

Item No.	Application No. and Parish	Statutory Target Date	Proposal, Location, Applicant
(2)	20/00674/FUL Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council	11 May 2020 <sup>1</sup>	Change of use of land and the construction of a 150 space car park with alterations to the highway, landscaping, and associated works.  Land to the South east of Mortimer Station, Station Road, Mortimer.  Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.

<sup>1</sup> Extension of time agreed with applicant until 30 October 2020.

The application can be viewed on the Council's website at the following link:  
<http://planning.westberks.gov.uk/rpp/index.asp?caseref=20/00674/FUL>

**Recommendation Summary:** Delegated to the Head of Development and Planning to refuse planning permission

**Ward Members:** Councillor Graham Bridgman  
Councillor Royce Longton  
Councillor Geoffrey Mayes

**Reason for Committee Determination:** Ward Member call in by Councillor Bridgman if recommended for refusal as a major application by the parish council, with project identified in the Neighbourhood Development Plan which would need a debate if proposed to be refused.

**Committee Site Visit:** Owing to social distancing restrictions, the option of a committee site visit is not available. Instead, a collection of photographs is available to view at the above link.

#### Contact Officer Details

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use of land and the construction of a 150 space car park with alterations to the highway, landscaping and associated works.
- 1.2 The site is to the north west corner of a large agricultural field which is bounded by trees and hedging. There is an agricultural access onto the site off Station Road to the north, opposite a row of semi-detached dwellings. The railway line is beyond the western boundary of the site. The Mortimer Station buildings are Grade II\* listed. The site is outside of a defined settlement boundary, and the nearest settlement of Stratfield Mortimer is to the west.
- 1.3 The submitted application includes:
  - arboricultural method statement,
  - extended phase 1 ecological survey,
  - statement of community involvement,
  - transport statement,
  - landscape visual impact assessment,
  - heritage statement,
  - highways technical note,
  - letters in response to comments from Network Rail and the Local Lead Flood Authority,
  - and drawings showing the proposed layout, sections and layout of the ramp and steps to the station platform, tree protection plan and surface water drainage strategy.
- 1.4 The proposed layout is for a new proposed vehicle access further east along Station Road opposite dwelling No. 5. The internal access road would go west and open out into the car park running north-south along the western boundary. The car park would have an elongated oval circulation route with 2 central parking rows and a row either side of the internal road. A drop off area is proposed to the north of the site.
- 1.5 Around the car park would be landscaping and a larger area to the east of the site where it would be on the boundary with the remainder of the agricultural field. The planting is now shown within an amended red line.
- 1.6 The pedestrian route through the site is between the central car park rows and towards the north of the site. This would join the proposed ramp access to the station platform. A pedestrian access onto Station Road is proposed to the west of the existing agricultural access along Station Road and over the bridge. The existing agricultural access would be stopped up and planted with hedging.
- 1.7 Part of the proposed drainage is for an elongated oval narrow attenuation basin between Station Road and the internal road roughly behind the existing agricultural access. A larger triangular attenuation pond is proposed to the other side of the internal road to the north east boundary of the site. Banking is shown on the boundary with Station Road to the north-west of the site.
- 1.8 Trees to the boundary with the railway line and along Station Road are proposed to be retained. Works to provide the steps/ramp to the platform and the footway over the bridge will be within the root protection areas of some trees.

## 2. Planning History

2.1 The table below outlines the relevant planning history of the application site.

Application	Proposal	Decision / Date
08/01464/FUL	Provision of car park for 100 cars to serve Mortimer Station.	Refused September 2008.  Dismissed at appeal March 2009.

2.2 The appeal decision (included within the agenda) of 2009 was made under the West Berkshire District Local Plan Saved Policies 2007, and the South East Plan. The South East Plan has since been revoked (except for one policy which is not relevant to this application) and more policies of the Local Plan Saved Policies 2007 have now been replaced. The West Berkshire Core Strategy was adopted in 2012 and the National Planning Policy Framework came into force the same year. The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan was made in 2017. The appeal proposal was for the car park to be laid out east/west towards the north boundary of the site.

2.3 The appeal decision noted the restricted visibility caused by the bridge on Station Road and the hazard it presents where the road is relatively narrow to those using it with pushchairs or wheelchairs (paragraphs 12 and 13). It also considered that proposal to be “an intrusive, large scale urbanising element in the countryside, and would be particularly obtrusive in the setting of the village on the approach from the south east” (paragraph 17). It also considered the level of car parking proposed to not be justified or contribute positively to the promotion of sustainable travel choices (paragraphs 24 and 26).

## 3. Procedural Matters

3.1 Since the application was deferred at the Eastern Area Planning Committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the applicant was advised of the matters the Committee considered needed to be addressed. These were:

- additional information to justify the proposed 150 car parking spaces;
- amended location plan to capture the proposed landscaping;
- details on lighting;
- additional information on the previous Inspector’s conclusion that additional traffic outweighs the benefit of increased use;
- additional information to address the declaration of a climate emergency since the neighbourhood development plan was adopted and the forecast shift from commuting to working from home arising from COVID;
- and clarification on the area where existing trees haven’t been surveyed.

3.2 The applicant responded with: a response statement; a car parking technical note; the GWR design guide and GWR electrical specification. These are addressed in the appraisal at section 6 below.

