Development Management Committee 7th February 2024

Item 7 Report No.PG2402 Section C

The information, recommendations and advice contained in this report are correct as at the date of preparation, which is more than two weeks in advance of the Committee meeting. Because of these time constraints some reports may have been prepared in advance of the final date given for consultee responses or neighbour comment. Any changes or necessary updates to the report will be made orally at the Committee meeting.

Case Officer David Stevens

consultations

- Application No. 23/00825/FULPP
- Date Valid 17th November 2023

Expiry date of 11th December 2023

Proposal Extension of existing temporary planning permission for the retention of two sound stages, workshops, and use of existing hospitality chalets as ancillary offices for the purposes of film making and Farnborough International exhibition and conference accommodation, with associated parking and ancillary infrastructure approved with planning permission 21/00187/FULPP dated 27 May 2021 for a further temporary period

Address Show Centre Farnborough International Exhibition & Conference Centre, ETPS Road, Farnborough, Hampshire

Ward St Mark's

Applicant Farnborough International Limited

Agent Tor&co (formerly Terrence O'Rourke)

Recommendation **Grant** subject to conditions.

Description and Relevant Planning History

The main element of the application site is an irregular-shaped area of land located within the Farnborough International Airshow (FIA) exhibition site, south of the Farnborough International Exhibition & Conference Centre. It is terraced elevated land adjacent to the south-east side of Farnborough Airport east of Trenchard Way, south of Conference Centre Hall 1.

The main application site area contains two Sound Stage structures (Stages 1 and 2), which are sited on the existing hardstanding terraced areas alongside where temporary Exhibition Halls 3 and 4 are erected during the biennial Air Show. The Sound Stages have been erected in these locations so as not to interfere with the Airport radar coverage and to enable their retention and use as conference/exhibition accommodation in conjunction with Halls 3 and 4 during the Air Show.

The Sound Stages are rectangular temporary aluminium portal-frame buildings with shallow pitched roofs that are enclosed film set stages designed and acoustically insulated so that

external noise does not disrupt film recording within. Both of the Sound Stages measure 40 x 50m in footprint with a maximum height of 18.7m and are clad in Kingspan (grey) metal cladding panels. Stage 1 is sited at the east end of Terrace 3, orientated approximately east-west and is approximately 35m from residential flats at Bowman House and 39m from Lewis House, both in Sopwith Drive, which is part of the Queen's gate residential development. Stage 2 is at the east end of Terrace 4, orientated approximately north-south, and located 54m to the west of Bowman House and 49m from Rochford House, Sopwith Drive. The FIA Show Centre offices are located immediately south of Terrace 4 approximately 55 metres south of Stage 2.

Also associated with the Sound Stages is a temporary Workshop building and the use of some of the existing Air Show hospitality chalets (a total of approximately 1103 sqm) as Offices used for purposes ancillary to the Sound Stage film-making. The Workshop building is located on the north side of Terrace 3 west of Stage 1. This is a is a rectangular portal frame structure with a footprint of 100 metre long by 20 metres deep; and has a conventional pitched roof reaching 7.7m high. This is divided into four separate areas and used for the creation of sets, costumes and props. The Office chalets are located on the lowest Air Show terrace (Chalet Row A : Units C123-C132) some distance to the west of the Sound Stages and Workshop near Hall 5.



The extract of submitted Site Layout Plan (Figure 1 above) shows the position (all in red) of Stages 1 & 2, the Workshop building and the ancillary Office chalets within the Air Show terraces. This plan also shows the position of gates providing vehicular access to the terraces : B Gate adjoins Hall 1 opposite the Aviator Hotel; C Gate is to the immediate north of Sopwith Drive; and D Gate to the south of Sopwith Drive adjacent to the FIA Show Centre Offices; all of these 3 gates are accessible from Queen's Gate Drive. E Gate and F Gate are situated

some distance to the west and are reached via Government Road and Aerospace Boulevard from the Queens Hotel Roundabout.

Also part of the Sound Stages facility is a high-voltage sub-station located adjacent to the east side of Stage 1 to provide not only the power needs of the temporary filmmaking use, but also any future uses on the site including the Farnborough Air Show.

Planning permission was granted subject to conditions for the film-making facilities described above in May 2021 comprising *"the erection of two sound stages, erection of workshops, and to change the use of existing hospitality chalets to ancillary offices for the purposes of film making until August 2024, together with ancillary works including installation of a permanent substation"* for a temporary period expiring on 31st August 2024, 21/00187/FULPP.

The temporary planning permission allows 24/7 operational activity to allow flexibility to meet filming schedules subject to Management Plans setting out means and measures to control traffic movements and operational activity. Parking for approximately 200 vehicles associated with film making personnel is provided on the extensive hardstanding area adjacent to Stage 1 and the Workshop building; and some further parking south of Stage 2. The conditions imposed by the extant 2021 permission include, inter alia, the following:-

Condition No.1: "The Sound Stages (1 and 2), and Workshop buildings hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition on or before 31st August 2024. The use of the Catering Chalets as ancillary offices for the development hereby approved shall cease on or before 31st August 2024.

Reason - Given the impact of the character and appearance of the structures, reconsideration in the light of prevailing circumstances at the end of the specified period would be appropriate in the interest of amenity."

Condition No.3: No sound reproduction equipment, conveying messages, music, or other sound which is audible outside the application site shall be installed on the site.

Reason - To protect the amenity of neighbouring property."

Condition No.4: "Noise (LAeq) from within the proposed sound stages should be controlled to ensure noise levels at 1m from the façade of the nearest noise sensitive receptor are 10dB below the background noise level (LA90) without the soundstage noise present, in each octave band.

Reason - To protect the amenity of the adjacent occupiers."

Condition No.5: "All plant and machinery shall be enclosed with soundproofing materials and mounted in a way which will minimise transmission of structure-borne sound.

Reason - To protect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers."

Condition No.6: "The rating noise level of any external plant and machinery on the application site, as assessed under BS4142: 2014 'Methods for rating and assessing industrial and commercial sound', shall be lower than the background sound level as measured or calculated at 3.5 m from the nearest ground floor sensitive facade and 1m from upper floor noise sensitive facades, during the relevant periods of operation.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity."

