

STRATFIELD MORTIMER

Parish Council Newsletter - Winter 2020/2021



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council



PARISH COUNCIL NEWS SUMMARY 2020

January to mid-March

The previous edition of the Parish Council newsletter was published last January and was mainly about the then forthcoming consultation on CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) held at the end of January. Much has happened since then and although all items of note have been published on the SMPC website, as well as all minutes of meetings, this article will give a brief overview of activity since then.

The January meeting of the Full Council adopted the budget for 2020/21 (April 2020 to March 2021) which included a small increase of about 1.8% in the precept raised through Council Tax, and we are now into the budget process for 2021/22 which will be published in the new year.

The March meeting considered the results of the CIL consultation and decided to proceed with three projects; the widening of the footpath to St Mary's School, SMPC taking over ownership of the library building from WBC and investigating providing a footway between Mortimer and Burghfield. [More at Page 18]

Mid-March to Late June

The way in which the Council can hold meetings and make decisions is strictly laid down in law and as lockdown threatened, it was clear that the Council needed to take action so that it could continue its business. An extraordinary (in all senses of the word) Full Council meeting was called for 23rd March and was held outside on the grass area behind the Parish Council Office. By agreement only six councillors attended, standing at least 2m apart using torches to see papers. Four things were agreed:

- *To cancel future council meetings until 14th May unless authority is given to hold remote meetings*
- *To delegate additional powers of decision to the Clerk, subject to various safeguards*

- *To allow Planning Committee to consider comments to be made to WBC on planning applications by email / telephone*
- *To cancel the VE day Event on 8th May but keep under review holding the event in the future*

The meeting started **at 7:30 and finished two minutes later**, which is certainly our shortest ever Full Council meeting.

Then, on 4th April, the appropriately named “*The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*” came into force.

These apply to all council meetings until 7th May 2021 (unless the Government brings the date forward of which there is currently no prospect). Essentially, these:

- *Allowed Councils to have remote meetings, provided councillors and public could be heard and preferably seen by all during meetings*
- *Removed the need to have the Annual Council meeting. This is the May meeting at which the Chairman, Vice Chairman and all Committee members are elected for the coming year. The occupants of those posts would continue in office for another year, or at least until a face-to-face meeting could be held.*

Government guidance also confirmed that the Annual Parish Meeting due to be held in St John’s Hall on 27th April had to be cancelled.

Government guidance published on 23rd March also confirmed that the playgrounds, MUGA and tennis courts be closed. This was the start of additional tasks for the Council’s Officers, Lynn and Bernise, which have continued until now; how to interpret Government guidance (which sometimes seemed contradictory) and then how to implement the guidance. Eventually the MUGA and one tennis court were allowed to reopen in mid-May (but closed again in November), but the

playgrounds could not reopen until the beginning of July.

Another important aspect of responding to the COVID crisis was providing information to the Parish. Bernise and Lynn worked tirelessly to put appropriate information, particularly that from West Berkshire Council, onto the SMPC website on both the home page and on the Community Information page:

[Community Information - Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council \(stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk\)](http://stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)

This is ongoing work so please do visit that page for current information.

Late June onwards

Fortunately, just prior to lockdown, SMPC had agreed to move its IT requirements to Microsoft 365 and so had Microsoft Teams available for online meetings. The first was a meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee on 11th June followed by Full Council on 25th June.

Notice of all meetings, and how to join, were posted on the website (as required by the new regulations) but Lynn and Bernise also posted them on the two Parish Council notice boards (outside The Baobab and by the Library door) as usual (not required under the regulations).

From the end of June, the programme of Full Council and Committee meetings followed, more or less, the normal timetable.

The Full council meetings dealt with all routine business, such as the approval of the annual accounts but other main points were:

- June meeting – awarded a grant of £2,070 for grass cutting in the Church Cemetery at St Mary's and agreed that VE day celebrations would take place on 8th/9th May 2021 although the November meeting agreed in principle to postpone these until Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022.
- September meeting – awarded a grant of £1,612 to

Burghfield and Mortimer Handybus.

- October meeting – considered what Remembrance Day activities could take place and agreed the supplier for a new SMPC website which would meet all the new Government accessibility requirements.

By the time you read this, it is likely that the next online meetings will be Finance and General Purposes on 5th January, Planning Committee and Full Council on 14th January.

Please feel free to join and see what the Parish Council does. Public participation (speaking) is limited to a 10-minute session at the start of the meeting to ask questions about items on the agenda, but we are somewhat flexible on this. But you can watch the rest of the meeting.

