

Annual Parish Meeting 28/4 7:30pm

Neighbourhood Plan - Update

The Parish Council completed the initial NP which came into effect in 2017, expiring in 2026 and available on the Parish Council website. To remind everyone what a NP is:

A neighbourhood plan is a legally binding planning document that communities create to shape the future of their local area. It gives communities the power to decide on development, such as where new homes, shops, and offices should be built, and how new buildings should look.

In 2022 the Parish Council appointed a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to create a wider-reaching new Plan, that reflects latest national policies, the emerging Local Plan and community priorities. This new Plan would continue on from the previous and in line with the West Berks Local Plan will be valid through to 2041.

This is a brief update of the status of the existing Neighbourhood Development Plan that expires next year and the new Neighbourhood Plan which will supersede it.

NDP Review

Under the terms of the original plan after 5 years we were required to review the planned use of the Land Set aside for community use located behind St Johns School (generally referred to as Reserved Land).

The review was completed last year and approved by the Parish Council.

It was agreed after considerable consultation with the local schools that a new infant school was not required however there was significant appetite for the creation of playing fields for St Johns.

It was agreed that the reserved land should now be used as follows:

- Playing fields for St Johns school along with parking for staff
- A new dental surgery for Oaktree Dental Practice
- A development of circa 25 residential units for Seniors +60 allowing for older residents in the community to downsize from family homes to smaller properties.
- The initial intention to hold land for a potential new GP Surgery was removed based on the economics of the site and no interest from the existing GP owners.

The developer for this development is the land owner TA Fisher who are currently working through final details are hopeful of submitting planning application within the next couple of months which could be approved late summer (assuming no issues... given that a

preapplication plan has been submitted to WBC and approved in principle). This would then mean that work could commence onsite early in 2026.

NP 2026 – 41

Now over 3 years into this project, it is fair to say this is challenging work for a very small team of only 8 people and given the technical nature of much of the content the heavy lifting is being done by 3 or 4 people.

Unlike the previous NP, we are not at this stage being required by WBC to take any additional housing and thus the general interest from the public has been very low however the purpose on the plan is to try to be prescriptive, as far as we are legally able, about what any future developments should look like to protect the nature of the village of Mortimer. Given the plan has a 15 year lifespan it is highly likely that additional development will be required.

After various consultations and we have worked to refine the plan to a number of key policy areas which include:

- Natural Environment
- Highways & Transport
- Employment, Facilities & Services
- Community energy
- Climate change & Resilience

We have now reached the stage where external consultants (paid by the Government) have completed some technical reports for us and provided a “health check” on the work done so far. It is clear that we still have a way to go, it is our intention however to have a report completed towards the end of the year for consideration by the community.

After those consultations, the new plan will be submitted to WBC for an examiner to review and ultimately go to a referendum by the community sometime next year to vote for its adoption to make this legally binding.

Once these “public stages” are reached you will hear a lot more about this on all the local Social Media and Newsletters and hope at that stage to have the community support for the work that by then will have taken 5 years.