

# *Sonning Parish Council*

## *Autumn Newsletter 2013*



### **INTRODUCTION by Pat Doyle, Council Chairman**

Having had the pleasure of being a regular Sonning Parish Councillor for a good few years, I cannot recall a time

when your Council was as strong and competent. An obvious vibrant atmosphere that seems to drive us along has enabled us to initiate and complete a number of projects that have been long delayed. Even our fantastically diligent and hard working Clerk, Lesley Bates, has finally been computer 'upgraded' from an almost steam powered set-up. We have fixed things and built things and installed things for the lasting benefit of our community. Yes, we still regularly attend those Planning Committees at Wokingham. We attend training sessions and ask questions of officers and other Councillors in nearby Wards. We also pester our tireless Borough Councillor, Mike Haines, who never seems short on energy. Major Projects monthly meetings at Shute End see us finding out exactly what is going on in the Borough and what will impact upon us here. We maintain, to the best of our ability, that important contact with both planners and highway officials, as without that ongoing contact we can never hope to be remotely aware of matters that directly effect this community.

Your Parish Council is very alive and well. Come and see us sometime.

### **The Wharf.**

During the Spring and Summer of 2013, Sonning Parish Council initiated a programme of works involving grass, foliage and tree restoration to improve the appearance of this valuable and much used leisure area overlooking the river, adjacent to Sonning's brick bridge.

Of necessity, Thames Water Utilities need vehicle access to the sewage pumping station, further along the towing path, that transfers waste to the treatment works in Wargrave, hence the gated access, now restored by Councillor Sid Liddiard.

To prevent further unauthorised vehicle entry and damage to the grassed area, the gate needs to be locked. Unfortunately, in spite of our efforts an

expensive security chain was cut through, resulting in its loss along with its equally costly security lock. We have now invested in a Boron steel 16mm security chain with its sophisticated lock to, hopefully, foil anyone who might

have a similar destructive inclination. A new hard standing roadway edged with timber boarding, built from twenty two tons of compacted stone skelpings to cope with heavy vehicles, has eliminated the unsightly muddy path.

Further works include additional works to the ancient willow and a turfed extension to the grassed area beneath the tree following clearance and levelling. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Dave Collier, these works have been undertaken with the minimum of inconvenience to everyone who enjoys The Wharf.

And a plea, please take your picnic boxes, bags, cans, wrappers, bottles etc. home if the rubbish bins are full. Thank you.

### **Sonning Brick Bridge Closure 2013 DATES SUPPLIED BY WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL.**

Sonning's brick bridge will close on \*October 28<sup>th</sup> until November 8<sup>th</sup> inclusive for engineering and traffic light works by Wokingham Borough Council. Weekday closure will be from 9.30 am until 4.00pm and remain open at the weekend with temporary traffic lights. As yet 'undated', the closure will include a four day period when the bridge will shut for twenty four hours. Pedestrian access will be unaffected. \*Closure dates and times supplied by Wokingham Borough Council.

### **Sonning Bridge Pathway Lighting Safety Works.**

In order to take advantage of the Sonning (brick) Bridge closure (October 28<sup>th</sup> to approximately November 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>), we are proceeding with the Bridge lighting project. While this is considerably earlier than anticipated, March 2014, we considered that leveraging the existing bridge closure, the approach of shorter days with winter, trying to obtain another bridge closure, in March, with its inherent significant financial cost and traffic issues were worth making the decision to proceed now.

To that end, our street lighting contractors, Scottish and Southern Energy, will install a system of sixteen LED (light emitting diode) light units into the tarmac pathway over the entire length of the bridge. Works will commence concurrently with the temporary traffic order so as not only to avoid a separate bridge closure, but also the massive expense that such a measure entails. We have already undertaken a combined 1 & 2 Road Safety Audit and will now proceed with the ground-works (excavations and making good) and the electrical installation.

Although generously supported, our original 'local funding' plan has not yet achieved the level required to cover the project cost. Your Parish Council has taken the 'fall back' position of funding the shortfall, of approximately £8,000, while local and corporate funding efforts continue. The originally scheduled closure date of Mid-March 2014 would have provided additional time for funding efforts. Unfortunately, the earlier October closure has lost us that time while providing an opportunity not to be missed.

