



# Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

## Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting

### 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010 at 7:30 p.m.

### St John's Hall Mortimer

The Annual Meeting of the Parish was held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2010 in St John's Hall, Mortimer with Cllr T Shorrocks in the chair.

**Present:** There were 51 people present.

- 1 Welcome by the Chairman:** Cllr Shorrocks welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the new format.
- 2 To receive the Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009:** The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009 were approved and signed as read by the Chairman.
- 3 Presentation of the Stratfield Mortimer Community Award 2010:** The Chairman presented the 2010 Community Award to Mrs Carmen Robinson in recognition of her contribution to the village over many years and especially her services to the Thursday Morning Age Concern Coffee Club.
- 4 Annual Report of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council from the Chairman of the Council:** Councillor Tom Shorrocks (Chairman of the Parish Council) started by introducing all the current members of the Parish Council present;

The Parish Council has had another very busy year and the Parish Office continues to be well used. Many residents, our District Councillors, and Parish Councillors all make use of this facility in person or by telephone on the open mornings.

The Parish Council Office is open Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30 am – 12:30 am. In addition to these regular *public* opening hours there have been approximately 47 additional committee and other meetings and 12 District Councillor Saturday surgeries held there over the last 12 months. Many people take advantage of the Parish Office's opening hours to speak with the Clerk for information or to view current planning applications (all planning applications can now also be viewed on the West Berkshire Council website).

The continuation of the office in its current location is, however, under threat as proposals put forward by West Berkshire Council for improvements to the Library mean there would no longer be room for the office and it would have to close. The Parish Council are however in discussion with West Berkshire Council to see if a way can be found to maintain the current office within the library precinct.

#### **The Parish Clerk:**

The Clerk's role as Responsible Officer (and Responsible Financial Officer) continues to be a very busy one covering the entire administration and management of the Parish Council, supporting our 15 councillors and maintaining an excellent working liaison with the various departments and personnel at West Berkshire Council in Newbury. In fact it is fair to say she remains the lynch pin of the Parish Council.

For those who are unfamiliar with the role of parish clerk, she has many responsibilities. She is responsible for:

- Giving legal advice to the Parish Council,
- Acting as the Council's Responsible Finance Officer, dealing with the accounts, the annual audit, budget, VAT returns, insurance etc.
- Preparing and publishing agendas and minutes of all Council meetings.
- Acting as the Cemetery Manager.
- Acting as the Fairground Manager.
- Managing the Parish Council Website.
- Editing the Parish Council Newsletter

The Clerk is also available for managing the many other things that come along on a day to day basis. I know that our Clerk has an enviable reputation not only among the other Parish Clerks from neighbouring Parishes, but also among the officers and full time staff at West Berks to name but a

few.

### **Finances:**

The Parish Council total budget for expenditure for 2010/11 has remained quite steady for routine items. There has been a small increase of £1,511 (1.75%) in the total precept budget for next year, which is to be used for:

- An increase in grants made by the Parish Council (S137 payments).
- The continued maintenance of an additional, part funded PCSO.

### **The Business of the Parish Council:**

Full Council meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month (except August) and commence at 7:30pm. Agendas for these meetings are displayed on the two Parish Council Notice Boards (one outside the Library entrance and the other, a new one, outside the Post Office), as well as on the Parish Council Website.

Full Council meetings are held in The Lounge (back room) of the Methodist Church, West End Road. Because of new security measures for the hall, to attend the meeting, it is necessary to ring the doorbell at the Church main entrance and someone will let you in. Members of the public are always welcome to attend all full Council and Committee meetings of the Council. Before the proceedings begin, the Council allows a Public Questions Slot (maximum 10 minutes) and members of the public are able to briefly address the Council. Any such discussions do not form part of the formal proceedings of the Parish Council Meeting and are not therefore included in the Council's official Minutes; any resultant follow-up actions may be dealt with separately. Make-up of the Council: In addition to the full council meetings the business of the parish is conducted through the five standing committees:

Cemetery Committee

Communications Committee

Fairground Trees and Amenities Committee

Planning Committee

Roads & Footpaths Committee

In addition, the Chairmen of each of these Committees, together with the Council's Chairman and Vice-Chairman make up the Finance & General Purposes committee which oversees the financial affairs and regulation of the council.

