



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Plan Refresh 2009

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Stratfield Mortimer Parish Plan Refresh – 2009

Background

Stratfield Mortimer was one of the first communities in West Berkshire to undertake a Parish Plan. Work on the Parish Plan was started in 2002 and the first plan was published in 2004; this was then adopted by the Parish Council and West Berkshire District Council. As the summary of its vision for the village it stated:

Stratfield Mortimer will conserve its rural heritage and retain its distinctive character. It will continue to have a thriving small business economy with a substantial commuter population. Changes and improvements that enhance the Quality of Life of the whole community are to be encouraged. Developments of whatever kind or scale will be in harmony with their setting and enrich the Parish.

These aims have been sustained throughout the ensuing five years and much has been achieved. The plan contained actions grouped under various Key Subjects; the following examples show some of the benefits to the village that have been achieved:

- **Crime Reduction:** An additional PCSO partially funded by the Parish Council
- **Traffic Management:** Village gateway signs, a pedestrian crossing on The Street, changes to speed limits
- **Public Transport:** The minibus service to the station
- **Housing:** the production of a Village Design Statement
- **Leisure Activities & Facilities:** The Community Centre, multi-sports wall and youth shelter
- **Communications:** the Parish Council newsletter

By 2008 most of the specific objectives of the original plan had been achieved and West Berkshire District Council indicated, and the Parish Council agreed, that it was time to refresh the parish plan.

The Parish Plan Refresh Process

The Parish Council set up a working party of parish councillors and parishioners to start work to refresh the Parish Plan in 2008. Public meetings were held in St. John's Hall in October 2008 and in St. John's Infant School in February 2009. The latter was particularly successful with close to 200 people attending on one of the iciest days of the winter, freely and enthusiastically giving their ideas and discussing the future of the village.

People spoke about the need for more activities in the village for all ages, but particularly for the young and the old. Concerns for the environment and a wish to work together to promote green issues came up time and time again. A common theme was the wish to volunteer, be it in conservation work, working with the young or working for the community. A frequent message was that individuals did not hear of the opportunities for such work and did not know how to get involved. The impression from the day was of great energy of community spirit waiting to be harnessed to the public good. Very few came to complain about anything; people spoke of Mortimer as a good place to live and were seeking to further enhance that experience.

From these events and ideas a questionnaire was developed. This was designed to be completed by individuals and, with much publicity, two copies were delivered to each of the 1700 households in the village, with further copies available on request. The questionnaire also included some questions designed to help the Parish Council with ongoing issues. Additional questions were designed to measure how the village rates various local services compared with five years ago.

Another vigorous publicity campaign resulted in 948 questionnaires being completed and returned which represents over 31% of the 3026 people on the electoral roll. Expert help was gratefully received from Greenham Common Trust in the design, production and analysis of the questionnaires.

Simultaneously a youth questionnaire was developed with the help of some of the young people of the village. This was distributed through St. Mary's Junior School and Willink School and was available on request for children attending other schools. A total of 133 youth questionnaires were returned.

The New Vision

The views of the community expressed this time through public consultation and the questionnaires are very similar to those expressed five years ago. Stratfield Mortimer is essentially a rural parish and wants to retain its character and sense of community. Some new trends and ideas are also apparent. In line with the country as a whole, green issues are now to the forefront of more people's minds and most excitingly, community involvement has come to take even greater precedence.

The people of Mortimer through the public consultation events and the questionnaire repeatedly and consistently asked for more opportunities to be involved in their community as participators in a wide range of activities, but even more importantly, as active organisers and volunteers.

The exercise demonstrated a groundswell of enthusiasm for community involvement and it is proposed to establish a community partnership, Mortimer Village Partnership, to coordinate community-based initiatives.

Since the last plan the village has grown – the Mortimer Hill development has added 120 houses to the village and there have been approximately 55 from other in-fills. New residents are just as keen to be involved in the village community and this has increased the demand for both new activities and greater capacity in existing activities that cannot accommodate all those who would like to take part.

The questionnaire asked if people were prepared to pay for suggestions in the questionnaire by an increase in Council Tax if it was necessary. Although the questionnaire was distributed during a period of significant economic downturn, 40% were prepared to pay extra although 42% were not.

Note that all percentages referred to in this document (%) are, unless otherwise stated, the percentage of people giving a particular response to a question, based on the number of people who answered that question.

