

# STRATFIELD MORTIMER PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter Autumn 2021



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## ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Annual Parish Meeting is a meeting of the parish electors that takes place annually between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June. It has both a formal element – the need to present the parish council’s annual report – and a chance for the village to suggest and discuss topical issues. Previous meetings have featured lively debate on whether Mortimer has a traffic speeding problem, whilst others have brought positive discussion and feedback on proposed improvements to village facilities that are described more fully elsewhere in this newsletter.

Owing to COVID-19 restrictions, this year’s Annual Parish Meeting was a scaled back online affair that took place on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March. After the essential business of receiving the minutes of the prior meeting and hearing the Annual Report, the focus switched to a presentation and discussion about becoming a parish councillor, because there were three vacancies at the time. The meeting was attended by several members of the public, some of whom went on the apply for those vacancies. Our regulations require us to publish the Chairman’s Annual Report in the next newsletter, so it follows below.

## STRATFIELD MORTIMER PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

*Report presented by Cllr M Dennett at the online Annual Parish Meeting on 22nd March 2021.*

This has certainly been a very strange year for Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (SMPC). It's actually exactly a year ago tomorrow that we had an extraordinary (in all senses of the word) Full Council meeting. This was held on the grass area behind the library by torch light and lasted exactly two minutes. We managed to pass resolutions to give the Clerk delegated emergency powers and cancel some meetings. This was necessary as there was considerable confusion over when we could meet again. Eventually, the government passed legislation to allow online meetings so that in mid-June we had our first remote meeting and such meetings have been held regularly since then.

Before reporting on the council, I wish to thank Mortimer Village Partnership and all the volunteers in the village for their responses and actions during lockdown. They made a substantial contribution to the community. SMPC could not have coped with organising all the help that was required. The council was able to help with passing on information from West Berkshire Council (WBC) and to deal with the legal aspects of lockdown such as closing (and then opening and then closing again!) the tennis courts and playgrounds. Interpreting government advice was sometimes quite difficult.

Normal business, such as maintenance of The Fairground and the cemetery continued. The council dealt with several consultations such as on the draft WBC local plan, the WBC housing plan, WBC Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the government planning policy reforms. Committees met regularly. The busiest was the planning committee which commented on over fifty planning applications as well as dealing with aspects of the new housing development and the council's station car park planning application.

The station car park was given planning permission in October, the satisfactory culmination of over four years work. When we started this work, no one would have imagined the present situation. We wait to see Great Western Railway's thoughts in the future.

During the year the council completed a project to restore and preserve the Pill Box at the junction of Mortimer Lane and The Street. In future, this will be used for educational visits. The council thanks the landowner (Englefield Estate), the farmer (Jim Wise) and volunteers including Andrew Thurley, Brian Willis, Angus Hodge and others. The plan was to have this completed by the VE day celebrations. The council hopes to hold the delayed VE celebrations at the same time as those for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

It was not possible to have a public Remembrance Day Ceremony this year but, with the help of the relevant organisations, a limited service was held and a video produced and streamed. We thank Ryan Saunders, Dave Kilshaw and Craig Woolridge of Mortimer Music Live for their excellent production.

Extra security measures have been put in place on the fairground, various pieces of play equipment repaired, the tennis courts cleaned and a path through the conservation area repaired. Work has been carried

out on the ponds and more tree planting took place. Orders are being placed for repairs to play equipment, ditch clearing and footpath improvements near the Community Centre. Our financial regulations state that we should obtain three quotes for any work costing over £1000 and thus considerable work is involved in getting contracts in place.

The cemetery extension is continuing and a substantial footbridge to link the existing cemetery to the extension has been ordered.

Last January, the council held a public consultation on the possible use of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding. Work has started on the three most popular projects.

The first is that SMPC will take over the library building from West Berkshire Council, giving us much more flexibility in the use of the building at evenings and weekends. A second project that has made good progress is the widening of the footpath down to St Mary's School. We have managed to get West Berkshire Council on board with this and they are currently drawing up plans. We think most of the funding is in place, so this should get done in the fairly near future.

The Council appointed Ridge and Co as project managers to assist with all council projects and their first work is a scoping assessment of the third project which is the proposed footpath/cycleway from Mortimer to Burghfield. Two other projects, the provision of fitness equipment in the village and provision of youth facilities are continuing. Work on the later has been particularly delayed by lockdown.

