

Sonning Parish Council

Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2014



Chairman's introduction by Pat Doyle

Unlike your Planning Committee that meets twice every month, Sonning Parish Council meets on the second Tuesday of each month, usually in the pavilion in King George's Field at 7.30pm. Both meetings are open to Parishioners to attend and busy those meetings have regularly been.

Sadly, we saw the departure of two Councillors in September, both vital members of the team, Vicky Reeve and Sid Liddiard, both of whom felt that their time was right to move to other activities within our community. Needless to say their contributions were substantial and valuable. We wish them well.

Your Planning Committee has dealt with a wide variety of planning applications on sites throughout the Parish at its regular meetings. The former fire station site has building under way for, we understand, completion for January 2015, while planning consent for the land at 'August Field' in Charvil Lane has yet to see construction begin, though preliminary works are imminent. A substantial application for demolition of the existing house at 'Birchley' in Old Bath Road to be replaced by four large houses in back-land form was opposed by your Planning Committee who have arranged a 'listing' opportunity for us (arranged via Borough Councillor Mike Haines) before Wokingham's Planning Committee should the Local Authority unfortunately decide to approve the application. One that is plainly against National and their own planning policy.

With the approach of winter upon us, your Council have responded in considerable detail with its observations on and recommendations to

Wokingham Borough Council's 'Strategic Flood Risk Assessment'. A weighty document that seeks to not only outline measures in place to deal with flood problems but also to take into account the impact of flooding potential on future planning application decisions.

Being mostly on higher ground above river level, Sonning itself is not usually prone to flooding as the river rises. But due to our neglected systems of ditches, culverts and rainwater drains etc., we do suffer from 'flash flooding' in heavy and sustained downpours caused by our drains being unable to cope, simply because they are mostly blocked with an accumulation of debris. Some street drains are emptied but only the residual water above the rubbish seems to be taken up. Having had to deal with rainwater drainage system troubles in years past, it is plainly obvious that our Water Management systems just don't work properly due to plain old neglect. Hopefully, our Local Authority will take heed.

Thames Street residents will celebrate the news that Thames Water plc will shortly be replacing the old sewer pump in the little pumping station fronting the river behind the 'Great House' and installing two new, high capacity units, presumably a primary and a back-up. Their motivation being the enormous costs of emergency tankers that dealt with problems when the original pump failed. And, as a reminder, please, none of those non degradable 'wipes' in the system. They don't dissolve and jam up the pumps.

You may have noticed some white lines about 30cm long spray painted on our 'tarmac' pathways and pavements in Thames Street, Pearson Road, a few in Pound Lane and Sonning Lane. Wokingham's Highways Department told me (on September 29th) that they indicate where

repairs will be undertaken within “the next twenty eight days”.

About time too.

Thanks to everyone involved, the draft of our Sonning Conservation Area Assessment is now being edited, readied for presentation to Wokingham Borough Council, hopefully during November. This has been a lengthy process in the auspices of your Parish Council and the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society. Adoption by the Local Authority will generate a further layer of detailed planning/development guidance for our Conservation Area.

As you may know, Lafarge – Tarmac have secured permission for the next element of aggregate extraction alongside the Shiplake road amounting to 1.89 million tons. Your Parish Council is actively involved with operational briefings from the company to particularly ensure that their customers do not use our ancient (weak) bridge as an access to the treatment works.

Even though your Parish Council has steadfastly ensured that its operations in the public domain are open and, in current jargon, wholly transparent, it seems that irrespective of those endeavours we are faced with the almost ludicrous prospect of not being able to disclose the names of people who write or email to the parish council. Our published minutes will display a series of gaps, i.e. Mr/Mrs wrote to ask, etc.. A process that can so easily arouse rightful curiosity plus perfectly understandable suspicion and mistrust. Anyone who speaks at Parish Council or Committee meetings will still be minuted and their name recorded.

Thanks to countless hours invested by our dedicated ‘workforce’, Tracey Hicks, Vicky Reeve, Jeremy Gillmore and Sid Liddiard plus numerous contributors, the new Sonning Parish Council web site was launched during November.

Apart from its totally new look, our new Parish Council logo will hopefully catch your eye.

Thus far, 2014 has been yet another very busy and mostly enjoyable year for your Councillors, it’s not all been as pleasant as we would like but at least we achieved a lot. Even the wharf is now looking in vastly better shape following the

ravages during the Summer when the additional dolphin barriers were installed East of the brick bridge by a colossal tracked machine. King George’s Field looks an absolute picture, again following much time and effort, plus considerable expenditure. As Winter is upon us we trust that effective measures are in place to deal with the threat of flooding as experienced in the early part of this year. Poor old Oxfordshire District Council came in for plenty of criticism, let’s hope that their works are successful.

