

Minutes of the Meeting of Sonning Common Parish Council held on Monday 19 May 2014 in the Village Hall.

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

Also present: Ms H Patchett (Henley Standard)

Declarations of interest were addressed at the Annual Meeting which immediately preceded this one.

- 15/016 Minutes of Finance Committee meetings held on 9 April and 7 May 2014 were presented and ratified.
- 15/017 Minutes of previous meetings:
017.01 Planning Committees held on 7 and 14 April and 6 May 2014 were presented and approved.
017.02 Parish Council meeting held on 14 April 2014 were presented and approved.
- 15/018 County Councillor's Report: Cllr Bartholomew had sent a written report in which he had referred to additional Highways Funding of approximately £5.4 million. Members agreed that the state of the roads in the village, particularly Kennylands Road, Wood Lane and Peppard Road, is appalling with near Third World conditions and asked that funds should be made available now for proper resurfacing rather than just continuing to patch up potholes and collapsed verges. Regarding the reference to Connecting Oxfordshire, concerns were raised at the 'Oxford centric' nature of proposals to date. It was agreed that Cllr Bartholomew should be asked to seek recognition of there being real issues outside the centre of the county.
- 15/019 District Councillor's Report – neither member attended or sent apologies
- 15/020 Parish Clerk's Report. Mr Rawlins asked that in trying to deal with Japanese Knotweed and the derelict buildings (33/35 Peppard Road) the Parish Clerk should enquire if SODC can compulsorily acquire the site under NPPF provisions. Agreed.
- 15/021 Skatepark progress: Mrs Lewis advised that following the receipt of three new tenders it the Working Party is proposing that the contract be awarded to Wheelscape Ltd. A motion to approve this having been put under the 10 o'clock rule, it was resolved to endorse that recommendation.
- 15/022 Neighbourhood Development Plan: Mr Greenwood gave a progress report and proposed that a special meeting of the Parish Council be convened on 18 August specifically to ratify the draft of the Neighbourhood Development Plan. This was approved.
- 15/023 Council's final input to SODC's Community Governance Review Working Group. A draft letter that had been circulated was discussed and after agreeing minor amendments it was resolved that the version appended to these minutes should be sent by the Parish Clerk.
- 15/024 Matters for future consideration. The continuing deterioration of roads in the village (15/018, above). The closure of the NatWest branch in August. The Knotweed problem (15/020, above). Mr Kedge noted that he and Mr Stoves would be away on 16 June and it was agreed that Miss Hunt will chair that meeting/

Meeting closed at 20.50

Next meeting: Monday 16 June 2014 at 20.00

Chairman:

Dated:

Appendix: Letter to SODC on Community Governance Review

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office

VILLAGE HALL, WOOD LANE

SONNING COMMON, OXON, RG4 9SL

Mr D Buckle

Chief Executive

South Oxfordshire District Council

20 May 2014

Dear Mr Buckle

Community Governance Review

Further to our letter of 18 February, attached, we are now making our final formal input to this process, about which our concerns have not lessened. We are responding to Working Group recommendations CGR 20 and CGR 23 that were approved for consultation by your Council on 20 February 2014.

CGR 20: Amending the boundary between Sonning Common and Rotherfield Peppard parishes.

We were astonished when the working group admitted to having failed in this matter by saying that: ‘... 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’. This is after it had been presented with our proposal that clearly meets the terms of reference.

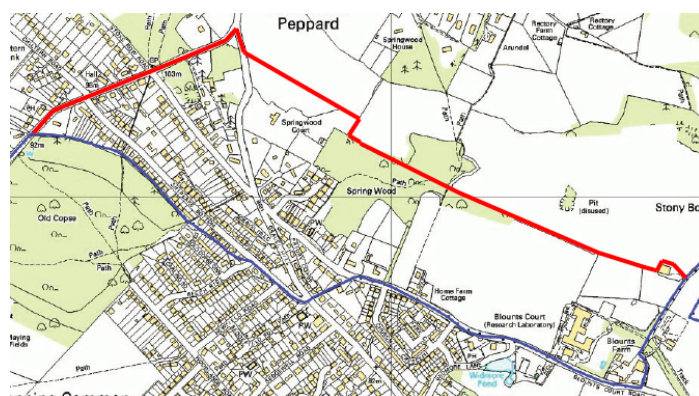
Our Parish Clerk was told by your officer that the ‘on the ground’ consideration of our proposal had consisted of you ‘driving around the village to have a look’ but not actually getting out and walking the proposed boundaries. Planning Committees often insist on visiting sites before making a decision that may affect just a handful of properties so why, when faced with a decision that affects two villages, has the Working Group itself not been out on the ground to see what is being proposed - as requested in our letter of 18 February?

