

Sonning Parish Council Spring Newsletter 2012

INTRODUCTION



*by Mark Green, Council
Chairman*

It hardly seems possible that a year has passed since we had the local elections. Our new Borough Councillor Mike Haines has settled well into his new role and is doing excellent work representing the ward at Wokingham. Unfortunately one of our two newly elected Parish Councillors, Ian Holt, found that work commitments made him unable to contribute the time to the role that he would have liked and as a result decided to stand down as a Councillor. Ian was replaced by Mena Pownall who was co-opted onto the Council in October. Mena is already doing great work on both the Planning Committee and the Recreation and Environment Working Group.

It has been a busy year for your Parish Council. A lot of excellent work has been undertaken by the Planning Committee especially with regard to the applications for Augustfield and the old Fire Station site. Recent changes to planning legislation and the slow implementation of new policies do nothing to boost our confidence in the planning system however the Parish Council through its Planning Committee will continue to oppose inappropriate development within the Parish. The persistence of the Highways Working Group with their HGV surveys has had a major success and we are now starting to see successful prosecutions taking place of drivers who ignore the 7.5 tonne environmental weight limit within the village.

Ex Borough and Parish Councillor Steve Chapman has moved away from the village recently and will be sadly missed. As a Councillor Steve worked tirelessly for the people of Sonning and even after he stood down he continued to put a lot of time and effort into maintaining King George's Field. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Steve for all his work and wish him all the best for the future.

This summer is set to be an exciting one for Sonning. The Diamond Jubilee Festival taking place over the Bank Holiday weekend of the 2nd – 5th June is set to be bigger than ever. The Jubilee Regatta, the Village Street Party, the Scarecrows, the Open Gardens, St Andrew's Church Flower Festival, the Art Exhibition as well as the Elegant Picnic, this year being held in July, will all go towards making this a summer to remember for Sonning. All the details can be found on the Jubilee Festival website <http://www.sonningfestival.co.uk>

I hope that whatever you do this summer the weather is good for you and that you have a great time!

HIGHWAYS by Ken Peters



**7.5 Tonne Environmental
Weight Limit.**

Our HGV surveys known as the 'Sonning Lorry Spotters Club' continue on a regular basis to protect our environmental weight limit and we are pleased to report that we now have 14 volunteers working on a rota system. Up until last summer we were working with Oxfordshire Trading Standards who ensured that all transgressors receive warning letters. However, there was a

reluctance to enforce the weight restriction with prosecutions which was our main goal to deter offenders. About the same time Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council Trading Standards Departments combined forces and as West Berks have a weight limit enforcing role which has now extended to Wokingham including our own Sonning Environmental Weight limit. We have conducted three surveys with this new arrangement which requires a stricter statement and evidence input process and as a result four successful prosecutions were achieved at a Reading Court early in April. There are another three which will appear at the same court shortly. When we began these surveys in November 2009 the average number of HGVs reported were 17 and over the last 4 surveys we have reported an average of 5. Whilst these are only a snap shot in time it is a positive trend. Realistically it is unlikely we will totally eliminate the problem but with our determined band of volunteers working in all weathers we can minimise the problem and make it known that Sonning is a 'no go area'. We will never stop the odd Polish driver with a forty tonner using an out-dated GPS but at least he will never return after the experience! If you would like to help us with this vital role please give me a call.

Please remember that 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. You should try to give date & time, registration number, make of vehicle, place seen and direction of travel, with description and company name etc. ('www.sonning-pc.gov.uk/highways'). Whilst the sighting will not result in a prosecution it helps us tremendously in maintaining a movement log on vehicles which is invaluable to our survey work.

Traffic Sign Survey.

Our Highways Working Group have been undertaking an in depth survey of all traffic signs in the Parish so that we can determine their suitability, condition and whether they are relevant today. They have logged approximately 650 road traffic signs and these do not include information or direction signs. We are aware that there is a high degree of clutter at key points that need to be addressed. Once we have identified which signs are considered 'surplus' and understand their validity we will be discussing their future with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

20mph Zone/Limit.

