

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Full Council 14/09/2023

Neighbourhood Plan

Agenda item 23/063 1. To resolve:

- a. the terms of Review of Reserved Land, as set out in 10.2.1 paragraph 3 of the NDP, have been met in full.
- b. the use of the Reserved Land on the MOR006 site be modified to provide:
 - i. An outdoor play space for St John's School with staff car parking
 - ii. A new dental practice for Oaktree Dental Surgery
 - iii. Reserve space for a possible medical surgery in the future
 - iv. 20 new homes reserved for Senior residents (over 55 / 65 TBA)
- c. This plan will be achieved through the combination of the reserved 1ha of land specified in the current Neighbourhood Plan and the site known as Redwood. This site will be purchased by TA Fisher.
- d. To progress this change through a Planning Application submitted by TA Fisher.

2022/3 Review of allocations of land as set out in section 10.3 Context and Justification of NDP 2017

BACKGROUND

The current NDP identifies a specific allocation of land for a new school and doctors' surgery on this site ("the reserved land").

School / Education

The context and justification for this were that St John's Infant School was under pressure and did not have the required area for outside activities, and had to restrict its intake of pupils because of capacity restrictions.

However, since 2017 we have not seen the predicted further pressure on the school in terms of pupil intake. In spite of the increase in housing from the 110-house development, projections by the St Mary's and St John's Federation Governors and West Berks Education Authority indicate that there is not expected to be any substantial increase in student numbers for the foreseeable future and, given the excellent condition of St John's school, it is clear that funding would not be available from West Berks for a new school.

The issue of outside activities space however remains, with St John's currently having considerably below the recommended external area and with no grassed area for sports activities etc.

Doctors / Healthcare

The context and logic for a new doctors' surgery remains largely unchanged. Whilst, at a recent open meeting held by the PPG on 7 June 2023 entitled "Health for the Future", the Senior Owning Partner stated that:

- the surgery was more than adequate and meeting its targets;
- the current site has been developed to the maximum extent based on the footprint;
- the surgery is fully staffed, and all space is being utilised;
- the Managing Partners own the site and may look to retire in the foreseeable future and theoretically liquidate their asset (the building and land);
- at this time there are no interested parties to take on the practice;
- there would be no further significant investment by the current owners.

What is also clear is that parking is a constant issue with limited onsite parking resulting in significant congestion on Victoria Road.

Given the uncertainty of the above, the current NDP plan remains sound, to safeguard the potential availability of land for a future doctors' practice in Mortimer and/or for possible future medical purposes, local NHS provision, etc.

Dental Practice

Since the initial plan citing the need for the doctors' surgery, the need for land for a dental practice has now become critical. The current practice, Oaktree Dental Practice, has seen increases in patient numbers and that changes in working practices following Covid have restricted the use of the practice rooms to allow deep cleaning, making the current facility unviable in the medium term. Currently emergency patients are redirected to their sister facility in Newbury.

It has not been possible to identify either an available building for the practice to move to, or any site within Mortimer for a new build facility (other than the reserved land), and thus there is a significant risk of Mortimer losing this valuable healthcare service from the village.

PROPOSED (ALTERNATE) REVISIONS TO NDP RELATING TO RESERVED LAND

There are two alternative proposals to revise the NDP to take account of the developments since 2017 referred to above:

- the first ("Revised Plan") simply changes the descriptions and use of the existing reserved land;
- the second ("Preferred Development Option") is more radical and uses a potential land swap to change the profile of the educational use, with commercial development to pay for the end result.

REVISED PLAN - see Appendix A

Healthcare

Whilst the current plans call for a new doctors' surgery, it is the intention of this revision to broaden the scope of the current NP description to "**Healthcare Facility / Facilities**".

Given the uncertainty that surrounds the current doctors' practice it has been considered prudent to retain a sufficient plot within the current hectare of reserved land to house a possible future doctors practice, however it is also clear that, with a changing NHS, we are seeing many therapies being moved to local facilities - within the current practice Physiotherapy and Phlebotomy are already included. It is therefore considered appropriate that we describe the area as allocated for healthcare generally rather than a doctors' surgery specifically.

Under that new heading we can then include the **dental practice** as one of the key healthcare requirements within Mortimer and thus provides for the allocated land to satisfy an imminent requirement and also futureproof the village healthcare services with land set aside for further development.

Education

Since the provision of a new school is no longer appropriate or required, it would seem to be reasonable to still retain a significant portion of the land for educational purposes that actually meet the specific needs of the school. The new plan therefore looks to address three key issues:

- provide outside grassed play / sports area to ensure the school meets (exceeds) the Government stated minimum requirement for a school of this size;
- provide a staff parking facility to free up the public car parking at St Johns Church and the Community Centre, improving the capability and safety of vehicular drop off / pick up;
- futureproof the school by ensuring sufficient new land is secured so that should the school require additional classroom (or, as with St Marys School, sheltered outside lesson space), this can be accommodated whilst still ensuring the availability of recreational / sport continues to meet or exceed any government guidelines for same.

PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT OPTION - see Appendix B

Whilst the above revisions are based on the land as identified within the current 2017 NDP as shown in Appendix A, a new opportunity has arisen, albeit subject to the commercial arrangements being acceptable.

The new and preferred plan is as follows:

Healthcare – The location of the potential doctors' surgery and dental practice remains unchanged from the Revised Plan detailed above, being located at the south end of the plot utilising a drainage area which is not suitable for buildings as landscape and parking for the healthcare facilities.

Education – The Revised Plan provides for the recreational / sports fields to be remote from the school, separated by the private dwelling known as Redwoods - this means that the logistics and safeguarding issues of moving and supervising the children are complicated and also means that additional toilet facilities will need to be built on site.

It has become apparent that there is an opportunity to **purchase the house (Redwoods) and land** which would then be demolished and the whole playing field area be moved north to link directly to the current school grounds. This makes the practicality of the new facilities immeasurably better and ensures that the land provides the greatest benefit to St John's School.

In moving the playing field adjacent to the school, the piece of land within the reserved land that would have been used for this purpose would thus become vacant (eg roughly the size of the Redwoods property). It is proposed that a small development of **20 "retirement" over 55 homes** with parking be built on this land, the revenue from this development being used to fund the acquisition and demolition of Redlands (and in turn providing much needed "down-sizing" housing stock for the senior members of the community, with the added benefit of being central to the village and also close to the proposed healthcare facilities).

The new Preferred plan is shown in Appendix B.

STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION - see Appendices C & D

At the start of the review, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group met with the key stakeholders which included the St Mary's and St John's School Governors, the Practice Owners of Mortimer Surgery, and the landowner and developer T A Fisher. The proposed alternate revisions to the NDP evolved from those discussions, being further enhanced by a separate approach from Oaktree Dental practice to both T A Fisher and Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council such that agreement was reached for a dental facility to be included in the plans.

Both the Revised Plan and the Preferred Development Option have been approved and supported by all parties with letters of support for Outline Planning permission being sent by SMPC and St Johns School to T A Fisher.

Both plans were presented to the public and consultation sessions were held between November 2022 and January 2023, with the details of the alternate proposals being delivered to every household within the parish (see Appendices C and D).

During the consultation sessions, members of the Steering Group discussed the alternatives with over 60 residents. All those engaging in that discussion supported the Revised Plan as being better than the proposals in the existing NDP, but agreed that the Preferred Development Option offered a significantly better outcome, both in terms of the school facility and the provision of housing.

The physical delivery of the proposals to properties asked for comments to be directed to the Parish Council Clerk. Only two responses were received, and both were in favour (see full output in Appendix D).

NDP REVIEW

1. The requirement in the NDP to review the use of the reserved land (10.2.1 para 3) has been met through discussions with Key Stakeholders, including TAF, MSJ School and

through community consultations and the previous presentation to SMPC on Feb 9th 2023.

2. Informal advice on whether to modify the NDP or progress the change of use by way of a planning application was sought from Bluestone and West Berks

APPENDIX A – Revised Plan



APPENDIX B – Preferred Development Option



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NO.	DATE	REVISION	BY	CHKD
1	2023/08/28	Issue for Public Consultation	T & P	
2	2023/08/28	Issue for Public Consultation	T & P	

CLIENT
 T & P
 PROJECT
 Phase 2, Siteplan

DESIGNER
 PROVISION
 CONSULTANTS LTD

DATE 2023/08/28
SCALE 1:2000
PROJECT NO. 2023/08/28
REV. 2



APPENDIX C – Leaflet drop to all houses in Mortimer

New Neighbourhood Plan

Draft Vision

- At the heart of the new Neighbourhood Plan, ensure that the parish becomes more sustainable, environmentally aware and responsive to climate change.
 - Provide housing for local people.
 - Enhance services and facilities appropriate for a modern rural parish, in line with its existing strong community spirit.
 - Support improved and safer pedestrian and cycle connections throughout the village including to the schools and station.
 - Support initiatives to deliver better parking facilities.
 - Retain the rural character and setting of the parish, with minimal extension of the settlement boundary and intrusion on the existing surrounding green and agricultural space.
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Climate Change and Energy | • Homes and Housing |
| • Community Services and Facilities | • Land and Street Scapes |
| • Employment | • Natural Environment |
| • Highways and Transport | |

Next Steps

- Please meet us on the dates shown overleaf and/or complete our online survey as soon as possible:

<https://neighbourhoodplan.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk/public-consultation>



HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE

MORTIMER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group seek your views on how the village should develop over the next 15 years, to meet your and your family's needs. Members of the group will be at the school halls to capture your views on 1) plans for land set aside in 2016 for a new school and doctors surgery and 2) draft topics for a new Neighbourhood Plan.

We'll be at:

- St Mary's school hall on Tuesday 31 January from 14.45 to 15.45
- St John's school hall on Friday 3 February from 8.30 to 9.15

Land Reserved Behind Tower Gardens

Background:

- Whilst there is no foreseeable need for a new larger (two-form entry) school, there is a need for and benefit from outdoor school sports and play facilities and natural habitat. This should ideally be located directly next to the school, for ease of access. Additional parking for school staff is still needed.
- Whilst there is a desire to offer additional medical services, that would warrant a larger premises, there is no foreseeable plan/funding to build a new surgery on the reserved land.
- Oaktree Dental Practice needs a larger premises and ideally wants to stay in Mortimer to continue to serve, in particular, its elderly and under-18 patients.

