



Examination of Wokingham Local Plan Update 2023-2040

Stage 2 Hearing Statement

Matter 1 (Spatial Strategy) – Issues 1, 2 and
5

March 2026

Prepared for:
Shinfield Studios Limited

Prepared by:
Stantec

Project Number:
333100248

Registered Office: Stantec House, Kelburn Court,
Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6UT

Office Address: 10th Floor, The Blade, Abbey Square, Reading
RG1 3BE Email: reading.support@stantec.com

Document Control Sheet

Issued by	Stantec UK Limited stantec.com/uk	+44 118 943 0000
Client	Shinfield Studios Limited	
Project name	Shinfield Studios	
Title	Examination of Wokingham Local Plan Update 2023-2040 - Stage 2 Hearing Statement - Matter 1 (Spatial Strategy) – Issues 1, 2 and 5	
Doc ref	P2a	
Project number	333100248	
Status	Final	
Date	03/03/26	

Document production record

Issue number	P2a	Name
Prepared by	[REDACTED]	Neve Lansdown
Checked by		Mark Owen
Approved by		Mark Owen

Document revision record

Issue number	Status	Date	Revision details
P2	Draft	27/02/26	
P2a	Final	03/03/26	

Stantec UK Limited has prepared this report in accordance with the instructions of the above-named client for their sole and specific use. Any third parties who may use the information contained herein do so at their own risk.



Contents

1 Introduction.....4
 1.1 Introduction4

2 Issue 1 – Policy SS1: Sustainable development principles5
 2.1 Q1) Is the proposed modification MM5 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS1? ...5
 2.2 Q2) Is the policy otherwise positively prepares, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?5

3 Issue 2- Policy SS2: Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy6
 3.1 Q3) Are the spatial strategy and overall distribution of development justified by the evidence base and is this consistent with national planning policy?6
 3.2 Q4) Is the settlement hierarchy appropriate and consistent with the evidence base? Are all of the settlements listed in the correct level within the hierarchy?6
 3.3 Q5) Is the Council’s Settlement Boundaries Review [OD2] robust and based on a consistent methodology?6
 3.4 Q6) Are proposed modifications MM6-MM8 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS2?7
 3.5 Q7) Is the policy otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?7

4 Issue 5- Policy SS5: Development in the countryside.....8
 4.1 Q17) Should Policy SS5 cross-refer to the exceptions allowed for under Policies SS3 and SS4? Is the Plan internally consistent in this regard?8
 4.2 Q18) Are proposed modifications MM11-MM15 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS5?8
 4.3 Q19) Is the policy otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?8

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Shinfield Studios land to be included within Settlement Boundary**
- Appendix 2 – Location Plan of external backlot area with temporary planning permission**
- Appendix 3 – Location Plan of prior approval external backlot area**



1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This hearing statement for Matter 1 'Spatial Strategy' of the Examination of the Wokingham Local Plan Update 2023-2040 has been prepared by Stantec UK&I on behalf of Shinfield Studios Limited (SSL).

1.1.2 This Hearing Statement responds to Questions under Issues 1,2, and 5 of Matter 1.



2 Issue 1 – Policy SS1: Sustainable development principles

2.1 Q1) Is the proposed modification MM5 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS1?

2.2 The proposed modification MM5 is consistent with national policy. As explained in answer to Question 2, other amendments are required to the draft policy to ensure it is consistent with national policy and therefore sound.

2.3 Q2) Is the policy otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

2.3.1 Part 1 l), the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that for buildings or land within conservation areas, “*special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area*” (see paragraph 72). Moreover, paragraph 203 of the NPPF states that “*when determining applications, local planning authorities (LPAs) should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets*”. Therefore, the wording of Criterion 1 l) is not consistent with national policy, as it employs more onerous requirements, stating that authorities ‘will be expected to’, rather than ‘take account of the desirability’.

2.3.2 In order to make this policy sound, the wording should be amended to state ‘*take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing*’, to ensure consistency with both national policy and statutory tests as stated above. This would also align with the flexible wording of draft policy DH5 (Part 2), which uses the term ‘*and, wherever possible*’.

