

5th December 2024

Our Ref: 333100248/A3/MH

C. Howard, Esq.,
Delivery Manager - Development Delivery,
Development & Regeneration,
Wokingham Borough Council,
PO Box 157,
Shute End,
WOKINGHAM.
RG40 1BN

VIA PLANNING PORTAL- PP-13460135

Dear Mr. Howard,

PRIOR APPROVAL APPLICATION FOR A FILM BACKLOT, SHINFIELD STUDIOS

On behalf of Shinfield Studios Limited, we are submitting this prior approval application regarding a film backlot on land to the south of Oldhouse Farm, Shinfield.

This application has been submitted under The Town and Country (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, Schedule 2, Part 4, Class E- temporary use of buildings or land for film-making purposes, for a period not exceeding 12 months in any 27-month period for the purpose of commercial film-making; and the provision of such land during the filming period, of any temporary structures, works, plant or machinery required in connection with that use.

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that 'significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development'. It goes on to state that this should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future, which is 'particularly important where Britain can be global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential'.

This backlot will form part of the Shinfield Studios proposals (a Creative Media Hub of film studios stages, workshops and production offices which has previous planning permissions (Ref: 210387 and 211841)) whereby the focus is upon driving innovation through the production of films, which in turn will create a 'creative cluster' of knowledge and technology, therefore supporting the NPPF's emphasis of sustainable economic growth, and also support the University of Reading's wider ambitions of growth at the Thames Valley Science Park.

The provision of additional backlot space will further support the operations at Shinfield Studios. Providing such additional space further supports the influence of Shinfield Studios in attracting production companies, and, in turn, assists in meeting the current pressing demand for film studio space. These proposals will also present further employment opportunities therefore supporting the economic influence of the Shinfield Studios at a local level.

Requirements as set out in the GDPO

Part E.3 (2) states that this prior approval application must be accompanied by the following:

(a) a written description of the proposed development

The description of the proposed development is as follows: "Backlot for external filming including temporary film sets"

The backlot will be used in connection with Shinfield Studios, with the land being used to erect and use film studio sets (which will form of timber and plaster). Filming will take place from July 2025 until April 2026 of which we currently anticipate minimal night filming (which will require the use of lighting within the redline boundary).

It is anticipated during use, crew numbers will be approximately 200 and cast numbers will range from between 1 and 80 depending on scenes.

Special effects (SFX) will be confined to small fires and the deployment of atmospheric smoke effects.

(b) a plan indicating the site and showing the proposed development

Please see the 'Site Boundary Plan' (Ref: RG-M-01A) which forms part of this application.

(c) the developer's contact address

Shinfield Studios Limited c/o Stantec, The Blade, Abbey Square, Reading, RG1 3BE.

(d) the developer's email address if the developer is content to receive communications electronically

Please can all electronic communication be sent to the writer (Molly Huck- molly.huck@stantec.com) on behalf of Shinfield Studios Limited.

(e) a site-specific flood risk assessment

The Environment Agency (EA) Flood Risk mapping has been reviewed alongside the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) and Level 1 and Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

This Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) concludes that:

- The EA Flood Map for Planning shows that the site is located with Flood Zone 2. However detailed modelling completed by WBC for the 2021 SFRA confirms that the site is entirely within Flood Zone 1.
- The EA Risk of Flooding from Surface Water mapping shows that the entire site is located within an area with a 'Very Low' risk of surface water flooding.
- The areas susceptible to groundwater flooding mapping contained within the WBC Level 1 SFRA shows that the entire site is located within a 1km² grid square of which 50% to 75% of the grid square is susceptible to groundwater flooding.
- There are no sewers within the site boundary. The risk of sewer flooding is therefore considered to be low.
- The EA reservoir flood mapping shows that the entire site is located within an area at risk of flooding in the event of a breach at Bearwood Lake. The risk of reservoir flooding occurring is low.
- The site is located within the River Loddon Flood Warning Area. Site users should sign up to the flood warnings and evacuate the site ahead of flooding cutting off the site.

- In summary the site is at a low risk of flooding from all other sources of flooding.
- The site is within Flood Zone 1, therefore the Sequential Test and Exception Test are not applicable.

This FRA demonstrates that the proposed development complies with national and local planning policy with respect to flood risk and drainage. The risk of flooding is adequately managed, and the offsite flood risk is not increased.

Moreover, a similar position was accepted by the LPA previously as part of a previous prior approval application (ref: 221645). The officer's report noted that the site-specific flood risk assessment was acceptable to comply with Part 2(e).

Others Matters

Construction and Remediation

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.