- Owners and prospective buyers of homes in Tower Gardens would like to know what that land will be used for.

Proposed NDP Reserved Land policy update:

This text is proposed as an update to the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan (section 10) to define the intended use of the land reserved behind Tower Gardens.

1. To set aside up to 40% of the 1 Hectare for school sports and play facilities, natural habitat and parking for school staff vehicles. This plan will be achieved in one of two ways:

Preferred Option

The new facilities will be located directly behind (south of) the school, by demolishing the adjacent property. Under this proposal, approximately 20 age-restricted retirement homes would be built on part of the land, to fund the acquisition of the adjacent property. The creation of these properties would align with the NDP's requirement to support downsizing and be located close to the village centre. (see Preferred Option plan).

Alternative Option

The new outdoor school facilities will be located behind (to the south of) the existing property, in the event that the property is no longer available when the updated NDP is agreed. (see Alternative Option plan)

2. To set aside land for a 300-500m² dental facility and associated parking.

Preferred Option



Alternative Option



APPENDIX D – Feedback from Consultation Sessions

Feedback regarding Reserved Land Proposals from Nov 2022 Public Consultation Drop-In Sessions.

Background

Three public consultation sessions to seek support for, and input into, the new NP to 2037 were held at St John's Hall, Mortimer on 16, 26 and 27 November 2022.

These sessions were publicised across Mortimer in the following ways:

- promotion via SMPC & NDP Facebook Pages and Website;

- promotion via MVP Village FB Page (5,000+ subscribers);

- posters distributed on 10+ Village Notice Boards;

- large banner display affixed to the Fairground Fencing two weeks prior to the event and moved to outside the venue of the event days;

- large Corex notices affixed to Street Lamps at four road junctions within the village.

In addition, following the events, a flyer was distributed with the SMPC Newsletter to circa 2,000 households within the village providing the opportunity for email feedback to be sent to an SMPC email address by 31 January 2023 (Appendix C).

Consultation regarding the proposed, alternate, revisions to the NDP in relation to the reserved land

Within the three public consultation sessions related to the new NP there was also a display relating to the proposals to revise the existing NDP as detailed above, staffed by members of the Steering Group plus a St John's School Governor.

Across the three consultation sessions, there were a total of over 60 individual conversations with interested members of the public in relation to the reserved land display.

The output from the conversations can be summarised as follows:

- 1 in general, there was no real expectation that a new school would be built, especially given the current economic climate (the Governor was on hand to explain that in terms of projected intake for the foreseeable future, St John's had sufficient capacity to meet the local need);

the public were very surprised that Mortimer Surgery had shown no interest in a new facility, given their experience of the current service and felt it was prudent for the SMPC to continue to keep land reserved for this use, in view of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the current premises;

there was complete support for the school to have access to outside recreation area and that it was fully agreed this should if possible be directly adjoined to the school;

there was very strong support to retain a facility / dental practice in the village and agreement that this central location was appropriate given the information that the existing practice (Oaktree) would not be able to continue to meet the community needs within its current premises;

there was unanimous support for the provision of 20 “retirement dwellings” given the extreme difficulty for local residents to downsize, releasing larger homes to families whilst allowing them to remain in the village. The trade-off of a large single dwelling (Redwoods) for 20 smaller homes was considered a very desirable outcome especially against the background of the closure of Windmill Court;

there were comments from two or three individuals questioning the role of T A Fisher and wondered if they were trying to “force” more development for their own gain, however these were explained to their satisfaction the housing development was not only desirable to the community but also necessary to fund the purchase of Redwoods and facilitate the school playing field.

Follow-up after the consultation events

In addition to explanation during the events that further comments could be made via email to the parish council, as detailed above leaflets were delivered with the SMPC Newsletter to over 2,000 households, including the two reserved land proposals, with an invitation to comment via email by 31 January 2023.

One email was received:

“As a new resident of Cob Street off Tower Gardens, I think the Preferred Option is the better option because the land for the school is adjacent to the school and there is new housing for older people.

“I moved from a large family house and found it very difficult to downsize to a more suitable home.” (Name withheld dated 09/12/23).

One parishioner visited the Parish Office and dictated following:

“With regards to the use of Land Reserved Behind Tower Gardens, he thinks Option 1 [the preferred option] is the better deal and thinks it would be better to move the St John’s School hard play area from outside the front of the school, where it is next to the road and there are fumes from the traffic to the back as proposed. He did add, providing, of course, it is possible to buy Redwoods.” (Dictated to Parish Clerk, Name withheld dated 12/01/23).

Note: Following the above activities two further consultation events were held, one each at the St Mary’s and St John’s Schools with the hope of engaging parents at drop off or pick up times, who otherwise may not have felt inclined to come to the general public events. Regrettably only three or four people attended each event. Their approval was in line with the previous commentary.