

## **PLANNING, DESIGN & STATEMENT**

**Extension to Gymnasium to provide extra flexible studio space and plant area together with other associated works including landscaping**

**Site: Soho Farmhouse, Great Tew**



**For Applicant: Soho House UK Limited**

**June 2021**

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared by JPPC Chartered Town Planners to accompany an application for planning permission in respect of the development described below. It should be read in conjunction with the other specialist reports, plans and drawings listed in the application covering letter.
- 1.2 The application seeks planning permission for an extension of the existing gymnasium to provide extra flexible studio space and a plant area plus other associated works including landscaping.
- 1.3 This Statement will provide a contextual analysis of the site before giving an overview of the background to the Soho Farmhouse development. It will then describe the proposals and the background to them before detailing the pre-application consultations which have taken place between the applicant and the local planning authority. The planning policy issues raised by the proposals will then be considered.

## 2.0 The Application Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 Soho Farmhouse is located on part of Great Tew Estate that covers approximately 120 acres (50 hectares) and is situated approximately 8 kilometres east of Chipping Norton on the east side of the B4022 connecting Charlbury and Banbury.

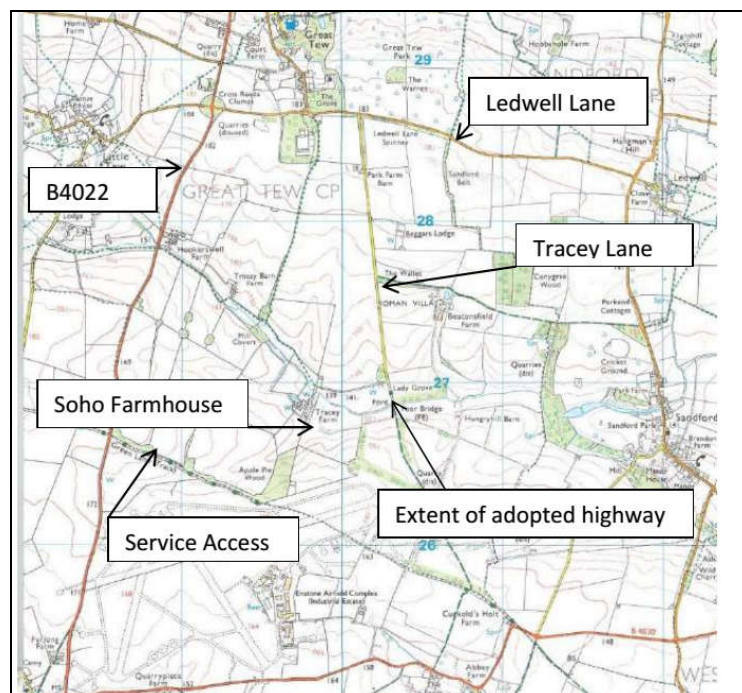
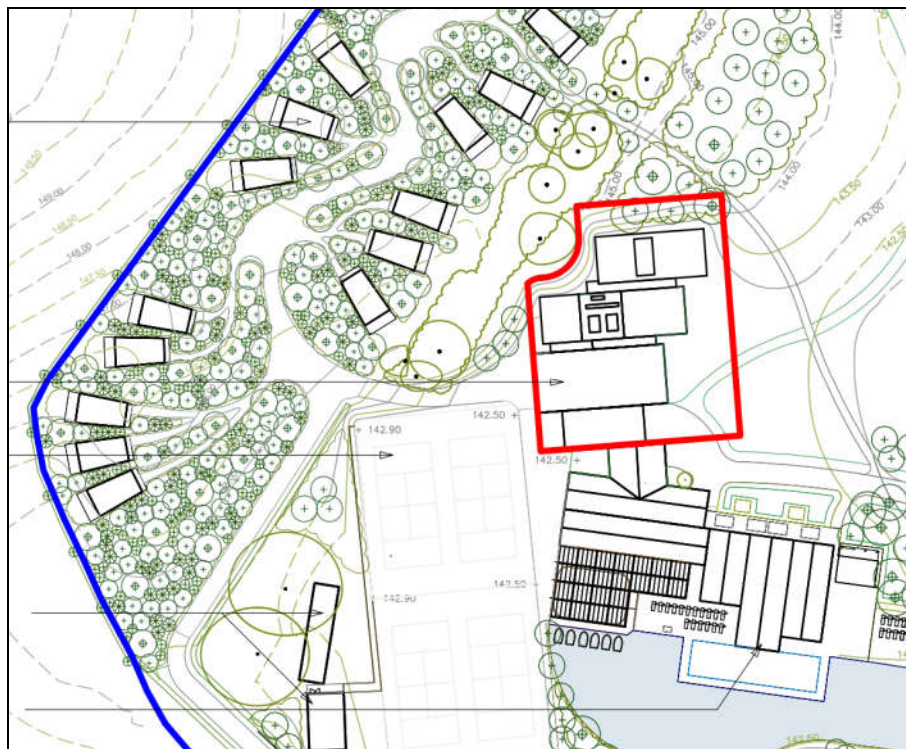


Figure 1 – Local Road Network

2.2 Tracey Lane from the north provides the main entrance to Soho Farmhouse for use by members, hotel guests and visitors, whilst staff and all deliveries, apart from biomass for the energy centre, enter via Green Lane which links the southern corner of the site with the B4022 to the west. The road network in the vicinity of Soho Farmhouse is shown in **Figure 1** above.

2.3 Soho Farmhouse falls outside the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, outside the Great Tew village Conservation Area and outside the historic Great Tew Park that is listed Grade II on the register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England.