Sadly, since September we have lost three councillors, Kevin Johnson, Lucy Jones and John Bull from the Council. The Parish Council thanks them all for their varied contributions over all the different periods they have been councillors. We will miss all their contributions.

When a councillor leaves the Council, a casual vacancy is created. A notice to this effect is posted and, if ten or more electors of the Parish contact West Berkshire Council to request an election, then a by-election must be held. Otherwise, the Council can advertise for persons interested in being co-opted to the Council and can then co-opt openly at a Full Council meeting. For the first two vacancies more than ten electors contacted WBC so these vacancies will be filled by election. Unfortunately, because of the COVID regulations, this by-election cannot occur before May 2021. We await the result of the third vacancy.



MORTIMER'S COVID RESPONSE

The Parish Council is incredibly grateful for all the volunteers and organisations that provided, and continue to provide, help during the pandemic. It was truly inspiring to see how the support developed as needed and involved so many members of the community working together. To express the Parish Council's gratitude and to ensure that the village is fully aware of the extent of the support we requested the summary below from Danusia Morsley. We thank all volunteers for all their efforts, sorry we cannot name you all individually.

Mortimer can be very proud of its response to the Covid pandemic in providing support to its residents in so many ways. As soon as there was a need during the first lockdown, volunteers came forward to support those shielding or isolating. At first it was neighbours helping neighbours, friends helping friends. Subsequently, Belinda Hopkins used Facebook to expand this into a group where each volunteer covered a road or part of a road, dropping in a card with their contact details to each house. It soon became clear that this was a longer term problem and the solution needed to cover the whole village.

The existing volunteers were embraced into an organised support group set up and managed by Mortimer Village Partnership. The dedicated phone line and tracking system enabled those needing help with shopping or prescriptions to get assistance quickly and safely. **(Editor's addition: Particular thanks to Belinda Hopkins, Andy Lavery, Danusia Morsley and John Hannawin for this huge undertaking)**. A payment system was developed so that those shopping were reimbursed by MVP and no cash or cheques had to change hands on doorsteps, thus reducing infection risk; MVP later received the money by bank transfer from the "customers". Two volunteers, Sian Nelson and David Gregory, became "prescription heroes", developing a special relationship with the surgeries and

pharmacies, and collecting and delivering all the prescriptions, several hundred over the whole period! This meant far fewer different people entering the surgeries and pharmacies, further reducing infection risk. Volunteers also regularly stayed in touch by phone with those identified as alone.

The support system was paused during July as incoming requests had all but stopped but was reinstated on 4th November as the new lockdown started. However, as many more people are now able to get shopping delivered, the pharmacies are all delivering to those isolating, and shielding is not required (although still recommended for the very vulnerable), it is not as busy as before, but the system will remain in place for as long as it is needed. And volunteers can still help with different issues, such as driving a car to a garage for MOT for someone isolating, being a recent example.

During the spring and early summer, when masks were becoming part of everyday life but were not yet readily available in the shops (and we were being recommended to leave them for NHS staff), several residents made hundreds and gave them away to local schools, Thames Valley Police, care workers, NHS staff and local residents. Particularly involved in this were Rodie Hill, Pauline Jones, Marie Worthington, Chris Jones and Valerie Whitehouse.

People made an effort to keep everyone in good cheer. The Thursday doorstep clapping for the NHS was enthusiastically taken up in many streets of Mortimer with neighbours waving to each other and staying in touch. Local businesses Loon Tin and Flavour Town Foods provided free meal treats for the elderly and vulnerable which were delivered by helpline volunteers.

No one knows how the next phase of the pandemic will look for Mortimer but, what we do know and can continue to be proud of is, that in this community, we have people who care for and are there for each other. **Mortimer is ready to help!**

MORTIMER STATION CAR PARK

Since 2007, the Parish Council has been trying to improve the car parking at Mortimer Station; the process has been long and difficult, with the first application turned down by WBC and then lost on Appeal in 2009. Happily, this has now come to a positive conclusion with WBC Eastern Area Planning Committee granting our second application on 28th October.

This decision has been the fruit of joint working between SMCP, Great Western Railway and Englefield Estate, Pro Vision, our planning agent, and Stuart Michael Associates, our engineers. The process started with the ratification of our Neighbourhood Development Plan in 2017 in which improvements in size of and access to car- parking at the station were given the highest approval by the public. Neil Kiley led the project since the outset, initially as a councillor and, for the last year or so, as a co-opted member of the public. His efforts have been vital in keeping the project going at each successive hurdle. We have also been most ably helped by Katherine Miles of Pro Vision, steering us through the minefield of the Planning process and the concerns and requirements of WBC Planning and Highways.

