

Sonning Parish Council

Spring Newsletter 2013

INTRODUCTION by Pat Doyle, Council Chairman



Having produced my own ten page Banjo magazine for twenty two years I know all too well the task facing Councillor Mena Pownall of bringing this Parish Council Newsletter together, reminding contributors of deadlines and organising print and distribution with our hard working Clerk Lesley Bates. It is a privilege to write my first introduction as Chairman to the Parish Council Newsletter. As the majority of our Parishioners can't always find the time to visit Parish Council meetings, our Newsletter endeavours to keep you 'posted', so I urge everyone to take note of its informative contents.

Although my additional duties as Chairman demand more of my time, that additional work will not compromise my existing responsibilities as Chairman of our Planning Committee, a task greatly assisted by the unstinting efforts of my fellow Councillors who deal with that very demanding element of our operations.

I trust that you will enjoy reading this Newsletter and also look forward to welcoming you to regular monthly meeting of Sonning Parish Council and its Planning Committee.

OUR DRAINS

By drains I mean sewers, our ancient sewers in Sonning, particularly those in the Village centre. Our predecessors did a grand job of construction to cope with the ancient layout of Sonning Village, with its undulating contours. You are probably aware of the redundant sewage plant to the rear of Thames Street, overlooking the University farmlands that was accessed from Thames Street. A replacement exit sewer bypassed that old plant, with effluent pipework being routed towards the river and pumped from the Pumping Station, adjacent to the towing path just behind the 'Great House' lawns, to Wargrave Treatment Works. Unfortunately, as experienced by a great many treatment works, the advent of the 'Domestic Wipe', that innocent looking, handy, sweet smelling disposable, seemingly, paper towel, has helped to clog up even the most efficient sewage systems. In spite of maker's claims, these little 'wipes' do not break down or dissolve easily as they are made of non-organic material. To the sewer men, they are a blight, as Thames Street residents all too recently know to their cost.

So may we urge that even as wonderfully hygienic and handy that your handy 'wipes' are, that they are consigned to the household rubbish, please not the recycling box, to help save our old sewers and the inevitable hike in our water bills.

Sonning Conservation Area Assessment – joint Community Project, co-ordinated by Sonning Parish Council in partnership with the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society.

The weekend of February 9th and 10th, with the staging of the Public Consultation Exhibition in Pearson Hall, saw a further step toward the completion of this vital community project that will result in the creation a robust level of protection via a Supplementary Planning Document specific to Sonning's Conservation Area and its environs that will be formally adopted by Wokingham Borough Council during 2013.

Text, audio and visual material on display, supplemented by Dr. Brian O'Callaghan's highly informative talks, was based upon survey results accumulated by a team of Parishioner Volunteer Surveyors who (following a training period) undertook detailed examination and photography of our Conservation Area during the latter half of last year assigned to five designated 'survey routes' and nine 'character areas'. Survey data generated an initial 'Draft Report' that was available for inspection during the weekend, it is also accessible on the websites of Sonning Parish Council and The Sonning and Sonning Eye Society. The Draft Report not only describes Sonning's Conservation Area, it makes initial recommendations, for example, concerning traffic management and preferred forms of development. Feedback forms were available during the exhibition and are also available on the websites. Their completed content will be taken into account during the final writing of the Draft Report to be submitted to our Local Authority, together with appropriate photographic support and appendices covering our Listed and Important Buildings etc.

With rapidly evolving changes and seemingly all too frequent 'necessary adjustments' to National Planning Policy that inevitably bears upon Local Planning Policy form and 'direction', our project will generate the much needed, updated document to replace the existing Sonning Design Statement to ensure that Sonning's Conservation Area is accorded the protection it rightly deserves. While other communities have had to resort to outside professional assistance,

with attendant fees, our project has been undertaken 'in house' by a dedicated group of highly competent volunteers on a very low budget.

We are now close to completion. All being well, by the start of the summer our final draft report could be in the hands of Wokingham Borough Council, which will then need to undertake their own environmental and policy analysis, linked to their own form of public consultation. Timing could be close, but with tight monitoring of progress, in 2013 Sonning should have the benefit of its own dedicated Supplementary Planning Document adopted by our Local Authority, a kind of 'workshop manual', a guide to anyone who might seek to carry out development in this place. We will keep you posted.

Enforcement!

