

Sonning Parish Council Autumn Newsletter 2012

INTRODUCTION by Ian Runnalls



In the Spring Newsletter we eagerly looked forward to the exciting Summer of Sonning Village events, starting with the Queen's Jubilee celebrations right through to the Sonning Village Show. Whilst the weather did its best to dampen some of the proceedings, the enthusiasm and spirit of Sonning parishioners was infectious, and when the rain threatened to ruin the village street party, for example, the rush to provide protective gazebos ensured that the sandwiches could be enjoyed in relative comfort!

Throughout all this Council business went on as normal, with the Planning committee deliberating on many new applications, but more of this later in the Newsletter. Perhaps an appeal for more parishioners to visit our planning committee meetings and even Parish Council meetings would be apposite here!

Unfortunately the council strength has recently been reduced by three Councillors stand-downs. Gary and Sharon Robinson due to health issues, and Ken Peters, Chairman of the Highways Group. We thank all three for their hard work on the Parish Council, and wish Gary a speedy recovery from his recent problems. We now look forward to the Winter festivities, and wish you all a peaceful and happy time.

PLANNING by Pat Doyle



Our previous issue included an article, some of which was to guide those wishing to write an objection to a planning application. All too often well intended objections contain points that cannot be taken into account, (rendering them ineffectual) such as impact upon the value of an objector's property, private legal matters, loss of a view, an opinion about the

developer or whether the work has already started * (*the latter is usually dealt with retrospectively).

Some valid points of objection that can be taken into account are Highway problems, such as unsafe access, noise, design and impact upon a conservation area, loss of light and privacy. Comprehensive cover of likely difficulties with planning applications is dealt with via guidance from our Local Authority and National planning policy.

Contrary to a recently expressed view at our Annual Parish Meeting, your Parish Council's Planning Committee does not promote a policy of encouraging objection to every planning application.

Such a naive course would require fabricated reasons bearing no relation to reality, which would rapidly discredit the Council with parishioners, applicants and the local authority. Our basic statistics are as follows; from May 2010 to May 2011 we dealt with seventy five applications, recommending sixteen for refusal. From May 2011 to May 2012 again we dealt with seventy five applications and recommended twenty for refusal.

Reading Rugby Football Club - Planning Application F/2012/0772 Change of use of existing car parking to Micro Park and Ride facility.

One of the most potentially environmentally damaging proposals that Sonning has faced in many years. In mid-April, our Planning Committee requested Councillor Mike Haines to 'list' the application to go before Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee should the case officer be minded to recommend approval. Our Planning Committee dealt with the application on May 17th, when two Parishioners attended, including the Captain of the Club, Craig Hunter, who was very open about the financial position of the Club, a factor that is naturally beyond the remit of our work. Our detailed submission, opposing the application was at Wokingham on May 23rd ahead of the original May 24th closing date for comments.

As the application was recommended for approval, it came before WBC's Planning Committee on July 25th. Councillor Doyle spoke against the application, as did Councillor Haines and Tony Thorpe, (a highly competent Planning Consultant engaged by a generous resident!) who was able to do so when it

was agreed by the Chairman of the Society to replace their speaker. A petition, organised by the Society, was shown to the committee by Mike Haines but could not legally be taken into account because it was presented over a month and a half beyond the extended closing date of June 6th. Even though it was clearly demonstrated that the application was against countryside, environmental, highways and sustainable local and national policy, committee opposition failed and the application was approved.

While supporters of the application were well marshalled, greater and more timely support for the Parish Council's solid opposition to the application could have seen a case file bulging with possibly two hundred opposition letters, opposition that the elected members of the WBC committee would have been obliged to take into account.

Even though Wokingham have yet to publish an approval notice (at the time of writing), the change of use approval is set for a review in two years. Thames Valley Business Park (some of whose tenants use the RRFC Park and Ride) are not at fault as they have an environmentally sustainable Travel Plan in place that in full operation stands a very good chance of rendering the environmentally crude RRFC facility rapidly redundant, we hope.