The SMPC budget for 2021/22 was approved by council in January and had a very small increase in the precept request (from £149,210 to £149,405). You may have seen this on your council tax bill where the SMPC component is shown as increasing by 0.09%!

During the last year three councillors (Kevin Johnson, Lucy Jones and John Bull) have left the council. Each time a vacancy occurred, at least ten members of the public requested that an election be held. Thus, there are three vacancies on SMPC to be filled at a by election on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021. The next item on the agenda gives information on how to apply.

Finally, I thank our three employees; Lynn Hannawin, Bernise O'Reilly and Frank Stansfield for their dedicated service during the year.

## A NEW WAY OF WORKING

In March 2020, the Government passed legislation allowing parish councils to hold meetings online instead of face to face. We began running meetings, open to the public, in this way, from then until the legislation to allow it expired on 6 May 2021.

We managed to hold our Annual Meeting online that day. At this meeting we elect councillors to the various positions on the council for the coming year. Cllr. Mike Dennett was elected as Chairman, Cllr. Danusia Morsley as Vice Chairman and other councillors were elected to roles on other committees, working parties and as representatives on outside bodies. You can view who serves on which committee and working party on our web site. The council also voted to give the Clerk greater powers to carry out the Council's essential business until face-to-face meetings could resume. Later, online 'advisory' meetings of Full Council and committees served to give the Clerk guidance, albeit not legally binding, on how to make delegated decisions on the councillors' behalf.

Also, on 6 May this year, voting took place in the community centre to fill three councillor vacancies. Whilst these had arisen last year, sufficient people had written in asking for an election, with 6 May being the earliest possible date for it. Amanda Marsden, Geoff Canton and Kevin Johnson were elected as councillors.

On 24 June, the Parish Council held a full council meeting in the grounds of the Mortimer scout hut in Birch Lane. Why, you may ask? Each year, the council must prepare and approve, by a given deadline, both its annual governance and its accounting statements. The former is a series of answers to confirm that the council has acted lawfully throughout the year and the latter summarises the financial position of the council at the end of the council year. Since the hoped-for relaxation of Covid-19 rules did not happen on 21 June, the council could not meet indoors. The 1<sup>st</sup> Mortimer Scout Group kindly offered a roof over our heads in case it rained and, as shown in the picture (which shows six of the twelve participants) we held a successful meeting whilst taking all necessary precautions.



In July, the unconnected resignations of Cllrs Geoff Canton and Cllr Kevin Johnson were received. On this occasion, only one request for an election was received and as a result the council will plan to fill these vacancies by 'co-option' – a selection of applicants by the existing councillors. At the time of writing, invitations to apply for co-option have been published and the council hopes to fill both vacancies at its 14 October meeting.



As other articles in this newsletter show, the council has been able to progress several areas and projects during these unusual times. Two other decisions taken in the last few months are worth a mention:

The council decided to pause its negotiations with West Berkshire Council about taking over the library building because it felt the business justification for doing so was lower now than it was when the idea was first considered pre Covid.

The council has also set up a Climate and Environment Working Party to guide its activities concerning climate change.

## FAIRGROUND IMPROVEMENTS

During the last few months, various improvements have been made on The Fairground.

### Community Centre

Two improvements have been made near the entrance to the Community Centre: the front apron has been resurfaced and a drain installed to improve rain drainage around the entrance and a footpath, with a 'golden gravel' surface has been laid to link the apron to the side entrance.

We hope the improvements will make access to the Community Centre much drier and cleaner.







## Multi Use Games Area

We received a request from the Mortimer Walking Netball Team to paint netball lines on the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). The Fairground and Cemetery Committee agreed to this, but also decided this was an excellent opportunity to clean the court and repaint the existing lines too.



## Tennis Courts

Maintenance has also been carried out on the tennis courts, with surface defects repaired, the courts cleaned, and lines repainted. The work itself was paid for using the remaining balance of a grant obtained from Sports England in 2015 to fully refurbish the courts.



## Play Equipment

An extensive list of work has also been carried out on several pieces of play equipment, particularly replacement of sections of matting under larger items of equipment.

The Parish Council has also put into place a quarterly maintenance contract for the play equipment, both in the play area and the children's playground, to track issues arising and to carry out basic maintenance.