WBC recently advised us that the 20mph zones throughout the borough, including ours, have been converted to 20mph limits thereby, in theory, making them enforceable. The signs have already been installed so they could be included in the budget for the last financial year. The new Traffic Regulation Order came into force in January.

Community Speedwatch.

We have been monitoring the Police initiative called 'Community Speedwatch' where residents are recruited and trained on police speed detection equipment to aid them identify and help enforce speed limits. We have seen these surveys taking place across the country and are endeavouring to set up a similar scheme for ourselves, particularly now the 20mph limit is enforceable. However, despite publicity and the Thames Valley Police promoting this initiative on their website, we are told it has been suspended pending clarification of legal issues. We expect to meet senior police officers soon to clarify the situation and in the hope of a positive outcome.

Sonning Lane/A4 Junction.

You will have noticed the changes to the A4/Sonning Lane junction carried out during last year which was one of our top 3 priorities. It was not the solution we desired, which we felt should have at least included an improved filter left to reduce the frustration. This was not economically possible at this time as a fibre-optic cable was unexpectedly discovered just below the surface at a critical point which would have cost at least £60,000 to move. WBC, under pressure from the Police to improve safety urgently, had no alternative but act with the current arrangements. Although we see this as a safety improvement it is still a compromise, but perhaps with us maintaining the pressure further improvements can be made in the future.

Sonning Highways – Long Term.

At our 2010 Annual Parish Meeting our Highways Working Group presented their work on our long-term highways strategy which has been set up to investigate the possible options to mitigate the damaging effects of over 15,000 vehicles travelling daily through the village. In short, is there a better way of managing the volume of traffic transiting the village which has less impact on our residents resulting in a general improvement in the quality of their lives. This was followed with an update at our 2011 Annual Parish Meeting. Whilst it is not within our powers to close the bridge or restrict traffic volume, which could have an adverse effect on adjacent authorities, including other bridge crossings, our initial findings demonstrated that there could be considerable improvements for residents including Pearson Road and the High Street which is the environmental core of the village most at risk. However, diverting any inbound traffic to the bridge elsewhere could impact negatively on other residents in the Parish. We have had lengthy discussions with the authorities, including the Police, which

has helped us understand what is possible and what is not. Whilst there is no final preferred proposal that can be presented to the Parish Council and onward to WBC one aspect we are sadly lacking is accurate meaningful data on the volume of traffic using our key roads, including speeding, flow rates, times etc. We plan to carry out an intense traffic survey for a two week period on all key roads later in the year. Without this we cannot begin to understand the true current situation and what might be expected if we proposed route changes, even for a temporary period, to gain knowledge and possibly create simulations of the results of any proposed changes. This will enable us to gather more accurate data to present to residents together with arguments for and against before a permanent solution can be determined. We still intend to undertake a resident survey or referendum before any final proposal is submitted to WBC on the long term plan.

There are many issues to consider even on a temporary measure before we make our proposal to WBC. It is the Wokingham Borough Council that has the ultimate authority and it could take some time before there is any further progress.

We appreciate the sensitivity of any changes to the traffic directions and flows and have repeatedly stated that we wish to involve all residents and keep them informed of progress.

All this work began when there was a hope that the Reading Traffic Innovation Fund could provide an additional Thames bridge crossing in 2018-20 at the earliest, but that possibility appears to be no more in the current economic climate. Therefore, we have to accept that there is no prospect of an additional Thames crossing being built in the foreseeable future. If we do nothing our traffic situation will only get worse. This could be our last opportunity for many years to

make a significant improvement to residents and our visitors alike. Our plan and our long-term highways strategy is certainly a better option than sitting back and doing nothing. The authority's reaction is severely limited as their highways priorities are governed, understandably, by safety issues and available funds. Realistically at this time non-accident areas and environmental plans are low priority.

