



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

held on the 27th April 2016 at St John's Hall Mortimer

Present: Approximately 30 parishioners and councillors.

The meeting commenced at 7:32 pm.

The attendees agreed that Cllr Wingfield should take the minutes.

1. Cllr. M Dennett, Chairman of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council, welcomed all attendees.
2. **To receive the minutes of the 2015 Annual Parish Meeting:** It was agreed that the minutes should be taken as read. They had been available on the Parish Council web site for some time and a copy was on display in the hall.
3. **Update on local Policing by Thames Valley Police:** PCs Stephen Hinds and Ian McDonnell outlined the latest crime figures which showed that crime was relatively low in Mortimer. Last year there had been 3 house burglaries (down on previous year), 21 non dwelling burglaries (up on previous year), 6 thefts from vehicles (about the same), 20 thefts from vehicles (up slightly), 17 other thefts (about the same) and 42 criminal damages (double the previous year).

There was then a question answer session concerning policing in the village. The main topic was the visibility of the PCSO's where it was explained that their role had changed to that originally envisaged. Concern over speeding was expressed but the police pointed out that they could only operate speed cameras/guns in places where it was safe to do so. It was pointed out that the Parish Council could use its own equipment as long as it was calibrated properly. Cllr Butcher explained the latest speed enforcement policy of West Berkshire Council.

Finally the Police asked for any intelligence to be passed to them via the 111 number, their Twitter feed or the use of Neighbourhood watch schemes.

4. **Presentation of the 2016 Stratfield Mortimer Community Award to Mrs Freda Batten:** First a certificate was presented from the Parish Council to recognize the outstanding service of Mrs Batten to the village for her role as a school crossing patrol for the last 34 years. This year's award was unique in that Mrs Batten had already received this award after serving for 25 years. The Chairman was delighted to announce that the rules did not prohibit this award for a second time and it had been the unanimous choice of the committee. The Community Award was then presented by the Chairman.
5. **Update on Stratfield Mortimer Development Plan:** It was reported that since the last Annual Parish Meeting the Housing need survey results had been received, a public meeting to discuss the site design brief for the site behind St John's school had been

held and the six week pre submission consultation had been carried out. The results of that consultation were very useful and 19 themes had emerged. The NDP document had been considerably amended as a result of the consultation and the submission version, together with supporting documents had been ratified by the parish Council on the 11th February 2016.

The submission document had been forwarded to West Berkshire Council who in turn had just completed their own six week consultation. It was understood there were only 19 responses to that consultation, most of which were from statutory bodies. The documents have now been sent to the appointed Examiner who is Richard Humphreys QC. It is expected that the referendum on the plan will take place either in July or September. A question was asked about what would happen if the plan failed at the referendum and the answer was given that the planning for the village would revert to West Berkshire Council.

6. The Annual Report of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council: Cllr. Dennett gave a resume of the activities of the parish council as follows:-

The last Annual Parish Meeting was held on 16th June 2015 and at that meeting I reported that at the election in May 2015 two new councillors had been elected; Cllr Nick Carter and Cllr Chris Lewis and that Cllr Tracy Audsley had resigned. An election was called by the public and three candidates contested the election in August. Cllr Dudley Ives was elected.

With great sadness, I report that Cllr Austin Colaço passed away in November. The Council has very much appreciated all his service and contributions over the years. With regard to the resulting vacancy, no election was called by the public. The Council then advertised for candidates for co-option. Three candidates came forward and Lucy Jones was co-opted after candidates made presentations at the March 2016 Parish Council meeting.

With regret, I also report that Cllr Angie Philips has just resigned. The Council would like to thank to Angie for her valuable contributions to debate and her service over many years. The Council will miss you.

Jayne Kirk, the Parish Clerk since 2000 resigned in August. The Council thanks her for her fifteen years of service and we wish her well in her new post. The services of a qualified Clerk are hard to obtain, at end of November Haydn Selwyn-Jones was appointed as locum clerk on a contract basis. Haydn had previously been Clerk at Burnham Parish Council. The Council advertised and interviewed for the post of Clerk and has appointed Haydn as Clerk for two years. Unfortunately, an operation on his shoulder, preventing him from driving, has delayed start of his contract (this is why he is not here tonight) but he will be in fully post as soon as possible. Members of the public have already meet him in the PC office and we expect the office to shortly be open to the public on Mondays Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Our other member of staff, Custodian Frank Stansfield (Custodian) continues to do an excellent job in tidying the Fairground, cemetery, the West End Road car park and he inspects all the play equipment each week.

What has the Parish Council done in the last year? A major activity has been dealing with West Berkshire Council and commenting on their budget proposals. We are only part of the process, but we have tried to respond to every proposal and to support/lead the community. However there has only been limited success over the Willink school transport, the 75 bus and the proposed library closure. The Council has set up a library working group to consider future options for the library and will be seeking input from the community.

The Council will carry on fighting cuts and reductions in services. Recently, it has become apparent that West Berkshire Council would like to devolve various services to the Parish Council. That will be a challenge. For some services, such as the library, it may be possible steer a way with volunteer help, but for others it may not and these may have considerable impact on the funding and scope of the Parish Council in future.