**Figure 2 – The Application Site**

2.4 The application site sits within the approved hotel and leisure development at Soho Farmhouse, just to the north of the Boathouse and Pen Yen Japanese restaurant. It also lies just to the east of a narrow tree belt which runs along the eastern boundary of the Farmhouse Huts site (see **Figure 2**).

### **3.0 Soho Farmhouse**

- 3.1 Soho Farmhouse is a hotel and members club which originally had 31 cabin buildings, a four-bedroom cottage, and a seven-bedroom farmhouse, plus two further guest rooms in a converted outbuilding adjacent to Tracey Farmhouse.
- 3.2 Following the grant of planning permission in December 2017, the amount of accommodation has been expanded by the addition of 50 new guest rooms comprising ten garden cottages which form part of a new walled garden development, and ten pods each containing 4 new guest rooms in the form of a pig arc style building ('Piglets'), set within an extension of an existing woodland landscape.
- 3.3 There is also an adjoining camping field ('Farm Camp') that was established on a parcel of land to the immediate west of the main Soho Farmhouse site in the summer of 2016. It included 15 'bell' style tents and an associated communal amenity building that provides cooking and cleaning facilities for those staying at Farm Camp. Planning permission has recently been granted by WODC allowing the replacement of the fifteen bell tents with the construction of fifteen cabins 'Farmhouse Huts' (WODC ref: 20/03562/FUL). The fifteen bell tents have been removed following the grant of planning permission 20/03562/FUL and in advance of the commencement of work on the approved Farmhouse Huts development.
- 3.4 Guest facilities at Soho Farmhouse include the Main Barn all day restaurant, Mill Room country pub, Pen Yen Japanese grill, The Little Bell Farmshack for lunch and dinner, and Hay Barn pizza and pasta restaurant. There is a Boathouse with indoor and outdoor heated pools, Cowshed Relax spa with Steam and Sauna Island, Cowshed Active with gymnasium and studio, an Electric Barn cinema, tennis courts, a boating lake and a five-a-side football pitch.
- 3.5 There is also an events building (Barwell Barn), a stable facility for up to 11 horses, a children's play barn with an associated outdoor activity area (Teeny Barn), a former Hay Store building that has been converted to provide a flower studio, bookings office and a small multi-purpose space (The Woodshed), and two farm shops.

#### 4.0 Relevant Planning History

4.1 Planning permission references 13/0666/P/FP and established the use of the site that formerly comprised Tracey Farm as a hotel and members club. The original development comprised the removal of modern farm buildings, conversion of traditional buildings and erection of purpose-built buildings to include thirty guest cabins, staff accommodation and guest facilities. A new car parking area and other associated works were also approved as part of the application.

4.2 In April 2015, planning permission was granted under application reference 15/00195/FUL which allowed a number of changes to the scheme approved by planning permission 14/0693/P/FP, including a larger Gymnasium building re-orientated but in the same position as approved. Planning permission 15/00195/FUL was granted subject to two conditions and condition number 2 states:

***“Other than the changes hereby approved the development shall be carried out in full accordance with the plans, conditions and approved details as already approved under reference 13/0666/P/FP and subsequent amendments thereto.”***

4.3 In April 2016, the Council approved an application under reference 16/04398/S73 for the variation of condition 2 of planning permission 15/00195/FUL to allow changes to the hotel and leisure facilities at Soho Farmhouse including changes to some of the buildings approved by 15/00195/FUL plus new proposals for an extended Boathouse Pergola, a covered link between the Boathouse and Gym, an extension of the approved Gym building, and a single storey ‘wraparound’ extension of the approved Electric Barn to house a new reception area and eight additional spa treatment rooms.

4.4 A reduced copy of the proposed floor plan and proposed west elevation of the Gym building approved by 16/04398/FUL are included below.