We are still planning to hold a further update meeting at Pearson Hall with regard to the ongoing work on a future Highways Strategy however with the recent emphasis having been so successfully focused on the HGV surveys there is very little additional information to present at this time.

Condition of Local Roads.

Keeping our roads and pavements in a condition that reflects the good image of our village is a constant battle and relies heavily on residents reporting faults on the highways including damaged signs etc. Should you see a damaged road or pavement conditions requiring attention including signage problems, you should initially report these to Wokingham BC. WBC welcome input direct from residents on their Customer Service Centre number on (0118) 9746000. You can also use their new Live Chat facility on their website to report road conditions and other issues. 'www.wokingham.gov.uk/contacts' or email 'wokinghamdirect@wokingham.gov.uk'.

PLANNING by Pat Doyle



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - Objecting to that Planning

You may be unaware that not only do Wokingham Borough Council keep a count in the Case File of how many letters arrive objecting to an application. Failed

applicants also monitor the numbers to similarly gauge the weight of opposition when revised applications are considered or consultants are preparing appeal evidence.

Situations have arisen with our Parish Council Planning Committee vigorously opposing an application against the view of Wokingham's Planning Department who are favouring approval and citing little or no local opposition as part of their case after checking the file to count the letters or prints of emails.

Revisions to Planning Applications by the applicant that do not go out for fresh public consultation following initial submissions by your Parish Council Planning Committee and local residents prevents us knowing the nature of those changes. New plans might appear on the 'planning' web site, but no time for further comment is given. This is an unfortunate process that has lately been re-adopted by Wokingham Borough Council. As an example, only by the fortunate intervention of our Borough Councillor Mike Haines were we told about the intent by Wokingham Planners to approve extensive development of the 'August Field' site in Charvil Lane based on plan changes and other measures. Objections prevailed and the application was soundly refused. Even so, we fully intend to ensure that all elements of planning applications, including revisions, are properly exposed to public consultation by the Local Authority.

When La Farge set up an exhibition about future gravel extraction at Sonning Eye, attendees were politely invited to sign the visitors book, thus a record was kept of local interest, or lack of it, for their future reference.

Letters of objection to any planning application, or even support, are highly effective, but they must be relevant. Loss of privacy, Noise, Design, Effect on your

Area, Road Safety for example are factors that have to be considered. Legal matters such as Covenants and Property Rights, Property Value or Financial implications or even your views about the applicant have no bearing whatsoever and will probably render your objection completely ineffectual. Do ensure that you quote the correct application number with your letter that must arrive no later than the Closing Date for Comments stated on the application notification.

The Local Authority does not expect your letters to contain numerous references to Local and National Planning Policy, complex points on highway safety, tree preservation rules, drainage or biodiversity etc, etc. They are always anxious to accurately gauge local views in addition to the Parish Council's comments.

Last but not least, do please take the time to write those letters or send emails if you want your opinion taken into account. Your Parish Council needs that support to underpin its own efforts, which, after all are for your benefit anyway.

Write, quoting Application Number no later than the Closing Date to;
Planning Department, Shute End,
Wokingham RG40 1WR
E-mail;
development.control@wokingham.gov.uk
Check Planning Applications at
Wokingham Borough Council Planning.

SONNING CONSERVATION AREA ASSESSMENT by Pat Doyle

The Parish Council needs your help!

In conjunction with the Sonning and Sonning Eye Society, your Parish Council has a statutory duty to produce a formal document, which is a detailed assessment, or appraisal, of our Conservation

area that will be a material consideration for deciding any planning application or appeal.

To create this vital document we need to re-examine, survey and collate information on our built environment. To do this we need additional volunteer surveyors to join those who have already come forward. Training will be provided.

This is an exciting community project, essential to the continued well being of Sonning. If your are interested please contact Pat Doyle on 0118 9693605

RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENT by Mark Green

King George's Field.

