

## Development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Stratfield Mortimer

One of the "rights" given to local communities in the Government's Localism Bill is Neighbourhood Planning.

*"A Neighbourhood Plan is a new way of helping local communities to influence the planning of the area in which they live and work. It can be used to:*

*Develop a shared vision for your neighbourhood.*

*Choose where new homes, shops, offices and other development should be built.*

*Identify and protect important local green spaces.*

*Influence what new buildings should look like."*

A Parish Council is the only body empowered to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan in any Parish but it does not have to produce a plan. If it does so, the plan must reflect the views of the community as a whole. Thus, the Parish Council must consult widely and involve the community. The plan has to be examined for soundness by independent assessors and, if passed, a referendum will need to be held in the Parish as to whether the community accepts the plan.

If the community accepts the Neighbourhood Plan, then it would form part of the wider planning arrangements and its policies would have as much force as any other Statutory Planning Policy, *ie*: it would be a material consideration as stated in the National Planning Policy Framework (published by the Government in 2012).

The plan has to be in conformity with the West Berkshire Core Strategy (see next article in this Newsletter). However, it can provide additional local detail and considerations of which West Berkshire Council may not be aware. Some possible benefits of producing a plan could be the identification of one or more sites for future housing development and the preservation of other Greenfield sites.

Members of the Parish Council's Planning Sub Committee and the Clerk, recently attended a Neighbourhood Planning workshop. This event highlighted the potential benefits of producing a Neighbourhood Plan, as well as confirming that a large amount of work would be required. The costs of producing a plan are mainly those associated with involving and consulting the community and obtaining professional advice. The costs of the actual examination and referendum will be met by West Berkshire Council.

The Council believes that we should provide the opportunity for the residents to be able to contribute to planning. Thus the Council has agreed that it is appropriate to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Stratfield Mortimer and that the first steps in this process are to:-

- seek assistance from bodies that have been set up to help those interested local councils
- engage with West Berkshire on this matter
- communicate (in this Newsletter) the background and the need for to develop a Neighbourhood Plan to the community of Stratfield Mortimer
- develop a draft outline project plan
- give a presentation on developing a Neighbourhood Plan at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2013.

## West Berkshire Local Plan

**The West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026)** is the first development plan document within West Berkshire's new Local Plan. It was formally adopted in July 2012 (and currently remains in place while a legal challenge is considered). It sets out a long term vision for West Berkshire to 2026 and translates this into spatial terms, setting out proposals for where development will go, and how developments will be built. The requirement for new houses throughout West Berkshire is 10,500. West Berkshire has been

divided into four areas. The South East area of West Berkshire which includes Mortimer, Burghfield and Aldermaston is called the East Kennet Valley. The extract below (p 40) concerns housing development in this area.

*“Some growth is planned for this area to help meet the needs of the village communities and to assist with the viability of village shops and services. This amounts to approximately 800 homes between 2006 and 2026, an average of 40 new homes a year. The relatively low growth proposed for this area of the District reflects the more limited services and poorer transport connections. At March 2011 there had already been considerable housing commitments and completions in the East Kennet Valley, leaving only about 320 dwellings to be allocated.*

*The two identified rural service centres of Burghfield Common and Mortimer will be the focus for development in this area, together with the more modest development of the identified service village of Woolhampton. Development may take the form of small extensions to these villages.”*

A second document is **The Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire 2011-2026**.

This contains (p42) the following statements specific to Mortimer:

*6.6.11 Opportunities to improve accessibility from Mortimer to employment and essential services in nearby towns will be sought. This will include working with the relevant bus, rail, and community transport operators where appropriate.*

*6.6.12 A safer route for pedestrians and cyclists will be developed between Mortimer and Burghfield Common. This will increase opportunities for walking and cycling to the Willink School, thereby supporting the Willink’s school travel plan.*

*6.6.13 The Council will work in partnership with Network Rail, the train operating company and Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council to enhance security, cycle parking, and passenger information and waiting facilities at Mortimer rail station. Further improvements will also be sought to allow better access to the station, including making the station’s platforms fully accessible to all rail passengers.*

There is also a general comment for the East Kennet Valley (p41):

*6.6.5 The Council will work with Network Rail and the train operating company to improve access, security, and facilities such as cycle parking and lockers, and improved car parking at rail stations in the area. This will increase the attractiveness and ease of travelling by rail.*

Both documents are available at: <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/>

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