

## Sonning Developments

Jeremy Gilmore, Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

I know. No important surveys for ages and now two in quick succession: The 2021 Census and, more importantly for residents, the Questionnaire for our Sonning Neighbourhood Plan (SNP).



By the time you read this you will have dealt with the census so now you can concentrate fully on helping to decide what is best for the future of Sonning.

We are hoping that a paper copy will be delivered to your door in April although you will also be able to complete it by going online to [sonning.info/snp](https://sonning.info/snp).

I have no doubt that I am preaching to the choir if I remind you how important it is that as many people as possible complete this questionnaire. We'd like to know the views of every Sonning resident, be they *Nimbys* or *Builders* or everyone in-between.

I'm sure we all accept that there has to be a certain amount of new

housing in our future but at least if we have a Plan in place we can decide what form that will take. Be it starter homes or high priced "retirement" flats!

Contrary to some views we still live in a democracy and every resident's opinion will be taken into consideration as we start drawing up the plans.

We also need to be aware that, with the withdrawal of plans for the garden town at Grazeley, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) are revising their Local Plan Update (LPU)). Development sites that had been discounted in 2019 are very much back on the table, plus a few more.

Back in 2019 when the LPU was in the news, various emails went out asking residents to give WBC their views. People were asked to go to the website and answer a few questions. I was surprised to see that there were only ten responses from the residents of Sonning:

Parish	#Responses	% of Total
Charvil	184	32.5
Earley	15	2.7
Sonning	10	1.8
Twyford	48	8.5
Woodley	14	2.5

Part of a Table from  
'WBC's Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 -  
Report on Initial Consultation Outcomes'  
showing some of the responses to the  
Local Plan Update consultation by parish.

Does this mean that everyone in Sonning is quite happy for WBC

to choose where to place any new developments? Charvil, who were concerned about the farmland in their area being turned into a housing estate, produced 184 responses. Not all of their responses disagreed with the proposal - so it's wrong to say that this type of consultation is only for Nimbys - but at least people gave an opinion.

Sonning residents missed the opportunity to make their views known. Charvil residents were better mobilised to respond probably because of the extensive development that was being proposed in their parish compared with the relatively small amount in Sonning. But things change and we may be next in the firing line.

So when it comes to the SNP Questionnaire, and also the second round of the LPU consultation from WBC, please please take a democratic moment and make your voice heard.

Ok, rant over. My apologies to all those of you who do voice your opinions. I'm merely a newcomer to Sonning (we moved here only 16 years ago) but I do kinda like the village and want to try and ensure that it develops in a way that is best for those of us on this side of the Thames and our neighbours in Sonning Eye.

Bridge is the newsletter of the  
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

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**Mike Hart, Chairman**

Looking slightly further ahead, we intend to organise a summer garden party this year. Tentative arrangements are in hand for it to be held on Sunday 4th July, in the garden of Acorns, 2 West Drive, courtesy of Mary and Gordon Jones.



# Charvil Lakes

Lesley Heaney, Membership Secretary

*I am sure that during lockdown many of you, like myself, have found new places to walk and enjoy the lovely countryside which surrounds us. I have walked more around Charvil Country Park and discovered the 75 hectares of former gravel pits (now restored lakes) and remnant pastureland, which borders the River Loddon between Charvil and Twyford.*

*I was surprised to learn that the lakes are named, Canberra, Orrell and Haupt and when I began to research this, I uncovered an interesting part of our local history.*

*The lakes were adopted by Wokingham District Council about 10 years ago, who asked residents to suggest names. Mr John Baker made the suggestion and provided the history behind his choice.*

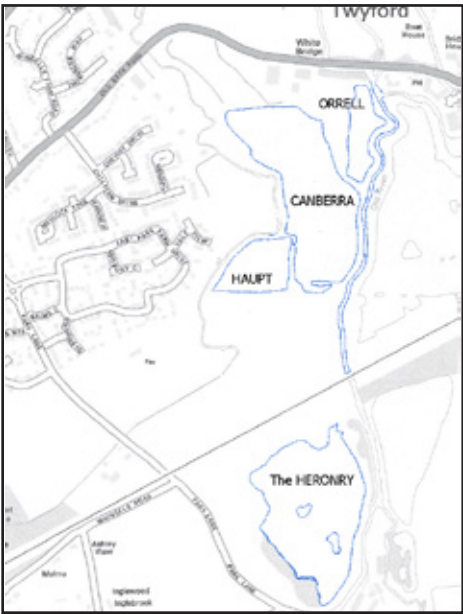
*With John's kind permission I have reproduced his report here.*