Occasionally we hear lurid tales of the Enforcement Men, officials from Local Councils who descend upon those who might, for example, build a two storey office block without planning permission, as happened in Sonning. A necessary task of course, but an expensive, time consuming and complicated process that can easily involve, in addition to Enforcement Officers, Development Control, Highways Departments, Environmental and Legal Departments, and not least the Courts, with the final bill picked up by payers of Council Tax and the Business Rate.

From a report about a potential planning infringement, Enforcement Officers are obliged to investigate, sometimes only to discover that the works or use being undertaken are perfectly legitimate. But substantial costs are still involved as planning details need to be verified, reports filed, 'reporters' notified and results forwarded to the local Parish Council for distribution.

So your Parish Council asks that anyone in our Parish who may consider that Planning Control has been breached and that they wish to report their concerns – (a driveway that wasn't there before, an extension that doesn't look like the approved plan, or even the disappearance of your favourite oak tree or ancient hedge) - that Sonning Parish Council (on 0118 969 7753) is contacted in the first instance to enable the matter to be thoroughly checked, remedied if necessary, before setting the mighty wheels of Wokingham Borough Council in motion. And if your neighbour suddenly starts playing loud music, assembling what you think might be an oversized Swiss Chalet or seems to be having a great deal of ready-mix concrete delivered, and you are worried about what's happening, why not lean over the fence to find out and then ask for the sound level to be reduced? If that doesn't work, please let us know before dialling Wokingham on 0118 974 6000. Thank you.

Sonning Bridge Pathway Lighting

Receipt of the Road Safety Audit undertaken by Reading based consulting engineers Peter Brett and Associates Ltd that confirmed via a fully detailed report the potential danger to pedestrians using the tarmac pathway over Sonning's ancient brick bridge coupled with the poor safety potential for motorists on the unlit,

unmarked, narrow roadway, underlined the fear already publicly expressed by your Parish Council about poor pedestrian safety on the bridge as very real. We know, for example, that guests at the 'Great House' going to 'The Mill' or 'The French Horn' in hours of darkness have torches available to light their way over the bridge!

Voluntary private funding while extraordinarily generous is still insufficient to progress the project. Final prices from Scottish and Southern Energy Contracting (street lighting contractors for Sonning) and G. D. Contracting Ltd. (Wokingham based local authority licensed groundworks contractor) total £13,500 plus VAT*, including PBA's fee (*to be claimed back). Thus far we are just under half way towards the total, we have avoided the phenomenal cost and disruption of bridge closures via a Local Authority approved scheme of staged excavation and installation that caters for pedestrian safety.

Having had its fears confirmed, your Parish Council has a duty to ensure that public safety on our bridge is safeguarded. As spring with decent weather approaches it is time to get the job done. We need your financial help to achieve that, either by immediate donation to Sonning Parish Council or a pledge of funds for when the contractor's invoices arrive for payment.

**Please contact our Clerk, Lesley Bates on 0118 969 7753. lesley@lesleybates.co.uk
Councillor Pat Doyle on 0118 969 3605 or Mobile 0790 513 7857. patjdoyle@btinternet.com**

HIGHWAYS by Ian Runnalls



Parish Council Heavy Goods Vehicle Monitoring – An Update

There has not been an HGV watch since last year due to changes within the Parish Council, and since then the to the passage of vehicles over 7.5 tonnes over Sonning bridge has become prohibited.

This is because Wokingham Borough Council appointed a firm of engineering consultants to assess the condition of the bridge structure, and they came to the conclusion that six of the eleven arches had sustained such damage due to age and the effects of repeated heavy traffic crossing that the bridge should be subject to a weight limit of 7.5 tonnes. The only overweight traffic (maximum 10 tonnes) now allowed over the bridge are emergency vehicles such as fire engines. The official designation is now a 'Weak Bridge', and traffic signs have been erected on both sides to reflect this status.

This has had serious implications for Sonning businesses on both sides of the bridge, and the Parish Council have tried to find an exemption clause to mitigate this, but unfortunately the ONLY exemption is for emergency vehicles.