## FITNESS 'FREE FOR ALL'

We are currently selecting a range of self-serve, all-weather exercise equipment for installation in the recreational area on The Fairground. The proposal is for a mix of machines suitable for all levels of experience and ability which will offer these exercise options:

- Skier
- Chest Press/Pull Down
- Rower
- Leg Press
- Air Walker

The machines will be mounted into the ground on rubber matting that will allow the grass to go through to ensure good aesthetics and safety. The location of the equipment is still to be agreed but installation of this 'outdoor gym' is targeted for Spring 2022.

Please note that the minimum age for use of this equipment is 14.



# The Queen's Platinum (70<sup>th</sup>) Jubilee celebration

The Fairground, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022.



A team of parish councillors and community volunteers, formed originally to organize last year's VE75 commemoration, have now turned their attention to putting on a **free entry** celebration of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee next year on the Platinum Jubilee Holiday weekend – Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> June and Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June.

Events planned so far for Saturday include:

- A "Queen" themed float procession, staffed by local organisations, businesses, clubs or schools. There'll be prizes for the best decorated floats.
- A World War II Battle of Britain Memorial fly past.
- A drop in on The Fairground by the RAF Falcon Parachute Display Team.
- A varied mix of music culminating in top tribute bands under a big top marquee.
- Food outlets, licensed bar, refreshments, fun fair, side shows and a "market row" of small traders.
- Sports for both children and adults, to coincide with the 2022 Commonwealth Games being held in Britain, including tug of war, sack race, egg and spoon race, wheelbarrow and more.
- Live screening of the Epsom Derby.
- Vintage, military and agriculture vehicles on display and in the procession.

- Professional pyrotechnics display to conclude the Saturday evening party.

This local celebration looks set to deliver a fitting and memorable weekend for Mortimer - save the dates to avoid disappointment and look out for updates on our web site and notice boards.

Groups wishing to decorate one of our low loader HGV floats should apply to us now to reserve their (free) float to be a central part of a unique carnival procession around our village.

The organizing team is also looking urgently for volunteer marshals to help on the Saturday. If you can spare an hour or so, please get in touch. If you have always wanted to wear a 'high vis.' jacket now's your chance.

To reserve a float or offer help on the day please contact [simon.beard@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](mailto:simon.beard@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)

For the big weekend, you're encouraged to decorate your house/business with bunting and/or flags, dress up if you wish, perhaps as a Pearly King or Queen or a town crier, or just come along to join the fun at this once in a lifetime celebration.



## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REFRESH

Neighbourhood Plans give communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan, adopted in June 2017, has certainly achieved this. The Plan still influences planning applications in the village, but that influence is expected to wane as time goes by, because changes in national policies and the forthcoming West Berkshire Council Local Plan may supersede/render some aspects of it obsolete.

The Parish Council has, therefore, concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan (the new name for Neighbourhood Development Plans) needs updating. A “Steering Group”, made up of some councillors and community volunteers was appointed at the July Full Council meeting to carry out this plan review/update. It’s expected there will be two editions of the plan. The first edition will result from a review and possible update of the “General Features” policy (SDB1) that relates to the site assigned for 110 new homes, a new school and doctors’ surgery. The existing policy calls for a review of the land allocation for the school and doctors’ surgery in the event that outline planning permission has not been obtained for their development by June 2022. Since neither has progressed to this state yet, the review will be done with public consultation and in collaboration with relevant education, medical and local government stakeholders. Once the policy review/update is complete, it will be put to public consultation, undergo scrutiny by West Berkshire Council and reviewed by an examiner. Discussions have already started with education stakeholders.

The second plan edition will result from a full review of all other aspects of the original. It’s expected that some policies will be retained, others revised and yet others removed as no longer relevant or superseded by national policy/the new West Berkshire Council Local Plan. This plan review gives the community the chance to introduce new policies on climate change and sustainability and consider including ‘design codes’ - illustrated design rules/requirements that instruct/advise on the physical development of a site or area. This second plan edition is expected



to take significantly longer than the first to complete and to entail multiple public consultations before going through a full adoption process including a referendum.

Keep an eye of on the Parish Council website, the dedicated Facebook page ([Facebook.com/MortimerNeighbourhoodPlan](https://www.facebook.com/MortimerNeighbourhoodPlan)), Parish Council noticeboards and future newsletters for news on the Plan refresh and please take part by reviewing and providing feedback on the proposals. The more that residents read and comment on documents and/or come to events, the better the outcome should be in making the village the place the community wishes it be in future.