This Bridge Lighting project is a vital element of your Parish Council's consistent response to pedestrian/highways health and safety - additional street lighting in Pound Lane and Charvil Lane (at just under £2,000 per light), preventative parking bollards adjacent to the primary school, works to unsafe trees, even arguing with WBC Highways Department over incorrect driveway sightlines used for planning permission are all initiatives that can so easily save a life. Aligned with this theme are the projects for the defibrillator in the listed telephone box outside Pearson Hall and the exercise equipment in St Georges field are focussed on the health and wellbeing of our community

### **Pound Lane Closure 2013**

Wokingham Borough Council's engineers will close Pound Lane for essential sewer works from November 25<sup>th</sup> until December 6<sup>th</sup> inclusive for twenty four hours of each day. Wokingham Borough Council and those utilities serving our area, Southern Gas Networks, Network Rail, Thames Water, South East Water, BT Openreach, Scottish and Southern Energy, participate in a comprehensive programme of essential renewal, repair and upgrade works. None are undertaken lightly, and all are for our benefit.

### **Planning.**

#### **Former Fire Station, Pound Lane, Sonning - Proposed Development F/2013/0149**

Following a strong case for refusal put by Sonning Parish Council at a meeting with Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee on August 21<sup>st</sup> '13, permission was granted unanimously for conversion and extension of the existing fire station plus a new house with its own vehicular access from Pound Lane.

Unfortunately, it has been miss-reported in another publication that redevelopment of the fire station was approved, with the second house being refused. This is not the case.

Previously, the same form of application (F/2012/1639) was granted consent by the same committee, against a strong case for refusal from your Parish Council, in November 2012. That decision was later reversed after thirty days to refusal following non-payment by the applicant of the required S106 infrastructure payment of £194,628.42 (including £160,000 towards off-site affordable housing).

It was readily apparent that a demand for an Affordable Housing payment of £160,000 was unrealistic in comparison with similar sites. It came as no surprise when

the applicants, having withheld payment, demanded an independent assessment, resulting in your local authority accepting £0 outcome, yes £0, with the vital supply of Affordable Housing funding losing out. Councillor Tim Holton did attempt to question the £0 figure at the August 21<sup>st</sup> committee meeting, but was over-ruled by the Chairman.

Dealing with proposed re-development of Sonnings' former Fire Station site has demanded a great deal of time and effort from your Parish Council. In later stages, particularly when dealing with Wokingham Borough Council's Highways Department, when farcically inaccurate road layout plans were being accepted by them (and still are) and both National and WBC's own Highway Guidance bypassed on the basis that as nobody has been actually injured or killed in Pound Lane in recent years, we were told that a "worst case scenario is acceptable".

#### **August Field, Charvil Lane, Sonning - Proposed Re-development F/2013/0140**

Following a similar lengthy process, re-development of the 'August Field' site was unanimously approved by Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee on July 24<sup>th</sup> '13 against a comprehensive submission for refusal by your Parish Council. We highlighted numerous undesirable elements of the application, not least its thoroughly Urbanising character, being out of keeping in an Rural environment and naturally the unquenchable precedent created in the event of planning approval.

Unfortunately, the fear of an appeal with costs against the Local Authority soon found its way into the Committees'

somewhat implausible deliberations via the Chairman. The additional spectre of costs seemed to bring the process swiftly to a close in favour of the applicant.

An S106 Infrastructure Requirement of £108,000-00 for the four dwelling development, including £40,000-00 towards off-site affordable housing was accepted by the applicant. A figure that raises questions over that initially sought from and subsequently levied upon the Fire Station developer.

As pointed out to Wokingham Borough Council, approval of 'August Field' must raise the prospect of precedent for such development in Sonning, particularly our Conservation Area, even more so on the adjoining site of 'Acre Field'. If both these prominent sites are developed as per plans submitted and approved, truly inappropriate development will, sadly, impose itself on our community for no other reason than material gain. A fact that continues to energise the unrelenting efforts of your Parish Councils' Planning Committee who consistently oppose

harmful proposals for development in our Parish.