King George's Field continues to be well used for both football and cricket. However this, almost continuous, use takes its toll on the grass. Therefore this spring we have decided to invest in a programme of work to improve the quality of the grass and playing surface. Work to roll, tine and weed and feed the grass has begun and we are already starting to see the benefits of that work aided by the substantial amount of recent rainfall! However the recent rainfall has not been enough to ease the current hosepipe ban so our initial plan to repair some of the surface with new turf has had to be postponed until we can guarantee that we will be able to water it in.

Our programme of planting has continued and many new trees and whips have been planted over the past few months.

Tennis Club Pavilion.

The new Sonning Lawn Tennis Club pavilion has been completed and is being well used by the thriving tennis club.

The Sports Pavilion.

Work to refurbish the kitchen in the pavilion has now been completed and new appliances and work surfaces have been fitted. This is providing a much more useful, and hygienic, facility for all our users.

The Wharf.

The Wharf continues to be well used but it has had some damage done to it by vehicles that were driven onto it by contractors working in the area. A blocked drain also contributed towards the deteriorating state of the Wharf grass however we are currently working on a plan to carry out restorative work to enable visitors to continue to enjoy this wonderful open space.

***POLICE AND SECURITY* by Mark Green**

We are extremely fortunate that the level of crime in Sonning remains relatively low however with the summer approaching I would like to take this opportunity to remind everybody of the importance of making sure that homes and out-buildings are not left unsecured as this presents an ideal target for the opportunist thief.

There has recently been introduced a new nationwide telephone number for non emergency calls to the Police. This number, 101, can be used anywhere in the country and will connect you to your nearest police force. 999 remains the number for emergencies.

***AMENITIES* by Tony Farnese**



Hello again! Primarily I would like to thank the seven stalwarts who turned out for the litter pick weekend, 24th/25th March 2012 a disappointing result. I am criticized for

not advertising enough, all being equal I shall remedy this in 2013, it is our village and river frontage.

Hopefully a new lamppost will be erected by the new bus shelter, an ongoing programme.

We are negotiating a repaired Towpath through the Wharf. Unfortunately price is being a factor.

Once again thank you litter pickers, Alex, Ella, Robin Victoria, Adrian, Thomas and Joan.

***WEBSITE* by Sharon Robinson**



Your Parish Council has its own website that can be found at <http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk>. The website contains general information about Sonning and the Parish Council. It also contains links to other useful websites. Please take the time to look at the website which is there to help you.

We now have a counter on the website so that we know how many people have visited the website. This counter is only on the home page so it does not count your visit if you enter the website via one of the other pages. So when you visit the website please take the time to visit the home page so that we know that you have been there.

The home page often contains interesting pictures of Sonning so it is worth visiting in its own right even if you do not need to find out anything about Sonning. The website also contains pictures of the Village Show in September 2011; so why not visit the website to see if you appear in one of our pictures?

Comment by Colin McCulloch (Co-opted councillor until May 2011)



It has been a great pleasure to serve on Sonning Parish Council for the past two years. I have witnessed the extensive work done by councillors outside formal meetings that has been of real benefit to our community. Sonning is a special place that should be conserved for future generations. At the same time it should develop to reflect changing times and our wider society. Sonning needs to continue to be a welcoming and inclusive community that caters for people of all ages and backgrounds. I have seen councillors working tirelessly towards these ends and am very grateful to them.

Parish information by Lesley Bates



Following the elections in May 2011 the Parish Council had nine, elected, Councillors. These included two new Councillors, Ian Holt and Gary Robinson who joined their seven hard working colleagues from the previous administration who were re-elected. Unfortunately, due to work commitments Ian Holt was unable to continue as a Councillor and the Council were delighted to be able co-opt Mena Pownall, who is well known to many residents and is proving to be a welcome addition. A list of Councillors, their contact details and responsibilities can be found below. As you will see from the reports in this edition the Council continues to work hard in all areas affecting the community and I would urge you to attend the meetings to see exactly how your committed Councillors work on your behalf.