In deciding on the budget for 2016/17 the Council managed to keep the precept per household constant, we have a slight increase in the total precept as the Council tax base (the number of equivalent Band D properties in the Parish) has slightly increased (from 1619 to 1642).

A statutory duty of the Parish Council is to respond to planning applications. In the last year, the Planning Committee has met thirteen times and dealt with 44-applications. At present we are still awaiting the outcome of two major applications, on the Tower House / Fairwinds and the Monkey Puzzle Field sites.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan is an important activity and Cllr Wingfield has just updated you on progress (full details will be in the minutes of this meeting). Essentially, the plan has been through two periods of consultation and has now been sent by West Berkshire Council to the appointed examiner. It is expected that the referendum on the plan will take place either in July or September. The referendum will determine whether the plan is adopted or whether planning for the village will remain with West Berkshire Council.

In June 2015 the Charity Commission issued a draft scheme which included the clause that if Garth Hall was sold the proceeds would be split 50:50 between the British Legion and the YMCA. The Parish Council strongly objected to this and the draft scheme was been withdrawn. The Royal British Legion and the Parish Council will be entering further discussions on what can and should be done, either to continue the use of the hall or to deal with the proceeds of any sale in line with the original objectives.

Throughout the year, the Parish Council has continued with its routine activities such as the maintenances, grass cutting and hedge planting on the Fairground. In 2015 it also arranged and paid for the grass cutting of the Alfred Palmer Memorial Field (excluding the football pitches). This arrangement will continue in 2016. On the Fair

ground, a programme of cutting back the spreading gorse has been started. The annual RoSPA inspection of the play equipment was satisfactory with only few minor items needing attention.

Everyone knows the Fairground but the Parish Council cemetery is a valuable resource that the Council manages and maintains and is a sizeable administrative task. During the last year there were eight burials and six cremations.

Parish Councillors operated a speed indicator device (SID) for two weeks in April at various locations in the Parish and a repeat is planned for later in the year. The Council decided to continue with the part funded PCSO contract for 2016/17, but any future continuation will require solid evidence of value for money.

Over the last year the Parish Council has tried to improve communication with the community. A six month trial of Facebook was deemed a success and will continue (facebook.com/stratfieldmortimerparishcouncil). This is not an official way of contacting the Council (which are email, telephone and letter) but we try to respond to posts. The newsletter is scheduled for four issues per year and we are trying to improve the content. The first issue with a colour cover seem to be well received.

A relatively minor part of the Council's activities, but perhaps the most obvious, are public events fully or partly organised by the Council. The Council decided to purchase a Christmas tree for last December, and this along with additional lighting, seemed to be popular. The Council was delighted with the attendance at the Beacon lighting on the Fairground on 21st April for the Queen's 90th birthday. It was suggested by a member of the public that the Council plant a tree to commemorate this birthday. A Malus 'Red Peacock' (flowering crab apple) was quietly planted near pond by the war memorial and it has flowered this year. The next event is a free 'Queen's 90th Birthday Party in the Park' on the Fairground on 4th June. I doubt whether we can match the Jubilee event, but we are trying our best.

The Council has many on going projects, such as car park refurbishment, better guides to footpaths and implementation of the NDP (assuming a successful examination and referendum). So please support the Parish Council and help us enhance this Parish. My sincere thanks to fellow councillors and staff for all their varied contributions during the last year.

At the end of the report Cllr Earl also brought the meeting up to date with the preparations for the Queen's birthday celebrations which were being held on the fairground on Saturday the 4th of June.

There were no questions on the reports but the view was expressed that the parish council was now perceived to be working for the community as opposed to a few years ago when it was perceived to be a hindrance rather than a help.

7. The Annual report of the Stratfield Mortimer Fairground Charity: Mr Geoff Mayes gave a resume of the activities of the charity as follows:-

The trust was in good health. Julian Earl has been appointed the Parish Council's trustee. The trust has over £14,000 in the bank but is finding it difficult to distribute this money, despite advertising, as few people have come forward or been identified as requiring help with their heating bills. Those present were asked to help identify people that might benefit from the trust.

The trustees have started the process of registering the fairground with the Land Registry. It is expected that this process will be completed in the next few months.

- 8. Election of Secretary of the Stratfield Mortimer Fairground Charity:** There was only one nomination and Mr Geoff Mayes was duly appointed secretary.
- 9. Open Forum and Questions:** The status of the safe route between Mortimer and Burghfield was raised and it was explained that the provision of a footpath was one of the projects contained in the NDP. It was also mentioned that the parish council had set up an Implementation Committee for the NDP and this would no doubt be considering the priority of the projects in the NDP.

The two district councillors present then outlined their plans to take the chief executive of West Berkshire Council on a tour of the ward, in the following week, and that the various aspects of the safe route to Willink would feature as a priority.

The presence of two very large wheelie bins outside the Community Centre was raised and Cllr Dennett agreed that they should not be there and he would take up this matter with the centre's management.

Finally, Cllr Dennett requested feedback on the agenda for the meeting to improve the meeting for future years.

The meeting closed at 8:56 pm