

Neighbourhood News

Jeremy Gilmore, Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Towards the end of May the Sonning Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) team delivered over 600 questionnaires, one to the door of every resident in Sonning. We asked you for your thoughts, not just about the future development within our parish but also what you value about living in Sonning; what elements you appreciate; and which aspects of living here you'd like to see improved.

We had a resounding response. We received one (and sometimes more than one) completed questionnaire from over 53% of the households! In all a total of 364 forms. So a hearty

THANK YOU

from all of us. Particularly since we appreciate that it probably took slightly more than the advised 20 minutes to complete 😊.

We now have a massive task in front of us. It starts with transferring the paper information to a spreadsheet format but then there's analysing the results and deciding the best way forward so as to please the majority. The end result, we sincerely hope, will be a plan that will appeal to all Sonning residents and will be used to decide future development in the parish.

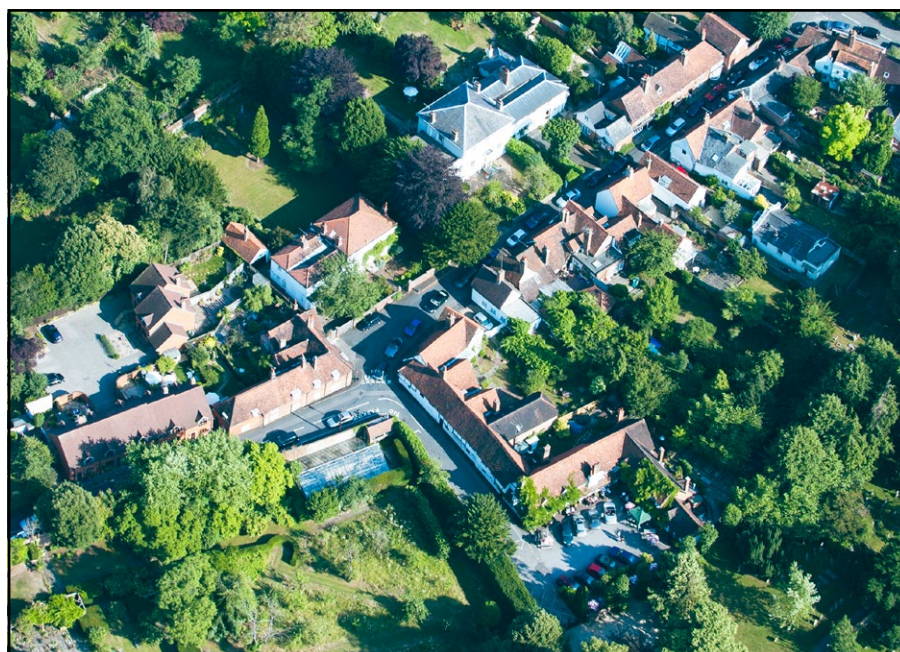
It would be premature to comment on any of the findings just yet but we have been very pleased to see that the majority of respondents appeared to have genuinely considered the questions and their answers. It wasn't just a case of quickly ticking the strongly disapprove box every time.

One hot topic that will not be a surprise though, is the amount and speed of the traffic that comes

through the village and causes congestion as well as being a danger to cyclists and pedestrians. A large number of the questionnaires voiced this concern. Our Society spans the Thames and since the traffic affects both Sonning and Sonning Eye you can be assured that we will be combining our efforts on this front. Although a Neighbourhood Plan cannot in itself provide the solution it can be a means of highlighting these types of issues and we will be looking carefully at what, if anything, can be done to alleviate the situation.

Local Plan Update (LPU)

The SNP questionnaire referred to the sites that currently appear on Wokingham Borough Council's LPU. We wanted to make everyone aware of all these sites but it is important to note that they are still open to investigation by WBC and some may well be removed (as happened last time around), so they are by no means a done deal. The Society's Planning & Traffic Panel is keeping a careful eye on progress and will let us know when the public consultation will happen and we are allowed to register our views.



