

## Minutes of the meeting of Sonning Common Parish Council held on Monday 17 February 2014 at 20.00 hrs in the Village Hall.

Present: Mr Kedge (Chairman); Mrs Diwell; Mr Fort; Miss Hunt; Mr Jones; Mrs Lewis; Mrs Phillips-Tilbury; Mr Rawlins; Mr Reynolds and Mr Collings (Parish Clerk).

County Councillor D Bartholomew and District Councillor P Harrison were present for part of the meeting.

- 14/130 Apologies for absence & declarations of interests. Apologies: Mr Greenwood; Ms Noble and Mr Stoves. No declarations.
- 14/131 Public Question Time under Section 30 of Standing Orders. None.
- 14/132 Police Report, previously circulated. Mr Kedge thanked PCSO Boyes for his report and continued good work.
- 14/133 Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 5 February 2014 were presented and ratified.
- 14/134 Minutes of other meetings:
- 134.01 Planning Committees held on 20 January and 3 February 2014 were presented and approved.
- 134.02 Parish Council meeting held on 20 January 2014 were presented and approved.
- 14/135 County Councillor's Report: Cllr Bartholomew advised that the disabled parking space in Ashford Avenue is progressing and a cost to turn the grassed corner into more parking spaces is being sought; that with no accidents in the past five years there is no funding for anything to deal with traffic speeding along Kennylands Road; that a Community Fund grant has been made to the Sonning Common Magazine; that the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee is looking for three members of the public to join Councillors in scrutinising how healthcare is provided in the County; that he is actively pursuing concerns about a possible third Reading Bridge and will be the focal point for local concerns..
- 14/136 District Councillor's Report: Cllr Harrison advised that the Community Governance Review will recommend no change to the boundary between SCPC and RPPC; that SODC has concerns about a possible third Reading bridge.
- 14/137 Parish Clerk's Report – noted.
- 14/138 Community Governance Review (Parish boundaries): A draft letter to SODC was discussed in detail and it was proposed and resolved that the amended version attached hereto as Appendix A should be sent immediately and that further analysis and documentation should be offered to SODC as necessary.
- 14/139 Neighbourhood Development Plan progress: Mr Rawlins briefed the meeting on progress to date and then proposed the approval of a modification to add a short preamble to the existing approved SON Site proposals as shown in Appendix B attached hereto. This was agreed unanimously and for the amended document will be posted on the NDP website.
- 14/140 Third Thames Bridge: After discussion it was resolved unanimously to note the following: *'In view of the timescale, Sonning Common Parish Council has had no opportunity to consult with residents as it would have wished. However, the Parish Council accepts that a third bridge is needed, subject to the following conditions:*
- 1. The road infrastructure can cope with the extra traffic without adverse effects on Sonning Common.*
  - 2. That South Oxfordshire is provided with formal Green Belt planning guarantees that neither the bridge nor the road route will be used to justify approval of further housing or other development along it.*
  - 3. There is no question of Reading using the existence of a third bridge to claim any part of South Oxfordshire.'*
- 14/141 Matters for future consideration.
- Meeting closed at 21.35.
- Next meeting: Monday 17 March 2014 at 20.00.

Chairman: ..... Dated: .....

## Appendix A

Letter sent to:  
Mr D Buckle  
Chief Executive  
SODC

18 February 2014

Dear Mr Buckle

### **Community Governance Review**

Your letter of 13 February has given us great cause for concern. We do not accept your proposal that we should be left with a boundary that *'is unsatisfactory in community governance concerns'*. This letter deals first with the recommendation specific to us and then with inconsistencies in your process.

#### **Recommendation CGR20**

Before elaborating on what we see as serious inconsistencies in the whole review process itself we must point out that the narrative concerning recommendation CGR20 is inaccurate and misleading. Under Justification it is stated that: *'The working group consulted the two parish councils on these proposals but neither supported them.'* This is an egregiously incorrect interpretation of our letter to you dated 21 January wherein without rejecting them we expressed perplexity at those initial proposals saying that:

*'Our final submission took careful account of your criteria which, although not numbered, we assumed were in priority order. First in your list is: 'natural or man-made boundaries that help to define clearly one community from another'. On that basis our views are that:*

*a. Our proposed north-eastern boundary line was put forward because it follows both a hedge and a ridge line that combine to provide a clear natural boundary to this settlement. The working group proposal on that edge seems to focus primarily on a man-made boundary of minor roads that we find perplexing and we suggest that it be reconsidered.*

*b. We readily accept the proposal following Gallowstree Road on the north-west as there is no obvious natural boundary there.*

This response is very far from not supporting the proposal – since when did reconsider and reject become synonymous?

