STRATFIELD MORTIMER PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter–Autumn 2023

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A warm welcome to this edition...

... of your parish newsletter and, as always, many thanks to everyone who has contributed to production and distribution – the authors of the articles, Bernise in the Parish Office for putting it all together, Chris Morsley and the rest of the team for sorting everything into distribution bundles, and finally to everyone who distributes this and the MVP magazine together.

As always, we hope that you find this edition interesting and useful – if anything here provokes a particular question or comment please note Danusia's comments about the surgeries we will be holding, but feel free in any event to contact any of your parish councillors – details on the Parish Council website.

All the best.

Graham Bridgman (Editor and SMPC Vice-Chairman)



Introduction

On Saturday 16 September the Parish Council took itself off on an Awayday – all the way to the 1st Mortimer Scout HQ in Birch Lane!

You might think that we meet often enough and didn't need another opportunity to talk, but meetings of the Parish Council and its committees are necessarily formal, with a summons to attend and many decisions taken (on a vote) only if the subject is an agenda item. (We do, of course, invite residents to come and raise anything they want to, with a dedicated spot at the start of the meeting for this purpose.)

Only making decisions about things that are on the agenda means that it can be quite difficult to talk generally about various things – for example possible ideas for the future, or how we could work more efficiently - hence the Awayday.

One of the aims that came out of the session is for parish councillors to be more visible and approachable – whilst you have always been welcome to come to a meeting or contact any councillor (all our phone numbers and email addresses are on the SMPC website) it was thought that this didn't really tick all the boxes of public engagement. So, we intend to hold informal 'surgeries' with a couple of parish councillors being available on a certain day at a certain time in different public locations in the village. This still needs a bit of planning, but watch out for announcements on our

website and Facebook - come along and tell us what is concerning you, and if we can't help directly we will do our best to signpost you to someone who can.

Another first is that the Parish Council is entering a scarecrow in the half-term MVP Scarecrow Trail look out for our big red bus.



Finally from me, you will see that we still have one vacancy for a councillor. Please do contact me, or our Clerk, Lynn, or any councillor if you would like to find out more.

Danusia Morsley, Chairman, Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Mortimer to Burghfield Cycleway and Footpath



In the last newsletter I said that "a planning application has been submitted for the much longed-for safe pedestrian and cycle route between Mortimer and Burghfield (horse riders will also be permitted to use the route)".

The planning application is still with the Planning Department at West Berkshire Council (please see

separate article about planning generally), although we do now have a case officer appointed so hopefully it won't be too long before we have an outcome, and hopefully that will be positive!

Danusia Morsley

Windmill Court Update

In the last newsletter we anticipated that a planning application would soon be coming forward in respect of Sovereign Housing's redevelopment plans for Windmill Court.

The plans have now been submitted and you can see them, and submit your comments, on the West Berkshire Planning Portal (<u>https://publicaccess.</u> <u>westberks.gov. uk/online-applications</u>) using the reference 23/01859.

As we said last time around, what is proposed is the result of a lengthy dialogue with the Parish Council and is a great improvement on the original proposals.

Instead of the previous mixture of market and affordable houses, all the homes on the new plans are classed as affordable. Stafford House is retained and 24 new homes are proposed. These comprise one four-bedroomed house, ten three-bedroomed houses, five two-bedroomed houses, six one-bedroomed maisonettes and two First Homes.

11 homes will be shared ownership and 13 rented. The Parish Council has been told by Sovereign Housing that they will be proposing the following lettings plan to WBC:

- the six maisonettes will have a first priority for returning Windmill Court residents, followed by a second priority for older persons from Mortimer, only then being put forward on to the general needs housing on the West Berkshire Register;
- the seven other rented homes will have first priority for Mortimer residents (or close connection to Mortimer), and then general needs housing if they are not all taken up by Mortimer residents/ connections;

The Planning Committee of the Parish Council made some comments on external architectural details of the submitted plans, but was otherwise in support of them.

