



## **Stratfield Mortimer Parish**

### **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting**

### **held at St John's Hall, Mortimer on 27 April 2026**

#### **Introduction**

The meeting commenced at 19:30 with approximately 70 present, including 12 parish councillors (apologies had been received from Cllrs Allan, Backhouse, Child, Kilshaw and Lock).

It was agreed that Danielle Davis, the Parish Council Clerk, would take the minutes.

#### **Welcome**

Cllr Graham Bridgman, Chairman of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council ('SMPC'), welcomed everyone to the meeting and drew attention to the information boards displayed along one wall, including:

- the draft minutes from the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting;
- the photography competition display; and
- reports from outside bodies and community organisations.

Cllr Bridgman also introduced the new SMPC logo and explained that it had been updated to provide a scalable and adaptable design for use across different media and formats.

#### **Minutes of the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting**

The minutes of the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting (held on 28 April 2025) were received.

#### **The 2026 Stratfield Mortimer Community Award**

Cllr Danusia Morsley, Chairman of the SMPC Community Committee, introduced the 2026 Community Award and explained that the council had received four nominations this year. The Award Panel had unanimously agreed that the award should be made to Tina Tomlinson.

Cllr Morsley said that there had been 32 nominations for Tina and said that the award was very well deserved. She outlined some of the reasons given for the nomination, including:

- 20 years of service to the community, including significant contributions to the Lunch Club, Coffee Club, Royal British Legion and Age Concern;
- reliability, dedication and numerous acts of kindness;
- supporting elderly and vulnerable residents.

Cllr Morsley said that Tina joined the Royal British Legion in 2006 and has since supported the Poppy Appeal, acted as a coordinator for collections, and held leadership roles within the RBL Women's Section, serving as both Secretary and Chair. Tina was also recognised at a national level, becoming Chair of the Berkshire County Women's Section in 2022, a role she still holds.

It was further noted that Tina took over the running of the Mortimer Coffee Club within the last two years and introduced exercise sessions as part of the club's activities. Through her work with Mortimer and Burghfield Age Concern, she had helped expand the trustees and improve accessibility and opportunities for residents with mobility issues.

Cllr Morsley remarked that Tina does not simply volunteer her time, but builds trust and meaningful connections within the community.

Tina received the commemorative plate to a round of applause. She thanked everyone present and commented that supporting the community was "not a chore", adding her thanks to everyone in the village.

Rebecca Barker thanked the Parish Council for bringing this item up the agenda enabling elderly Lunch Club attendees to be at the presentation (but leave early).

## The 2026 'Spirit of Mortimer' Photography Competition Awards

Cllr Morsley introduced the award and referred to the entries, some of which were on display, and then presented certificates and prizes to the winners and highly commended entrants in each category as follows:

- Sebastian Minto – Winner, Below Year 7 Category
- Ronnie Steele – Highly Commended, Below Year 7 Category
- Josh Kelly – Winner, Year 7–11 Category
- Florence Jourdan-Brown – Winner, Year 12–13 Category
- Megan Barker – Winner, Adult Category
- Hannah Spratt – Highly Commended, Adult Category
- Clare Darbyshire – Highly Commended, Adult Category
- Paul Carless – Adult Category entrant recognised for his submission

## Presentations from local bodies/organisations/etc

### Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner

Matt Barber, the PCC, introduced himself and explained that the role of Police and Crime Commissioner is expected to be abolished within the next couple of years, although it is currently unclear what form any replacement will take. He noted that the role may become appointed rather than elected.

Mr Barber explained that his role is not operational but stated that he would do his best to provide responses to operational questions where possible.

It was reported that the Thames Valley Police force has grown significantly, and now consists of approximately 5,000 officers, making it the fourth largest police force in the country. He advised that 53 additional neighbourhood officers are being recruited this year, although only 40% of the funding has been provided by central government.

Mr Barber also outlined several operational initiatives currently underway, including the recently launched Road Policing Tasking Team, which focuses on speeding, drug and alcohol driving offences, and mobile phone usage whilst driving. He explained that this is a dedicated team operating in addition to normal roads policing resources, established in response to the high number of road traffic accidents and fatalities across the force area. He noted that further work is still required to reduce these figures.

The meeting also heard about the Rural Crime Taskforce, which Mr Barber described as one of the best dedicated rural crime teams in the country. He reported that approximately £4 million worth of stolen equipment had been recovered. The taskforce focuses particularly on organised crime affecting rural communities.

Mr Barber acknowledged previous concerns regarding delays on the 101 non-emergency telephone line. He stated that when the current Chief Constable was appointed, average waiting times were approximately six minutes, which have now reduced to around one and a half minutes.