2.3.3 Part 1 m) of draft policy SS1 states development proposals will be expected ‘*to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the area*’. Paragraph 180 (b) of the NPPF only recognises “*the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*” and paragraph 180 (a) only states the protection and enhancement of “*valued landscapes*”, while paragraph 180 (c) acknowledges that the character of the undeveloped coast should simply be ‘*maintained*’. Elevating the need to enhance all landscapes, regardless of their quality or importance, introduces a higher test than national policy and is therefore not effective and unsound. Consequently, a modification is required to Part 1 m) to state ‘*conserve and, where possible, enhance*’.

2.3.4 The following amendments are therefore required to the policy to make it sound:

1. *As appropriate to their nature, development proposals will be expected to:*
a) ...

l) ***Take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing*** ~~*conserve and enhance*~~ *the significance of heritage assets, including their wider settings;*

m) *Conserve and, **where possible**, enhance the landscape character of the area, with particular attention paid toward significant landmarks and toward landscape attributes and features;*



3 Issue 2- Policy SS2: Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy

3.1 Q3) Are the spatial strategy and overall distribution of development justified by the evidence base and is this consistent with national planning policy?

3.1.1 No comment.

3.2 Q4) Is the settlement hierarchy appropriate and consistent with the evidence base? Are all of the settlements listed in the correct level within the hierarchy?

3.2.1 No comment.

3.3 Q5) Is the Council's Settlement Boundaries Review [OD2] robust and based on a consistent methodology?

3.3.1 The Council's Settlement Boundaries Review (OD2) identifies the extent of the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park that lies within a modest settlement boundary. Although the identification of the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park which includes Shinfield Studios, within a settlement boundary is supported; to be effective, the extent of the settlement boundary needs to be extended to include further land, used as an external backlot, that currently supports the operations of Shinfield Studios and land for future growth of the Studios. This land is identified in **Appendix 1** to this statement.

3.3.2 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states "*Planning policies.....should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt.*" Furthermore, paragraph 87 of the NPPF states "*Planning policies.....should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries.....*".

3.3.3 The UK Government's 2025 Modern Industrial Strategy identifies the creative industries, including film and television as one of the eight "growth-driving" sectors. The Strategy commits to long-term investment, infrastructure development, and skills enhancement to support regional creative clusters. Shinfield Studios, as a major production hub within the Thames Valley, is well-positioned to benefit from this national policy emphasis, reinforcing its role in attracting inward investment and delivering high-value employment.

3.3.4 This growth potential is identified within the Economic Strategy for Wokingham 2025-2035 (WBC48) which refers to an emerging creative sector across Berkshire, with Shinfield Studios providing an opportunity to extend that creative cluster within Berkshire. On page 14 of the Economic Strategy for Wokingham 2025-2035 (WBC48) it states that the Shinfield Studios "*.....is one of the largest studio complexes in the UK and a powerhouse of film, TV and innovation.*"

3.3.5 The Employment Land Needs Review (ED2) confirms at paragraph 1.3 that "*the Borough has seen a substantial upturn in interest from the film and media sector*". This has been assisted by the establishment of Shinfield Studios. Paragraph 1.12 of the Employment Land Needs Review (ED2) goes on to state "*Growth in jobs and floorspace requirements can be associated with expanded or new sectors developing, and in this regard the very active TV and film sector in Wokingham is very likely to drive positive growth and industrial floorspace requirements.*"

3.3.6 The impact of Shinfield Studios on the local economy, as well as supporting the UK's creative industry, is therefore evident.