#### **Planning the way forward.**

With upgrades, modifications and drastic changes to regulations covering development in our environment, the process of trying to keep pace with the changes is an unrelenting process, particularly that which concerns us locally. Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Guidance 'bible', the 'Core Strategy', was adopted in January 2010

effectively to replace the 2004 Local Plan. It seemed to your Parish Council that WBC's Core Strategy document lacked specific detail, especially about Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. Consequently, many Local Plan Policy details have been officially 'saved' to operate alongside the newer Core Strategy that is also being enhanced and updated, but still sadly, lacking specific policy covering precious Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.

As a Council we are heading towards the completion of our vital Conservation Area Assessment document that will

serve as a vital tool for use as guidance when development is envisaged. Due to a clearly overburdened Local Authority dealing with massive developments scheduled to the South of the M4, the conclusion and final presentation of this detailed piece of work will be unavoidably delayed probably until late spring 2014. Meanwhile,

your Parish Council's Planning Committee continues to undertake its work on a regular basis (public meetings on the Monday of the week before the Parish Council meeting and the Wednesday of the week following).



#### **Safety Bollards - Pound Lane By Sid Liddiard**

Over several years Lesley Green the Head Teacher of Sonning Church of England Primary School tried for safety

reasons to persuade parents not to use the area in front of the Bus Shelter near to the gates to King George Field, to park or as a drop off or collection point for pupils. Unfortunately she was not successful.

Following the schools requests for consideration of the issue and complaints from parents, Sonning Parish Council felt compelled to act. The main issue was vehicles reversing onto and from Pound Lane across the footpath. Parents had experienced near misses for themselves and their children, especially when push chairs were being used.

After consideration and discussions with the school safety bollards were installed to prevent this dangerous practice. Whilst aesthetically not pleasing they have at least stopped reversing across the pavement. Sonning Parish Council is considering ways to make the preventative measures more attractive.

The fundamental problem remains of the high volume of traffic using Pound Lane, around 7,000 vehicles a day, with two of the three peaks at school time. The school is continuing to encourage parents to consider not using cars to transport pupils to school or if cars are used then to consider car sharing and to be considerate in their parking.

With regard to parking on Saturdays, the school has in the past kindly offered to make the school car park available to Charvil football club to ease parking in Pound lane.



#### **PALMER PUMP HIGH STREET SONNING - By Lesley Bates**

Another exciting project currently underway. The Parish Council were approached by Chris Fry on behalf of the Sonning Scarecrow Committee with

a proposal to fund the renovation of the exterior casing of the Palmer Pump. The Pump has been a familiar sight in the High Street since it was presented to the Parish by Robert Palmer in 1846. It is now some time since it was last treated to any renovation work and it is badly in need of some attention. The Parish Council were very pleased to support the request but asked for the casing to be filled where necessary with mild steel and to be welded to the main casing. Chris had identified a contractor who was capable of carrying out the work and had an estimate. Chris and the Parish Clerk met the WBC Conservation Officer who supported the proposal and confirmed that it required Listed Building permission. This was obtained in August but WBC asked for additional information about the workshop where the work would be carried out and the contact details of the specialist contractor. In addition WBC required photographs of the internal mechanism. Unfortunately this now requires an application to comply with the conditions which should be approved soon. Once this is obtained the work can begin. The Parish Council would like to thank Chris Fry on behalf of the Scarecrow Committee for their generous donation and very much look forward to seeing the renovated Pump in all it's glory.

#### **Red phone box Pearson hall**

The Parish Council are delighted to announce that they have agreed a new use for the redundant telephone box outside the Pearson Hall. It is hoped to use it as an information centre and to install a defibrillator in November this year. The initiative for the defibrillator came from Vicky Reeve who carried out a very, comprehensive investigation which she presented to the Council at their May meeting this year. Vicky explained that there was a need for a Community Public Access Defibrillator (cPAD) as Sudden Cardiac Arrest happens around 140,000 times a year in the UK, making it the largest killer-equivalent to a jumbo jet crashing every day. The potential for saving life was dependant upon time, the faster medical help can be attained, the better the chance of survival. Clinical studies suggest there is less than 5 minutes from the event to save a life, this decreasing by up to 23% per minute. Vicky also explained that, in all cases of cardiac arrest, someone should dial 999 as it is really important to make sure professional help is on the way. The operator would notify the caller of the location of the nearest operational cPAD box and give them the access code and instructions. As ideally the caller will commence CPR, two or more people would need to be present. The Council approached the Pearson Hall Management Committee who were pleased to be involved with such a worthwhile project and they sought funding from the Sonning Fire Brigade trust who were equally supportive and approved £2,500 for the defibrillator and installation. Vicky has offered to be the caretaker which

