

KESGRAVE TOWN COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN 2021-24



Plan adopted by Kesgrave Town
Council 18 October 2021

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1. Introduction

1.1 History

Kesgrave has a long history with origins recorded in the Domesday Book but for many years it remained a small agricultural community with a church, an inn and a few small farms. In 1921 the population was 100 housed in 20 dwellings. Following significant post-war development, by the mid-1970s the parish comprised a population approaching 5,000 mainly on the west side of town, along Main Road and down Dobbs Lane. The remainder was private woodland and agricultural land but in the late 1980s the major development of Grange Farm commenced. This was carried out in broadly two major phases covering more than two decades of expansion.

During the 1990s the population grew from 5,000 to 9,000 and to mark the millennium our status changed from a village to a town. The second phase in the 2000s saw further growth to over 15,000. This expansion was by far the greatest of any town in Suffolk and district council planners recognised Kesgrave's need to settle in their subsequent strategic housing plans in 2013 and 2020 where few additional dwelling requirements were allocated.

1.2 Background

In a pandemic-delayed referendum held on 6th May 2021 a majority of 89% of those who voted were in favour of adopting the Neighbourhood Plan 2018-36 (NP). At 25%, the turnout was somewhat lower than the national average (32%) but understandably so in the circumstances. The NP now stands alongside the East Suffolk District Local Plan in determining the outcome of all planning applications for development within the town. However, more than that, the NP expresses a vision for our town with a number of aspirations that will contribute to this Business Plan.

The need for an NP derived from three main inter-linking issues:

- a concern that the rapid growth of Grange Farm had not been fully matched in the provision of social and recreational facilities for the incoming younger population;
- an aim for the town's identity to be recognised as important in its own right and not to be seen by planners as ever fertile territory for Ipswich over-spill; residents' concern in this respect centred on avoiding coalescence of housing development on the countryside area south of the settlement boundary;
- recognising that Kesgrave is a great place to live that the reasons for this should be preserved in terms of access to and use of our green spaces, cycle lanes and walkways and the complimentary flora and fauna that sustain our well-being; and
- coupled with these a desire for the town to have a bigger say in how planning applications were being addressed.

These sentiments were encapsulated in the vision and objectives in the NP that were supported by residents via the referendum and therefore logically should frame the actions set out in this Business Plan. They are therefore worth repeating here.

Vision

We see Kesgrave as remaining an attractive town to live in which is still a geographically distinct settlement from others on the east side of Ipswich and it remains a town where residents:

- *still enjoy the surrounding countryside, wooded areas and green open spaces within the built-up area;*

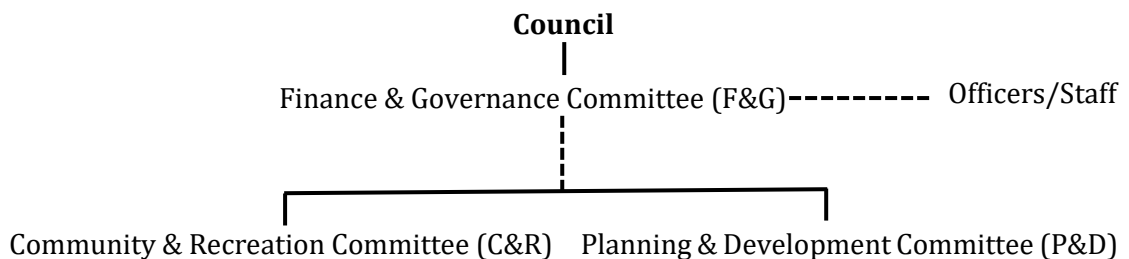
- *have access to sporting and recreational facilities of a scale that reflects the size of the population;*
- *have less dependence on the car for local journeys; and*
- *feel a genuine sense of belonging to a vibrant, caring community.*

Objectives

1. *To protect the character and identity of Kesgrave, particularly in respect of preserving the established openness of the built-up areas and its separation from neighbouring communities.*
2. *To enhance and protect the quality of our green spaces and landscaping.*
3. *To ensure that air quality in Kesgrave is not worsened.*
4. *To ensure wildlife thrives and wildlife corridors are protected and enhanced.*
5. *To preserve our heritage assets.*
6. *To expand and enhance the range and quality of recreational and sporting facilities so that they more fully serve the needs of Kesgrave’s community today.*
7. *To provide genuine alternatives to the car for local journeys particularly on foot and by bicycle.*
8. *To increase the provision of usable off-road parking in order to enhance the character of Kesgrave and improve pedestrian and cycle safety.*

1.3 Governance

There are 16 available seats for councillors who stand for election/re-election every four years. The next elections are in May 2023. Where seats are not taken up through an election or are vacated for any reason Council may fill the open position through co-option until the next election.