On 27th January 1953 local residents had a narrow escape when a twin jet-engined Canberra light bomber plunged into the side of White Bridge on The Old Bath Road opposite Goodey's scrapyard. The crash caused a crater 25 feet deep by 40 feet across and brought down telephone wires, which cut communication between Reading and Twyford. The wreckage was spread up to a quarter of a mile away.

Mr Eric Goodey was standing at the entrance to his yard when he watched the aircraft corkscrew into the ground. Mrs A Pearce, the licensee of The Waggon and Horses, heard the aircraft pass overhead then upon running outside saw the smoke from the crash site.

An inquest was convened at The Almshouses, Twyford on 4th February and one witness, P.C Lovegrove, who was off duty at the time, reported hearing a boom followed immediately by the noise of a jet travelling at speed. From out of the clouds he saw an aircraft in a vertical dive going very fast. Mr Sidney Moreland saw a similar sight and when the aircraft hit the ground, he reported seeing a great flame shoot up and the plane blowing to pieces.

The aircraft concerned was a new English Electric Canberra B2, which was collected from the manufacturers just 11 days before the crash. It was based at Abingdon and on the fateful day the crew were Master Pilot Stuart



Left: Officials examine the crater left by the crash

Top: An English Electric Canberra B2 jet aircraft

Right: Master Pilot Stuart Cardy Orrell 1920-1953



Continued on page 7 →



difficult to choose what to stock. In the end I took a piece-meal approach, starting with products which offered a long shelf-life - household cleaning products for example - and built from there. Once a few items were on the shelves it became easier to visualise what was 'missing' and I could then browse the numerous catalogues and websites of my suppliers to find what was needed.

As the August bank holiday approached, the pressure began to mount. Would the shop be ready in time? My dear friend Sally-Ann, who I have known since our days at Caversham Primary School, offered her assistance in preparing the deli and willingly set to task in labelling all the products.

The August long weekend was just days away. A brand-new point-of-sale system had been installed and I spent several very late nights away from the hustle and bustle of the daytime activities ensuring that each item we stocked was added to the system along with the bar code and pricing. A large order of fresh fruit and vegetables arrived at the shop, along with supplies of French bread and fresh milk. Cakes were iced. We were ready to open the doors.

Then, at the eleventh hour, the laptop which ran our point-of-sale developed an issue and kept shutting down. I frantically called in the help of my son, a recent graduate in Computer Science, and after some diagnostic testing he discovered that the battery was not holding a charge and was constantly being drained. A call to the system provider ensured that a replacement laptop would be dispatched but, no matter how many strings they tried to pull, it wouldn't arrive until the Tuesday after the long weekend. I was distraught. It was to be a beautiful weekend in terms of the weather and with funds running low, I needed to start trading.

We had bread and cakes to sell - lots of them - and so with barely 24 hours to go, I decided to switch focus once again. The plan was to remove the large front windows on the tearoom side of the building,

and with a long table we could set up a 'pop-up' display and introduce our products from there. The only problem was that the tearoom was a building site, at best! Walls were waiting to be plastered, rubble from the garden was being stored in large bins and there were various tools and bags of building materials piled high.

We set to however, and within a few hours the room had been transformed - or at least the part of the room that was visible from the window. Strategic placement of folding screens, a free-standing cupboard and a large sheet of fabric hid the worst. Sally-Ann's extraordinary creative talents were then put to good use in setting out the display with the use of vintage tablecloths and tea sets and a willow hamper. It looked beautiful!

It was an early start the following morning as I set up for our first day of trading. With the help of my daughter, a post on social media allowed us to introduce the cakes we would be selling and that we were open for business. The cakes and bread sold well all weekend and both the support and feedback I received was hugely encouraging.