Condition No.7: "Loading and unloading from / of vehicles shall only be carried out on the side of the buildings remote from sensitive premises.

Reason - To ensure the provision and availability of adequate off-street parking and to protect the amenity of adjacent occupiers."

Condition No.8: "The use hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the Operational Management Plan 'Stage 50 - Farnborough International Site Operational Management Plan' and Highways Management Plan 'Vectos Farnborough International Limited. Temporary Film making Facilities and Associated Works Transport Management Plan 215824' This shall include public liaison meetings to address operational issues and amendments arising from subsequent review (See condition 9).

Reason - In the interest of residential amenity."

Condition No.10: "Access to the development hereby approved shall be solely via Gate F as set out on approved plan S50/ 008.

Reason - To protect the amenity of adjacent occupiers."

Condition No.11: "The filming use shall cease for the duration of the biennial Farnborough Air Show.

Reason: - To safeguard the free flow and movement of traffic on the surrounding highway network."

In addition to its use in connection with the Airshow, Hall 1 has permanent planning consent as an exhibition hall, media centre, meeting and conference facility. Hall 5 is used for exhibitions, conferences, product launches and filming. Events in Hall 1 and Hall 5 are operated in accordance with a robust traffic and parking management plan. The use of the Air Show site with a variety of temporary structures for the duration Air Show is a long established planning use of the land.

The Current Application Proposals

The current application proposes the extension of the current temporary permission until the end of August 2028; a further 4 years. In this respect, permission is sought to retain the current 7-day operational activity to be managed through revised Operational and Traffic Management Plans. Although it is indicated that the standard operational hours would remain 06:00 to 20:00 Monday to Friday, continued 24/7 flexibility is required to allow weekend activity to enable production companies using the Stages to respond to evolving programmes and deadlines.

The application is accompanied by an Agents' Covering Letter; a Planning, Design & Access Statement; Daylight & Sunlight Impact Assessment; Flood Risk Assessment; Report on Economic Benefits; Transport Statement; Transport Management Plan; and an Operational Management Plan. More recently, in mid-January 2024, the applicants' agents have submitted a response to the objections raised, a complaints log for the Stages facility for 2022 and 2023, and a revised Operational Management Plan that has responded to the experience of managing filming events in 2022 and 2023. At the time of writing this report, on 26 January 2024, a revised Transport Statement and Transport Management Plan have been submitted

in response to consultation comments made by the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council) seeking more information.

Consultee Responses

HCC Highways Development Planning More information required. The proposals comprise the retention of buildings for filmmaking and Farnborough International exhibition/ conference accommodation until August 2028.

The planning submission includes a Transport Statement dated May 2021 and a Transport Management Plan dated November 2023. Both of these documents are the same documents as those submitted for the previous temporary planning application 21/00187/FULPP.

The Transport Statement refers to extant events that were due to take place from June 2021 when details of post Covid operations were being speculated and were in effect not fully known. This should be updated to reflect the events that did take place during this period along with the attendance/ parking demands and details of forthcoming events that are programmed/ anticipated to take place on the site. This is requested to fully understand the impact from the extant use and whether this has changed substantially to those set out in the original Transport Statement.

The proposed development trip generation is based on a first principles approach, however the site has been in operation since previous planning was granted and therefore actual operational information should be available. The Transport Statement should be updated accordingly to reflect how the site has operated and is intended to operate in future.

The Traffic Management Plan (TMP) makes reference to June 2021 events and what could take place on the site instead of what happened on the site. The TMP also refers to the need to read the document in conjunction with the Operational Management Plan which doesn't appear to have been submitted as part of this application [Officer Note: an Operational Management Plan was submitted with the application and available for inspection by this consultee].

The previous TS and TM made assumptions concerning the forthcoming extant events in May 2021 and the proposed development trip generation, which included all proposed development traffic would take place off peak and managed through the TM. The site has been operational since the 2021 permission was granted and therefore the HA request further information to demonstrate how the extant events and permitted temporary filming uses operated, and for the Transport Statement, Traffic Management Plan and operational management plan to be updated accordingly.

	[Officer Note: At the time of writing this Report on 26 January 2024, a revised Transport Statement and a Transport Management Plan responding to the requests made by this consultee has been submitted to the Council. As a result, the Highway Authority has been re-consulted and also provided with a copy of the amended Operational Management Plan recently received. Members will be updated on engagement with the Highway Authority at the meeting.]	
Designing Out Crime Officer	No comments received during the consultation period.	
Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service	Provides advice of the relevant legislation relating to fire safety and precautions.	
Environmental Health	No objections subject to imposition of same conditions as with existing temporary consent.	

Neighbours notified

In addition to posting a site notice and press advertisement, 190 individual letters of notification were sent to properties adjoining or within a radius of the application property. This included all flats within Bowman House (Nos.1-20 inclusive), Lewis House (Nos.1-16 inclusive) and Rochford House (Nos.1-16 inclusive) Sopwith Drive, being the blocks of flats located closest to the Sound Stage structures.

Neighbour comments

At the time of writing this report a total of 13 representations have been received.

These comprise a total of 11 **Objections** received from the occupiers of Nos.2, 9, 12 (twice), 14, 15 & 18 Bowman House; 13, 15 & 16 Lewis House; and 2 Rochford House, all of Sopwith Drive, raising the following summary grounds:-

(a) The proposed additional temporary period until end of August 2028 is not temporary at all – and should never have been allowed even for a temporary period. How many times will this 'temporary' permission be extended?;

[Officer Note: a temporary permission for the Sound Stages was granted in 2021; the applicants are entitled to apply for planning permission for a further temporary period at any time and the Council are, or would be, obliged to consider this further proposal objectively on its relevant planning merits.]

- (b) The Sound Stage structures are an eyesore;
- (c) The Sound Stages were erected prior to any planning application being submitted and the current temporary permission was granted despite the retrospective nature of the development;

[Officer Note: development considered on a retrospective basis does not automatically attract, justify or require the refusal of planning permission; and works and use of land that occurs on an unauthored basis is undertaken entirely at the applicants' own risk in the absence of a retrospective planning permission being approved. The fact that the applicants have previously undertaken development on an unauthorised basis can have no bearing on the consideration of the current planning application.]