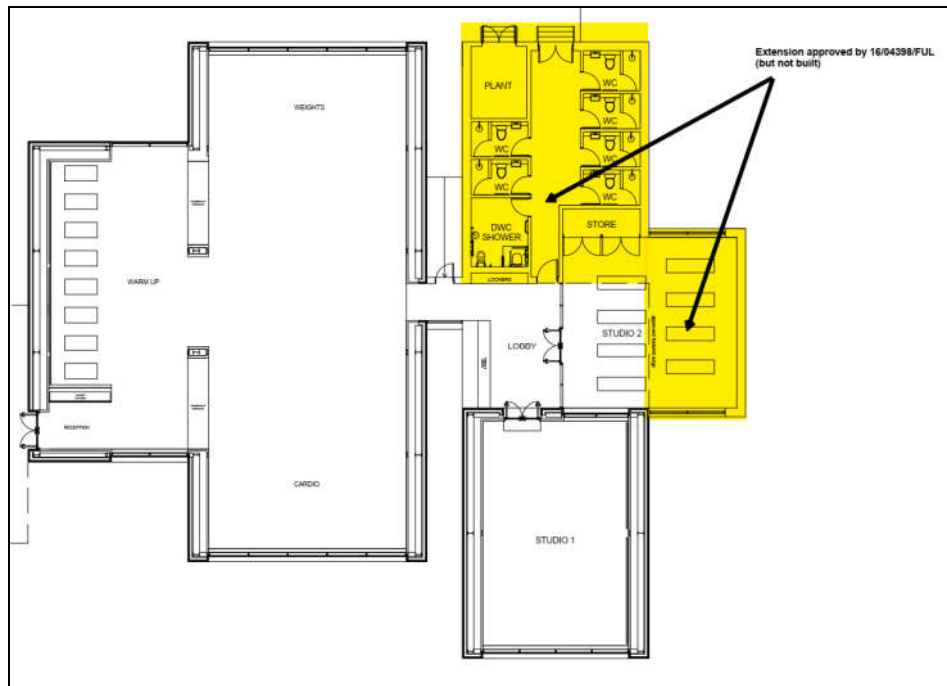


Figure 3 – Gym Floor Plan Approved by 16/04368/FUL

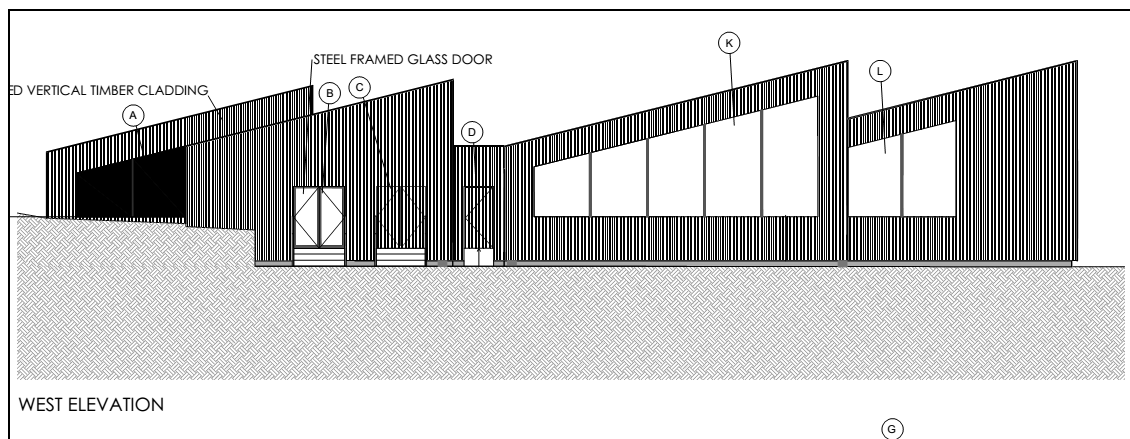
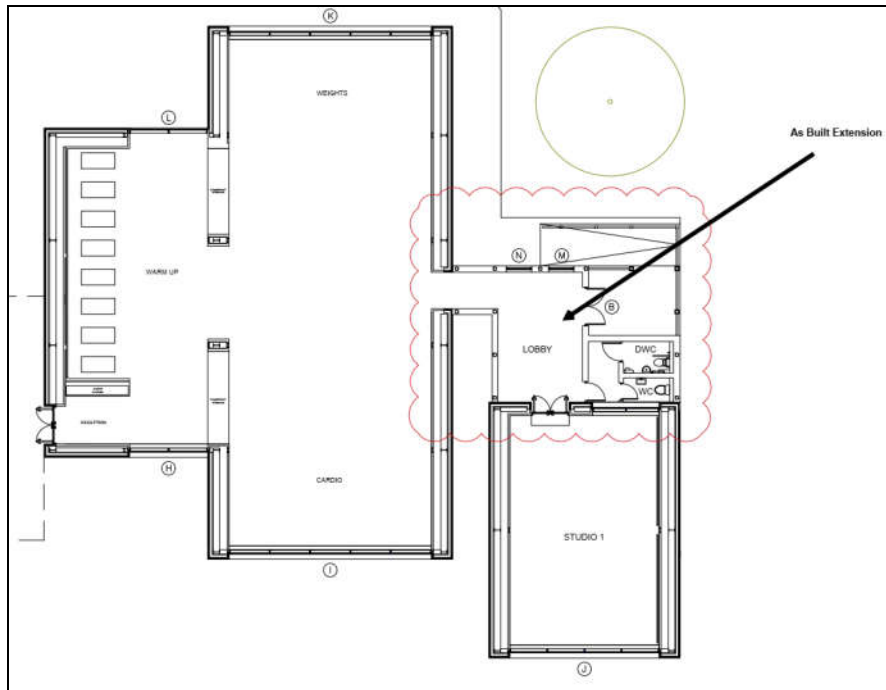


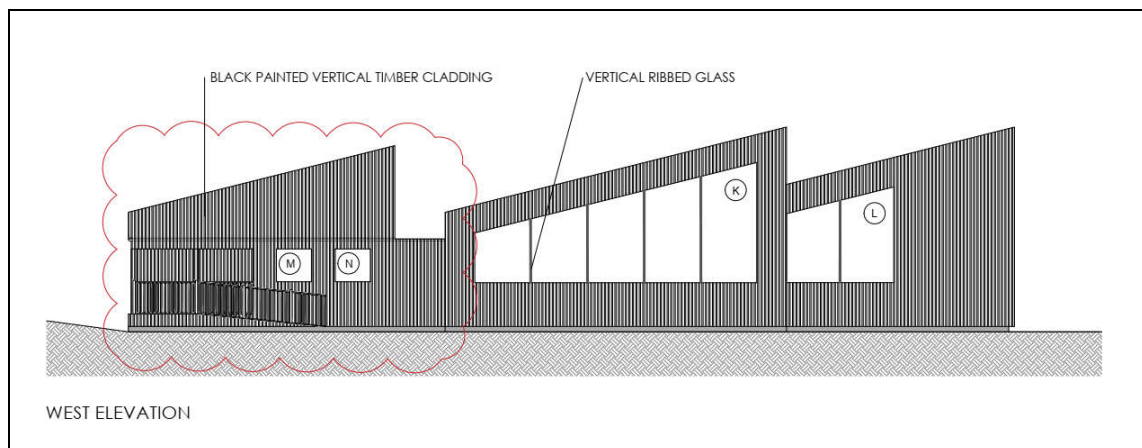
Figure 4 – Gym West Elevation Approved by 16/04368/FUL

4.5 Most recently, the Council confirmed by their letter dated 17 August 2016 that minor changes to the design of the Gym building approved by planning permission 16/04368/FUL were acceptable as a Non-Material Amendment (WODC ref: 16/02572/NMA).