The baton now passes to Great Western Railway to complete design and build the new car park of 150 spaces on the Basingstoke platform side of the station. There will be pedestrian access through to that platform and a drop off/pick up area. A footpath for passengers unable to use the metal footbridge will be built over the road bridge and traffic will become one-way traffic light controlled. Once in place it is expected that measure will be taken to eliminate dangerous road parking that is happening in the vicinity of the station.

The village can look forward to being able to use the rail network more easily.



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL 2019 – 2020

The rules of the Annual Parish Meeting (APM), normally held at the end of April, require the Chairman to give a report on the activities of the Council during the twelve months and that this report is published in the next Parish Newsletter. Although the meeting could not be held last April, a brief report is given below.

Soon after the last APM on 29th April 2019 the existing Council was dissolved after its four-year term and elections were held on 2nd May 2019. Fourteen of the fifteen successful candidates signed the acceptance of office. These were Cllr. S. Beard, Cllr. G. Bridgman, Cllr. J. Bull, Cllr. N. Carter, Cllr M Dennett, Cllr. S. Hill, Cllr. D. Ives, Cllr. K. Johnson, Cllr. L. Jones, Cllr. D. Kilshaw, Cllr. C. Lewis, Cllr. M. Locke, Cllr. D. Morsley, Cllr. J. Wells.

Four of these councillors (Cllr. S. Beard, Cllr. G. Bridgman, Cllr. D. Morsley, Cllr. J. Wells) were not members of the previous council. Another new councillor (Cllr K Field) was co-opted in July 2019 to bring the Council back to full strength. Profiles of the councillors were published in the Summer 2019 Newsletter (available on the SMPC website).

The first meeting of the new council (The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council) was held on 16th May 2019. Cllrs. Mike Dennett and David Kilshaw were elected as Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively. Cllrs Danusia Morsley, John Bull and Chris Lewis were appointed as Chairman of Planning, Fairground and Cemetery and Roads and Footpaths Committees, respectively.

Through the year Council business continued as normal, though this was interrupted in late July (2019) when an incursion occurred on the Fairground. The Council used bailiffs to serve

an eviction notice which was successfully executed within a few days. A smaller excursion occurred in September. Thames Valley Police served a Section 61 order and escorted the insurgents away from the village.

The Planning Committee spent considerable time in dealing with the detail conditions of the MOR006 development (land behind Tower Gardens) and with the SMPC application for car parking at the station.

All major decisions and actions are recorded in the minutes but some of the items that were approved / implemented in the year to end of April 2020 included:

- Additional security measures for the Fairground
- Online booking of the tennis courts
- Taking over management (and costs) of the village defibrillators in conjunction with Mr. T Maynard.
- Confirmation that DNA tests show Great Crested Newts are present in the ponds.
- CIL consultation in January / February 2020.

Writing this to record the situation at the end of April 2020, many projects that time has been spent on are on hold because of COVID but it is hoped that these will be returned to as soon as possible. Such projects include the CIL projects, VE Day, Outreach sessions in Mortimer from Tadley CAB and continuation of the Youth Forum Work with Berkshire Youth.

Finally, I would thank the Council's Officers Lynn and Bernise, custodian Frank and all councillors for all their work and efforts during 2019/20.

Cllr. M. D. Dennett
Chairman

CENSUS 2021

The census is a survey that happens every 10 years and gives a picture of all the people and households in England and Wales. All kinds of organisations, from local authorities to charities, use the information to help provide the services needed by the population, including transport, education and healthcare. Without the census, it would be much more difficult to do this.

Run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the next census will be in 2021 on **Sunday 21st March**. Census 2021 will be the first digital-first census. The ONS will provide access codes to enable the census to be completed online, on any device. For those who cannot get online or need help completing the census online, there will be Census Support Centres to assist. Further information can be found at:

<https://census.gov.uk/about-the-census/>

THE PARISH OF STRATFIELD MORTIMER

Looking back, as at Census day 2011, the Parish of Stratfield Mortimer had 3,807 usual residents with an average age of residents of 41 years. In total there were 1,644 household spaces and of these, 1,572 (95.6%) had at least one usual resident and 72 (4.4%) had no usual residents.

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E04001190>

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (SMPC) is the first tier of local government representing the residents of the Parish. Through collective decision making and working within the Council's powers as laid down in law, the SMPC aims to address local issues and needs.

