

Shinfield Theatre – Proposed Replacement Extension to form Toilets.

Planning Statement

Preamble

The Shinfield Theatre was originally constructed for services personnel and operated by NAFFI. It then passed to the Met Office before The Shinfield Players took on a long lease of the premises in 1973. The Theatre trust has since operated it as a community facility staging a programme of regular performances throughout the year.

An extension to the existing theatre was constructed in 2023 to provide much needed audience toilet facilities. However, the theatre group was led to believe that the modest extension did not require formal planning or building regulations approval.

Shortly after completion a problem was discovered in the construction. The committee of the theatre group instructed a surveyor to inspect the extension. The surveyor advised that amongst other things, local authority approval was required. A pre-planning application was then duly submitted. Leading to the formulation of a plan to rectify the deficiencies. This has in due course led to this application for planning permission for the extension.

The proposal is for a single storey rear extension to the theatre in an area that was formerly the theatre car park. The toilets have been formed partly within the original theatre building envelope in the foyer area. This has been extended approximately 2m in depth to create the required layout for the toilets.

Pre-planning application advice has been obtained (application number 250041) and acknowledged in producing this planning statement.

Location

The site is located along Whitley Wood Lane in Shinfield, to the northwest of the Black Boy Roundabout, and it is within the Major Development Location of Shinfield (North of the M4).

The site is approximately 0.19 hectares.



The theatre building is single storey having a pitched roof with a green mineral felt finish. It is a community building occupied by the tenant /applicant – the Shinfield Players. The building structure differs in height dependant on their internal uses. The theatre hall to the front, south side is higher than the area proposed for the extension which is to the rear of the site which is significantly lower than the main theatre.

The site has developed over time from it own original use by NAFFI. But the principle is more or less the same with a theatre hall leading to reception's rooms, a bar and café, public facilities, as well as back of house storage, workshops and changing rooms.

The building is sited centrally along the western boundary, which is formed mainly by a metal chain-link fence and timber fencing along the southern end. The northern and eastern boundaries are formed by a 1.8 metre high timber fence which wraps around to the entrance that is located along the southern boundary. The entrance has gated access, and the southern boundary is formed by a metal fence that faces the street and public pathway that runs to the south. As noted in the pre-planning application advice letter, the theatre building itself is surrounded by plenty of parking spaces for visitors and staff.

Assessment of Proposal & Key Issues

Principle of Development:

The advice from the Local Authority is as follows.

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.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Act requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the Local Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the Development Plan consists of the Core Strategy (CS) 2010 and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan 2014. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) must also be considered as it constitutes guidance which the Local Planning Authority must pay regard to, however it does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making. However, the NPPF is a material consideration in any determination and must be read alongside the Development Plan.

Policy CC02 of the MDD Local Plan sets out the development limits for each settlement as defined on the policies map. The site is located within a major development location and as such the principle of development should be acceptable subject to other material considerations. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

The design principle of the building extension is to externally match the existing in all respects.

Sustainability:

Policies CP1, CP4, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the CS permit development where it is based on sustainable credentials in terms of access to local facilities and services and the promotion of sustainable transport.

In this instance, the site is located within settlement limits within a major development location and is acceptable in terms of the principles stated in the Core Strategy. It also accords with the relevant policies in the MDD Local Plan.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF (2023) notes that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. NR1 of the Borough Design Guide states development should respond to key characteristics and features of the site, and NR2 states that non-residential development should contribute towards improving the quality and character of the area, and that proposals will be required to justify the appropriateness of the approach in each case. Additionally, NR5 requires that building height should be designed to relate well to the local context.

The extension is to the northern side of the existing theatre and has a depth of 2.0 metres and a width of 8.85 metres.

The extension was seen by the planning officer (as noted in the pre-planning advice letter) on a site visit carried out on 19/02/2025 and it was clear that the extension matched the height of the existing element that was being extended, and this is lower than the maximum ridge height of the building. This ensured that the extension appeared as a subservient addition to the theatre. Additionally, the materials used closely matched those of the existing building. It is deemed that the extension has an appropriate effect on the character of the area, and it also complies with the policies stated in the paragraph above.

Neighbour Amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity and NR6 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that where there are significant differences in height between and/or bulk between neighbouring buildings, that the design approach must moderate any impact.

