

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24 MARCH 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.53 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Simon Weeks (Chairman), Chris Bowring (Vice-Chairman), Gary Cowan, Carl Doran, Pauline Jorgensen, Abdul Loyes, Andrew Mickleburgh, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Michael Firmager, Jim Frewin and Charlotte Haitham Taylor

Officers Present

Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery
Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager
Mary Severin, Borough Solicitor
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Andrew Chugg
Christopher Howard

68. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stephen Conway.

69. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

70. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

71. APPLICATION NO.210387 - LAND SOUTH OF CUTBUSH LANE (WEST OF OLDHOUSE FARM LANE) AND GATEWAY 4 PLOT AT TVSP

Proposal: Full application for the erection of Film studio stages and workshops (for a temporary period of 5 years). To include access to the site via Old House Lane / Cutbush Lane, car parking, ancillary buildings to support the use of the site and landscaping, with a workshop to be included on Gateway 4 plot at Thames Valley Science Park.

Applicant: Shinfield Studios

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 5 to 92.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Correction that the size of the buildings should read 14,080m²;
- Various amendments of recommendations A and C;
- Updated list of plans associated with condition 2;
- Updated document reference for condition 8, and updated Construction Environmental Management Plan reference;
- Amendment of condition 17 to remove reference to hard landscaping as these details had since been approved;

- Additional condition related to a lighting plan;
- Clarification that 30 cycle spaces were proposed;
- Clarification that the Ecology Officer raised no objections and the package of offsite biodiversity enhancements had been secured;
- Correction to paragraph 10, to read 2017 rather than 2007;
- Correction to paragraph 51, to state 200m² of solar panels rather than 200 panels as stated;
- Correction to paragraph 61, to state that 10 blue badge spaces would be provided rather than the 9 stated;
- Letter of full support from Arborfield and Newland Parish Council;
- Two letters of support from the Department of Digital, Cultural, Media and Sport outlining the economic gains of the media sector;
- 4 further letters of support and a further letter of objection from residents;
- Letter of objection from the owners of Shinfield Grange – University College Estate of Management.

Nick Smith, applicant, spoke in support of the application. Nick stated that despite the current economic downturn, the film industry was 'booming', however a lack of studio space was limiting the growth of this sector. Nick added that there was a real and significant opportunity with this application to put Shinfield, Wokingham, and Berkshire on the global film studio map. Nick stated that the inward investment of millions of pounds in addition to the local job creation was significant, which would have lasting long terms benefits going forwards. Content production was the fastest growing industry in the UK, with quarter four of 2020 generating £1.2 billion of inward investment. Nick stated that there was an acute shortage of studio space to meet the needs of big names such as Disney, Netflix and Apple, and the Government was targeting a 65 percent growth which equated to approximately 1.8 million square feet of studio space across the UK. Provision of these spaces would benefit communities, creating investment opportunities and many new jobs. Nick added that a typical production would spend £80m to £100m in any 12 month period, with a significant proportion of this spend occurring locally. In addition, a typical production would require around 500 crew, which would create a number of local highly paid job opportunities. Nick stated that he hoped to be able to bring these benefits to Wokingham and Shinfield, and extended his thanks to Shinfield Parish Council and local residents for their support.

Nick Paterson-Neild, agent, spoke in support of the application. Nick stated that national policy supported the creative sector, which played an important role in supporting collaboration, innovation, productivity and sustainability whilst driving the economic prospects of the local area, whilst expressly supporting additional studio capacity. Nick added that this was the first step towards developing the University City Valley proposal. Nick concluded by stating that the development would allow for collaboration between creative content providers, whilst driving inward investment and providing local jobs.