The Parish Council now challenges CGR 20 using all the points made in our letter of 18 February summarised thus:

- A. The existing boundary with Rotherfield Peppard Parish (RPP) is **illogical**. It runs between houses and along streets and does not properly separate the two villages contravening your first three criteria for a good boundary, and the associated LG BCE Guidelines. To state in CGR 20 that it is ‘*unsatisfactory in community governance terms*’ and then recommend doing nothing about it seems like an egregious and illogical position for the Working Group to take. Our proposal is actually correct for satisfactory community governance.
- B. The existing boundary with RPP is **inequitable**. There are 300-plus residents living in the continuous built up area of Sonning Common that is technically in Rotherfield Peppard. They use Sonning Common’s shops, services and facilities but do not contribute to parish funds and are not represented on the parish council.
- C. The existing boundary with RPP is **unfair**. Sonning Common’s housing allocation – of having to build 138 new homes by 2027 – is based on a continuous built-up area that includes most of Rotherfield Peppard. Twenty three of the new homes that we have to find sites for in this village were allocated because of Rotherfield Peppard being in your calculations.

Furthermore, we have been discomfited throughout the process to hear that the two District Councillors (Harrison and Rooke) elected to represent the Sonning Common Ward have publicly supported views that ignore your first three objective criteria.

We conclude our challenge to CGR 20 by reminding you yet again that our proposal shown here as a map:



and here in an aerial view of the ridge line:



meets your top three criteria by:

- Providing a natural and a man-made boundary that between them define clearly one community from another.
- Incorporating housing developments that currently straddle parish boundaries and result in people being in different parishes from their neighbours.
- Ensuring effective and convenient representation at parish level of residents who share local facilities.

Thus our proposal is indubitably satisfactory in community governance terms and therefore, by definition, good for local democracy.

We reiterate our request that the Working Group should itself physically inspect our proposal before reaching its conclusion - we would be delighted to provide them with an informed guide. A short critique of the CGR process as observed is attached.

We now turn to **CGR 23: To increase the number of councillors from 12 to 15.**

In our initial submission of June 2013 we gave a short rationale and merely asked that we be considered for an upward revision without specifying a number.

On 14 January 2014 you advised us that this had been overlooked, then saying: *'I note that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) guidance on councillor numbers suggests that 12 councillors is the appropriate number for an electorate of 4,400. If the working group is going to recommend an increase it will need to have compelling reasons to move so far outside of the NALC guidelines.'*

We responded to this on 21 January with a full rationale that was reproduced in CGR 23. In recommending refusal of an increase, the report states: *'The working group notes that the parish council's request appears to be based on an assumption that this council will support its proposal to extend its boundary.'* We strongly refute this interpretation that takes just one of four equally important reasons put forward and ignores the rest.

We are very certain that an increase is justifiable on any one of the four criteria and remind you that our original request was just for an upward revision; we would certainly like to end up with an odd number above 12. Please reconsider.

Finally we turn to **CGR 22: Amending the boundary of Sonning Common parish to include Chiltern Edge School currently in Kidmore End parish.**

We understand that Kidmore End Parish Council has expressed a wish that the change should leave the western part of the school grounds in that parish by making the change coincident with the boundary of the AONB shown in red on the map below. This we fully support.



In conclusion, this letter has been approved by the full Parish Council to be read in conjunction with all our previous inputs, particularly our letter of 18 February.

We wish to stress our incredulity at what appears to have been a flawed and partial process being applied to an important matter of governance where the public has the right to expect logical and scrupulous impartiality.

We look to the Working Group now putting forward - and the full Council meeting on 17 July agreeing to - final recommendations that are actually satisfactory in community governance terms.

Yours sincerely



Philip Collings
Clerk to Sonning Common Parish Council

Copies to:
Mr S Corrigan

Attachments as pdfs with email:
Letter of 18 February 2014
CGR Critique