This misinterpretation is compounded in the 'Summary of other responses' which opens quite fallaciously by saying: *'Despite the fact that the council has not yet put forward any proposals, we have received a lot of resident comment.'* Detailed proposals were indeed been put forward in letters dated 19 December 2013 that you sent to both parish councils. The proposals map attached to your letter was, quite reasonably, widely circulated by RPPC to stimulate the correspondence that you received from their residents.

What neither the working group recommendations nor RPPC's local briefing addressed are the effects of your Core Strategy and your Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment (SHLAA) wherein 1,916 dwellings were assessed as comprising the Sonning Common Settlement: 'the built form of the settlement including all the continuous and adjacent housing – including across roads until an envelope area of undeveloped countryside was reached'.

**The entire parish of Sonning Common and much of the parish of Rotherfield Peppard have been used by your staff to define the Sonning Common Settlement, a fact that seems to have been entirely overlooked.**

The effects of this are significant because the number of dwellings in the parish of Sonning Common at March 2011 was 1,595. So to make up the full 1,916 on which our Core Strategy allocation of new homes to be built between 2017 and 2027 is based, your Planning Department included 321 dwellings from Rotherfield Peppard as part of the Sonning Common Settlement.

As a result twenty three out of our current allocation of 138 new homes are included because of dwellings that are actually in Rotherfield Peppard parish - largely the houses that would come to us if our proposal is accepted.

We are actually relieving Rotherfield Peppard of the need to find sites and provide facilities for those extra homes without any commensurate gain to our income. If, as seems likely, the SHMA raises our allocation we will have to find more sites and provide more facilities for yet more new homes – a challenge that natural justice suggests should actually be given to Rotherfield Peppard parish. The RPPC residents' complaints to you about our wishing to develop on open land are at best misinformed.

#### **Process inconsistencies**

We now turn to the manifest inconsistencies in the CGR recommendations regarding the application of the criteria set out in your both original and amended Terms of Reference. When we read the original six criteria we

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<sup>1</sup> CGR 20 final paragraph

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applied, as is our wont, the Reasonable Person<sup>2</sup> approach that their sequence indicated their priority, an opinion since borne out by careful scrutiny of the LGBCE 'Guidance on community governance reviews 2010' on this matter.

This logic would say that if a proposal clearly meets the first criterion, *'natural or man-made boundaries that help to define clearly one community from another'* this largely obviates the need to consider lower order criteria. If then the same proposal also completely meets the next criterion, *housing developments that straddle parish boundaries, thereby resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours'* then surely we must be looking at what is known as a 'slam dunk'.

As was made very clear in our detailed submission to you of 21 November 2013, we believed and still believe that our proposal meets 100% of both criteria and is not conflicted by any of the next three criteria: *'effective and convenient representation of local residents at parish level; the LGBCE's proposals for the warding of South Oxfordshire for the purposes of district council elections; the newly created county council electoral divisions'*.

We did not believe that the original sixth nor the added seventh criterion: *'views expressed in relation to any changes, particularly from those people directly affected; and the extent to which proposals reflect the identities and interests of the affected community'* could ever outweigh the solidity of the first two criteria.

**Careful reading of the twenty two boundary recommendations other than our own CGR20 shows that where either or both of the first two criteria were met they have been recommended in every case even in the face of very strong parish council and resident opposition.**

To conclude the justification (page 100) by saying that the working group *'makes this recommendation because, although it considers the existing boundary is unsatisfactory in community governance terms, it cannot identify a noticeably improved one that better meets the terms of reference of the review'* is literally incredible as well as being laced with the irony of the working group publicly admitting its failure to achieve what it was set up to do. If this recommendation is allowed to proceed Sonning Common will remain a village with an illogical border that runs down a street and through properties and be a testament to SODC's failure to take the proper decision. Not much to show after sixty two years.