Guidance was also provided on the appropriate use of the 999 emergency number, with Mr Barber explaining that residents should call 999 during emergencies or where an active crime is taking place, including incidents such as shoplifting.

Mr Barber advised everyone that the most prevalent reported crime was domestic abuse, which represented a significant proportion of policing demand, accounting for approximately 20–30% of an officer's shift time. He commented that this may partly reflect increased social and cultural awareness and greater willingness amongst victims to report incidents.

Thanks were given to Mr Barber for his presentation.

### [West Berkshire Council](#)

Cllr Jeff Brooks, Leader of West Berkshire Council ('WBC'), introduced himself as the political head of the authority.

Cllr Brooks began by referring to the meeting held in the same hall at the end of 2025 regarding the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council ('BDBC') proposals for development.

Cllr Brooks then spoke about local government reorganisation and devolution. He explained that central government's preference is for larger councils and elected mayors, noting that government would rather work strategically with around 40 mayors nationally rather than numerous smaller councils, particularly when discussing large-scale infrastructure projects. He commented that these arrangements are intended to focus on strategic infrastructure matters beyond the scope of smaller councils.

It was explained that WBC had put forward proposals involving West Berkshire and parts of Oxfordshire. However, government currently favours progression towards a Strategic Foundation Authority model rather than a mayoral authority at this stage. Discussions are continuing regarding the final geographic scope of any future authority, which could potentially include areas of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

Cllr Brooks advised that the government considers unitary authorities of the size of WBC to be too small, noting that many modern unitary councils serve populations closer to 400,000 residents. He explained that WBC currently delivers approximately 700 services across the district but faces challenges in maintaining resilience within smaller service teams. As an example, he referred to the Planning Enforcement team, which currently consists of only two officers.

He further explained that population growth and increasing service demands mean that the current structure is becoming more difficult to sustain effectively.

Discussion then turned to the proposed Ridgeway Council, which is anticipated to cover a population of approximately 400,000 residents. Cllr Brooks stated that larger authorities could benefit from increased efficiencies and stronger funding arrangements. Whilst the main administrative offices may be located slightly further away, he stressed that local services would still continue to operate locally.

Cllr Brooks stated that he believes the Ridgeway proposal is likely to proceed and that further clarity is expected in July 2026. He advised that proposals remain on track, although the final geographical shape may differ slightly from earlier expectations.

It was also noted that elections for a potential Shadow Ridgeway Council could take place in May 2027, with transition arrangements potentially occurring during 2027/28.

Cllr Brooks advised that consultation exercises undertaken to date had received a strong level of public response. He then took questions, including:

- Whether a Ridgeway authority would be more rural in nature than the current WBC area? Cllr Brooks responded that this may be the case, although it would also include areas with greater development potential due to there being less area with National Landscape (previously Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) designation. Parish Council service delivery arrangements were also referenced.
- What efficiencies and savings were anticipated? Cllr Brooks stated that a single Chief Executive and fewer senior management would be required, creating administrative efficiencies. He added that he would not expect savings to be made through reductions to operational frontline roles such as highways officers.
- About the financial costs associated with merging authorities, including overlapping systems and service migration. Cllr Brooks advised that the overall transition cost was estimated at approximately £22 million, of which government funding was expected to provide around £15 million, with the councils needing to fund the remaining £7 million.
- A question was raised regarding concerns about Reading Borough Council potentially seeking to absorb parts of West Berkshire. Cllr Brooks commented that residents were against this.
- A further question asked why a mayoral model had not yet been agreed? Cllr Brooks stated that WBC had strongly advocated for this approach, but government had indicated that the timing was not currently right, although he remained hopeful for the future.
- A question was also raised regarding the situation with Royal Berkshire Hospital. Cllr Brooks advised his understanding that land had been purchased, although development work was not expected to commence until approximately 2038.

Thanks were given to Cllr Brooks for his presentation.

### Neighbourhood Plan

Doug Overett, speaking on behalf of the SMPC Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, provided an update on progress with the Neighbourhood Plan (NP), and commented regarding the existing Neighbourhood Development Plan ('NDP') policies, in particular regarding the development of the 'reserved land' within the Tower House Farm site.

Mr Overett acknowledged that many residents may be experiencing some degree of "Neighbourhood Plan fatigue", given that the project has now been ongoing for more than three years. He noted that members of the Steering Group also recognised this feeling. However, recent planning applications, particularly the Tower House Farm reserved land application and the BDBC proposals for 350 houses, had reinforced the importance of the NP and renewed momentum behind the project.

He reported that the process is now approaching the final stages before publication of the draft NP for formal consultation.

Mr Overett thanked residents who had recently responded to requests for information regarding Assets of Community Value. He explained that these responses had helped identify buildings and facilities considered important to the community which may be recognised within the NP. He advised that these were among several remaining matters being finalised before progressing to the next stage.