Overbearing:

The extension to the theatre is set 10.4 metres from the boundary with the nearest neighbouring property no. 3 Cirrus Drive. Given the significant separation to the

boundary, and the modest height of the extension, it is not deemed that the proposal would have a significant overbearing effect on this property or others nearby.

Sunlight and Daylight:

R18 of the Borough Design Guide SPD aims to protect sunlight and daylight to existing properties, with no material impacts on levels of daylight in the habitable rooms of adjoining properties. Given the relative height of the extension and the appropriate separation distance to the boundary of no. 3 Cirrus Drive, it is not deemed that the proposal would impact on the level of light reaching the property.

Overlooking:

R15 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires the retention of reasonable levels of visual privacy to habitable rooms. No windows are featured on the extension and therefore there are no concerns relating to overlooking and a loss of privacy.

Noise disturbance:

There are no noise disturbance concerns.

Light Spill:

There are no light spill concerns.

Odour:

There are no odour transfer concerns.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

P3 of the Borough Design Guide SPD notes that parking spaces are to be a minimum of 5m x 2.5m and there should be 6m separation between the two rows of parking spaces to allow for safe manoeuvring.

The landscaping plan submitted with the application shows the minimum parking provision on the site. This indicates that 20 car parking spaces are available. The access to the site is not affected by this development. The development will be for the current use and occupiers of the theatre group. There is no intensification of the use expected because of this development. Whilst part of the car park has been utilised it is a circulation area that has been lost. There has been no reduction in the car park capacity.

The proposed development is an extension to the existing building on the theatre's car park. Whilst there are trees surrounding the site there are none within falling distance. The footprint of the building as extended occupies what was the tarmacked car park so there is no loss of green space or adverse effect on biodiversity. A planter is proposed to act as a decorative buffer to the extension from vehicle movements. It will be planted with seasonal bedding plants.

Disposal of waste to landfill

The building work will create some waste but as far as possible this will be sorted and recycled. The plan is to retain as much of the structure of the extension as possible. It is anticipated that the foundations will require some further excavation.

However a degree of reconstruction will be required. The timber floor (which has failed) will be replaced with an insulated concrete foundation. The walls will require thickening to add further thermal insulation. The roof will be retained in its current form but further loft insulation will be provided to conserve energy. The internal fittings and services including low energy lighting. Are to be retained and re-used. By re-using the materials of construction waste disposal to land fill will be minimised.

Ecology:

The Ecology officer has not provided any comments on this application.

The single storey extension has already been constructed although an element of rebuilding will be required to attain approval under the building regulations. It is the opinion of the planning officer that it will not be necessary for any habitat and/or species surveys to be submitted alongside any formal submission. Given the nature of the works, it is unlikely that they would have impacted upon protected species and priority habitats.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

The applicant believes that the Biodiversity Net Gain with respect to this proposal is de minimis and is therefore exempt from the requirement to submit a Biodiversity net gain plan.

Flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding. The site and access thereto are located within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal represents no additional flood risk or vulnerability, especially as it has been constructed on an area of existing hardstanding. It is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC09.

Atomic Weapons Location:

Policy TB04 of the MDD allows development in the vicinity of the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Burghfield but only where the increase in density can be safely accommodated. The site is within the outer zone, which is within 3km – 5km from the establishment. As the proposal will not impact the number of people on the site, there will be no impact on the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Burghfield.

Planning Balance and Summary:

From the pre-planning advice letter we are advised that Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out that achieving sustainable development means that development should satisfy three overarching objectives in relation to economic, social and environmental benefits. The proposal is a modest extension aimed at improving the toilet facility of the theatre. In that respect we agree with the officers view which is as follows.

Economically the proposed development would have enabled job creation during the construction period, although this likely would have been very limited given the scale of the development. This would likely hold limited weight in the tilted balance.

Regarding the **social** role, the provision of new toilet facilities provides a much needed facility at the theatre that will benefit both members of the public and the staff/crew of the theatre. This would likely hold limited weight in the tilted balance.

Regarding the **environmental** role, the extension has already been constructed, and it is unlikely that it had any adverse environmental impacts. However, if necessary, there is scope to mitigate and enhance the environmental impacts e.g. through enhanced soft landscaping.

Though there are limited possibilities within this site it is proposed to replace a metal rail barrier with a planter as a vehicle barrier.

Keith Walker

For and on behalf of the applicant.