

Kingsdon Parish Council

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A

Briefing Paper

For

The Extra-Ordinary Parish Council Meeting

Being held in the Village Hall

At 10.00.am

On Saturday 13th October 2018

*“Change, tax and death are the only certainties in life”
(Adapted from a quotation by Benjamin Franklin 1706~1790)*

September 2018

1. A Brief Historical Perspective

Our village can probably trace its roots back to two centuries ago with historical evidence of the B3151 being a roman road and tesserae being found in several gardens. The earliest reference to the church is in the 13th century and in the 16th & 17th centuries Kingsdon was sometimes known as Kingsdon Cary. There are historical references to a quarry for lias in 1552 and a bowling green in 1777.

The earliest reference to Kingsdon Cary manor house is in 1356. Jumping forward in time the Kingsdon Manor and estate was sold by Henry, Lord Arundell to a Mr Aaron Moody and his son conveyed it to William Neal of London in 1864. It was during the ownership of the Moody family that Frog Lane ceased to run through the grounds of Kingsdon Manor to the Somerton Road and also Lodge Road was constructed to give greater privacy to the manor house and gardens. Indeed for many centuries it appears that the village was predominantly an agrarian estate with agriculture providing employment for most of the inhabitants, although references can be found to milling, masons, weaving and glove making. Indeed there are parishioners living in our village today who remember when there were seven farms whereas today there is only one. It is also the case that now most residents in employment commute out of the village to their place of work.

The black and white photographs mounted in the village hall illustrate much about both the Neal family as well as life in the village in former years. Indeed there are memorials to the Neal family in the Church and churchyard and a study of all of these is a reminder of a different era. Although Mrs Neal and her three daughters emigrated to Australia after the Second World War they continued to own the Kingsdon Estate, a very substantial amount of land and property in and around Kingsdon, although Kingsdon Manor itself was sold to the Bristol Corporation in 1952.

Not only has our village evolved in form and structure over the centuries but also in the size of its population. In 1791 it was estimated at 450 and 455 in 1801. Thereafter the figure rose to 610 in 1831 but declined to 252 in 1901. After the First World War the population remained largely stable, but had risen to 313 in 1951; again relatively stable at 312 in 1961. Census figures of 366 in 1981; 336 in 1991 and 303 in 2011 are the most recently published. However since then many new houses in the village are now occupied and it is estimated the current population is 340.

2. Some Recent Changes

Many of the houses in Top Street were built in the 1970's and some in later years.

Following the closure of the primary school in 2011 this has now been converted into the much valued and successful village shop, operated by the efforts of an army of volunteers. Outside the shop, the telephone box, purchased by the Parish Council, is now our village library thanks to its refurbishment by volunteers. The land adjacent to shop has been developed with a new detached property, and the former school playing field has been purchased by the Parish Council, with plans to develop it into a community orchard.

It was in 2011 that developers gained permission for the restoration of Kingsdon Manor into three dwellings along with a further 18 dwellings in the grounds, a project which is still ongoing. The view from the Manor looks across the cricket pitch, which has been successfully acquired on a long lease for the club who have also subsequently built a new pavilion.

The street scene in Lower Road is now very different since the seven new properties were completed in 2011 which fit comfortably into the village due to their complimentary design.

These first two sections, whilst not a comprehensive history nor a complete coverage of all developments in recent years do illustrate that our village has been evolving throughout time, adapting to the changing needs of society and demands of the local economy.

3. Proposals from the Kingsdon Estate

When the Village Hall Committee approached the Parish Council with concerns about the longevity and the material state of the village hall, an initial dialogue was started with the Kingsdon Estate to see whether any land might be available on which to build a new hall. Subsequently the agents for the Kingsdon Estate (GTH) came to see the Parish Council following changes to their management brief. They explained that the three Neal daughters who emigrated to Australia were now in their 80's and wished to realise some of their assets in England for the benefit of their families. Parishioners may recall that earlier this year 1100 acres of arable, pasture and woodland were recently sold as have been other smaller sites.

Initial meetings took place in the village hall which is visibly showing signs of its age and does not have the facilities of many new halls throughout Somerset. The first proposal was for a housing development on the field between Underwood and Henley roads.

