

A group of people in medieval costumes are on a float during a parade. The float is decorated with a large red cloth and a shield featuring a crown and the letters 'ER'. The people are wearing white and red dresses, and one person is wearing a tall white conical hat. The background shows a brick house and trees.

Executive Committee & Panels

Patrick Hamblin, Planning & Traffic Panel

Meetings & Planning Applications

Monthly meetings of the Panel have continued since the last edition of *Bridge*. At the June, July and August meetings a total of 10 applications were discussed.

The following decisions have been made by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) in cases where the Society commented:

- Application for a 20 metres 5G telecommunications mast with a cabinet at its base on land at Bath Road, Sonning – approved.
- Fairway, 7 West Drive: two applications (one to build in back garden and one to demolish existing property and build two houses in its place) – refused.
- Land South of Old Bath Road: 57 dwellings in three blocks for over 60s – approved.
- Holme Park Sports Ground Pavilion: to be replaced by a detached bungalow, previously refused by WBC and now dismissed on appeal.
- Reading Blue Coat School: to increase pupil numbers up to 1,100 – approved.
- Berkshire County Sports Club, Sonning Lane: to extend the car park

area – approved.

- Reading Golf Club: Reading Borough Council refused permission for 257 houses on the site of the former golf club.
- South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) approved alterations to a building at Mill Farm, Sonning Eye.
- The Environment Agency, reporting to SODC, objected to the application by The Mill at Sonning for the conversion of the existing rehearsal/accommodation building into two dwellings.

Local Plan Update

In view of the fact that all the sites that were previously promoted by WBC, as well as three additional sites, were included in an update WBC issued earlier this year, the Society is waiting for the updated plan to be issued so that suitable comments can be given.

As noted in the previous edition of *Bridge*, these three additional sites are: The Old Redingensians Sports Ground (4.29 hectares), Sonning Golf Club (1.6 hectare extension to the already agreed

site) and land at Holme Park Farm (25.3 hectares).

Traffic

As noted previously, Panel members are participating 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. Improvements in Pound Lane, being the extension of the 20mph area, are understood to have been agreed by WBC but we are waiting for the signage and street furniture to be installed.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The results of the questionnaire are being analysed.

Third Thames Crossing

No further developments to report.

Sonning Parish Council Planning Committee Meetings

The Society continues to monitor all the applications and ‘attends’ the virtual meetings, where appropriate.

We're Back!

Mike Hart, Chairman

It's been well over a year since our last live event, along the way we had several false starts but at long last the Society was able to hold its summer garden party on 8th August. Thanks to the generosity of Mary and Gordon Jones the event was held in their beautiful garden in West Drive and was attended by 60 members and guests. We were very lucky with the weather, threatening black clouds flew past on both sides but we kept dry, although precautions had been taken by hiring the Scout tent. Tables and chairs were borrowed from Gary and Sharon Robinson,



the tables were further beautified with the Society's tablecloths and gorgeous flower arrangements made from flowers picked from her garden by our new Education & Social Panel Coordinator, Heather Kay.

Guests enjoyed a glass of champagne, sandwiches, tea and cakes (some from the Village Hamper) served on attractive crockery. Gordon hid several clues around his garden which made up the letters to a phrase, participants filled in the answers and Gordon presented the winner and runner-up with a bottle of wine from the Hurst vineyard. Unfortunately Heather was unable to attend but she and her team did a great job planning and managing the event which everyone enjoyed, especially because of the opportunity to enjoy chatting to friends again, just like the old times!



Gordon Jones

It was 1984. Empty desk, no rules. No one had done that job before. Making it up as you go along. So, I asked myself what does this organisation do? It employed 10,000 people. 3-4,000 were engineers doing things that were potentially damaging to the environment. Dredging rivers, building flood defences, pipeline schemes, sewage works, reservoirs, all these civil engineering works gradually eroding the natural environment. A massive challenge so I focused on certain things. Gradually winning people over and building a big department.