Bridge is the newsletter of the
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

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web: www.sonning.org.uk

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Mike Hart, Chairman

A photograph of a brick building with a clock tower, identified as the Old Rectory in the text. The building is made of red brick with a dark tiled roof. A large arched window is visible on the left. A clock face is mounted on the tower. A paved path leads towards the building, and a red telephone box is visible on the right. A large tree is on the far right.

Looking ahead to when we hope that everything will be back to (almost) normal, Pearson Hall is taking an increasing number of bookings from individuals booking parties, and organisations such as the WI and the Sonning Art Group planning to resume their regular activities. The Pearson Hall Management Committee is able to respond to these booking through its online booking system and wifi-enabled electronic door lock which allocates hirers a unique 4-digit code to match the time of their booking. Anyone interested in participating in these events or hiring the hall can see the bookings that have been made and the available slots on the calendar in the “Make a Booking” page of the www.pearsonhall.org website. For everyone going to the hall the website is also a useful place to discover what regular and special events are scheduled.


A wooden outdoor table is set for a picnic on a grassy lawn. The table is covered with a blue patterned tablecloth. There are two place settings visible, each consisting of a white teacup, a saucer, and a yellow napkin. A white teapot is also on the table. The background shows a green lawn and a wooden chair.

Select month to change

2021

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Calendar View | [Switch to List View](#)

 Please see the *How to Book* page regarding Covid-19 precautions.

Displaying: All Rooms

- Main Hall
- Multi-Room Booking

● Main Hall ● Committee Room ● Stage ● Kitchen

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1 No Bookings New Booking	2 12:30-16:00 Sonning Art Group Meeting New Booking	3 9:00-12:15 Dancercise 18:30-23:30 Quiz Night New Booking
4 No Bookings New Booking	5 18:45-20:00 Meeting 19:45-22:00 Bel Canto Choir Rehearsal New Booking	6 10:15-11:45 QJ Gong-Stand Still Get Fit New Booking	7 16:15-18:00 Dancercise 20:00-22:00 table tennis New Booking	8 No Bookings New Booking	9 12:30-16:00 Sonning Art Group Meeting New Booking	10 9:00-12:15 Dancercise New Booking
11 No Bookings New Booking	12 19:45-22:00 Bel Canto Choir Rehearsal New Booking	13 10:15-11:45 QJ Gong-Stand Still Get Fit New Booking	14 16:15-18:00 Dancercise 20:00-22:00 table tennis New Booking	15 No Bookings New Booking	16 12:30-16:00 Sonning Art Group Meeting New Booking	17 9:00-12:15 Dancercise New Booking
18 No Bookings New Booking	19 19:00-22:00 WI Meeting New Booking	20 10:15-11:45 QJ Gong-Stand Still Get Fit New Booking	21 20:00-22:00 table tennis New Booking	22 No Bookings New Booking	23 12:30-16:00 Sonning Art Group Meeting New Booking	24 18:30-22:30 Birthday party New Booking
25 No Bookings New Booking	26 No Bookings New Booking	27 10:15-11:45 QJ Gong-Stand Still Get Fit New Booking	28 20:00-22:00 table tennis New Booking	29 No Bookings New Booking	30 12:30-16:00 Sonning Art Group Meeting New Booking	31 No Bookings New Booking

**The online Pearson Hall
booking system.**
www.pearsonhall.org.uk

Executive Committee & Panels

Patrick Hamblin, Planning & Traffic Panel

Meetings & Planning Applications

Monthly virtual meetings of the Panel have continued to have been held since the last edition of *Bridge*. At the March, April and May meetings a total of 22 applications were discussed.

An objection was sent to Reading Borough Council in connection with the application to build 257 houses on part of the former Reading Golf Club in Emmer Green. If the plan goes ahead, this will without doubt lead to more traffic passing through Sonning.