involves a weekly check of the defibrillator to see if it is in working condition. A green light indicates all is well. If it is red there are problems and the local Ambulance Service or Community Heartbeat would carry out repairs. Vicky was greatly assisted in her investigations by Community Heartbeat. The caretaker would also change the code on the box if the defibrillator had been used and also restock any disposables that have been used. The caretaker would always be contacted after use by the ambulance service. BT also support this scheme and will pay the cost of the electricity supply for seven years, which is also the life span of a cPAD. The Council would like to thank Vicky, The Pearson Hall Management Committee and the Sonning Fire brigade Trust for all their support for this very worthwhile community project.



**Website By Tracey Hicks**

Watch this space! We are now in the process of developing a new, more user friendly website for Sonning Parish Council. We are hoping that this will go live early in 2014. This will provide lots

of up to the minute news and information about the activities of the parish council and what's going on in your community. It will also be more interactive allowing you to get in touch with us more easily.

In the meantime, the existing Sonning Parish Council Website is still the place to come to for information. You will find current agendas and minutes for both the monthly parish council meetings and our twice monthly planning meetings where we consider whether we need to comment on current planning applications within the parish. The facility to report overweight vehicles crossing Sonning Bridge can also be found under the highways section.

And don't forget Social Media..... A simple search will enable you to find the Sonning Parish Council Facebook page. 'Like' us and automatically receive Sonning Parish Council updates and notifications directly to your own personal Facebook page!



**Bonfire Nuisance By Trefor Fisher**

It's the bonfire season. Whilst there are no specific byelaws prohibiting bonfires, this should not prevent us from being considerate to our neighbours.

Having a bonfire can be the most practical way to deal with garden rubbish. There are a few points to think about though.....

- Brown Bins - Would it be better to use a Brown Bin for your garden waste? These are provided (at cost) by Wokingham BC and are emptied fortnightly.
- Timing - Avoid lighting a bonfire at times when neighbours may be outside or have washing out. Consider lighting the bonfire at dusk when least nuisance will be caused. Avoid weekends and bank holidays.

- Smoke - Take account of the weather conditions. From which direction is the wind coming? On a still night, will the smoke hang around? Do not allow the bonfire to smoulder for a long period and do not allow smoke to reduce visibility on local roads.
- Waste material - Only burn dry garden rubbish. Do not burn household waste which can contain plastics leading to noxious fumes. Do not use accelerants to "get the bonfire going".

Above all, why not talk to your neighbour(s) prior to lighting your bonfire? A friendly chat may give them a chance to close their windows, get their washing in or ask you to delay until a more suitable time.



**Recreation and Environment By Mena Pownall**

I'm sure that by now most of you will have happened upon the outdoor fitness equipment in King George's field. Funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund, a variety of exercise machines have now been installed.

The range is designed to extend fitness opportunities to the wider community with resistance being provided by the users own body weight. The cardio bundle is fun to use and is already proving to be extremely popular with all age groups. Its free for everyone from age 7 upwards, in an uncontrolled yet social and uninhibited environment, whether its just to play, for a work out, or as an aid to recuperation after an injury or illness. If you haven't seen it yet, take some time out and go and try it for yourselves.

**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 - Recreation Chair	0118 9698245
Trefor Fisher	07789 880072
Sid Liddiard	0118 9272783
Alex Evans	0118 9448348
John Hargrave	0118 9690236
Lesley Bates - Clerk	0118 9697753
Email:-	lesley@lesleybates.co.uk
Website:-	<a href="http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk">http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk</a>



### **From the Borough Councillor for Sonning and Warren**

Firstly I would like to thank Sonning Parish Council for letting me place an article in their magazine, I would like to commend this group to you, All Parish councils have a lot of responsibility locally with a wide and expanding brief and it isn't always an easy job.