(d) There were nearly 100 objections raised in respect of the original planning application

in 2021 and the impact on residential neighbours was not taken into account and the views of local residents were over-ridden;

[Officer Note: the consideration of planning applications is not a ballot where the number of objections or assertions of the strength of local opinion influences the outcome. Planning applications must be considered objectively on the basis of the relevant material planning issues and represent the interests of the wider community as a whole, not just those making representations. The Council must not be forced into taking an unreasonable and unsustainable position in considering any planning application as a result of any campaign for or against those development proposals.

The 2021 planning application did carefully consider the impact of the development on neighbours. Indeed, the application was considered by Committee following a Members' Site Visit.]

(e) The proposed extended temporary permission is contrary to Government guidance because Class E permitted development for 'temporary use of buildings or land for filmmaking purposes' only applies if this use does not take place for more than 9 months in any 27-month period, and the land in question, or the land on which the building in question is situated, does not exceed 1.5 hectares in area;

[Officer Note: this comment relates to the Planning legislation, which allows some filmmaking activity to take place on land or within buildings for a temporary period of time and on a limited scale without the need to seek formal planning permission from a Local Planning Authority, albeit there is a 'prior approval' procedure involved. In this case, the applicants did not seek to invoke these 'permitted development' rights since the Sound Stages were intended to remain on the land for in excess of the time limit criteria. This is why, instead, a planning application was submitted for the retention of the Sound Stages when they were still under construction in 2021, and the current application has been submitted seeking to further extend the temporary permission that was granted in 2021. The 'permitted development' limits noted in this objector comment do not specify the limit to what can be allowed, simply the limit above which planning permission is required.]

- (f) The Sound Stages have only been seen to be used just twice for filming purposes since they were completed in 2021, but, nevertheless, the owners breached their original planning permission on those occasions;
- (g) There have been on-going issues with persistent breaches of the terms of the existing temporary permission in terms of hours of operation, late night noise and activity, Stage traffic using Gate D instead of Gate F as they should etc, which, although raised with the operators by residents directly, have remained unresolved. It is considered that, given the nature of the film industry, operators are unable to follow the agreed restrictions on use of the Sound Stages;
- (h) A further 4 years of poor quality of life the eyesore should be removed;
- (i) A further 4 years of endless complaints from occupiers of residential properties in proximity to the Sound Stages will occur due to:-
 - Noise and general activity from large vehicles coming and going and airconditioning plant running throughout the evening and overnight – especially during the summer months;
 - Loss of light and outlook from flats : a significant amount of daylight and sunlight, have been lost from nearby flats;
 - Having to look at portable toilets;
 - Upset to neighbours; and
 - Additional traffic;
- (j) The economic justification for the retention of the Sound Stages presented with the 2021 retrospective application has proven to be untrue : the Sound Stages have not generated local employment because all production crew are sourced from companies

based outside Hampshire;

(k) It is suspected that the applicants already had plans for a longer temporary period – but were unwilling to reveal this when the original temporary consent was being considered by the Council in 2021;

[Officer Note: opinions regarding an Applicants' likely future behaviour and intentions cannot affect consideration of planning applications on their merits : the Council must simply consider the proposals the subject of the application.]

 With the proposed increase in Airport flights there will be sufficient income; [Officer Note: Other than relating to land that adjoins Farnborough Airport, the current planning application the subject of this Report has no connection with the planning application also currently under consideration by the Council for, inter alia, proposed increases in the number of flights at Farnborough Airport.

The income that may be generated by the proposed extension of the temporary permission for the Sound Stages is not a matter material to the determination of this application.]; and

(m)Loss of property values and inability to sell-up and move anytime soon. No one is compensating homeowners for their losses.

[Officer Note: These are matters specifically excluded from consideration with planning applications by long-standing Government guidance; and there are no grounds for the Council being liable to pay local residents compensation as a result of making planning decisions that may have an impact on property values and the ability to sell property as a result of the Sound Stages.]

Two representations in **Support** of the proposals have been received from the occupiers of 5 Farnborough Road and 10 College Crescent, College Town, Sandhurst. The following reasons are given for their support of the proposals:-

- (a) Positive boost to local economy;
- (b) Provision of employment opportunities; and
- (c) Netflix, Amazon, BBC, Disney & Paramount have utilised the Sound Stages to date, thereby putting Farnborough on the map with the major production houses : Farnborough should continue to cement its status in this respect.

Policy and determining issues

The site is located within the built-up area of Farnborough. It is not within a Conservation Area; and neither does it contain nor adjoin a Listed Building.

Adopted Rushmoor Local Plan (2014-2032) Policies SS1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development), SS2(Spatial Strategy), IN2 (Transport), DE1 (Design in the Built Environment), SP4 (Farnborough Airport), IN2 (Transport), DE1 (Design in the Built Environment), DE10 (Pollution), PC1 (Economic Growth and Development), PC8 (Skills, training, and Employment), NE5 (Countryside), NE9 (Surface Water Flooding at Farnborough Airport), together with the Council's Car and Cycle Standards SPD and the NPPF and National Planning Guidance are considered relevant to the consideration of the current application.

In originally granting a temporary planning permission for the Sound Stages in 2021, the main determining issues for the Council were identified as follows:- (a) Principle; (b) Visual Impact upon the character and appearance of the area; (c) Impact on Neighbours; (d) Highways Considerations; (e) Ecological Impacts; (f) Economic benefits; and (g) the Planning Balance.

The applicants are entitled to seek planning permission to extend the term of their existing

temporary planning permission for the Sound Stage facility; and the Council are obliged to consider this proposal objectively on its relevant planning merits. In this latter respect, it is considered that a sequence of questions arise which form the logical basis for the consideration of the current application:-

- (a) What reason(s) formed the basis for the Council granting temporary planning permission for the Sound Stages in 2021?
- (b) Have there been any material change(s) in the Planning circumstances relating to the application site and its surroundings since 2021? In particular including:-
- Has the operation of the Sound Stages under the aegis of the approved Management Plans, together with the conditions imposed by the 2021 temporary planning permission, given rise to material and undue adverse impacts on the amenities of occupiers of adjoining and nearby residential neighbours? And
- If so, are there any possible additions or modifications to the mitigation measures that can be reasonably imposed that would deal with and/or better mitigate those material and undue adverse impacts?
- (c) In light of all elements of (a) and (b) above, is the balance of the Planning consideration under which the Council granted temporary planning permission for the Sound Stages in 2021 the same? And, if not the same, is any difference in the balance of the Planning considerations sufficient to justify a different conclusion being reached in respect of the consideration of the current proposal to extend the temporary permission?