Danusia Morsley



Outside Bodies

The Parish Council appoints members/representatives to a number of external bodies, and this is the first of a series of articles to highlight what they do, starting with the Neighbourhood Action Group.

Some individuals are appointed annually (usually at the Parish Council's Annual Meeting in May) unless there is a vacancy, and some are appointed from time to time for longer terms of office.

The Council appoints annually to the:

- AWE Local Liaison Committee (one representative);
- Burghfield & Mortimer Neighbourhood Action Group (BMNAG) (two);
- Burghfield and Mortimer Volunteer Bureau (one);
- St John's Hall Management Committee (one);
- Stratfield Mortimer Relief in Need Charity (one);
- Willink Leisure Centre Joint Advisory Committee (one);
- Wokefield Common Advisory Committee (one).

The Council appoints other than annually to the:

- Clarke's Educational Foundation (one, four-year term until July 2026);
- Stratfield Mortimer Fairground Trust (two four-year terms until October 2025 and October 2026 respectively).

Graham Bridgman

Burghfield & Mortimer Neighbourhood Action Group

A Neighbourhood Action Group is a multi-agency problem solving group dealing primarily with police-related issues within its area – in this case the parishes of Beech Hill, Burghfield, Padworth, Stratfield Mortimer, Sulhamstead, Ufton Nervet and Wokefield. BMNAG doesn't have a statutory status, but it is expected that it "will have enough standing such that the bodies and organisations it deals with will engage with it in a mean-ingful manner" (*BMNAG Constitution*).

Each parish council appoints at least one member (Burghfield and Stratfield Mortimer appoint two each – in SMPC's case these are Graham Bridgman (the current Chair of BMNAG) and John Wells), and other members include representatives of Thames Valley Police, District Councillors, and various co-opted individuals (eg from Neighbourhood Watch groups).

BMNAG meets every couple of months or so (aligned with TVP shift patterns) and discusses local policing issues and crime statistics, and anything else of relevance to the communities covered – meetings generally take place alternately between Burghfield Village Hall and St John's Hall in Mortimer. Members of the public are welcome to attend any meeting, details of which can generally be found on the SMPC website as well as Facebook, etc.

At the September meeting we discussed the issues of antisocial behaviour in the village (catapults, etc) as well as other local policing issues.

Graham Bridgman, Chair, BMNAG

Garth Club

A small group of Parish Councillors met with representatives from Royal British Legion Headquarters (RBL) in July and September regarding Garth Club.

RBL are seeking to find new trustees willing and able to take on the trust and the property. The formal process for this is for RBL to place a statutory notice on the building and in local newspapers asking for interested parties to come forward. The minimum period for responding to such a notice is four weeks, but SMPC and RBL agreed that this should be extended to six weeks, and not be published until 19 October.

In the interim we agreed that a public statement should be issued to forewarn anyone interested and to enable possible trustees to come forward. So, a mutually agreed public statement was issued by SMPC in September and posted on the council website, on Facebook, and on noticeboards throughout the parish. It reads:

"Garth Club (aka Garth Hall) Mortimer

A Public Statement from Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council members met representatives from the Royal British Legion in July and September to discuss the future of the property known as Garth Club (aka Garth Hall), Mortimer which is currently held by the Royal British Legion on trusts declared in 1942. A number of issues were discussed, principally the transfer of the trusteeship of the trust to new trustees. The next step will be for a public notice to be placed in the local press and on the property seeking expressions of interest from local community groups, or any other third parties, interested in taking on the trusteeship of the trust (and thus taking on the premises). The notice will also cater for the property to be sold in the event that new trustees cannot be found.

A period of 6 weeks will be given for interested parties to come forward and further details will be found on the public notice once it is published, which is likely to be on Thursday 19 October 2023 - anyone interested in taking on the trusteeship will be able to get more information from the Royal British Legion's agents, whose details will be in the notice."

If suitable trustees cannot be found the likely outcome is that the building will be sold and the formal public notice caters for this possibility. Any sale is likely to need approval and a scheme from the Charity Commission concerning the objects of the trust and proceeds of the sale.

