

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Issue 61 • Winter 2019

SONNING NEEDS YOU!

Mike Hart, Chairman

Representatives from Sonning Parish Council and the Society met James McCabe, a senior planning officer, and his team at Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) at the end of September to inform them of the intention to draft a Sonning Neighbourhood Development Plan (SNDP). WBC assured us that they would support this initiative and provide assistance. They also confirmed that there is Basic Grant Funding to contribute towards the associated costs.

Whilst this initiative relates only to Sonning, the Eye & Dunsden Parish Council has also committed to preparing a separate NDP therefore our two communities will be embarking on parallel courses.



As mentioned in the last issue of *Bridge* the SNDP is the best tool we have to combat the worst excesses of unwanted development, particularly in view of the Local Plan Update. It gives us an equal voice in determining where and what form any development should take. Without it we will have minimal control over the future design of our neighbourhood.

The next step is to kick off the SNDP in a

PUBLIC MEETING
to be held in
Pearson Hall
at 7.30pm on
Tuesday 18th February

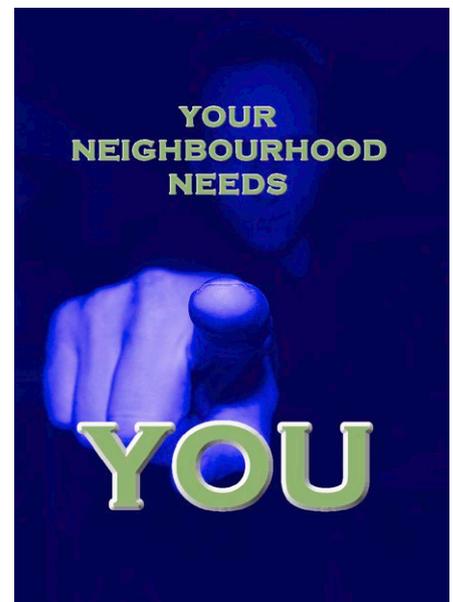
Members of the interim joint SNDP steering committee, drawn from SPC and the Society, will address the meeting, the objectives of which are as follows:

- To inform the residents of Sonning what is involved in a Neighbourhood Plan and why it is important for Sonning to have one
- To explain how the SNDP must tie in with WBC's Local Plan and to summarise what is included in the Local Plan Update, now in its consultation phase
- To outline a schedule for drafting the SNDP
- To pinpoint critical aspects which need to be addressed
- To seek comments from residents
- To seek volunteers to join the SNDP committee in order that it is fully representative of all Sonning residents, organisations (including schools) and businesses.

This last point is most important. We should not underestimate the amount of work that will be required and although we have a nucleus of people keen to see this through we will need help from the community.

We will have a complex document to put together. This can only be produced following surveys of the residents and businesses as well as discussions with as many locals as possible. All to ensure that we take everybody's views into consideration. We're eager to encourage residents to get involved but particularly any people with architectural skills or experience with planning policies.

Flyers will be delivered to all residents prior to the meeting with more information on the timing and agenda for the meeting.



Bridge is the newsletter of the
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

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At some point it had become impractical and the two areas were separated and became self-contained (possibly for security). The cottage is now let very successfully and most tenants remain for several years. Similarly the old post office was converted to provide facilities for the hairdressers and Natasha has operated her business now for many years. Without the income from these two sources the hall could not cover the outgoings which become more and more expensive every year.

Pearson Hall has always been the central meeting place in the village and now has a variety of different users. During the 1930s the Village Players put on many successful productions, there were social evenings and many existing clubs and societies were using the hall for meetings and events. During the Second World War the hall was requisitioned by the British Army together with Berkshire County Council (BCC). It was necessary to install blackout curtains and BCC had been pleased to pay half the costs.

There was a welcome resurgence in activities during the early 1960s and the Management Committee felt it was time to invest in redecoration, a new kitchen, toilet and stage facilities. It was envisaged that these improvements would attract private functions and village activities would increase. The cost of these internal improvements was approximately £1600 (1997). Happily, the hall was found to be structurally sound and in good repair. The Fire Brigade Trust made a contribution of £200 and nearly £500 had been raised at a Flower Arrangement Exhibition and the Village Produce Show (as it was known then) and the extra money had been raised by borrowing £200, interest free, from four people in the village.

In the 1990s the Management Committee, under the chairmanship of Bob Noble,

decided on a more adventurous scheme. This involved removing the men's toilets at the front of the hall and incorporating it in a new meeting room on the land to the side of the hall with male and female toilet facilities, rebuilding the kitchen and extending the structure to include disabled toilet facilities and a new changing/storage room. A huge fundraising exercise was undertaken after Lottery Funding was obtained on the understanding that 50% of the funding was provided from local contributions. This remarkable achievement was only made possible by the dedication of the Trustees, particularly Bob Noble and Michael Forrest.

"All brought the community together in this wonderful and historic village hall"

And so into the late 90s with sell out productions by the revived (1977) Village Players, and then headlong into the turn of the century. Helen Clarke's famous Burns Nights, with her wonderful singers and Dan Andrew's professionally trained Scottish Dancers (including Jonathan Crump and his memorable kilt), Cathy Haille's review, Suna and Later, a brilliant and historical (not to say hysterical) history of Sonning from Sunna to the present day (a sell out and well worth repeating), street parties (using the hall's facilities and earmarked in case of inclement weather). All brought the community together in this wonderful and historic village hall.

The Pearson Hall Social Committee continue to raise funds for items that might not generally be provided by the Management Committee and their famous Christmas Suppers are a sell-out. With David Duval's unique Christmas Carols, Lynn and Andrew's brilliant menus, what's not to like and

they continue to be the highlight of the hall's calendar.

After some consideration the Management Committee agreed to install a clock to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of H M Queen Elizabeth, which took place in June 2012. The chosen clock was made by Smith of Derby and was of high quality as befitted the dedication. It was anticipated that the siting, on the very busy Pearson Hall, would allow it to be seen and appreciated by the community as a whole and by the numerous users of the hall. It would be an outstanding, permanent memorial to H. M. the Queen. On October 19th of 2012 the clock was unveiled by the Hon. Mrs Theresa May (MP). The clock remains a focal point to this day.

And so life goes on, nothing is 'new' each generation inventing 'new' ways of doing things but actually repeating events that have been held for over a century. Today you can enjoy art classes, become an active member of the W.I., play table tennis, keep fit and learn yoga all within this lovely venue. The recent purchase of a projector and new sound system mean that the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society's monthly Film Nights have taken off, showing the most recent and sought-after films. The help of the Fire Brigade Trust, who made it possible to purchase these and other items, is much appreciated.

Finally, without the hard work and dedication, of the Management Committee (Trustees) both current and past, none of this could take place.

Photos: The black and white one is from some time in the late 1960s; the colour one is more recent and shows the memorial clock.

