

4 Consultation, Alternatives and Design Evolution

4.1 Consultation

EIA Consultation and Consultation with Wokingham Borough Council

- 4.1.1 Prior to the preparation of this Environmental Statement, the Applicant did not request a formal Screening Opinion from Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). Instead, EIA was voluntarily undertaken and this was set out in a pre-application request submitted in August 2025. In this pre-application request the Applicant also outlined the intended scope for the Environmental Statement.
- 4.1.2 The Applicant entered into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the Council. As part of the PPA, four pre-application meetings were held between the Project Team and WBC, which included a meeting on 10 September 2025 in which the scope of the Environmental Statement was discussed and agreed. This is further discussed in Chapter 5 – Approach to Assessment.
- 4.1.3 Further details of the Approach to the EIA are set out within Chapter 5.
- 4.1.4 During the course of application preparation and the EIA, the project team consulted with WBC to clarify elements of the scope where required. Details of technical consultation directly related to the specific ES chapters are provided in the methodology and baseline sections of each technical chapter.

Public Consultation with Members of the Public and Key Stakeholders

- 4.1.5 Full details of public consultation and responses are provided in the Statement of Community Involvement which accompanies the planning application.
- 4.1.6 The following key stakeholders were contacted to discuss the proposals:
- Leader of Wokingham Borough Council, Cllr Stephen Conway;
 - Wokingham Borough Council Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement, Cllr Martin Alder;
 - Barkham & Arborfield ward Councillors: Cllr Adrian Betteridge, Cllr Joseph Barley, Cllr George Evans;
 - Barkham Parish Council;
 - Arborfield & Newland Parish Council;
 - Members of the Arborfield Community Liaison Group.

Public Engagement

- 4.1.7 The Applicant has sought to involve the local community and stakeholders extensively to help shape the proposals.
- 4.1.8 A dedicated consultation leaflet was produced and delivered to 3,584 households surrounding the Site on 13 February 2026 which provided information about Crest, the Site context, the proposals, the public consultation event and contact details for the project team.

- 4.1.9 A dedicated project website was set up which went live on the day the public consultation leaflets landed which provided an overview of the proposals, the consultation materials displayed at the public consultation, a place to record feedback on the proposals and a contact page. Additionally, a dedicated email address was established and made available to members of the public for them to leave feedback on the proposals.
- 4.1.10 A 'drop-in' event was held on Wednesday 25 February 2026 from 4-8pm at Arborfield Community Centre in which 43 people attended, including representatives from Barkham Parish Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

Feedback Received

- 4.1.11 Out of the 14 respondents to the online survey, 41% agreed that the redevelopment of Arborfield Studios would be a positive to Arborfield Green. Other comments consisted of:
- The most frequently raised issues related to transport and traffic with issues mainly around increases in traffic on local roads and construction traffic and road safety near schools and playgrounds;
 - Comments received on public transport and sustainable travel, suggesting improvements such as enhanced bus connections to Reading and Twyford stations and a continuous cycling route to Reading;
 - Queries around parking provision, particularly for visitors and the need to consider that households have multiple vehicles;
 - Support for maintaining and enhancing pedestrian and cycle connectivity, including retaining certain routes and bridges as pedestrian / cycle-only links;
 - Queries around a lack of infrastructure to support the development.

Response to Feedback

- 4.1.12 In terms of transport and traffic, a Transport Assessment has been prepared to evaluate the potential impacts of the development and to identify appropriate mitigation measures, where required.
- 4.1.13 In terms of infrastructure, the application will include financial contributions through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 planning obligations. These contributions are intended to help mitigate the impact of the Proposed Development and support the delivery of local services and infrastructure.
- 4.1.14 The participation in the consultation process has helped to inform the design proposals and ensure a robust planning submission.

4.2 Alternatives and Design Iteration

Alternative Sites

- 4.2.1 The Site falls within the adopted Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location (SDL) (*Policy CP18 – Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location* of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010)) which sought to deliver 3,500 dwellings and associated infrastructure. Some of this development has now been delivered.

- 4.2.2 The Wokingham Local Plan Update 2023-2040 (2024) (currently under Examination) includes the Site within a new Strategic Development Location proposed allocation under Policy SS11 – Arborfield Green SDL (full policy wording is provided in Appendix 2.1). Arborfield Studios (the Site) is identified at 3(ii) in Policy SS11 for ‘300 dwellings by optimising development density at land currently occupied by Arborfield Studios’.
- 4.2.3 Additionally, the area of land to the northeast of the Site (currently identified as countryside) is identified as ‘Barkham Square’ at 3(iii) in Policy SS11 for ‘600 dwellings on land to the north of Arborfield Studios, known as Barkham Square’. Crest Nicholson have also submitted an application earlier in 2026 for Barkham Square.
- 4.2.4 The Local Plan process assessed alternative sites as part of a comprehensive site selection and Sustainability Appraisal process considering potential development options (and combinations of options) around Wokingham Borough as a whole. From this process, WBC concluded that the Site was suitable for development and that its allocation via a strategic Local Plan policy (along with other sites) would represent a sustainable approach in order to fulfil identified housing needs. This process took into consideration an array of social, environmental and economic factors, and the consideration of reasonable alternatives.
- 4.2.5 Additionally, the Proposed Development is on Arborfield Studios therefore, developing a different site is not a reasonable alternative to the Proposed Development. As such, alternative sites have not been considered further by the Applicant or assessed in the EIA as these would not be deliverable and would contradict the spatial strategy and related allocations in the Local Plan Update.