- 3.3 **EIA:** The nature and scale of this development is considered to fall within the description of 10(b) urban development listed in Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. As such, EIA screening is required. The screening opinion found that the proposal is not EIA Development within the meaning of the Regulations and an Environmental Statement was not required as part of the planning application.
- 3.4 **Publicity:** A site notice was displayed on a fence post on 19 March 2020; the deadline for representations expired on 9 April 2020. A public notice was displayed in the Reading Chronicle on 26 March 2020.
- 3.5 **CIL:** Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy charged on most new development to pay for new infrastructure required as a result of the new development. CIL will be charged on residential (C3 and C4) and retail (A1 - A5) development at a rate per square metre (based on Gross Internal Area) on new development of more than 100 square metres of net floorspace (including extensions) or when a new dwelling is created (even if it is less than 100 square metres). Any CIL liability will be formally confirmed by the CIL Charging Authority under separate cover following the grant of any permission. More information is available at [www.westberks.gov.uk/cil](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/cil)

## 4. Consultation

### *Statutory and non-statutory consultation*

- 4.1 The table below summarises the consultation responses received during the consideration of the application. The full responses may be viewed with the application documents on the Council's website, using the link at the start of this report. Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council are the applicant.

<b>WBC Highways:</b>	Objection to the proposed footway over the bridge on Station Road and the number of car parking spaces proposed.
<b>Archaeology:</b>	No objection subject to condition for archaeological supervision during development.
<b>Conservation:</b>	No objection following receipt of additional information.
<b>Historic England:</b>	No comments to make.
<b>Network Rail:</b>	Initial objection. Objection withdrawn following receipt of additional information.
<b>Ecology:</b>	No objection subject to conditions to secure biodiversity mitigation measures and enhancements.
<b>Tree Officer:</b>	Clarification required on trees by the footway over the bridge on Station Road. Otherwise no objection subject to conditions on landscaping, arboricultural and tree protection matters
<b>Landscape Consultant:</b>	Objection. Impact of a large area for parking 150 cars, new access with signage and lighting introduces development into open countryside which will not be possible to successfully mitigate.

<b>Transport Policy:</b>	Support need for additional parking, but concerned with the level proposed.
<b>Local Lead Flood Authority:</b>	No objection subject to condition following receipt of amended plans.

### ***Public representations***

4.2 Representations have been received from 31 contributors, 8 of whom object to the proposal, and 22 who support. A letter of support was included in the application submission from Great Western Railway.

4.3 The full responses may be viewed with the application documents on the Council's website, using the link at the start of this report. In summary, the following issues/points have been raised by objectors:

- 50% increase in parking proposed on site compared to previously refused application;
- Lack of justification for level of car parking proposed and in light of COVID-19 epidemic the long term impacts on commuting to work;
- Proposal does not address previous issue of impact on rural landscape, on productive agricultural land and would be highly visible;
- Green Park station and associated parking for Grazeley to be completed soon;
- Potential alternative car parking sites were identified by the Parish Council in 2013 including the field adjacent to the existing station car park and issues of deliverability of this site;
- Disabled access whilst beneficial is not a legal requirement;
- Issues of safety of vulnerable people using proposed footway including the gradient of the footway;
- Issues with impact on businesses using existing station access and their level of traffic movements onto Station Road both on accessibility from conflict with proposed footway and in queuing at proposed traffic lights;
- Issues with large vehicles needing to cross the bridge and conflict with pedestrians;
- Submitted landscape and visual impact assessment acknowledges high impacts on local residents;
- Issues of pollution including cutting carbon emissions and drainage;
- Issues of construction/delivery vehicles;
- Issues of additional traffic from provision of additional car parking.

The following issues/points have been raised by supporters:

- Benefit to the whole community, many local residents would not need to use their own car but use public transport;
- It would prevent on street parking which is sometimes unsafe;
- The proposal would not be intrusive;
- The proposal is welcomed by many village residents following partnership working by the parish council;
- It would save residents travelling to Reading or Theale as there is no parking at Mortimer after 7.30am;
- Cars also parked on Mortimer Hill and on the verge towards Wokefield due to lack of station parking demonstrating ample need for additional space;
- It would save residents driving to drop off family members due to lack of parking;

- The existing car park was not designed for the commuter traffic which exists now;
- Driving to other train stations adds to congestion along narrow roads;
- The proposal is an improvement for disabled persons to access the Basingstoke platform;
- It would reduce overall harmful environmental car emissions;
- Many elderly people struggle to use the existing stepped footbridge over the railway line which limits their access;
- Bicycles also have to be carried over the stepped footbridge.

## 5. Planning Policy

5.1 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The following policies of the statutory development plan are relevant to the consideration of this application.

- Policies ADPP1, ADPP6, CS5, CS8, CS13, CS14, CS16, CS17, CS18, CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026 (WBCS).
- Policies OVS.5, OVS.6, TRANS.1, and Appendix 5 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved Policies 2007).
- Policies GD1, GD2, GD3, GD4, GD6, IS3, B2, B3 of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan (2017).

5.2 The following material considerations are relevant to the consideration of this application:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire (2011-2026)
- Manual for Streets
- WBC Quality Design SPD (2006)
- WBC Sustainable Drainage SPD (2019)
- WBC Cycle and Motorcycle Advice and Standards for New Development
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

## 6. Appraisal

6.1 The main issues for consideration in this application are:

- Principle of development
- Character and appearance
- Heritage
- Quality of life
- Biodiversity
- Tree protection
- Flooding and drainage
- Highways

### ***Principle of development***

6.2 According to Policy ADPP1, development in West Berkshire will follow the existing settlement pattern, and only appropriate limited development in the countryside will be

allowed, focused on addressing identified needs and maintaining a strong rural economy. Policy ADPP6 states that development in the countryside will be strictly controlled. The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan establishes the principle of additional car parking to serve Mortimer Rail Station under policy IS3. This policy states that an extension to the station car parking will be promoted and encouraged. It does not identify a particular site or allocate land for the extension to the car parking. Nor does it state the level of additional car parking identified as being required.