Jim Frewin, Ward Member, spoke in support of the application. Jim stated that he was broadly in favour of the proposal and fully understood the need for the speed of this application, however it was important to ensure that planning policy was applied equally to all applicants. Jim asked that officers confirm that all due process had been applied to this planning application. Jim asked for clarity and confirmation regarding the officer comment that the development would not have a severe impact on the local highways network, and asked for analysis that confirmed this particularly for the M4 junction 11 blackboy roundabout on Lower Earley Way. Jim queried what modelling and analysis had been carried out to confirm contradictory statements within the report, one stating that there

would be significant morning and evening peak travel patterns, whilst the other stated that traffic would be spread out more evenly throughout the day. Jim stated that this development was proposed to be carried out on top of a number of other ongoing developments within the community, and queried whether a cumulative community impact had been undertaken. Jim stated that the local sewerage system had regularly failed residents in the area, and noted that the report stated that the development would not impact on this further, and asked for confirmation that this was indeed the case. Concluding Jim asked how many 100 year flood occurrences had occurred within the last 5 years, as this area regularly flooded.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Ward Member, spoke in support of the application. Charlotte stated her disappointment that the temporary studios were proposed on mainly open countryside, contrary to policy CP11, when other land within the science park had not been used first. Charlotte added that it was therefore especially important that the S106 agreement was secured in a timely fashion in order to secure measures to mitigate against this, and to agree a plan to dismantle the site should permanent permission not be granted. Charlotte asked that if the Committee were minded to approve the application, that the Chairman of the Planning Committee would be granted full oversight of the S106 agreement. Charlotte suggested that the Planning Committee may wish to put further detail into the landscape and planting, as the studios would be 18m high and would dominate the neighbouring countryside and college at Shinfield Grange, contrary to policies CP3, CC03 and TB21. Charlotte was of the opinion that further conditions should be required, to ensure the planting of further mature trees in order to protect visual amenity in a timely fashion. Charlotte was of the opinion that the current sewerage system did not have the capacity for a development of this scale. On balance, Charlotte stated that she was in favour of the proposals as it would, in time, bring with it economic prosperity to the area whilst creating hundreds of new jobs in a variety of different roles.

Simon Weeks queried whether Old House Farm was residential, queried whether the delay of further works to the science park would reduce the pressure on the upgraded road network, queried whether the longer operating time of the site would reduce peak traffic concerns, and queried what colour the major buildings would be as this would have an impact on the development's impact on the countryside. Christopher Howard, case officer, stated that there was a residential element to the Old House Farm which was located around 100m away from the proposed development. Christopher stated that part of the current proposals included that further works to the Science Park reserved matters would not progress until further modelling had been carried out, which would reduce traffic impact on the roads. Regarding the extended operating times of the site and the impact on the road network, Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager, stated that the daily profile of the site meant a 7am to 7pm usage, which would peak before the normal network peak in the morning and after the usual 6pm network peak. Judy added that the site would create approximately 70 peak hour vehicle movements which could be accommodated by the road network. Relating to the colour and appearance of the proposed main buildings, Christopher Howard stated that they would be dark brown and grey clad with additional landscaping, which made the proposals acceptable.

Andrew Mickleburgh noted the supportive comments from the Parish Council and local residents, and the local jobs that the proposals would create. In addition, Andrew noted the concerns raised by the local Ward Members. Andrew queried what the parking standards were for the site and whether all parking needed to be provided on site by condition, queried whether the modelling done with Shepperton Studios was a like for like comparison, queried whether the additional trips related to the proposals had been