### **Committee Reports**

**Planning: (Chairman: John Morden).** West Berkshire Council is the authority which determines our local planning applications. However, the Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, is invited to comment on all applications within the Parish and it actively engages in its responsibilities. The Planning Committee have met 12 times and considered 46 planning applications (last year it met 13 times during and considered 51 applications).

All Parish Council Planning Committee Meetings are also advertised on the two Parish Council Notice Boards outside The Post Office and outside The Library three days in advance. Parishioners are always welcome to come along and observe (These meetings are usually held in the Parish Council Office at the back of the Library).

This last year the Parish Council made its own planning application with a proposal for additional car parking space at the railway station. This would have provided 100 spaces adjacent to the south (Basingstoke) platform. The application was however rejected on appeal. The reasons for dismissal, given by the appeal officer were:

Road safety. The 85th percentile speeds are at the limit of the stopping sight distance. Any back up of cars due to traffic flow would reduce the stopping sight distance to an unacceptable level. Accepted that the existing car park entrance does not meet this standard does not justify the introduction of a new substandard development.

Disabled travellers returning to either car park needing to traverse the road bridge would be a significant hazard.

Large scale urbanising element in the countryside.

**Roads & Footpaths: (Chairman Dudley Ives):** The Roads, Footpaths and Commons Committee has had a busy year and among many other matters it is continually looking at the parking situation and speeding within the village. Roads and Footpaths is an area which benefits from the strong links and relationships we have formed with the local highways authority at West

Berkshire. With an eye to improving the parking situation some restrictions on the car park outside St. John's Church were brought into force, limiting some of the spaces to a 2 hour stay and the kerb outside of the dental surgery was raised and bollards put outside the bank to discourage inconsiderate parking. There has also been renewal of 7 kissing gates on various public footpaths around the village.

**The Fairground, Trees and Amenities Committee: (Chairman: Pete Blagden):** This committee does a sterling job in looking after some of our most prized assets within the parish. It can be argued that the Fairground in particular continues to be very much the heart and focal centre of the community and we believe that the Parish Council, through the committee, has achieved a great deal of improvement to the site during the year. Some new hedges have been planted with the help of various volunteer groups. You may have noticed the provision of new seats: one in the playground and one in the grazing area. We have, with some financial assistance from West Berkshire Council also replaced most of the kissing gates on the Fairground and the five barred gate at the entrance to at Windmill Road. The Council has proposals for a new and exciting initiative in providing new playground facilities for 8 – 13 year olds.

**Communications: (Chairman: Danusia Morsley)** The Parish Council continue to produce a Parish Council Newsletter three times a year which is distributed to every house in the parish by a band of volunteers. The Newsletter is well-received by residents who have said that they find the information very informative. In the last issue we changed to a new, improved A5 format.

**Cemetery: (Chairman: Steve Clark)** The Cemetery is, we believe, looking very neat and tidy and, in the light of its good practice, our thanks go out to those who look after it.

#### **Other Council Activities**

#### **Web Site:**

All minutes, agendas and other parish council information can be viewed on the Parish Council website [www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](http://www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk) and also on the two parish council notice boards outside the Post Office and the Library.

#### **Mortimer, Burghfield and District Neighbourhood Action Group:**

Two Parish Council representatives (Angie Phillips and Danusia Morsley) sit on this Committee which meets bi-monthly.

#### **The Parish Plan Refresh:**

The Parish Council has now completed a refresh of our Parish Plan and this has now been formally adopted both by the Parish Council and West Berkshire Council. The Parish Council has already begun working toward realising as many of the aspirations contained within it as possible and a full report was in the last Parish Council newsletter, as well as details being available on our website. One of the practical things which has grown out of the Parish Plan initiative is a new group which has formed itself, The Mortimer Village Partnership (MVP). The MVP is an independent, unofficial group of individuals who have grouped together "to involve people and groups in the life of the village, by improving communications, by connecting people together and by facilitating activities and events." They have already set up their own website ([www.mortimervillage.org.uk](http://www.mortimervillage.org.uk)).