4.6 Under application 16/02572/NMA, the Gym extension was proposed to be smaller than the extension approved by 16/04368/FUL in terms of its volume and footprint, but it retained the roofline of the original building and its strong form, with three mono-pitched roofs and angular gable ends (see figures 5 and 6 below).



**Figure 5 – As Built Gym Floor Plan - 16/02572/NMA**



**Figure 6 – As Built Gym West Elevation - 16/02572/NMA**

## 5.0 The Proposal and Planning Justification

- 5.1 One of the most popular facilities at Soho Farmhouse is Cowshed Active which includes the gym, indoor and outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, spin classroom, fitness studios, steam and sauna and the associated showering and changing facilities.
- 5.2 Since the site first opened in 2015, the programme of classes run for members and guests in the fitness studio, ranging from boxercise to Pilates and yoga, have proved highly popular and demand has only grown.



- 5.3 Whilst gym facilities have been allowed to re-open following the easing of full statutory lockdown restrictions, the number of people able to use such facilities has been significantly reduced by social distancing rules. The current gym studio measures 80 square metres, and under the current social distancing guidelines for indoor space is able to accommodate a maximum of 7 persons plus an instructor. This is a reduction from the pre Covid-19 era when the studio capacity was up to 30 persons.
- 5.4 Individuals paying for membership of Soho Farmhouse, and guests paying to stay at the hotel, expect the facilities and availability to remain comparable with at least the pre-Covid-19 era. The only practical way to achieve this in the current regulatory environment is to provide additional studio space. This requirement is expected to be ongoing for the foreseeable future given the uncertainties surrounding new variants of Covid-19 and the altered expectations of the public as to what constitutes acceptable conditions to manage risk of infection in enclosed public spaces.
- 5.5 Looking further ahead to a post Covid era, we know from feedback from the Gym Manager, that there is significant unmet demand for classes from the existing membership and hotel guests that could be met by the addition of the proposed new flexible studio space. There is also demand for multimedia studio space for audio visual content creation, by members of Soho Farmhouse and by members of the Soho House team.
- 5.6 The development proposal is to extend the existing gym at Soho Farmhouse with a further flexible studio space which can be used either as one large or two smaller studios. The concept of a multi-purpose space will reduce the need for additional extensions or new buildings elsewhere around the site.
- 5.7 The proposed location of the flexible studio is to the north of the existing gym building. It takes the same simple geometric form as the existing gym and utilises the same external materials of blackened timber vertical cladding and glazing. Views from the north and northeast looking towards the gym across the Boathouse lawn will essentially be maintained.
- 5.8 A further small extension is proposed to the west elevation of the gym building. This is in the same location as the extension previously approved under planning reference 16/04368/FUL. This space to the rear of the building will be used to

house storage and plant facilities for the proposed studio and for the adjacent Farmhouse Huts development approved under permission reference 20/03562/FUL.

- 5.9 The idea of housing the plant requirements for both developments in this location is to consolidate the requirements within the built form of an existing structure, to avoid the spread of new detached buildings across the site.

## **6.0 Pre-Application Consultation**

- 6.1 The submitted scheme results from pre-application consultation with officers of West Oxfordshire District Council by the prior submission of details and a site meeting with Miss Eldridge on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

- 6.2 Following the meeting, the Case Officer wrote to JPPC setting out the views of the Local Planning Authority in connection with a number of developments proposed at the existing Soho Farmhouse hotel and members club.

- 6.3 With regard to this particular development proposal, the WODC Case Officer's response confirms that as consent has already been granted for a significant extension to the gym and that in visual terms, the development would form an appropriate addition to the existing building, the proposed development is supportable. However, the officer's letter goes on to make clear that the need for the extension should be clearly justified in any formal application submission, and it should be demonstrated that the use of the additional space will not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of the local road network in terms of numbers of movements associated with it.

- 6.4 This application has been formulated in response to the verbal and written advice received and, in particular, the comments detailed in paragraph 6.3 above. The application is supported by a comprehensive suite of professional reports including a Planning Justification Statement (see Section 5 above) prepared by the applicant Soho House UK and a Transport Statement prepared by the project Transport Consultants PFA Consulting. These and the other planning issues raised by this application will be fully considered in the following section of this statement.

6.5 A copy of the Case Officer's letter dated 17 November 2020 is included in this statement as **Appendix 1**.

## 7.0 Planning Policy Considerations

### The Development Plan

7.1 Relevant legislation is provided for in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Localism Act 2011, and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Section 38(6) of the PCPA 2004 provides that there is a statutory obligation for local planning authorities and other decision makers to determine planning applications and appeals in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations can include Government guidance and any other matters relevant to the use and development of land.