At the same time as designating the bridge as Weak the 7.5 tonne environmental limit was lifted, and it may be thought that this will result in lesser protection of our buildings and roads from vehicle damage. In fact the situation remains the same, in that the only HGVs that will be seen in Sonning will either be on delivery or collection having accessed the village from the Berkshire side of the river, or be flouting the law by having crossed the bridge from the Oxfordshire side or intending to cross the bridge from the Berkshire side. Trading Standards is the body that will be taking enforcement action against offenders of the new Traffic Regulation Order, and the Parish Council will be working closely with them, soon resuming our lorry watch program to collect data that will be useful in assessing the effect of the new TRO. Living in Charvil Lane, I personally have noticed a distinct reduction in the number of 'rogue HGVs'.

Before the new Traffic Regulation Order regarding the bridge had come into force, the Lorry Watch volunteers had secured a number of successful prosecutions of overweight vehicles, and it is hoped that the future Lorry Watch program will further deter HGV drivers from 'taking a chance'.

It would be helpful if anybody witnessing what they think is an overweight lorry crossing the bridge could obtain the registration number, log on to www.sonning-pc.gov.uk and click on Highways, and then the word 'here' under the red note about reporting vehicles, and then fill in the information boxes. We will use the registration number to ascertain the actual weight of the vehicle and log all of the details on our data file for future use.

AMENITIES by Tony Farnese



Hi. Firstly I must apologise for the litter pick non event! A phone call from Wokingham DC cancelling the event due to health and safety reasons meant we had little choice. We will try and arrange another date as soon as possible, sorry folks!

We have started refurbishing the Wharf, a larger path through to the towpath proper, much needed work on the willow tree and some planting. Please use.

The programme of upgrading street lighting is in hand, subject to monies available.

Finally please call if you find a problem that requires our attention.

RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENT by Mena Pownall



King Georges field

The council are currently applying for a grant from the lottery fund, and if

successful we plan to purchase and install outdoor fitness equipment on the recreation ground. The Cardio bundle from the outdoor fitness range consists of 8 pieces of equipment with 12 work stations, and is suitable from age 7 upwards.

This type of equipment is very popular with all age groups and is in use in a great number of parks. Its attraction is that it offers **FREE** exercise and fitness opportunities to the widest cross section of the **ENTIRE** community.

Resistance is provided by the users own body weight and is perfect for both keeping fit and recuperating following injury or illness.

It will be situated along the fence line behind the children's play area.

I would be very interested to hear any feed back you might have on this project.

You can obtain more information on the equipment and pictures at: www.caloo.co.uk

A message from the University Farm

The University farm would like to thank all of you responsible dog owners out there who use the permissive foot path running through the farm respectfully. However sadly it has become necessary to point out that the permissive path on Sonning farm, Broadmore Lane, has been abused by a number of dog walkers who are creating new paths on most of the fields causing considerable damage to the crops.

The land forms part of an active farm used for teaching and research and is the private property of the University of Reading. Farm staff have recently had to deal with the problem of perimeter fencing being cut, presumably to afford access to the farmland. This is obviously unacceptable and constitutes criminal damage. The police have been informed and should the perpetrator/s be caught, we will seriously consider prosecution of the offence.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that no public right of way exists across the farm, the only footpath is a permissive footpath and should this problem continue, the University would consider closing it and any access thereafter would be trespass. The University would obviously prefer to be on good terms with its neighbours, but this is a two-way process and we cannot tolerate the cutting of perimeter fencing in fields which, after all, could well be used for livestock.

Two new maps will be displayed one at each end of Broadmore Lane, showing the permissive footpath.

Wokingham Borough voluntary sector forum

In March our Parish council meeting was attended by Clare Rebbeck, a development worker from Wokingham. The forum they have set up is to provide FREE assistance for organisations. This might be in the form of man power for work parties or help with funding. The following letter contains more information.



New FREE support available for charities and community groups which are based or delivering services in Wokingham Borough from

Wokingham Borough Voluntary Sector Forum

Clare Rebbeck, WBVSF Development Worker, offers support, communication and development assistance to groups and charities directly, will deliver 'The Chain' newsletter and support the WBVSF Lunches and website. Contact Clare on 07432 829906 or email info@wbvsf.info or you can leave a message on 01189 770 749

Alison Coe, WBVSF Training Coordinator, will produce a monthly electronic training bulletin highlighting local and web based provision and will identify the needs of the sector and provide governance-related courses to complement existing training provision where possible and within the resources available. Contact Ali on 01189 210 555 or email on training@wbvsf.info

Bruce Wright, Funding Advisor, will provide weekly funding alerts, telephone mentoring on funding and critical friend reviews on your funding bids. Contact Bruce on 01626 867 604 or email funding@wbvsf.info

