

**M&G Developments – Spoken Representation for Planning Committee 28.10.2020**

**Ref. 20/00674/FUL**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a representation. Members have previously received a lobby pack from M&G detailing our involvement in putting forward the logical alternative site for the Station Car Park extension.

At last Committee, Counsellor Bridgeman spoke at length in support of the Parish-led application. A good advocate but we respectfully submit that the issue here is not about skilful advocacy, but what is best for the residents of Stratfield Mortimer.

What is proposed amounts to a gross intrusion into open countryside, blighted by the many issues set out in the Case Officers Recommendation for Refusal, **not least of which are Highway Safety issues.** It is **telling** that an application in similar form has previously been refused both at Committee and by the Planning Inspectorate.

Given the history, it **beggars belief** that the Parish Council have **not** properly engaged with us despite having been aware of our alternative for many years. This failure is **in breach** of the Neighbourhood Plan which sets out an obligation to **investigate options** for increasing Station parking. **No such investigation has openly taken place.** Neither M&G, the landowner, nor our Planning Consultant have been contacted.

M&G have reached out to the Parish Council on **multiple occasions** only to be rebuffed. In frustration, 12 months ago we attended a Parish Council meeting as members of the public in order to raise our alternative. Subsequently we were approached by residents concerned about the Parish Council scheme, one of which was a member of the Parish Council who offered support **only to be ‘silenced’ and forbidden from engaging with us.** Whilst fully aware of our alternative the Parish continued **without review** and lodged their application.

In March, the Parish Council and GWR indicated that their application would be withdrawn **if** M&G agreed terms with GWR. M&G with significant investment in time and expense agreed detailed terms with GWR for a 35-year Lease. The Parish subsequently reneged and refused to withdraw their application. GWR advise us that our site offers a **far superior alternative,** as evidenced by agreeing Lease terms.

M&G's proposal is superior in **policy, technical and deliverability terms.** It **does not** require public funding, nor does it involve extensive works to either the highway nor the Grade II Listed road bridge. It does not sit in open countryside. Rather, it is an extension to the existing station car park and **surely is the obvious choice.**

The complexity of the Application site calls in to question its viability and whether it will be constructed in the foreseeable future. For obvious reasons M&G has been reluctant to lodge a competing planning application whilst a Parish Council application remains undetermined. **The M&G site is deliverable in a short timeframe.** PreApp advice has been sought. Architects drawings prepared. Preliminary investigations have taken place and **specialist contractors** have priced construction.

History will not judge the present custodians of the Parish well if they **neglect** the obvious car park solution in favour of a **‘carbuncle’** on the side of the village.

**499 words**