Appeal by Alfred Homes Ltd against refusal of Planning Application F/2011/0523 at 'August Field' Charvil Lane, Sonning for Erection of Five Houses with associated access and parking. Demolition of existing building. Planning Inspectorate Ref APP/X0360/A/12/2177607/NWF.

This particular site has a long and complex planning history, including one failed appeal. This most recent application was 'listed' for our Planning Committee by Councillor Steve Chapman early in 2011 as a precaution against a recommendation for approval by WBC.

Due to the application's form of typically intensive Urban development, the application was opposed by our Planning Committee and was unanimously refused by WBC's own Planning Committee (in the face of strong support for approval from the case officer) on December 14th 2011 when Alex Evans agreed to deliver the Parish Council's case as Pat Doyle was in the Royal Berkshire Hospital at the time.

We now face the appeal at an Informal Hearing, open to the public, at Wokingham at 10.00 on October 30th. Alfred Homes Ltd are sure to field a team of consultants in various capacities to present their case. We already know of at least four and that the hearing could last two days.

We are due to meet with WBC Officers prior to the October hearing date, to have access to their case detail, which we trust will be suitably robust, bearing

in mind that the same authority were fully in favour of approval!

Consistent with its previous submission, your Parish Council's Planning Committee will oppose the appeal.

Planning Applications F/2012/1639 & CA/2012/1640

Conversion and extension of existing Fire Station in Pound Lane, Sonning and erection of a further dwelling with vehicular access and landscaping. Closing date for comments September 19th 2012.

Your Planning Committee dealt with the applications at its meeting on September 3rd when it was unanimously agreed to oppose the applications, *in their present form*, basically due to over-development, bulk, massing, impact on the amenity of neighbours at No.11 and close proximity of the proposed dwellings to themselves. A safe vehicular access in compliance with National guidance cannot be formed to cope with traffic intensification. The important Horse Chestnut tree in the centre of the site is also threatened as are trees in the neighbouring property to the South due to potential root damage. As we all appreciate, this is a particularly important and sensitive site within our conservation area. Even for that reason alone, there is absolutely no necessity for us to accept anything less than a suitable development for the site. As a precaution, the applications are already 'listed' should the WBC view be for approval.

Sonning Conservation Area Assessment.

Thanks to our dedicated and very enthusiastic team of Surveyors, who deal with the five selected 'survey routes' in teams of two and three within the Conservation Area, this vital project is progressing very well. At our meeting on October 20th in Pearson Hall, it was confirmed that all surveys of the five routes are now complete. Each survey route also generates its own photographic record which will be in the professional hands of David Bates and Jeremy Gilmore to ensure consistent quality.

Prior to forwarding our completed analysis to Wokingham Borough Council, who have to undertake their own environmental assessment of our findings, full public consultation will be required by presenting our work to Sonning's residents in the form of an explanatory exhibition coupled with our draft document which we aim to have available in January. Overall, this is a huge amount of work which would have not progressed successfully without Parish Council initiative plus detail input from Diana Coulter and Brian O'Callaghan. We have also enlisted the help of a Louise Ryan, a talented student with a proven academic record and a keen interest in architectural conservation and the heritage industry. Louise, with

the help of Diana, will assemble the mass of detailed analysis into a workable draft document. A document in its final form that will eventually replace Sonning's 2004 Parish Design Statement as a fully-fledged Supplementary Planning Document alongside WBC's Core Strategy (plus Local Plan saved policies and National Policy) providing accurate guidance to ensure clear direction for anyone seeking to undertake development in Sonning.

Sonning Bridge Pathway Lighting – A Project for our Community.

This seemingly simple project has proved to be by necessity fairly complex, taking into account various elements of electronics, groundwork's and engineering, planning and conservation, pedestrian and road safety audit, BT sub-ground cable survey, local authority (WBC, SODC and OCC) consultation and, not least, cost analysis coupled with the search for private funding.

It is important to note that in spite of what may have been published elsewhere, it was made very clear by Councillor Mark Green, Chairman of Sonning Parish Council, at our May 22nd Annual Parish Meeting, that this project is NOT Parish Council funded, private funding alone being the sole source of revenue.