7.2 At present the statutory development plan for the area comprises the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 (WOLP 2031) which was adopted by the Council in September 2018 and replaced the plan in force when Soho Farmhouse was allowed. The Development Plan policies considered to be relevant to the proposals are:

- OS1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- OS2: Locating development in the right places
- OS4: High quality design
- E4: Sustainable tourism
- T1: Sustainable transport
- T3: Public transport, walking and cycling
- EH2: Landscape character
- EH3: Biodiversity and geodiversity
- EH7: Flood risk

7.3 The West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 – adopted by the Council in April 2016 – is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and is a material consideration in planning decisions so far as it is relevant.

7.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also a material consideration in decisions on planning applications and is clearly relevant in the determination of this proposal.

### Planning Considerations

7.5 Taking into account the relevant planning policies and other material considerations it is considered that the main planning issues raised by this application are as follows:

- 1. Principle of Development**
- 2. Design and Access Considerations**
- 3. Highways and Transport**
- 4. Ecological Impacts**
- 5. Arboricultural Impacts**
- 6. Flood Risk and Drainage**

### **Principle of Development**

7.6 The principle of hotel and leisure development was established by the grant of planning permission reference 13/0666/P/FP: the officer's report for that application concluding that "the principle of the proposed development is in accordance with guidance and policies contained within the NPPF and policies TLC1 and TLC2 of the adopted Local Plan 2011." Although the NPPF and Local Plan have been updated since then, there is not considered to be any change of relevance to this site which would alter that conclusion.

7.7 In line with national planning policy, Policy OS1 of the recently adopted WOLP 2031 is underpinned by a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In other words, development that is shown to be sustainable in West Oxfordshire will be permitted, especially where it conforms to the WOLP 2031 as a whole.

7.8 Policy E4 of the adopted WOLP 2031 which deals with sustainable tourism development is perhaps of greatest relevance in confirming the acceptability of the principle of the proposed development. Policy E4 confirms support for sustainable tourism development, particularly where it utilises and enriches the natural and built environment to the benefit of visitors and local communities. The policy goes on to confirm that in more rural locations, new tourism and visitor

related facilities may be justified where there is a locational or functional linkage with a particular existing countryside attraction. Soho Farmhouse is in this context an existing attraction.

- 7.9 The provision of an extension to the existing Gym building is in direct association with an acceptable hotel and leisure facility and it is located on land which already forms part of the existing Soho Farmhouse site. There is thus a clear functional linkage between the proposed development and wider Soho Farmhouse site, and accordingly, the proposal should be considered to comply with the provisions of WOLP 2031 Policy E4, given the clear locational and functional linkage with the existing Soho Farmhouse site.
- 7.10 In terms of specific policies in the NPPF, paragraph 80 advocates that planning policies and decisions “*should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt*”. The policy confirms the need to support economic growth and productivity is a consideration of “significant weight” in deciding planning applications. Further, it says that development should be supported which allows “*the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings*”, and “*sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside*” (NPPF paragraph 83 refers).
- 7.11 The type of development to which paragraphs 80 and 83 of the NPPF are referring to includes proposals such as this one which involves the modest expansion of an established well-functioning tourist and visitor related business. The scale of this proposal is minor in comparison to the wider hotel taken as a whole and is to be carried out in a similar spatial and aesthetic style to the existing development that has already been accepted by WODC as respecting the character of the countryside.
- 7.12 Soho Farmhouse is now one of the largest employers in West Oxfordshire with a total of 529 employees as of October 2019. Carrying out this development will help sustain that employment.
- 7.13 Overall, sustainable tourism and development related thereto are intended to be supported and treated favourably. Following the planning policy analysis above, it is concluded that the development would be consistent with the tourism and economic policies at both a national and local level. The proposal would

represent a sustainable form of development of which the WOLP Policy OS1 and the NPPF are strongly in favour, and in light of the prevailing policy context, it is considered that the principle of the development is entirely appropriate in this instance.

- 7.14 It will be demonstrated through the remaining sections of this statement and through the other specialist reports accompanying the application that there would be no materially adverse impacts or planning harm which would outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

## **Design and Access Considerations**

### Design

- 7.15 The development proposal is to extend the existing gym at Soho Farmhouse with a further flexible studio space which can be used either as one large or two smaller studios. The proposed location of the flexible studio is to the north of the existing gym building. It takes the same simple geometric form as the existing gym and utilises the same external materials of blackened timber vertical cladding and glazing.
- 7.16 A further small extension is proposed to the west elevation of the gym building. This is in the same discrete location as the extension previously approved under planning reference 16/04368/FUL and will also be constructed using the same materials of blackened timber vertical cladding and glazing.
- 7.17 Views from the north and northeast looking towards the gym across the Boathouse lawn will essentially be maintained.
- 7.18 It is considered therefore that the proposed development is in accordance with WOLP Policy OS4, as well as the design-focused policies and advice contained in both the West Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 and the NPPF which promote high quality design.

### Access

- 7.19 All level and clear access considerations designed in the approved scheme have been maintained in these new proposals. The access to the Gymnasium has



been designed to meet Part M of the Building Regulations affording all hotel guests, members and staff easy and convenient access to the extended building.

