

**SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL
SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE**

Parish Office

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Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee
South Oxfordshire District Council
Milton OX14 4SB

15 June 2017

Dear Sirs

Request to increase the number of Sonning Common Parish Councillors from 12 to 14.

Background: The Council had 15 members until 2003 when, being almost moribund, a reduction to 12 was agreed. In 2011 the council was revived and began to become the active force that it is now. In June 2013 we applied for an increase as part of our input to the wide ranging Community Governance Review. We were advised in January 2014 that our application had actually been overlooked and it was then dismissed in the CGR23 conclusions with a reference to 1988 NALC guidelines and without any apparent examination of the four very compelling reasons that we had put forward – Appendix A.

Current situation: We had a fully elected council of 12 members in 2011 after a contested election with 14 candidates. In 2015 the 12 stood again and were returned unopposed. There are currently 11 members in post and we have three local residents wishing to be co-opted for the single vacancy. The Council has had the General Power of Competence since November 2013 which has enabled it to tackle many new opportunities.

Workload: The workload of the council has grown immensely since 2011 such that we now have four formal committees plus four, soon to be five active working parties and we are also represented on 10 external bodies. All these responsibilities are listed overleaf and give an outline of the level of unremunerated work in hand. A new Woodlands Management Working Party about to be set up will require at least two councillors as members whilst the work to revise and update our Neighbourhood Plan will again take a significant toll on several members.

Constraints: The NALC guidance is almost thirty years old and not relevant to the present position wherein more and more services and activities are either being formally devolved to parish councils or just being quietly abandoned by higher authorities. This is leaving the parishes either to make their own arrangements to meet local needs or to accept lower standards. Sonning Common Parish Council is firmly in the former category.

Village expansion: Sites allocated under our Neighbourhood Plan plus those arising from the 2033 revision and other infill developments will add some 400 homes to the village; these new residents will all be expecting us to serve them as well as we do those here now.

Conclusion: Our request is to be allowed to increase the number of our councillors to 14 in total to help to continue with our work to provide our own residents and those in the surrounding small villages with an attractive, vibrant and a well managed large village.

Yours faithfully,

For and on behalf of Sonning Common Parish Council



Philip Collings
Parish Clerk

Sonning Common Parish Council Committees and Working Parties

Finance Committee now: John Stoves (Chair); Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury; Dirk Jones; Barrie Greenwood; Douglas Kedge; Carole Lewis.

Planning Committee now: Stan Rust (chair); Tom Fort; ; Douglas Kedge; Carole Lewis; Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury; Leigh Rawlins; John Stoves (non-voting ex officio as Vice Chair)

Trees Committee: Stan Rust (Chair); Tom Fort; Dirk Jones; Douglas Kedge.

Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Party (NDPWP) now: Barrie Greenwood; Leigh Rawlins; Tom Fort; Stuart Howe plus co-opted members.

Memorial Hall Field Working Party (MHFWP): Leigh Rawlins; Vacancy; Chaired by Diana Pearman with several active co-opted members. Parish Clerk and Deputy both attend as members.

Village Centre Working Party (VCWP): Stuart Howe (Chair); Jane Diwell; Tom Fort; Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury; Leigh Rawlins; Stan Rust. Parish Clerk and Deputy both attend as members. Co-options will take place soon.

Recreation Working Party (Skate Park): Carole Lewis; Dirk Jones; Douglas Kedge; Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury.

Widmore Pond Committee: Jane Diwell; Tom Fort

Footpaths Working Party: John Stoves; Stan Rust.

External Bodies: Council is represented by custom or by requirement on the following external bodies.

Allotments Committee: John Stoves.

Village Hall Management Committee: Barrie Greenwood.

Sonning Common Magazine Committee: Tom Fort

Club SC: Dirk Jones.

Sonning and District Welfare and Educational Trust: Jane Diwell.

Chiltern Edge Community Association: Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury

Poor's Land Trust: Leigh Rawlins; Bernard Winnington.

On Your Bike (Health Centre) Committee: Tom Fort

Police Neighbourhood Action Group: Douglas Kedge

Scouts/Guides Hut Management Committee: Tom Fort

Other activities that members are actively involved with include the Village Gardeners; FISH volunteers; Nottakwire; Horticultural Society and many others.

Appendix A - Notes from the previous application.

Rationale for an increase as put forward to the 2013 Community Governance Review:

(Note that this is as submitted and has not been updated)

- a) Sonning Common is a key district centre as is indicated by the 8,400 patients registered at its Health Centre. Collectively the population of 'Greater Sonning Common' (including Rotherfield Peppard and Kidmore End) was 6,735 at the March 2011 Census. Sonning Common is unusual in having such populous other settlements so close to and dependent on it. We are actually servicing needs arising from well beyond our actual boundary.
- b) The parish of Sonning Common had 1,595 dwellings in March 2011 but as SODC Planning has determined we are actually a "larger village" settlement that has 1,916 dwellings (including 321 from Rotherfield Peppard) for the purposes of allocating new homes under the Core Strategy.
- c) The number of parish councillors has no bearing on any costs as they are all volunteers and in many cases retired. As we are currently inhibited from doing things we want to do because of a shortage of members then surely it should be up to SCPC to decide how many councillors it actually needs. The public are being denied the opportunity to participate in local democracy and get things done.
- d) We are faced with the likely retirement of some experienced and very hard working members in 2015. With more members we may be able to spread the workload more evenly to help new members to gain experience by gentle rather than total immersion.

Letter 20 May 2014 from SCPC to SODC:

Re: CGR23: To increase the number of councillors from 12 to 15

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

We were advised on 14 January 2014 that our request had been overlooked and that *'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 under CGR23. In recommending refusal of an increase the working group report states that: *'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.'* That takes but one of four equally important criteria and ignores the rest – is cherry picking criteria really the hallmark of this whole exercise?

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

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