Some questions from the 2004 questionnaire were repeated to see whether people's views on local services or their usage of local facilities had changed. The comparisons are shown below.

What are your views on the service provided in the Parish by the following?

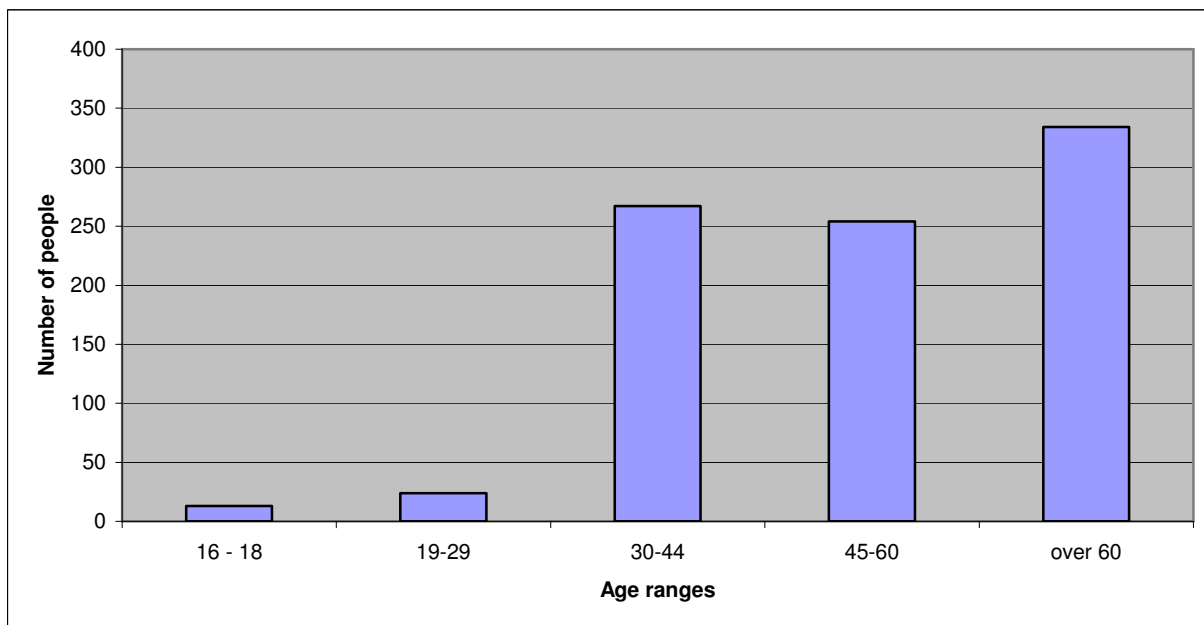
	Good		Poor	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Fire Service	63%	68%	0%	0%
Police	3%	18%	61%	28%
Ambulance Service	18%	28%	5%	3%
Doctors	62%	63%	4%	4%
Dentists	34%	39%	8%	9%
Chemist	79%	74%	1%	2%
Healthcare support services	19%	21%	4%	3%
Library	54%	47%	3%	2%
Parish Office	17%	18%	3%	7%

In this table and the following one the percentages are based on the total number of people returning a questionnaire.

How often do you use the following facilities?

	Daily - monthly		Occasionally		Never	
	2004	2009	2004	2009	2004	2009
Willink Pool and Leisure Centre	18%	23%	20%	27%	59%	45%
Tennis Courts	3%	6%	9%	18%	82%	70%
Football Pitches	3%	8%	5%	12%	84%	73%
Cricket Pitches	1%	2%	1%	6%	91%	86%
Children's Playground	21%	29%	16%	21%	58%	45%
Fairground	24%	44%	27%	35%	43%	16%

The following graph shows the age ranges of the 892 people responding to the 2009 questionnaire who answered the question concerning age:



The Action Plan

The process of parish planning has developed considerably since Stratfield Mortimer undertook its first plan in 2002. Building on good ideas from many communities, West Berkshire has now developed a template that it requires communities to use in describing their parish plans. This asks communities to consider their needs and aspirations under five headings:

- **A Strong Community** - Actions in this category should seek to include everyone, fostering a sense of belonging and participation in community life, providing similar life opportunities and accessible services for all
- **A Greener Community** - This can include reducing carbon footprint in the community, reducing waste and increasing recycling, encourage consumption of local produce, increasing diversity of local wildlife.
- **A Safe Community** - Examples of this include reducing anti-social behaviour, reducing speed on roads, emergency planning
- **A Prosperous Community** - Communities may, for example, seek to support the economy of villages, encourage Tourism, or support employment in rural areas
- **A Healthy Community** - Communities are asked to think widely about health, including such things as fostering a sense of place and belonging, improving health and well-being of local people and young people, promoting independence of vulnerable people

The following pages give a summary of what the people of Stratfield Mortimer have said through the questionnaire and public consultation, and the resultant objectives and actions. This is followed by the Action Plan Template.

