

# THE OTFORD VILLAGE VOICE

NEWS-SHEET OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY



# STRONGER TOGETHER

**WE'RE BACK – Re-formed, re-generated. What's next?  
20mph OR NOT– two years later is anything happening?  
A BRIDGE TOO FAR– the bridge Otford doesn't want.**

## **WE'RE BACK! – a Message from your chairman**

As this is our first issue, I felt I should introduce myself to you. I'm Rod Shelton. I have lived in the village for some twenty-five plus years now, just opposite The Crown, and I am your new chairman. I had not planned to lead a re-invigorated Otford Society at all but it appears, with the difficulties that now face us, that our common concerns may be better shared through a strong, community society like this. So in the months ahead we will do our best to keep you informed, but we must know who you are. With our limited funds, we cannot continue to print paper copies of our news-letter so it is imperative that you allow us to contact you by email in future. On the clear understanding that your information will not be shared by a third party, please send us your name, address and email and we will keep in touch with you. Contact:

[enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk)

Of course, this was not the sort of introduction I had planned to write but with the step-change in the virus, events seem to have overtaken us, don't they? The new year ahead will be a challenge for all of us but, with help, as a community we will get through this awful stage and move on.

As you will read in this issue, we are already engaged in a number of schemes for the months ahead.

For a moment though, may I share with you the principles of what we believe the Otford Society is for:

- To promote the welfare, the happiness and the harmony of our community
- To help preserve the fabric of our heritage buildings
- To maintain and retain the individuality of our village and its countryside
- To protect our countryside from unwanted or insensitive development
- To support retail, hospitality and micro-businesses operating within the village

Not a bad set of objectives really. We'll do our bit but we need your support too. We know this will be a difficult year for all of us. But we will get through it and, so long as we are prepared to offer a helping hand to our neighbours, then every time we do, our community grows stronger. So, stay safe, God bless and have a well-earned New Year.

Rod Shelton.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING ABOUT 20 mph ?

Well, it's been almost two and a half years of discussion and planning but finally, this month, the '20s Plenty!' scheme will be off the ground. So, what roads will be covered?

Station Road from Colet's Orchard; the whole of the Green and Pond; the whole of the High Street, then across both bridges as far as the junction with Rye Lane. This is Phase One of the plan. A whole lot of other 'traffic calming measures' have been proposed and approved by Kent County Council for our



*Yet another car ends up in Otford Pond!*

adjoining roads as well. These form separate parts of the overall plan and will take place once parish funds become available. So what will we be getting in phase one?

The pedestrian refuge (outside the Pharmacy) will be made safer for pedestrians with dropped kerbs and a broader refuge. White lines will also ensure traffic approaching from the High Street and wishing to turn right around the pond at this point, no

longer continues to block the entrance to Station Road. Similarly, dropped kerbs and clear crossing points to the other refuge opposite the Crown will also make this much-used crossing safer.

As traffic approaches the pedestrian crossing before the school, a clearly-marked street-wide 'platform' is being introduced so that the busy pedestrian crossing itself is clearly defined in the centre of this raised traffic-slowing device. The old problem of the 'Pickmoss Step' has finally been resolved at last. A broader pavement will be introduced around the step so that mothers with buggies, wheel-chair users and children on bikes can pass in safety. The 'chicane' this creates will slow traffic just as it prepares to accelerate out of the village. Having passed Darent Bridge, given the breadth of the road at this point, traffic often begins to accelerate. Now cross-hatching is being introduced which will narrow the bottom of Pilgrims Way West to prevent this

tendency. There are a number of other measures, like the ‘No Stopping’ instructions fronting the car park entrance to ensure a free flow of vehicles, and a simplification of excessive signage.

Though even traffic in a 20mph area may travel at 23mph, at this speed the likelihood for serious injury is massively reduced from 34mph and there is much more time to stop. Traffic may not keep to 20mph but it **WILL** be significantly slower than it is at present... and we will all be safer for it!