Council and Committee meetings take place in public, albeit they are not public meetings with the exception of the Annual Town Meeting. As well as participation in the monthly meetings of Council each councillor opts to join at least one of the Committees. The Committees elect a Chair and Vice Chair at their first meeting of the financial year to serve for that year. The respective chairs of C&R and P&D also join the Finance & Governance Committee.

Council has Terms of Reference (ToR) that specify its statutory functions and set out the responsibilities and delegated powers of its Committees. These include the authorisation of expenditure in their area of responsibility within the budget that has been previously signed off by Council. The conduct of meetings is governed by Council’s Standing Orders.

In addition to the ToR, governance of Council’s decision-making and actions is determined by its Financial Regulations and a series of policies that are published on our website. Amongst other things these set out how Council ensures compliance with the many legal requirements imposed on it including data protection, employment law and health & safety.

1.4 Operations

Based in the office at Ferguson Way, and the engine room of the organisation, are the part-time officers (Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer) and other members of the team: Estate and Events Manager and Administrator plus three job-sharing Estate Operatives. Their main duties are to:

- provide the frontline service to residents, organisations and businesses fielding their many enquiries;
- liaise with other community bodies, the Police, other councils and the Suffolk Association of Local Councils;
- manage Council's finances and administer Councillor training and attendance at conferences and events;
- organise all Council meetings as to their scheduling, venue, agenda and the taking and publishing of minutes
- plan and arrange annual events, for example the Fun Day, fireworks display, senior citizens outing, Christmas tree lights switch on ceremony;
- manage the Millennium Jubilee Hall (MJH) in terms of the building and its use by hirers;
- oversee the running of the monthly Kesgrave Market;
- manage and maintain council owned public open space and play equipment;
- manage and monitor services provided by third party organisations, funded partially or fully by Council, namely the PCSO, 4YP Youth Club and Library;
- lock/unlock Council's premises to provide security and access and keep them clean and tidy;
- monitor all litter bins, benches, tables, signs and noticeboards and repair/replace where required; and
- initiate, investigate, progress and extend existing projects in line with this business plan.

2. Strategic Objectives

As mentioned in the Introduction, our objectives for this plan will be framed against the long-term aspirations set out in the Neighbourhood Plan. These must be coupled with the need to comply with the many statutory and regulatory obligations placed on Council in the exercising of the powers bestowed upon us. This aspect will always shape how we go about achieving our aims.

Over the plan period our strategic objectives are:

- a) Provide an 'umbrella', single point of contact, support service to our residents to deal with issues initially arising from the covid emergency i.e. collecting food, prescriptions, telephone support typically for vulnerable, shielding or isolating individuals and help establish in the medium term a Good Neighbour Scheme to provide a wider support facility.
- b) To enhance the use of our green spaces by the provision of appropriate additional facilities and, where feasible, protect them for the long term through the adoption or acquisition of land ownership.

- c) To ensure best practice in our operations and to support community initiatives aimed at environmental improvement and the development of the flora and fauna in our suburban environment.
- d) To expand the range of organised social events, where feasible, and work with community partners wherever possible to retain existing, and provide new, recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.
- e) To provide value for money to residents and ensure effective and verified governance covering compliance with all applicable codes, laws and regulations as they exist or are introduced over the plan period by government, other authorities and/or our “trade” associations (primarily the National and Suffolk Association of Local Councils) in the form of best practice.

3. Action Plans

Given our organisational structure it is appropriate to set out our plans in the context of each constituent part: our committees and the operations.

3.1 Community & Recreation (C&R)

The role of the C&R committee is to support engagement with other community stakeholders; oversee the management of our land and property assets and related services; engage with young people in supporting our youth provision; oversee Kesgrave Market, the MJH and all community events; and liaise with other bodies in proactively contributing to solutions to the climate emergency, conservation work and public transport.

There are some facilities the neighbourhood plan project identified (in most cases simply reaffirming past understanding) that Council would very much wish to consider providing, such as an FA standard football pitch, more allotments/orchards, a community cafe and a host of other sporting and recreational amenities. However, these generally depend on having access to land and/or the availability of premises both of which are at a premium in town. Whilst Council remains alert to any opportunities for premises becoming vacated, the cost of acquiring land and buildings (or erecting them) inevitably raises a question of affordability.