My main focus was the way we managed our rivers. There was a lot of dredging going on for no good reason. The assumption was if you dredge a river and make it straighter it's going to be better for flood risk management. It's often not. In many cases it makes things worse downstream. And of course, you lose the natural habitat as well. Our legal duty was to further conservation while carrying out our functions. I ended up with thirty people in my team in the Thames region when I moved up to head office.

on stuff. It was a similar situation as before, there weren't many policies or strategies in place, so I brought my experience from Thames and built-up a big department over the next 15 years, despite multiple cut-backs.

The winning of that award was the highlight of my professional career and it was great to get international acclaim for what we had been doing. As a result of the environmental work I've been privileged to be involved in, I've been invited all over the world to advise governments and even royalty and it always amazes me just how small the Thames is compared to rivers elsewhere - but the basic principles are the same.

There have been lots of other local initiatives to get stuck into as well, like the barn owl box project, the Sonning Cutting tree-felling saga, tree planting along the A4 and the restoration of the Pound. Small ways of contributing to a better natural environment. I've also enjoyed securing over £100K from various external sources to fund things in the village over the years.

By 2016, the Environment Agency (EA) was becoming increasingly clawed into DEFRA. I was becoming very constrained in what I could do and say at work.

Ali with Sir David Attenborough



Then within three months, a job as Director of Rewilding Britain, a tiny charity, turned up and it turned out to be the perfect next step for me. It's a controversial subject, but already much less so than five years ago. What we are seeking to do is to catalyse large scale ecological restoration for nature and people, bringing communities with us. I've worked hard on the inclusive community-based approach explaining what it can do for people as well as wildlife. Not purist rewilding admittedly, but this is how we can move people into a more sustainable future.

[illegible]

Now I am thoroughly enjoying myself again. It's all the best bits of what I used to do without the bureaucracy. I love it. I did enjoy managing a team but I did my time, 35 years of that. I'm cut loose now. I can just pick up the phone to senior politicians or CEOs of the National Trust etc. - and vice versa. And we've had some big wins with policy lately; the Environmental Land Management scheme, natural regeneration now being allowed to be counted alongside tree planting in the Woodland Grant Scheme, and the establishment of the £640M Nature for Climate fund.

If I'm talking about my career, I have to give massive credit to Belinda because when we got married in 1980, her dad said "What does he do? An ecologist? How's he going to keep you as an ecologist?" Don't blame him. But



Will you stay in Sonning?

We love Sonning – our three sons Daniel, Liam and Kieran were all brought up in this village and the whole community spirit here is phenomenal and we are both really happy here. We're involved in so much, and it's just a privilege to live in this community with so many good friends. And the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society stuff. Amazing. To have a village organisation like that with over 200 members and packing out the village hall for an AGM every year. And the scarecrow festival. So much going for us here. If you give, you get it back in spades in a place like this. That's another reason why I am always looking for more projects to get stuck into. My next one will hopefully be a hedgehog street for this part of the village. Always something else to do if you think global and act local!

Our Next Events

More information and links to purchase tickets to all our events in Pearson Hall can be found on sonning.org.uk

TALK: Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter

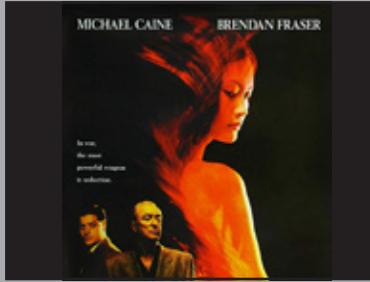
Tuesday 5th October, 7.30 for 7.45pm

Reading Abbey was founded in June 1121 exactly 900 years ago. It was one of England's foremost and wealthiest monasteries inhabited by monks for more than 400 years.

The Abbey fell into decline for 3 centuries. In 2018 the ruins were fully restored and opened to the public. John Painter will be delivering an illustrated talk about this ancient building.

To book a place email penny.feathers@btinternet.com or book online.

Tickets as usual are £4 for members or £5 for guests.



FILM CLUB: The Quiet American POSTPONED FROM LAST SEASON

Tuesday 19th October, 7.30pm

The Quiet American is a 2002 film adaptation of Graham Green's best selling novel set in Vietnam in the early 1950s. It was directed by Phillip Noyce and stars Michael Cane, Brendan Fraser and Do Thi Hai Yen. A veteran British reporter vies with a young U.S. doctor for the affections of a beautiful Vietnamese woman.