### **Conclusions**

We have to presume that the working group was unable or unwilling to venture so far south to view the lie of the land and observe that our proposed boundary runs along the ridge above the dry valley that separates us from Rotherfield Peppard and which makes each village invisible to the other<sup>3</sup>. This line indubitably marks and makes a natural boundary that defines clearly one community from the other. To allow specious objections to deny the facts of geography and geology whilst continuing to burden us with the costs of servicing the wider area and accommodating its housing needs and then to preclude further consultation seems to fall somewhere between manifest error at best and maladministration at worst.

Given the seriousness of our concerns **we believe that at the very least we should meet the working group on the ground before CGR20 is even discussed in Council** so that they can actually see what is proposed. We wish at that meeting to explain, show on the ground and have our proposal properly considered.

Failing that then we should at least be offered the logically almost defensible boundary that you put forward to us on 19 December. **We did not reject it nor did we say that we could not support it – we just queried how it met the criteria.** It will, if all else fails, just about pass muster in governance terms in our reading of the 2007 Act and the LGBCE guidance.

Otherwise we will have to consider how we can appeal to higher authority and would welcome your support in making this a test case for a ruling from the LGBCE.

Yours sincerely

Douglas Kedge  
Chairman

Copied to:  
All SODC members;  
Steven Corrigan.

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<sup>2</sup> Also known in law as: 'the man on the Clapham omnibus' test.

<sup>3</sup> See map appended hereto.

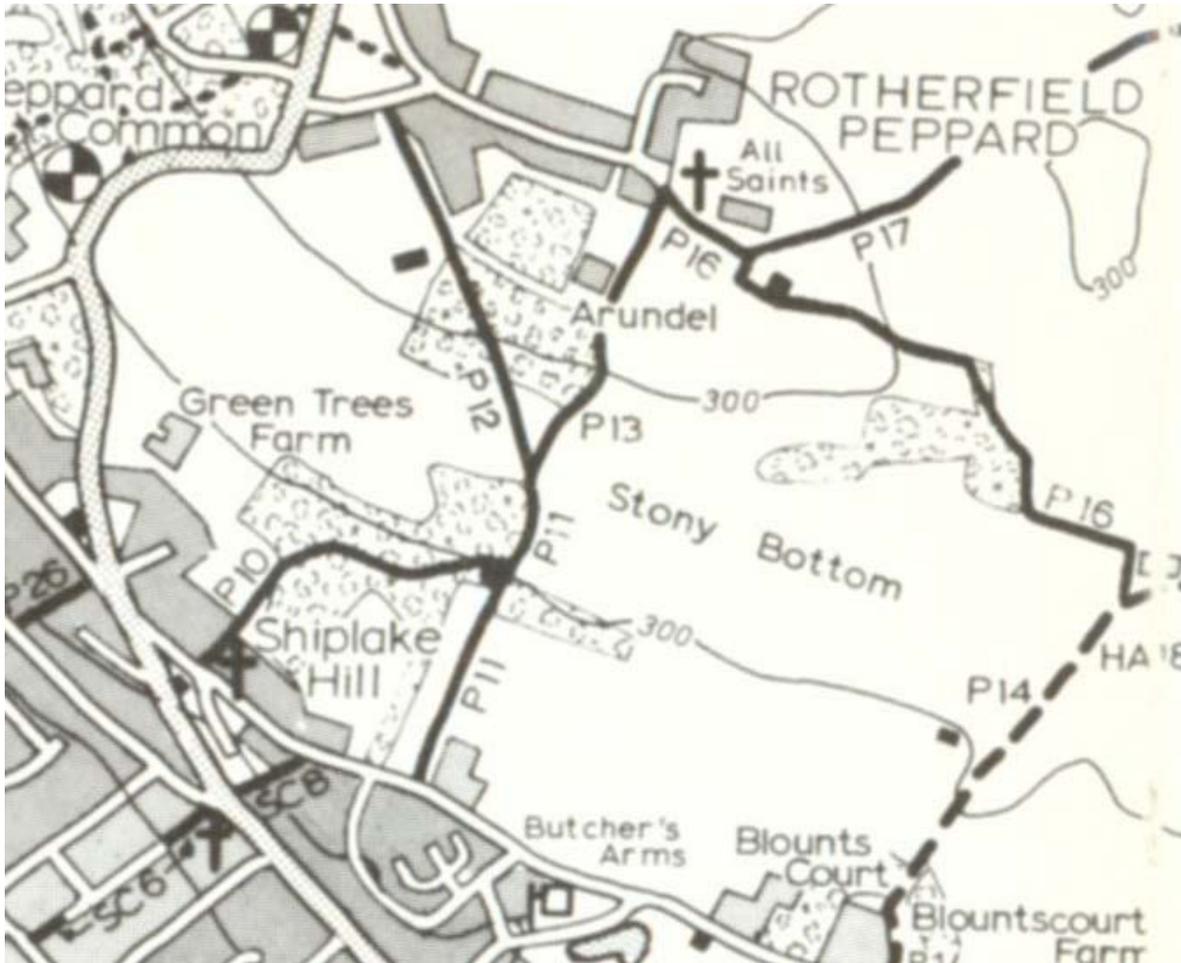
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Appendix.

