



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Date: 3rd March 2016

Response to:

West Berkshire Council's Budget Proposal 2016/17 Phase 2: Libraries

The following response was posted on the WBC feedback form for the above proposal.

1. Contact details:

The Parish Clerk, Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.

2. Do you or a carer use this service?

No

3. What do you think we should be aware of, in terms of how this proposal might impact people?

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council held an Extraordinary Council Meeting on the 18th March to consider the Phase 2 and resolved to strong oppose the closure of Mortimer Library.

This proposal will significantly affect the lives of much of the rural population of Mortimer, Beech Hill and Wokefield, together with the rest of West Berkshire. Libraries play a vital role in the life of villages and small towns. It is unlikely that many people will travel to Newbury to access the sole remaining library.

The current proposals for cuts in public transport make this even more unlikely.

In the West Berkshire Core Strategy, Mortimer and Burghfield are designated as Rural Service Centres for the East Kennet Valley, providing services for their inhabitants and those from neighbouring parishes.

This proposal is contrary to that designation and leaves the East Kennet valley with a significant decline in service provision.

The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development plan, which has recently been submitted to WBC supported this designation.

An additional concern regarding Mortimer Library is the lease for the Parish Council office attached to the library.

It is conceivable that closure of the library could strongly impact on the ability of the Parish Council to function.

4. Do you feel that this proposal will affect particular individuals more than others, and if so, how do you think we might help with this?

This proposal will affect all sections of the community.

However, it will particularly affect the elderly, young children and the unemployed. These groups are unlikely to be able to visit Newbury to reach library facilities and both groups make good use of the current facilities.

The proposals will decrease contact with books and may affect literacy in the young and quality of life for the elderly. Use of computer facilities and access to local newspapers



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

are important resources for people seeking employment and these need to be provided locally, as is currently the case at Mortimer Library.

Some members of the community, especially the elderly, do not have their own computer facilities and need access to computers as the move to online services becomes even greater, such as pension benefits and applying for Council tax rebates from West Berkshire Council.

5. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way? If so, please provide details.

No

6. Is there any way that you or your organisation can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of this proposal? If so, please provide details of how you can help.

There is an extremely strong desire in Stratfield Mortimer Parish and the surrounding communities to retain the Mortimer Library facilities and the Parish Council should respond to the wishes of its parishioners.

However, this has not been possible to discuss in any detail so far.

It is impossible for the Parish Council to consider alternative proposals until it has detailed figures on costs, footfall, the level and costs of any support services that could be provided from the remains of the West Berkshire library service and possible alternative approaches to providing library facilities.

A particular concern here is the very short time scale on which seems that closures will occur.

If WBC decide to go ahead with these proposals, we urge that the time scale is extended to allow parishes time to consider alternatives.

7. Any further comments?

The Parish Council would like to point out two facts regarding Mortimer Library.

First, the land was given to Berkshire County Council in 1971 with a restrictive covenant which includes the phrase “ ... not to erect any building on the land herby other than a public library in accordance with the plans already submitted...”.

Second, Mortimer library was refurbished at considerable expense eighteen months ago. It now has excellent modern facilities and is well used as a library.

The Phase 1 proposal was to close Burghfield library and merge it with Mortimer. The Parish Council urges WBC to reconsider this proposal. Keeping Mortimer library open would enable the Council to provide library facilities in the rural East Kennet Valley serving much of the rural east of West Berkshire and make effective and sensible use of its asset.