Alternative Development Scenarios and Design Iterations

- 4.2.6 Schedule 4, paragraph 2 of the EIA Regulations requires Environmental Statements to include:
- ‘A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example, in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.’*
- 4.2.7 Given the nature and purpose of the Proposed Development, the assessment of reasonable alternatives to the development presented in the ES considers options within the following categories.
- **Do Nothing:** under this scenario no development is implemented at the Site and baseline conditions continue in their current trends. This option would not result in the delivery of a substantial part of the LPA’s emerging housing need in a sustainable location and the benefits from the Proposed Development would not be realised.
 - **A Different Design:** under this scenario the Proposed Development is realised with alternative scales and layouts, often in the context of developmental constraints present at the Site. This option is discussed further below.
- 4.2.8 The design of the Proposed Development has been developed to minimise the environmental impact and, where possible, deliver environmental enhancements.

Arborfield Film & Television Studio

- 4.2.9 At present, the Site is in operation as Arborfield Film & Television Studios with three stages (Stage 1: 69,797 sq. ft. (39 ft high); Stage 2: 13,176 sq. ft. (26 ft high); and Stage 3: 13,455 sq. ft. (29 ft high)) and other associated buildings for workshops (for editorial / VFX suites, extensive wardrobe, art department, construction and props) and office buildings as well as two large backlots for film set construction.
- 4.2.10 Since February 2017, the application Site parcel has been subject to a temporary permission (ref. 162881) for a change of use to operate as land for filming, known as 'Arborfield Studios', the use of which will cease on or before 1 February 2028 (ref. 251004). The extant planning consent does not preclude residential development on this Site.
- 4.2.11 The studio has served as an effective 'meanwhile use' to ensure the Site was not left vacant whilst the rest of the Arborfield Green allocation was under construction. Although the Site has a temporary permission to 1 February 2028, once the planning application to which this ES relates has progressed through the planning process, the temporary permission will have almost lapsed.
- 4.2.12 With the most recent film studios application, twelve public comments were received predominantly objecting to the scale and poor condition of the existing Site. The Site was initially approved at a time when the surrounding context of the Site consisted of the Ministry of Defence Barracks, which had not yet been demolished. Since this time, the surrounding context of the area has developed as the Arborfield Green residential development has progressed. The Site has progressed significantly between 2023 and 2025 such that, as more residents move to Arborfield Green, the presence of the film & television studios becomes more unacceptable in terms of design, being overbearing and adjoining use.
- 4.2.13 Additionally, as of 19 June 2024, the nearby Shinfield Studios became the UK's largest new film & television studio including 18 state-of-the-art soundstages (for a total floorspace of approximately 1,000,000 sq. ft.), as well as 38 workshops, substantial office space and a nine-acre filming backlot. As such, Shinfield Studios provides an ample replacement for the 96,428 sq. ft. of soundstages at Arborfield Studios.
- 4.2.14 Therefore, Shinfield Studios renders Arborfield Studios redundant and out-of-date in comparison, thereby leaving the Site ready for demolition and replacement.

Arborfield Studios - Design Iterations

- 4.2.15 Through an iterative design process with the project team, consultation with key stakeholders and WBC pre-application engagement, the proposals have evolved into the masterplan presented as part of this application. The public engagement, as set out above, has assisted in the review and progress of the design objectives, key principles and layout of the Masterplan. This included inputs from the technical project team to ensure, where possible, embedded environmental mitigation was factored into the designs.
- 4.2.16 Delivery of the proposed scale and quantum of development on a single site has been identified as necessary in order to ensure comprehensive, integrated and sustainable development with a high quality of place-making.

Stage 0 - Constraints and Opportunities

- 4.2.17 The constraints and opportunities plan (Figure 4.1) has guided how the development proposals respond to the existing Site. With the existing buildings on Site, there was the potential for effects due to contamination and ground conditions as well as effects from demolition and construction processes on air quality and ecological receptors. Alongside this is the number of existing trees on site which could be retained or removed depending on location and quality.
- 4.2.18 All edges of the Site are relatively sensitive with the southern boundary fronting existing residential properties. The northwest boundary fronts Langley Common Road and areas to the northeast and southeast fronting the countryside (and future Barkham Square proposals). As such, consideration of buffers in this area is important to ensure that any potential habitats (within tree belts and vegetated areas) are not adversely affected. Additionally, the neighbouring amenity of residential properties fronting the proposals should be considered in the design.