An objection was sent to WBC in connection with an application to increase pupil numbers at Reading Blue Coat School from 825 to 1,100. The objection was based on the increased volume of traffic delivering and collecting pupils that would result in still more congestion both in Sonning Lane and the remainder of Sonning.

In connection with the proposed increase in pupils at Reading Blue Coat School, there was also an application to increase the parking area at the Berkshire County Sports Club to provide additional parking for the school. An objection was also made to WBC to this application.

There was again liaison with Sonning Eye Action Group (SEAG) in connection with Sonning Quarry and an objection

to the proposed removal of groundwater monitoring was made to Oxfordshire County Council.

An objection was made to SODC to an application to carry out alterations at Mill Farm, Sonning Eye, as this would result in still more vehicle movements and potentially more noise in the hamlet.

Support was given to an application to SODC for the replacement of rehearsal/ accommodation areas of The Mill at Sonning building to form two dwellings.

Wayfinding Signage

The Society was consulted by SPC regarding a suggestion that new signage is provided in Sonning. The suggested signage was totally inappropriate for Sonning as it was similar to that used in large towns and cities. The Society's view was that the existing wooden finger posts were perfectly adequate and additional signage was not required.

Local Plan Update

A newsletter from WBC gave an update on the preparation of a new Local Plan. It confirmed that the Grazeley Garden Town proposal was no longer achievable and listed all the sites that were previously promoted as well as three additional sites. These three additional

sites are: The Old Redingensians Sports Ground (4.29 hectares), Sonning Golf Club (1.6 hectares extension to the already agreed site) and land at Holme Farm (25.3 hectares). WBC will give the opportunity for comments in due course and the Society will be commenting appropriately.

Traffic

Panel members are continuing to participate in a working group consisting of representatives of Sonning Parish Council, WBC, and others to endeavour to find solutions to the road safety problems in Sonning. Some discussions have been held on reducing the speed limit in Pound Lane in the area from the school up towards the A4 road.

Third Thames Crossing

No further developments to report.

Neighbourhood Plan

Progress is discussed on the front page of *Bridge*.

SPC Planning Committee meetings

The Society monitors all the applications and 'attends' the virtual meetings, where appropriate.

Berkshire Gardens Trust

Fiona Hope, Secretary of BGT

Despite the unavoidable cancellation of last summer's scheduled visits, it's been a busy few months for us.

Firstly our website has received a massive overhaul. Linked with this, we now have a separate email for general enquiries and planning, which will hopefully benefit further potential users and local authorities.

In addition, the need to respond to various planning applications and consultations across the county has not diminished, with the overriding objective of protecting our precious designed landscapes, including public parks and gardens which have proved to be so important to everyone's wellbeing during the pandemic. In particular, later this year and linked to our recently launched research project, we have a lecture about the history of Public Parks on Friday, 19th November at 2pm.

We have also run our first series of Zoom lectures. The lecture topics have varied from the early history of Purley Hall on the outskirts of Sulham Woods near Tilehurst

and Pangbourne, to the gardens at Walpole House, Ealing (home of the diarist Horace Walpole), the one-time house of the artist JMW Turner, in Twickenham and the satirist William Hogarth at Chiswick, all of which have been recently restored.

As a complete contrast (and hopefully a boost to those whose overseas holidays have not been possible), our most recent Zoom lecture was by Richard Bisgrove, entitled “Gardening Across the Pond,” which Richard discussed some of the Anglo-American exchanges of horticultural knowledge and plants, from the early settlers in Virginia through to prairie gardens in 21st century England.

You can find out more about the BGT, check out our scheduled events for the late spring and summer (on the optimistic basis that we will be able to visit gardens in person), as well as more Zoom lectures at £5 a time, via <https://www.berkshiregardenstrust.org>.