And

(d) If it is concluded that the temporary permission can be extended on the basis of (c) above, is this on the basis of the same Management Plans and conditions as imposed with the 2021 permission? Or are amended and/or additional conditions and Management Plan content required?

Commentary

1. Reasons for Approval of the 2021 Temporary Planning Permission -

It is considered that there are three basic, sometimes overlapping, purposes for why granting development on a temporary basis occurs, and is sometimes sought by an applicant:-

- To provide a 'trial period' within which the impacts of a development can be considered and evidence collected of any adverse impacts that may arise : for example, the operation and management of extended opening hours for a takeaway fast-food restaurant;
- Physical development can only be granted on a temporary basis because it is of a type and nature of construction that would not be considered acceptable and/or tolerated for permanent retention, such as in the case of the provision of portable buildings since these are not generally manufactured with longevity in mind and their visual appearance often degrades notably with time;
- Allowing permanent development of land could prejudice and/or compromise longer-

term development objectives for an area of land, but it is considered appropriate or even desirable to allow the land to be put to temporary use(s) in the meantime. An example of this is the provision of temporary car parks on cleared land awaiting comprehensive development, such as part of a Town Centre regeneration scheme; and

In the case of the Sound Stages it is clear that it is the second reason which applies.

The Development Management Committee report for planning application 21/00187/FULPP concluded that: "....it is considered that the identified potential impact on residential amenity and character resulting from the development, when balanced against the economic benefits of the development, is not such that permission for the temporary period, subject to the recommended conditions, should be withheld." Additionally, the decision notice for the 2021 planning permission cites the following reasons for approval: "The Council has granted permission because taking the above into the round, it is considered that the harm to residential amenity and character resulting from the development would be outweighed by the economic benefits of the development." On this basis, it is clear that the decision was a matter of balance between (a) impacts on the residential amenities of neighbours in the vicinity of the Sound Stage development and the visual impact of the Sound Stage development.

In considering the impacts of the Sound Stage facilities with the 2021 planning application, this was principally focussed upon the impacts on visual amenity and the amenities of neighbours in respect of the Sound Stage structures alone, since these are by far the largest structures and are situated nearest to neighbouring properties. As such, the workshop building, being of more modest height and sited beyond the Sound Stage structures further away from neighbours, was not considered to give rise to any material and harmful impacts. Further, the ancillary office accommodation could have no visual impact since this utilises part of existing structures situated even further away from neighbours and on lower land.



Figure 2: Stage 1's impact upon the Queensgate flat's north facade



Figure 3: Stage 2's impact upon the Queensgate Flats West façade.

In terms of visual impact, the Council considered that, although the Sound Stage structures would be approximately 4 metres taller than Exhibition Halls 3 & 4 (when erected) and of relatively utilitarian appearance and means of construction, they were not out of character with the locality, which already contains some other large structures of similar construction and external materials. It is undeniable that the Sound Stage structures have a significant visual impact, yet it was concluded in 2021 that the character and appearance of the area as a whole was not sufficiently harmed by their presence on a temporary basis so as to justify the refusal of permission. In this respect, the Sound Stage buildings are clearly structures of a temporary nature, not even possessing dug foundations, and, as such, they are reversible works only appropriate for retention for a temporary period.

Impacts upon neighbours in respect of the Sound Stages arise from both the physical impact of the built development in terms of loss of light and outlook; and also in respect of potential nuisance effects arising from the use and operation of the facility, although this latter type of impact is considered later in this Report. In terms of the physical impacts on neighbours, the 2021 application considered these in terms of loss of sunlight & daylight and outlook.

The basic question for the Council to consider in assessing the physical impacts of the Sound Stages upon is whether or not the impacts of the proposed development on the residential amenities of neighbouring properties would be both materially and harmfully impacted in Planning terms. This means that the refusal of planning permission is not justified simply because any form of negative impact(s) upon neighbours arise. Instead, the correct test is whether or not existing neighbouring properties would, as a result of the proposed development, maintain acceptable amenities in terms of sunlighting/daylighting and outlook to meet the needs of residential occupation and, as such, it is necessary to consider whether or not the extent of any amenity harms to neighbours is sufficient to justify the refusal of planning permission. Furthermore, it is not the role of the Planning system to defend neighbours against the loss of any private views from their properties where these views are derived from over adjoining land not in their ownership. In terms of the concerns raised about loss of property value this is not a matter that can, at all, be taken into account in considering a planning application. Finally, concerns about the noise, mess and inconvenience of the construction period of a development are also not matters that can dictate the refusal of a planning application.

Within this context it was concluded in 2021 that, although the Sound Stages would have an impact on the sun/daylighting and outlook of flats with elevations facing the Sound Stage structures at Sopwith Drive to the south and east of the application site, this would not be to an extent that justified the refusal of planning permission, especially also having regard to the circumstance that the structures were of a temporary nature and the impact therefore reversible. Furthermore, in respect of operational impacts, it was considered that such harms to neighbours could be sufficiently mitigated through imposition of conditions to apply controls over the management of the activities arising from the operation of the Sound Stages.

