

Temporary (for a period of 5 years) Film Studio Backlot, Land South of Oldhouse Farm:

Landscape and Visual Technical Note



Revision Record

Revision	Description	Author	Date	Quality Check	Date	Independent Review	Date

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Prepared by:

Annabelle Silver-Setchfield

Reviewed by:

Daisy Parsons

Approved by:

Matthew Chard

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1 Introduction

This Landscape and Visual Technical Note (LVTN) accompanies a temporary planning application for the continued operation of a film studio backlot ('Backlot 3') on land south of Oldhouse Farm ('the Site'), to the south of the wider Shinfield Studios development. The temporary planning application is for a period of five years for external filming including temporary film sets with a maximum height of 20m.

The wider Shinfield Studios development was considered as part of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) forming part of a previously submitted Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in 2021, accompanying a detailed planning application for the development of a new film studios facility on land south of the M4 at Thames Valley Science Park, to the east of Shinfield, which was approved (Ref. 211841).

Backlot 3 will continue to be set within the context of the approved and completed phases of the Shinfield Studios development to the north and the existing British Museum Archaeological Research Collection facility, also to the north. Backlot 3 has been subject to a Prior Approval (Ref. 243097) under Class E of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended). A further prior approval application has been submitted to the Council for the use of this land as a backlot for an additional three month period (until July 2026).

The Site location is shown on Figure 0983-S-BL3-10_P5: Existing Site Plan. The extents of Backlot 3 are shown on Figure 0983-S-BL3-11_P3: Proposed Land Use Site Plan, which shows Backlot 3 to the south of existing development at Oldhouse Farm, within a larger field parcel partly in agricultural use and partly in operation as another backlot ('Backlot 1'). Backlot 1 was approved in 2024 and has temporary permission for a period of five years (Ref. 222906).

The temporary permission for Backlot 1 covers an area of 3.88ha, surrounded to the east, south and west by an ecological mitigation zone including landscape screening. The western extents of the mitigation extend beyond western edge of the Backlot 1 area, along part of the southern boundary of the Site of Backlot 3.



2 Planning Policy

Following the submission of planning application (Ref. 211841) for the wider site, updates to the relevant policy for the Site and Proposed Development in comparison to the policy considered for the approved scheme are predominantly related to the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as the emerging Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

The current version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024, and key extracts are set out in this section.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines that *“the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”*, which is defined as *“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. The NPPF states that the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The environmental objective is described as follows:

“to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

Paragraph 9 of the NPPF notes that the objectives should be delivered through the planning process but recognises that planning policies and decisions should “take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”.

Paragraph 39 relates to decision making and states:

“Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”

Paragraph 48 of the NPPF also clarifies that “planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”

Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, with Paragraph 187 setting out that planning policies and decisions should look to achieve the above by *“protecting and enhancing Valued Landscapes”* and *“recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services”*.

Paragraph 188 states:

“Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for



the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (2025)

As of May 2026, the NPPF is in a period of significant transition. The government published a comprehensive consultation draft on 16 December 2025, with the public consultation period concluding on 10 March 2026. While the December 2024 NPPF remains the officially adopted policy for decision-making, the draft NPPF 2025 is a material consideration. However, as it is still subject to potential change following consultation, it carries limited weight at this stage unless specifically directed otherwise by local transitional arrangements. For landscape assessment, the most notable difference is the proposed removal of the valued landscapes terminology in favour of a more structured emphasis on landscape character, alongside new mandates for high-density development and grey belt release.

The key differences most relevant to the Site and Backlot 3 (in relation to landscape and visual matters) between the 2024 NPPF and the draft 2025 NPPF are summarised below:

- NPPF 2024 Paragraph 136 states: *“Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments... applicants should work with highways authorities to ensure tree-lined streets.”* NPPF 2025 Policy N3(1a) states: *“Planning decisions should ensure that all new streets are tree-lined...unless there are compelling reasons why this would be inappropriate.”* This moves from an expectation to requirement, and mitigation strategies must now justify any lack of street trees.
- NPPF 2024 Paragraph 180(a) states: Decisions should *“protect and enhance valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).”* NPPF 2025 Policy N4(1) states: *“Planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...protecting and enhancing landscapes and their character...”* The term ‘valued landscapes’ is removed for undesignated land, shifting the focus to landscape character and objective qualities.
- NPPF 2024 Paragraph 180(b) states: Decisions should *“recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital...”* NPPF 2025 Policy S5 states: Decisions should *“conserve rural character and prevent unsustainable patterns of growth”* by limiting development types outside settlements. This shifts from a recognition of beauty to a more protective requirement to conserve. Proposals must now be measured against how they conserve specifically rural traits.

