

Dear KNF Members

Here is an update on our Kirkstall Neighbourhood Plan, and notice of some future meetings.

The next full meeting of the Kirkstall Neighbourhood Forum will be on **Tuesday 7 February** in the **New Burley Club, Burley Hill Drive, LS4 2SZ** starting at **7:30pm**. Previous meetings were held in Paxton Hall, but this time we are experimenting with an alternative location at the New Burley Club. Further details will be circulated shortly.

Before that, some members might wish to attend the inaugural meeting of **Kirkstall Valley Development Trust (KVDT)** which will take place on Tuesday 31 January in the **Milford Sports Club**, Beecroft Street LS5 3AS, starting at 7:30pm.

Kirkstall Neighbourhood Forum (KNF) is drawing up a Neighbourhood Plan that will benefit Kirkstall, but KVDT could put important parts of our plan into practical effect. Hopefully both organisations will work closely together, but they will perform different functions and it is better to keep them separate. Please visit our KNF website at www.kirkstallforum.org for more details, as well as the KVDT website at <https://www.kvdt.org.uk>

KVDT is a [Community Benefit Society](#) which is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority under the Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. KVDT is a not-for-profit community organisation. KVDT is *similar* to a Co-op (one member – one vote) but there is one crucial difference: Co-operatives can pay dividends to their individual members, but KVDT must by law re-invest any profits to benefit the local community.

KVDT is an ethical property developer that works in the public interest. It is building a close relationship with the Welsh [Centre for Alternative Technology](#), which hopes to expand into England. KVDT is interested in both St Ann's Mills and Abbey Mills, but the whole of St Ann's Mills was completely re-designated as "grade 3" (high risk) flood plain after the Boxing Day floods. It means that under sections 100-104 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) the Council would have to refuse most planning applications on this site, EXCEPT for those that are directly related to the river, and cannot go anywhere else.

The interim KVDT board has therefore set its sights on Abbey Mills, opposite the Kirkstall Sports Centre. Abbey Mills is a grade 2 listed building which has been owned by Leeds City Council for about 50 years. The mills are divided up into small industrial units. The present buildings were constructed in the 1830's but there have been water mills on this site for almost 900 years. In 2006 the Council attempted to sell Abbey Mills for conversion into flats, but there were no serious takers and it has stood largely empty for the last ten years.

Some of these historic buildings are in a shocking state. There are holes in the roof and water damage to the property. Ferns have taken root inside some rooms, but other areas are still OK. It is vital to properly secure these buildings against wind and water without further delay. As a legally constituted society, KVDT can apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and similar sources, for capital grants. I would expect some success here, although not necessarily straight away. A more serious problem is the ongoing revenue stream.

Whatever community ventures run in Kirkstall, be they education, recreation or public open space, they must be able to pay their running costs. We might undercut Leeds City Council on service provision, but we can't do any of these activities "for nowt". Cutting grass costs real money, but we can scarcely charge the public for admission to a public open space! Our Neighbourhood Plan must therefore include sufficient revenue-generating activities to make the whole combination stack up. At the same time, we need planning conditions that keep money circulating within the locality and prevent private operators cherry-picking all the profitable bits, while avoiding any necessary but expensive tasks.

For example, *and this is only an example*, we might decide that Kirkstall needs a better civic centre, so Abbey Mills should include a library, IT training and benefits advice, like Armley and Harehills one-stops. If the Council provides this service, then it would pay its own staff plus a reasonable room rent (as it does elsewhere) but nothing more. Any shortfall must be met from another income stream.

This is why I have been so enthusiastic about our **heat pump proposal**, which could heat homes and workplaces with warmth pumped from the River Aire. This plan could halve our CO₂ emissions, and substantially reduce the cost of domestic and commercial heating. If it proves viable, then it could generate a substantial ongoing revenue stream, which would unlock the door to many other desirable activities. Heat pumps are widely used for other applications, so we already know that the basic physics is OK. The whole enterprise hinges around the cost of burying heat distribution pipes in the streets. Various professional reports are in progress – watch this space!

There are now three separate community organisations active in the Kirkstall Valley: KNF, KVDT and KVP (see below). They specialise in different areas, and we hope for productive cooperation between them. Under Leeds City Council rules, I am required to disclose that I am involved in all three organisations, as recorded on the Council's website.

The third and the oldest organisation is **Kirkstall Valley Park (KVP)** which was established in 2003, and is a Registered Charity. It has a website at www.kvp.org.uk although this would benefit from a makeover at the present time! KVP's main objective is to establish a new Public Park in the Kirkstall Valley. This park could include both Abbey Mills and St Ann's Mills, but there are in addition over 20 acres of **grade one agricultural land** along the valley bottom, with obvious potential for outdoor recreation and public open space. The original idea for a Kirkstall Valley Park dates back to 1970. The current manifestation came from discussions with Probation officers around 2003. At the time, Probation expected a huge expansion in Community Punishment and a big fall in the prison population. Prisons are very expensive to maintain. Probation officers were looking for big new projects, which could provide community punishment work for criminals *without taking work from law-abiding citizens*. They needed completely novel schemes that could not happen in any other way. A new public park was ideal. Probation officers also wanted punishment work that could link into basic literacy and numeracy training, since many petty criminals can hardly read, write or add up. They consequently find it difficult to hold down a regular job.

In the event, rehabilitation of offenders has gone in the opposite direction, the Probation Service is being privatised and the prison population is at record levels. But in the original concept, massive savings on prison costs would have provided the vital revenue stream.

With no obvious source of revenue funding, Kirkstall Valley Park has been treading water for the last ten years. Nevertheless it has been able to secure capital funds and complete some useful projects. Working with Leeds Canoe Club and Landscape Architecture students from Leeds Beckett University, KVP has published basic plans for a Kirkstall Valley Park, and the concept has been incorporated into Leeds City Council strategic planning policies. KVP has also facilitated joint work between the Council Parks Department, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Groundwork Leeds and the Trust for Conservation Volunteers, which will improve green spaces throughout the wider Kirkstall Valley. In 2016 KVP secured national government funding and has successfully promoted a new public riverside footpath to the south and west of St Ann's Mills. This footpath obtained planning consent last week.

I am trying to ensure that engineers working on the Leeds flood alleviation schemes also consider local needs for sport and recreation. When they run their big computer models for the flood defence works, I have asked the engineers to include a white water canoe course at St Ann's Mills. It will cost very little to add this to an existing model, but it would cost the canoe club a fortune to do this work from scratch. I have also been asking for public access to the river banks, and new footbridges, to be built into any flood alleviation scheme.

We are still working on our draft Neighbourhood Plan. The Forum has spent considerable time discussing traffic issues: congestion, traffic pollution, accidents, speed limits, weight limits, one way systems and the chronic shortage of residents' parking spaces in many neighbourhoods. There have been many complaints about match day parking from Headingley Stadium, and also about commuter parking in residential streets by people avoiding city centre charges. We hope to ease some of these long-term problems, and develop our off-road footpath network, although some of this depends on securing an adequate revenue stream.

All of our reports, minutes, plans and drawings can be downloaded from the forum website at www.kirkstallforum.org. This includes draft policy statements and additional information about the issues reported here. I hope this summary has been of interest, and that we can discuss these matters further at our next meeting in the New Burley Club on 7 February. In the meantime, please consider attending the KVDT Inaugural Meeting on Tuesday 31 January in the Milford Club.

Best wishes

Cllr John Illingworth
KNF Secretary
26 January 2017