### **Highways and Transport**

- 7.20 The NPPF (February 2019) states, that in considering development proposals it should be ensured that appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport are taken up, safe and suitable access should be achieved for all users, and that any significant impacts on the transport network can be cost effectively mitigated (paragraph 108). Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe (paragraph 109).
- 7.21 It is not anticipated that the development proposals will result in any increase in guest traffic using Tracey Lane given that it is to cater for the existing membership; it will however result in a small increase in staff traffic, with potentially an additional four vehicle movements to the site each way per day, which would be expected to use the Green Lane service access from the B4022. This level of traffic is not considered material and will have no significant effect on the local roads approaching Soho Farmhouse.
- 7.22 The updated Travel Plan for Soho Farmhouse was approved by Oxfordshire County Council in October 2019. The Travel Plan has achieved its objectives of reducing staff travel by single occupancy car, and of directing member and guest travel away from minor routes through local villages.
- 7.23 In liaison with Soho House, the project Transport Consultants PFA Consulting have prepared a Transport Statement which provides a comprehensive assessment of the transport issues raised by the proposal. All things being considered, it concludes that the gym extension proposals will have no significant impact on the local road network and effective measures are already in place to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel.
- 7.24 It is considered therefore that the proposed development complies with WOLP policies T1 and T3 and the guidance in the NPPF, and there is no reason in transport terms why planning permission should not be granted.

## **Ecological Impacts**

- 7.25 AA Environmental Limited (AAe) have been instructed to assess the ecological impacts of the proposal. Although previous ecological surveys have been carried out on the site by AAe in 2019, it was considered best practice to carry out a follow-up survey to update the previous findings and to record any changes that may have occurred during the intervening period. This information will serve to assess the ecological impact of the proposals and identify and ecological constraints and/or mitigation measures that may be required.
- 7.26 Based upon the findings of the previous and most recent survey completed, there are no over-riding ecological constraints to development, with the site assessed to be of overall low ecological value. A range of standard controls are available and deliverable to ensure that there would be no adverse impact on local wildlife that are using the site with a series of controls to be implemented to avoid contravention of current legislation. Full details of the control measures to be adopted during the works have been detailed in the Precautionary Working Method Statement, which forms part of the AAe Ecological Assessment report.
- 7.27 In addition, there is also an opportunity to implement some enhancement measures to increase the nature conservation value of the site in the long term, in accordance with Government guidance set out in the NPPF. In particular, the new woodland tree planting and creation of additional habitats will have a positive impact in terms of biodiversity enhancement and contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability of the site, which was a principal objective of the original scheme. The full range of enhancement measures are summarised in the Ecological Assessment and shown on Figure 1 of the report.
- 7.28 In light of the above, it is considered that the proposals accord with the requirements of WOLP policy EH3 and the policies in the NPPF which seek to safeguard, maintain and, where possible, provide net gains in biodiversity.

## **Arboricultural Considerations**

- 7.29 An Arboricultural Report has been prepared by Nick Bolton of Tree Frontiers Limited. It consists of a Tree Survey that records all relevant information about the trees that might be impacted by the development proposal. This includes an Arboricultural Impact Assessment to consider the potential impact that the

extensions may have on the existing tree stock at Soho Farmhouse. It also includes a Tree Protection Plan and set of measures that will be put in place to ensure that trees are not harmed either directly or indirectly from construction activities associated with proposed development.

7.30 The report provides the information necessary for WODC to assess the tree related issues associated with the planning application, and use it as a firm basis for granting planning permission.

7.31 The proposed scheme has been prepared with the retention of trees as a key consideration. The Arboricultural Report confirms that the development proposal does not require the removal of any trees or hedges and all construction activity can be completed without encroachment of the Root Protection Area of trees. Further, the retained trees and hedges will be protected throughout the development through the use of barriers that will create a defined Construction zone (CEZ). The CEZ will ensure that all construction activity occurs outside the RPA of any retained tree or hedge.

7.32 While this specific proposal does not require the removal of any of the existing tree stock, landscape enhancements in proximity to the gym are being made through the planting of a new woodland in the open space to the north of the buildings. This enhancement has been proposed as part of a separate application submitted for the Farmhouse Huts on the western side of the hedge and as such, no additional enhancements are proposed through this application.

7.33 The report concludes that the development will have no impact on the existing tree stock on site. Tree protection measures will be implemented to ensure that construction activity will not harm the trees and the design of the fencing layout has been considered with the access needs of the construction team. Further, the new woodland planting scheme in the vicinity of the gym will enhance the existing tree stock and will result in a net gain in the volume and extent of tree cover across the Soho Farmhouse site.

7.34 On this basis, the arboricultural impact of this development is assessed to be positive, providing an improvement to the long-term setting of the site. It is our view therefore that the proposals fully comply with policies EH2 and EH3 of the adopted WOLP 2031 which are consistent with the advice in the NPPF in that development should not result in the loss of trees, woodlands or hedgerows,

which are important for their visual, historic or biodiversity value and, where removal is proposed, this will not cause any material harm.