Note that all percentages referred to (%) are, unless otherwise stated, the percentage of people giving a particular response to a question, based on the number of people who answered that question.

A Stronger Community

Questionnaire results and commentary

The single strongest message that became apparent from both the February 2009 public meeting and the questionnaire is that people want more personal involvement in the village through volunteering and taking part in local activities and events. There are many suggestions for new clubs and regular events for the whole village. People expressed a strong feeling of belonging to the village and wished to be able to pursue their interests locally as well as take up new pursuits. Not having to travel out of the village for a particular activity is viewed as a great bonus, particularly for the young and old who may not have access to a car and have to rely on the still limited public transport.

264 (32%) wanted to be part of a new list of volunteers who would be willing to help with initiatives such as community planting, conservation, helping support local events or fund raising. 30 (23%) young people wanted to form a youth community group to discuss how the changes they wanted could be progressed.

There was recognition of the needs of the disabled through a clear mandate for disabled access to both platforms at the station (82% composed of 44% stating it essential and a further 38% as desirable). When asked about the provision of play equipment for disabled children 555 (69%) indicated they would support this.

There was much interest in improving and extending facilities at the public library. 43% would like extended opening hours although a similar number had no opinion. 83% of young people wanted more DVDs to be available at the library; there was also a strong demand for more books for older children. 121 (13%) people also took the time to write their own ideas for enhancing the library.

There was a high level of support for a community website with 35 (4%) people offering to help develop and maintain one. 88% wanted a village events diary, 82% information about clubs, and 84% information about schools, doctors etc. 149 (16%) people provided additional ideas of content and features for the website.

Vision for the future

The vision that emerged from the public consultation process was that Mortimer should become a place where:

It is easy to access information about what is happening in the village, and in particular to find out about volunteering opportunities. There are many options for social and community activity within the village. An active community website promotes the image of the village. People come together to organise whole village events. Those wishing to form new clubs or organise new events in the village have a source of support and guidance. Young people are involved in making decisions about facilities and activities for their age group. The library has modern facilities in keeping with the size of the area it serves.

Community Actions

- A new, independent, community organisation, Mortimer Village Partnership, to create, own and manage a community website, coordinate volunteers and volunteering opportunities in the village, and to promote and support community activities and events.
- New activities for adults, starting with a book club, a film club and a group organising activities for older people.
- A youth club at the Community Centre.
- Whole Village events such as a fun day, winter fair, sports tournament, community litter-picking activities.
- Create a Youth community group, probably starting with children of junior school age.
- A community meeting place to incorporate some or all of: coffee shop, Internet café, local produce market.

SMPC to look at the feasibility and practicality of the following actions

- Additional station car park and disabled access to both platforms.
- Additional Royal Mail post boxes.
- Improved library facilities.
- Increased car park size at Fairground.
- Play equipment for disabled children on the Fairground.

A Safer Community

Questionnaire results and commentary

Many ideas were suggested to reduce speeding in the village. A total of 89% thought that 20 mph time-controlled signs outside the schools were essential or desirable. A total of 78% thought more vehicle-activated signs were essential or desirable. 78% of young people of the village said that getting cars to stop speeding in the village was very important to them.

The issue of car parking at drop off and pick up times at St. Mary's School was important to many people. 468 people (66%) rated a car park/drop-off facility as the most acceptable solution. 373 (57%) people thought that avoiding the area at school times was the least acceptable solution, while 376 (58%) thought doing nothing was the least acceptable solution. Other solutions involved a free or subsidised bus service.

The safety of pedestrians was in many peoples' minds. 71% want the feasibility of crossing point on West End Road and Victoria Road to be investigated. 59% would like physical restrictions such as bollards to be used in the area of the Post Office and Dentist's Surgery to prevent cars being parked on the pavements. 66% of young people said pavement parking should be stopped.

