

Sonning Parish Council Newsletter October 2026



From the Chairman

Welcome to our October 2026 edition of the Sonning Parish Council (SPC) newsletter. Sonning is now recovering from the long hot summer and enjoying this season of somewhat cooler but still very pleasant weather. We'll get that rain we need eventually, I'm sure. I have to (again) mention the planters at the entrance to Lige Way. We have had so many positive comments about them over these last few months. Many thanks, once again, are due to Ian Runnalls for his help in maintaining the planters.



Sonning Neighbourhood Plan (SNP)

The SNP is now into the final furlong of its long 6 year journey. By the time that you read this, it should have been ratified by Wokingham BC at their September meeting. The referendum is scheduled for Thursday 12th November. Do look out for notification in the coming weeks on voting process.

Recreation Update

King George V Field Update

We recently completed a number of maintenance improvements at King George V Field.

A professional inspection of the site's trees was undertaken to help ensure their ongoing health and safety. Following the inspection, the recommended remedial works have been completed.

Our work

Your parish councillors continue to work hard on your behalf on a whole range of matters that keep Sonning running and contribute to the beautiful parish that it continues to be. My thanks to all of them and to Lesley, our parish clerk. Their reports will continue below.

If you have any concerns or comments that the SPC might help you with, please feel free to contact me or Lesley, our Parish Clerk. If really interested, you may wish to join the SPC team as a councillor. Do get in touch with us if that is the case.

Trefor Fisher, Chair

trefor.fisher@sonning-pc.gov.uk 07789 880072

Lesley Bates, Clerk

clerk@sonning-pc.gov.uk 0118 9697753

In alphabetical order, our current Councillors (and their responsibilities) are:

Sanjeev Bhardwaj*	Recreation/ Environment
Leon Cook	
Richard Draper	Highways
Trefor Fisher	Chair SPC
Trudi Flanagan*	Finance
Chris John*	Website
Jackie Ruffle	Planning Committee Chair

[* indicates councillor is part of our IT group. All Councillors are members of SPC Planning Committee]

Please see individual reports below.

We have also repaired the leg press equipment in the outdoor gym, which is now back in service and available for residents to enjoy.



The Parish Council remains committed to maintaining King George V Field as a safe, attractive, and welcoming space for the whole community.

As always, if you have any questions, ideas, or feedback on recreation facilities in the parish, we would love to hear from you.

Sanjeev Bhardwaj (Parish Councillor (Recreation)): sanjeev.bhardwaj@sonning-pc.gov.uk

Planning Update

Planning is an area which has a degree of unpredictability about it as we generally don't know what is coming forward for consideration to SPC, as a consultee for most planning applications made to WBC.

Since our July newsletter we have had 8 planning applications to review and discuss, with parishioners providing their comments & views to enrich the SPC response to the consultation.

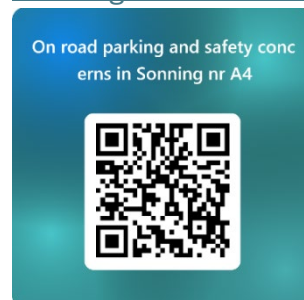
If you want to discuss a planning application with Sonning Parish Councillors, ideally before the SPC planning meeting, feel free to contact: Jackie Ruffle (Parish Councillor (Chair Planning Committee)): jackie.ruffle@sonning-pc.gov.uk. We will be happy to arrange a time to speak on the phone or to visit you to hear your thoughts and relay back through appropriate channels.