Mindful of the traffic chaos caused by snow, during the winter of 2009/10, the Council purchased three salt bins (plus salt) for use during an emergency, which thankfully wasn't repeated during the 2010/11 or 2011/12 winters. However the bins are now onsite ready for use should the occasion arise.

When BT announced that the telephone kiosk in Pearson Road was to be taken out of service the Council immediately took up the offer to purchase it. Once the legal details were in place Pat Doyle tracked down the special paint and Sid Liddiard painstakingly repainted the kiosk inside and out. Pat also replaced the damaged, glazed, panels displaying 'Telephone'. Together Pat and Sid have restored the kiosk to its former glory. Any suggestions for its future use would be welcome.

Sonning Bridge Pathway Lighting 2012 Jubilee Community Project by Pat Doyle

As a major community public works project to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, Sonning Parish Council has devised a system to install safety lighting set flush into the single pedestrian pathway across Sonning Bridge.

This project is public safety motivated. We have a responsibility to anticipate the need to safeguard the well being of pedestrians rather than visit them in hospital or attend their funeral following an accident on Sonning Bridge.

With the total absence of any street lighting even remotely close to the Bridge Pathway, during hours of darkness pedestrians have to use a totally darkened narrow pathway with traffic passing very close by, some even carrying torches to light their way, in Victorian times yes but in 2012 not conducive to good health and safety.

Lighting will be provided by sixteen Light Emitting Diode units, 100mm square, spaced at 5.85 metres, set flush in the asphalt pathway with their outer edges flush with the inner edge of the stone kerbs. Sixteen Lights will be connected to Sonning's street lighting system, automatically switching on and off via light sensors. An environmental over-ride switch will be included should the need arise to limit the lighting 'on time' in the early hours of the morning.

Extensive consultation has been undertaken since February with Highways and Planning Departments at Wokingham Borough Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. Wokingham Borough Council's Conservation Officer Giles Stephens and his counterpart at SODC Jamie Preston both concluded that Listed Building Planning Applications were not necessary for either authority. SODC also confirmed that an ordinary planning application was also not necessary. Meanwhile, WBC's Marcia Head insisted that our Parish Council should submit an ordinary planning application for 'development' and undertaking pre-planning discussion. Naturally, to ensure progress, your Parish Council fully complied.

Similarly, both Oxfordshire authorities have been more than helpful and compliant, Our local authority do require a statutory full project Road Safety Audit, an element that your Parish Council are undertaking with Peter Brett and Associates in Reading.

To carry out these important works, at least two, possibly three, roadway – bridge closures will be required between the hours of 10pm and 4.30am weekdays. As our bridge forms a vital link in the roadway infrastructure, these closures will be legally sanctioned by Wokingham Borough Council (with the co-operation of Oxfordshire County Council), and

advertised on the approach roads in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. A team of sign erectors will then install the appropriate closure and diversion signs, removing them again to match the closure and re-opening times.

Thus far, Scottish and Southern Energy have submitted a full job specification and costing. This company already provides street lighting and maintenance in our area. Their involvement ensures unconditional guarantees as the quality and integrity of their work.

As expected, providing Sonning with a very long term project for our benefit and that of future generations, high cost is a major factor, our aim being, following fine tuning of 'groundworks' (excavation) costs is to bring the project in at not much more than £18,000. Which is why your Parish Council is looking to community and business funding to support its own expenditure.

This is the first major public works project undertaken by Sonning Parish Council, even the widening and the new pathway in Charvil Lane was funded by our Local Authority, so it is anxious to stress the importance of a very unique project for our village in the fervent hope that effective funding will be forthcoming.

If you would like to know more, please call Councillor Pat Doyle on 0118 969 3605 mobile 0790 513 7857 or email patjdoyle@btinternet.com or ptrck.doyle@googlemail.com

Pearson Hall Clock by Mena Pownall



The Pearson hall committee have received planning permission to erect a projecting wall clock on the Pearson Hall to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of H. M. Queen Elizabeth II.