Following meetings over the past twelve months negotiations have culminated in the following:

- A proposal to build 20 properties in the field between Underwood and Henley roads with vehicular access off Henley road and pedestrian access from Underwood road. In line with the feedback from the questionnaire last autumn this will include a few starter homes and smaller affordable housing.
- This development will also include land for a new larger village hall and car park that will be acquired on a long lease for a minimal rent, similar to that obtained for the cricket pitch.
- A proposal to build 8 bungalows in lower road opposite the former school playing field.
- The majority of this field will not be used for their construction and will likewise be granted to the village on a long lease as above. It would be the intention for this to be developed as a copse/spinney and orchard as feedback from the autumn 2017 questionnaire indicated that residents wished to see more trees planted in the village. Possibly with some of the new disease resistant varieties of elms.
- GTH had expressed a wish for another housing development on the site of the allotments. However as a result of the negotiations with the Parish Council they have also agreed it could be retained on a long lease for a minimal rent.
- Following the twelve months of negotiations GTH have also agreed that our much loved and valued village field can also be treated similarly and granted on a long lease for a minimal rent.

Because of the Neal family's long association with the village terms of reference have been given to GTH that would most certainly not apply if the Parish Council had been in discussions and negotiations with a more commercial, and indeed hard nosed, property developer. A few parishioners have suggested that smaller developments could be considered over the next 5 -10 years. In light of discussions with the Kingsdon Estate that is not an option.

The following analysis illustrates the reasons why these proposals are supported by The Parish Council and believed to be, a fair and reasonable offer from the Kingsdon Estate (Neal family), that are in the long term interests of the village.

4. SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats)

Strengths

- This development represents only slightly more dwellings than those which received planning permission for the Kingsdon Manor site.
- It represents a mixed development with a range of different sizes of properties catering for people across the socio-economic spectrum and age range.
- The Kingsdon Estate has agreed that current and former residents of Kingsdon and their offspring will have priority when the new properties become available.
- The Kingsdon Estate will consult with the Parish Council on the detailed plans prior to submission for planning permission.

Weaknesses

- The time frame from development concept to completion is as yet not defined
- No plans have, at this stage, been submitted to SSDC, and their views, as the planning authority, may modify these proposals, although initial soundings are encouraging.

Opportunities

- This proposition represents a one-off opportunity for the village to secure significant areas of green space for the foreseeable future and provide security for future generations to enjoy Kingsdon's special environment.
- It enables the Parish Council to respond to parishioners views on future housing preferences and will facilitate opportunities for investment in "greening" Kingsdon.
- The village hall committee have expressed major concerns about its condition and limited lifespan. A larger site for a new hall would present the village with a very significant financial saving, and even more if its construction were to coincide with the adjacent housing development.

Threats

- The major threat would be for the village to reject this proposal and the Kingsdon Estate then sell the land holdings on the open market to the highest bidder. We could then be faced with a large developer whose only objective would be to maximise their investment.
- The current lease on the village field and allotments is due to expire in 2032; however a break clause allows the Estate to take back the field in 2021. Even if the lease were renewed, the rent could be increased in line with current commercial rates resulting in a very significant hike to the precept.
- Was the Parish Council to find itself at loggerheads with a different developer our reserves are such that we could not finance a costly legal case?

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Whilst this proposal from the Kingsdon Estate represents another aspect of change in the life of the village, and will be a source of anxiety for some, it represents an opportunity to secure key landmarks that define the very heart and character of the village for future generations.

It is recognised that there will be a need to keep parishioners informed as these proposals are firmed up and fleshed out in the course of the next year.

In the past decade many new parishioners have come to live in Kingsdon and they have not only integrated into our community but brought skills, knowledge and abilities that have significantly contributed to its life and vitality. There are quite a few of our parishioners whose health, unfortunately, limits their involvement. So a modest increase in our population not only enables the “spreading of the load” but can inject fresh ideas, vibrancy and ensure we remain a sustainable village. Indeed even if the village grows to just over 420 residents it will still be smaller than in the 18th Century.

It has taken many months and numerous meetings to evolve this constructive proposal and parishioners are asked to carefully and diligently give due consideration to what this constitutes and the potential implications were it not to proceed.

The Parish Council therefore commends the Kingsdon Estate proposal to parishioners.