And as I always say, why not call in and see us sometime, once a month at the pavilion in King George’s field.



**Third Thames Bridge
by Trefor Fisher**

The good news is that there has been some limited progress on the Third Thames Bridge project which is obviously of concern to residents of Sonning.

The Third Thames Bridge Summit at Westminster, mentioned in the last newsletter, did go ahead on March 3rd. At least three further meetings have taken place since then – a Westminster Summit held on June 2nd, a Summit at the Wokingham BC offices held on July 11th and the latest on Friday 3rd October at the Oxfordshire County Council offices.

“High level strategic projection modelling” by Wokingham BC has indicated that there would be net benefits of a third river crossing for Reading, Maidenhead and Oxfordshire. However, it was felt that further work was required to determine the impact on specific roads, especially those in South Oxfordshire.

I contacted Oxfordshire Councillor David Nimmo Smith in September for his comments. He reported that the modelling to date had been inconclusive and that Oxfordshire CC does not see the economic benefit to them of a Third Bridge. He mentions that the Reading stance is that the “answer” is a Third Bridge. He asks, though, what the “question” is that they are trying to resolve?

I have also heard from Councillor Tony Page, Deputy Leader of Reading BC. He mentions that the most recent traffic modelling shows the residents of Sonning as the biggest beneficiaries of a Third Bridge. Councillor Page goes on to say

that both Oxfordshire CC and South Oxfordshire DC “are still unwilling to engage in detailed discussions with Reading and Wokingham. It’s about time that they recognised that the communities of South Oxfordshire stand to benefit as much as those south of the river”.

Reporting on the latest meeting, Rob Wilson, MP for Reading East said: “I’m pleased to report that we have again made important progress towards delivering the third Thames crossing that my constituents desperately need. Whilst the agreement to undertake a Full Model Upgrade will take time, the data collected will be absolutely imperative to providing an accurate traffic model, which in turn can determine all the potential impacts a third bridge will have on the wider local area.”

Talks have also taken place between the Oxfordshire and Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnerships regarding funding of this expensive project. Progress here was reported at the October meeting mentioned above.



Police & Security Update by Alex Evans

Over the Summer we have been very fortunate in that we have had no domestic burglaries and limited out building break-ins, sadly to do more with our Sports clubs and their equipment. There has also been a very limited amount of small crime such as mobile phone and car number plate thefts.

In terms of what activity we undertake as a village, we have several teams that support us so as to keep our village safe. They are:

Sonning Local Police Team

In terms of local policing in Sonning, our local support team is made up of the following:

PC Giles Murphy - Neighbourhood Officer, Jason Stavelly - Community Support Officer

Jackie Daniels - Community Support Officer, Christine Seal - Neighbourhood Watch Administrator

To support their efforts and aid in communicating with the residents of Sonning, the Thames Valley Alert system is an extremely useful vehicle.

The Thames Valley Alert System site provides an invitation for you to participate in the exchange of information with Thames Valley Police, Neighbourhood Watch and other community

groups. As a registered recipient you will not only benefit from two-way messaging but may also learn about those in your community subject of anti-social behaviour orders, help identify suspected or wanted criminals from the Gallery pages or learn about community groups, events or meetings in your area.

To learn more please go to -

<https://www.thamesvalleyalert.co.uk/>

Sonning Neighbourhood & Home Watch

Neighbourhood Watch is a voluntary network of schemes where neighbours come together, along with the police and local partners, to build safe and friendly communities. We have been an active member of the Neighbourhood Watch for some time and we are committed to becoming a Neighbourhood Watch Village.

There are 23 coordinators for Sonning with the main coordinators being Janet Fielder and Sue Bradley.

They are currently looking for coordinators for Charvil Lane, Hawthorn Way, Holmemoor Drive, Little Glebe, High Street, Pearson Road and Pound Lane North.

Please get in touch if you want to be a coordinator in any of these roads. It does not require too much of your time and you help to keep our village safe.

To learn more please go to -

<https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/>

Community Speed Watch

We are currently looking at getting a team together for The Community Speed Watch (CSW) Scheme which has been developed by the police to work with local communities to help reduce speeding. In simple terms, CSW works by having neighbourhood volunteers manning a roadside speed device to record a vehicle’s speed. The registration details of those vehicles recorded as speeding are noted and entered onto the TVP Speed Watch database, with repeat offenders being identified to Roads Policing for targeting. We have a small team already but we need more; please join us to stop speeders going through our village.