## LIFE AS A NEW COUNCILLOR – AMANDA MARSDEN

I was absolutely thrilled to be elected as a parish councillor in May this year. Thank you for making that happen!

In my campaign, I said that I wanted to give back to the community in which I have loved living for many years. I feel that being a parish councillor has already given me ample opportunity to do just that at both strategic and tactical levels.

I work on three of our four committees, and four of our eight working parties, including Strategy, Communications, and the newly formed Climate and Environment, which is surely such an important focus for us all.

Activities are diverse, ranging from developing the Neighbourhood Plan, that aims to give the community a say in how the village will develop until 2036, to selecting and managing the installation of outdoor adult fitness equipment planned for installation on The Fairground in Spring 2022 - see the separate article for details.

I feel that becoming a parish councillor is a chance to help maintain, develop and protect our wonderful village and its beautiful surrounds, as part of a committed, talented team. If you would like to know more about what your parish council does, how we can help you, or what being a councillor involves, please do feel free to contact me for an informal chat.



## ST. JOHN'S VILLAGE HALL

The hall's trustees are partway through a significant refurbishment of the seating area, by the pavement. As part of this, the Parish Council was approached, and agreed, to pay the cost of one of two planters, to be dedicated to its former chairman the late Lawrence Picking.

The Parish Council was pleased to recognise his service as Parish Council Chairman and support the hall's trustee's efforts to create a more attractive and welcoming for passers-by to stop and sit.

At the time of writing a beautiful new bench has just been installed, donated by the family and in memory of Sarah Hawkins, formerly of Mortimer St John's School and the Pre-School.





## CYCLEWAY AND FOOTPATH BETWEEN MORTIMER AND BURGHPFIELD

Since January, the Parish Council has been working with Theale-based project managers, Ridge & Partners (appointed after competitive tender), to progress the planned safe walking and cycling route between Mortimer and Burghfield. There have been positive discussions with all the landowners involved, all of whom support the project, although many details still need to be sorted out. Burghfield and Wokefield Parish Councils are both supportive of the initiative too.

The proposed route starts at Reading Road, at its junction with College Piece, follows the existing informal footpath on the eastern side to the junction with Longmoor Lane. From there the proposed route comes closer to the road, passes in front of Five Oaken Cottage, then follows the current informal footpath again until the junction with Padworth Road and Goring Lane, where a new crossing would be created. Some variations to this proposed route are being considered, notably around the Five Oaken Cottage section. Whilst undoubtedly many technical issues remain to be solved, we are hopeful they will be overcome.

Ridge & Co have submitted a planning pre-application for the proposed route to West Berkshire Council. This gives the District Council the opportunity to identify and raise any major concerns before detailed technical reports and drawings are prepared as part of a full planning application. The response to this was due on 23 August, but at time of writing in late September had still not been received.

## PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

A small initiative being progressed by the council is to improve small areas of public open space. The first such improvement is the site of the small tumulus (burial mound) in Stephens Firs. Working with West Berkshire Council, the plan is to both make this a pleasant place to sit and explain its historic importance.

West Berkshire Council has already removed some scrub and raised the canopy of the trees there, making it possible to walk around the tumulus. The Parish Council plans to install a bench near the entrance and an information board explaining what the tumulus is and its significance. Before that can happen, West Berkshire Council will protect the tumulus itself by covering it in appropriate vegetation.



## COMMUNITY MOBILE SCREENING UNIT

Following concerns raised by a member of the public that Mortimer might lose the visits from the Community Mobile Breast Screening Unit, as soon as the West Berkshire breast screening programme resumed at the beginning of the year, arrangements were made to secure a site in Mortimer. To make it possible, a power supply and access to services for the unit's staff were put in place.



The mobile unit arrived at The Fairground car park on 15<sup>th</sup> February and stayed until 6<sup>th</sup> May. During its stay with us, the screening team were busy with appointments for both local and nearby residents.



The Parish Council would like to thank Sarah and Stuart of Stanley Electrical Services, and Adrian Smith of the Community Centre, for all their assistance helping

make this happen.

Having the unit 'on our doorstep' made it a very valuable community service and hopefully they will visit us again.