- 6.3 The Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire 2011-2026 is a material planning consideration. Pedestrian and cycle links to Mortimer Station are highlighted as locally important improvements in the East Kennet Valley area (paragraph 6.6.3). Opportunities to improve accessibility from Mortimer to employment and essential services in nearby towns will be sought (paragraph 6.6.11). 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 (paragraph 6.6.13).
- 6.4 The submitted Statement of Community Involvement sets out a survey conducted in June and July 2018 to evidence the need for the 150 space car park to serve Mortimer station. It found that:
- a) 85 respondents use Mortimer station daily, 67 a few times a week, 59 weekly, 103 monthly, 100 less than this, and 47 never (paragraph 4.15 quotes these as percentages but the total would be greater than 100% so it's assumed the numbers are total respondents rather than percentages);
  - b) 119 respondents did not travel by train due to the lack of car parking at Mortimer station (paragraph 4.12);
  - c) 203 respondents travel by car as a single occupant to a station (paragraph 4.21). It's not known if these are to Mortimer or another station (the question doesn't specify the station although it's within the section on Mortimer). Paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 of the statement of community involvement note that all respondents who travel to work were invited to participate including those who do not use Mortimer station;
  - d) 377 respondents would travel by train more frequently if it was easier to park at the station (paragraph 4.24), and 444 respondents agreed more car parking should be provided at Mortimer station (although the number of additional spaces or where they might be located was not included in the question) (paragraph 4.25).
- 6.5 The Statement of Community Involvement estimates that the survey was sent to around a third of residents within the catchment of Mortimer Station (paragraph 4.36) which it states are postcodes RG7 1, RG7 2 and RG7 3.
- 6.6 Of the 85 respondents who use Mortimer Station daily it is not known how many drive to it or if they are the sole occupant of vehicles. Similarly it is not known how regularly respondents who do not currently use the station due to lack of parking would use the station if the parking were to be increased.
- 6.7 Whilst the submitted Statement of Community Involvement demonstrates that there is demand for more parking at Mortimer Station it is difficult to assess from it the actual additional spaces required. According to the GWR website Mortimer has 53 car parking spaces, two of which are for disability vehicles.

- 6.8 The submitted Transport Assessment appendices include a count of occupied parking spaces at the existing station car park undertaken on Tuesday 4 July 2017 between 7am and 7pm. The highest occupancy was 49 spaces at 4.30pm, an occupancy of 92% including the disability vehicle spaces. At no point during survey was the car park at capacity, but it was at more than 80% at capacity for 8 of the 12 hours.
- 6.9 The Transport Assessment also included a parking beat survey on The Street and Station Road. No vehicles were observed in zones 2, 3 and 6 at any time and zone 7 was only associated with school and church parking.
- 6.10 Vehicles stated as “station related” in zone 4 were 10 vehicles at 4.30pm. In zone 5, 12 vehicles were quoted as “station related” at 4.30pm. Also in zone 5, 3 parked cars were stated as “went to station” in each half hour between 8.30am and 1pm. “Departure from station” was stated for 14 parked cars in zone 5 at 10.30am, 13 at 3pm, 11 at 4pm, 9 at 6.30pm and 8 at 7pm. Paragraph 2.16 of the Transport Assessment states that these documents in appendix 2 demonstrate a clear demand for additional parking to be provided at the station.
- 6.11 What is evident is that there is parking associated with the station in zones 4 and 5. However, the 3 cars parked in zone 5 between 8.30 until 1pm would have been able to park at the station at 8.30am when 9 spaces were available. The cars observed in zone 5 at 6.30pm and 7pm would have been able to park at the station at that time (although they may have been parked all day as part of the 14 vehicles observed from 10.30am. At 10.30am there wouldn’t have been capacity for all of them). The remainder of cars parked on roads between 10.30am to 4.30pm wouldn’t all have been able to park at the station from the time they were observed. This seems to amount to 14 vehicles, although there was some capacity at the station car park between 10.30am to 4.30pm.
- 6.12 There is evidence therefore that a proportion of users of the station who park on the roads in the surrounding area out of choice. On street parking is assumed to be free of charge. Parking charges at Mortimer Station taken from the Great Western Railway website are quoted as £3.40 per day, £17 per week, £62 per month, £185 for 3 months and £620 per annum. So cost may a factor for those choosing not to use the station car park. It is not known what the proposed car park charges would be, and it would not meet the tests of the National Planning Policy Framework to apply a condition relating to parking fees.
- 6.13 The suitability of the zones for on street parking isn’t provided. Nevertheless the levels of on street parking observed associated with the station are not considered evidence to justify a local need for an additional 150 space car park. The Highway Authority remains concerned that provision of such a car park would draw in additional traffic from further afield to utilise the car park.
- 6.14 The proposed car park of 150 spaces and the existing provision would take the total to nearly 200 spaces. This would be a similar level of car parking to that being provided for Network Rail as part of the redevelopment at Market Street, Newbury, which is an urban area and a transport hub. Green Park Station will have a 200 space multi-storey car park to improve accessibility and connectivity to Green Park Business Park which is a large employment area and in proximity to Madejski Stadium in Reading and also designed as a transport hub. Theale station has 215 parking spaces which is a rural service centre with nearby protected employment areas.
- 6.15 As Mortimer Station is in a rural area outside of a settlement boundary it is difficult to concur that 200 parking spaces meet an identified local need. The Statement of Community Involvement states that a third of the catchment residents were targeted for the survey. It states the catchment as being postcodes RG7 1, RG7 2, and RG7 3. Postcode RG7 1AA is out of district in Wokingham and will be nearly a kilometre closer



to the station being developed at Green Park than Mortimer. Burghfield is a smaller village under the settlement hierarchy of policy ADPP1 and will also be closer to Green Park or Theale than Mortimer. Burghfield Common is a rural service centre and roughly equi-distant to Theale and Mortimer station.

