COMMUNITY FUND:** Of the £5000 grant received just before the Covid epidemic hit, we still have £428 left in this fund for special purposes that the committee decides upon.
2. **BUILD BETTER FUND:** We were successful in obtaining £1900 from this fund, now spent on a new shed and tools and equipment for managing the Lake, pond dipping nets, a trail camera, bat boxes & gate counter.
3. **VOLUNTEERS:** During the year we have held about 3 volunteer mornings when 3-4 regular volunteers have come along for 2-3 hours. Volunteer numbers have dropped during the late autumn and winter, meaning that more work as to be undertaken by committee and outside contractors. The annual bonfire was held in March, and as usual attracts a few more volunteers. Some specific tasks required have been carried out by volunteers at a time to suit themselves eg planting 180 snowdrops “in the green”. This will be encouraged.
4. **CONTRACTING WORK:** Our tree work contractor, Danny Isaacs, worked for a day in February, removing brush and trees from the Lake edge on the N side to allow more sunlight to the wildflower area and a more open vista from the NW picnic bench. Also removing ivy from our sycamore with a TPO on it. He also checked for and removed any dead branches. Major strimming work was carried out in the autumn to the wildflower areas. Committee members continued with scarifying and overseeding in the spring. Boardwalk bi-annual maintenance (protective coating to timber) may need to be carried out by contractors in 2025.
5. **SKPC LAKE BUDGET:** We agreed on a SKPC Lake budget of £1250 per year, with the new SKPC for 2024/25.

Item	Cost (exc VAT)
Tree work (Danny Isaacs)	£650
Strimming (J Uncles)	£100
Servicing mower, trolley and petrol	£120
Seed for spring overseeding of wildflower area	£140
Snowdrops in the green	£50
Miscellaneous items	£165
Total	£1225

6. **WILDFLOWER MEADOWS:** Our areas designated as wildflower areas, have progressed at different paces. But regular maintenance is the key, together with patience!
7. **ECOLOGICAL MATTERS:** LME ecologist James Ponting has taken a continued interest in our Lake. We have
 - Relocated our owl box. Camera and battery yet to be relocated
 - Installed bat boxes .. a bat walk was carried out lead by James Ponting
 - Built an otter holt, otters are regular visitors, but the carp are surviving in the 7m deep water
 - Installed a hedgehog house, but no visitors this winter
 - Snowdrops planted annually over the past 3 years are now becoming well established by the gate.
 - Bluebells in Bluebell Dell near the boardwalk are steadily increasing and will be augmented
 - Cowslips in plenty were the first wildflowers to show this spring, in Weeping Willow Bay.

- Moth trapping & identification was carried out on 2 August .. we found many and some rare species.
- Hosted Village Pond Day on 13 July

Two families of little grebes have been spotted but are very shy. Harry the heron is a regular morning visitor and “Daffy” our white duck is back, as well as the usual moorhens (red beaks) and coots (white beaks)

8. CHILDRENS’ ACTIVITY MORNING: This was held in the Spring Bank holidays, led by Jane Hayman

Mike Wilding

Lake subcommittee Chairman 12 May 25



Appendix Four

The Somerford Keynes Village Charity

This charity can help villagers, who find themselves struggling to meet an immediate financial need or pressure, by means of a grant.

Enquiries and applications for financial support for, or on behalf of residents of Somerford Keynes or Shorncliffe should, in the first instance, be sent to the Reverend David Austin, using the email address revdavid@austin@gmail.com If that is not possible, please telephone him on 07504 295822.

Financial requests may be for a wide range of purposes which could include

- supporting an individual's educational needs by paying for textbooks or school uniform
- the repair or replacement of essential but unaffordable household items
- heating costs and/or general household bills
- urgent health or dentistry costs
- exceptional transport costs, such as for hospital visits

The Reverend David Austin chairs the biannual (and ad hoc) charity's trustee meetings where each application is considered in the strictest confidence by the board of trustees : The

Privacy Notice posted on the village website provides more detail about the trustees' responsibilities in this regard. Awards are typically between £50-£200.

The trustees are village residents ; two are nominated for terms of four years by Somerford

Keynes Parish Council, one by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and another is co-opted

every 5 years by the other trustees.

In addition to the Reverend David Austin, they are

Mrs Diane Gibbons

Mrs Ellie Tracy

Mrs Clare Baker

Mr Graham Shearn

The Somerford Keynes Village Charity is registered and regulated by the Charity Commission for England and Wales.