### **Flood Risk and Drainage**

- 7.35 In terms of flood risk, a review of the Environment Agency Flood Map shows that the location of the camping field and five-a-side pitch falls wholly in Flood Zone 1, the category with the lowest risk of flooding.
- 7.36 The Soho Farmhouse Master Plan drawing 118\_MP\_SHG\_GA\_00\_00\_03 shows the extent of Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3 in relation to the site. A review of the Master Plan drawing confirms that the location of the Gymnasium is outside both the 1 in 1000 year and 1 in 100 year plus climate change flood extent and that the development will therefore not contribute to flood risk elsewhere.
- 7.37 In addition, the Environment Agency published ‘flood risk from surface water map’ shows there is very low flood risk from surface water across the application site and all other sources of flood risk.
- 7.38 The application is accompanied by a Drainage Strategy Report prepared by Mason Navarro Pledge. The drainage scheme includes proposals that are all effectively SUDS compliant and it demonstrates that the site can be adequately drained. The report reiterates the drainage strategy for the site that has been approved previously by the Local Planning Authority, although the Proposed Drainage Strategy (drawing no. 219467-C-SK-1000 Rev P01) has been updated to reflect the latest Farmhouse Master Plan for the site and including the development the subject of this planning application.
- 7.39 The report confirms that any changes proposed by this planning application have been considered in terms of any potential impacts on drainage and it has been concluded that they have no effect on the approved drainage strategy for the site.
- 7.40 In light of the above, the proposed development is considered to fully comply with WOLP 2031 Policy EH7 and the policies and guidance contained in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance in relation to flood risk and water management.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The proposals have been the subject of pre-application consultation with the Council and forms an integral part of the overall Soho Farmhouse hotel and leisure development, which will continue to provide significant benefits to tourism, leisure and the economy.
- 8.2 The development has been carefully considered against national and local planning policies. From the foregoing, and the analysis undertaken in the reports accompanying the application, it is concluded that the proposed development would be consistent with the Council's adopted development plan and the NPPF. Given this, the presumption should be in favour of planning permission being granted.

# APPENDIX 1



Mr Andrew Eaton  
JPPC  
Bagley Croft,  
Hinksey Hill,  
Oxford,  
OX1 5BS

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
Our Ref: 20/02714/PREAPP  
Please ask for: Stephanie Eldridge  
Telephone: 01993 861653  
Email: Stephanie.eldridge@westoxon.gov.uk

Dear Mr Eaton,

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

APPLICATION: 20/02714/PREAPP

PROPOSAL: Various new developments in connection with existing Soho Farmhouse hotel and members club

AT: Soho Farmhouse, Great Tew

I write in regard to your enquiry received by the Council seeking the pre-application views of the Local Planning Authority. The relevant information is set out below. Please be aware of the disclaimer at the end of this letter. If you have any questions relating to the advice given, please contact the Case Officer.

### **Policies**

The main policies of relevance are:  
West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031  
The National Planning Policy Framework  
The West Oxfordshire Design Guide  
The National Design Guide

### **The Proposal**

The proposal, the subject of this pre-application advice, comprises a number of developments in connection with the existing Soho Farmhouse hotel and members club. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Bicycle Workshop
2. Glasshouse Alterations
3. Gym Extension
4. Health Club
5. Lounge Space
6. Farm Camp
7. Photovoltaic Panels

Following our meeting in October amended proposals were submitted in respect of the proposed development at the Farm Camp and Health Club.

I will deal with each of these elements below.

### **Bicycle Workshop**

I am of the opinion that the proposed extension to the Stable Courtyard to provide a bicycle repair workshop and additional bike shelters, by virtue of its siting, design and form, would be in keeping with the existing character and appearance of the courtyard and wider site, and is therefore supportable.

I note that the development would sit within the root protection area of the nearby Category B tree, and that your submission advises that the foundations would be designed in response to the guidance of the project arboricultural consultants, Lockhart Garratt. The Council's Forestry and Landscape Officer will be consulted on this matter as part of any formal application submitted.

### **Glasshouse Alterations**

The proposed alterations to the existing Glasshouse to incorporate three pairs of 'Crittall' style metal glazed sliding doors and sidelights, to enable the building to open onto the walled garden area, is supportable in my opinion.

### **Gym Extension**

I note in the pre-application submission that the existing gym, spin classrooms, fitness studios and other 'active' facilities have proved highly popular since the site opened in 2015, and that result of the Covid-19 restrictions on the use of these facilities has resulted in a significant reduction in the maximum capacity; for example, the studio buildings with a normal capacity of 30 can now only accommodate 7 people. The planning justification states that the only practical way to achieve a service comparable to the 'pre-covid' facilities in the current regulatory environment is to provide additional studio space. Therefore, a new flexible studio space is proposed.

I note that consent has been granted for an extension to the gym. This development has not been implemented. The approved gym is a slightly smaller footprint than that proposed as part of this pre-application enquiry.

The proposed extension to the gym would take the same simple geometric design form as the existing gym and utilises the same external materials of blackened timber vertical cladding and glazing.

I do have some concerns over the provision of a significant permanent building erected as a temporary solution to the current pandemic. However, I was advised during our meeting on site that if and when the restrictions caused by covid-19 are relaxed there would still be use for the space given that demand has been growing for use of the existing facilities. Therefore, given that consent has already been granted for a significant extension to the gym, that the current restrictions mean that the development would not, for now, result in any great intensification of visitors using the facilities, and that in visual terms, the development would form an appropriate addition to the existing building, I am of the opinion that this element of the proposal could be supportable. However, the need should be clearly justified in the application submission and it should be demonstrated that the use of the additional space will not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of the local road network in terms of numbers of movements associated with it.

### **Health Club**

There are a number of proposed features to enhance the existing wellness facilities at the complex. The proposed new facilities include additional wooden hot tubs, infra-red sauna pods, new hot and cold plunge pools, a new sunken bridge additional changing facilities (conversion of existing ice house), a cryo chamber and a small natural swimming pond. A path within the site would also be rerouted so that the sauna pods and hot tubs could be sited adjacent to the pond.

I am of the opinion that the siting, scale and design of each of the proposed elements would be supportable given the context of the site. However, again, the need and the role this development would play in the business plan for the overall complex should be clearly justified in the application submission and it should be demonstrated that the visitor traffic movements associated with the additional space will not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of the local road network.

The other key consideration of this element of the proposals is going to be the impact on biodiversity. The appropriate surveys and mitigation proposals should accompany any formal application submitted.

