

# Sonning Parish Council

## NEWSLETTER

### INTRODUCTION

Steve Chapman

Welcome to your Council's Spring newsletter. On several occasions I receive a question which has been covered in the newsletter; the response that the newsletter was never received is not uncommon! We deliver to every house in Sonning and also some to Eye. If you are sure that you do not receive it please let Lesley Bates or I know and we will make sure that you do.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our councillors for the time that they devote voluntarily towards the community of Sonning and also to Lesley for her loyal support. At this time I particularly wish to thank Sharon Auld for her contribution over the past two years. Sharon has now decided to stand down in order to spend more time with her family.

**New Councillor.** I am very pleased to announce that Ian Runnalls has volunteered to join the Council and that he was unanimously co-opted by councillors at our February meeting. Ian has lived in Sonning for 38 years and I know he will be a great asset to the Council.

**New Street Light.** Some of you may have seen the new conservation style street light opposite Hope Cottage in Pound Lane which has replaced the old lollipop version. The Council wishes to express its thanks to Sid and Sue Liddiard for their generosity in funding this conversion.

We have long desired to convert the last remaining lights in the Conservation Area to the conservation style; however, funds are limited. If you wish to contribute to further conversions, please contact myself or Lesley Bates.

**Robert Palmer Almshouse Charity.** After six years as the Council's nominated representative on the charity, David Bates has decided to stand down. His contribution to the charity over this period has been considerable. He has overseen the refurbishment of many of the flats, was the driving force behind the rebuilding of the David Penny Sheds and was always available to give advice and fix problems. The Council wishes to thank him for his considerable contribution during the past six years. Phil Parker, who has assisted David over the past two years, has agreed to be the Council's new representative.

### ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Lesley Bates

All parishioners are encouraged to attend the Annual Parish Meeting of the Council on Wednesday 13 May in the Pearson Hall; format as follows:

7.00pm Reception and welcome drink  
7.30pm Councillors Reports  
8.00pm Questions to Councillors  
8.30pm Guest Speaker  
9.00pm Questions to Guest Speaker  
10.00pm Close

I am delighted to announce that Pat Baxter, Transport Strategy Manager, Reading Borough Council has accepted our invitation to attend and update parishioners on Reading's current transport plans. The plans have significant implications for adjoining authorities and include a potential additional Thames crossing.

### FINANCE

Steve Chapman

At its November and December meeting the Council considered and agreed its budget for 2009/10 of some £38,000. The budget is funded by three main streams, the local Sonning element (precept) of your Council Tax, income from the cricket and football clubs and interest from investments.

We currently have £94,500 invested in National Savings of which £70,000 is from the allotment sale 40 years ago which can only be spent on a capital project, for instance a new pavilion. We have all benefitted from the interest of approximately £5,000 subsidising the local tax. However, since October we have seen an unprecedented reduction in the bank rate from 5% to 0.5% and as a consequence a significant decrease in our investment income. As a result we are currently looking for budget savings of approximately £4,000 and whether we can achieve a better return elsewhere – not Iceland I would add!

Over the past few years we have controlled our budget well, addressed major capital items, increased the precept moderately and have introduced new provisions; this gives us the ability to absorb the deficit. The precept for 2009/10 will remain as the current year.

**7.5t Environmental Weight Limit.** After a long campaign we can confirm that the 7.5 tonne environmental limit was completed on 21 January with the erection of the 14 prominent new road signs at the three A4 junctions leading into the village. This now protects the whole of Sonning north of the A4 from vehicles over 7.5t, except for access. Previously this signage only protected the bridge which in many cases was too late for vehicles to turn on the approach roads. Now, unless they have legitimate business with delivery or collection in the designated area, vehicles above 7.5t are breaking the law if they enter. Considerable public awareness was created through BBC TV South, BBC Radio Berkshire and the local Twyford and Wokingham newspapers. We are liaising closely with the Police on a very visible monitoring process so that the new regulation will not only be applied but enforced.

**High Street Bollards.** The installation of two bollards on the corner of the High Street with Pearson Road has now been completed. This was applied to keep turning left traffic from the Sonning Lane direction away from the pavement as vehicles had a tendency to clip the corner putting pedestrians and property at risk. This was particularly the case when there were no parked cars on the approach.

**Thames Street Pavement.** The pavement narrowing outside Fairlawn is still an outstanding issue. This remains high on the Council's list of priorities being a major safety hazard. We have submitted detailed plans of options to the Borough Council. Additionally, the owner of Fairlawn has offered to sell a strip of land which would avoid re-profiling the road. The Borough Council has acknowledged this as requiring action and is now considering the options and costs involved. Funding at this time could be a constraint.

#### **Pearson Road Pinch - Point by the High Street**

Despite our decision not to apply double yellow lines on either side of this junction, the narrow pavement still remains an issue.

Currently vehicles from both directions persist in driving on the pavement risking pedestrians and damaging property. We are discussing with the Borough Council what options are available to help protect pedestrians and prevent damage to property without reducing the parking capacity.