The clock will be located in a central position with two dials facing East and West. It is a traditional design which will blend in with its surroundings and be seen by the community as a whole, as well as the numerous users of the hall

The chosen clock is of a high quality. It is made by Smith of Derby who were established in Derby in 1857 and are the leading clock repairers, restorers and conservation specialists in the UK.

Smith is a family run business which is world renowned and their clocks are in countries all over the world. They are also in the Guinness Book of records.

We will be amongst good company! The clock on St Paul's Cathedral was also made and installed by Smith in 1893, they have maintained it ever since and it is still in perfect working order.

Smith have also carried out a lot of work on the stone clock on Derby Cathedral over the years, the most recent being the restoration of the dials. Each clock dial has been hand painted in blue, with the numbers and minute markers gilded with 24 carat gold.

Smith were chosen to work with English Heritage on the restoration of the Derby Roundhouse clock (built in 1839), as well as the restoration of the clock and dials of the Woolwich Arsenal (built in 1671).

The Parish council fully support the Pearson Hall Management Committees initiative.

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:

Mark Green – Chairman and Recreation group Chairman	0118 9696621
Pat Doyle – Planning Chair	0118 9693605
Tony Farnese	07774 494610
Ken Peters– Highways Chair	0118 9696762
Vicky Reeve	0118 9449354
Gary Robinson	0118 9690748
Sharon Robinson	0118 9690748
Ian Runnalls	0118 9693389
Mena Pownall	0118 9698245
Lesley Bates - Clerk	0118 9697753
Website	http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk

2012 Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish meeting will take place this year on Tuesday 22nd May 2012 in the Pearson Hall starting at 7.00 for 7.30pm. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage as many residents as possible to attend this meeting.

Sonning Annual Parish Meeting

Tuesday 22nd May 2012

7pm for 7.30

Agenda

Introduction and Welcome to Councillors and Guests.

Apologies.

Approval and signing off of the 2011 APM minutes.

Chairman's Report (Mr Green)

Councillors reports

a) Finance – Chairman

b) Sports, Recreation and Environment – Chairman

c) Police – Chairman

d) Highways – Mr Peters

e) Planning – Mr Doyle

**Borough Councillors Report (Mr Haines).
Conservation Area Assessment - Presentation (Mr Doyle)**

Open Forum – Questions from Parishioners

Summing up and close of meeting.

BOROUGH COUNCIL UPDATE - 2012

by Mike Haines



1. Introduction

Last year we saw a full election for Sonning Parish Council on, the first full election in quite some time. At the Borough level Steve Chapman stood down and I was selected by interview and then elected as Sonning's new Borough Councillor. Mark Green was unanimously re-elected by fellow councillors as Chair of Sonning Parish Council for a further year.

For my part I was elected as the new Borough Councillor for the Sonning Ward, I would like to thank Steve; he put in 10 years valuable service and gave me his full support in the handover period for which I am most grateful. I believe much has been achieved which could not have been done without the efforts of a strong team and the support of the community – and we all wish him well following his move to the West Country.

2. Budget

Wokingham is the worst government funded authority per head of population in the country. We receive £119 per person which equates to less than 20p in the pound, the average authority receives 50p, this already low amount fell in 2012. And is a result of the relatively affluent nature of the Borough, this involved a change at Government level in the formula deployed to calculate the amounts released to Borough Councils.

Much was said in the press regarding northern councils experiencing large funding cuts compared with the South - this is misleading. Although our major grant increased by 6%, our total grant funding was cut by 23.7%, £6.4m. As a result our budget for this year is £99.2m v £105m last year (Education at £117m is a separate ring fenced budget). This balancing has been achieved through the hard work of councillors and officers to achieve efficiencies whilst maintaining services - we continue to be rated good on value for money by external audit. The work on streamlining the way the Council works initiated two years ago continues and as a result we approved a zero increase in your Council Tax for 2011/12. The pressure on finances continues this year and tight fiscal control is being exercised.

