



## Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

**Response to:**

**West Berkshire Council's Budget Proposal 2016/17: Home to School Transport.**

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 wishes to comment on the proposal to remove free school transport from Mortimer to the Willink School with effect from April 2016.

It is the Council's opinion that the proposed walking route is not safe (see section 7 below). In view of this the proposal:

- a) Will put at risk those children and parents that do try to use this route.
- b) Is likely to generate considerable extra car journeys between Mortimer and the Willink School with environmental and safety issues and traffic congestion in Burghfield Common and hence affect many local inhabitants.

**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?**

- a) It will particularly affect families who have two or more children with at least one of these attending the primary schools in Mortimer.  
The timing means that they are not able to accompany children on the walking route (even if it was safe).  
It would also prevent them walking to St Mary's school as many parents and children now do, parking and road safety at this school is a current issue and potentially more car journeys has the potential for traffic chaos on The Street.
- b) The route is unsuitable for buggies and push chairs thus preventing families with younger children taking the route
- c) It will particularly affect families with both parents working, especially those with jobs such as teaching where flexibility in working hours is not possible.  
It is also quite likely that owing to the time needed to accompany many children would walk unaccompanied, thus posing an unacceptable child safety risk.

Need to maintain the current services.



## Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

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

Not at this stage.

There is no practical or safe walking route available between Mortimer and Burghfield at this time. Unless or until the route is made safe a practical bus service needs to continue.

Need to maintain the current services.

**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.**

Not in the short / medium term.

However, the draft Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) does contain a potential project “ Develop parish cycle ways, in particular investigate and if possible provide a pedestrian/cycle way linking (a) Burghfield and Mortimer (b) away from the road connecting the village with St Mary’s Junior School and the station.”

If the NDP is adopted, the Parish Council would be happy to work with West Berkshire Council and landowners to try to achieve (a), which could then provide a safe walking route.

**7. Any further comments?**

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council vigorously opposes this proposal for these reasons:

- a) The Council does not believe that the proposed walking route is safe. Particular concerns are:
  - i. Longmoor Lane – much of the route here is a narrow single track lane with substantial parts without any step-off verges. It is subject to the national 60mph speed limit.

There is a pronounced drop to the valley bottom and a climb up to the entrance the woods. Running water and ice in the winter are potential hazards on these slopes both to pedestrians and vehicles.

A sharp bend near the entrance to the woods gives drivers little time to see pedestrians

- ii. Junction of Goring Lane and Hollybush Lane - this is an offset 4 way junction with all roads subject to the national speed limit. Under the proposal groups of pupils would gather to cross the road and would block the views of the drivers. The 3 year accident report only reports accidents with injuries, local knowledge (eg Wokefield Parish Council) is aware of many more.

Indeed there was an accident there on 9<sup>th</sup> December with one vehicle finishing up on the area where pupils could have been waiting to cross the road. According to



## Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

the Thames Valley Police traffic officer who attended this collision, there have been three non-injury accidents on Goring Lane since October. He also commented “that it is very busy at peak times with people rushing to and from work/school drop offs and even with a police car with flashing lights and 2 police officers wearing high vis jackets motorists were paying no attention to us until the very last second. In my opinion this is not a pedestrian friendly road, especially for children who are not as aware of the dangers of traffic as we are”.

Speeding on Goring Lane has been a continued subject of discussion at the Burghfield and Mortimer Neighbourhood Action Group meetings during the last four years. Traffic, in both directions, on the route from Aldermaston to Grazeley have only a short portion of 30 mph limit around the double roundabouts at the junction with the Reading Road and, the 30 mph limit is mostly ignored and thus speeds on Goring Lane are high.

- iii. Hollybush Lane - this is also subject to the national speed limit.

There are no realistic step off verges on this road.

That on the east side (used in walking to school) is narrow and overgrown, that on the west side (walking from school) is virtually non-existent with no refuge at the junction with Goring Road.

Experience of walking this route to school at the appropriate time in the morning showed that this was a busy road with a constant flow of traffic in both directions and certainly not a safe pedestrian route.

- iv. The proposed route uses footpaths through some of the wooded area and is therefore not accessible for cyclists.
- v. There is a potential hazard from tree stumps on the footpath which may not be seen, particularly when children are walking through the woods in the dark
- b) The route passes through managed woodland and as such is regularly unavailable at times throughout the year due to forestry operations.
- c) The Willink School has no facilities or space to deal with or accommodate wet coats and muddy boots and shoes. Children arriving in this state will also make the school floors potentially muddy and slippery.
- d) The footpath through the woods is not suitable for regular heavy use, it floods and is slippery. It also contains inclines making it easy to slip over when it is at all muddy.
- e) Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council has previously objected to this route being a designated safe walking route:

Minute 06/138 (Clerk’s update) of the meeting of 12 October 2006 states:



## Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

“06/121 Following the last meeting the Clerk wrote as requested (with photographic evidence) to West Berkshire Council stating several reasons why the identified ‘safe’ recreational route (via Windmill Common, Starvale Wood, Wokefield Common, crossing Goring Lane at a blind corner where the national speed limit of 60mph applies and up Hollybush Lane where there is not a footpath) from Mortimer to Willink School was very unsafe. Malcolm Berry of WBC replied stating that following further consideration of the available route, Members of WBC have taken a decision to identify the route as unsafe. Provision has been available for all children to be transported from the area by bus from the start of the academic year and will continue free of charge. A thank you letter to the Parish Council was also received from Mrs Wynn, Headteacher of Willink School”.

Minute 09/96 of the meeting of 11 June 2009 states:

**“Update on Parish Council response to West Berkshire Home to School Transport Policy 2010/11 Consultation:** The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had responded to the consultation regarding a safe walking route between Mortimer and the Willink School that the Parish Council’s Policy of opposing Transport Policy remains unchanged from their response of the 26th September 2006. A response to the original response was received West Berkshire Council on the 28th September 2006 which stated that Members had taken a decision to identify the route as unsafe for all families in the area and that provision would be available for all children to be transported from the area by bus from the start of the academic year (06) and this will continue free of charge. The Parish Council also stated in its recent response that it would like to understand what significant changes have occurred that have precipitated these new proposals. This was also forwarded to RH John Redwood MP who has also agreed to take this matter up with West Berkshire Council”.

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council is firmly of the view that the proposed walking route, which West Berkshire Council decided was not a safe acceptable walking route in 2006, is still not a safe acceptable walking route as nothing has changed to make this a safe walking route.

### **Conclusion**

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council is of the firm view that the bus service should be retained until a safe footpath / cycle way has been established, in line with the statutory guidance on sustainable school travel.