modelled in relation to increased vehicle emissions, queried how far the traffic modelling had been carried out geographically, queried how the proposals were considered acceptable in terms of appearance within the context its countryside surroundings, and queried why the application was for a temporary period rather than permanent. Judy Kelly stated that although the proposals would create 600 new jobs, not all personnel would be on site at the same time. There were no specific parking standards for film studios, however other similar studios had been looked at for comparison. Modelling suggested that 175 spaces would be needed in the worst case, and 181 spaces would be provided. In addition, the area was well connected via bus routes and greenways. In relation to the comparison with Shepperton Studios, Judy stated that this had been carried out on a per metre squared basis. Judy stated that all major junctions which could be affected by the proposals had been included in the modelling. The University of Reading had agreed not to bring forward the larger science park site until further modelling had been carried out, which would reduce the pressure on the road network. Christopher Howard stated that the trip generation would be much less than the amount consented for at the wider science park, which would result in a net reduction of vehicle emissions compared to the consented amount. Christopher Howard clarified that the appearance of the proposals had to be viewed in the context of it being a temporary structure. In relation to the application for temporary permission, Christopher stated that this was a decision made by the applicant, and all buildings would be required to be removed and the land restored by the end of the 5 year permission should an extension or application for permanent permission not be submitted and approved.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried how many apprenticeships would be offered on site, queried how the site would be heated, and queried whether additional photovoltaic panels could be installed to a total equivalent of 25 percent of the energy usage of the site. Christopher Howard stated that the S106 agreement required provision of apprenticeships on site or a financial contribution to the work skills plan. Christopher clarified that the workshop and stage buildings would not require heating due to the specifics of how the buildings would be constructed. Christopher clarified that the size of the stage building restricted the total number of photovoltaic panels that could be provided on site.

Abdul Loyes stated that the Shepperton Studios had very little residential dwellings nearby and therefore may not be comparable in highways terms. Abdul queried whether the expected noise levels would be acceptable. Judy Kelly stated that whilst Shepperton was more remote, the trip rate that had been used was a worst case scenario. As such, the proposals were possibly overestimating the trip rates and parking requirements as this site would have better access and public transport links. Regarding the issue of noise, Christopher Howard stated that conditions 21 and 22 related to this, and added that many loud noises heard in films or television shows were edited in post-production. In addition, no complaints had been received regarding noise from residents nearby to the studios located in Arborfield.

Chris Bowring stated that there were positives and negatives to this application. The positives included additional local jobs and investment, whilst the negatives included development within the countryside and an 18m high building which would result in poorer amenity within the countryside. Chris queried whether workshop 4 had existing planning permission, and queried whether it would be possible to excavate below the site in order to reduce the 18m building height. Christopher Howard confirmed that workshop 4 had existing planning permission under outline consent as a part of the science park, however it did not have consent to be used as a film studio. Christopher clarified that the science park gateway building was 15m in height, whilst the British Museum building was 12m in

height. Excavation below the site would limit access provision and drainage. Simon Weeks commented that excavation could be an option if the application was for permanent permission, however the limited period of use created different circumstances.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that she was largely in favour of the proposals. Pauline queried how the land would be restored at the end of the 5 year permission, should it be granted. Christopher Howard stated that condition 3 related to restoration of the site, and this was enforceable. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Planning and Delivery, stated that this was a standard condition for many schemes of a temporary nature. Connor added that should the applicant fall in to liquidation, responsibility to restore the land would fall to the landowner, the University of Reading.

Malcolm Richards queried what mitigation would be in place for local residential properties should deliveries for construction take place overnight to allow for early morning construction, queried whether the buildings being a green colour could allow them to fit in better, and queried whether any trees would be felled as a part of this application. Christopher Howard stated that apart from Old House Farm, the nearest residential property was 200m away. In addition the buildings would be fabricated offsite and the site was located in an isolated area. Christopher added that construction traffic would not pass any local residential properties. Christopher stated that the proposed materials and colours were similar to the British Museum buildings, which fitted in well with its surroundings. Christopher confirmed that some hedgerows would be cut along Cutbush Lane, however these would be compensated via landscaping conditions and biodiversity net gains. In addition, the remediation plan would seek to secure additional planting at the end of the permission period.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that once the principle of development had been established, it was very likely that an application for permanent permission would be recommended for approval by officers. Gary added his agreement with the statements made by local Ward Members. Gary had concerns regarding the safety of the access proposals to the site, and sought assurances regarding this. Judy Kelly state that access to the site would not be off the junction of the Eastern Relief Rad with Cutbush Lane, as all traffic would go from the Eastern Relief Road roundabout junction via the link road through the science park. Judy stated that there would be no opportunity for vehicles to use the whole length of Cutbush Lane to gain access to the site.