To learn more please go to -

<http://www.communityspeedwatch.co.uk/>

No Cold Calling Village

We are currently putting plans in place to make our village a “No Cold Calling” Zone. This zone is about local residents having the confidence to say “No” to uninvited salespeople or to warn rogue traders that are being watched and will be reported. The No Cold Calling Zones are a crime prevention initiative implemented by us but supported by West Berkshire & Wokingham Trading Standards and Thames Valley police and it is a brand new initiative. While Cold Calling is not illegal it may become illegal if we indicate to the caller that we do not wish to do business in this way and they fail to leave or return later.

A No Cold Calling Zone can help us feel safer by:

- Raising awareness of doorstep crime such as Distraction burglars, bogus callers, rouge traders, high pressure sales
- Empower residents to say NO
- Encourage reporting of these activities

As a member of this scheme, it is required that the majority of people say they want to support becoming a “No Cold Calling” zone. As such we will be passing around a voting card for your support, which will outline all the benefits, roles and responsibilities. You will all be pleased to hear that there will be no cost to us for joining this scheme as all the time will be by donated by volunteers and all the necessary paperwork, stickers, signs and press releases will be paid for by our local Trading Standards.

Finally, it is important to note that this initiative is not designed to prevent charity work, religious groups, political parties or regular rounds persons (milky) from doing their work

Alex’s Security Tips

Did you know you can elect not only to put your home phone on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) system but your mobile phone as well? This is really useful to stop those pesky phone cold callers and texters. More information can be found at www.tpsonline.org.uk



RECREATION AND ENVIRONMENT by Mena Pownall

It was lovely to see lots of use being made of King George’s field over the summer months. Repairs were made to the seat on the zip

wire and to some of the surface in the play area. We have also invested a substantial amount this year on maintenance of the field in order to provide good facilities for both the cricket and football teams.

It is always our aim to ensure that King Georges field is a safe and clean environment for all users and an area we struggle with is litter and dog mess. We realise that it is not only Sonning residents that use the park so no fingers are being pointed just a gentle reminder to ensure that everyone is aware of the problem.

We are currently looking into drainage solutions for the field to avoid the amount of water collecting at the bottom near the car park. Due to some helpful advice we hope to solve this ongoing problem in the near future.

A reminder that the outdoor fitness equipment is for use from age 7 years and up. Please ensure that children are supervised at all times.

Litter Pick - The dates for the next litter pick are 21st and 22nd March 2015.

FIRST AID SKILLS – We would like to bring your attention to a very informative website which gives both practical and interactive information about basic first aid skills. It also includes an interactive simulation of how to perform CPR. We would highly recommend that you take a look at this website as we can never know when we might be in a position to help family, friends or even a stranger in a crisis situation. Go to www.life-saver.org.uk

**Website – www.sonning-pc.gov.uk
by Tracey Hicks**

At the end of November, the old Sonning Parish Council website makeover was finally completed! Over the past year or so, the Web Team, along with local IT professional, Jeremy Gilmore, have been working hard on this upgrade and as you will see, it is now packed full of up to the minute information, news, views and **‘All things Sonning’!**

The ‘eye-catching’ and vibrant pages now hold a wealth of information, not only about the workings of Sonning Parish Council but about

Sonning itself; its history, amenities and facilities, details of local groups and organisations and much, much more. We couldn't have achieved this without help from many knowledgeable, local individuals and we would like to extend a warm 'thank-you' to everyone who has given their help and support freely over the last few months.

This is YOUR website too, so please do browse through the pages using the menus on the left hand side and if you think that anything is missing, or if you have any comments generally about how the website looks or works or if you have a view about the information that it provides, then we would love to hear from you.

We would especially like to hear from local groups and people organising community events, who would like to have their contact details added to the relevant pages. We very much hope that this will become a well-used and valued community resource.

You will notice that we have also taken this opportunity to give Sonning Parish Council an 'image makeover'. We are delighted to be able to unveil our new Sonning Parish Council logo, painted for the council by local artist and Bluecoat school teacher, Mr Richard Ennis. As you can see, the logo cleverly incorporates many of the key features for which Sonning is known and loved. We would like to extend our gratitude to Mr. Ennis for his assistance with this.



Our New Logo



Richard Ennis

As technology moves forward at an ever increasing speed, we were very aware that any new website should be easy to maintain and update, easy for the public to use and needed to be 'future-proofed', as much as possible. We hope that we have ticked all of those boxes and in addition, the website has been designed to be accessed from computers, tablets and smart

phones. So whether you are at home with your computer, or in front of your smart TV, or on a train with your smart phone, you should be able to keep in touch with what's going on in your Parish!

We look forward to hearing from you.