A comprehensive Road Safety Audit was carried out by Reading based Peter Brett and Associates, the results of which further confirmed your Councillor's views, which are shared by many, that there is considerable risk to pedestrians crossing Sonning Bridge, particularly in the hours of darkness.

Councillor Doyle also explained that due to revised methods of Groundwork's by a WBC licensed contractor which avoid the necessity of over-night bridge closures with attendant cost factors of legal work, generator lighting, out of hours wages, diversion signs and general disruption etc. etc., our initially projected top-line project figure of £18,000 (plus reclaimable VAT) was reduced to just over £13,500 (plus reclaimable VAT).

Efforts to attract local funding in such straitened financial times has not been easy, but it is hoped that this vital project can move forward prior to the end of 2012.

Our Weak Bridge.

Following extensive structural examination of Sonning's ancient brick bridge by Wokingham Borough Council's engineers, the Grade II listed

structure has now been officially designated, via a published traffic order until further notice, as a Weak Bridge.

We understand from Wokingham Borough Council 'Highways' that as from October 22nd, all traffic using the bridge from both directions will be limited to an individual unit weight of 7.5 tons without exception save for Fire, Ambulance and Police vehicles which are themselves limited to ten tons.

AMENITIES by Tony Farnese



Hi, a busy year so far with a new bus shelter and a new lamp (yet to be painted).

The Council have agreed a refurbishment of the wharf.

Parishioner Sid Liddiard has provided a well designed seat and framework to the Glebe bus shelter on Pound Lane. A big thank you to Sid and thank you to Pat Morgan for suggesting it.

Future plans include another lamp and the litter pick next spring, the date has yet to be decided but we will keep you updated.

One point we would like to make is a request that any notices you place on the parish notice boards please be removed when they are finished with so as to make room for others to use the facility. We thank you for your co-operation.

Tony Farnese

WEBSITE by Vicky Reeve



Sonning Parish Council has its own website this can be found at:

www.sonning-pc.gov.uk

The website contains information about the parish council and its sub committees. It also contains information about Sonning, upcoming events and useful links to other websites. Please take a look it is there for you.

The Parish Council would like the website to be a useful tool for everyone in the Parish old and young. So moving with the technology you will soon be able to access from the website facebook and twitter. You will be able to do this by clicking on the icons located on the Sonning Parish council Homepage.

RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENT by

Mena Pownall



King George's Field.

Several comments have been received on the improvement to the grass on King Georges field this year. Thankfully the programme of work undertaken on the field in the spring with the rolling, tine and weed and feed, has been a great success and we have seen a vast improvement of the grass and playing surface which was greatly appreciated by the cricket club.

Sadly we have come to the end of another cricket season which saw Sonning cricket club enjoying great success including the Under 13s winning the county cup for their age group! We would like to pass on our congratulations to them.

The Football season is now up and running and we wish them a successful season also.

Work has recently been undertaken to cut back the hedge by the SLTC. This has made the area look much tidier.

We are also in the process of installing another rubbish bin in this area which attracts a lot of use with visitors to the skateboard park.

The Wharf.

Despite attempts to cut back shrubs and hedges this year, the amount of rain meant that re-growth was overwhelming!

Work will shortly be carried out to tidy up and improve the health of the willow tree on the wharf. Once completed, we plan to further enhance this attractive river frontage with the planting of shrubs around the base area of the tree.

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	0118 9696621
Pat Doyle – Planning Chair	0118 9693605
Tony Farnese	07774 494610
Vicky Reeve	0118 9449354
Ian Runnalls	0118 9693389
Mena Pownall –	0118 9698245
Recreation Chair	
Lesley Bates - Clerk	0118 9697753

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

BOROUGH COUNCIL UPDATE Autumn - 2012

by Mike Haines

1. Introduction

Firstly I would like to write thanking Mark Green and the Sonning Parish Council (SPC) team for allowing me to write a section in this edition of the Sonning Parish Council magazine.