Carl Doran was of the opinion that the temporary nature of this application was messy. Carl queried whether cyclists and pedestrians could still use Cutbush Lane, and queried the need for a 3m high boundary fence. Judy Kelly confirmed that Cutbush Lane would only be stopped for vehicle movements, and would therefore allow for pedestrians and cyclists to pass through in addition to emergency vehicles. Christopher Howard stated that the 3m fence was required due to the operational aspect of the studio, and would be of a mesh design.

RESOLVED That application number 210387 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 6 to 16, various amendments to conditions as set out in the Members' Update, and additional condition as set out in the Members' Update.

72. APPLICATION NO.201833 - LAND SOUTH OF OLD BATH ROAD, SONNING

Proposal: Outline application with Appearance and landscaping reserved for the proposed 57 dwellings suitable for older persons accommodation (Use Class C3) with consideration

of means of access, layout and scale to be determined. Following demolition of existing dwellings.

Applicant: Arlington Retirement Lifestyles

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 93 to 136.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Amendment to condition 16;
- Correction to the correct affordable housing contribution in lieu.

Trefor Fisher, Sonning Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. Trefor stated that Sonning Parish Council were shocked that this application had been recommended for approval, as Sonning was a designated limited development location, and this area in particular was characterised by detached houses with large gardens. Trefor was of the opinion that this development would be an overdevelopment of the site. Trefor stated that a similar proposal at Linkside was refused as the density of 32 dwellings per hectare was regarded as too high, whereas this proposal would result in 48 dwellings per hectare. Trefor stated that Sonning was a very small community, and this development would add almost 10 percent to the total number of households in Sonning. Trefor added that this area was dangerous for pedestrians, and the Parish Council was frequently made aware of speeding vehicles at crossing points. Trefor stated that pedestrians would have to cross the railway bridge with no pedestrian pathway to reach Woodley for shopping and amenities. Trefor added that should this scheme be allowed, many extra vehicles would have to pass over the Sonning Bridge which was already had significant traffic issues. Trefor stated that light pollution was a common complaint for residents, which would be made worse should the application be approved. Trefor added that the neighbourhood development plan was underway, and thus far there were no comments in favour of development at this specific site. Trefor asked that should the Committee be minded to agree to this development proposal, that their decision be delayed until the outcome of the questionnaire be known.

Paul Etherington, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Paul stated that the plan was for large developments to take place on two sides of his property, with the golf course green space being built on and then potentially this development in addition. Paul stated that he had sat on the Planning Committee at Maidenhead for a number of years, and therefore appreciated the large bundle of papers that Members had to consider. Paul felt that it was difficult for Members to get a proper feel for the area, however it was recognised that Sonning had no GP surgery, no dentist, no walkable shops, churches, bars or restaurants. With all of these factors taken into account, this development would create a large number of additional vehicle movements including delivery vehicles. Paul stated that the local rugby club had been enjoying success as of late, and had just built a brand new stand. On match days the entirety of Old Bath Lane, Pound Lane and other surrounding roads had cars parked on the pavements and verges, leaving no room for emergency services vehicles. Paul felt that the lack of local amenities meant that this development would cause many more vehicle movements than stated within the report. Paul stated that although Highways had no objections, they also had no objections to the golf course scheme whereby a fatality occurred a year after in a spot which locals knew was dangerous. Paul was not convinced that there was a demand for these units, as a

similar development in Twyford, close to local amenities, was not fully sold after a couple of years of being open.

Tim Burden, agent, spoke in support of the application. Tim stated that this proposal would meet the needs of a specific sector of the community. Tim added that it was recognised that this was an unusual site, especially when considering the bulk and mass of the adjoining Sunrise care home. Since the submission of this application, the scheme had been amended and consequently there were no outstanding objections from the Council's internal consultees. Tim stated that Highways officers were satisfied with the approach to car parking provision, as it had been demonstrated that there was a low level of car ownership by residents at retirement schemes. Tim added that the access to the site was deemed acceptable, and the proposals fully complied with all standards and policies. Tim stated that the proposal would be set back from the boundary, and there was planned reinforcing of trees and hedgerows in addition to enhanced planting. Tim added that high quality trees, and trees of value, would be retained. Tim stated that full contributions would be made in terms of affordable housing, and the proposals would cause no material harm to amenity values and the character of the area.

