

PLANNING REF : 251004
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Barkham
:
: RG41
SUBMITTED BY : Mr . King
DATE SUBMITTED : 13/05/2025

COMMENTS:

I object to this planning application.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF requires development to meet three broad sustainability criteria - social, economic and environmental. The use of land and buildings for film production at the development site does not meet any of them. No economic benefit accrues to the local community because the operations are completely self-contained, with all staff, supplies and facilities being brought-in whenever a production takes place. There are no social benefits because the same containment excludes any interaction between the users of the site and local residents. Finally, the filming and production operations conducted have a deleterious impact on the environment. This includes high volumes of private motor vehicle use by entire production teams commuting from distant locations to and from the site daily, very high carbon expenditure from the manufacture of single-use stage sets and props of significant dimensions and the detonation of fuel, combustible materials and explosives.

The assertion contained in the letter submitted for the application that the SUDs 'corridor' between the development site and residential properties provides suitable mitigation for the operation of the studio is wholly unpersuasive. Quite how a ditch adequately reduces the effects of exposure to light, noise and particulate pollution for sensitive receptors living nearby to their source of generation is not clear. In recent times, operations have produced loud explosions (which could be felt as well as heard), vehicles being driven in circles for prolonged periods (with the attendant squeal of tyres), a helicopter circling repeatedly at very low altitude with a spotlight and loudspeaker emitting exceptionally loud noises. Whatever is being filmed, high intensity lighting systems deployed on elevated tower gantries have been in use routinely, producing significant light spill and not extinguished until long after filming sessions have concluded late in the evenings, if at all. I live a considerable distance from the development site but have experienced the effects of these things nevertheless. I have genuine concern for those residents who live closer to it.

It should be noted that local residents have never been given prior warning of filming sessions that have the potential to create nuisance, a common courtesy to which the operators of the site or its clients are clearly oblivious. This does not align with the concept of community cohesion, partnership and inclusion promulgated for Arborfield Green SDL by its developers and the LPA.

The argument that all of these things should be expected, as they are part and parcel of the site's use, would carry weight if it were

located on an industrial estate or in an isolated area, not when it is hard against a high-density residential development. The fact that the use of the site for its current purpose pre-dates the latter is irrelevant: this is a new application and its merits and disadvantages must be assessed with regard to the current situation, not that which existed when original permission was granted in 2017, and the LPA must give equitable consideration to all parties concerned. The material considerations are now different compared to when the original consent was granted, in particular that the build out of the SDL has resulted in a significant increase in the number of residential dwellings proximate to the development site.

Many of these are family dwellings and so it is not unreasonable to conclude that they contain children and pets in varying number. Aside from everyone's right to the quiet enjoyment of their home, some of the activities carried out at the development site have the potential to affect adversely their interests: children need time to both study and relax, and domestic animals and livestock (which are present in neighbouring fields) can be startled by sudden loud noises. I also question whether it is sensible to deploy pyrotechnics and explosions, involving what must be at times a considerable volume of highly-inflammable material, in such close proximity to residential dwellings.

It is stated in the application letter that no complaints have been received about the activities at the studios. However, I would remind all concerned that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

For these reasons, I urge that the application be refused. However, if the LPA is minded to approve it, I believe that conditions should be imposed to (i) restrict the studio's current hours of operation (particularly for evenings and weekends); (ii) mandate the use of appropriate acoustic and visual screening barriers; and (iii) control the storage and use of inflammable or explosive materials a suitable separation distance from residential properties. If points (ii) and (iii) are controlled by condition already, they are inadequate and should be revised.