The items set out below represent what Council considers an ambitious but realistic set of plans to take forward and improve our town. Any initiative involving significant expenditure will be subject to assessment of cost/financing (inc project management) and benefits, affordability and, where appropriate, resident consultation before proceeding.

Council is made up of volunteer Councillors most of whom are in full-time employment, and a small number of busy paid staff. Therefore, the resources we have available to achieve our aims are limited. There is ample opportunity for residents and businesses in town to become involved and contribute to the delivery of these plans.

Public Open Space and Play Equipment

- a) We will consider providing a canopy or canopies in Rupert Fison Centre Square for the use of Kesgrave Market, social purposes (eg street cafes) and for community events.
- b) We will look to improve the Town Square by providing additional planting, features and possibly a central feature.

- c) We will make repairs and improvements to the Multi-use Games Area (MUGA) at Cedarwood Green with a view to recommissioning its use beyond dusk.
- d) We will invest in improving the grass pitches and field at the Millennium Sports Ground.
- e) We will investigate the provision of recreational equipment at Long Stroops suitable for use by teenage children.
- f) We will investigate the provision of a hut for the sale of drinks, ice creams with table and chairs in one of our public open spaces.
- g) We will review the case for the provision of a public lavatory including the best location, if feasible.

See also Finance & Governance objective on land acquisition and adoption.

Highways and Public Transport

- h) When opportunities arise e.g. electricity provision is being upgraded or moved underground, typically in western Kesgrave, where lighting is still in the ownership of the Town Council, we will consider funding additional street lights to bring lighting levels up to modern standards and/or upgrade the lights to LED and install remote control units and additionally attempt to transfer ownership to Suffolk County Council.
- i) We will organise a project to have street signs cleaned and tidied up where sub-standard.
- j) We will investigate the options for providing improved and greener community transport alternatives covering e.g. buses, taxis and volunteer/community transport schemes.
- k) We will consider the provision of more bus and cycle shelters where practical and sufficient use can justify their provision.
- l) We will monitor and support initiatives that improve parking, especially around our schools, and that help minimise parking on pavements and grass verges. This will include consideration of employing a parking warden if justified.

Youth Provision

- m) We envisage maintaining the current Youth Provision arrangements via 4YP throughout the plan period and additionally we will investigate other provision where it enhances youth provision (eg outreach workers, internet café etc).
- n) We will consider the provision of more teenage shelters.

Conservation and the Environment

- o) We will create a Tree and Wildlife Conservation strategy to drive our conservation projects along with creating a maintenance schedule for our public open spaces including considering taking on responsibilities currently carried out by others on Council's behalf.

See also Finance & Governance objective on environmental matters.

Community Services and Support

- p) We will consider extending the provision of the resident's helpline established during the pandemic emergency.

- q) We will support Suffolk County Council in its lease review of the provision of Library services within Kesgrave including its accommodation restrictions.
- r) We envisage maintaining the current Community Policing arrangements for the shared Police Community Support Officer throughout the plan period. We will also continue to pursue extending the standard hours of the contract into the evenings beyond 6pm to provide a service that fully suites local circumstances.
- s) We will consider supporting and funding other Kesgrave organisations in providing facilities of benefit to the residents of Kesgrave, e.g. a community café.

3.2 Finance & Governance (F&G)

The role of the F&G committee is to regulate, set plans, manage and control our finances, resources and HR/staffing of Council. This includes recommending to Council for approval an annual budget and precept in accordance with our Financial Regulations. F&G also oversees the running of our operations through the Officers and staff.

- a) We will introduce a policy for land acquisition and adoption and pursue all feasible opportunities to bring strategically important land in town under Council control and provide additional facilities of benefit e.g. cemetery extensions and allotments.
- b) We will consolidate the good intentions expressed in our neighbourhood plan on environmental matters with the introduction of an appropriate policy which will set out our internal and wider community commitments and ambitions, including the adoption of solar panels, wind generators, heat pumps, insulation and improved air quality.
- c) We will review and update all other Council policies ensuring compliance with any relevant legislation or recommended best practice; and establish a timetable to ensure all documents are reviewed as designated during the plan period.
- d) We will document an Emergency Plan to bring into action in the event of a serious interruption to Council's operations with a view to ensuring the speediest possible resumption of our services to residents.
- e) We will continue to maintain our Council website and explore opportunities be more engaged on social media channels.
- f) We will investigate enhancing the information and facilities on Council's website and consider the provision of a printed Town Guide or Magazine to allow us to cover all resident demographics and audiences.
- g) We will investigate removing the warding in Kesgrave and reducing the number of councillors from 16 to 14 in time for the 2023 Town Council Election.