- 3.3.7 The land identified at Appendix 1 includes a backlot area for external filming which is required to support the operations of the production companies that use the Studios. This backlot area received temporary (for a period of five years) planning permission (Application Ref: 222906) in 2024 (Location Plan included at **Appendix 2**). Prior to this, prior approval (Application Ref: 221645) was also given to use part of this land for external filming for a temporary period. To the west of the backlot land which has temporary planning permission, a further prior approval (Application Ref: 243097) was given in 2025 for external filming for a temporary period (Location Plan included at **Appendix 3**). The other land identified within Appendix 1 could support future operations of the Studios such as additional workshop space, alongside the intention to have a permanent backlot.
- 3.3.8 On this basis, a significant element of the land identified in Appendix 1 is, following planning permission, being used as an external backlot to support the operations of the Studio. The other elements of the land could support the future operations of the Studios. It is therefore considered that the settlement boundary of the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park should be extended to include the land identified at Appendix 1 to ensure the settlement boundary is positively prepared and effective which supports the principle of economic growth at the Park.

3.4 Q6) Are proposed modifications MM6-MM8 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS2?

- 3.4.1 No comment.

3.5 Q7) Is the policy otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

- 3.5.1 As per the response to Question 5 above, to ensure the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park settlement boundary is positively prepared and effective, which supports the principle of economic growth at the Park, the extent of the settlement boundary should be extended to include the land identified at Appendix 1 which is partly used (as an external backlot) to support the operations of Shinfield Studios, plus includes land which could support the future growth of the Studios. It is also considered that the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park Core Employment Area should be extended to include this land (a hearing statement has been submitted regarding Matter 13 (Policy ER1: Core Employment Areas)).

4 Issue 5- Policy SS5: Development in the countryside

4.1 Q17) Should Policy SS5 cross-refer to the exceptions allowed for under Policies SS3 and SS4? Is the Plan internally consistent in this regard?

4.1.1 No comment.

4.2 Q18) Are proposed modifications MM11-MM15 necessary to ensure the clarity and soundness of Policy SS5?

4.2.1 No comment.

4.3 Q19) Is the policy otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

4.3.1 Part 2 of Policy SS5 states that development proposals in the countryside 'will in general only be supported' for the specific types of development outlined in the policy. The policy is not considered effective as it needs to acknowledge that there may be other types of development that can be considered on their merits beyond those set out in the criteria of the policy, and that the criteria outlined in Part 2 of the policy is not a closed list. The opening sentence should be modified to remove the word 'only' which infers that the types of development are limited to those expressed in the policy. This will ensure the policy is positively prepared and remains aspirational and would be effective in accepting that there may be a need to accommodate other types of development not listed in the policy if material considerations indicate a need for such development to be located within the countryside.

4.3.2 The proposed amendment to this draft policy is shown below.

1. *Development proposals in the countryside will in general ~~only~~ be supported for the types of development set out below:*



Appendix 1 - Shinfield Studios land to be included within Settlement Boundary



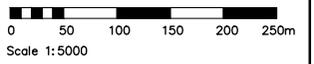
01.01

POLICY SS2: SPATIAL STRATEGY AND SETTLEMENT





© ABLEY LETCHFORD PARTNERSHIP LTD.
 This drawing should not be reproduced without consent.



Rev	Date	Description	Drawn	Checked
P2	09.22	RED LINE UPDATE	AG	PJ
P1	08.22	FIRST ISSUE	LPA	LPA

ABLEY LETCHFORD PARTNERSHIP
Consulting Engineers

3 Tealgate, Charnham Park
 Hungerford, Berkshire RG17 0YT
 www.alpce.co.uk Tel: 01488 684390

Client
SHINFIELD STUDIOS

Project
FILM STUDIO STAGES & WORKSHOPS

Title
PROPOSED BACKLOT LOCATION PLAN

Status

Scale	Date	Drawn	Checked
1:5000 @ A3	AUG 22	LPA	LPA
Drawing No	Revision		
A282-092			P2



The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd
A Amended scale	28.10.24	ALC	MO

 Boundary
(1.04ha / 2.57ac)



Project
SHINFIELD STUDIOS

Drawing Title
Boundary Plan

Date	Scale	Drawn by	Check by
14.10.24	1:1,250 @A3	ALC	MO
Project No	Drawing No	Revision	
333100248	RG-M-01	A	



Stantec UK Limited
The Blade
Abbey Square
Reading
RG1 3BE
T: 0118 9430 000



stantec.com/uk