The economic benefits case in favour of the retention of the Sound Stages considered and accepted by the Council in 2021 was set out by an Economic Benefit Statement by Planit Consulting, An Economic Benefit Statement by Farnborough International and Stage 50, a statement from the British Film Commission, and a note from Rushmoor Borough Council's Economy and Growth Service Manager. In this respect, in 2021 it was noted that the Covid pandemic lockdowns and restrictions had had a significant impact upon the economy at National and local level, affecting businesses and increasing the level of unemployment. In Rushmoor there had been a large rise in the number of people claiming out-of-work benefits, in March 2021 5.1% (3,110) of the working age population were claiming out-of-work benefits,

up from 1.7% (1,030) in March 2020. The number of 18-24 year olds claiming out-of-work benefits had increased to 8.1% in March 2021, representing 585 claimants in the area. This was a higher percentage than Hampshire (7.4%) and the South East (7.8%). In this general context, Farnborough International Limited (FIL) was acknowledged to be a key local employer and significant economic asset for the Borough, providing considerable direct and indirect economic benefits to the local economy. However, Covid-19 had a significant impact on FIL's business activities : the 2020 biennial Airshow was cancelled and FIL were unable to host any other exhibitions and conferences from March 2020.

The Airshow and other exhibitions and conferences run at Farnborough International bring visitors and provide employment and business opportunities in the supply chain across the Borough. Therefore, the Sound Stages arose from FIL seeking to diversify its operations for a temporary period until August 2024. In this respect FIL demonstrated in 2021 to the Council's satisfaction that there was significant demand for new film studio space immediately within the M3/M25 corridor and that they had received significant interest from production companies seeking space to undertake film-making. Indeed, it is a matter of historic record that the demand for film-making studios was so compelling and immediate that FIL were prepared at their own risk to allow the construction of the Sound Stages from early March 2021 (when the third Covid lockdown began to be lifted in phases until 19 July 2021) in advance of planning permission being obtained.

Film-making was noted to be a booming sector and to offer significant economic spill-over effects. The British Film Commission cited film and TV studios as examples of how creative businesses and local investment increased local employment and shares spill-over benefits across the local areas within which the operate and their supply chains – such as through production company staff using local shops, hotels and restaurants. Indeed, that their contribution to Gross Value Added (GVA) had outstripped that of automotive, aerospace, life-sciences and oil and gas industries. It was also asserted that film studios using the Sound Stages could generate up to 200 jobs for local residents (particularly including young people (whom had been particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic) and that work to provide this was underway. In this respect, the first film production company signed-up to use the Stages had already engaged. with Local Authority with a view to supporting the skills and employment work in the area. The temporary planning permission subsequently imposed a condition (No.12) requiring the production of Skills & Management Plans and the first production companies sought to engage with various local organisations and the Council to encourage local employment opportunities and other linkages with the local economy.

In terms of the highways implications, it was accepted that the Sound Stage facility would result in an increase in traffic to and from the site. The Transport Statement approved in 2021 sets out that around 250 staff daily would be involved with the film-making process, but anticipated that the day-to-day traffic would be less than 200 vehicles, equating to a total of some 400 vehicle trips to and from the site. A Traffic Management Plan was submitted and approved, inter alia, incorporating requirements to/for:-

- Vehicles to use Gate F and car park 3 only;
- Studio 50 to encourage staff/visitors to avoid travelling during the AM and PM peak times;
- Studio 50 to encourage filming crews and support staff to consider active travel modes or public transport;
- FIL to monitor and record film-making traffic movements at Gate F during the AM and PM peak;
- FIL to work with Stage 50 to ensure movements operate outside of peak movements

as much as possible meeting on a monthly basis to review the situation;

- Set up an Operations Management Group where FIL event managers meet regularly with Stage 50 management staff to discuss and review any issues that may arise, including potential traffic conflicts arising from interactions with other Farnborough International exhibition and conference events that may coincide;
- Consider further control measures if monitoring of the site access identifies any issues with visitors accessing and egressing the site during AM and PM peak hours.

Within the submitted and approved Transport Management Plan FIL undertook:-

- To avoid event start/closing times during morning and evening peak hours;
- To provide the local business community, local residents and other stakeholders with information on the use of the Sound Stages and any forthcoming events at Hall 1 and other on-site venues;
- That, if filming activities occurred at the same time as events on site, FIL would continue to dynamically manage traffic movements and volumes in response to activities on the site. FIL would also implement the package of measures for the filmmaking activities in conjunction with FIL's existing event management plan, as set out in the Traffic Management Action Plan;
- That the site accesses be monitored by Traffic Marshalls; and
- The filming use would cease for the duration of the Farnborough Airshow [Officer Note: also the subject of a specific planning condition imposed with the planning permission] primarily because it was intended that the Sound Stage space be used as additional covered exhibition space then; albeit that this also ensured that there would be no cumulative traffic impacts during the Air Show period.

The approved 2021 plans show provision of a parking area for 200 vehicles within the application site and there is clearly ample further space within the site for additional vehicles should a greater number of spaces be required. Accordingly it was accepted that the Sound Stage facility would not result in any parking stress in the surrounding streets or highway network.

On the basis of the 2021 Transport Statement and implementation of the Traffic Management Plan, the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council) raised no highways objections to the proposals.

Finally, whilst the Sound Stages are located close to the SINC (Site of importance for Nature Conservation) consisting of grassland within the Airport and Exhibition site, the Sound Stages and Workshop are built on existing long-established hardstanding areas and, as such, do not have any material impact upon the SINC. Similarly, flood risk and drainage are not of material concern since there is no change in the effective extent of hard-surfaces at the site.

2. Have there been any changes in planning circumstances since 2021?

It is considered that the Planning context of the application site remains materially unaltered since temporary planning permission for the Sound Stages was granted in May 2021.

It is proposed that the Sound Stages and their ancillary workshops remain subject to a temporary planning permission, but for a period of time extended to expire at the end of August 2028, a further 4 years. The temporary Sound Stage and workshop structures would remain located within the established exhibition site containing the Farnborough International Exhibition & Conference Centre. The sound stages and workshops are sited on the existing

terraced hardstanding where temporary Exhibition Halls 3 and 4 are erected during the Air Show. This area has periodically accommodated large structures associated with such events and the erection of temporary structures in this location for longer periods has also taken place periodically since the mid-20th Century. This development generates a degree of noise, disturbance and activity that is not subject to any regulation under Planning legislation, although it is potentially subject to controls under Environmental Health legislation, such as in respect of noise abatement, should a statutory nuisance be considered to be occurring. It is, in particular, to be noted that vehicles that are not associated with the operation of the Sound Stages can and do use Gates B, C and D from Trenchard Way. Ecology and drainage considerations remain the same as in 2021.

