



## Stratfield Mortimer Parish

### Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

held online on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 at 7.30pm.

- i. There were approximately 20 members of the public and councillors present.
- ii. The meeting commenced at 7.30pm.
- iii. It was agreed that Mrs. L. Hannawin would take the minutes.

#### **1. Welcome by the Parish Council Chairman.**

Cllr. Mike Dennett, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed all attendees and the councillors of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (SMPC) introduced themselves.

#### **2. To receive the Minutes of the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting.**

Cllr. Dennett confirmed that no Annual Parish Meeting had been held in 2020. The Minutes of the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting were approved by those present.

#### **3. The Annual Report of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.**

Cllr. Dennett thanked the Mortimer Village Partnership and the volunteers who helped in the Covid emergency and stated that the Council were very grateful to all those who took on the role.

He gave a verbal report on the activities of SMPC. The transcript follows.

*This has certainly been a very strange year for Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council. 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 MVP 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 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 Many thanks to 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.*

Further to a question from a member of the public regarding the likelihood of another public consultation on the need for a large car park at Mortimer Station, it was confirmed that SMPC have completed what they had agreed to do, and any future consultations would be the commercial decision of GWR.

#### **4. Presentation and open discussion on being a Stratfield Mortimer parish councillor.**

Cllr. Dennett provided background information regarding the three current vacancies on the Council and Cllrs. Morsley, Hill, Carter and Field gave a brief explanation of their experiences of being a councillor, what it entails and the various ways to be involved.

Further to a question from a member of public, information was given regarding the influence of the Parish Council with other authorities. In addition, information was provided regarding the Neighbourhood Development Plan and the application process for becoming a councillor.

Cllr. Dennett thanked everyone for their contributions.

#### **5. Open Forum and Questions.**

Cllr. Dennett invited questions from those attending.

Information was given regarding the future projects and plans of the Council and a member of the public reported that they were generally impressed with the work of SMPC and the MVP.

Information was also provided on current issues and plans relevant to the district; SMPC's plans to take on Mortimer Library building; tips for standing as a councillor to assist with getting elected; SMPC's meeting structure; councillor allowances; councillors assisting with projects by undertaking research; unopposed elections if just three nominees stand and conservation work that the Council undertakes.

There were no questions raised during the Open Forum session which needed to be noted and placed on the Agenda for the June or July Parish Council Meeting.

- iv. Cllr. Dennett thanked everyone for coming along for what was a very constructive meeting.
- v. The meeting closed at 20.35.