

Sonning Parish Council

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

INTRODUCTION

Steve Chapman

Welcome to your Council's summer newsletter. We hope that you will all have the opportunity to relax with family and friends despite the Met Office's mixed messages. Why not stay and enjoy Sonning and support our local businesses.

New Councillor. Many of you will be aware of the vacancy created by Pam and Frank Glasspool moving to Southampton to be closer to their daughter Wendy and two grandchildren. I won't repeat what I said at the Annual Parish Meeting and in the June edition of the Parish Magazine other than to say that their departure is a real loss to this community, Pam's contribution to the council has been considerable since she joined in 2004. They will be greatly missed and we wish them all happiness in their new life in Southampton. I'm sure that they will continue to be regular visitors to Sonning and no doubt Pam will keep the council on its toes!

Co-Option. Mark Green, who many of you will know, has volunteered to join the council and he was formally co-opted as a councillor at our July meeting. Mark was brought up in Woodley, has spent all his career working for the fire service and was appointed Officer in Charge of Sonning Fire Station in 1992; he currently heads up Berkshire's Arson Reduction Team. He has strong links with Sonning. He is an executive member of the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society, recently appointed chair of the Sonning, Hurst and Charvil Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG), an official Sonning village guide and as many of you will know, his wife Lesley is headteacher at our primary school. I am sure he will be a great asset to the council for many years to come.

Volunteers. We are always on the look out for community minded volunteers to assist the council. It gives you a taste for the council without formally committing yourself. I am delighted that Colin McCulloch, who with his wife Ineke, lives at Old Well Court just off Thames Street, has volunteered his services to the council. Before retiring in 2008, Colin spent many years working for the Probation Service rising to a senior level and has a degree in criminology - so watch out!

Resignation. Pam Byrne who has served the council loyally since 2001 has now decided to spend more time with her family and her many interests. Pam is our longest serving councillor, vice chairman of the council for many years, held the council's police and security portfolio and until recently chaired the NAG. Thank you Pam from all of us for your contribution to the council during those eight years.

As a result, the council will be considering the vacancy at the September council meeting.

Annual Parish Meeting. The annual parish meeting was held in the Pearson Hall on 13 May. It was attended by all councillors and approximately 40 residents.

Among issues raised were the long term parking of commercial vehicles in the village, the proliferation of signs urbanising Sonning and questions to Pat Baxter on road charging.

Pat Baxter, Transport Strategy Manager, Reading Borough Council, presented Reading's plans for their £300m bid to the government for measures to ease road congestion in the area. Within the bid is money for an additional Thames crossing, timescale 2019. Detailed discussions are now taking place with adjoining authorities including South Oxfordshire and this is covered separately in this newsletter under Reading's Transport Innovation Fund Bid.

A thank you to all of you who gave up your time to attend, our PCSOs and to all councillors for their reports.

WEBSITE

Sharon Robinson

Have you tried using your search engine to look for Sonning Parish Council (SPC)? The SPC has its own website which can be found at:

www.sonning-pc.gov.uk.

This website is there to give everyone in Sonning, or those who are just interested in Sonning, useful information about the area including details of the SPC councillors, working groups and meetings. It also includes useful links to other websites.

In addition it contains two links to enable you to contact the Council. If you click on "Contact the Council" you can send an email to the Clerk to ask a question, report problems or give the SPC useful information. Alternatively if you go into the

“Highways” page you can use that link to report any vehicles that you see in the village that you think are exceeding the 7.5t limit. Obviously the SPC is happy to receive reports in other ways but I would like to encourage you to use this link to report suspect vehicles. This link sends your report direct to Ken Peters, who is Chairman of the Highways Working Group, and so it ensures that your report reaches the right person as quickly as possible.

FINANCE

Lesley Bates

Our balance sheet to 31 March 2009 reported total assets at £106,368 v £129,807 last. The reduction is due to the £26,581 re-surfacing of the tennis courts. This is required every 7-8 years and 90% of the cost is met by members of the club. As reported previously, £70,000 is ring fenced for a capital project such as a future pavilion replacement and we consider it prudent to hold £15,000 for unforeseen expenditure; we remain well above that level. Our interest rate with National Savings is no longer competitive so we will shortly be moving some capital to a higher earning account but one where the capital sum is assured. We have now trimmed our annual revenue expenditure to £34,500 to reflect the lower interest rates. On the plus side, we have been successful in bidding for some £6,000 for the playground and recreation ground from the Borough Council which will allow us to complete the playground safety fencing and other works.