Map showing the 300' contour lines either side of the Stony Bottom dry valley separating Sonning Common from Rotherfield Peppard.

From the point where paths P12 and P13 meet P11 both villages are invisible over their respective ridges.

The SCPC proposed boundary runs along this contour line which forms a clear natural boundary as specified in the criteria for the CGR.



## Appendix B SON SITE PROPOSALS

**The proposals below relate to potential applications for housing, employment or recreation uses only. Any proposal that a site should not be developed relates to the aforementioned three uses only and is not intended to affect scope for other uses such as, for example, allowable agricultural development.**

- SON 1:** This is the largest of all the sites put forward for development and as such it would not make sense to use all of it for any one purpose. Our proposals are two-fold:
- First, the upper half (probably 10 acres) of SON 1 should be considered for use as amenity green space i.e. informal grassed recreation land without formal pitches or organised team sports use. This would give the north of the village the kind of open space that the Millennium Green provides in the south.
  - Secondly, in the event that SON 2 was developed for housing, there could be access to this site and to this end, the lower SE quadrant of SON 1 could be considered for a small area of housing in keeping with the nearby properties of Lambourne Road.
- SON 2:** Whilst acknowledging the challenges to find suitable access routes, SON 2 should be considered as a possible site for housing.
- SON 3:** SON 3 should be included as a possible site for development. Choices of use to be considered to include one or more of the following:-
- Housing
  - Community centre / sports hall and playing pitches
  - Amenity green space (informal grassed recreation land without formal pitches or organised team sports use)
  - Office space
- SON 4:** This site should not be developed for any purpose.
- SON 5:** The proposal is to set this site aside and not to include it in the next design stage of our NDP.
- SON 6: Whole site:** Only part of the site should be developed in order to retain the village envelope.
- Part site:** A small, mixed size, housing ribbon development linking 56 to 80 Kennylands Road.
- SON 7:** This site has potential for development and should be included in the next design phase of our NDP. It offers scope for housing, a small-company office development, or sports/recreation use.
- SON 8:** This site should be considered in the next design phase of the NDP for potential wider sports hall and recreation use only.
- SON 9:** The site has potential for a number of development options and should go forward into the next design phase of our NDP. Consideration should be given to sports/recreation use, a small-company office development, or housing.
- SON 10:** The proposal is to set this site aside and not to include it in the next design stage of our NDP for any purpose.
- SON 11:** Only **part** of the site should be considered for development. There is potential to develop the strip of land running along the Peppard Road stretching from the northern boundary of Reddish Manor to the Blackmore Lane / Peppard Road junction.
- SON 12:** SON 12 should not be considered as a site for development of any kind.
- SON 13:** During the process it has been withdrawn and is not available for development.
- SON 14:** This site should not be developed for any purpose.
- SON 15a:** This site has potential for a development option and should go forward into the next design phase of our NDP.
- SON 15b:** This is to be set aside and not included in the next design phase of our NDP.