The Planning Policy context within which the current application must be considered is the same as that which existed in 2021. In this respect, the application site remains on land subject to adopted Local Plan Policy SP4 (Farnborough Airport) and, having regard to Policy SS1 (Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development), assessment of the development in principle must continue to be considered in relation to the basic presumption in favour of sustainable development, which the NPPF defines as having three over-arching objectives : economic, social and environmental. Accordingly, as was the case with the 2021 planning application, in order for the refusal of planning permission to be justified, any adverse impacts of the development must significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

There has also been no material change in the nature of the surroundings of the application site and the number, position and nature of nearby residential properties and, as such, no change in the way in which the Sound Stage structures relate to neighbour residential dwellings in the Queen's Gate development, most immediately the blocks of flats at Bowman House, Lewis House and Rochford House located in Sopwith Drive. There has also been no change in the position, scale and visual appearance of the Sound Stage structures. As such, it is not considered that the adverse impacts upon the visual character of the area, and upon the amenities of residential neighbours as previously identified in 2021 have changed.

Further, although the Sound Stages and Workshops are temporary structures, they are, nevertheless, of substantial construction and their visual appearance has not materially degraded since they were constructed in 2021; and it is not considered likely that the visual appearance of the structures would be materially harmed by their continued retention on the land for a further 4 years. Nevertheless, it is considered appropriate that the Operational Management Plan now sets out specific requirements for the on-going maintenance of the structures to keep them in good working order and external appearance given the addition length of stay that is being sought.

<u>Operation of the Sound Stages since 2021 :</u> Experience with the operation of the Sound Stage facility since 2021 is a potential area where it is necessary to consider whether there are any material harmful impacts that have arisen that were either not anticipated or have not been subject to adequate control.

Construction of the Sound Stage structures commenced in early March 2021; and they were first brought into use on 19 May 2021, albeit some completion and snagging works continued on and off for a few more months afterwards. With the exception of the 2022 Air Show period between 16 May and 21 August 2022 (when the Sound Stages were re-purposed as additional Air Show space) and September 2023 to the present (when a script-writers' strike effectively halted all filming work globally), the Sound Stage facility has been is more or less continuous use. Indeed, the facility has generally been used by more than one production company at a time to date. The Applicant's agent advises that bookings for the facility are expected to

commence again soon, albeit currently, in the immediate aftermath of the 'writers' strike, it will take some time for film-making activity to re-start again.

Objectors to the current application solely comprise the occupiers of some of the flats directly facing the Sound Stages from the adjoining blocks in Sopwith Drive, whom variously describe having issues with some incidents of late night noise and disturbance arising from deliveries being made to the site via D-Gate next to Sopwith Drive, noise from the operation of air conditioning units in hot summer weather, and general noise from evening and late night (including weekend) general activity at the site outside the Sound Stages on the side adjoining the residential neighbours. Whilst it is alleged that some of these issues have persisted for extended periods of time, the evidence that has been provided to the Council by an objector only describes some relatively isolated incidents that were brought to the attention of the operators and also the Council and appear to have been resolved by reminding the production company using the facility of the Management Plans for the facility. Some of the reported incidents arose from activities not associated with the Sound Stage facility. The incidents for which some specific documentary details have been provided are as follows:-

- 10 & 11 June 2021 when snagging works on the exterior of the Sound Stages were being undertaken by contractors into the evening [Officer Note: technically this activity was not covered by the Management Plans or planning conditions – because the various impacts of site preparation construction works cannot be taken into account in determining planning applications. Nevertheless, the operator resolved this matter by contacting the contractors undertaking the work.];
- Early February 2022, when deliveries to the facility took place, allegedly on a regular basis, at weekends and overnight using D-Gate. A follow-up complaint was made in early April 2022 and, on 24 April 2022 it was noted that vehicles were being unloaded on the residential property side of the Sound Stages [Officer Note: as previously mentioned D-Gate can be legitimately used by other staff and organisations not associated with the Sound Stage facility. However, those incidents attributable to, or associated with, the production companies using the Sound Stages were addressed.];
- Complaints were raised again on 8 & 9 May 2022 about further deliveries/servicing of the facility out of hours [Officer Note: ditto the above];
- Concerns were expressed about noise and disturbance arising from the operation of plant and the preparatory works for the Air Show undertaken at the site from 13 June to 17 July 2022 [Officer Note: these incidents were clearly not attributable to Sound Stage filming activity.];
- A complaint about an overnight delivery to the site on 7 June 2023; and
- A complaint about repair works being undertaken to the roof of one of the Sound Stages on 2 and 3 July 2023. [*This was emergency work for which no warning could be provided to neighbours in advance.*]

The applicants have recently provided the Council with their Complaints Log for 2022 and 2023 (there is no complaints log for 2021), which records contact from local residents that corresponds with the 2022 and 2023 dates set out above. There is, therefore, some evidence of some limited deviations from the Management Plans and planning conditions. However, it is considered that these events do not, overall, amount to a significant and consistent level of nuisance given the overall scale and extent of the activity that has taken place within the Sound

Stages facility when in use. Where the events are attributable to the operation of the Sound Stages facility, these would seem to arisen from misunderstandings on the part of some production company personnel and delivery drivers that have subsequently been corrected. The concerns raised did not relate to the operation of activities within the Sound Stages themselves, but to activity outside them. Further, it is considered that, because the facility has been used by a variety of production companies, it has been necessary on a few occasions to repeat the same learning process with new users of the facility. Whilst this has no doubt been annoying for neighbours it is perhaps inevitable that some mistakes would arise from time to time. Nevertheless, it is evident from the correspondence that there has generally been constructive dialogue between the operators and neighbours throughout and, indeed, the operators have generally been proactive in both providing advance information concerning changes in the tenure of the Sound Stages; and also being responsive in resolving and replying to complaints when they have arisen. It is considered that this is evidence for the Management Plans generally being adequate and sufficiently robust in dealing with the operation of the Sound Stages facility and, indeed, forming the basis for dialogue with neighbours.

