



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council Minutes

Minutes of the Public Meeting held on Monday 08 December 2025 at 19:30 at St John's Hall, Mortimer, RG7 3TF

Present

West Berkshire Council Members

J Brooks, D Gaines, L Callan, P Morelli

Councillors speaking

Cllrs G Bridgman (Chairman of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council), N Carter (District Councillor)

Members speaking

Mr D Overett.

Officers of the Council

Miss D Davis.

Commencement

The meeting commenced at 19:30

25/019 Items for consideration

1 Members of West Berkshire Council

Members of West Berkshire Council (WBC) attended the meeting to provide information on the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) Local Plan Draft and to explain how the public may engage with and object to the proposals.

Officers Laura Callan and Paula Amorelli introduced themselves. Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced himself and stated that he shared residents' concerns. He explained that WBC hoped the session would help provide clarity and reassurance and confirmed that WBC intended to submit a robust, evidence-based response to the proposals. He emphasised that this marked the start of a formal process and that WBC was present to support residents.

Councillor Denise Gaines, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning at WBC, also introduced herself.

Laura Callan then provided an overview of the Local Plan process, explaining that a Local Plan is a statutory document covering a minimum 15-year period and is supported by a substantial evidence base compiled over several years. Its purpose is to identify land to meet development needs, including housing, while protecting the environment. She confirmed that the BDBC Local Plan is intended to cover the period to 2042.

She outlined the key stages of the Local Plan process as follows:

- The current stage is Regulation 18 (early engagement), during which initial views are sought.
- Comments received are then considered and used to inform a revised draft Local Plan.
- The revised plan is submitted for independent examination by a Planning Inspector on behalf of the Secretary of State.
- Further public representations are invited before and during the examination process.
- Following examination, decisions are made on what is taken forward into the final adopted plan.

Members were advised that the Regulation 18 consultation period is currently open for a limited time. West Berkshire Council officers are reviewing the proposals and considering their implications for the district. It was noted that, following Regulation 18, two proposed allocations on the West Berkshire border include land at Mortimer for approximately 350 dwellings and Oakley Farm for approximately 500 dwellings. The inclusion of a Gypsy and Traveller site was explained as a statutory requirement that BDBC must address within its Local Plan.

Paula Amorelli then explained the **Duty to Cooperate**, which is a legal requirement for local planning authorities to work together on strategic matters such as housing and employment. She emphasised that while councils are required to cooperate, they are not required to agree. She noted that national planning guidance confirms that BDBC must cooperate with WBC and that the Local Plan must ultimately be found sound.

She outlined the steps WBC has taken to date:

- WBC was informed of the emerging proposals during the summer, with details made public in September.
- WBC officers have reviewed the emerging Local Plan.
- Concerns were formally raised by WBC at a Duty to Cooperate meeting held in October.
- Guidance was provided on how residents can make effective representations:
 - All consultation responses are taken into account.
 - Objections may be submitted with or without supporting evidence, although evidence-based comments carry greater weight.
 - Residents were strongly encouraged to review the evidence base underpinning the Local Plan, including technical studies.
 - Personal circumstances were not recommended as the basis for objections.
- Examples of relevant matters to raise included:
 - Adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan policies, noting that while these only carry statutory weight within their own designated area, they may still be material considerations.

- Evidence gathered during neighbourhood planning processes, including studies and consultation outcomes.
- Whether the Sustainability Appraisal adequately considers cross-boundary impacts.
- It was confirmed that:
 - Each individual, including members of the same household, should submit their own response.
 - Responses are encouraged via the online consultation portal, although handwritten submissions are also accepted.
 - All representations must be submitted by the stated deadline.
 - A Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council drop-in event is scheduled for 7 January 2026.
 - BDBC will request a Statement of Common Ground from West Berkshire Council.
 - Following Regulation 18, the Local Plan will proceed to Regulation 19, with examination anticipated in 2027.

Councillor Jeff Brooks and Officer Laura Callan were asked about the effectiveness of petitions, noting that District Councillor N Carter had been publicising a petition in relation to the proposals. They advised that individual written objections are more effective within the Local Plan process. While petitions may demonstrate strength of feeling in principle, they are not afforded the same weight as individual, substantive representations and are not considered as strongly as formal objections.

Councillor Jeff Brooks reiterated that WBC's response must be objective, evidence-based, and unemotional. He stated that, at this stage, officers' focus is on demonstrating why the site is inappropriate, rather than discussing mitigation, as WBC does not agree that the development should proceed at this location. He expressed the view that the aim is to clearly demonstrate why this is not the right place for the proposed development.