3. Transport Funding

Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with Reading is currently competing for a £24.2m slice of the £590m Sustainable Transport Fund from central government. The LSTF is the successor to the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) and the Urban Fund. The results will be known in June 2012. There are many caveats attached and (unfortunately) the money may not be used for major structural projects - For example a Thames Crossing.

If granted the money will be used to enhance the A329 route, the bid includes plans to modernise traffic signals along the routes, improve public transport, introduce an online car sharing portal, as well as appointing a cycle officer to increase the number of people using pedal power.

Funding for an additional Thames crossing is not available in the current economic climate and the subject is at the back of the agenda although it remains a recognised priority, this is all the more reason to support the hard work of Ken Peters and his team of councillors on SPC and residents on proposals to reduce traffic and try to ease the flow in the centre of Sonning.

4. Housing Strategy

In January 2010 the Council approved its housing strategy to 2026 to accommodate the 12,500 houses imposed upon the Borough by the previous government; this was following an extensive Public Inquiry. Public consultation was strongly in favour of a limited number of major locations with effective infrastructure. The main plank of the strategy is for 10,000 of the 12,500 houses to be located in four areas; North Wokingham, South Wokingham, Arborfield Garrison and South of the M4. Detailed work and consultation has been ongoing on the four areas. Further consultation was conducted this summer.

Within the strategy, Sonning is identified as an area for limited development. Due to the range of facilities, it is not considered that significant development is appropriate, although smaller proposals which help support the community and meet an identifiable local need may be acceptable (see para 2.87 of the Core Strategy). I work hard in this area along with Sonning Parish Council and Woodley Town Council; several local applications have been "Listed" for the Planning Committee to review.

The council established a fully owned company (Wokingham Housing Ltd), in Feb 2012 it was announced that nearly £2m will be invested so we can progress plans to build 10 one-bedroom flats for people with learning disabilities and two bungalows for older people at Hillside Park in Shinfield Rise.

5. Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration

The Council, following due process has appointed Wilson Bowden Developments to work on the £100m regeneration project. It will include 140,000 sq ft of new retail space (5 ½ times Waitrose Twyfords!), housing and leisure facilities. This is expected to create 750 new jobs and £21m in additional wages going into the local economy.

Wilson Bowden is working with the Authority to secure the necessary planning consents and public consultation is ongoing, allied to this but separate is a plan to re-develop the Station Road area of Wokingham, this scheme is currently at the consultation stage.

A separate entity WEL (Wokingham Enterprise Limited) has been established which is also wholly owned by the Council, it has been set up to meet a number of the objectives involving the town regeneration project.

6. Education

The Borough continues to be one of the top 10 performing authorities in the country and investment in our students continues. In November 2011 the £31m project transforming Waingel's College was completed and the new £13.5m Addington School in Woodley for children with special needs has been up and running for some time. A new 6th Form block is currently being erected at the Piggot School in Wargrave.

A £6m refurbishment and business plan for Bulmershe School has been announced. There is also continuing investment in the primary school refurbishment programme and Wokingham is one of the few Boroughs' in the country with no schools in "Special Measures" as I write.

7. Political Balance

Following the elections in May 2012, the balance on the Borough Council is 44 Conservative, 9 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independents; The next elections in Sonning will be in November 2012 for the new role of Police Commissioner.

At the Annual Meeting on 19 May 2011, Dianne King was re-elected as Mayor, Bob Wyatt as Deputy Mayor and David Lee as Leader. Simon Weekes, Finchampstead South, took over from Steve as Chairman of the Planning Committee. I am proud to sit on the Corporate parenting board and on the Licensing and Appeals Committee. The make up for 2012 won't be determined until 25th May 2012.