

Shinfield Studios: Extension of Backlot 3 Temporary Permission

Ecological Statement

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Ecological Planning & Research Ltd (EPR) has been commissioned to provide ecological advice in relation to proposals to apply for a temporary 5-year planning permission to continue to use land at Shinfield Studios, referred to as 'Backlot 3' for filming purposes.
- 1.2 Prior Approval consent to use the area for external filming purposes including the construction of temporary film sets was granted by Wokingham Borough Council on 14 February 2025 (WBC application number 243097). The prior approval consent expires after April 2026, and consequently, Shinfield Studios has sought an extension of 3 months to the extant Prior Approval consent, to allow for filming operations to continue.
- 1.3 The current application for a temporary 5-year consent is intended to enable filming activities to continue on the site following the lapse of the abovementioned 3-month extension to the consented Prior Approval application.
- 1.4 This Ecological Statement summarises the potential for the newly proposed 5-year temporary planning permission to interact with nature conservation related legislation and policy. The following key articles of legislation and policy have been considered:
- 1.5 The following articles of nature conservation legislation and planning policy are of relevance to the Proposals, and have been considered:
 - The Environment Act 2021;
 - The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended);
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
 - The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000;
 - The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended);
 - The Protection of Badgers Act 1992;
 - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024);
 - Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (adopted June 2010);
 - Wokingham Borough Council, Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (June 2014);
 - Supplementary Planning Document: South of M4 Strategic Development Location (adopted October 2011);
 - The Shinfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan (2016); and
 - Emerging planning policy contained in the Wokingham Borough Submission Version Local Plan Update 2023-2040

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1.6 In addition to the above, biodiversity objectives detailed in the following documents have been considered:

- The Government's Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services (2011), 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) and Environmental Improvement Plan (2023);
- The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (October 2025);
- Berkshire Local Nature Partnership's Biodiversity Strategy for Berkshire which includes targets of the Loddon Valley South Biodiversity Opportunity Area; and
- Wokingham Borough Council's Biodiversity Action Plan 2012-2024.

2. ECOLOGICAL BASELINE AND EFFECTS

2.1 This Ecological Statement has been written with reference to the following drawings that have been produced by Atelier Gooch:

- 0983-S-BL3-10 P5 – Existing Site Plan (March 2026)
- 0983-S-BL3-11 P3 - Proposed Land Use Site Plan (March 2026)

Ecological Impact Assessment

Habitats and Vegetation

2.2 When the site was visited by EPR on Friday 26 September 2025 in relation to proposals for the wider Shinfield Studios Phase 3 application, the entire area of Backlot 3 as shown within the red line boundary of the Existing Site Plan had been cleared and covered with crushed aggregate. The entire site is therefore currently classified as 'Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface' - UK Habitat Classification (UK Hab) code u1c.

2.3 The clearance of the site and laying of crushed aggregate is consistent with the consented use of Backlot 3 as described in the 'Backlot Prior Approval Covering Letter' submitted alongside the original prior approval application by Stantec (5 March 2025), which states under the heading 'construction and remediation' that:

"Before the site will be used as a backlot, topsoil will be removed from site to allow a 'sub-base' to be constructed, forming of an initial layer of a geosynthetic material, followed by crushed aggregate, compacted in layers. A further stabilisation/geotex membrane will be added with a final layer of aggregate to a depth of 150mm"

2.4 As the site itself is currently comprised of an artificial surface and there are no changes proposed to the nature of the activities that will take place within Backlot 3 to those that are already taking place, there are no new likely significant ecological impacts to either habitats or faunal species, that might occur as a result of the new temporary 5-year planning application. The change is temporal only in terms of the duration of the permitted activities continuing for up to 5 years.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- 2.5 The applicant believes that, if granted, the application for a temporary 5-year consent for Backlot 3 **would be subject to the legally mandatory biodiversity gain condition.**
- 2.6 This section of the Ecological Statement therefore provides the information that must be submitted to inform BNG requirements in accordance with Part 3, Article 7 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)(England) Order 2015 (as amended).