In the draft NPPF 2025, landscape character is the primary difference relevant to landscape and visual matters. While the concept of valued landscapes served as protection for undesignated land in the NPPF 2024, the new Policy N4 (Protected Landscapes) and Policy S5 (Principle of development outside settlements) prioritise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside more broadly. Consideration of proposals should rely less on whether a site is special and more on how the development conserves rural character.

Local Policy

The current local policy for Wokingham Borough relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development comprises the Core Strategy, adopted 2010, and the Managing Development Delivery Plan, adopted 2014. These are supported by Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) including the South of the M4 Strategic Development Location SPD, adopted 2011, the Borough Design Guide, adopted 2012, and the



Sustainable Design and Construction SPD, adopted 2010. The current neighbourhood policy covering the Site is the Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan, made 2017. Between 2023 and 2026, WBC expects to complete and adopt the Local Plan Update, which will become part of the development plan to 2040 upon its adoption, replacing the Core Strategy. The Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) consultation closed on 13 November 2024. The plan is now in the examination phase following its formal submission to the Secretary of State in February 2025.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010)

The Core strategy sets out the broad spatial vision for how the borough will develop and where development will take place in the period to 2026, and the policies designed to achieve this. It was adopted in 2010 and is a material consideration for determining planning applications, subject to its compatibility with national policy.

Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development states:

“Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that:

1) Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment”.

Policy CP3 – General Principles for Development states:

“Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

a) Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life...;

c) Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.

d) Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species;

e) Use the full potential of the site and contribute to the support for suitable complementary facilities and uses;

f) Contribute 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”.

Policy CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals states:

“The scale of development proposals in Wokingham borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.”

Policy CP11 – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside) states:

“In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:



1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and

2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings.”

Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Plan SPD (2014)

The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan is an important part of implementing the adopted Core Strategy, and adds extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy. Together, these two documents set out how the Borough will develop up until 2026.

Policy CC02: Development Limits states:

“2. Planning permission for proposals at the edge of settlements will only be granted where they can demonstrate that the development, including boundary treatments, is within development limits and respects the transition between the built up area and the open countryside by taking account of the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.”

Policy CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping states:

“2. Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals:

a) Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough’s Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development...;

c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside;

d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features;

e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.

3. Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.”

Policy TB21: Landscape Character states:

“1. Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues.

2. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.”

Policy TB23: Biodiversity and Development states:

“2. Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they:

a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing;



b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation;

c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network.”

Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (2023–2040) (2025)

The Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (2023–2040) is a strategic framework designed to manage growth and sustainable development across the borough over the next two decades. Its primary purpose is to identify suitable locations for new housing, employment, and infrastructure while protecting the area’s character and environmental assets. As of May 2026, the plan is in the examination phase following its formal submission to the Secretary of State in February 2025. Having completed Part 1 of the public hearings in late 2025, the process has moved into Part 2 hearings, which commenced in March 2026 and are scheduled to continue into June 2026. A reserve week of hearings is currently set for July 2026 if required, after which the Planning Inspectors will determine if any modifications are necessary before the plan can be formally adopted.

The Site lies within the emerging Loddon Garden Village proposed allocation (under draft policy SS13) and within an area proposed to be defined as Countryside (under draft policies SS2 and SS5). The Site lies outside but immediately adjacent to the proposed boundary of the River Loddon Valued Landscape Area (under draft policy NE6).

Draft policy SS13 Loddon Valley Garden Village states:

“1. The area identified as Loddon Valley Garden Village Strategic Development Location...is allocated for a beautifully and imaginatively designed community including housing, employment, social and physical infrastructure.

2. The garden village will be delivered in accordance with the development, place shaping, and delivery principles set out below...

Place shaping principles

3. The siting, layout, and form of development, including landscaping should:

a) Draw on and enhance the site’s context, changes in topography and its considerable natural assets such as the River Loddon..., irreplaceable habitats, and hedgerows, trees, woodland and other features...;

f) Incorporate measures to conservation and enhancement of heritage assets, including listed buildings, through appropriate design and the provision of sufficient space...; and

j) Draw on the recreational and ecological opportunities of the River Loddon...to create a multi-functional country park which provides coherent ecological networks, recreational opportunities and active travel connectivity...