Michael Firmager, Ward Member, spoke in objection the application. Michael stated that he was extremely surprised that this application was recommended for approval, as the development was out of character with the area. Michael added that the proposals were overbearing at a height of 3 storeys, in an area where properties were predominantly 2 storeys in height. Michael felt that the overbearing nature of the development would result in a loss of privacy for local houses, especially due to the proposed balconies. Michael stated that this development would result in overdevelopment of an already congested area, especially when considering that the side road to the development already provided access to the busy rugby club. Michael added that the access to this proposed development would be onto the A4, which was an already extremely busy road with speeding traffic. In addition the site had poor bus links, and was located far away from any local amenities which would result in many additional vehicle movements. Michael was of the opinion that the parking allocation of 63 spaces for 57 flats was not acceptable, and there was not enough visitor parking provision. Michael added that removal of trees went against the declared climate emergency, in addition to the resulting loss of natural habitation and biodiversity should this application be approved. Michael stated that there was a strength of feeling across the whole village against this development.

Simon Weeks asked for confirmation that the site had outline planning permission for 6 large detached dwellings, and queried whether the bulk and mass of the adjacent sunrise building made this proposal acceptable. Andrew Chugg, case officer, confirmed that the site had outline consent for 6 detached dwellings. Andrew stated that the adjacent building was a very significant building, and therefore in part formed the context for the acceptance of the proposals.

Andrew Mickleburgh felt that the nature of the adjacent Sunrise building meant that this development would not have a significant impact on the character of the area. Andrew queried why some or all affordable housing could not be provided onsite, queried whether analysis of highways safety had been carried out in terms of access to the site, and queried whether the unsustainability of the site could warrant refusal. Andrew Chugg stated that the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) affordable housing team requested a financial contribution rather than onsite provision of affordable housing, in part due to service charges and sustainability issues. Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager, stated that the proposals would result in an additional 8 vehicle movements in the morning

peak and 6 movements in the evening peak. Offsetting this against the existing 3 houses would result in an additional 6 vehicle movements in the morning peak and 4 in the evening peak. Judy added that the infrastructure could be improved in the area, however officers had to consider the proportionality of this compared to the existing vehicle movements that the proposal would create. As such, it was not for this scheme to provide solutions to existing problems faced by residents. Judy added that it would be a requirement for the applicant to develop a travel plan. Judy stated that the NPPF only allowed for developments to be refused in highways terms if the cumulative impact of them was severe, which was not a sustainable point in this case.

Chris Bowring queried whether Members were being asked to approve the employment skills plan, queried whether the age restriction which allowed for more choice by older people was a positive for the application, queried whether the adjacent Sunrise building was taller in height than the proposed building, queried whether the Sonning golf club provided any context for this application, queried whether the parking was compliant with WBC parking standards, and queried what considerations had been given to cycle parking on the proposed development site. Andrew Chugg clarified that Members were not approving an employment skills plan as such, but instead the applicant would pay for officers to produce one on their behalf. Relating to the age restriction element, Andrew stated that he wanted to make clear in the report that there was no significant weight applied to the fact that the development would be for residents of 60 years and older, and there was no care need associated with the site. With this being said, the development would provide more choice for older people looking for accommodation. Andrew stated that the adjacent Sunrise property was higher than the proposed development, and the neighbouring residential dwellings were lower than the proposed height of block A. Referring to the Sonning Golf club development, Andrew clarified that this gave some context to this application as that development was allowed at appeal despite encroachment into the countryside. Judy Kelly confirmed that the parking was fully policy compliant, and as the parking was controlled by one entity then some of the disabled spaces could be reassigned should there not be a need for all of them. In addition, Judy confirmed that 12 cycle spaces were proposed and this number could be further increased should the travel plan indicate an increased need.