**Sonning Lane/A4 Junction.** This remains a very high priority for the Council and we are using every opportunity to pursue this with the Borough Council including the recent planning application

from the Reading Cricket and Hockey Club for the development of 2 further all weather artificial pitches. This highlighted the current and projected impact on this dangerous junction.

There are several options available to help improve the safety of this heavily used junction from traffic lights to road widening to help filter left traffic. The last estimate for lights, a few years ago, was approximately £120,000. In today's economic climate any solution decided on would need to be within the Borough's limited resources. Nevertheless, it will remain a high priority for this Council to continue to pursue.

**Condition of Local Roads.** Following the recent spate of bad weather some of the road surfaces in the parish have deteriorated and are in need of repair. Whilst the Parish Council is compiling a list of road repairs, residents should be aware that they can contact Wokingham Borough Council Direct on their new Customer Service Centre number to report potholes and other dangerous road conditions requiring urgent attention on 974 6000. You can also use their new Live Chat facility to report road conditions, etc on [www.wokingham.gov.uk/contacts](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contacts).

**Additional Thames Crossing.** In our last newsletter we highlighted the announcement by Reading Borough Council of their future traffic plans including an additional river crossing. Whilst there has been little public news since on this subject, there has been much activity behind the scenes in developing those plans and liaising with the adjoining authorities. We are very pleased that Pat Baxter, Transport Strategy Manager at Reading Borough Council, will be speaking at our Annual Meeting on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May when she will update us on the plans and progress.

**Survey.** A recent Neighbourhood Action Group survey carried out in the Sonning Lane/Sonning Meadows/South Drive area showed your main concerns to be traffic delays at the A4 junction, excessive speed on the A4 and Sonning Lane and parking in the road. I am currently reviewing parking problems in Sonning Lane.

#### **PLANNING**

Pat Doyle

As I explained before, your Parish Council deals with the appraisal of planning applications via its Planning Committee which meets twice monthly (7pm) in the pavilion at King George's Field, these meetings are open to Sonning Parishioners and others who wish to attend. Meeting twice a month ensures that no deadlines are missed.

There is a set, published agenda (displayed on our notice boards) listing the applications or other relevant matters for discussion. Our meetings are not a forum at which applicants can 'present' or

explain their plans but they can obviously listen to what we say about the applications and how our decisions are reached. Visitors may also ask questions at the chairman's discretion, and, similarly, it is helpful if the applicant is present who could clarify any query we might have. Current applications are assigned to individual Councillors to examine and bring their findings back to the committee for discussion. Some large applications may require more than one pair of hands to cover additional detail, such as tree and arboriculture surveys, highways and possible discussion with the Conservation Officer at the local authority, etc, etc.

What the committee decides is binding upon the Parish Council and that is then communicated by our Clerk, Lesley Bates, to the Case Officer in Wokingham Borough Council's planning department prior to the all important closing date for comments (this date is annexed to the application when it goes out for consultation).

Much of our decision making is greatly aided by published guidance in Wokingham Borough Council's 'Local Plan' plus their newly published 'Residential Design Guide'. Very recent regulation under 'The General Permitted Development Order', covering development that may be undertaken without the requirement of a planning application, must be checked and taken into account as necessary. Further guidance and directives contained within the 'Berkshire Structure Plan' and the 'Policy Planning Guidance' series from the Department of the Environment are invaluable when dealing with larger development proposals.

Highways matters, such as directives on safe sight lines from access driveways, that have significant bearing on a great many applications is explained in the Department for Transport's enormously helpful 'Manual for Streets'. It's all there in these weighty documents and if we're still not sure we ask their creators to explain.

In addition to the published guidance a fair slice of common sense and local knowledge is essential, particularly as those in our local authority who make the final decision may not know Sonning as we do. That's not to imply that our colleagues at Wokingham don't appreciate just what a lovely place Sonning is, but we like to think that we know best.

We are confident that the planning appraisal process undertaken by your Parish Council is a very effective and practical means of not only dealing with a steady stream of applications but to ensure that they all are dealt with in a fair and open manner for the good of Sonning and its parishioners.

## RECREATION & ENVIRONMENT

Pam Glasspool

King George's Playing field is a superb parish asset worthy of great care and support to maintain and improve its environment and facilities for all to enjoy, now and in the future. It is part of the National Playing Fields Association and a registered charity. New signage will clarify the rules of use.

A few dog walkers continue to badly abuse the area by allowing their dog(s) to foul the area. Your help is needed - please let the clerk have information on any walker not 'scooping up' or not disposing in correct bins. (Date, time, breed, name or description of walker, car details etc).

Several new trees and hedging have been planted around the field and in The Pound Copse. There is space for more young Yew or Holly if you have any to donate!

Membership of the sports clubs using the field is open to residents. Joining fees help to run the clubs and to pay council licence fees used for the upkeep of facilities.

The three council tennis courts are managed by Sonning LTC which offers great family membership deals as well as some free coaching for juniors. Play varies from games with friends to matches against other clubs. The hard courts are undergoing a massive refurbishment to be completed in time for the **Sonning Tennis Open Day on the 26<sup>th</sup> April**.

You are invited to come and see what is on offer for you and your family.