With the long weekend over though, it was back to working through the challenges of getting the deli open with the added concern that I now had a large quantity of fruit and vegetables that needed to be sold.

The replacement laptop arrived and was installed; June set to baking more cakes to fill the chiller and, whilst I rearranged products on the shelves to get the 'right feel', Sally-Ann patiently relabelled the products that I had moved. The



decision was made to open on the Friday so that we had a day to 'test' the operation of the deli before the weekend and smooth out any issues that arose.

It was a quiet opening but successful. Many visitors were curious to see the work that had been done and to see what products were on offer. I welcomed their comments, many of whom remembered the shop when it was a tearoom - some even recalled it from when it was run by Bert the Butcher. I have since been given a photo of the shop when it was 'The Tea Cosy' and it is now hanging in the deli beside the chiller.

Meanwhile work was still continuing in the tearoom. We had stripped back the tired carpet and the underlying laminate flooring to discover a beautiful - albeit dirty - red-tiled floor. An acid wash soon brought the tiles back to their former glory, marred only by the two large concrete areas that had obviously been added in the recent history of the building. I looked at every means possible of dealing with the ugly concrete and in the end settled on employing a heritage painter who used his skills



Bert Huggins and Phyllis Wright in the doorway of Bert's family butcher's shop. c. 1949

## Open All Hours cont.

to paint matching 'tiles' onto the floor. The results are outstanding and you would be hard-pressed to distinguish genuine tiles from painted concrete.

At the same time, the floor to the tearoom toilets was being re-tiled. I had chosen a mosaic tile with a Victorian feel, one that would complement the original tiles in the tearoom, and although covering a relatively small area, this proved to be a huge task. First of all the tiles had to be laid out in the correct pattern, ensuring they were visually 'in line' with some very uneven walls. Just the setting out of the tiles, took the tiler a full day and a half. Then each tile sheet had to be lifted before being reset with adhesive and grouted. The tiles themselves were costly, and the labour more than doubled that cost but the results were well worth it.

In early November, I invested in a coffee machine. It would eventually be needed for the tearoom and, with the Covid restrictions that were in place, I felt it might be a useful addition to be able to offer takeaway drinks. Little did I know how vital that machine would become to my business.

On the day that it was installed, I arranged for all the staff to receive training and, with varying degrees of confidence and competency, we spent the next few days honing our barista skills. With the assistance of those members of staff who had some experience in these matters, it wasn't long before we were able to begin serving delicious coffees to our customers to accompany the cakes already on offer.

Meanwhile, finishing touches were being put to the tearoom with bench seating, framed prints, and some antique mirrors. I was very kindly given a beautiful large mirror which fits the rear wall perfectly – in fact, it looks as though it were made for the space. Recipes had been tested and menus had been decided. But then, just as we were set to open, we suddenly found ourselves moving from Tier 2 into Tier 3 and, before we knew it, Tier 4. Lockdown! It was immensely disappointing, and so close to Christmas, but there was nothing to be done other than accept the government's advice and the restrictions imposed upon us.

We wait now with hope that the coming weeks will bring an

easing of restrictions. Under the phased approach that has recently been outlined, it seems we will be able to accommodate customers with seating in the outdoor space initially before fully opening the tearoom at some point during the summer months. Until then we continue to provide coffee, tea, cakes and freshly-made sandwiches for takeaway; pizza nights on Friday and Saturday evening; and of course freshly-baked French loaves and pastries each day.

*Writing this article has given me the opportunity to reflect on what I have achieved in the past year, but of course it would have been utterly impossible without the assistance of others. I am immensely grateful to my brother, Chris, for all his hard work; for his encouragement when things seemed overwhelming; for his humour and his never-failing 'can do' attitude. Thanks too, to my incredible team of staff who support my vision - and often find ways to improve it! - and to June who, not only bakes amazing cakes but, has been the metaphorical rock to which I have so desperately clung on many a storm-filled day.*

## Some Q & A

Have you ever done anything like this before?