- 6.16 It would seem therefore that geographically Mortimer Station would primarily serve Mortimer, a rural service centre under policy ADPP1, to a certain extent Burghfield Common, and the local environs thereabout. Policy ADPP6 notes that this area of the District has more limited services and poorer transport connections such that lower growth and development is proposed for this area. The protected employment areas in this part of the district are closer to Aldermaston and Theale which have their own stations.
- 6.17 The submission includes supporting information from Great Western Railway. They consider the lack of parking to be suppressing growth in rail use at the station. They state the Office and Rail and Road published estimates of station usage shows an increase of 3% to and from Mortimer between 2004/5 and 2018/19, compared to a 95% increase across the industry. They note the increase in passenger numbers following car park expansion at Hanborough, Kingham and Kemble.

	Car parking spaces			Passenger numbers	
	2004/5	2018/19	With expansion	2004/5	2018/19
Hanborough	39	278		75,976	231,986
Kingham	123	248		124,462	183,514
Kemble	220	553		223,066	372,686
Mortimer	51	51	201	182,741	189,316

- 6.18 The recent submission of the technical note on car parking demand reviews the previously submitted car parking survey undertaken in July 2017 and the questionnaire. It outlines that rail users will drive to an alternative station or not use the train if they are not confident there is sufficient parking. With regard to the 2017 car parking survey they note between 09:30 and 16:30 the car park was almost at capacity with only 3 or 4 spaces available. There were circa 20 cars parked on The Street between 09:00 and 17:00 on the same day.
- 6.19 With regard to the 2018 questionnaire which covered a third of the area considered to be the catchment the applicant's technical note considers that the same number in each of the other third of catchment would not use the station because it lacked parking. So the response of 80 people would be a total of 240 people for the whole catchment.
- 6.20 Based on the 85 people in the questionnaire who said they use the station on a daily basis and the 53 car parking spaces available they arrive at a ratio of 0.62 (53/85) and project that 169 spaces are required based on 240 people who would use the station if it had parking and multiplying that by the factor of 0.62. Adding the 9% shift of the approved travel plan for the allocated housing site in Mortimer takes the total to 179 spaces. This would be an additional 126 car parking spaces and the technical note considers that this provides sufficient evidence for the proposed 150 car park.
- 6.21 Highways have been asked to comment on the technical note and the letter responding to the request for additional information following the deferral at Committee. They dispute that of the catchment of the submitted questionnaire 80 people would use the station if there were more parking. They consider that figure to be 47 people.

- 6.22 Nor do Highways agree that each third of the catchment would generate an equal number of people who would use the train more. They consider that those further away from the station will gravitate to other stations closer to them, citing Sulhamstead towards Aldermaston and Theale and Silchester towards Bramley. The car park being built at Green Park Station will also be 6.5km away and which will affect travel patterns of those in Burghfield and Grazeley.
- 6.23 Highways also dispute the additional 10 vehicles to park at the station from the new development in Mortimer on the basis is assume the travel plan target of 9% shift away from the car will be met and that those using the station will travel to it by car.
- 6.24 On the GWR point that it is lack of parking that is suppressing rail passenger demand Highways note that many stations on the Reading to Bedwyn line through Newbury and Thatcham saw significant falls in passenger journeys over the last five years and question if that is to be accounted for due to lack of parking at stations.
- 6.25 Highways have therefore undertaken their own car parking projection from census 2011 Travel to Work data on the following basis (SoCI: Statement of Community Involvement):
- Three census districts that form the catchment around the train station.
  - The population employed within each district.
  - The percentage of the census district that is considered within the station catchment.
  - Taking account of Green Park station.
  - The 2011 census data for West Berkshire revealed that some 5% travelled to work by train. Unfortunately it has not been possible to obtain this data for each of the three census districts, so this figure is applied.
  - From the SoCI, some 67% of respondents travelled every day.
  - Assume additional journeys for non-employment uses such as leisure, shopping etc. These generally will not occur so regularly as employment.
  - From the SoCI, 55% of respondents from Mortimer travelled to the station solely in a car that was parked. A higher level of 75% is assumed for Burghfield and Swallowfield due to greater distances from the station.

Census district	Burghfield E36000846	Mortimer E36000858	Swallowfield E36000945
population in employment	3068	2692	1485
% district in catchment	70%	60%	50%
	2148	1615	743
5% travel by train	107	81	37
67% travel daily	72	54	25
plus 20% non - employment	86	65	30
travel to station in car alone	75%	55%	75%
	65	36	22
Total car parking required	123		
Plus 5% population growth since 2011	<b>129 car parking spaces</b>		

- 6.26 The projected maximum totals 129 spaces, minus the existing 53 spaces, would be an additional 76 spaces. This is half of the proposed additional 150 car parking spaces. As with any projection it includes assumptions and is based on the information available – that submitted by the applicant and census data. It is considered a more robust projection than the applicant’s submitted car parking technical note.
- 6.27 Transport Policy have now commented on the application. They support a moderate increase in car parking appropriate to serve Mortimer and the surrounding area. They also have concerns on the level of parking proposed which makes it difficult for some of the reasons for refusal in the previous application to be overcome, and that there is an absence of robust forecasts and evidence from GWR. They do not consider any information presented demonstrates justification of the level of parking proposed.
- 6.28 Whilst the principle of additional car parking at Mortimer station is provided by policy IS3 it does not specify the amount or allocate land. The supporting documents submitted with the application indicate additional demand but do not translate into a daily quantifiable demand. The nature of Mortimer as rural service centre without the employment base of other rural service centres in this part of the District do not evidence the local need for a station car park totalling 200 spaces, comparable with the provision at known urban areas and transport hubs. As such the proposal is considered contrary to policies ADPP1 and ADPP6.

