

Sonning Traffic

Trefor Fisher, Sonning Parish Councillor

Community Speed Watch

We all know that we have a big problem with the volume and speed of traffic in Sonning. We cannot do much about the volume - unless someone wants to place a barrel of gunpowder under the bridge on November 5th? But residents have told us that something needs to be done about speeding vehicles.

Sonning Parish Council has operated two Speed Indication Devices (SID) for a number of years and we are well aware that a small number of anti-social motorists use our roads as speed tracks. The highest speed recently recorded (in the 30mph limit) was 75mph outside Reading Blue Coat School, this was on a Friday evening at 8.35pm; and last month another racer entering the village from Charvil Lane also registered 75mph, this time in a 20mph zone! It is not unusual to discover that every day a couple of vehicles have reached between 50-60mph on our roads.

With this in mind, Sonning now has its very own Community Speed Watch (CSW). The scheme, with the support of Thames Valley Police, records and reports the details of speeding vehicles to the police. We have been up and running since July and you may have seen us standing by the side of local roads. We have permission to conduct checks at 5 sites (so far) - 2 locations in Charvil Lane, 2 in Pound Lane and 1 in Sonning Lane.



To date over 250 vehicles have been recorded breaking the speed limit. 151 of those were logged within a 2 hour period in the 20 mph limit in Charvil Lane! This was not really a surprise since the parish council's mobile "speed indicating device" has shown us over some years that this is a known hotspot for speeding traffic.

Offending vehicles, those exceeding the speed limit plus 10% plus 2 mph, are reported to Thames Valley Police. The vehicle owners are then automatically sent a warning letter. The registration of vehicles accruing 3 or more warning letters (from anywhere in the UK) is entered into the Police National Computer. The vehicle will then get flagged up by any ANPR-equipped patrol car and a special watch will be kept in case of any further offences.

We only have five people on the CSW team at the moment. We require a minimum of three for each Speed Watch session and this is quite often a problem. If you wish to help improve the safety of Sonning's roads, you would be very welcome to join us. Please contact me at : trefor.fisher@sonning-pc.gov.uk.

HGVs

Slow vehicles can also be a problem.

This poor chap, travelling down Thames Street towards the river, discovered that he couldn't proceed down to the bridge so made the fateful decision to back into the High Street in order to turn around. He hit the walls on both sides of the road and side-swiped a parked car.

Residents will know that there is a 7 ½ ton weight limit on Sonning Bridge so do please take photos of any transgressors you spot and email them to me at the address above. They will be reported to the relevant Trading Standards authority responsible for policing this - at the time of writing there are two different prosecutions on the cards, one on each side of the river — it's comforting to know that the authorities are also keen to dissuade HGVs from using our bridge!





Seeing the Wood for the Trees

Professor Alastair Driver, Environmental Adviser to the Society

The environmental talk of the town in Sonning lately has been the “devastating”, “catastrophic” “carnage” (and I am quoting from social media here!) of the woodland on the north bank of the Thames just downstream of Sonning Bridge. In reality, this woodland is a non-native poplar plantation, originally planted under the Bryant & May incentive scheme for match production. As a result they were always going to be clear-felled but as we now know the matchstick market burnt out (arf arf) and many of these plantations are still standing way past their originally sell-by date.

These non-native poplars don't live very long and start to crack up from the top and they are notoriously poor for wildlife, because their branches are very thin and well spaced out and thus fairly unsuitable for bird nesting. In addition, because they do tend to crack and fall before rot sets in, they are less suitable for fungi, invertebrates and hole nesting birds etc. In this particular case, the felling was long overdue, not least for safety reasons when it comes to trees near the towpath and so what it now provides, thanks to the conditions of the Forestry Commission felling licence is the opportunity to replace these poplars with a mix of native species suitable for a floodplain situation. Inevitably this is wet ground and underwater in very wet winters (which are increasing in frequency due to climate warming), so the landowners Phillimore Estates should focus on the establishment of wet woodland habitat by planting species such as the rare native Black Poplar, Alder, Aspen and various willow species, including shrubby willows such as Sallow and Osier. I am told by Phillimore's land agents Savills that the felled timber itself will be “used for cladding, bearers and pallets or biomass woodchip depending on the quality”. The other key aspect which I for one will be strongly encouraging the estate to focus on, is the creation

of ponds and scrapes within the former plantation to increase its value for wetland biodiversity. Having overseen hundreds of projects like this in my time I know it is very easy to do and you get an instant positive response from nature!