Mike Dennett

Mortimer's Neighbourhood Plans

As was reported last month, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (the SG) has two main activities - to review the existing Neighbourhood Development Plan (which commenced in 2017 and is valid until 2026), and to develop a new Neighbourhood Plan for Mortimer to run from the expiry of the current one through to 2039.

Those who have been to any of the public consultations regarding both the NDP and the NP will know that the NDP reserved land within the development site (then MOR006, now Tower House Farm) for a new infant school and doctors' surgery, and that, if these didn't progress within five years, that element of the Plan needed to be reviewed. Well, in short, they haven't progressed, but instead the SG proposed (and received unanimous public support for such at the Neighbourhood Plan consultations) that the land be reassigned for school sports and play facilities, and a dental practice with parking, with the remainder continuing to be set aside for a possible

future doctor's surgery. This all culminated with a Resolution passed at the meeting of SMPC on 14 September as follows:

- 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.

It is anticipated that a draft planning application from TA Fisher (TAF) will be discussed by SMPC, the SG and TAF shortly.

So far as the new Neighbourhood Plan is concerned, a review of potential policies is underway – it is anticipated that the NP will keep some of the NDP policies (with possible slight amendments), adopt a number of WBC policies in the emerging new WBC Local Plan, and create some new ones. We expect that there will be wide consultation on the proposals, so watch this space...

(For the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan (2017) visit: <u>https://np.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk</u>, and for the latest news, please visit: <u>https://bit.ly/mortimerneighbourhoodplan</u>.)

Graham Bridgman

Straight (or Strait) Up!

Whilst undertaking an office spring clean, details of the Council's straitjacket were unearthed - "the Council's straitjacket?" I hear you say – yes, that was our initial thought too!

The straitjacket is on loan to Hampshire County Council's Arts and Museums Service as part of a 25-year agreement which finishes in 2039. At the time of going to print we were not able to confirm as to whether the straitjacket is currently on show or not, but a picture of it may be found below.

Straitjackets were invented in 1790 by a French upholsterer named Guilleret. They were typically used to restrain a person to protect them from harm or to prevent them from causing harm and were considered more humane than traditional restraints made of ropes or chains.



Who knows why the Council owns a straitjacket? Unfortunately we haven't been able to establish that – but all I can say is that councillors had better behave or the current loan agreement may come to a premature end!

Lynn Hannawin, Parish Clerk

Cemetery Extension

The Parish Council owns and manages the civil cemetery situated adjacent to St Mary's Churchyard, and we are in the process of extending it - the project is progressing well, having been delayed as a result of lockdown.

Between the old and the new cemetery is a ditch, partially enclosed with a culvert, for most of the length of the cemetery, so the first thing we needed was a bridge over it. Following a tendering process in 2020 and subsequent structural calculations to ensure that the bridge would be able to support the diggers required to dig the graves, the bridge was installed in December 2021.

The next stages were, first to design new footpaths (to match the existing ones) to and from the bridge – this installation will not be easy due to the slope of the land and the consequent need for retaining walls on both sides

of the bridge – and, second, to secure a design and specification for the new layout. A tender pack was put together by the Clerk, with the assistance of Councillors with relevant experience, and issued in June 2022 (as this is very specialised project, there are only a few companies to go to for quotations).

The contract was eventually awarded to the winning design consultants and we received the first design draft in July 2023:



Due to the new cemetery's location next to the Foudry Brook, the Parish Council are extremely vigilant regarding any potential pollution issues that might arise. As part of the earlier processes we had undertaken various watercourse testing procedures, and had received approval from the National Rivers Authority. However, recently, the Environmental Agency issued more stringent guidelines regarding the proximity of new cemeteries next to waterways - to mitigate any groundwater pollution. The Parish Council and its consultants are now in dialogue with the EA to ensure that the design and layout fully complies with their requirements.

Once this been dealt with, the next stage will be to put the design into the build phase, and we anticipate the extension becoming available in 2024.