Figure 4.1 Constraints and Opportunities Plan



Stage 1 – Early Concept Plan

- 4.2.19 The early initial concept plan was landscape-led, establishing green infrastructure and a landscape framework early in the design process. This approach sought to integrate the development around the existing constraints with development blocks shaped around key landscape features and existing built form on site to reduce impacts on ecological receptors. Air quality, noise and climate change impacts on existing residential receptors were taken into consideration whilst ensuring suitable surface water management with less extensive areas required for SuDS provision.

Stage 2 – Emerging Framework Plan

- 4.2.20 As the concept developed, the central green spine area was introduced more prominently, which reflects some of the existing area stretching from Langley Common Road through the existing built form and to Bridle Road. A more detailed access and movement strategy was then developed alongside the required SuDS provision in alternative locations across the site, thereby, vastly improving flood risk and drainage provision.

Stage 3 – Proposed Framework Plan

- 4.2.21 The SuDS, highways and landscape strategies were then further developed to allow a refinement in the areas of drainage provision required across the Site. The placemaking strategy evolved with development of functional and distinctive play and social public open spaces. The green corridor was extended from the area in the northeast, connecting to Langley Common Road, to the southeast of the Site, connecting to Princess Marina Drive which contributes to the wider landscape network across Arborfield Green.

Stage 4 – Proposed Site Layout

- 4.2.22 The principles established through the framework were subsequently developed through the detailed layout, allowing the original landscape-led concept to be fully translated into the arrangement of streets, homes and public spaces. The proposed house types were carefully considered and positioned to respond to the characteristics of each part of the Site, ensuring that the most appropriate house types and orientations were used in each location. This detailed coordination also allowed the scheme to respond to effectively respond to planning policy and guidance whilst maintaining the established landscape structure and placemaking principles. The result is a coordinated layout in which the built form, streets, landscape and green infrastructure work together to create a series of high-quality, legible and characterful places throughout the development.
- 4.2.23 The evolution of the masterplan proposals are presented at Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2 Design Evolution

Stage 1 – Early Concept Plan



Stage 2 – Emerging Framework Plan



Stage 3 – Proposed Framework Plan



Stage 4 – Proposed Site Layout



4.2.24 Table 4.1 outlines further how environmental constraints and consideration of potential impacts have influenced the design of the Proposed Development.

Table 4.1 Key Design Changes/Influences

Environmental Topic	Change and influence on Environmental Impacts / Effects
Air Quality	Air quality impacts on existing residential receptors were considered during the design process, with existing dwellings buffered by vegetation and hardstanding to the southern boundary. Sustainable travel measures will reduce reliance on external vehicle trips and therefore, air quality impacts from transport emissions will be reduced.
Climate Change and Greenhouse Gases	Habitat retention and creation will counterbalance environmental impacts for vegetation and soil carbon lost during construction. By promoting sustainable travel measures through a travel plan, the operational phase will seek to reduce reliance on the car with existing and proposed dedicated pedestrian/cycle routes within the Site. Potable water efficiencies and flood risk management through SuDS have been incorporated into the design.
Ecology	Retention of key landscape buffers to the boundaries of the Site will prevent damage. Tree Root Protection Zones of a radius 15 times the diameter of the tree or an area reaching beyond 5m beyond the tree's outermost canopy to avoid compaction and other adverse impacts. Contributions to a Sustainable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) will avoid adverse impacts on Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Green spaces are incorporated into the Proposed Development with the central spine area and natural buffers to the boundaries providing inherent designed mitigation.
Ground Conditions and Contamination	Although existing buildings were considered for retention, this was discounted early in the process due to any remediation or groundworks needed for conversion. Additionally, more effective layout for dwellings and stronger placemaking can be more achieved through total demolition of the Site.
Noise and Vibration	Good acoustic design has been incorporated with dwellings being oriented in the northwest of the Site to front Langley Common Road thereby mitigating traffic noise in gardens as well as being buffered by vegetation with those dwellings to the northern corner of the Site, close to Langley Common Farmhouse.
Transport and Access	The promotion of sustainable travel measures will be secured through the provision of a Travel Plan including public transport, cycling and walking routes through the spine road in the centre of the proposals. This will allow the provision of the bus network to be completed through the proposals.

Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage	A surface water drainage strategy incorporating SuDS was key to the proposal design with the locations and sizes of these basins across the Site heavily influencing each stage of the design. The Drainage Strategy will prevent pollutants and sediments travelling off-Site and ensure the volume of discharge is at greenfield runoff rates.
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Summary

- 4.2.25 The Proposed Site Layout Masterplan focuses on creating an integrated and sustainable community.
- 4.2.26 The Site is currently brownfield land comprising multiple large industrial buildings and hardstanding and provides land for a film studios under a temporary consent. The site is part of and adjoins the currently developing Arborfield Green development. Concerns around the neighbourliness of this temporary use have been raised, which this application seeks to mitigate.
- 4.2.27 As set out above, the Proposed Site Layout Masterplan has been adapted and updated to take into account the comments received during extensive consultation as part of the project development and also as part of the development of the Wokingham Local Plan Update.
- 4.2.28 The technical work undertaken as part of the EIA process has identified key environmental constraints which has fed into the design, seeking to avoid and reduce adverse environmental impacts.