Vision for the future

The vision that emerged from the public consultation process was that Mortimer should become a place where:

Drivers are discouraged from speeding in the village. Pedestrians are safe on the pavements and safe crossing points are available. Children are able to get to and from the schools safely. The Parish Council has an agreed plan that can be used in emergencies such as extreme weather, flooding etc.

SMPC to look at the feasibility and practicality of the following actions

- Measures to prevent pavement parking.
- Provision of pedestrian crossing points.
- Speed reduction measures.
- A solution to St Mary's School parking problem.
- The Parish Council to develop an emergency plan for the village.

A Prosperous Community

Questionnaire results and commentary

Although the visible business community did not engage to any significant extent with the questionnaire, it is believed that many people running business replied as individuals: 16% of respondents in employment work from home.

A new community website would promote the benefits of the village and give practical and attractively presented information about it.

Vision for the future

The vision that emerged from the public consultation process was that Mortimer should become a place where:

Those working from home are able to network with others.
Mortimer presents a positive aspect to the outside world.
It is easy to find up-to-date information about local businesses and services.

Community Actions

- The new community website promotes Stratfield Mortimer as an attractive place to live, work in or visit.
- Information about local businesses available on community website.
- To publicise the SUN Business Group for small businesses, which meets at Ufton Court.

A Healthy Community

Questionnaire results and commentary

From the public consultation process there was support for more opportunities for physical exercise. 330 people (55% of those who replied to this question) would like an annual sports tournament with 18 (3%) people volunteering to help set up such an event. 51% would like an, ideally all-weather, football pitch on the Fairground. 66% would like the tennis courts adapted to make them useable for other sports and 54% would like them floodlit to extend the hours in which they can be used.

Both the adult and youth questionnaires supported the provision on the Fairground of play equipment for older children. 81% of the respondents to the youth questionnaire wanted a zip wire. 58% of adults thought an adventure playground should be provided; this was endorsed by 92% of young people.

Provision of allotments and bicycle anchorage points (described under A Greener Community) would also contribute to making the parishioners healthier.

52% thought public toilet facilities should be provided in the centre of the village and 50% also at the railway station.

Vision for the future

The vision that emerged from the public consultation process was that Mortimer should become a place where:

Good facilities and opportunities for sport and outdoor activities are available within the village. Public toilet facilities are available in the centre of the village and at the railway station. People are encouraged to walk and cycle in the village.

Community Actions

- Annual sports tournament
- Organised family walks

SMPC to look at the feasibility and practicality of the following actions

- Additional outdoor recreational facilities at Fairground
- Investigate provision of public toilet facilities through village centre shops and pubs.
- A modest increase in car park spaces at the Fairground.
- More trees to provide shade on the Fairground.

A Greener Community

Questionnaire results and commentary

57% of respondents felt that the village should be more proactive in reducing our carbon footprint through saving energy, promoting renewable energy and further action on recycling. 35 (4%) people wanted to form and join a Mortimer Green Group to work towards these aims.

To ascertain the true demand for a number of green amenities, people were asked not whether they supported their provision, but whether they would actually use them. 22% of respondents would like to have an allotment if suitable land can be identified in Mortimer while 44%, 32% and 28% would make use of bicycle anchorage points if provided respectively outside village shops, at the Fairground, and in addition to those existing at the railway station.

74% of young people said that a litter free village was very important to them. 64% of adult respondents said they would like the village to have organised litter-picking days enlivened by a picnic or similar community activity.

Vision

The vision that emerged from the public consultation process was that Mortimer should become a place where:

Reduction of the carbon footprint of the village is encouraged and individuals who wish to can find relevant information easily. People who wish to are able to grow their own food through the provision of allotments. People are encouraged to walk and use bicycles within the village. The village is clean and tidy and is kept so by its residents.

Community Actions

- Formation of a Mortimer Green Group.
- Promote reduction of energy consumption.
- Formation of a Gardening Club.
- Organised litter-picking days with social aspects e.g. picnic.

SMPC to look at the feasibility and practicality of the following actions

- The provision of allotments.
- Bicycle anchorage points outside shops, at Fairground and additional ones at railway station.
- A Campaign to reduce litter and dog fouling; more bins and signs if required.