I feel it appropriate to brief you on some of the things that are going on in the wider area:

It's a tough time to be in local Government, Wokingham Borough is the lowest funded local Authority in England and the second lowest spending, being in this position it was hoped that the reductions in grants from Central Government would be lessened for us, unfortunately this isn't so and as far as we can see the pressures will continue, for 2014 the information we are receiving is that the situation will be at the worse end of our projections, this means that some difficult decisions lie ahead.

However many tasks continuing and we are moving forwards, for those who have been to Wokingham recently, the regeneration project has begun, The frontage of 38 Market Place and Boots is now covered by scaffolding to allow work to replace and restore the fronts of these buildings during the coming months. Much of the work is painstaking and is hidden behind the screening so the shops can continue trading, as a separate but linked project the work on Wokingham Station and the new link road has begun, due for completion in 2014.

I would also like to mention the Eustace Crescent development which was originally built in the 1960s to provide council social rented housing in 76 one, two and three bedroom flats. The estate had become very run down with damp and drainage issues, residents asked to move out. The estate is being re-developed to provide 72 homes. This will comprise eight one-bedroom and 14 two-bedroom apartments, as well as 27 two-bedroom and 18 three-bedroom houses. Five four-bedroom houses will also be built. The central green space will be retained, allowing for community activities to take place. All houses and ground floor apartments would have gardens and all upper floor apartments would have private balconies. The tenure mix will be 50% social rent and 20% intermediate rent. A total of 30% will be shared ownership, with 35% equity shares available and rent on unsold equity capped at 1.5% per year. This is considered a flag ship development.

The Strategic Development Locations (SDL's), there are 4 of them in the Borough, (South of the M4, Arborfield, North Wokingham and South Wokingham), the most advanced of them, South of the M4 (Three Mile Cross, Spencers Wood area) was granted outline planning permission last week, this is balanced against the Managing Delivery Plan which was widely consulted upon in 2010 and 2011, Sonning Parish Council among many other respondents provided input. If everything goes ahead this will bring 13,000 homes to the Borough by 2026 of which around 30% may be classed as affordable. This is a huge amount of building and brings many issues for example the provision of schools, sports facilities, healthcare and traffic management. As I have mentioned before, our areas in the North of the Borough which includes Sonning are classed for "Limited Development" only although it would be wrong of me to state there will be no impact.

Some may be aware that when a Developer submits plans for a new building under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) a so called "Section 106 agreement" is drawn up. This means that a developer will contribute towards local community facilities to mitigate the impacts of new development. This contribution can be financial or an agreement to provide a particular facility or service (such as parks, schools or transport improvements). The background to this is hugely complex and there

are many rules and caveats however Wokingham is now publishing the details. -  
<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning/residents/spent/>

On a more modest note, in partnership with the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association, 60 English oak trees were planted last year and earlier this year, across the Wokingham Borough to mark and celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. From Tuesday October 1 until Thursday October 31, 2013 an exhibition will be held in the Mall Gallery, Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham explaining the project, showing photos of the individual trees, their associated welcoming event and a map indicating where all the trees are planted.

One of the major features of the ward my ward are the bridges, the ward is divided between Sonning and Warren by the Brunel built London to Bath railway which is crossed by 4 bridges, (Shepherds Hill, Warren Road, Butts Hill road and Duffield Road) without forgetting the Sonning Thames Bridge. The river crossing is a major bottleneck and is a Grade 2 listed structure. In late October 2013 the bridge will be closed for essential maintenance and also for the upgrade of the traffic lights to use the MOVA system. This bridge recently featured in the National Press and on the BBC when a Letter Box facade was attached to one of the pillars. Mainly due to the electrification of the main line but also involving the need for maintenance Duffield Road Bridge has been replaced, Warren Road Bridge will be closed until January 2014 and Butts Hill Road Bridge will need maintenance. I need to emphasize that Network Rail have the authority to perform tasks on rail bridges without requiring planning permission or have any obligation to involve Wokingham, I also realize that the Duffield Bridge replacement has not been without issue, the design of the replacement bridge is questionable at best, some simply dislike it, some feel it to be an example of modern brutalist art, another point I fully recognize is the need for a Footbridge to run parallel to the road bridge on Butts hill road for pedestrian safety, this issue has rightly been raised many times and I have raised questions about the possibilities however Network rail are being as intransigent as ever and the funding simply isn't there, I will not forget the matter.