Survey to help further understanding of specific area concerns

SPC are keen to support ongoing provision of recreational/sporting facilities and in seeking solutions to allay and/or mitigate residents' concerns with developments in the parish. To help us better understand residents' concerns raised in relation to some facilities and potential options to address these, we have developed an online survey for completion. Whilst this is focused on the A4 side of the parish we are aware of similar concerns elsewhere. We will trial this initial survey with

view to expanding/repeating, so please bear with us if this doesn't cover your area at present. (Closing date 30/11/26)

[On road parking and safety concerns in Sonning nr A4 – Fill out form](#)



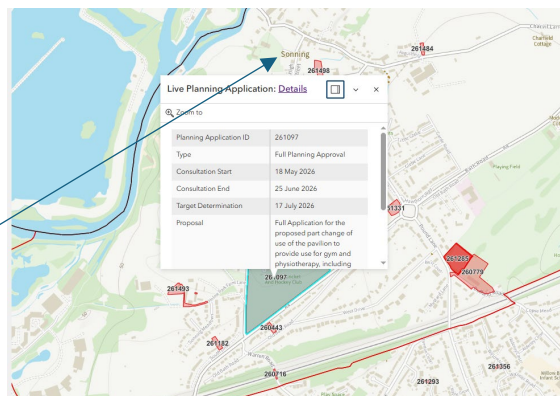


Keeping informed

You can keep an eye on latest applications via the interactive map

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d7dbd7abe271468ba132402bbbd0f53b>

Just type in your postcode and applications nearby can be seen on the map. To get access to all related documentation you just click on the blue 'Details' text in the pop-up.



Highways Update

Planned bridge closures

Wayne Smith, your Councillor for Thames ward, has asked Wokingham Borough Council for a full brief on Network Rail's planned closures of Butts Hill and Warren Road bridges.

Published dates seem to vary but indication is that within the coming weeks, Butts Hill Bridge is due to close for three months and Warren Road Bridge for 18 months. Diversions are planned along Western Avenue. The closures are expected to have a significant impact on residents in the Village.

A4 pedestrian crossing

Trefor has been working to resolve a visibility problem with the pedestrian crossing on the A4, west of Pound Lane.

When travelling westbound, drivers can clearly see all three sets of traffic lights. Travelling eastbound, only one set is clearly visible. We believe this needs to be corrected, but Wokingham Borough Council considers the lights to have been installed correctly and is not currently willing to make changes.



Speeding in the Village

We operate several Speed Indication Devices (SIDs) in Sonning, and volunteers also run Community Speedwatch sessions at different locations. Together, these provide us with a substantial amount of data.

Last month, I wrote to Yuan Yang MP to ask for her support in tackling speeding in the Village. **Around 8,000 vehicles use Pound Lane each day, and we estimate that 50–60% are travelling above the 20 mph limit.** The highest speed recorded so far was 75 mph, at school opening time.



Yuan Yang was very supportive and asked Wokingham Borough Council to look into the issue. The Council acknowledged that a vehicle travelling at 75 mph is clearly concerning and praised our Speedwatch and SID work, which helps educate drivers about their speed.

However, the Council says its own data shows that speeds are compliant and that no further action is required. I will continue to find ways to tackle the speeding problems we see on a daily basis.

Get in Touch

I would really value hearing from you. If you have any thoughts, concerns, or suggestions regarding highways in and around Sonning, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Richard Draper (Parish Councillor (Highways)): richard.draper@sonning-pc.gov.uk

Finance

The Community Infrastructure Levy (the 'levy') is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. It is an important tool for local authorities to use to help them deliver the infrastructure needed to support development in their area.

Part of the CIL money collected by WBC for new developments within the parish is then allocated to SPC. This money has been used to support infrastructure in the parish via numerous projects, some of the more recent one's being repair of the zip-wire and gym equipment in King George's field; provision of planters to secure safe space around the bus stop.

We are always open to hearing parishioners' ideas for appropriate use of this money to improve the wide range of infrastructure as allowed. This might include facilities such as play areas, open spaces, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities, and community safety facilities.

If you have ideas for consideration to help us deliver for Sonning we'd love to see you at a forthcoming meeting of the parish council. These are advertised on the parish noticeboards and usually held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month.

We would really value hearing from you. Trudi Flanagan (Parish Councillor (Finance)):
trudi.flanagan@sonning-pc.gov.uk

IT & Website update

Last quarter we committed to analysing how our website is actually being used before making further changes — and we are pleased to report that we have now introduced web analytics, giving us our first clear picture of how residents are engaging with sonning-pc.gov.uk.