#### **Parish Council Custodian:**

Over this year Mr. Les O'Rourke, who had been our Parish Custodian for several years, was forced to give up his post due to continuing ill health. The Parish Council offer Les our thanks for his service to our community and wish him a speedy recovery to full health. The Council has appointed a new custodian, Mr. Terry Hall and welcome him into his new responsibilities.

- 5 **Presentation of the proposals for the Playbuilder Scheme for an exciting additional play area on the Fairground for 8 to 13 year olds:** Cllr Morsley gave a brief overview of the schemes and invited everyone to view the different schemes on display.

There was a break for refreshments with the opportunity to look at and comment on the Playbuilder displays/ designs etc.

- 6 **Report from PCSO Steve Innes:** PCSO Steve Innes gave an update on his work in Mortimer.

- 7 **District Councillor's Observations:** District Councillor Keith Lock reported that much of our work revolves around local issues and the 5 Parish Councils in Mortimer Ward but we

serve on a number of committees and task groups. Mollie sits on the Licensing Committee and hearings, the Stronger Communities Select Committee, the Schools Standards and Effectiveness task group, the Corporate Parenting panel, School Transport appeals and the Health and Wellbeing task group. she is also the Council's representative on Clark's Charity and is a Local Authority Governor at St. Mary's School. Keith sits on the Eastern Area Planning Committee, the District Planning Committee, the Personnel sub committee and the Schools Standards and Effectiveness task group.

This year the Council Tax has increased by 1.9% around the national average although the level of government grant rose by 1.5% compared with a national average of 2.6%. . The Administration is seeking to make savings of £3.3 million and about 40 staff have been made redundant or not been replaced. The outlook is uncertain and if the Government grant is reduced next year by 10-15% then 150 staff jobs would be at risk. The cost of respite care will increase from £71 per week by a rate of 30% per annum and although it will be means tested those who pay all the costs will eventually pay £700 per week. The Council's capital programme totals £67 million which includes £43 million from the Government for schools and a new joint school and community library to be provided at Willink School.

In our view the roads were already deteriorating before the bad weather earlier in the year and the effect of the snow and ice was disastrous, around £500,000 was set aside for pot hole repairs and the Council has received an additional £400,000 from the Government specifically for this work. The Administration has been asked to increase the stocks of salt, to ask Farmers to use their tractors and snow ploughs to help clear roads and to restore salt bins where they have been removed.

Locally we have been promised that repairs will be done this year on Stephens Rd., Stephens Firs and Victoria Rd. from St. Catherine's Hill to the War Memorial. The lower end of The Street and Station Rd. are in next year's programme.

As many of you will know West Berkshire is scheduled to get another 10,500 dwellings up to 2026, of these 6000 have already been built or have sites identified. In this area we were allocated 800 but as nearly 500 have already been built or given planning permission Mortimer and Burghfield are likely to get around 130 each.

Fortunately the scheme for 7,500 houses in Pingewood north of the M4 has been abandoned. Our real problem remains provision of affordable housing with only 150 new houses planned for each year while the Council waiting list stands at 4,500.

Education continues to be well run and we, as Members of the Schools Standards and Effectiveness Committee, routinely visit many of our schools, the majority are very good in fact Hampstead Norreys Primary was awarded "best primary school in England" status last year. At GCSE 60% of our students gained 5 passes at A\* to C grades. Nevertheless 4 of our Primary Schools and 3 of the Secondary Schools have been in difficulty.

Mollie has successfully used the Members Capital Grant scheme to obtain grants totalling £23,160 for repairs to the lych gate at St. Mary's Church, to the triangle at the entrance to byway 7 near the church and a joint grant with councillor Royce Longton for the Scout Hut near the Rising Sun which is used by children from Mortimer as well as Burghfield and Sulhamstead. Keith bid successfully for £5,000 for the new Community Hall at Beech Hill bringing the total grant for this project to £20,000 over two years.

Lastly problems with the adoption of services at Mortimer Hill have continued but the drains and sewers were taken over by Thames Water last September and the public open spaces are about to be adopted by West Berks Council. The roads remain a problem because the remedial work carried out by Taylor Wimpey was substandard and they are still awaiting delivery of some materials before work can start.