3.3 Planning & Development (P&D)

The role of the P&D committee is focused on the provision of certain services on behalf of our residents. These are related to planning applications and consultations where Council's role is to respond on behalf of our residents. This is either to support cases that accord with planning policies (including those in the neighbourhood plan) or to object to those considered to be non-compliant.

A momentous recent strategic objective having been achieved with the implementation of the neighbourhood plan, there are no major initiatives proposed for P&D during the period of this Business Plan.

The introduction of the East Suffolk Council Local Plan in September 2020 should herald a period of stability throughout this plan's period. Undeveloped areas of land in Kesgrave beyond the built-up area north and south are defined as countryside in the Local Plan barring their development by the landowners. However, historically, this has not prevented speculative attempts to exploit loopholes in planning policies by developers and we will remain alert to take appropriate action in given circumstances to ensure the policies and sentiments expressed in the neighbourhood plan are observed.

Planning consultations are referred to Council in the main by the Government and local tier 2 authorities (East Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council/Highways). These are normally referred to the P&D committee first to consider and make recommendations on the content of a written representation. These are then referred to Council to comment on them and approve before being processed by the Clerk.

Planning can be a daunting and complex subject for those joining P&D for the first time. Therefore, a tailored Planning Manual was introduced in 2020 for the purpose of training and induction and use as a reference to assist committee members and our deliberations. This will be updated where any significant changes take place over the plan period that affect the committee's work.

P&D will also monitor and progress initiatives to improve road safety around Kesgrave. This includes the provision of 'road crossings' across the main road (to access All Saints cemetery) and elsewhere and junction improvements in particular at the Bell Lane/Foxhall Road and Doctor Watsons Lane/Main Road.

3.4 Operations

- a) Significant recent progress has been made in modernising and professionalising the estates operation including the provision of vehicular transport eliminating the risks associated with employee use of their own transport. We will investigate options to further enhance our operations including the use of electric vehicles, trailers and ride-on mowers.
- b) The administration of meetings was successfully adapted during the pandemic to digital means under applicable government restrictions. Subject to government legislation permitting its continuation it is our aim to facilitate hybrid meeting options (mixed in-person and digital attendance) as a means of encouraging resident participation and providing a degree of flexibility to assist with Councillor and Officer attendance.
- c) Improvements were also made to the security and efficiency of our IT services with the distribution of Council email addresses to all Councillors and staff, together with the introduction of password control over access to digitally stored documentation. We will consolidate this progress with the introduction of an Email, Internet etc Policy and Procedure.
- d) We will review the staff handbook in conjunction with our employment contracts to ensure compliance with Employment Law and other relevant regulations.
- e) We will establish a list of all work carried out by the office ie inspections, surveys, safety checks etc.
- f) We will offer a work experience placement to Kesgrave High School.

- g) The current offices are restricted in relation to the space ideally required for efficient operation and community engagement, therefore action will be taken during the plan period to investigate any viable opportunities for expansion.
- h) We will establish a project to computerise the Lawn Cemetery records.

4. Resources & Finance

Staffing resources and structures are always kept under review but in general no significant increase is envisaged as necessary over the plan period in order to deliver the commitments set out. However, there is likely to be a need for an additional administrative assistant to free up key staff to carry out their roles effectively and deliver on this plan. Longer term we may need a parks manager to oversee grass cutting, planting and hedges.

It is a key duty bestowed upon Council to set and manage an annual expenditure and income budget which is made public. It is our objective to minimise increases in costs to residents during the early part of the plan period whilst the impact of the pandemic is likely to negatively affect a number of people.

Initiatives brought forward that have a significant additional unbudgeted cost will be fully investigated, costed and justified along with holding significant public consultation.

There is no objective to alter our conservatively managed investment strategy.

Appropriate training will be provided to all staff and Councillors to ensure that the work they carry out is to a high standard and as safe as possible.

We will investigate the provision of a video conferencing system to allow hybrid digital/in person attendance at Council meetings to encourage greater resident participation and provide flexibility for Councillors and office staff, subject to the legal authority to do so.

5. Monitoring and Review

We will review progress against our objectives and action plans on an annual basis.

The results will be published for residents, businesses, organisations and community partners to gain an appreciation of what has gone well and what there is still to do.

Additional actions deemed appropriate from time to time will be added to the action plan and reported on in the annual review.