Councillor Brooks also confirmed that he had written to the Leader of BDBC approximately three weeks earlier to initiate dialogue but had not yet received a response despite follow-up correspondence. He stated that continued lack of engagement would be a concern and reiterated the importance of constructive dialogue between authorities.

In conclusion, residents were strongly encouraged to submit individual responses, as both the number and quality of objections can have a significant impact. Parish Councils were encouraged to support residents by providing guidance on how to respond effectively.

2 District Councillor N Carter

District Councillor Nick Carter addressed the meeting and introduced himself, apologising for the absence of the other two District Councillors.

Councillor Carter stated that the meeting was not intended to be a political campaign rally, nor was it intended to instruct residents on what to do. He explained that the purpose was to help residents understand the process, digest the available information, and engage meaningfully with the consultation.

He noted that the WBC Local Plan is expected to run until 2042 and emphasised the importance of understanding the Local Plan process and the evidence that underpins it. He confirmed that the consultation was approximately one week into the eight-week Regulation 18 period and that there was a significant volume of information for residents to review. His role, he explained, was to highlight key issues and assist the public in understanding how to input effectively into the consultation process.

Councillor Carter outlined his role as a District Councillor and explained that the validity and soundness of the BDBC Local Plan would ultimately be determined by an independent Planning Inspector and, if necessary, the Secretary of State. He advised that the Duty to Cooperate would be further explained during the meeting by senior WBC councillors.

Using maps of the proposed BDBC sites, Councillor Carter highlighted the location of the proposed development, noting that the site is separated from existing development by a small piece of land known as MOR003.

Councillor Carter expressed the view that the proposed site allocation fails to comply with the Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). He stated that, in his opinion, the proposal is unsustainable, poorly evidenced, and appears non-viable, and that it fails relevant NPPF tests. He further stated that the location fails the Basingstoke and Deane settlement hierarchy and does not represent a valid extension of Mortimer towards Mortimer West End.

Concerns were raised regarding the reliance of the proposal on WBC services, including GP provision, where he noted inconsistencies within the consultation documentation. He also raised concerns regarding school capacity and the location of proposed facilities, which he stated were not in close proximity to the site, creating additional transport implications. He further highlighted sewage treatment capacity, noting that an increase in residents could exacerbate existing issues.

Councillor Carter stated that, should BDBC proceed with the allocation despite the current lack of supporting evidence, including the outcomes of agricultural land surveys, and take the plan forward to examination, then consideration should be given to requiring BDBC or developers to fully fund the additional infrastructure and services required to support the development.

Councillor Carter asked the panel whether members of the public could use a template response when submitting objections and was advised that this was acceptable. He also sought clarification on whether responses could be resubmitted during Regulation 18 and was advised that individual responses are the most important and carry the greatest weight.

3 Public questions

Members of the public raised a number of questions to the panel prior to the contribution from Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.

- Residents asked whether templated letters could be used when submitting objections. **It was confirmed that template responses may be used by editing them into their own words.**
- Members of the public asked whether Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council would be providing a statement during the meeting. **It was confirmed that the Parish Council would be addressing the meeting.**
- Questions were raised regarding the location of the evidence supporting the proposed allocations. **The panel advised that the supporting evidence base is available on the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council website and residents were encouraged to review the documentation.**
- A question was raised regarding the absence of Englefield Estate at the meeting. Confirmation given that they had been invited but were not able to send a representative.
- Members of the public asked whether councils work from a standard template when assessing the viability of Local Plans. **It was confirmed that there is no single standard template and that each Local Plan is assessed on its own merits.**
- Questions were raised regarding funding for infrastructure. **The panel explained that infrastructure funding would normally be secured through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements. While monies would be paid to BDBC, WBC would seek to negotiate appropriate contributions should the development proceed.**
- A question was raised regarding the cost of research and evidence gathering required to support the Local Plan and objections. **It was clarified that BDBC is responsible for undertaking the required assessments and analysis, and that WBC will review this work.**
- Concerns were raised regarding school funding, particularly in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN), and how funding would operate if council tax receipts are received by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. **It was acknowledged that SEN funding presents challenges, that some funding flows across boundaries while some does not, and that this represents a potential risk to WBC taxpayers. Members were advised that this was an important point to raise within consultation responses.**
- Members of the public expressed concern that, despite encouragement to submit objections by the consultation deadline of 23 January, there appeared to be limited evidence currently available. **The panel advised that in some cases anecdotal evidence may be sufficient and that residents should submit responses based on the information available.**
- A question was asked regarding what level of public response is considered effective during Regulation 18. **It was confirmed that there is no specific percentage or threshold; both the quality of evidence and the number of responses are important. It was noted that statutory consultees can be slow to respond and that residents were encouraged to submit representations.**