## **8 Reports from local Charities:**

**a) Stratfield Mortimer Relief in Need Charity:** Mr Hector Clark, the Chairman of the Stratfield Mortimer Relief in Need Charity reported that the funds of the Charity have not altered during the past year, interest rates are low but as reported previously, we are able to fund a number of requests and projects. Recently funds have been provided to assist in the construction of the Nurture Room at St John's School. This facility will provide an area which it is hoped will help in the development of pupils and families. Funds are also being made available for the new organ at St John's Church and to provide equipment for the Youth Club. Assistance has been given to thirteen families who have special needs and find difficulty with funding. In this connection, we hope to reach those in need, but welcome information about such cases. Many people, for what ever reason, do not like to seek help from charity. However we are here. All requests will be considered on merit.

**b) Clarke's Educational Trust:** Mr Tom Shorrocks reported that Clarke's Education Foundation is a registered charity serving the Parishes of Stratfield Mortimer, Mortimer West End and Wokefield. The objects of the Charity are to make grants for educational purposes to schools, other organisations and individuals in these parishes. The Trustees have continued with their programme of awarding bursaries to assist with further education. This year the trustees have awarded bursaries totalling £3,150 to nine persons studying at university or undertaking modern apprenticeships. During the year there was significant refurbishment work carried out to the investment property. It was found that the foul sewerage system needed extensive work which involved digging up the floor of the entrance lobby and replacing several sections of pipe. The floor has been re-laid and tiled. Further damp proofing work was required to the solid walls and a new dining room carpet was laid.

**c) Alfred Palmer Memorial Trust:** Mr Keith Lock's reported that the principle users of the Palmer Ground is still Mortimer Football Club who have had a much better season this year and will finish in the top half of the Reading Senior League table. Some of you may know that the club would have been relegated last season if the league had not decided to make the Senior Division an invitation league. Mortimer retained their status by virtue of having one of the best grounds in the league. The barriers and dugouts around the pitch are requirements of the Reading League and Section 106 money was used to provide them. The youth sections are still flourishing and apart from the under 9's, the club intend to start a 4 to 7's group next year and to enter an under 15 side in the local competitions. The Guides continue to use the ground once a year and we would welcome approaches from other groups. Lastly the Parish Council contribution although reduced was again very welcome.

**d) Stratfield Mortimer Fairground Trust:** No report.

## **9 Statements by School Governors:**

**Mortimer St John's Church of England Infant School:** Mrs Rebecca Barker gave a verbal update on St John's School.

**Mortimer St Mary's Church of England VA Junior School:** Throughout the past year Mortimer St. Mary's School has continued to serve the local community by offering the highest possible standards of education, while remaining open and inclusive in its admissions policy. High levels of satisfaction have been expressed by our pupils, their parents and carers through their response to annual questionnaires and academic standards are high.

The SAT's results for the tests taken in May 2009 are among the best ever achieved by pupils at Mortimer St. Mary's and are evidence of hard work and commitment by pupils and staff alike. For the second year running SAT's results have shown an improvement with St. Mary's School continuing to achieve above West Berkshire and national average levels.

The 241 pupils currently on role are also offered a range of opportunities and experiences beyond those laid down by the National Curriculum. These include many and varied after-school clubs and two residential trips during their years at the school.

This picture of a thriving, happy school in which children are eager to learn is a tribute to Roger Green, our Headteacher, and to all members of our teaching and support staff. Many of them are very experienced and all have high levels of commitment in carrying out their work. It is school policy to encourage ongoing professional development and two of our Learning Support Assistants are currently undertaking teacher training courses at Oxford Brookes University on a part-time

basis while remaining on the school staff.

One of our Foundation Governors, Clare Edmondson, moved away from the area in early December and Steve Colley recently had to withdraw on what we hope will only be a temporary basis, for professional reasons. Since then Mother Juliet Straw has moved to serve her own parish near Portsmouth. Mollie Lock joined the Governing Body in the autumn as a Local Authority Governor and we welcome her. There are currently two vacancies on the Governing Body. The Governors have recently completed the lengthy interview procedures to appoint a new Headteacher to replace Roger Green when he retires at the end of December 2010. An appointment has been made and our new Headteacher will take up her duties in January 2011. This will give us an opportunity to provide an induction period to smooth the transition.

Our PTA continues to support the school by providing varied and entertaining events while raising additional funding for projects not paid for from the school budget.