The Web Team

COUNCIL ALLOTMENTS LITTLE GLEBE

The Parish Council can offer one half and one full allotment to rent on the Little Glebe Allotments. These will become available from 1 January 2015 to allow time for new tenants to prepare the plots for planting in the spring. The tenancy agreement will come into effect on 6 April 2015 at a fee of £15 for a whole allotment and £7.50 for half an allotment. The Council can only offer up to one full allotment per tenant due to the current demand.

For further information please contact the Clerk, Lesley Bates on 01189697753 or e-mail clerk@sonning-pc.gov.uk

SONNING PARISH COUNCIL

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

Both meetings are open to the public.

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

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

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

SONNING PARISH COUNCIL CONTACTS:

Pat Doyle – Chairman	0118 9693605
Pat Doyle – Planning Chair	
Tony Farnese	07774 494610
Ian Runnalls	0118 9693389
Mena Pownall – Recreation Chair	0118 9698245
Trefor Fisher	07789 880072
Alex Evans	0118 9448348
John Hargrave	0118 9690236
Peter Morrison	0118 9697223
Lesley Bates - Clerk	0118 9697753
Email:-	clerk@sonning-pc.gov.uk
Website:-	http://www.sonning-pc.gov.uk



From Mike Haines the Borough Councillor for Sonning and Warren

Firstly I would like to thank Sonning Parish Council for giving me the opportunity to write for this publication and also to wish every resident a Happy Christmas and new year, hopefully this article will get to you in time.

As is customary at this time of year it is good to review some of the ongoing issues.

Funding, Wokingham Borough Councils funding is still in strong decline, we believe there is a need to save about £7 million a year for the next 3 years, some of this is made up in reductions of grant from Central Government, the other part by increases in the Council's obligations, for example increased Social care bills as the population ages. The Council still has a strong ambition for capital and infrastructure investments, the challenge being to generate future income streams for the Council that will support services valued by residents. One issue is that investment is often required up front at a time when the general funding resource is in decline.

A good example: Planners agreed Wokingham Housing Ltd's (WHL) planning application for a range of 68 modern homes, from one bedroom flats to four bed houses each with their own private amenity space or garden, as well as 91 parking spaces. With the 1960s blocks of flats now demolished WHL is due to start on the site next spring and the first residents it is hoped moving in autumn the following year. Phoenix Avenue Wokingham is the new name chosen by the public in a competition run in partnership with the Wokingham Times. The legal process to officially change the name has also started. The planning application agreed reflects several consultations and much public input, which among other things saw the final number of homes lowered and parking spaces increased.

During the second half of the year there have been big issues in Sonning Cutting where Network Rail planned to strip out the vegetation, I am very concerned about this. As a Council we are virtually powerless over Network Rail who hold something called "Permitted Development Rights", this allows them to do pretty much as they wish without recourse to Wokingham. The Council has been reminding Network Rail of their responsibilities to protect biodiversity under NERC 2006, this act places obligations on National bodies to protect the environment. We also escalated this to Theresa May MP, - I include her comments in full.

I share the concerns of many local residents about the removal of a large number of trees and bushes as part of Network Rail's work on the train line at Sonning Cutting. Although some de-vegetation work is needed to prepare the way for the electrification of the train line, local residents were not informed that this would be taking place on such a large scale.

I am concerned that the work not only ruins residents' visual amenity but also removes an important noise barrier and reduces security for properties backing onto the cutting. In addition it removes an important habitat for local wildlife. I took the matter up with Network Rail to request that they urgently consider alternative solutions, and that they provide better information to residents affected. In response, they agreed to halt the work pending a re-assessment and I am continuing to monitor this closely. – Theresa May MP

While thinking about trees, Sonning has many fine trees - First mounted in 1975, National Tree Week, which runs from November 29 to December 7, is the UK's largest tree celebration held annually and launches the start of the winter tree planting season. Wokingham Borough Council appreciates residents' enjoyment of the many trees that grow across the borough. It has supported the retention of prominent and significant trees by protecting them with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's). The council benefits from working with partners, including the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) as well as many other voluntary community groups. Some members of WDVTA, as well as contributing to the enormous task of finding, measuring and recording the position of over 7,000 veteran trees across the borough, also act as tree wardens. The Wokingham tree warden network is part of a national tree warden scheme run by the Tree Council and of which the borough council is a member.

I have to say that as I write this I am suffering from a cold and plan to shuffle off to my bed with a hot toddy, so if this is perchance briefer than usual there is a reason. As I started I hope you all have a great festive season and I commend Sonning Parish Council to you for the hard work that they do for example King Georges Field and the play area is kept in an immaculate and safe state.