<u>Highways Considerations</u> : The Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council : HCC) has requested a revised Transport Statement (TS) and Transport Management Plan (TMP) updated with traffic and parking usage data reflecting the actual usage of the Sound Stages facility since 2021 in order to fully understand the impact of the extant use – and to assess whether this is materially different from the 2021 planning application documents. Revised versions of the TS and TMP were submitted to Rushmoor on 26 January 2024 and HCC reconsulted; and a response is awaited.

The revised information contained in the January 2024 TS indicates that the Sound Stages will have resulted in an increase in traffic movements on the local highway network, however, that these generally occur, as a result of the operation of the 2021 approved TMP, outside the network peak periods. Indeed, it is noted that, based on operational information received from Stage 50, during 2022 the maximum average number of vehicles on site during a film shoot was 120 vehicles, equating to 240 two way vehicle movements per day. This is substantially below the predicted trip generation included in the 2021 TS (400 vehicle movements per day) approved with the 2021 planning permission.

Furthermore, the increase in traffic movements associated with the Sound Stages is also shown to be significantly lower than traffic movements associated with large events at the wider Exhibition site & Conference Centre. The revised TS includes information provided by FIL for events that were held on site during 2023 : there were 31 events on site during 2023, with a total of 78,159 vehicles accessing the site to attend these events. This equates to a quantum of traffic several orders of magnitude greater than that associated with the operation of the Sound Stages facility, albeit still well below the theoretical maximum number of vehicle movements to and from the site already anticipated and approved under the planning consent for Hall 1 (215,000 vehicles per year). It is therefore evident that the Sound Stage facility has had a negligible impact on the operation of the highway network during peak hours. It is therefore considered unsurprising that, whilst the site has already been operating as film studios since April 2021, no adverse issues have been identified or recorded on the local highway network attributable to the development.

In the circumstances, subject to a positive re-consultation response from HCC, it is considered that the operation of the Sound Stages has, in reality, been less impactful than the 2021 highways assessment anticipated. As such, it is not considered that highways issues are likely to have any material influence on the balance of Planning considerations in this case.

<u>Economic Benefits</u> : It is proposed that the Sound Stages and their ancillary workshops remain subject to a temporary planning permission, but for a period of time extended to expire at the end of August 2028, a further 4 years. The applicants' agent has explained that:

".....the additional 4-year temporary period for which planning permission is now sought is a commercial requirement. FIL's purchase of the studio assets from Stage 50 is only viable based on a 4-year financial model. FIL's investment in the studio assets will secure the retention of filmmaking activity for a further 4 years and its associated significant local economic benefits, including business rates, daily spend in the local economy and approximately 250 jobs. In addition, the assets are used during the biennial Farnborough International Airshow and significantly enhance the exhibition space on offer during this world class event. Without FIL's investment, the filmmaking activity, its associated economic benefits, and provision of additional high-quality accommodation for the Airshow would be lost."

In terms of demand for film production facilities at Farnborough, the Sound Stages, which are marketed as 'Farnborough Film Studios', will soon be prepared for this year's Air Show and the period from now until May 2024 is now too short for most companies to schedule and complete film productions. Therefore, continual film production activity is now anticipated to recommence at Farnborough from September 2024 after the Air Show. Nevertheless, Stage 50 has provided evidence of significant on-going market demand from co-productions that require boutique studio space such as that provided by the Farnborough Sound Stages, albeit due to the agile nature of the film industry, co-productions are not normally booked years in ahead they are typically scheduled months ahead. Accordingly, it is difficult to be specific about the extent of usage and by whom. Nevertheless, Farnborough Film Studios are well positioned for some of the most popular shooting locations near London diverse and adaptable options for period and contemporary properties, as well as build spaces and doubles for overseas locations. These nearby locations, all within a 15 mile radius of Farnborough, include the Aldershot Garrison, Bourne Woods (south of Farnham), Hankley Common, Hawley Lake & Woods, Minley Manor, Bramshill House, Blackbushe Airport, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Swinley Forest, Royal Holloway University, Wellington College, Ascot Racecourse, the McLaren Technology Centre and Dunsfold Aerodrome; and not to mention the adjacent Farnborough Airport, Farnborough Business Park and the Wind Tunnels, and the Farnborough International Exhibition & Convention Centre. Given the locational advantages offered by Farnborough and the on-going burgeoning state of the film-making industry in the UK, the significant interest in the facility from several film production companies from September 2024 onwards, and the experience since 2021 of the Sound Stages being used continuously (aside from the 2022 Airshow period) before the writers' strike, it is considered likely that the Farnborough Sound Stages facility would be well utilised for the full extent of the additional 4year temporary period now sought.

It is considered that the experience gained from the use of the Sound Stages to date will enable local employment opportunities to be realised on a more organised basis than has been the case since 2021, in part because the Council now has an Employment & Skills Officer in post. For a significant portion of the time that the Sound Stages have been in operation the Council did not have this post filled following the resignation of the former Skills & Employment Project Support Officer.

3. The 2024 Planning Balance and its significance -

In order for the refusal of planning permission to be justified, any adverse impacts of the development must significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits having regard to the

presumption in favour of sustainable development and adopted Local Plan Policy SS1. It is considered that the consideration of some of the key planning issues in this respect are inevitably subject to some changes in content since the 2021 planning permission as set out and examined in the preceding Report. Nevertheless, it is considered that a credible economic case exists to justify the extension of the temporary permission for a further 4 years and that the harms that arise remain insufficient to outweigh these benefits.

Furthermore, it is considered that the limited operational harms to neighbours remain possible to mitigate adequately through imposition of conditions and the implementation of revised Management Plans.

4. Planning Conditions and the Management Plans -

Stage 50 remains the operator for the Sound Stages facility and will implement the Management Plans on a day-to-day basis, but the applicants (Farnborough International Limited : FIL) have now taken-over overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Management Plans. Revised Management Plans have been submitted as a result of comments and queries raised by both neighbours in their representations and also from the case-officer during the consideration of the application – and further amendments to further enhance the Plans in the light of the current proposals and the experience of the operation of the facility since May 2021 are also considered necessary as follows:-

- Explicit identification and acknowledgement of the roles and responsibilities of FIL and Stage 50 and any successors.
- Identification of points of contact within FIL and Stage 50.
- Regular contact and engagement with neighbours.
- Records of all neighbour complaints and the response to them to be made available to the Council and County Council annually;
- A positive affirmation that all traffic associated with the Sound Stages facility shall use Gate F only.
- Use of 'white noise' reversing buzzers only on all vehicles servicing the Sound Stages facility.
- A requirement for the on-going maintenance of the temporary structures to keep them in good working order and external appearance given the addition length of stay that is being sought.
- Procedures for the annual evaluation and review of the Management Plans.