BEFORE

Page 4: Before the clearance, looking south from November 2020 and afterwards with the Cow Parsley in bloom, May '21

Left: Greg Elphick crafting the new steps and Right: how they are blending in now



AFTER

- *Planting of 1025 native wildflower plants, bulbs and corms: Snowdrops (300), Wild Daffodils (250), Bluebells (250), Aconites (100), Wild Garlic (50), Wood Anemone (50), Primrose (25)*

- *Sowing of a native woodland wildflower mix in the barer areas*

Then in early April, following a conversation between Ali and Chris West, Youth Minister at St Andrews, the final touches were applied to the site. "Westy" had been so successful in the commissioning of home-made bird boxes with local families, that in addition to the 10 boxes installed in and around the churchyard, there were still 5 left for The Pound. These were eagerly installed by the Smyly and Biddulph families under Ali's supervision and will attract nesting Great Tits and Blue Tits, as well as being useful roosting

sites for a variety of bird species in a woodland where there are currently no trees old enough to provide natural cavities.

Ali would like to record his sincere thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard to get this job done so swiftly and who told him that they found it very enjoyable and a great way to exercise whilst "giving something back to the community" in difficult times. He would also like to thank Parish Councillor Trefor Fisher for his positive support for the initiative and the Parish Council themselves for funding the purchase of the wildflower bulbs and seeds. With the wildflower seed mix and planted bulbs flourishing and the Cow Parsley about to explode into bloom, The Pound is realising its true value once again – for wildlife and for people.



Middle Upper:

Jim bramble-basher Reed

Middle Lower:

The West family suitably tooled up for bird box construction (well most of them!)

Bottom: Volunteers in action in 2020

Photographs taken by Ali Driver



Bunkered !!!

The Secret History of Wentworth Golf Club

Lesley Heaney



A few years ago, with some friends, I was doing research for a walk around the Sunningdale area, including Wentworth Golf Club. We discovered an interesting tale about the club, which I wanted to share with you but..... "What is the Sonning connection?" I wondered. Then I remembered an article I'd written for Bridge issue 40 from Autumn 2014.



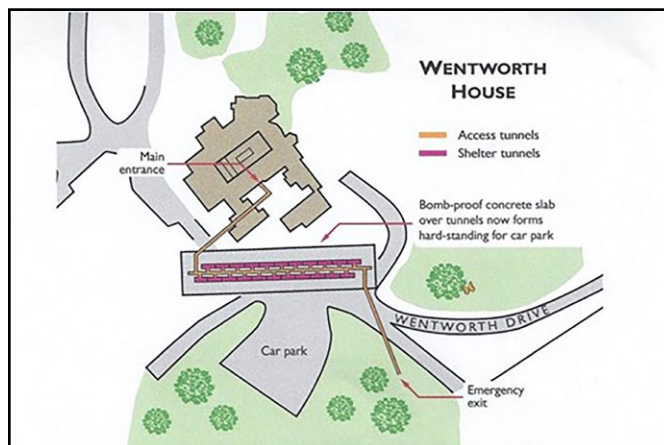
Henry Abraham Mitchell (Abe Mitchel) 1887- 1947, was the first golf pro at Sonning Golf Club. He was also Samuel Ryder's personal golf instructor. So, when Samuel organised the inaugural Ryder Cup at Wentworth Golf Club in 1926, he put Abe's figure on top of the trophy, where it still sits today. I thought this was connection enough.



**Passage leading to the main chamber
of the underground bunker**

There are hundreds of bunkers on the Wentworth golf estate, plus one that remains forever hidden.

With the outbreak of World War II, Wentworth Estate was selected as an alternative seat of government and a rural command post, offering fewer security problems and more resources than the London Cabinet War Rooms. It is from here that the British government would have operated had it been forced to flee London during the *blitzkrieg*. Many of the large houses were requisitioned; the golf courses were changed so that enemy planes could not land there; and nearby Virginia Water Lake was drained to prevent its use as a navigation landmark by enemy pilots. A subterranean bunker and tunnel system, now sealed and covered by car parks, was built near the clubhouse. It consisted of two 25-ft diameter parallel tunnels made from cast iron London Underground tube segments with a 12-ft diameter service tunnel running between them.



