

# bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

Issue 62 • Summer 2020

## Life in the Time of Coronavirus

Jeremy Gilmore

We start this extended edition of *Bridge* with an apology for its inescapable delay. *Bridge* was put to one side during the lockdown partly because it was unreasonable to ask people to hand deliver it and partly due to limited resources. Also, under the helm of two parish councillors, a group of residents banded together in order to organise support for the elderly and vulnerable in the parish. So resources were allocated elsewhere. More of that on page 6.

In this extended edition we are publishing the articles written for issue 62 before Covid-19 precautions were the new norm as well as some that have been compiled since.....



### NDP for Sonning

Let's take you back to February when public gatherings were permitted and 120 members of the parish squeezed into Pearson Hall for a public meeting to discuss the **Neighbourhood Development Plan**.

The audience was definitely engaged with the issue and a significant group of people registered their interest to help. The presentation and notes from the evening are available to view on the website: [sonning.info](http://sonning.info)

Work on the NDP paused during lockdown but now that restrictions are easing we are pulling out all the stops. Life goes on! The recent planning application for 57 properties south of the A4 (amongst others), on top of the government's recent announcements relaxing the planning regulations, means that an NDP will be more important than ever.

Currently the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group comprises eight people drawn from the Sonning Parish Council and members of the Society. We would welcome help from all parts of the community and in September will be contacting those people we know are interested. So if you haven't already done so please let us know if you'd like to be involved.

The next step is to start "Building the Evidence Base". Basically this means that we have to assess the landscape, its geology and ecology; identify what defines the character of Sonning Parish and what it's used for; and look at the building design, including our historic sites. Then we get to say what we, as a village, would like to see developed in the future. We will be able to identify which areas should be enhanced and, equally importantly, which should not be available for development. We also get a say in what sort of buildings we feel should be allowed in the village so that they improve rather than spoil our environment.

The "we" in the above paragraph means all of us, the residents of Sonning. We have to form a

consensus and put together an NDP that will be welcomed by the majority.

It is important that we also take account of neighbouring parishes and their plans, to that end there is already a good working relationship with the Steering Group for Eye & Dunsden.

A lot is happening around us. WBC's Local Plan will shortly be out for final consultation. Reading's new Transport Strategy, to create a net zero carbon Reading by 2030, will include a clean air zone, road user charging, a third Thames bridge and a new north orbital route. South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan is also being finalised. It includes the fact they 'recognise the ambition of neighbouring authorities for additional connections across the River Thames', although few of the affected parishes are in favour.

Before anyone gets too excited as regards the possibility of a third bridge relieving Sonning's roads, know that it is planned to only be for public transport and a segregated cycle/walking route.

The next steering group meeting is scheduled for early September. If you would like to be involved in this important project please contact me using [jeremy@sonning.info](mailto:jeremy@sonning.info).

Bridge is the newsletter of the  
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# Road Safety in Sonning

Jeremy Gilmore & Trefor Fisher

The tragic accident causing the death of a cyclist on Thames Street in June has highlighted the fact that our roads are a cause for concern.

Sonning Parish Council (SPC) published their Road Safety Report in June - there's a link on the front page of their website. The article is comprehensive so we won't repeat it here but it is certainly worth reading.

Road safety affects us all and the Society has offered to help by establishing a joint working group with SPC. Trefor Fisher (chair of the Highways Group) welcomed the alliance and we recently met for an informal (and socially distanced) chat about some of the issues.

### Traffic Volumes

The data from the device (officially a SID - speed indicating device) monitoring traffic on Pound Lane show, unsurprisingly, that the level of vehicle movements dropped from an average of about 26,000 vehicles every week down to about 7,000 during lockdown. However the volumes increased steadily from the start of May and had returned to just below their "normal" value by mid June. SPC will continue to monitor the situation on various roads around the village.

### Speeding Vehicles

60-70% of vehicles exceeded the speed limit of 20mph but not by a huge amount. The average speed of all vehicles is just under 25mph. Vehicle speeds on our roads are above this figure in the early hours but from 8am through to 10pm few people exceed 25mph, no doubt partly due to the volume of traffic.

Like much of the UK, we have noticed an increase in overall vehicle speeds during and after lockdown. In Sonning there are a small number of extreme transgressions with speeds in excess of 60mph but these generally occur overnight.

### Pollution from Traffic

We have all seen the "switch off your engine" signs at the Twyford crossroads and it felt inevitable that Sonning would suffer similarly. The levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sup>2</sup>) are monitored at Sonning Bridge and also mid-way along Thames Street.

It is good to find that, over the last few years, levels appear to be dropping ever so slightly. In 2018 NO<sup>2</sup> at the bridge was 22µgms/m<sup>3</sup>, and up on Thames St 28µgms/m<sup>3</sup>. This compares with 25µgms/m<sup>3</sup> and 31µgms/m<sup>3</sup> respectively in 2014.

(The official UK "Air Quality Objective" is an NO<sup>2</sup> level of 40µgms/m<sup>3</sup> as an annual mean, but

we shouldn't be complacent.)

There is much to be done but little can change quickly. It takes about 18 months to certify a member of the public for Neighbourhood Speed Watch, so unfortunately that is a long term project.

We can help now on the HGV front by sending any photos of lorries contravening the bridge's weight limit to SPC. (But not while you're driving please!)

The oft-mentioned and always controversial Third Bridge has re-surfaced as part of the North Reading Orbital Route. But it seems clear that even if this was to be built (and that's a big IF) the bridge would be to promote public transport, cycling and walking routes.

The main task of the working group will be to keep pressure on WBC's Traffic Management section to make improvements. So do let them know your views. Currently WBC are doing a review on extending the 20mph zones, up to the roundabout with the A4 on Pound Lane and as far as Blue Coat School on Sonning Lane. And there is talk of reducing the limit on Charvil Lane to 30mph. Small steps...