## **A BRIDGE TOO FAR! – the bridge Otford doesn’t want**

We all know the level crossing just south of Otford Station that joins the footpath between Well Road and Tudor Drive. It’s a much used path to the station and village for people who live on the eastern side of the railway line.

This foot crossing has served the community since 1862. There has **not** been a single fatality or serious accident on it in **over 158 years!** Yet Network Rail is seeking to replace it with a footbridge. No... not a tidy little footbridge that you might find on a Hornby Double-O train set, but a massive 36ft high bridge constructed to accommodate gantries carrying overhead power cables beneath its walk-way. A slip or trip on the bridge’s 64 steps is all too easy to imagine... especially in bad weather! Incredibly, neither Network Rail, nor anyone else, will be responsible for keeping the bridge safe and clear of wet leaves, ice and snow.

National statistics for trips and falls from steps suggest the rail bridge represents a far greater risk of accidents happening than the foot crossing



*Linking both sides of the track for 158 years!*

which it seeks to replace. Those who will be particularly vulnerable are parents with young children and older residents. A third of Otford’s population is over 65 and, as we grow older, this formidable structure will become more and more of an ‘uphill’ challenge to cross. Of course you can avoid the 64 steps by taking

the longer route all the way round past the Scout Hut and down Station Road, avoiding speeding traffic as you try to cross. It's a much longer route to the village and we all know how dangerous the main road can be!

The Otford Society stood against the bridge proposal in March 2017. At that hearing adjudicators from Kent County Council supported Otford's concerns about safety and inconvenience, and threw out Network Rail's appeal with a **unanimous 5-0 verdict**... yet now (seemingly to try and wear us all down) they have appealed again. We need as much support as possible to oppose Network Rail's plan. So please email or write expressing your concern to Yvonne Oddy at The Planning Inspectorate, Rights of Way Section, Room 3/A Eagle Wing, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6PN.

Email: [yvonne.oddy@planninginspectorate.gov.uk](mailto:yvonne.oddy@planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

Please quote reference number ROW/3201659 (deadline 24th February).

If you would like further information, please contact councillor Philip Clucas on [philip.clucas@otford.net](mailto:philip.clucas@otford.net)

## **CYCLING DOWN THE VALLEY**

We are all aware, particularly those with children, how dangerous it has become to cycle on our roads. So Simon Featherstone and Graham Bignall have been surveying the Darent Valley Path from Otford to Farningham to assess how much of it might be used safely by family cyclists. They are liaising with The Darent Valley Landscape Partnership, who have already carried out some excellent preparatory work. Obviously, the route must be safe and not interfere with pedestrians enjoying the experience so it requires a bit of planning as well as a bit of alternative routing. The team are drawing up maps and have a list of proposals so we hope this is a project which will gain a successful 'tick' this year.

Meanwhile, the two are also assessing alternative 'safe' cycle routes to access Sevenoaks as well as looking at ways to make our village more "cycle-friendly". Through the encouragement of more 'everyday cycling' we can ease traffic congestion and reduce pressure on the limited village parking facilities. So, even if you're not a cyclist yourself, there can be clear benefits for everyone. If you feel you can usefully participate in this scheme, contact us on [enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk)

## STEP BACK TO THE '60S

Almost without notice, our road signage has changed radically over the years. Not only does there seem to be more of it but it has become more intrusive and certainly, bigger. Well, the Traffic Management Group, (OPC) supported by the Otford Society, have tried to do something about it. Around the pond, it is now our hope that all those big road signs will shortly get replaced by the old '50s/'60s style striped finger posts, so familiar to many of us. It should bring back a sense of the 'old village pond' and the days when there was considerably less traffic on our roads. We have tracked down a foundry in Derbyshire who still produce traditional signs and fingerposts. What's more the Parish Council have gained the support of KCC Highways. The Parish Council along with a generous donation from the Otford Fete Committee, have made this financially possible for us, so thank you. Let's hope it will bring back a warm pleasure of times-past to all our members.