Residents and passers-by will have also noticed the pollarding of some of the old Crack Willows along the riverbank. This is an old countryside management technique which helps to prolong the lifespan of these valuable old trees. The clue is in the name when it comes to the characteristics of this willow species! Having said that, this riverbank clearance has been done primarily because the Estate has come to an arrangement with Sonning Boats and Launches for the latter to establish long term riverbank moorings on this north bank section of the river. At present Phillimore Estate tell me that “there are no plans for any infrastructure”, but a visit to the sonningboats.com website shows a map with an access track (presumably coming off the Sonning Eye mini-roundabout) and a parking area somewhere near where the northern edge of the plantation was. The key questions for Sonning and Sonning Eye residents are how formalised will this become and how much associated infrastructure will then start to appear? No doubt the two parish councils and our own S&SES Executive will be on the case!



Looking After Our Rural Spaces

Jeremy Gilmore

After more than a month when the birdsong was drowned out by the constant cacophony of chainsaws, peace and quiet has finally returned to our patch of the Thames. Or has it?

The banks of the Thames and the areas inland from Sonning Bridge to beyond the first corner of Sonning Reach are within the Conservation Areas of Sonning Parish and Eye & Dunsden Parish. It is important that they are conserved and/or improved.

Residents on both sides of the river are expressing their concerns about the sudden development of boat moorings on the Oxfordshire bank. Since this is a change of use we can expect that some form of planning application will be required.

Historically there used to be rowing boats and the occasional launch darting about by Sonning Bridge but there weren't many - everything was in moderation. Personally I am not convinced that a long row of permanently moored diesel-guzzling boats along with ancillary parking and hard standing will enhance the conservation area. Anyone who has seen the effect of the Val Wyatt Marina on an otherwise peaceful stretch of the Thames in Wargrave will no doubt share my concerns.

There have been short-term moorings along Sonning's Berkshire bank for many years and I don't think anyone would want to discourage this since it allows river folk to visit our local attractions. Likewise a boat or two for hire is generally considered a good thing and we applaud the fact that Sonning River Charters has undertaken some river bank clearance in the area and also that it operates some electric boats amongst its fleet. But again, everything in moderation: "a few" is good, large numbers not so. Sonning is not Wargrave, nor would we want it to be.

The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan is being developed in part to ensure that our rural Thames-side village is not overwhelmed by inappropriate development or swamped by businesses, and that includes its quiet stretch of the river. If you stand on Sonning Bridge and look west towards Sonning Lock, both banks are fronted by trees and it is a charming view. The view to the east is very different. On the Berkshire bank most of the trees have been lost to storms. The north bank had a wooded area through which the towpath meandered but most of that went in this clearance. I do hope that this area will be fully replanted but given that the moorings' website identifies "private parking" you'll forgive me if I am sceptical.

Fortunately Ali Driver has taken a concerned interest in the area. As his article describes, the plantation on the Oxfordshire bank was always due to be harvested but one feels that the possibility of revenue from car parking for the moorings, hard standing and future facilities has resulted in a larger clearance than would otherwise have occurred. Ali is experienced in regenerating these types of areas and has been advising the management team for the Phillimore Estates on what would be good for the environment. Let's hope that they listen.

As for Sonning Boats, in all its guises, we would encourage them to continue to care for our river banks and urge them to temper any larger ambitions on this part of the Thames with a careful eye to safeguarding our rural spaces.



Above: "Devastation"

Below: View from Sonning Bridge looking west towards Reading; and looking east towards Shiplake

Below left: New moorings

Photo credits: Trefor Fisher and Jeremy Gilmore



Thames River Tidy

Chris Ashworth, Loddon Vale Rotary Club

On Saturday 24th September a team of over 45 volunteers from Sonning and surrounding areas joined local Rotary teams (Loddon Vale Rotary Club along with Winnersh and Binfield Rotary Club) and the Thames Rescue Service to clean up the footpaths and river Thames from Shiplake, through Sonning and to Thames Valley Park.