Parish councillors are elected representatives and serve for a 4-year term, unless co-opted or elected in a by-election when they serve until the next main election. SMPC has 15 councillor seats but, due to recent resignations, there are currently 3 vacancies. Although at the time of going to press at least two of the vacancies cannot be filled until next May's by-election – confirmation from West Berkshire Council is awaited about the third - there is no time like the present to start to think about becoming a councillor. Do you meet the criteria? Are you interested in local issues? Would you like to represent your community? Can you work as part of a team to make a difference?

Further information about becoming a councillor will be made available shortly but, in the meantime, why not chat to one of the serving councillors to see what it involves or attend one of the Council's online meetings to see what it is all about? Contact details of councillors and information regarding meetings can be found at www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk or by contacting the Parish Office - 0118 9331955 or admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk .



FAIRGROUND NEWS

A meeting of the Fairground and Cemetery Committee took place on 24th November and Cllr. Stephen Hill was elected Chairman.

During the year various pieces of work have been carried out on the Fairground including:

- Security measures such as the height barrier and extra bollards
- Repair of the section of footpath across the conservation area
- Tree maintenance as identified in a recent tree survey
- Clearing of vegetation along the boundaries with Hammonds Heath and Windmill Road
- Cleaning of the tennis courts

Quotes are currently being obtained for future works including:

- Maintenance and repairs to play equipment
- Desilting of the ditches along Hammonds Heath and Windmill Road
- Cleaning of the MUGA and painting of lines for netball
- Replacement of the conservation area information panels



CEMETERY NEWS

A purchase order will be placed shortly for the purchase of the wooden bridge required for the extension of the Parish Cemetery. SMPC received planning permission for an extension to its cemetery in 2013 with the plan to have it ready when the current area is nearing capacity. The extension was fenced in, the boundary fence can be seen in the background of the photograph. A bridge is required to span the ditch / drain that runs down the present boundary shown in the middle of the photograph. The bridge needs to be fairly substantial so grave digging equipment can reach the extension.



WW2 PILL BOX

Last year, SMPC agreed to restore and preserve the Pill Box just off the Street near the junction with Mortimer Lane. The project was part of the postponed VE Day celebrations. The aim is to preserve it as a historical site and for it to be available to schools when studying the history of the Second World War. The project was completed in August thanks to a team of volunteers.

The Pill Box is on Wise's farm and Englefield Estate are leasing the box and the small surrounding area to SMPC at a rent of one peppercorn per annum. We are very grateful to Englefield Estate and Jim Wise for their support in making this project happen.

We thank the volunteers and, in particular, Brian Willis for designing and overseeing the fencing, Angus Hodge for organising Fred and his colleague with installing the posts, Andrew Thurley for designing and fitting the Pill Box door and Andrew Rowland from Englefield Estate for donating materials.



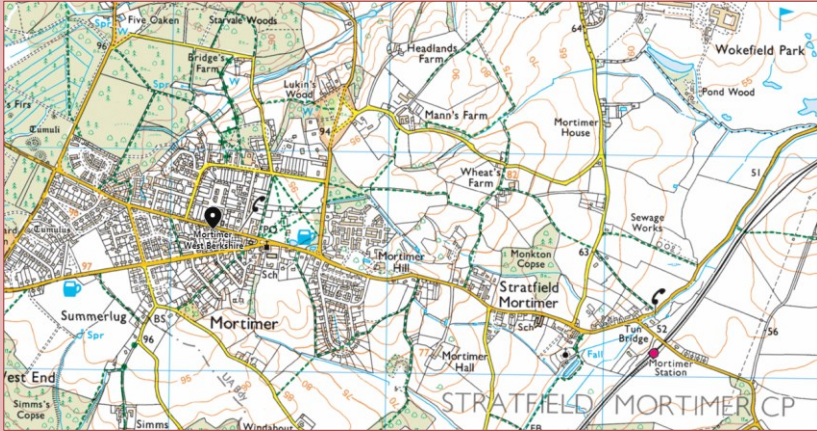
REMEMBRANCE DAY 2020

The Government's advice about Remembrance Day Services was quite hard to understand and it was not practical to have a COVID secure ceremony at the War Memorial this year. We thank parishioners for heeding our advice and staying away.

Mortimer Music Live came to our rescue and we thank Ryan Saunders, David Kilshaw and Craig Woolridge for producing a truly excellent video. Some of it was filmed on the previous Wednesday and some filming took place early on Remembrance Sunday and rapidly edited in.

We also hope that many of you heard the Last Post and Reveille played from the Fairground at 11am. The video is still available on the SMPC website or on the MML website.





COMMUNITY PROJECTS

In February 2020, the Parish Council ran a consultation to gauge demand for eight projects, each intended to be largely funded by money received from housebuilders, via the Community Infrastructure Levy which is applied to new builds. We have just published on our website our analysis and response to your nearly 350 comments and ideas for new projects. Thank you if you contributed.