### ***Character and appearance***

- 6.29 Core Strategy Policies ADPP1, CS14 and CS19 apply, as well as the Quality Design SPD. The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Plan also outlines a number of strategies that relate to character and appearance which have informed the policies and policy GD6 relates specifically to landscape. The strategy states that the site selection and design for additional station car parking will conform to all relevant policies in the plan.
- 6.30 The submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, planning statement, plans and arboricultural impact assessment have been reviewed by a landscape consultant. They note that under the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) the site is located in the *Grazeley Open Clay Lowland* which is described as:

*“traditional lowland mixed farming landscape divided into large scale fields bounded by hedgerows;*

*sparsely settled rural area with small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads with high levels of relative tranquillity;*

*varied visual character, with expansive views from some vantage points across large fields enabled by low hedgerows;*

*rural landscape provides an undeveloped backdrop and setting to existing settlements.”*

- 6.31 With regard to existing detractors the LCA notes the pressure for development due to the proximity to Reading and that development out of character with the local context would detract from the rural quality, tranquillity and dark night skies. The applicant's landscape consultant notes that the LCA also notes that,

*“noise and movement emanating from busy transport routes including the nearby M4, A33 and the railway line are locally intrusive in places and have a negative impact on the rural and tranquil qualities of the mostly undeveloped landscape”.*

- 6.32 The applicant's landscape consultant therefore considers that where the railway is already a detracting feature that a station car park adjacent to a railway station, railway line and railway bridge could not be out of character with it. However, the LCA only refers to the railway line, it does not specifically mention the station at Mortimer or its car park.

- 6.33 With regard to views the Council's landscape consultant considers that the site is only visible from Station Road and from upstairs windows of the dwellings on Station Road and Keepers Cottage in the summer. There is little inter-visibility between the station and the site due to the trees and shrubs between them and where the station is at a lower level within a slight cutting. They note the site is set within an open rural landscape outside of the settlement of Stratfield Mortimer. They consider the key landscape issues to be the impact on the setting, gateway and approach into Stratfield Mortimer village and the impact on the landscape character of the area.

- 6.34 The applicant's landscape consultant notes that, as a planning consideration, the dwellings along Station Road have no right to a view. They also consider that there will be greater inter-visibility between the site and the railway in the winter months and that the Council's landscape consultant has failed to consider this. However, the Council's landscape consultant notes that the railway is within a cutting. From the submitted plan on the details for the proposed steps and ramps from the proposed car park to the platform there is a drop in ground level between 1 and 1.8 metres.

- 6.35 The Council's landscape consultant assesses that the proposal would be low-rise development of urban character in a rural area and that there will be a significant adverse effect on the landscape character of the site. The impact of a large-scale urbanising development is not considered possible to successfully mitigate; that there will also be views of the car park replacing a local rural view which contributes to the sense of leaving the village of Stratfield Mortimer into a more rural landscape.

- 6.36 The Council's landscape consultant considers the site to be within a rural approach and for this approach to be adversely affected by the proposal. They consider the village to be a linear patterned settlement, developed along The Street, and its character includes intermittent rows of dwellings interspersed with fields with no defined edge to the settlement. Under 3.1 of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan it states that *“all roads coming into Stratfield Mortimer pass through either open farmland or woodland, thus all approaches to the parish are rural”*. The objective of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan to avoid creeping urbanisation and maintain rural approaches to the parish is therefore considered not to have been met.

- 6.37 The applicant's landscape consultant conversely considers that the site is on the edge of the village and therefore closely linked to it and that the existing railway station is already a significant feature in the landscape.
- 6.38 Overall the Council's landscape consultant assesses the site as part of an arable field forming part of a wider rural landscape contributing to the setting of Stratfield Mortimer and rural approach to it along Station Road. The proposed landscaping is not considered by them to contribute to mitigating the view of parked cars from the more sensitive locations of the southern side of Station Road bridge and the row of dwellings on the opposite side of Station Road. The band of tree planting to the southern side of the car park would provide a long term landscape feature of value but is not considered by them to compensate for the size, scale and urban character of the car park. Planting adjacent to Station Road on the southern side of the bridge they are also concerned would be to the top of a slope that will be dry and not grow well, whilst planting at a lower level under the existing tree would not provide long term screening.
- 6.39 The applicant's landscape consultant reiterates that the proposal includes 0.4ha of woodland and other planting including 0.5km of native hedge planting and that in their opinion it would significantly (if not fully) mitigate the adverse landscape effects. The full area of planting is now shown within the red line.
- 6.40 The applicant's landscape consultant considers the resultant views of the site to be less sensitive and for those passing the site the views to be of short duration. They consider the effect on the character of the approach to the village to be very limited, and the changes to the landscape pattern to be localised. There is also disagreement on planting to the slope towards the bridge on Station Road that it would provide screening and would not be limited in growth.
- 6.41 The Council's landscape consultant concludes that the proposal is contrary to policy CS14 for being unsympathetic to the surrounding rural landscape and its setting, contrary to policy CS19 for not respecting the existing form of settlement in the landscape and eroding the rural landscape of an undeveloped backdrop on the approach to the village. It is also contrary to the strategy of the neighbourhood plan which seeks to maintain a compact village and avoid urbanising creep, and maintain rural approaches to the parish.
- 6.42 The recently submitted GWR design guide also includes section 7.2 on fencing with security fencing to be considered for all car parks and of a minimum 1.8m in height with the choices shown all being metal railing fencing.
- 6.43 The existing railway station is set at a lower ground level than the site such that it is not particularly visible from the site or further away along Station Road. The station is not specifically mentioned as a detracting feature in the landscape in the LCA. The settlement pattern of Stratfield Mortimer is predominantly along The Street such that the row of houses along Station Road near the site are not considered within or immediately adjacent to the edge of the village. The site is therefore considered to be part of a rural approach to the village. Overall therefore it is considered that the Council's landscape consultant's conclusion is accepted that the proposal is contrary to policies CS14, CS19 and the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

### ***Heritage***

- 6.44 The site is in proximity to areas of archaeological interest, The Council's Archaeologist has been consulted on the application. They advise that archaeological reports received since 2008 indicate the presence of later prehistoric or Roman cropmark features about 100m to the north. Whilst the 19<sup>th</sup> century railway line and bridge will have created some

disturbance they nevertheless request a condition for an archaeological watching brief so any remains on site can be properly recorded.

