

Date: 5 January 2024
Application: 233052



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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Pre-application Advice Response Letter

Application Number: 233052

Site Address: Pinewood Miniature Railway Society Ltd, Pinewood
Leisure Centre, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham,
Berkshire, RG40 3AQ

Expiry Date: 25 January 2024

Proposal: The existing signal box has now reached a stage in its life where a replacement is needed due to the condition of the fabric of the building and the need to improve the environment for the operators as well as increased storage. The new signal box would be a larger building than the existing going over the current footprint of the old signal box. It will be approximately 2.5 times the size, and it is designed to look like a signal box from the steam era on the railways (<https://signalbox.org>). The construction of the frame for the building will be with new wood, with where practical and obtainable, using good quality second materials for all of the other construction.

Dear Kevin Munn

Thank you for your request for planning advice which was validated on 28 December 2023. This letter will provide advice about your scheme and what you may need to do when submitting a planning application.

At this stage, we have not consulted anyone else about your scheme, such as neighbouring properties, but we would do so if a planning application is submitted. Before you submit a planning application, we recommend that you carry out your own public consultation and provide evidence of this through a Statement of Community Involvement.

We have provided a [frequently asked questions page](#) to answer some of the

common queries about planning which will help explain the planning application process.

Description of Proposal

Replacement of old signal box for an increased sized signal box (3m in length, 2.4m in width and 2.5m in height). The new signal box would be a larger building than the existing going over the current footprint of the old signal box. It is designed to look like a signal box from the steam era on the railways. The construction of the frame for the building will be with new wood, with where practical and obtainable, using good quality second materials for all of the other construction.

Site and Surroundings

The new signal box would be part of the Miniature Railway Society, which is located within the grounds of Pinewood Leisure Centre. Pinewood Leisure Centre hosts many clubs and societies.

Assessment of Proposal & Key Issues

Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. Policy CC01 of the MDD Local Plan states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Location with the Countryside: The site is located outside the settlement boundary and in the countryside.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy does not permit development outside of development limits except if in the case of residential development, it involves extensions to existing dwellings or replacement dwellings, does not lead to excessive expansion away from the original building, does not result in inappropriate increases in scale, form or footprint and would bring about environmental improvement.

The volume of the old signal box as 6.6025 cubic metres, and the new signal box at 12.2 cubic metres.

Whilst the signal box will be approximately 2.5 times the size of the existing it is still considered to be an appropriate scale within the context of the site. The additional bulk from the proposed development will therefore have no impact on the character or appearance of the countryside. The proposal is therefore considered compliant with policy CP11 in this respect.

Character of the Area: Core strategy policy CP1 states *“planning permission will be granted for development proposals that ‘maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment’*.

CP3 states planning permission will be granted if development is *“of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design’ and contributes ‘to a sense of place in the*

buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping”.

The new pitched roof signal box will be 3m in length, 2.4m in width and 2.5m in height. Even though it will be approximately 2.5 times the size in comparison to the existing it considered that the proposal would be appropriate in size and scale. Therefore, not harming the character of the area. Furthermore, it is set back significantly from the road and would not be visible from the public realm.

The construction of the frame for the building will be with new wood, with where practical and obtainable, using good quality second materials for all of the other construction. As labelled on the proposed elevation, the signal box will be utilise tongue & groove or shiplake cladding in the front elevation and wood cladding in the end elevation along with a green felt or red tiled roof.

Neighbour Amenity: The proposal would not have a negative impact upon neighbouring amenities.

WBC Landscaping and Trees: The site is located in countryside, on WBC leisure complex, they own and lease the land, in a mixed species woodland which features mature trees. Pine grow adjacent to the existing signal box.

As can be seen from the submissions for the proposal, the site features a number of trees in the immediate vicinity of the proposal, there are no details of these, or how many will be impacted/removed; so I am unable to comment specifically on this.

In a full application, to ensure both the health and safety of the trees and safety of those using the railway facility, an arboricultural survey to specify impacted trees will be required. I would also like to see the necessary arboricultural impact assessment and method statement, detailing mitigation. The submissions must be to BS5837:2012.

Although I believe the trees to be removed represent a very small number when compared to the overall mass of the existing woodland, they appear to be mature trees offering public amenity. Therefore, a replanting scheme must be included with a full application to mitigate for their loss.

From a landscape perspective design will be key to achieving a structure which compliments the woodland setting and I believe the submitted plans suggest this.

Regarding CP11 – I feel that this project adheres to point 1. Overall, the application appears to comply with the T&L parts of the policies and guidance listed above. So, assuming the tree issues can be accommodated, I could support a scheme of this type, in principle.

WBC Drainage: The site is within flood zone 1 and we would have no flood risk concerns with the construction of the new signal box.

We note that the old box was 6.6025m³, and the new signal box at 12.2m³.

We would have no objection to the development, as represented by Issue B of the plan view drawing for the old signal box (1.68m x 1.4m) and new signal box (3m x 2.4m).

WBC Ecology: The Increase in size of the signal station is minor and unlikely to have any ecological impact.

WBC Ecology Newts: No comment

Summary

In summary, the project accords with national and local policy and therefore is likely to be acceptable.

Submitting a Planning Application

Once you are ready to apply, please submit an application through the [Planning Portal](#). Specific documents are set out in the appendices below but refer to the Local Validation List available on the council's [how to apply for planning permission page](#) to assist you with ensuring the plans and documents submitted meet our validation requirements.

Other Guidance

Your development may also require Building Regulation approval to ensure it is built to national safety, design, and environmental standards. The Council's Local Authority Building Control (LABC) service offers a full range of plan approval, inspection, and associated services through an ISO9001 nationally accredited team of qualified building surveyors. These surveyors work closely with the Council's planning department to ensure the appropriate construction of your build. To find out more visit the Council's [Building Control website](#) or call 0300 790 0580 to speak to a member of the team.

In addition to the application form, community infrastructure levy form and application fee, we would expect to see:

- Location Plan
- Site Plan (indicating any parking spaces if needed)
- Existing and Proposed Floor Plans
- Existing and Proposed Elevation Plans
- Preliminary bat survey if required
- Tree survey if required
- Heritage statement if required

If your project requires a dropped kerb on the road in front of your house then you may require consent from the highway authority; further information is available on the Council's [dropped kerbs page](#). Finally, if your project includes 100 sqm or more of new floor area then it is liable for the community infrastructure levy. Refer to the Council's [CIL page](#) for more information.

This concludes the pre-application process and I trust that this informal advice is of use to you. Please be aware that it is given without prejudice to any future decision

that the Council may take. If you would like further advice, then a new pre-application submission and associated fee will be required.

Yours sincerely,

Cameron Young

Planning Officer

Authorised by: *MC*
25.01.2024