Landscape and green and blue infrastructure

6. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive strategic landscape and green and blue infrastructure strategy that:



...b) Protects and enhances the identified attributes of the River Loddon Valued Landscape...;

d) Retains, and incorporates appropriate buffers for, ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees, watercourses, hedgerows, and other trees into the connected green and blue infrastructure of the site...;

Draft policy SS5 Development in the Countryside states:

“1. The countryside...will be recognised for its intrinsic character and beauty, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, in accordance with national policy.

3. All development proposals within the countryside must take a landscape led approach to development in accordance with Policy NE5: Landscape and design and, where applicable:

a) Contribute to and enhance the local, natural and historic environment;

b) Be of a scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate with regard to its use; [and]

c) Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact.”

Draft policy NE6 Valued Landscapes states:

“...2. Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:

a) Landscape quality (condition);

b) Scenic quality;

c) Rarity;

d) Representativeness;

e) Conservation interests;

f) Recreation value;

g) Perceptual aspects; and

h) Associations.

3. Development proposals affecting Valued Landscapes will only be supported where they protect, and where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.”

3 Proposed Backlot Development

It is proposed that Backlot 3 will continue to operate for a period of five years as an external filming area, including a hard surface of aggregate and temporary film sets, with development potential for up to 20m in height across the Site.

The Site currently comprises an area of hardstanding and temporary film sets, constructed under the Prior Approval (Ref. 243097). While this constitutes the current physical baseline, it is noted that Prior Approval conditions require the Site's restoration. However, a further Prior Approval application has been submitted to extend operations to July 2026. Consequently, while this LVTN acknowledges the prior state as a theoretical future baseline, it primarily considers the effects of the proposed five-year extension in the context of the evolving baseline of the wider, permanent Shinfield Studios development.

Development within the maximum parameters will be temporary in nature and changing constantly, exhibiting a variety of materials and colours. Generally, development within Backlot 3 will occupy an area much smaller than the maximum parameters, in terms of both footprint and height, extending across a limited area of the Site at any one time and varying in height.

As a result of the temporary nature of Backlot 3, changes resulting from the backlot will impact the landscape and visual receptors for a limited duration, and the sets will only be present for short periods of filming activity. The continued use of Backlot 3 will include stage sets that are erected and dismantled as required, with the elements present on the Site changing over the duration of five year period.

Backlot 3 is set within the context of the existing temporary permission for Backlot 1, which includes a 5m wide strip of mitigation planting along the eastern extents of the southern boundary of the Backlot 3 Site. This will help to integrate Backlot 3 into the receiving landscape of the Loddon Valley. The buffer will deliver vegetation where planting will mature to create a dense visual screen as well as helping to restore the field boundaries, forming a connection between existing trees on the Site boundary.

4 Landscape and Visual Context

Site Appraisal

The Site's current baseline is its established use as an operational filming backlot, following the implementation of Prior Approval (Ref. 243097). The Site comprises an engineered aggregate surface with temporary set structures in situ at various times throughout the year. Ancillary infrastructure, including a silent generator and waste management facilities, is present, with Heras fencing providing localised screening.

The Site's theoretical future baseline is its returned prior state should the temporary permissions expire without renewal. The Site's prior state was predominantly agricultural land in arable production, a small area of grassland along the western boundary, and an area of hard standing used as car parking in the western corner of the Site.

The current condition of the Site and its surroundings are demonstrated in **Appendix A: Site Photographs 1 to 13**, the locations of which are shown in **Appendix B: Photograph Location Plan**. The photographs were captured in May 2026.

Landscape Effects – Current Baseline

Adjacent to Backlot 1 (Site Photograph 1), Backlot 3 occupies an area already transitioned to filming use (Photographs 2 to 5). It sits within the existing landscape pattern and does not cause the loss or alteration of boundary features characteristic of the Loddon Valley. The proposal is in line with Policy TB21: Landscape Character, as it retains the structural features that contribute to the landscape.

When considered against the current baseline, the proposal represents a continuation of the existing land use for a further five years. The 5m wide landscape buffer associated with the temporary permission for Backlot 1, including alder, black poplar, and willow, will continue to mature, reflecting the character of the Loddon Valley. The continued use of Backlot 3 will maintain the existing changes to colour, movement, and height within a small area of the Loddon Valley landscape. The temporary nature of the development ensures these effects remain reversible. Backlot 3 will be limited to a maximum height of 20m.