HIGHWAYS

Ken Peters

7.5 Tonne Environmental Weight Limit

Over the past 3 months we have introduced a number of measures to monitor and report on the volume of HGVs over 7.5t that transit through the Sonning environmental weight limit area. We have conducted 2 major surveys for a period 06.00 to 17.00 on 1st April and 15th June which has helped identify not only types of vehicles but the pattern of usage during the day. 22 and 27 vehicles were identified respectively for the 2 dates some of which legitimately serve businesses in the area and the development work taking place at Bishop's Close. The majority of vehicles appear to be either locally based or regular users and these are initially our main targets to be addressed. Large TIR and articulated types appear to be in the minority and not necessarily regular transgressors. Once having experienced our narrow roads they do not want to repeat the experience! Those companies clearly identified are being written to by the Council to advise them of the consequences of using the area illegally. The Police are giving us their support with officers in attendance during the surveys stopping and checking vehicles and

drivers. We have also established a reporting facility on our council website enabling residents to report their observations directly where they believe a vehicle is clearly over 7.5t. Date & Time, Registration number, Place seen and direction of travel, with description and company name etc. (www.sonning-pc.gov.uk/highways). A further survey conducted on 16 July 10am – 2pm with police support identified only 4 overweight HGVs. This positive trend can only be confirmed with regular surveys at peak HGV transit times. Future surveys will be focussed on times of the day known to be HGV peaks again when possible with police support. We have received good coverage in the media of our actions and will continue to seek their support to spread the word.

Parking in Sonning Lane outside Reading Blue Coat School.

We are aware of the potential dangerous situation caused by vehicles parked immediately outside RBCS severely restricting the road width making it difficult for approaching traffic to negotiate. In conjunction with Wokingham BC Engineers and the School we have been working on a solution using a series of road markings which will discourage parking at this key point but minimise the effect on further down Sonning Lane nearer to Pearson Road. Currently a proposed Traffic Regulation Order is being circulated to interested parties prior to being processed and applied with an expected installation date in October/November.

Top 3 Priorities

Wokingham BC have requested our latest top 3 highway priorities and we have submitted our top 2 whilst we are carefully considering our options for the third.

Our top 2 are as follows:

Sonning Lane/A4 Junction

Whilst there have been no significant change in this situation it still remains a very high priority for the Council and we are using every opportunity to pursue this with the Borough Council. Our preferred option is the installation of traffic lights more so with the recent spate of accidents and the increase in traffic using this junction partly due to the increased use of the local sports facilities. At an approximate cost of £120,000 in an environment of very limited financial resources there is little prospect of this being resolved in the short term. Nevertheless it will remain the number one highway's priority for the Council.

Thames Street Pavement. The pavement narrowing outside Fairlawn which is a hazard to pedestrians is still an outstanding priority item. Again, budgetary constraints are impeding progress; however, we will continue to urge the Borough Council to resolve this issue.

Pound Lane Pedestrian Crossing

The road markings at this crossing are shortly due for an upgrade to make them more conspicuous and comply with new legislation by replacing the buff coloured pavers with red ones.

Condition of Local Roads

The condition of our local roads over the past weeks has left a lot to be desired. Whilst the Borough engineers with their restricted resources have worked hard to resolve problems they do rely heavily on receiving information. Residents should be aware that they can contact Wokingham Borough Council Direct on their new Customer Service Centre number to report potholes, other dangerous road conditions and damaged road signs requiring urgent attention on (0118) 9746000. You can also use their new Live Chat facility on their website to report road conditions and other issues at 'www.wokingham.gov.uk/contacts' or email 'wokinghamdirect@wokingham.gov.uk'.

PLANNING

Pat Doyle

Sonning's Listed Buildings

Without doubt, Sonning's rich architectural heritage and the unique quality of its conservation area is enhanced by the number of listed buildings within the village.

Since 1997 English Heritage has had the gargantuan task of not only identifying those buildings and structures that form part of our heritage, but also to ensure that via listing they are properly protected and preserved. With the exception of a limited number of new structures, historic buildings are a non-renewable source. In spite of such weighty protection their very existence is not automatically assured by listing alone, consequently the task of ensuring that 'unwelcome' developments do not adversely affect the well being of these precious structures falls upon our local authorities and to no less a degree upon parish and town councils.

There are now three categories of 'listing' in order of importance – Grade 1 being buildings of exceptional importance, under which 'The Deanery' is rightly listed. Grade II* (star) important buildings of more than special interest. Both St. Andrew's Church and 'The Bull' hotel come within this category.

Grade II, buildings of special interest cover the remaining buildings and 'listed' structures on the present Sonning inventory of forty nine. These include Sonning's brick bridge, the iron gates, brick pillars and canopy at the entrance to 'Bishop's Close', the mile stone in the Old Bath Road and the telephone box outside Pearson

Hall among others. An ancient ice house on the site of 'Bishop's Close' is another Grade II listing to which special protection is being afforded during the construction process on that site, as are pillars and their iron gates.

Whilst it is perfectly in order to carry out works, both alteration and refurbishment, to a listed building, such works not only require detailed Listed Building consent, together with formal Planning Consent, those works must also maintain strict compliance with any consent, together with conditions, that may be granted by Wokingham Borough Council. This process usually works very well and can only be of lasting benefit to the building and its proud owners, particularly if time has taken its toll and work is urgently required. One only has to look around this village to see what can be achieved.