## NEW VILLAGE FOOTPATHS

The Parish Council made successful applications to add two footpaths in the village and these are now on the West Berkshire definitive map of public footpaths:

1. The junction of Victoria Road and Stephens Road through to Stephens Firs – STRA/44/1.
2. Between 34 and 35 Stephens Close through to Alfred Palmer Memorial Ground – STRA/45/1.

Go to: [West Berkshire Online Map](#)





## COMMUNITY FIBRE PARTNERSHIP

The Parish Council agreed recently to back a resident-initiated campaign to bring **Fibre To The Premises (FTTP)** broadband to the parts of Mortimer that can't get it from the existing provider.

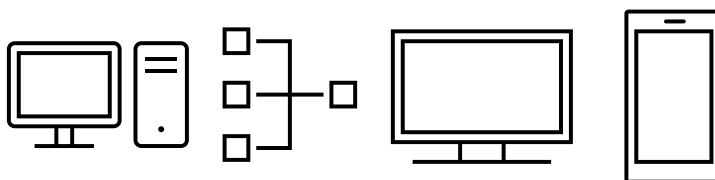
Fibre To The Premises, which replaces the old copper connection with fibre all the way to the property, promises a faster, higher capacity and more reliable connection than previously possible.

With speeds of up to 900 MB/s its ideal for home workers, multiple users wanting to work or play at the same time, or anyone frustrated with drops in internet connection. Studies suggest that installing FTTP brings a 2-3% increase in property value too.

If this interests you, your only commitment is to take out a contract with one of the FTTP providers if the scheme goes ahead. Packages are available from multiple providers at prices ranging from about £25 per month, depending on provider/options.

Small/medium businesses with annual turnover of under EUR50 million, who are a limited company, sole trader or charity and operate from Mortimer are particularly encouraged to apply because not only will the service suit them well, their inclusion also attracts higher government funding, thereby helping make the scheme viable. You can read more and apply by visiting:

[www.StratfieldMortimer.com/CommunityFibre](http://www.StratfieldMortimer.com/CommunityFibre)



### Pavement Widening

As part of an initiative to widen the pavement between the War Memorial and St. Mary's School, to give a safer walking route particularly for school pupils and parents, West Berkshire Council, at our request, has recently cut back the hedges along The Street. The next stage is that West Berkshire Council will remove leaves and soil back to the highway boundary along the length of the footpath.

### Telephone Box Defibrillator

As reported in the last newsletter, the Parish Council adopted the phone box on King Street on behalf of the community, with a plan to install a defibrillator to supplement those elsewhere. It was recently agreed that the phone box can be painted blue in honour of the NHS.

### Fairground Table Tennis Table

Following a request from the Mortimer Cricket Club for a practice space and a perceived low usage in its current spot, The Fairground table tennis table will be relocated to the Alfred Palmer Memorial Field, West End Road.

### Parish Council Website refresh

Following competitive tender, local business I-Next Ltd. was commissioned to create our recently launched new web site ([www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](http://www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)). The main reason for doing this was to ensure compliance with recent legislation requiring public sector bodies, such as the Parish Council, to make reasonable efforts to make their websites accessible to people with various disabilities including impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities and deafness/impaired hearing.

I-NEXT is also providing technical support for the site.

## 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's 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](mailto: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 – [Graham.Bridgman@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Graham.Bridgman@westberks.gov.uk)

Cllr Royce Longton - [Royce.Longton1@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Royce.Longton1@westberks.gov.uk)

Cllr Geoff Mayes - [Geoffrey.Mayes1@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Geoffrey.Mayes1@westberks.gov.uk)

**Mortimer Village Partnership** - For village news and information on events, including a directory of local clubs and businesses:

[www.mortimervillage.org.uk](http://www.mortimervillage.org.uk)

## 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](mailto:the.clerk@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)

Email Bernise: [admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](mailto:admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)

The office is currently closed to the public, but the Clerk and Assistant may be contacted by telephone and email.

Correspondence can be left with the library staff or dropped through the library letter box.

Parish Council office working hours:

Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays

09:30 to 17:00

Website: [www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](http://www.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/stratfieldmortimerparishcouncil](http://www.facebook.com/stratfieldmortimerparishcouncil)

The website provides announcements and information on meetings, policies, councillors and committees. Council notices are also published on Facebook, the Parish Council notice boards outside The Baobab (the old Post Office) and the library.