The entire bunker system was covered in a bombproof slab broken by a brick ventilation tower. Access tunnels extended under the clubhouse and down Wentworth Drive toward the rail station. Wentworth's top-secret Army camp housed, among others, General Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group, which controlled most of the British, Canadian and American ground forces for the Allies' western invasion of Europe (Operation Overlord). This suggests that many major strategic decisions were made in the Wentworth bunker and surrounding camp.

Before it was finally sealed in 1978, John Whitbread, a reporter with The Surrey Herald was fortunate enough to witness a final inspection by the club's secretary. I can quote some of the article which appeared in The Times on October 11th 2003:

Officers staying at the Georgian-style Wentworth Dormy House (for a princely four shillings — 20 pence — per night) were entitled to play the course, but not for free. Honorary membership cost them one shilling and a round cost an extra



Another view of the main tunnel



One of the two large rooms

3p. That would have been for the East Course only, as the West was allowed to grow wild to prevent planes landing on its fairways.

It was a consequence of this security measure that the now internationally famous nickname for the West Course — “The Burma Road” — was coined after the war. The fairways had to be cleared of undergrowth and bushes, and the job was given to a party of German prisoners of war, stationed at a nearby internment camp. One of the officers overseeing the clearance commented, “let this be their Burma Road”. Even the East didn’t completely escape — two cross-bunkers were inserted on the 16th fairway, also to deter aircraft. It was only in 1999 that the club took them out and returned the hole to its original Harry Colt design.

In the later days of the war, WW was used by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery’s 21st Army group, and it was thought by many that some details of the D-Day landings were planned under the clubhouse.

An issue from the Surrey Herald files of the time quotes former special police constable John Hammond, one of the few locals allowed inside the camp, who declared: “It was all very hush-hush. Without a pass you could not get anywhere

near the camp. There were guards everywhere with a major sentry post at the club entrance.”

Research also uncovered one major diplomatic incident at Wentworth during the war. General Wladyslaw Sikorski, the leader of the Polish government in exile, unwittingly leased a home in the middle of the camp from a homeowner who had not been told his house had already been requisitioned by the British! Quartermaster-General Sir Walter Venning, anxious not to offend the Polish General, pointed out, in a note to General Sir Alan Brooke, that the difficulties of dealing with the situation of removing Sikorski were “fairly considerable”. Brooke saw no difficulty at all. He wrote back stating unequivocally that Sikorski should not be allowed to take up residence, and he never did.

After the war, the bunker was earmarked for food storage in the event of a nuclear attack on London. After being completely stripped of electrical and other recyclable materials the bunker was sealed up completely for health and safety reasons

Images courtesy of Nick Catford & Subterranea Britannica

>>Bridge Ends

Society Garden Party DATE CHANGE

We have had to amend the date of this special event (which is probably just as well given the current situation). The date for your diary is now Sunday 8th August at 3pm.

Swarming Bees

This is the time of year when honey bees have a tendency to swarm. We desperately need to make sure that we do our best to help them in this endeavour and if a swarm turns up in your garden please contact the Reading & District Beekeepers Swarm Team



(swarm@rbka.org.uk) or visit www.rbka.org.uk/swarms for phone numbers.

Bumblebees do not swarm but now that the weather is warm they may make themselves known. They generally do not tend to sting humans unless they feel threatened. So if they turn up in a quiet corner of your garden then please leave them be. They will be gone by the winter and they will do a lot of good in the meantime. Please do not spray them with water/vinegar or fill in the entrance to their burrow, that will kill them.

If they have decided to nest in an inconvenient place then you should contact <http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/>.

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.