What the data tells us

The headline finding is encouraging: overall website usage is trending upwards, which suggests that more residents are turning to the site as a source of information about the parish.



Looking at which pages residents visit most — beyond the home page — a clear picture emerges of what matters to our community:

- **Village History** — our heritage content remains one of the most visited sections, reflecting a strong interest in Sonning's past
- **Events and Walks** — practical, local content that helps residents make the most of village life
- **Annual Reports** — it is good to see residents engaging with the council's formal publications
- **Our Councillors** — residents are actively looking to find out who represents them
- **Food & Drink and News** — local information and current updates are clearly valued

Perhaps most notably, **our newsletter is now the most downloaded item on the site** — so if you are reading this, you are part of a growing audience.

This data is genuinely useful. It tells us where to focus our energy: keeping events, walks, and

news content current, making sure our councillor information is up to date, and continuing to publish the newsletter reliably.

What comes next

Armed with these insights, our priorities for the coming months remain:

- **Content refresh** — updating the site to reflect what residents are actually looking for
- **Accessibility** — our accessibility statement has been drafted and will be published on the site shortly
- **Mailing list subscriptions** — we are exploring ways for residents to opt in to direct updates, in compliance with data privacy requirements

We will continue to monitor usage and share what we learn. If there is something you would like to see on the website — or a way you would prefer to hear from us — please do get in touch. Your views directly shape how we prioritise this work.

[Sonning Parish Council : Home Page](#)

Please get in touch and let us know — we would love to hear from you
Chris John (Parish Councillor (Website)): chris.john@sonning-pc.gov.uk

(continued overleaf)





ROBERT PALMER'S ALMSHOUSE CHARITY

Registered Charity No. 205222



Almshouse Vacancy

A one-bedroom cottage is becoming available in the Robert Palmer's Almshouse cottages in Sonning village.

It is suitable for a single person or couple who have been living in one or more of the following parishes for the past two years and who meet the eligibility criteria:

- Sonning parish
- Eye & Dunsden parish
- Sonning Common parish
- Charvil parish
- Woodley town

Information on the Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity is available on our website

www.robertpalmers.org

If you meet the criteria (see [VACANCIES -](#)) and are interested in making an application please email the Clerk, Christina Goodacre, at clerk@robertpalmers.org for an application form.

Application Deadline 30 November 2026



WBC Councillors – Sonning Parish Update

Councillors for Thames Ward, covering Sonning, Charvil, Remenham, Wargrave and the surrounding villages of Crazies Hill, Kiln Green and Hare Hatch.

As borough councillors, we continue to work alongside Sonning Parish Council on issues affecting the village and

wider parish, from planning and development, protection of the Greenbelt, highways, drainage, weeds and litter. Residents' reports help us raise concerns with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and press for action.

Protecting green spaces and planning

Locally, there is significant concern about the level of development across the parish and ward, and the prospect of development on Greenbelt land as a result of a lack of an agreed Local Plan. This is an issue affecting the wider area and something we have been discussing with the community and local political leadership for a number of months.

Residents are right to be vigilant and keeping an eye on known sites across the ward. Local landowners have been putting forward sites through Wokingham Council's "call for sites" process but are also able to submit applications at any time until there is an agreed housing supply, meaning that communities are more exposed to speculative development, proposals and appeals.

We are clear that the Greenbelt and green spaces in and around Thames should not be built on simply because national housing targets have increased. The gaps between villages protects the separate identity and

character of our villages, prevents urban sprawl and provides valued countryside, wildlife habitats and green space that, once lost, cannot be replaced.

The Council must first exhaust brownfield and previously developed sites and demonstrate that any proposed development is genuinely necessary and can be supported by the roads, school places, GP provision, drainage, public transport and other infrastructure local communities need. This is something that Cllr Cook has pressed the council on in the chamber.

We will continue to monitor this closely, press the Council for openness about sites being considered, and keep residents informed of any formal proposal or consultation. Should an application come forward, it must be assessed rigorously against Greenbelt policy, infrastructure capacity and the views of the local community. Residents who have information or concerns about a potential site are welcome to contact us directly.