Cost of attendance is £5 for members (£6 for guests) on the door or via our website.

Society AGM & Supper

Saturday 20th November, 7.15pm sharp!

Our AGM and Supper will be held in the Pearson Hall on Saturday 20th November.

We are hopeful that, if she's not called away, our guest speaker will be Sacha Dench, the renowned conservationist and founder of Conservation Without Borders, who is currently planning a 3,000+ mile circumnavigation of the British Isles in a green electricity powered paramotor - the Round Britain Climate Challenge.

Tickets remain at £16 and must be purchased before 5th November.



Eye & Dunsden – Neighbourhood Development Plan

David Woodward, Chair of Eye & Dunsden NDP and Parish Council

Eye & Dunsden parish held its first ever public consultation event on the area's emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan on Bank Holiday Monday. Creating NDPs has become essential for communities under increasing pressure that wish to influence what should be protected and where and what new building development should take place. The parish consists of just 150 houses, and the local landowner has already suggested it could cope with almost 800 more.

Around 50 people attended the event which took the form of a series of professionally designed exhibition panels and a questionnaire. The need to combat the climate emergency is a prime concern of the policies being developed by a dedicated team of ten volunteers who were available to answer questions. Consultation will follow with local businesses by Zoom later this month. It is hoped that the NDP process, which began 18 months ago, will be completed by this time next year. Comments received have so far been very supportive, with a number of people also urging

improvements to roads and footpaths. The parish hopes to work with Sonning on issues such as traffic calming and speed reduction measures on the B481.

So far the parish has attracted around £20,000 in funding to help pay for the tough and time-consuming process. This has mostly been spent on consultants' reports, with many more hours put in by volunteers. When adopted after a public referendum, the NDP will run with the South Oxfordshire Local Plan to 2035, although the Government's imminent new Planning Act, should it be passed, threatens to reduce the impact of the scheme to merely providing guidance on the design of new development.

In the opinion of your correspondent, this is the biggest initiative taken by our community in at least half a century. If we get it right, and if NDPs are not emasculated by forthcoming reforms, our NDP will be a powerful ally in our continuing battles to ensure that our parish continues to be an agreeable place in which to live.

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 information and to book tickets.

5 th August - 9 th October 2.15pm & 8.15pm	The Mill at Sonning, Ray Cooney's riotous comedy Two Into One, directed by Ron Aldridge and starring Mark Curry	Tickets available from millatsonning.com
10 th September 7.30pm	S&SES Talk: William Smith the Oxfordshire Mapmaker, presented by Owen Green from Oxford University	Members of the Society and guests are very welcome
11 th September 2pm-5pm	The Sonning Village Show - the annual fruit & veg, arts & crafts, baking show with lots of entertainment for all the family	In the grounds of Sonning Primary School, Ligure Way, Pound Lane
29 th September at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome
5 th October 7.30pm	S&SES Talk: Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter, an illustrated talk by John Painter	Tickets available online, members of the Society and guests are welcome
16 th October 8.15pm	The Mill at Sonning, First Night: Top Hat, this year's spectacular Christmas Musical directed by Jonathan O'Boyle	Tickets available from millatsonning.com
22 nd October 1.45pm	Berkshire Gardens Trust: AGM & Autumn Lecture - Kiftsgate Court Garden; Three Generations of Women Gardeners	Details at berkshiregardenstrust.org
20 th November 7.15pm	S&SES AGM followed by a Supper, our guest speaker will be Sacha Dench, founder of Conservation Without Borders..	Members of the Society and guests are very welcome
8 th December at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome

Joanna Harvey

Welcome packs for new residents are available from Lesley Heaney, our Membership Secretary (membership@sonning.org.uk), so please mention the Society when you chat to your new neighbours. We can also be found on Facebook and at www.sonning.org.uk.



email: bridge@sonning.org.uk web: www.sonning.org.uk