- 6.45 Due to the proximity of the site to the Grade II\* listed Mortimer Station a heritage impact assessment was requested. Paragraph 193 of the NPPF says that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and policy CS19 requires the conservation and where appropriate the enhancement of heritage assets and their settings. Historic England were consulted on the application but had no comments to make.
- 6.46 The Council's Conservation Officer considers the impact of the development on the setting of the listed buildings to be acceptable. They note there will be an impact from the partial removal of some of the tree and hedge cover that separates the site from the listed buildings by reducing the existing verdant back-cloth and partly altering the setting of the station. However, as it is relatively small scale and there will be additional planting they raise no objection.

### ***Quality of life***

- 6.47 Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy and the Policies OVS.5 and OVS.6 of the Saved Local Plan (relating to noise and environmental pollution respectively) and the Quality Design SPD are applicable. Policy GD4 of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan outlines that street lighting should only be provided for security with low level lighting for pedestrians. There are properties to the other side of Station Road which would be affected by the development.
- 6.48 With regard to potential noise impacts policy OVS.6 states that measures to minimising adverse impacts of noise generation include location, design, layout and operation of development and have regard to matters including existing sources of noise, and the need for appropriate sound insulation measures.
- 6.49 There is a street light either side of the bridge on Station Road, but otherwise there is none along Station Road in-front of the row of houses. The proposed footway link onto Station Road comes out opposite No. 1 on Station Road in proximity to the existing street light. The proposed traffic lights would not be directed towards the front elevation of the dwelling and No. 1 is set back from the road by approximately 13m.
- 6.50 The vehicle access point would be opposite No. 5 on Station Road. That dwelling is set 10 metres back from the road. There will be both car head lights from vehicles exiting the car park and noise from vehicles accessing and leaving the car park. The main car park is set away from the properties where it runs at right angles to Station Road. The internal road would run parallel to Station Road and would be set 10 metres from the road. Planting is proposed between the internal road and Station Road which will provide some screening both visual and acoustic. Within the car park itself therefore the noise impact is not considered to be materially harmful.
- 6.51 The Committee requested additional information on lighting. A lighting plan has not been submitted by the applicant who maintains this is a matter that can be secured by condition. But documents of GWR on their design guide and electrical specification have been submitted and that CCTV would be included and some limited signage necessary (which is covered by Advertisement Regulations).
- 6.52 The submitted electrical specification at 6.7.2 on lighting states that their approved suspended, surface mounted and recessed luminaires shall be installed on desks, control panels, screens and mimic panels to meet CIBSE recommendations with dimming controls fitted. At 6.9.2 on open areas lighting is to meet RIS 7702 requirements to secured car parks standard on column mounts.

6.53 The GWR design guide states that CCTV must be considered at all car park entrances and exits, with coverage that should also track people through an area and to monitor vehicle movements. At section 11.1 on lighting which states consideration always to be given to LED, including at locations with high risk of vandalism or low height installations, and shrouding considered next to residential areas. Pole heights should not exceed 8m high for car parks with galvanised columns. External lighting must be photocell controlled at a minimum.

6.54 In addition GWR car parks are to meet the park mark standard. From that website:

### **Safety**

Park Mark car parks have lower crime as operators do all they can to reduce both crime and the fear of crime. During the accreditation process, police assessors recommend changes that are known to deter offenders, such as perimeter fencing, surveillance and bright lighting. If incidents do occur, operators and assessors together identify the causes and take action.

### **Lighting levels**

Pedestrians want to see and be seen as they walk to and from their car. People can fear dark areas. Park Mark recognises that increased lighting levels in dark areas can reduce the fear of crime and opportunities to commit offences. Maximum use is made of daylight supplemented by artificial illumination

6.55 From the additional information submitted it is reasonable to assume that a 1.8m perimeter safety fencing would be sought, CCTV at the vehicle entry/exit and within the car park and over the ramped and stepped access to the platform. The lighting within the car park likely to be sought would be columns of up to 8m. Whilst lighting is likely to include shrouds to direct light downwards all of these features can be urbanising in their impact and tall lighting columns difficult to mitigate with boundary landscaping. The recently submitted letter in response to the matters raised by Committee states that the hedging along Station Road being allowed to grow to 3.5 metres high and the proposed new landscaping screen would make the car park virtually invisible from the road. The hedge is likely to be lower than the lighting columns and the lighting is likely to be visible from the road at night and on dull days.