## 'WINTER IN OTFORD' A PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

We are launching a competition to encourage budding local photographers. Entries should feature Otford landscapes, landmarks, wildlife or local buildings, with a focus on the theme 'Winter'. Why? Because at each quarterly edition, we aim to launch another competition building a great portfolio of pictures which celebrate Otford through the seasons. The competition is open to all Otford residents irrespective of age. Anyone can take part so long as you live in Otford, and there will be a winner's prize each quarter.

Your image does not even have to be taken this year. We will accept older photographs provided they meet the criteria specified. Just one digital entry per person and your piece of work must be submitted to us by 28th February 2021. Initial judging will be done during March by the Otford Society Committee. The best five entries will then appear in the Otford Village Voice. Then it will be up to all of you to choose a winner from the short list. To find out details of how to submit your entry, go to [www.otfordsociety.org.uk](http://www.otfordsociety.org.uk) or our Facebook page on [www.facebook.com/otfordsociety](http://www.facebook.com/otfordsociety)

C'mon let's see that talent of yours. Any more questions, contact us on [enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk)

## **CHRISTMAS TREE PRIZES!**

Your committee thought, things couldn't get much worse this year so at least we'll cheer everyone up. We bought Christmas trees for all the shops. It seems to have done the trick. And judging by the number of youngsters who took part in the Snow Dome Trail, that proved a success as well.

We promised prizes for shops that dressed their Christmas tree – but of course, being in lock-down no one was there to receive them. Don't worry they are all safe. Who got them? The Otford Barber – for exuberance; Denise Flowers – for originality; Vitality – for topicality; and Otford Dry Cleaners – for just fun! So thanks retailers all, for helping to make it a special Christmas this year. We were all winners.

If prize winners would like to contact Rod on 01959 523371, I'll be happy to pop over and give them their prize.

## **STARTING OUT ON YOUR OWN?**

It's been a difficult year for so many of us. What lies ahead for families is an even greater worry. The economy of the whole country has been affected. Many have been told that there will simply be no job to return to when this is all over. That's why so many are now considering forming their own companies and making a go of it from home.

As your village Society, we should like to be able to do as much as we can to help you reach prospective clients, find useful contacts, or gain useful information. For that reason the back page will in future be devoted to listing all those one-man/woman 'local' companies who are now operating out of Otford. Just provide us with a brief resume, a contact email and telephone number. We won't charge you for this. Little by little we aim to build a useful information centre for everyone who is starting on their own. Get in touch!

## **WELCOME TO OTFORD ENTERPRISE**

As part of our remit to help and support those setting up their own companies, we are launching our Otford Enterprise Scheme. We have formed a liaison with the Centre for Micro-businesses, an experienced operation



designed to help those who want to start up their own company or who want the best advice on running it efficiently. The Centre have long experience at providing exactly the sort of information you will need if you are a 'first-timer' at running your own operation.

There are so many aspects to running even a small business, from advice for setting up accounts to developing routes to market. That's what you will get if you would like to enrol – and it need not cost you a penny. The Centre for Micro-businesses will provide you with a one-to-one on-line session for an hour-per-person, all completely funded by the West Kent Partnership and supported by Sevenoaks District Council. It is an incredible operation to help you get started.

So please get in touch with us ASAP. Give us your email, name, address and a brief summary of your business and we will get back to you. There may be opportunities to join with others in the village who are doing similar work so that you can learn together (and of course have additional hours of tuition). As your community Society, we believe it is one way we can be of positive help to many in Otford who look for a more optimistic future.

Get in touch with us at [enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk). Your data will be held securely and not passed on to a third party without your express permission.

## **WE NEED YOU TO TELL US**

Apart from regular quarterly issues of this Village Voice news-Sheet, given the present circumstances, we may need to contact you to keep you up-dated on matters. If we have your email, we can then provide advice or news as it is required. But we cannot do it unless we have your details. Your data will always be protected and never passed to a third party. Email us on [enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@otfordsociety.org.uk) or drop us a line to: Village Voice, c/o The Parish Council, School House, 21 The High Street, Otford TN14 5PG. We can then stay in touch. If you have a neighbour who does not use email, perhaps you could print out any important material and then pass it on to them.