The Site is set within the low-lying LCA A2 Loddon Valley, where existing containment limits the extent of its influence. This area is heavily influenced by its proximity to substantial existing development, including the wider Shinfield Studios (Photographs 6 and 7) and the Reading conurbation. The use of Backlot 3 extends these existing built elements south from Oldhouse Farm for a limited time. All built form remains temporary, relating to sets erected only for the duration of filming activity.

Visual Effects – Current Baseline

Backlot 3 is located on low-lying land where the visual envelope is naturally constrained by the flat, well-treed nature of the valley. Views are frequently terminated by field boundary vegetation and woodland blocks.

As Backlot 3 is currently in operation, the proposal to extend to a temporary permission does not introduce new visual elements into the landscape; rather, it maintains the existing visual condition for a defined period. The 20m maximum parameter, combined with the enclosed topography, limits visibility to near-distance, often intermittent or oblique views from PRoW SHIN3 and SHIN4.



Transient receptors (pedestrians) using these routes currently experience views of Backlot 3 in the context of the larger fields to the south-west. For receptors passing north along PRow SHIN4, the Site is seen within the context of the existing built form at Oldhouse Farm. The proposal does not increase the current visual envelope of development in the Loddon Valley.

Near-distance views from PRow SHIN3 (Photographs 8 and 9) show that the existing built form at Oldhouse Farm and the current Backlot 3 occupy the foreground and mid-ground. The proposal seeks to maintain this visual relationship. In views northward from the Loddon Valley (Photographs 10 to 13), the Backlot is seen alongside the permanent workshop and stage buildings of the wider Shinfield Studios site. The proposal appears in the same portion of the views as this established built form and does not increase the horizontal extent of the developed view.

The maturing mitigation planting on the south-western boundary, associated with the temporary permission for Backlot 1, continues to provide a characteristic landscape buffer, filtering views from the south. Visual receptors will experience a continuation of the current transient views for the duration of the five-year permission. Where visible, the Backlot 3 elements will remain below the established skyline of vegetation within the Loddon Valley.



5 Summary and Conclusions

Backlot 3 will continue to respect the existing pattern of the Loddon Valley for the temporary period of the proposals through the retention of boundary features, and its limited visual envelope remains as previously.

The continued operation of Backlot 3 to the south of the existing Shinfield Studios will not further increase the footprint of the built form in this locality, and any structures will only be present for short durations of time which reflects the nature of an external filming backlot area. It will continue to retain existing boundary features and will continue to be seen in the context of the built form at Oldhouse Farm, where it is visible in views north and east from PRoW SHIN3 and SHIN4, as shown in Site Photographs 1 to 13.

The continued operation of Backlot 3 will not extend the amount of the view occupied by built form seen in filtered views through existing vegetation that occupies the Loddon Valley.

In conclusion, it is considered that the Site, to the south of the existing Shinfield Studios and Oldhouse Farm, has the capacity to absorb the continued operation of Backlot 3 without introducing any new elements that are uncharacteristic of the area or extending the visibility of built form beyond the local footpath routes of PRoW SHIN3 and SHIN4, where existing built form at Oldhouse Farm is partially visible in views often filtered through vegetation.

The continued operation of Backlot 3 will not cause the loss or alteration of boundary features that are characteristic of the Loddon River Valley LCA, with mitigation planting (associated with Backlot 1) along the southern edge of the Site creating a strong landscape buffer that will mature to provide further visual screening, enabling Backlot 3 to assimilate into the local area.

Appendix A Site Photographs 1 to 13





Site Photograph 1



Site Photograph 2



Site Photograph 3



Site Photograph 4



Site Photograph 5



Site Photograph 6



Site Photograph 7



Site Photograph 8



Site Photograph 9



Site Photograph 10



Site Photograph 11



Site Photograph 12



Site Photograph 13

Appendix B Photograph Location Plan



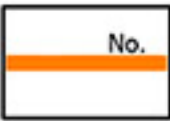


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LEGEND

 Site Boundary

 Public Rights of Way *

 Location of Photographic Viewpoints
(Site Photographs: 1-13)

Sources:
* Wokingham Borough Council GIS Data

Data collated for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Stantec shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.



FIGURE 1

Project
Shinfield Studios Backlot 3

Drawing Title
Photograph Location Plan

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
28.04.2026	1:2,000 @A3	OF	DP
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
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Stantec UK Limited
3rd Floor Arthur Stanley House
40-50 Tottenham Street
London
W1T 5RN
T: 020 7446 6888



stantec.com\uk