### **Biodiversity**

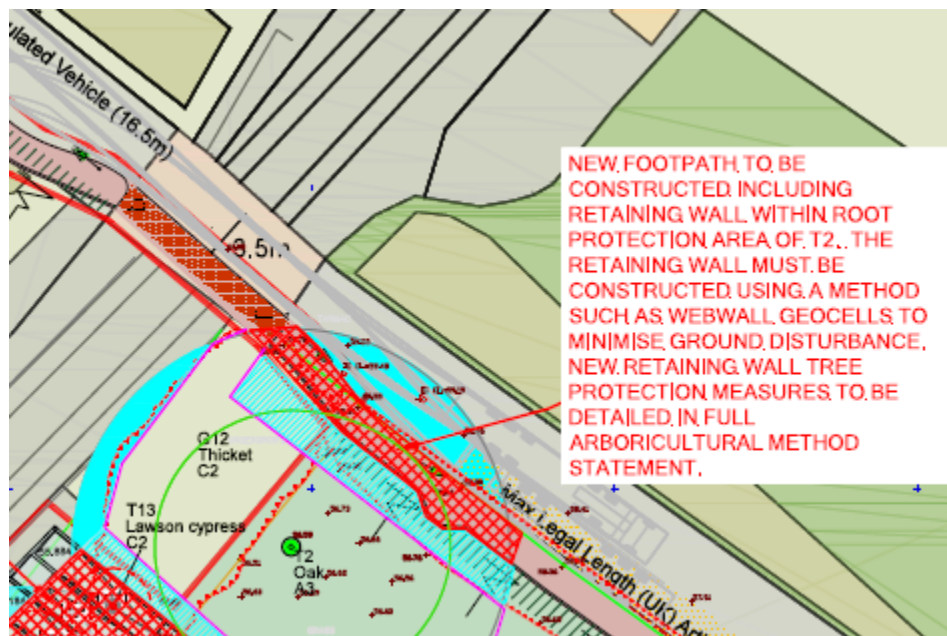
6.56 Policy CS17 requires biodiversity to be conserved and enhanced and the B2 and B3 policies on biodiversity in the Stratfield Mortimer Development Plan also apply. An extended phase 1 ecological assessment has been submitted and reviewed by the Council's Ecologist.

6.57 The submitted survey identifies the loss of a small area of native hedgerow which can be compensated for and increased overall as part of the landscaping proposals. The boundaries may be used by bats foraging and commuting but are to be retained. Lighting is to be minimised in these areas and specification on the type of lighting that would have least impact on bats is identified in the assessment. The small area of hedgerow clearance should be avoided during bird nesting season. Measures for vegetation clearance as part of the development are outlined as precautionary to avoid impact on reptiles within the field margins. Biodiversity enhancements identified in the assessment are additional bird and bat boxes and native species tree and shrub planting.

6.58 The Council's Ecologist agrees with most of the identified impacts and mitigation. There is a request for the bird and bat boxes to be adhered to the back of the existing building for more secure fixings this is not considered appropriate for the listed building. Details of fixings could be secured as part of a condition. Conditions are otherwise identified by the Council's Ecologist for construction environmental management plan and a landscape environmental management plan, and a lighting plan. It is considered that with these conditions the development would be in accordance with policy CS17.

## Tree Protection

- 6.59 Policy CS19 requires landscape character to be conserved and enhanced with the natural, cultural and functional components of its character considered as a whole. Part of the landscape is the green infrastructure of trees and hedges which are a potential constraint on site for the proposed development. The submission includes tree protection details of trees to be retained and an arboricultural method statement. The Council's Tree Officer has been consulted on the application. It is noted that the arboricultural impact assessment states it is preliminary with details of drainage, footpath construction, services and contractors' facilities to be prepared at a later stage.
- 6.60 They note that impacts of the development are the removal of around 40m of roadside hedge, removal of some trees and thicket, pruning of a tree, construction of new access ramps between two trees, construction of the car park and access road near four trees that will require a change in ground levels, and a type of green retaining wall construction alongside the proposed new footway that would be within the root protection area of a tree.
- 6.61 The arboricultural impact assessment notes the difference in ground levels is approximately 1.4m between the field and station platform. The footpath to link towards the bridge on Station Road will require construction of a retaining wall for structural support although details have not been prepared the change in ground level 2.2 and 2.8m high. Please see extract from plans:



- 6.62 As these are specialist matters a project arboriculturalist will be required which can be secured by condition. Post and rail fence protection to the root protection areas of five trees is requested to prevent soil compaction from vehicles and pedestrians which can also be secured by condition. A landscaping condition for landscaping planting mitigation is also required.
- 6.63 The Council's Tree Officer notes that the group of semi-mature planted trees and hedgerow to the northwest of the red line where the new footway in the extract from the plans above is proposed to connect to the existing car park were not considered. Some loss of the trees is expected here and further clarification on these impacts has been requested. The arboricultural impact assessment states that the new footpath will run through an area of trees to the west side of the road bridge and that the trees in this area have not been surveyed.



- 6.64 The conditions the Tree Officer otherwise recommends are tree retention and protection, arboricultural method statement and supervision, and details of landscaping, with a condition on details to be submitted on the matters the arboricultural impact assessment notes it does not include. The applicant has confirmed acceptance of such a condition.

### **Flooding and Drainage**

- 6.65 The site is located in Flood Zone 1 and just below a hectare in size. As such a flood risk assessment is not required. Policy CS16 of the Core Strategy requires all development to manage surface water in a sustainable manner through the implementation of sustainable drainage methods. The Council also has an adopted SPD on sustainable drainage. Policy GD3 in the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan also relates to flooding.
- 6.66 The Local Lead Flood Authority has been consulted on the application. They accepted the calculations provided for the proposed attenuation pond. On the drainage strategy more natural ways of removing pollutants such as swales or wetland rather than the proposed oil interceptors were requested along with further details on the detention basin to show that it maximises biodiversity/habitat/amenity benefits.
- 6.67 Amended surface water drainage strategy plans were submitted along with calculations. The swales provide green water quality benefits and have a suitable outfall discharging to the pond. The scrape pond is now shown to overflow to the attenuation.
- 6.68 Maintenance work to the ditch the final swale would discharge to is required to maintain its upkeep and ensure it remains operative for the lifetime of the development and is shown on the amended plan. The ditch runs across what is shown as the access to the site. It is now shown as being diverted under the road which will require a separate ordinary watercourse consent.
- 6.69 The amended drainage strategy is now considered to comply with policy CS16 and the Sustainable Drainage SPD and can be conditioned including for the maintenance to be undertaken.