To register for FREE for information from WBVSF and receive 'The Chain' newsletter and training dates please register on line www.wbvsf.info

Also, Christine Knox, Wokingham Volunteer Centre Manager, can offer support to find, manage and support volunteers, set up policies and best practice guidance and will be offering training courses. Contact Christine on 01189 770 749 or email wok-vol@btconnect.com

WEBSITE by Tracey Hicks



Did you know that Sonning Parish Council has its own website? This can be found at: www.sonning-pc.gov.uk

The website contains up to date information about the parish council and its councillors, the working groups and the meetings that we hold. You will also be able to find copies of recent minutes and agendas for both parish council and planning meetings.

There is also a section focussing on Sonning Village with details of upcoming events, local news items and useful links to other websites.

Remember, you can use the website to contact us via the 'Contact the Council' page. Any messages will come through to our clerk, who will forward them on to the relevant councillor. In addition, under the 'Highways tab', there is also an online facility for

reporting overweight vehicles that are seen crossing Sonning Bridge.

For those Facebook users in the parish, we've now added a link to Sonning Parish Council's Facebook Page. Just click on the Facebook icon on the homepage. If you select the option to 'Like' us on Facebook then any postings we make about meetings or events should come through on your own Facebook feed.

If you have any thoughts or suggestions about the website then we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at webmaster@sonning-pc.gov.uk

SONNING PARISH COUNCIL

Sonning Parish Council meet on the second Tuesday of each month (except August) at 7.30pm in the Pavilion in 'King George's Field', Pound Lane. Sonning Parish Council Planning Committee also meet in the Pavilion at 7pm on the Monday of the week before and the Wednesday of the week after the meetings of the Parish Council.

Both meetings are open to the public.

The Parish Council Annual Public Meeting is normally held in Pearson Hall, its date and time will be posted on Parish Council notice boards.

Parish Council and Planning Committee agendas are displayed on Parish Council notice boards three working days prior to their meetings.

Changes to meeting times and venues caused by severe weather or unavoidable circumstances will be posted on Parish Council notice boards.

SONNING PARISH COUNCIL CONTACTS:

Pat Doyle – Chairman 0118 9693605

Pat Doyle – Planning Chair

Tony Farnese 07774 494610

Vicky Reeve 0118 9449354

Ian Runnalls 0118 9693389

Mena Pownall – 0118 9698245

Recreation Chair

Tracey Hicks – Website 0118 9272768

Sid Liddiard 0118 9272783

Alex Evans 0118 9448348

Lesley Bates - Clerk 0118 9697753

Email :- lesley@lesleybates.co.uk

Website :- <http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk>

BOROUGH COUNCIL UPDATE Spring - 2013

Cllr Mike Haines



1. Introduction

Firstly I would like to write thanking Pat Doyle and the entire Sonning Parish Council (SPC) team for allowing me to write a section in this paper prepared and produced by Sonning Parish Council. I would like to welcome Pat who is new to the role of chair following on from Mark Green who recently stood down.

Sonning Parish Council members do a huge amount of work in the village on behalf of Sonning residents, I attend Parish Council meetings often as a guest and it's only by attending these meetings that one gets a sense of how much work is actually done.

2. Budget

It is not pleasant to report however at the February 21 Council meeting, Wokingham Borough Council agreed its share of the overall council tax for 2013/14 at £1,222.50 for Band D, representing a 1.9% or a rise of 45 pence per week. This is in the context of £5million grant cuts and the need to make significant investment in regenerating our borough.

Since December 2012 the council has been looking at the impact of the local government finance settlement which was the worst settlement the authority has ever had in one year. The borough council suffered a 10.3% reduction in its main grant from central government and in 2014/15 the borough council believes it faces a further 16% reduction. These grant reductions are unprecedented and will be probably more than any other Government Department can expect.

The background to this is that Wokingham remains the lowest funded unitary authority in England. We receive £86.6 per head of the population compared with the national average for unitary authorities of £313.1 – that's nearly four times more than we receive and we of course provide the same statutory services as any other authority. The average council receives 40% funding we receive only 14% - the rest is raised through council tax. Wokingham Borough is the second lowest spending council in the country, York being the lowest.

3. Transport

Wokingham Borough Council, in partnership with the University of Reading has secured an investment of almost £25 million for the Shinfield Eastern Relief Road, a key constituent of the infrastructure to underpin the development of good-quality housing in the Borough and alleviate congestion.