We find ourselves in difficult times and there are hard choices to be made, I believe much has been achieved locally which could not have been done without the efforts of the strong and capable team of Sonning Parish Council and with the support of the community, you can read about these things that have been done in this magazine - so thank you all, but as always there is a huge amount to do and the work continues.

2. Budget

I need to reiterate that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) is the worst government funded authority per head of population in the country. We now receive £119 per person which equates to less than 20p in the pound, the average authority receives 50p, and this already low amount fell in 2012. and is a result of the relatively affluent nature of the Borough and involves a change at Government level in the formula deployed to calculate the amounts. WBC is designated as the “least needy” local authority in the country which means we have to be as efficient as possible,

One of the biggest issues at the moment concerns Council Tax Benefit, until April 2013 this is managed nationally however for the next financial year this is to be managed by local authorities. For 2013/14 Central government is providing funding, however they are imposing a 10% cut in the amount provided. This equates to something like a £600,000 shortfall for the Borough and the change impacts the Parish Council tax base. This would be equivalent to almost a 0.75% increase in council tax for everyone in the Borough if no action was taken. In principle the Council has decided that it isn't right to absorb this cost but will not increase the council tax for all residents to fund it. The thoughts are to decrease the benefits paid while protecting those who have the lowest income levels and those who face the highest levels of financial vulnerability. This is a national issue affecting all local authorities in England, No decisions have been made yet, and until 22nd October 2012 a consultation is ongoing.

3. Transport Funding

I can report that Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with Reading won 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. There are many caveats attached to this funding and the money may not be used for major structural projects (For example a Thames Crossing) but it may be used to improve local transport.

The money is going to be used to enhance the main A329 route from Bracknell to Reading, 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. It is also worth mentioning the Wokingham Station re-development, although separate to this fund it will further improve transport facilities in our area.

Funding for an additional Thames crossing remains unavailable in the current economic climate and the subject is off the agenda although will remain a recognised priority, I can advise that SPC “Lorry Watch” working with Wokingham and West Berks Trading Standards have been able to secure the prosecution of a number of drivers of overweight vehicles in Sonning, fines were in the region of £400, and remember that the 20mph limit in Sonning is now enforceable.

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 for a long time.

Within the strategy, Sonning has been identified as a location for "Limited Development", due to the smaller range of facilities, it is not considered that significant development would appropriate, although smaller proposals which help support the community and provide for an identifiable local need may be acceptable (see para 2.87 of the Core Strategy).

I work hard in this area along with the Sonning Parish Council Planning Committee to prevent inappropriate Developments, several applications have been listed in the past year for the Planning Committee to review which provides for a more detailed examination.

The council established a fully owned company (Wokingham Housing Ltd), it is worth mentioning the Eustace Crescent Development in Norry's, Instead of spending £5million on repairs to Eustace Crescent with the support of residents the plan is to demolish the properties and re-build, this will become one of the largest developments of affordable housing in the South of England.

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 1/2 Waitrose Twyfords!), housing and leisure facilities. This is expected to create 750 new jobs and bring £21m in additional wages 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

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. These are major projects and work is ongoing.

6. Education

This 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.

A £6m refurbishment and business plan for Bulmershe School was announced earlier in the year. The Piggot School 6th form block is up and open and Waingels is strongly progressing. It was heartening to find out that Waingels School was selected to host the Borough Looked after Children's Event in 2012, and the Children's representatives made the recommendation themselves.

Discussions are underway about how to manage the increase in children requiring Primary School places in 2013/14 and 2014/15. There are a number of possibilities which might include the development of a new primary school in Charvil and maybe another in the Wokingham area.

7. Political Balance

Following the elections this summer, the political makeup of WBC is: 43 Conservative, 9 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independents. There are no Borough elections scheduled in 2013, the next election in Sonning will be to fill the new Police commissioner role on 15th November 2012.

Following the Annual Meeting in May 2012 Bob Wyatt was selected as Mayor and Ula Karin Clarke as Deputy Mayor, David Lee remained in position as Leader of the council. I sit on the Licensing and Appeals Committee, I am a reserve for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and was appointed to the Sports Council, the Asset Management working group and as the WBC representative attached to Twyford Age Concern.