The close links between the ecclesiastical parish and Mortimer St. Mary's remain strong and valuable in creating a caring community within the school. Our pupils are encouraged to respect others, to be tolerant of difference and to be protective of their environment.

The school's Governing Body has continued to take a lead in encouraging pupils and staff to become involved in environmental projects. As a result the school's grounds have been further developed to enhance the pleasure they give as well as to provide further learning opportunities. Volunteers from BG Group spent a day in school during the summer term when fencing round the swimming pool was treated, decking was installed in the wildlife area, a chicken run was built and a classroom redecorated. We appreciate their hard work and hope they enjoyed their day with us. For the past seven months a building project has been taking place to demolish the old administrative block and replace it with a greatly improved school entrance area, new offices for the Headteacher and administrative staff and a larger and more pleasant staff room. This has involved considerable upheaval and some inconvenience but staff morale has remained high throughout. The new building, partly financed by the Diocese of Oxford, is now completed and was blessed by the Bishop of Reading at a School Assembly on 26 March 2010 in the presence of pupils, staff, governors and representatives of the Diocese, District and Parish Councillors and the Contractors. Finally, on behalf of the pupils, staff and governors of Mortimer St. Mary's, I would like to thank everyone who has supported us in any way during the past year. We hope that during the coming year there will be many opportunities for you to visit the school and we assure you of a warm welcome.

- 10 **Report from Parish Council's Representative on St John's Hall:** Mr Lawrence Picking, Chairman of the St John's Hall Committee reported that this time last year I spoke of the finely balanced state of our finances. As we will hear from our Treasurer, savings made from good housekeeping and lack of any major maintenance items were more than offset by a reduction in lettings income and bank interest, and increased charges for gas and electricity, resulting in a very small trading loss for the year. A sub-committee was formed during the year in order to speed up progress regarding the proposed alterations to the porch area. I would like to thank John, Tim and Angela for the work they have done in this respect. I would also like to thank the officers of the Committee, and record the committee's thanks to our auditor, Harry Smith and Kerrie our cleaner.
- 11 **Report from CiC on Stratfield Mortimer Community Centre, Fairground:** Mr Adrian Smith reported that after some years it is a great pleasure to be able to report to this meeting that the Community Centre is finally open and being used. The hall finally opened on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and has been in much use ever since. The cricket club were the first users, followed by the ballet school and then the Mortimer Fun Day, which gave a lot of people their first opportunity to have a look inside the building. The hall has 8 regular user groups ranging from the very young at the Toddler Group to the less young who attend the Lunch Club. Sports are represented too; not only the cricket club, but keep fit, yoga classes ballet and music classes are regularly run in the hall. The hall has been used by local businesses for meetings and presentations, its hosted children's parties and band practices and next month will act as the village polling station. The hall is run by a board of volunteers and all the expenditure has to be covered by the rental income. The construction costs for the building have all been paid off and the board is now able to look at adding more fixtures to the building; new seats and some tables being a priority. Before opening, we had estimated it to be necessary to raise around £10,000 in rental costs to pay out way; this being

based on the running costs of other local halls. We hoped for 2 things, that we would hit this level of income by the third year and that, as the building is new, our running costs might not be so high. In fact we should achieve this income level in this, our first year, which will mean we we'll be able to improve the facility with new chars, tables curtains etc all the sooner. We'd like to thank those groups that helped and supported the construction of the building and for all your patience over the years. There were people who worried that the building wouldn't be used enough and would be a burden to the village, so we'd now like to thank all our users for making the building such an active part of the community.

**11 Open Forum:**

- The Cricket Club gave an update. They have gone up 2 divisions into League 2 for the 2010 season and the club goes from strength to strength. The club is financially stable and needs more players especially youth members.
- Mr Lewis raised a query about the comparison between the precept figures for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. The Chairman said he would look into this and ensure that any necessary correction would be made public in due course.
- There was a request that a report from the MVP be placed on next year's agenda.
- A query was raised about double yellow lines outside the surgery. The Chairman said that this would be passed to the Parish Council.
- The Chairman answered queries about hire charges for use of the Fairground.
- A question was raised about provision of allotments; this matter was being progressed by SMPC.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9:15 p.m.

The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting is Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011 at 7:30 p.m.