Alongside the clean-up activities the river was surveyed as part of a 'plastic blitz' campaign by the environmental group Thames21.

The event was supported by groups including Shiplake College, Reading Blue Coat School, the street litter clean up group (WASP), Wokingham Borough Council, Surfers

Against Sewage and Woodley Town Council.

You can get involved in future projects by contacting Loddon Vale Rotary Club.



Guided Tours around Sonning

Diana Coulter & Heather Kay (Education Panel Coordinator)

Is there an inner 'History Boy' or 'History Girl' looking for a stimulating project? Do you feel that you know something about Sonning and Sonning Eye, which you would like to share with interested visitors? Have you got what it takes to show people around our beautiful village? If so, would you be willing to give village guiding a go?

For the past 15 years or more, a small team has shared responsibility for guided walks, whether for the annual Heritage Open Days events in September or on a bespoke basis

for interested groups, typically other civic or local history societies. Feedback has always been positive, so the Society's ability to fulfil the perceived need is clearly welcome.

While the current team of volunteers can still take a turn, other demands may sometimes make it more difficult to meet individual requests or the annual commitment. Therefore we would like to bring at least three or four more guides on board. We would offer an initial guided walk for prospective guides only and share tips about technique

as well as some of the research which current and previous team members have undertaken.

Later, on an agreed date, we would follow up by asking each trainee guide to prepare to talk about a couple of buildings in the village for the group, to see what it feels like and how comfortable they would be with extending their repertoire. We would like to lay the groundwork during the autumn and suggest saving the date on either Saturday 12th November or Sunday 13th November for the initial tour. The date will be confirmed nearer the time and will depend on the weather. It will also aim to avoid the Remembrance Day service and parade.

If you would be interested in participating in this worthwhile project please contact either Heather Kay on kaydenis@googlemail.com or Diana Coulter on diana.coulter@mac.com before 6th November.



A keen audience on a guided tour
Photo credit: Stephen Humphreys

Dates For Your Diaries

The events that are organised by the Society are shaded in brown, other events within the environs of Sonning and Sonning Eye have a green background.

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.



8 th Sept - 5 th November 2.15pm & 8.15pm	The Mill at Sonning: Funny Money, a classic comedy by Ray Cooney performed in the newly named Ray Cooney Auditorium	Tickets available from millatsonning.com
18 th October doors open 7pm	Film Club returns: The Last Bus, starring Timothy Spall using his bus pass to travel to the end of the country with his wife's ashes	Tickets are online or pay at the door Society members and guests welcome
19 th October at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome
28 th October 7.30pm	S&SES Talk: Sarah Somerville will tell us about the 400 year history of Shaw House, north of Newbury	Tickets available online, members of the Society and guests are welcome
5 th November 11am - 5pm	Sonning Neighbourhood Plan - Open Day in Pearson Hall Meet members of the Steering Group, ask questions, discuss the options and let us know what you think about the Plan	All Sonning residents welcome
16 th Nov - 30 th December 2.15pm & 8.15pm	The Mill at Sonning: Top Hat, the toe-tapping hit musical is back by popular demand	Tickets available from millatsonning.com
15 th November doors open 7pm	Film Club: The film will be chosen in consultation with the audience present on 18 th October	Tickets are online or pay at the door Society members and guests welcome
19 th November 7.15pm	S&SES AGM & Supper and a talk about the biodynamic wonders achieved at Waltham Place by Niki McCann the Education Officer	Tickets available online, members of the Society and guests are welcome
5 th December at 7.45pm	S&SES Executive Committee meeting in Pearson Hall	Members of the Society are very welcome
8 th December doors open 7pm	Film Club: The film will be chosen in consultation with the audience present on 18 th October	Tickets are online or pay at the door Society members and guests welcome
31 st December at 8.15pm	New Year's Eve at The Mill at Sonning with the Definitive Rat Pack	Tickets available from millatsonning.com

>> Membership information

A warm welcome is extended to new members:

Mr and Mrs H Thomas

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.



**Bridge is the quarterly newsletter published by the
Sonning and Sonning Eye Society**

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