Owing mainly to Covid-19, the Parish Council will not run a consultation in 2021, but instead will try to progress the three projects that gained public support already – pavement widening along The Street between the war memorial and St Mary's school, the Parish Council taking on ownership and running of the library building, and the foot/cycle way between Mortimer and Burghfield Common. We will try to progress other suggestions too, as time and practicalities permit.

STRATFIELD MORTIMER COMMUNITY AWARD 2021



The Stratfield Mortimer Community Award 2021 is an annual award given to a person who has devoted outstanding time and energy for the benefit of the community of Stratfield Mortimer, irrespective of whether or not they live in the village.

Due to COVID, unfortunately there was no award made for 2020. Those submissions received by the Parish Council will be carried forward to be considered in the new year.

If you know of someone who you think deserves recognition, please nominate them by completing a nomination form available from the Parish Council website or by contacting the office. The closing date for nominations is Monday, 17th February 2021.

BT PHONE BOX

BT wish to decommission the phone box on the corner of Victoria Road and King Street as it is very rarely used. Full Council recently agreed that the Parish Council will take it over and the contract is in the process of being signed. It is proposed to look at installing a further defibrillator.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE



In an attempt to return to normal life, the Christmas Tree was put in place on the Fairground on Friday, 27th November. Although, unfortunately, due to the Covid restrictions, the usual Lighting Service on the first Sunday Advent was not able to take place.

However, many thanks to the councillors, volunteers and James Strang for their assistance. So, just how many councillors does it take to put up 2000 light bulbs?

GRAVEL LORRIES

Comments have been received from members of the public regarding large articulated lorries carrying bags of gravel passing through the village.

Lorries leaving the gravel quarry on Welshman's Road are instructed to turn right, away from Mortimer. This was a condition of the planning application to extract gravel which coincidentally is currently up for renewal with Hampshire County Council. SMPC have been in contact with the planning officer and reported details of lorries passing through the village. SMPC have not seen any lorries in the last week or so but if you do please inform the Parish Office.

CLARKE'S EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Clarke's Education Foundation, which owns the School House adjacent to St Mary's school, provides grants to schools, youth organisations and residents of Stratfield Mortimer, Mortimer West End & Wokefield. Grants are provided for items not provided by the Local Education Authority, typically including further education and apprenticeships. The Parish Council's two trustee representatives are Cllrs. Lock and Carter. For more information or to request a grant application form, please email the Trust's Secretary Valerie at vh.greensands@yahoo.co.uk or contact a trustee.



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council
wish you all a

HAPPY NEW YEAR

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME FOR RESIDENTS

West Berkshire Council has launched its COVID Winter Grant Scheme for food, energy and other essential items for residents in need due to the pandemic. Free School Meal vouchers for holidays will also form part of the programme. **The COVID Winter Grant Scheme will run from 1st December 2020 to 31st March 2021.**

For more information and a link to the applications:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-support>

USEFUL CONTACTS

Fairground Emergency - report any emergencies and dangerous situations on the Fairground: 0743 6807543

For **non-emergencies** contact the Parish Council Office: 0118 9331955

Police Non-Emergency: 101

To report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response.

NHS non-Emergency: 111

If you need medical help fast but it is not a 999 emergency.

West Berks Council (WBC): 01635 551111

WBC Out of Hours Emergency Contact: 01635 42161

To report major incidents out of hours.

West Berkshire Council Streetcare Team: 01635 519080

Email: streetcare@westberks.gov.uk

To report problems with streets, roads, highways, pavements, etc.

West Berkshire District Councillors for the Burghfield & Mortimer Ward:

Cllr Graham Bridgman

Cllr Royce Longton

Cllr Geoff Mayes

Mortimer Village Partnership - For village news and information on events, including a directory of local clubs and businesses: www.mortimervillage.org.uk

PARISH COUNCIL CONTACT INFORMATION

Parish Council Office

The Library

27 Victoria Road

Mortimer

RG7 3SH

Tel: 0118 933 1955

Email Lynn: the.clerk@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk

Email Bernise: admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk

Website: www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/stratfieldmortimerparishcouncil

Minutes and Agendas of Council meetings, as well as other Council information, can be viewed on the above website or on the Parish Council notice boards which are located outside The Baobab (the old Post Office) and the Library.

The Parish Council Office is open:

Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays,

09:30 to 17:00

Whilst the physical office at the Library is closed to the public, correspondence can be left with the Library staff or put in the Library letter box.