The meeting heard an overview of the statutory NP process: designation, evidence gathering, drafting policies, a Regulation 14 consultation, a Regulation 15 submission, then a Regulation 16 consultation, followed by an independent examination and finally a referendum.

Mr Overett advised that the NP is now approaching the Regulation 14 consultation - the formal stage where it is published for community consultation before submission to WBC as the local planning authority. The consultation must run for a minimum of six weeks and represents the principal opportunity for residents, businesses and organisations to comment on the draft plan before submission.

The draft NP will include:

- the overall vision for the parish;
- key objectives and themes including housing, green space, design, heritage and the local environment;
- draft planning policies, with explanations of the purpose and supporting evidence behind each policy.

Mr Overett advised that once the Regulation 14 consultation opens, full details will be published explaining where the draft NP can be viewed, how comments may be submitted, and the consultation deadline - he stressed the importance of securing responses from as many residents and organisations as possible, whether supportive or raising concerns and suggestions, to ensure the final version properly reflects community views.

Following closure of the consultation, every response would be logged and reviewed by the Steering Group. The draft plan may then be amended where appropriate, with all responses and resulting decisions recorded within a Consultation Statement before submission to WBC as the local planning authority.

Mr Overett concluded by encouraging the whole community to engage fully once the consultation is announced and asked residents to monitor village noticeboards, Facebook pages and the SMPC website for updates throughout the six-week consultation period.

In response to a question regarding timescales, it was suggested that the referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan would likely take place in the autumn, subject to the statutory process progressing as expected.

Cllr Bridgman then addressed some of the issues regarding the NP and NDP, and wider planning matters, including:

- The current WBC Local Plan would not automatically cease if the proposed Ridgeway council is created. However, all Local Plans are required to be reviewed every five years and such reviews cannot take longer than 18 months to complete.
- As a result, despite the current Local Plan having been adopted in June 2025, WBC had launched a Call for Sites exercise in January 2026 as part of its review process. Although SMPC had previously been advised that additional development sites were not currently required, this position could change in future, reinforcing the importance of the NP.
- Significant recent work had been undertaken on the NP due to the evolving new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the need to ensure that NP policies didn't overlap with Local Plan or NPPF policies.
- Discussion also took place regarding the proposed 350-house development within the Basingstoke and Deane area, particularly whether the site progresses from Regulation 18 to Regulation 19 stages of the Local Plan process.

- In response to a question about three-storey housing on Tower House Farm, Cllr Bridgman said that NP policies were intended to continue NDP policies to only allow for three-storey buildings where the third storey is contained within the roof space. He said that there were two genuine three-storey houses on the site, and that these had only been agreed to by SMPC in order to avoid yet another significant retaining wall (he said that the roof heights matched the adjacent two-storey housing).

### Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Steering Group

Cllr Heath Geary gave a presentation on the work of the Steering Group and the proposed BDBC Local Plan allocation for SPS5.15, which anticipates approximately 350 homes at West End Farm.

The Group had outlined concerns that the proposal would have significant impacts on Mortimer's character, infrastructure, environment and local services, whilst conflicting with the emerging NP and placing cross-boundary pressures on West Berkshire infrastructure, including schools, healthcare and transport.

The presentation included a timeline of the proposal, explaining that the Local Plan process initially did not identify Mortimer-edge strategic sites, before SPS5.15 later emerged as a preferred allocation. Significant community opposition had since developed through formal objections, meetings and ongoing campaigning activity.

The Steering Group summarised work undertaken to date, including evidence gathering alongside SMPC, reviewing planning and infrastructure evidence, identifying perceived gaps and inconsistencies within supporting documentation, engaging with residents to gather local impact evidence, and liaising with ward members, MPs and neighbouring authorities.

Key concerns raised included:

- a lack of robust infrastructure evidence relating to healthcare, education, highways, drainage, flood risk and utilities;
- environmental impacts on countryside, woodland and agricultural land;
- emergency planning and public safety issues linked to AWE consultation zones and evacuation planning;
- the proposal's compliance or otherwise with national planning policy and local plan soundness tests;
- that significant matters were being deferred to later planning stages without sufficient supporting evidence at allocation stage.

Cllr Geary said that the current Steering Group focus was on seeking removal of SPS5.15 prior to Regulation 19 consultation, maintaining formal opposition from affected councils and preparing evidence for future examination stages. The importance of consistent and disciplined community engagement was also emphasised.

Questions raised following the presentation included clarification regarding an email issued by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council to respondents who had submitted representations in relation to water infrastructure matters. It was noted that this correspondence related to areas within Basingstoke itself rather than directly to Mortimer.