The courts will be in tip top condition but there is a desperate need to replace the dilapidated 'hut' with a small pavilion and toilet facilities. Please help and **offer your support** for this urgent Pavilion Appeal. Grants and donations are being sought and we hope the dream can soon become a reality. Cheques made out to King George's Field, Sonning, should be sent to the Clerk, Council Office, Pearson Road, Sonning. As a charity, KGF can recover tax on donations made.

Support from Rotary Loddon Vale, the football foundation, our two football clubs and local residents enabled a full size football pitch with new goalposts and nets to be installed, allowing Sonning FC to play first team matches on home soil after an absence of several years. Charvil Junior football club run 6 teams of Sonning and Charvil boys and girls aged from 6 -11. Matches and training take place on our 3 junior pitches.

Permission was given to Sonning CC to extend the square, allowing additional wickets to be created which should give greater recovery periods between use. The donation of a second secure store has meant SCC is now able to store fuel driven equipment safely.

The Council has recently spent £2,000 on high ball protection fencing along the perimeter of the playground to provide additional protection for the playground and the hedge has been cut to an easy view height.

The main Sports pavilion needs continual attention. Thanks to volunteer work parties the exterior and stores were painted. The shower room was stripped, treated and redecorated. All danger points highlighted on a fire risk assessment have been addressed. The carpet received a strong double shampoo (removing decades of egg sandwich residue!) Anti-frost heaters have been fitted. Extensive repairs to the roof have helped make it weather tight.

A new Lime tree was planted on the Pound Lane embankment in place of the badly vandalised tree planted last year. That Lime was transplanted in the Pound Copse where it can repair itself with new growth. A dead Alder tree was removed from The Wharf. This will be replaced with a Swamp Cypress tree donated and planted in memory of Cllr David Penny. A red oak has been planted near the tennis courts.

Resident Tim Pascall was co-opted onto the council Recreation Working Group in September and has now kindly taken over from me as Chairman of the Group – good luck Tim!

## NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION GROUPS

Pam Byrne

NAGS are made up of volunteer representatives from the community. They bring together organisations and partners like residents, the police, local authorities, businesses and schools. They are a key to neighbourhood policing and plan on behalf of the community. This improves community safety and reassurance and reduces crime, disorder and fear of crime. Members of NAGS are able to influence decisions within their neighbourhood. If you would like to learn more then please contact me on 969 6889.

## KEEP OUR VILLAGE CLEAN Lesley Bates

**Fouling by Dogs.** Due to continued dog fouling on King George's Field and our nature reserve, the Council considered a proposal that all dogs be banned from those areas. The Council is mindful that a ban would not just punish the guilty owners but all dog owners. As a result, the Council rejected a total ban but will be considering a number of preventative measures at its April meeting.

The Borough is covered by the Dog Fouling Act 1996. Fines of up to £1,000 can be imposed on offending dog owners. We have some wonderful recreational areas, please do respect them.

**Litter.** We wish to thank Ken Trimmings for his stalwart work on behalf of the council which helps to keep the Conservation Area clean. We can all play our part by taking home our own litter and picking up that dropped by others who regrettably are less community minded. Why not join us for the .....

## --- VILLAGE SPRING CLEAN, 25/26 APRIL ---

Tony Farnese

The Parish Council has chosen this weekend for the annual spring clean in order to co-ordinate with the Borough wide litter campaign on 26 April. **Your help is needed** to make our lovely village ready for the summer and our visitors.

The control point will be the Sports Pavilion, King George's Field, where equipment and refreshments will be available. The start time on both days will be 10am aiming to finish at 2pm; areas will be allocated on the day.

Individuals and groups are welcome and children must be accompanied by an adult. Please ensure adequate protective clothing such as gardening gloves.

Last year the response was only moderate, we need **plenty of volunteers please**. It is our village, let's be proud of it!

For further information, please contact either me 07774 494610 or Lesley Bates 969 7753. Look forward to seeing you on the day(s).

## PARISH COUNCIL DETAILS

<b>Steve Chapman – Chairman &amp; Borough Councillor</b>	<b>0118 9697398</b>
<b>Pam Byrne – Vice Chairman</b>	<b>0118 9696889</b>
<b>Andrew Barker</b>	<b>0118 9699991</b>
<b>Pat Doyle – Chair, Planning Committee</b>	<b>0118 9693605</b>
<b>Tony Farnese</b>	<b>0118 9440374</b>
<b>Pam Glasspool</b>	<b>0118 9692800</b>
<b>Ken Peters - Chair, Highways Group</b>	<b>0118 9696762</b>
<b>Sharon Robinson</b>	<b>0118 9690748</b>
<b>Tim Pascall – Chair, Recreation and Environment Group</b>	<b>0118 9696935</b>
<b>Ian Runnalls</b>	<b>0118 9693389</b>
<b>Lesley Bates – Clerk to the Council</b>	<b>0118 9697753</b>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk">http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk</a>

The full council traditionally meets on the second Tuesday each month, except August, at 7.30pm in the Sports Pavilion. From June this will change to the second Monday due to changes in the Borough's meeting dates. 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.

**March 2009**