- A question was raised regarding concerns previously raised by WBC at Duty to Cooperate meetings. **It was explained that WBC had queried whether additional evidence would be provided at the Regulation 18 stage, whether adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan policies had been adequately considered, and whether further engagement events would be held as part of the consultation.**
- Members of the public asked whether additional representations could be submitted if further evidence becomes available after an initial submission. **It was confirmed that further representations may be submitted and that responses can be read together, provided submissions are made within the consultation period. Councillor Jeff Brooks advised that residents may wish to consider submitting responses after the BDBC event scheduled for 7 January 2026, but emphasised that timing is critical and late submissions would not be accepted.**
- Reference was made to a previous submission of 34 questions directed to West Berkshire Council, which had been advised as being matters for BDBC. **It was confirmed that while these were valid questions, West Berkshire Council could not respond directly. WBC confirmed it would submit its own response to the Local Plan, but could not confirm a timescale, having only received the plan one week earlier.**
- Questions were raised regarding whether BDBC could refuse to share CIL funding. **It was advised that the focus of the examination would be whether adequate infrastructure exists to support the development. Infrastructure requirements will be assessed through the planning process, and WBC indicated it has influence to seek appropriate outcomes. Councillor Jeff Brooks reiterated that it was not yet appropriate to focus on mitigation and that the primary objective should remain opposition to the allocation itself at this stage. Residents were also encouraged to sign up to the Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council email subscription service for updates.**
- A final question was raised as to whether, if the site were removed from the plan, BDBC could reintroduce it at a later stage. **Councillor Jeff Brooks confirmed that discussions would continue and that WBC would remain engaged on the matter.**

4 SMPC

The Chairman of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council, Councillor Graham Bridgman, addressed the meeting and spoke about the importance of submitting objections as part of the Local Plan consultation. He emphasised the need for the Parish Council and residents to work constructively alongside WBC. Councillor Bridgman outlined the Parish Council's concerns regarding the suitability of the proposed site and explained why the location was considered inappropriate.

Councillor Bridgman then invited Mr D Overett, a member of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Steering Group, to speak.

Mr Overett explained that the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Steering Group, comprising eight residents (four of whom are Parish Councillors), is currently preparing the Parish Council's formal Regulation 18 objection. He advised that this would be a comprehensive document addressing a range of matters including

utilities capacity, infrastructure pressures, and impacts on wildlife, many of which had been referenced previously.

Mr Overett emphasised the importance of residents also submitting their own individual objections directly to BDBC. He confirmed that each adult within a household may submit a separate objection, provided a unique email address is used.

Mr Overett outlined the process for submitting an objection, noting that the online portal was the simplest method. Mr Overett demonstrated how objection information can be accessed via the Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council website, using the projector to show the relevant pages and the objection templates available. He referred to the leaflet distributed at the meeting, "It's Time to Register Your Objection," and explained that it included a QR code linking to further guidance. He also noted that objections could be submitted by email or post, although these methods required completion of a form.

He advised residents to focus on the issues that mattered most to them personally and stressed that submissions must be written in the individual's own words. Mr Overett explained that while the leaflet highlighted key topic areas, further detail and example statements were available on the Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council website under "Object to the Plan." He cautioned that identical or copied submissions were likely to be disregarded.

Mr Overett reminded attendees that the deadline for submitting objections was **5.00 pm on 23 January** and encouraged residents to submit their responses as early as possible, particularly in light of the Christmas period.

He also advised that one-to-one drop-in workshops would be held throughout December for residents requiring assistance with the process, with bookings available via the Parish Office.

Finally, Mr Overett encouraged residents to sign up to receive Parish bulletins to stay informed of key dates, developments, and other community information.

25/020 Communications

It was advised that a full village leaflet drop would take place to distribute the 'How to Object Leaflets' created by the Parish Council. Further updates will be expressed to the public via the Stratfield Mortimer Parish Councils Email subscription service.

Close

The meeting closed at 21:15

Miss Danielle Davis 13/12/2025