Abdul Loyes queried whether policy TBO6 was relevant to this application, as the application appeared to cause harm to the local area. Simon Weeks stated that any harm caused must be viewed in the context of the adjacent Sunrise building. Andrew Chugg stated that although TBO6 set a higher standard for redevelopment of residential land, this had to be viewed in the context of the adjacent Sunrise building. As such, it was deemed that the proposal would not be out of keeping with the character of the area, and the blocks of flats would be sufficiently spaced.

Carl Doran welcomed the provision of 40% affordable housing, though stated that he would prefer to have seen it provided on site. Carl was of the opinion that due to the adjacent Sunrise building, it was hard to argue that this property would be out of character with the area. Carl felt that due to the lack of amenities, parking provision should be higher as residents would require vehicles for everyday activities such as shopping and healthcare appointments. Carl queried whether this application would return to the Committee at the reserved matters stage if approved on the evening. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Planning and Delivery, stated that as a major application this item would return at the reserved matters stage.

Gary Cowan noted a Wokingham Town site, which had low parking provision, which had to expand the age range of residents and then did not meet parking standards. Gary had concerns that a similar issue could occur at this site, if approved. Gary queried whether affordable housing could be conditioned to be provided onsite. Simon Weeks stated that as WBC officers had asked for an affordable housing contribution, it would put WBC at a difficult position should this go to appeal.

Angus Ross stated his growing unease with this proposal. Angus stated that the proposal was not out of keeping with the area due to the context of the adjacent Sunrise building, met affordable housing requirements, and met WBC parking standards. Angus felt that the use of the term 'retirement' was misleading in this instance, as many residents would still be working within this age range. Angus queried whether there was sufficient turning space for delivery lorries and refuse lorries, queried whether the overlooking element had taken into account that this was a three storey building, and was of the opinion that the unsustainable nature of this site would warrant a reason for refusal. Angus asked that an informative be added to encourage the installation of sprinklers. Judy Kelly stated that the site layout had been tracked for a WBC refuse vehicle, which showed that the vehicle could travel to the southern part of the site and use the turning head at that point. In addition, the access road was 5.5m which would allow for two vehicles to pass each other. Regarding the overlooking comment, Andrew Chugg stated that the Borough Design Guide broke down the side to side and back to back distances. As such, the criteria for flats to dwellings back to back came to 30m. The closest relationship with number 4 Sonning Gate was 31.6m. In respect of Redgrave, the back to side arrangement was 19m, which was in excess of the 15m distance required by policy. Regarding sustainability, officers accepted that there were not many local shops however it was not unusual for new housing to be located this distance from shops, and it was located within settlement which made it hard to argue that it was located within an unsustainable location.

Malcolm Richards raised concerns regarding the sustainability of the site, especially considering that many residents would be of working age which would require them to travel to and from their place of work. Malcolm commented that the pedestrian routes within the locality were not safe, and would not be suitable to travel with a reasonable amount of shopping.

Angus Ross queried where the nearest shops were located. Judy Kelly stated that there were a number of amenities and facilities within the area, and the nearest shop was approximately 1.1km from the proposed development site. Connor Corrigan stated that officers understood concerns regarding sustainability, however it was very difficult to object to the application on these grounds as it was no different from many brand new housing developments. Chris Bowring commented that the sustainability would be the same for existing dwellings in the area.

Due to concerns raised relating to any potential change of conditions in the future to allow the facility to operate as, for example, sheltered accommodation, Simon Weeks proposed officers ensure that any change of conditions would return to the Planning Committee for approval. This proposal was agreed by Members and noted by officers.

Angus Ross proposed an additional informative, which encouraged the applicant to install sprinklers within the facility. This proposals was agreed by the Committee and added to the list of informatives.

RESOLVED That application number 201833 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 94 to 103, amended condition 16 as set out in the Members' Update, and additional informative encouraging the installation of sprinklers as resolved by the Committee.