The investment will support proposals to build approximately 2,400 new homes as well as the University's proposed 18,580sqm Science and Innovation Park south of the M4. Around 780 new jobs would be created through this investment in the road by unlocking the wider housing and science park developments.

On a smaller scale Work has started on £160,000 cycleway improvement project in Earley and Woodley, to make cycling easier in this area of the borough and hopefully to inspire local school students and residents to get pedaling.

The Wokingham Borough Council scheme links the underpass in Henley Wood Road and Pond Head Lane, Earley, with Addington School and Bulmershe School in Woodlands Avenue, Woodley.

Under the scheme, the footpath along Woodlands Avenue, Fairwater Drive, Nightingale Road, and School Drive is being widened to three meters so that pedestrians and cyclists can both use it safely.

On March 15 Wokingham Borough Council's road safety team supported Tispol's Europe-wide seatbelt enforcement campaign with an operation on the Reading Road, Winnersh (outside Sainsbury's).

Some 15 drivers were caught not wearing a seatbelt and three drivers caught using a mobile phone between 10am and 12pm. Fixed penalty notices were handed out by a road safety constable who was supported by road policing officers.

4. Development Strategy.

The Wokingham Borough will see major development in the years up to 2026, with around 10,000 homes being built in four major sites, known as Strategic Development Locations (SDLs). The council's vision is to make sure these homes complement existing towns and villages and become successful, sustainable and thriving communities. As I have mentioned before, Sonning and the Northern Parishes are designated "limited Development" areas.

Community forums have been established for the four SDLs, Arborfield, South of the M4, North Wokingham and South Wokingham, as well as Woodley (which will also see development in the coming years). Residents interested in finding out more or would like to attend a forum can visit: www.wokingham.gov.uk/communities/communityforums or email: sdl.forums@wokingham.gov.uk.

Wokingham Borough Council has secured additional major funding of £2.5million from the government to back its drive to secure not only good quality housing developments for its residents but that they are accompanied by the right levels of much needed infrastructure including schools; transport links and sporting, community and youth facilities.

5. Wokingham Town Centre.

Planning permission has been granted for the Wokingham station link road, to create a new highway between the forecourt of the town's main train station and A329 Reading Road.

The new link road is the key element in the multi-million scheme to redevelop the town's train station into a 21st century travel centre, ease traffic congestion and improve provision for pedestrians and cyclists.

The planning permission granted means Wokingham Borough Council can now begin the crucial preparatory work needed before construction starts on the new link road, junction changes, transport interchange, cycleway and footpath and associated landscaping.

These enabling works, which will last until early summer, include at this stage general site clearance, demolition work and erection of site hoardings. Future works include an archaeology check, installation of temporary site access, removal of Japanese knotweed, reptile mitigation, drainage and earthworks.

All works on the site will be subject to strict construction environmental management plans to reduce impacts on residents and the traveling public.

The main work on the new link road is due to start in early autumn.

6. Education

Wokingham Borough continues to be one of the top 10 performing authorities in the country and investment in our students continues apace. We have very high attendance rates and near record examination pass levels.

The £6m refurbishment and business plan for Bulmershe School is being progressed. The Piggot School 6th form block is up and open and the school is looking for further development.

Plans are well advanced to increase provision for children requiring Primary School places from 2013/14 and onwards. Building work on three new primary schools in Wokingham Borough will start during the next few weeks, after members of the planning committee (March 27) gave planning consent.

The planning applications submitted by Wokingham Borough Council are for single-form entry schools to meet pupil demand in Charvil, Winnersh and Wokingham. Each will cater for 30 new children per year.

7. Political Balance

Following the elections in 2012 the political makeup of WBC consists of: 43 Conservative, 9 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independents. There are no Borough elections scheduled for 2013, the next election in Sonning will be for our Euro MP's in June 2014.

Following the Annual Meeting in May 2012 Bob Wyatt was selected as Mayor and Ula Karin Clarke as Deputy Mayor, in May 2013 all positions are re-selected. David Lee remains in position as Leader of the Council. In my role I have a seat on the Licensing and Appeals Committee, I am a reserve for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and sit on the Asset Management and Waste Management working groups. I am also the Council's appointed member attached to Twyford Age Concern, the Sports Council and the Sonning and District Educational and Welfare trust.