Andy Noonan

Planning

The Parish Role in Planning

The Parish Council's Planning Committee meets every two weeks, but only if there are planning applications to consider.

To put this into context, West Berkshire Council (the planning authority) issues two comprehensive lists every week (covering all towns and parishes within the district) – the first of the decisions taken to grant or reject permission following planning applications made some time before, and the second of new applications. The current lists can be found at:

https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planning-application-search.

In addition, WBC sends SMPC details of each application in the parish, with a deadline date for SMPC to respond with comments. It is important to note that planning officers at WBC are not bound to take SMPC's views into account when making a decision – thus SMPC may object to a particular application which then gets permission, or support an application which is then refused.

The current problem is that WBC has a substantial planning backlog (to the extent that they have a webpage devoted to it -

https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planning-backlog).

This means that, whereas in the recent past the list of new applications would show which WBC case officer had been assigned to the application, the list now regularly reads "Awaiting Case Officer".

Generally, until a case officer is assigned, there won't be an orange planning notice put up, so members of the public may not be aware of the application.

Until very recently, SMPC was applying for extensions of time to respond but still calling meetings of the Planning Committee. Now however we are taking a different stance – whenever we receive notification of a new application we are responding to the effect that we won't be calling a Committee meeting, and so won't be able to comment, until the orange notice has gone up and the public have had a chance to address the Committee should they wish to.

Current Applications

The larger projects and developments awaiting a planning decision are the Burghfield to Mortimer Cycleway and Windmill Court, both of which are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter.

We can now also report on progress with Tower House Farm. Following objections from the SMPC Planning Committee, and a 'call-in' to WBC's Eastern Area Planning Committee by one of our then district councillors, planning permission for a substantial retaining wall between the planned housing and the public open space below was refused (the video of the EAPC meeting is here:

<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?</u> <u>v=Yt5e62wBxJU&list=PL6cepKKElwne9h0GajvDRG65M2AG0Wn_U&index=29</u>).

The refusal of that application (which the developer T A Fisher are currently appealing) meant that phase 2b of the development couldn't be completely built out, but - following very constructive discussions with T A Fisher - we are currently awaiting a revised application which we believe addresses the major concerns the community had over the project and the retaining wall. Details are currently confidential but will be made public when the application is received by WBC.

We welcome any local residents that wish to air any concerns regarding planning approvals and look forward to welcoming you at our Planning Committee meetings.

Dave Butler, Chairman, Planning Committee

Tackling Speeding in Our Village

Residents will hopefully have seen two portable speed safety devices in use in the village, used along with the fixed speed indicator devices (at the corner of Pitfield Lane and The Street and near The Turner's Arms) – the Speed Indicator Device (SID) and the Automatic Speedwatch Camera (ASWC). You may also have seen signs on the road entrances to the village regarding the fact that road users are entering a Community Speedwatch Area. This article is about the ASWC, with an update on progress made and results achieved.

First a Very Big Thank You!

In addition to the Parish Councillors who you will see regularly roadside during rush hours, our call to the community has been answered and we are very fortunate and grateful that the team now has a number of volunteers from the village, meaning that we can deploy the camera more frequently (and all operatives have passed the required training provided by the national Community Speedwatch Scheme (CSW)).

Most people will have seen the portable SID in use displaying the speeds of passing cars. Despite that fact that many drivers slow down when they see the display, for most places and times in the village, at least 15% of vehicles are exceeding the limit – and this can be as high as 40%, particularly in the early morning.

So, we use the SID to identify speeding hot spots; and then deploy the ASWC to turn observation into action. As a result, since the beginning of July:

- 259 speeding offences have been reported to Thames Valley Police (TVP) for their action
- the highest speed recorded in the village was 55 mph!

So, how does it work?

The camera photographs vehicles travelling above a set limit and records speeds and registration numbers. After a roadside session, the software links to the DVLA and this returns the colour and make of the vehicle corresponding to the registration number recorded.