It is possible that HCC Highways may request amendments to the Transport Management Plan.

The suggested planning conditions to be imposed are set out following the Full Recommendation below.

Conclusions -

Having regard to the presumption in favour of sustainable development it is considered that the planning harms that arise in terms of the visual appearance and relationships with neighbours continue to remain insufficient to outweigh the likely economic benefits to arise from the proposed continuation of the development for a further temporary period. The proposal is thereby considered acceptable having regard to Policy SS1 of the adopted Rushmoor Local Plan (2014-2032).

Full Recommendation

It is recommended that **subject** to no objections being raised by the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council) in respect of the highways considerations of the proposals and the addition of any condition(s) requested in that connection, the Head of Planning in consultation with the Chairman be authorised to **GRANT** planning permission subject to the following conditions and informatives:-

1 The Sound Stages (1 and 2), and Workshop building hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition on or before the 31st August 2028. The use of the catering chalets and ancillary offices for the development hereby approved shall also cease on or before the 31st August 2028.

Reason - Given the impact of the character and appearance of the temporary structures, reconsideration in the light of prevailing circumstances at the end of the specified period would be appropriate in the interest of amenity.

The permission hereby granted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved drawings Drawing numbers: 158903/TOR1 - Location Plan; S50/001 - Stage 1 floor plan; S50/002 - Stage 2 floor plan; S50/003 - Workshop floor plan; S50/004 - Stage 1 Elevations; S50/005 - Stage 2 Elevations; S50/006 - workshop elevations; S50/008 - site plan (showing gates); S50/010 - Offices layout; S50/011 - Offices layout; & S50/ 013 - site plan; and Terence ORourke Planning, Design & Access Statement; Stage 50 Operational Management Plan [Version to be updated]; SLR Consulting Ltd. Transport Statement Revision 02 dated 25 January 2024; and SLR Consulting Ltd. Transport Management Plan Revision 01 dated 25 January 2024.

Reason - To ensure the development is implemented in accordance with the permission granted.

3 No sound reproduction equipment, conveying messages, music, or other sound which is audible outside the application site shall be installed on the site.

Reason - To protect the amenity of neighbouring property.

4 Noise (LAeq) from within the Sound Stages should be controlled to ensure noise levels at 1m from the façade of the nearest noise sensitive receptor are 10dB below the background noise level (LA90) without the sound stage noise present, in each octave band.

Reason - To protect the amenity of the adjacent occupiers.

5 All plant and machinery shall be enclosed with soundproofing materials and mounted in

a way which will minimise transmission of structure-borne sound.

Reason - To protect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

6 The rating noise level of any external plant and machinery on the application site, as assessed under BS4142: 2014 'Methods for rating and assessing industrial and commercial sound', shall be lower than the background sound level as measured or calculated at 3.5 m from the nearest ground floor sensitive facade and 1m from upper floor noise sensitive facades, during the relevant periods of operation.

Reason - In the interest of residential amenity.

7 Loading and unloading from / of vehicles shall only be carried out on the side of the buildings remote from sensitive premises. All vehicles servicing the Sound Stages facility shall use 'white noise' reversing buzzers only.

Reason - To ensure the provision and availability of adequate off-street parking.

- 8 The Sound Stages (1 and 2) and ancillary facilities and associated external areas hereby permitted shall be operated at all times in full accordance with the Operational Management Plan and Traffic Management Plan hereby permitted.
- 9 The Sound Stages facility hereby approved shall only be accessed via gate F as set out on approved plan S50/ 008.

Reason - To protect the amenity of the adjacent occupiers.

10 The filming use shall cease during the timespan of the bi-annual Farnborough Air Show.

Reason: In the interest of the highway network.

11 No external production filming and/or construction and operation of sets shall take place within the application site outside of the Sound Stage buildings hereby permitted.

Reason - To protect the amenity of the adjacent occupiers.

12 Prior to the re-occupation of the Sound Stages a revised Skills & Management Plan to be implemented as appropriate by all occupiers of the Sound Stages facility shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason - To maximise opportunities for associated of skills and employment in the local area.

Informatives

1 INFORMATIVE - **REASONS FOR APPROVAL**- The Council has granted permission because:-

Having regard to the presumption in favour of sustainable development it is considered that the planning harms that arise in terms of the visual appearance and relationships with neighbours continue to remain insufficient to outweigh the likely economic benefits to arise from the proposed continuation of the development for a further temporary period. The proposal is thereby considered acceptable having regard to Policy SS1 of the adopted Rushmoor Local Plan (2014-2032).

It is therefore considered that subject to compliance with the attached conditions, and taking into account all other material planning considerations, including the provisions of the development plan, the proposal would be acceptable. This also includes a consideration of whether the decision to grant permission is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

- 2 INFORMATIVE Your attention is specifically drawn to the conditions marked *. These condition(s) require either the submission and approval of details, information, drawings etc.by the Local Planning Authority BEFORE WORKS START ON SITE, BEFORE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL ARE CARRIED OUT or, require works to be carried out BEFORE COMMENCEMENT OF USE OR FIRST OCCUPATION OF ANY BUILDING. Development started, carried out or occupied without first meeting the requirements of these conditions is effectively development carried out WITHOUT PLANNING PERMISSION. The Council will consider the expediency of taking enforcement action against any such development and may refer to any such breach of planning control when responding to local searches. Submissions seeking to discharge conditions or requests for confirmation that conditions have been complied with must be accompanied by the appropriate fee.
- 3 INFORMATIVE The Local Planning Authority's commitment to working with the applicants in a positive and proactive way is demonstrated by its offer of pre-application discussion to all, and assistance in the validation and determination of applications through the provision of clear guidance regarding necessary supporting information or amendments both before and after submission, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.





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