Duffield Road: upcoming closures

The traffic signals at the Duffield Road railway bridge are due to be renewed and upgraded, with work starting on Saturday 24 October 2026 and lasting two weeks.

During the first week, coinciding with the school half-term holiday, Duffield Road will be closed around the clock between Pound Lane and Highcliffe Close, although access for residents will be maintained. From Sunday 1

November to Friday 6 November, closures will be restricted to 9am–2.30pm.

Advance warning signs will be installed at least a week before work begins. Please allow extra time for journeys. Queries about the works can be submitted through the council's [highways enquiry form](#).

A4 traffic lights: pressing for a review

Following concerns raised by residents and Sonning Parish Council, Councillor Smith wrote to WBC about visibility of the A4 traffic lights following the removal of an additional signal on the eastbound approach.

The council says the remaining signals meet the required visibility standards and that removing the additional signal will reduce maintenance costs. It also

acknowledges concerns about the position of a weight-limit sign but maintains that visibility remains sufficient.

We do not consider this response adequately addresses the concerns raised. Residents need confidence that drivers can see and respond to the lights clearly. Cllr Smith is challenging the council's response, pressing for a further review and raising the issue with local press.



Butts Hill Road/Pound Lane bridge: pedestrian access secured

There is better news regarding the planned closure of Butts Hill Overbridge. Following residents' concerns, we raised the impact with WBC, particularly for people who rely on the bridge for walking, school journeys and access to local facilities.

The council subsequently contacted Network Rail's contractor and has confirmed that a safe pedestrian route

will remain open throughout the bridge closure. Restrictions will still be needed to allow the works to proceed safely, but people on foot will be able to pass through.

This is a welcome outcome that should reduce disruption for residents. Thank you to everyone who raised the issue.

Helping families find school places

At September's council meeting, Councillor Cook raised concerns about families in Thames whose children are still without a school place in this new school term. Parents have described difficulties finding vacancies across the Wokingham borough across a number of year groups and an inability to secure a place for their child at a viable school.

Cllr Cook asked the WBC Executive in the chamber why parents are not able to access a centralised system including neighbouring schools in Reading, South

Oxfordshire and Windsor and Maidenhead showing up-to-date vacancies across school year groups, helping them identify where to apply and reducing delays.

The Executive Member for Children's Services said that a centralised admissions system for WBC exists and that offering an available place at Oakbank fulfils the council's statutory duty. Cllr Cook will continue pressing for clearer information and practical support so that families can secure school places promptly and through the appeals process.

Overgrown vegetation along the A4

Keeping footways clear and accessible remains a concern along the A4 through Sonning and Charvil. At the council meeting on 17 September, Councillor Sam Akhtar highlighted the recurring problem of overgrown vegetation narrowing the usable footway. He asked how many cuts are scheduled each year and whether an additional cut could be arranged.

The response acknowledged the problem and the efforts of volunteers to keep vegetation under control. However, with the Executive Member for Highways absent, no details of the cutting schedule or commitment to an additional cut were provided. A follow-up answer was promised. We will continue pressing for a clear maintenance schedule to keep these routes accessible for residents

Thames Water and drainage

After repeated efforts to engage Thames Water, the company finally attended in the last week a number of leaks across the parish and issues with drainage. Cllr Smith visited sites with the Flood Service Manager, including Pearson Road. One issue already apparent was the volume of leaves blocking gullies. We secured a

visit from the road-sweeping team to clear a number of areas; some will need to be revisited because parked vehicles prevent access. There is clearly further work to do to keep drains clear, and we will continue to press WBC for action and updates.

Planning enforcement

A number of residents have contacted us about activity on building sites before permitted hours of operation, including Sonning Golf Course. If you see activity that you believe may be unauthorised, please let us know and

we will raise it with the Council's enforcement team on your behalf. As always, if there are issues you would like to flag to us and we can help in any way, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sam Akhtar

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Leon Cook

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Wayne Smith

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