The operators check that these details are visually correct (ie the details returned by DVLA match the photograph) and, having done so, pass the details of offending vehicles to CSW, who do a further check on colour and make before passing the details to TVP. The parish operators do not have any access to details of the registered keepers - only TVP has that information, and the data recorded must be destroyed within two months of each session.

Registration numbers of speeding vehicles are entered on to a Police database by trained Police volunteers and staged warning letters are then sent out by TVP to the registered keepers stating that their vehicle has been reported as speeding. The first letter is a warning letter. The second and third are stronger letters. If three incidents occur within a six-month period positive intervention by the Police is likely.

Can You Help?

If you are concerned about speeding in the parish, please:

- feel free to tell us of locations where you think speeding is an issue;
- consider becoming a volunteer ASWC or SID operator (full training is provided).

Amanda Marsden, Chairman, Roads, Footpaths & Commons Committee

Storm Discharges into Foudry Brook

In the last newsletter we published information on storm discharges from Mortimer Sewage Treatment Works for the last four years, with an analysis up to 31 March this year.

To remind everyone, and put things into context, for the last winter period (1 September 2022 to 31 March 2023) discharges occurred on 105 out of 211 days.

Further discharges occurred in April; about 90 hours from 10 April, and 32 hours between the 19th and 23rd. Discharges are not often expected during the main summer months. The next substantial discharges occurred on 2 and 5 August totalling at least 60 hours. Following heavy rain in mid-September, a discharge started on 20 September and finished (apart from a few minutes break) on 23 September, lasting in total over 55 hours.

The Parish Council has obtained measurements of the flow of sewage at 15 minute interval from 2018 to 2022. We are working with 'Windrush Against Sewage Pollution' (WASP) to understand why and whether discharges are necessary. WASP is a registered charity working to end sewage pollution of the River Windrush in Oxfordshire.

The Clerk has recently contacted Thames Water on the progress of the planned upgrade to Mortimer STW and received the reply below on 22 September:

"I can confirm that we're still expecting work to take place in 2024. I don't have specific dates, but likely to be in the latter half of the year. We anticipate updating the website in the coming weeks.

The scheme will involve a variety of work, including new pumps being installed, modifications to some of the weir heights on storage tanks, replacement pipework between various parts of the process and replacement and modification to some of the telemetry equipment within the site.

While this work won't prevent discharges taking place, it has been designed to improve the ability of the works to treat the volumes of incoming flow, and ensure robust compliance in all weather conditions against the performance expected within the permit it's issued from the Environment Agency.

This scheme is one of many taking place across a number of sewage works in our region, with the overall aim of reducing spills by 50% by 2030, and by 80% in sensitive catchments. While our ultimate aim is to eliminate all storm overflows, this is a long-term aspiration and they currently remain a necessary and permitted function to prevent sewers flooding our homes, gardens and streets.

Our recently published Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) 2025 – 2050, which was published for the first time earlier this year starts to detail a medium to long-term plan which looks to address challenges of climate change, population growth and advancements in regulatory targets over the next 25 years. One of our headline targets within the plan is to reach a position where we see less than 10 storm overflow discharges per outfall, per year on average into the environment. This would involve an investment of £10.9 billion, and will require the support and approval of customers and regulators over that period. You can find out more about the plan here - <u>https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage</u> -and-wastewater-management."

Mike Dennett

West Berkshire Council Interactive Map

This probably looks a little strange for a parish newsletter article, but I regularly get asked something and think "don't you know about the WBC Map?".

There are quite a number of interactive maps around that can tell you a lot about what is going on locally and nationally – for example there is MAGIC (<u>https://maqic.defra.gov.uk/maqicmap.aspx</u>) which is managed by Natural England. It has loads of different land designation (etc) layers you can switch on and off – for example, here are national cycle network, village green and common land designations locally according to MAGIC:



Then you have One Network (<u>https://one.network/</u>) which shows roadworks today/over the next two weeks/three months/twelve months, along with the official diversions – you can find out who is doing the work and who to contact if there is an issue. For example, here are the local roadworks planned for the next two weeks (as at 25 September):



And so to WBC. The WBC interactive map (<u>https://gis2.westberks.gov.uk/</u> <u>webapps/OnlineMap/</u>) has a huge amount of local data in various layers – you can look up planning permissions and planning applications (and then drill down to the individual planning portal records), check postcodes, identify public footpaths, see if WBC manages grounds maintenance for a particular piece of land, etc, etc.