Well, sort of. I have a (very) long career history in customer service which has stood me in good stead and, for a number of years, I ran my own online business in Canada importing British snack food and selling it to the ex-pat community. With that I learnt about stock control; dealing with government agencies; and that chocolate left in the sun on a hot day is unlikely to sell.

## Why did you call it 'The Village Hamper'?

I wanted to give the idea of a local place to go for food supplies and the word 'hamper' conjures that up for me. Plus it links into my hobby which is basket-making - many of the baskets you will see in the shop have been made by me from willow grown at my allotment. The name also lends itself to being able to market food hampers for events such as Henley or Ascot, once Covid restrictions permit.

## Can I have your recipe for....?

Hmm, I'm afraid not.

## How do you choose the products you sell?

I aim to stock essential items that you might be missing from your cupboard but at the same time offer something a little bit 'special'. This is where manufacturers are key. For example, our Stokes range of products offer a selection of jams and sauces that are simply delicious – their English mustard takes it to a whole new level!

I also try to stock items with the environment in mind, aiming to reduce packaging with our bulk dispensers – bring in your own container to fill with rice, pasta or grains – whilst also considering the needs of dog-walkers, boaters and visitors to the village.

## When will the tearoom open?

That is up to Boris. As soon as restrictions are eased on meeting indoors we will be ready to showcase our lovely tearoom but in the meantime we will open the rear patio area for outdoor seating once permitted to do so. I look forward to seeing you there.

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If it's not tempting fate we're also pleased to let you know that the Society AGM and Supper is planned for Saturday November 20th.

We have a special relationship with the BGT and any of our members are allowed to attend their meetings. Their next Zoom talk is on 16th April "Gardening Across the Pond" where Richard Bisgrove will be discussing the horticultural knowledge of the settlers in Virginia up to present day prairie gardens. See [www.berkshiregardenstrust.org](http://www.berkshiregardenstrust.org)

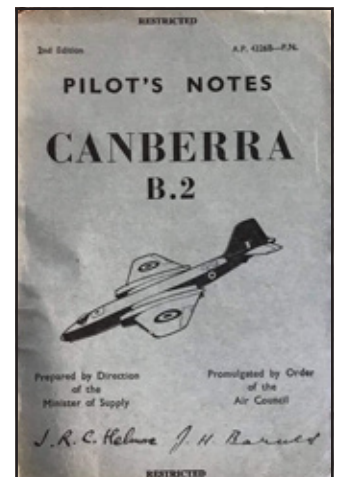


Nothing concrete to report just yet but members might like to know that there are groups on both sides of the Thames who are currently looking at ways of improving the Broadband connectivity to our homes. Sonning Eye is fortunate in that they are classed as a rural area and might be able to apply for a special voucher scheme to achieve the government's view of a digitally connected Britain. Those in Sonning will have to rely on the offers from providers, the hope of added government funding or community self-funded partnerships with the infrastructure providers.

**....continued from page 3**

Cardy Orrell aged 32 and Navigator William Gordon Haupt aged 26. Orrell was an experienced pilot and on this flight, there had been no communications to indicate the aircraft was in trouble. The Coroner returned a verdict of accidental death due to the disintegration of the plane. RAF documents give the cause of the accident as obscure, there was no evidence of a technical fault and weather conditions were good. The pilot was experienced and fit, and this left the Commander in Chief with insufficient information to establish a cause and the case was closed.

During my research I have been told that this is not the only unexplained crash of a Canberra. Over the years a number of them “fell out of the sky”. The cause was eventually traced to “runaway trim”, where the aircraft would suddenly pitch nose down and dive at a very high speed into the ground. With hindsight, this would appear to be the most probable cause of the accident in 1953, which could have easily devastated Charvil.



John A Baker

### Daily Mirror Report from 28th January 1953

Master Pilot Stuart Cardy Orrell was buried in Spring Garden Cemetery (also known as New Cemetery) Abingdon  
Navigator Sergeant William Gordon Haupt is buried at Brookwood Military Cemetery, Woking.



Please note these events are what we hope will take place but they are subject to whatever Covid restrictions are in place at the time. Check our website for up-to-date information.