A question was also raised regarding the position of the Englefield Estate and whether the proposal would cease to progress should the Estate change its position. Members were advised that discussions had taken place with Englefield Estate, who remain supportive of retaining the site within the Local Plan process. It was confirmed that the Estate is aware of the strength of local feeling and opposition within the village.

## The Scout Hut

Cllr Bridgman invited Neil Johnson of the Scouts to address the meeting regarding the recent fire at the Scout Hut, which had caused significant damage to the roof.

Mr Johnson said that, whilst the roof can be replaced, reconstruction would require substantial time and funding. He noted that the group is one of the oldest scouting groups in the country and expressed sincere thanks to residents and organisations for the many messages of support, sympathy and offers of assistance received following the incident.

The meeting was advised that a GoFundMe page had been launched and promoted through the Mortimer Village Partnership website and social media channels to assist with fundraising efforts. Whilst insurance is expected to cover the fabric of the building, additional funding will be required as the Scouts hope to rebuild improved facilities and to meet immediate costs associated with temporary relocation arrangements.

The Scouts are currently relocating activities to alternative venues, including Mortimer West End Chapel and St Mary's School for the Beavers group. Mr Johnson commented positively on the strength of community support and the role social media had played in mobilising assistance following the fire.

## Election of a Trustee (Regulation 3 Trustee) to the Fairground Trust for a 4 year term

Cllr Dave Kilshaw was proposed and unanimously elected as a Trustee to The Stratfield Mortimer Fairground Charity.

## The Annual Report of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Cllr Bridgman referred to the formal report that was published on the display boards in the hall, and invited everyone present to read it. He said that it would be included in the parish newsletter that SMPC would be distributing alongside the MVP one in the summer.

He then referred to various parish council activities over the past year:

- the questionnaire that sought feedback on a number of issues, including how residents wish to be communicated with;
- the new monthly parish e-bulletin;
- the very well attended extra Parish Meeting held in October 2025 regarding the then emerging draft BDBC Local Plan and the proposal for 350 houses, and the huge amount of work done subsequently by the Steering Group, as referred to by Cllr Geary (and Cllr Bridgman said that SMPC had set aside £50k against potential costs);
- the work on the NP as referred to by Doug Overett - a massive piece of work over the past three years (and he wanted to thank everyone on the Steering Group alongside him for the effort put in to get us where we were);
- SMPC having distributed nearly £10,000 in community grants to the HandyBus, the Volunteer Bureau, the Toy Library, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Greening Mortimer, the Cricket Club, the Craft Club, the Hobby Hall, the Methodist Church, the Schools PTFA, the Table Tennis Club, Warm Welcome, and the Hall we were meeting in;
- progression or completion of a number of projects including the new footpath alongside the Fairground car park, the new Fairground fence, the extension to the parish cemetery, three new bus shelters, SEN playground equipment and resurfacing on the Fairground, two new benches on the Alfred Palmer Memorial Field, and two new speed indicator devices, plus commencement of work on the Mortimer to Burghfield footpath and cycleway.

Cllr Bridgman said that this last project represented the culmination of a huge amount of work over many years, and particularly over the last year in obtaining planning permission and going through a tender process (and he thanked Englefield Estate and the Trust that owns Wokefield Common for their assistance).

Cllr Bridgman contrasted this Annual Parish Meeting with the Annual Parish Council Meeting to be held in May, and said that at last year's such meeting he had been elected as Council Chairman, with Dave Kilshaw being elected as Vice-Chairman. He wanted to pay special tribute to Cllr Kilshaw, who had put in a massive amount of work over the past year, and been front and centre in relation to a number of activities - the 350 houses, the cemetery, the new Fairground footpath, the new Fairground fence, and, by no means least, the Mortimer to Burghfield footpath and cycleway.

He also wanted to thank Cllr Danusia Morsley as the outgoing SMPC Chairman for her huge contribution over the previous two years and, most recently, as Chairman of SMPC's Community Committee, and to thank Cllrs Steve Hill and Jayne Todd as, respectively, Chairmen of the Estate Management and Planning and Highways Committees.

Cllr Bridgman then thanked all of the other SMPC councillors and said that they were all unpaid volunteers trying to do their best for the community.

Finally, he thanked the SMPC Officers – Danielle Davis, Sallyann Taylor and Jay Sylla – he said that the work of the parish council was very much a team effort, and the contribution of each member was greatly valued.

### Open Forum and Questions.

Questions raised included:

- whether any funding contributions had been received from Burghfield Parish Council towards the footpath and cycleway project - it was confirmed that funding had been requested;
- clarification on the proposed route of the footpath and cycleway – details were provided; and
- whether the footpath and cycleway may attract littering or rubbish - it was hoped this would not become an issue.

### Close

The meeting closed at 21: 19

Miss Danielle Davis

20/05/2026