Constant and steady pressure upon local authorities and, indeed, Parish Councils to perhaps take a more 'relaxed' view when dealing with quite complex and difficult structural problems invariably associated with listed buildings is ever present. Those "roof tiles that will do" or an ancient oak beam replaced by "a more convenient steel beam" are dangerous erosions of our heritage, and not just here in Sonning. Rest assured that your Parish Council is fully aware of its duty and responsibility to ensure the well being of this important 'listed' heritage.

Public Inquiries

The Inspectors report on the Sandford Farm, Woodley appeal for 492 dwellings and 150 retirement units is expected next month and the result of the Core Strategy inquiry in October. The Core Strategy laid out where the 12, 460 dwellings dictated by the government to 2026 could be accommodated in sustainable locations.

RECREATION

Tim Pascall

Tennis. The tennis club wish to replace their current "hut" with a small pavilion to include toilets. To help achieve this we applied for a £10,000 lottery grant, regrettably we were not successful so are now rethinking the project. The council have approved £6,600 towards the project and are seeking to reclaim the £4,000 VAT on the court resurfacing which would give us ~£10,000 towards the project. This would certainly achieve the key criteria of providing toilets and avoid the current trek to the pavilion.

Cricket. Sonning Cricket Club is enjoying a terrific season with 55 matches won out of 67 played so far across all teams. The Under 11s have won their division of the Berks Youth League in their debut season, all three adult

Saturday sides are in with a chance of promotion from their respective leagues and the midweek team also in their debut season, are on the verge of winning the top division of the Reading Midweek League unbeaten.

Village Rounders Match. A highly successful match was held on the recreation ground on 3 July. It was great to see so many people enjoying themselves, particularly the number of children particularly – the Scouts team triumphed!

Wharf Path. The path on our grass area to the front of the Great House is in need of refurbishment following rainwater flowing down the hill causing erosion. We identified the cause as an inadequate sized drain cover being overwhelmed by the volume and partial collapse of the road. At our request the Borough Council have recently installed a much larger drain cover which we hope will resolve the problem and allow us to improve the path. A thank you to Eddie Napper at WBC for his very prompt action.

Dog Fouling. I am happy to report that instances of dog fouling on the recreation ground have reduced significantly following the publicity we gave this. This makes the area a much safer and more pleasurable environment and avoids selfish owners incurring a fine of up to £1,000.

Vandalism. Vandals recently smashed two windows on the pavilion and damaged the doors – the police are treating it as criminal damage. The cost of repair is likely to be four figures. We would ask you all to be vigilant when using the recreation ground and to report anything suspicious to Lesley Bates.

Working Party. One for your diary. We will be holding a working party on the recreation ground 10am to 2pm on Saturday 26 September to carry out general maintenance, repairs and planting - volunteers requested, the more the merrier. Control point will be the pavilion. Please contact me if you can help so that the tasks can be prioritised.

POLICE & SECURITY Pam Byrne

Burglaries. There has been an increase in the number of burglaries in the area in the past month or so. Remember, most are committed by opportunists and can be prevented by the use of window and door locks – 20% gain entry through an open door or window. Don't leave your keys in the front door or your car – we have all done it! Please report any suspicious activity to the Police Enquiry Centre on **08458 505505**.

Neighbourhood Action Group. I am delighted that Mark Green has taken over as chair of the

area's NAG and Bob Hulley as the secretary. The NAG should not be confused with Neighbourhood Watch. NAGS are made up of residents, the police, local authorities and schools and work to improve community safety.

Police Community Support Officer (PCSO)
Several of you will now have met our new PCSO Anne Chalmers who has spent some time familiarising herself with Sonning and our particular issues. On duty she can be contacted on **07800 703324**.

TECHNICAL SERVICES Tony Farnese

Spring Clean. Spring seems a long time ago, more like autumn at the moment!
A thank you to all the stalwarts who turned out on the Saturday and Sunday in April to help make our village and the river something to be proud of. A total of 33 bags of rubbish were donated to the Borough Council including a double child's buggy!

Street Signs. A number of our street signs have letters missing. As a result I recently met with the Borough Engineer who is arranging for them to be re-lettered.

Rubbish Bins. Following requests we have installed a bin by the bus stop at the bottom of Pound Lane and will shortly be installing a new bin on the recreation ground by the car park, a popular place for rubbish to accumulate.

PARISH COUNCIL DETAILS

Steve Chapman – Chairman & Borough Councillor	0118 9697398
Andrew Barker	0118 9699991
Pat Doyle – Chair, Planning Committee	0118 9693605
Tony Farnese	0118 9440374
Mark Green	0118 9696621
Ken Peters - Chair, Highways Group	0118 9696762
Sharon Robinson	0118 9690748
Tim Pascall – Chair, Recreation and Environment Group	0118 9696935
Ian Runnalls	0118 9693389
Lesley Bates – Clerk to the Council	0118 9697753
Website	http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk

The full council meets on the second Tuesday each month, except August, at 7.30pm in the Sports Pavilion. The agenda is posted on parish notice boards 3 full working days before each meeting. The planning committee meets twice a month, the agenda is also posted in advance on the notice boards.

August 2009