Beyond these initial enabling works, construction of the backlot will commence as detailed below:

- Construction is currently scheduled to take place between April to June 2025
- 3 Structures/Sets are to be built in this location.
- Structures will be constructed both on site at the exterior location as well as inside carpenters workshops within Shinfield Studios and transported to the location.
- Any structures that need to be secured to the ground will be scaffold rigged to water filled IBC or concrete blocks.
- Construction crew will be briefed as to the importance of working at low noise levels whenever possible.
- A silent generator will be on Site to power batteries for tools and support any other equipment that is required.
- Covered 1100L wheelie bins and a 20 yard skip will be on Site for the purposes of waste disposal.
- The site will be guarded 24/7 by a manned Security team.
- Heras fencing is to be located around the boundaries of the site to assist in screening the backlot.

The structures/sets will be removed after the filming period has ended. To reinstate the land the 150mm aggregate to the geotex membrane will be removed from site. Following the removal of the membrane, the sub-base material will be carefully removed to expose the geosynthetic material. This will then be carefully removed. Following this, topsoil will be returned to the location to match previous levels.

Highways

A highway statement has been prepared by ALP (in support of this statement), Vehicular access would be achieved into the north-western area of the Backlot in a straightforward manner via the existing route through the Oldhouse Farm Estate which serves existing field accesses into the eastern and western parcels, close to the northern boundary of the site.

The proposed works will comprise some groundwork activities at the commencement in order to create a level and useable site. The construction activities would be undertaken following the principles set out in the approved Construction Environmental Management Plan which governs construction activities across the Shinfield Studios development (ALP Ref:A282- R015/F dated January 2023).

ALPs report concludes that the temporary film backlot would not result in any additional trips that were not already accounted for within the May 2021 Transport Assessment given that such movements were already implicitly allowed for within the trip rates which informed the analysis undertaken to date.

The findings of the May 2021 Transport Assessment Report, which concluded that the traffic attributable to the proposed development would not result in any significant impacts to the operation of the wider highway network, therefore remain valid.

Ecology

The habitats of the area were mapped by EPR on 9 October 2023 as part of an Ecological Appraisal linked to wider proposals. At that time the westernmost part of the site, on the western side of the track that leads to Oldhouse Farm, was mapped as UK Habitat Classification (UK Hab) category 'Other Neutral Grassland'. The area to the east of the track to Oldhouse Farm was mapped as being cereal crop.

The south-western boundary, which follows the northern edge of a farm track, was mapped as being a native species-rich hedgerow with trees associated with a bank or ditch, and the boundary at the western tip of the site was mapped as a line of trees (ecologically valuable) associated with a bank or ditch. To the immediate north of the application site lies the buildings and hardstanding of the Oldhouse Farm complex, with an area of artificial, unvegetated, unsealed surface to the west.

Additionally, three trees located within the south-western boundary of the site (EPR IDs: 53, 54 and 57) have been identified as being Trees of Ecological Importance (though not veterans), and will need to be protected from any impacts arising from the proposals.

A ground-level assessment of trees for bat roost potential took place on 28 September 2023. No trees with bat roosts or high bat roost potential were recorded either in or adjacent to the site, but trees within the south-western boundary (EPR IDs: G4, T17 and T18) were identified as having low potential to support roosting bats, and a single tree (EPR ID: T20) in this boundary was identified as having moderate bat roosting potential.

Buildings located immediately to the north of the site were subject to a preliminary assessment for bat roost potential on 28 September 2023, and then subject to a series of follow-up dusk emergence surveys between June and October 2024 in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Good Practice Survey Guidelines (2023). Whilst bat roosts were recorded within the Oldhouse Farm building complex, those buildings that sit adjacent to the site of the proposals (buildings 2 and 3) were not recorded to support any roosting bats.

Bat activity transect surveys incorporating the site were carried out by EPR in September 2023 and in Spring and Summer 2024. The September 2023 survey recorded low levels of foraging by 2 Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrelle* bats along the south-western boundary of the site. Occasional passes of Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* were also recorded.

Overall, the key feature to protect in terms of bats will be the south-western boundary, which should be separated from site activities and protected from increased in night-time lighting.

There are active Badger setts located to the east of the site, on the opposite side of the consented 5-year backlot area, but these are already subject to mitigation associated with the consented scheme, and are unlikely to be affected by the proposals.

Past surveys carried out by EPR in the area and reported previously to Wokingham Borough Council have demonstrated the likely absence of Great Crested Newt and Hazel Dormouse in this area. Past reptile surveys nearby have occasionally recorded individual Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica*, but no other species of reptiles, and it is unlikely that the proposals would have any implications for this species. The habitats within the site itself are not likely to support an important assemblage of invertebrates, although trees within the southern boundary may play a minor supporting role in providing habitat for assemblages of saproxylic invertebrates. The southern boundary is also likely to support nesting birds during the nesting season.

Subject to the adequate protection of the southwestern boundary from direct impact and disturbance (including increases in night-time lighting), there will not be any likely significant negative impacts on features of ecological importance as a result of the proposals.

Summary

We trust that you have sufficient information to determine this application. Should you wish to discuss the application further, please do not hesitate to contact the writer on 0118 943 000 or by email molly.huck@stantec.com

Yours sincerely

MOLLY HUCK

Senior Planner
STANTEC UK LIMITED