As simple examples, here are our local public rights of way:





and here are the postcode polygons:

and here are local tree preservation orders:



Take a look and see for yourself!

Graham Bridgman

It Still Could Be You!

At the time of writing, one vacancy remains on the Council which we are very keen to fill. No experience or specific skills are required, but if you are passionate about Mortimer and enjoy living or working in or close to the parish then it could be you.

Council decisions are invariably taken at the more formal meetings held throughout the year but, in addition to these, there's also the opportunity to join the various less formal working parties which assist with communitybased projects and Council initiatives. In addition, you could become a Council representative on one of the external bodies associated with the Council, assist with the Community Speedwatch programme, or help spread the word about the role and aims of the Council – the role is varied and rewarding. Whatever you choose to do, training is available, and help and support is close at hand from the other councillors and Officers.

Please do consider taking on this exciting position. Further information may be found at <u>https://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor/becoming-councillor-</u><u>*O#4-who-can-be-a-councillor*-</u> or, even better, why not speak to one of the current serving members about what's involved? Alternatively, you can express your interest by contacting the Council office on 0118 9331955 or emailing <u>the.clerk@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk</u>.

Lynn Hannawin, Parish Clerk



Hedges

Now that autumn is upon us and the bird nesting season is definitely over, it is high time to cut back, trim and prune our hedges. All householders or land-owners who have a hedge adjacent to a road, pavement or footpath are obliged to keep the hedge trimmed back to their boundary.

Overhanging hedges cause real problems:

- they are a hazard to pedestrians who can be forced out into the road where protruding branches or brambles make the pavement unusable - this is especially true for wheelchair users or those pushing a pram or buggy;
- they can affect the visibility for users driving along the road, especially at bends or junctions - they may obscure signs and increase the risk of accidents;
- even a small amount of overhanging vegetation can make a pavement deteriorate more quickly as the surface does not dry out as quickly, moss may grow and it may become slippery or even icy in winter.

Please help keep pedestrian, cyclists and drivers safe by keeping your hedges cut back and doing it promptly now. If you are a tenant, and your tenancy agreement says the hedges are the landlord's responsibility, it is still your duty to inform the landlord when the hedges need cutting.



Danusia Morsley



And Finally

Since this is the last newsletter before Christmas, everyone at the Parish Council wishes you and yours felicitations of the season and hopes that Santa brings you what you wish for!

CONTACT US

Parish Council Office, The Library, 27 Victoria Road, Mortimer RG7 3SH

Opening/working hours: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 09:30 to 17:00

Tel: 0118 933 1955

Website (announcements, meetings, people, committees and policies): https://stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk

Facebook: https://facebook.com/stratfieldmortimerparishcouncil

Neighbourhood Plan: <u>https://np.stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk/</u>

Fairground Emergency contact - for emergencies and dangerous situations: 07436 807543

Non-emergencies contact the Parish Council Office: 0118 9331955

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

West Berks Council: 01635 551111. Out of hours emergencies only: 01635 42161

Report a problem online: <u>https://www.westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem</u>

West Berkshire Council Streetcare Team (to report problems with streets, roads, highways or pavements): Telephone 01635 519080 Email: streetcare@westberks.gov.uk

District Councillors for Burghfield & Mortimer Ward:

Cllr Nick Carter - Nick.Carter2@westberks.gov.uk

Cllr Geoff Mayes - Geoffrey.Mayes1@westberks.gov.uk

Cllr Vicky Poole - <u>Vicky.Poole1@westberks.gov.uk</u>



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