### **Highways**

- 6.70 A Transport Assessment which includes a Road Safety Audit and subsequent Technical Note have been submitted and the Council's Highways have been consulted. Policies CS13 and TRANS.1 are of relevance and the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan policy GD2 requires development to provide direct, safe and convenient pedestrian access to community facilities, minimal street furniture.
- 6.71 The Highway Authority notes that the access entrance would be 6m wide onto Station Road with visibility splays of 2.4m back and 59m to the right and 56m to the left. The pedestrian ramps from the car park to the southbound station platform would be 2m wide. The footway proposed along Station Road would be 2m wide except over the bridge where it would be a 1.8m wide painted surface. The road over the bridge would be narrowed from 5.2m to 3.5m and traffic lights installed for one-way shuttle operation that has been subject to the road safety audit, modelled, and the impact on nearby junctions considered. All matters are accepted by the Highway Authority with the exception of the need for a car park of the size proposed, and the proposed footway along Station Road. The need for a car park of the size proposed has been covered in the section on the principle of development.
- 6.72 The proposed footway is considered unsuitable. The gradient of the footway would be 6% or 1 in 16 to the west and in places 7% or 1 in 7 to the east. This exceeds the recommended maximum of 5% or 1 in 20 in Manual for Streets and is considered unacceptable. The originally proposed footway would be a painted surface. A kerb is

now proposed as additional separation of vehicles from pedestrians to a height of 50mm. As vehicles could easily mount a kerb of this height 125mm would be sought, but is understood to not be achievable due to it causing further the footway gradient issues. The Highway Authority therefore recommend refusal on these grounds for being contrary to policy GD2 and CS13 the supporting text to which policy states that road safety is a key consideration with a particular focus given to safety of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

- 6.73 The applicant considers that whilst ideally a footway should have a 5% or 1:20 gradient, that one of 8% or 1:12 may be used. They state that the submitted drawing shows that the average on the south eastern side of the bridge slope is 5% and that to the north western side averages 8%. Furthermore, the distance of this gradient the applicant considers short and is in line with both Manual for Streets and Inclusive Mobility Guidelines.
- 6.74 Transport Policy have commented that they do not consider the proposal to result in the station being seen as any more accessible than it currently is; that it would remain a station that is not fully accessible. The Council has promoted the station for consideration for Access for All funding to improve its accessibility but as yet it has not featured highly in Network Rail's list of priorities. They note that cycle parking and a considerable number of electric vehicle charging points should be provided alongside any increase in car parking.

## **7. Planning Balance and Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan supports an extension to the car park at Mortimer Station. It does not allocate land or specify the level of car parking required. The proposal would provide a benefit to the local community. Where the site is in the open countryside only appropriate limited development will be allowed focused on addressing identified needs under policy ADPP1. Whilst a demand for additional car parking for Mortimer station has been demonstrated the submission is not considered to justify a need for an additional 150 spaces, resulting in a total capacity similar to that provided at urban transport hubs. As such the proposal is not considered appropriate limited development in the countryside and not acceptable in principle which weighs significantly against the proposal.
- 7.2 The provision of access from the southbound platform to the site and onto Station Road for those unable to cross over the railway line via the existing footbridge steps could provide a significant benefit and potentially address an identified accessibility issue for station users. However, the proposed footway along Station Road is not considered accessible due to the steep gradient over the bridge and it is not considered to provide sufficient safety for pedestrians and disabled users. As such the benefit cannot be fully realised, weighing against the proposal.
- 7.3 The size and scale of the proposal is considered to result in an urbanising impact on the landscape which is a rural greenfield site and part of the rural approach to the village of Stratfield Mortimer. The proposed landscaping is not considered to mitigate this impact and the lighting is likely to be visible. This weighs significantly against the proposal.
- 7.4 There is a minor adverse impact on the amenity of the residents of Station Road from the access and lighting.
- 7.5 Having taken account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material considerations referred to above, it is considered that the application fails to comply with the development plan. In the balance the adverse impacts of the development

significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The application is recommended for refusal.

## **8. Full Recommendation**

- 8.1 To delegate to the Head of Development and Planning to REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION for the reasons listed below.

### ***Refusal Reasons***

1. **Identified Need**

The proposed development is large in scale and size for 150 car parking spaces and on a hectare of site area. It would not be appropriate limited development in the countryside and would not address an identified need for additional car parking to serve Mortimer station. As such the proposed development is contrary to policies ADPP1 and ADPP6 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026, the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. **Landscape**

The proposed development would have an urbanising impact on the landscape character and appearance of the rural area. The proposal would erode the rural landscape which provides an undeveloped back drop and setting to the rural approach to the village of Stratfield Mortimer. As such the proposal is contrary to policies CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026, the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017, the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. **Footway**

The proposed footway along Station Road is unsuitable for pedestrians including disabled persons using the proposed car park and train station. This is due to the proposed gradient in places and the footway design over the existing bridge. The proposal would therefore adversely affect road safety and the flow of traffic contrary to Policy CS13 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026, Manual for Streets, the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

### ***Informatives***

1. In attempting to determine the application in a way that can foster the delivery of sustainable development, the local planning authority has approached this decision in a positive way having regard to Development Plan policies and available guidance to try to secure high quality appropriate development. In this application there has been a need to balance conflicting considerations, and the local planning authority has also attempted to work proactively with the applicant to find a solution to the problems with the development; however, an acceptable solution to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area could not be found.