Habitat Baseline for the Purposes of BNG

- 2.7 Notwithstanding the fact that the entire site is now 'Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface' (UK Hab u1c), following clearance permitted under the approved Prior Approval consent, there are provisions in Schedule 7A, Part 1, paragraphs 6 and 6A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), that require the pre-development biodiversity value of a site for the purposes of BNG to be taken prior to certain forms of habitat 'degradation', if these have occurred.
- 2.8 In summary, where activities that cause the lowering of the pre-development biodiversity value of a site have taken place either i) on or after 30 January 2020 and not in accordance with a planning permission, or ii) after 25 August 2023 in accordance with a planning permission, the pre-development biodiversity value of the site should be taken to be the biodiversity value of the site before the carrying out of the activities.
- 2.9 When EPR visited the site on 9 October 2023 to carry out habitat surveys connected with separate proposals for Shinfield Studios Phase 3, the habitats present on the site had not yet been cleared and comprised that shown on **Figure 1** – comprising a mixture of artificial surfaces, Other Neutral Grassland (UK Hab code g3c) in 'poor' condition and Tall Forb (UK Hab secondary code 16) in 'moderate' condition.
- 2.10 Prior to the 9 October 2023, the area of 'Tall Forb' on site had been mapped by EPR as cereal crops, but subsequent abandonment of this area had left it developing into a tall forb habitat. Cereal crop is of lower biodiversity value than Tall Forb in moderate condition, and the transition to the latter was also the result of natural succession following abandonment as farmland. Consequently, the eastern part of the site is assumed to be Tall Forb in Moderate condition for the purposes of BNG.
- 2.11 To the best of EPR's knowledge, the habitats that were present on site on 9 October 2023 were cleared following the grant of the Prior Approval Consent for the backlot (WBC planning application number 243097), which was granted on 14 February 2025.
- 2.12 For the purposes of applying Biodiversity Net Gain therefore, **the pre-development biodiversity value of the site is taken to be that which was recorded by EPR on 9 October 2023**, prior to the degradation (clearance) of these habitats that was undertaken for the purposes of implementing the aforementioned Prior Approval consent. This position is shown on **Figure 1**.
- 2.13 The pre-development biodiversity value of the site on 9 October 2023 amounts to a total of 3.18 habitat units. This is shown in the completed Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric Spreadsheet submitted separately with this Ecological Statement (completed on 7 May 2026). The Statutory

Version of the Defra Biodiversity Metric that has been completed was published on 29 November 2023.

- 2.14 The pre-development baseline habitats **do not include any irreplaceable habitats**.

Post Development Habitats and Biodiversity / Habitat Unit Change

- 2.15 The application for a 5 -year temporary consent for Backlot 3 entails the maintenance of the site in its current form, as shown on **Figure 2**.
- 2.16 The clearance of the habitats from the pre-development baseline on 9 October 2023 (**Figure 1**) and the replacement of the entire area with 'Artificial, unvegetated, unsealed surface' (UK Hab code u1c)(**Figure 2**) **leads to a loss of 3.18 habitat units (i.e. a 100% biodiversity loss compared to the pre-development baseline)**. This is shown in the completed Defra Biodiversity Metric spreadsheet submitted separately with the planning application (EPR, 7 May 2026).
- 2.17 To achieve a net 10% gain in habitat units over the pre-development baseline biodiversity value for the purposes of BNG, a total of 3.498 habitat units will need to be delivered off-site, and secured within a Biodiversity Gain Site that is registered on Natural England's public register of biodiversity gain sites. The details of this off-site provision will be set out in a Biodiversity Gain Plan submitted post consent, for the purposes of discharging the legally mandatory biodiversity gain condition that will be placed upon the consent by Wokingham Borough Council.

3. SUMMARY

- 3.1 In summary, no new significant ecological impacts on important ecological features are predicted from the proposed 5-year temporary application for continued use of the site as a filming backlot, as the site already serves this purpose, has already been subject to clearance under existing Prior Approval consents, and the nature of the activities undertaken is not proposed to vary from that which already occurs.
- 3.2 Notwithstanding the above, whereas the previous Prior Approval consents were not subject to legally mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, the proposed 5-year temporary planning application for continued use of the site as a Backlot is now believed to be subject to BNG and the biodiversity gain condition introduced into legislation under the Environment Act 2021.
- 3.3 As previous clearance to facilitate the Prior Approval consents is likely to constitute 'degradation' of the pre-existing biodiversity value of the site in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and Government Guidance on Biodiversity Net Gain, the date at which the pre-development biodiversity value of the site is proposed to be taken is 9 October 2023.
- 3.4 As a result of the loss of the habitats present on the site at this date, it is anticipated that the discharge of the post-consent biodiversity gain condition will involve the applicant securing a total of 3.498 habitat units in a Biodiversity Gain Site that is registered on Natural England's public register.

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Figure 1 On-Site Baseline Habitats

KEY

- Site boundary
- Other neutral grassland
- Tall forbs
- Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface
- Developed land; sealed surface

SCALE: 1:600 at A3

0 10 20 30 40 Metres

N



CLIENT: Shinfield Studios

PROJECT: Shinfield Studios Backlot 3

DATE: 30 April 2026



Figure 2 On-Site Post Development Habitats

KEY

 Site boundary

Created

 Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface

SCALE: 1:600 at A3

0 10 20 30 40 Metres

N



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