### **Lounge Space**

This element of the pre-application enquiry comprises the erection of a new building adjoining the existing cinema to provide a dedicated lounge space for use by guests and members where they can use their mobile phones and laptops away from the existing dining/lounge spaces. One reason for this is because Soho House have identified that activity on electronic devices in the same lounge and dining space as used by members and hotel guests relaxing and socialising can change the atmosphere and on occasion prove to be anti-social. Further, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the statutory social distancing measures imposed there is an additional need to offset the loss of capacity in existing food and beverage areas by creating additional lounge space.

I note that consent was granted for a single storey wrap-around extension to the Electric Barn cinema building under ref. 19/02411/S73.

I do have concerns over the scale of the building proposed. Firstly, the provision of such a large lounge area, in addition to the significant amount of existing lounge space already provided on the site, could attract more local members to visit which would in turn result in an intensification of the use and in particular the traffic movements associated with the site; which has historically been a key matter of contention with local residents and councillors.

Further, I am of the opinion that the proposed building itself, given its scale and form, would compete with the existing cinema building.

Therefore, it would be preferable for this element to be reduced in scale so that the number of members/guests using the space is less and that it reads as a secondary addition to the main cinema building. Again, as expressed on site, the need for the development should be clearly justified in the application submission and it should be demonstrated that the additional space will not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of the local road network.

### **Farm Camp**

Planning permission (ref: 20/00905/FUL) was granted earlier in the year for the '*Change of use of land from agriculture to hotel (to allow year round use of camping field 'Farm Camp') together with replacement guest amenity building, five a side pitch and new landscaping*' which permitted fifteen units of guest accommodation in the form of one bedroom bell style tents, plus a replacement amenity building which will house a communal lounge, kitchen and dining area and new bathroom facilities.

Since the statutory lockdown and restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic I understand that the management team at Soho Farmhouse have reviewed all options to mitigate the loss of revenue across the site resulting from the Government guidelines and changes in the attitudes and behaviour of members and guests which will remain in place for the foreseeable future. I am advised that the starting point was to look at how existing accommodation and facilities can be utilised and adapted to optimise revenue, and help secure the future viability of Soho Farmhouse and the five hundred plus jobs that it supports directly.

Whilst planning permission 20/00905/FUL permits year round use of the fifteen tents, given the lightweight nature of them they do not lend well to year round use. Therefore, the original pre-application documents

proposed the direct replacement of the fifteen tents with fifteen pre-fabricated structures which are heated and thermally insulated within the same site area. However, the amended documents submitted after our site meeting now propose several options for 20 units which would extend onto the existing football pitch adjacent to the Farm Camp.

I am conscious that the Council have expressed in the past that we would be unlikely to support any additional units of accommodation at the site due to concerns that the incremental addition of more and more accommodation and facilities on the site is having a transformative impact in this countryside, rural location. Further, as mentioned above, an increase in traffic to the site has always been a great matter of contention.

Based on the information provided in this pre-application submission I do not consider that the need for the provision of additional units has been justified.

Further, the existing football pitch is relatively open and currently acts as a soft, low key edge rounding off the site, similarly to the tennis courts adjacent. I am of the opinion that the development of this area would result in an intensification that would fail to preserve or form a logical complement to the existing low key character and appearance of this area of the complex.

If, notwithstanding this advice, an application is submitted to replace the existing bell tents with more permanent units on the Farm Camp site, the application should clearly justify the need and demonstrate how the development would add value to the existing business, and the impact it would have on the wider rural economy. Further, it should be demonstrated that the provision of additional units of accommodation will not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of the local road network.

### **Photovoltaic Panels**

The proposal to erect photovoltaic panels to the large south facing roof plane of the existing warehouse building, which is located in a discreet location facing the Soho Farmhouse deliveries yard and the Enstone Airfield Industrial Estate beyond, is supportable in principle.

### **Conclusions**

The key point we want to emphasise is that the accumulative impact of the provision of further accommodation and facilities will result in an intensification that will have a transformative impact on the overall character and appearance of the site - which is something that the Council has historically expressed concern about. Therefore, in order to support further development on the site, comprehensive and clear justification and evidence demonstrating how the different elements will add to the value and success of the business, and wider rural economy, should be provided, alongside evidence that there will be no detrimental impact on the wider road network, biodiversity, setting of the heritage assets, and landscape.

Please note that all applications should demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity where possible.

This advice is given on the basis of the information that you have supplied. The Local Planning Authority will not be responsible for any errors resulting from inaccuracies in that information and the consideration of amenity issues from within neighbouring properties have not been assessed.

Please note that this is without prejudice to any decision the Local Planning Authority may make and is in no way binding Members of the Area Planning Sub Committee.

West Oxfordshire District Council would encourage all applicants to consult with neighbouring properties prior to the submission of any application.

I trust this is of some assistance. If I can be of further help, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

*Stephanie Eldridge*  
Senior Planning Officer

### **Useful links**

West Oxfordshire District local plan: <http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning/localplan2011.cfm>

Environment Agency: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Thames Water: [developer.services@thameswater.co.uk](mailto:developer.services@thameswater.co.uk)

Natural England: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

NPPF: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

### **Disclaimer**

- The above advice is given for purposes relating to the Town and Country Planning Acts and for no other Council function.
- Please note that this is without prejudice to any decision the Local Planning Authority may make and is in no way binding Members of the Area Planning Sub Committee.

West Oxfordshire District Council Planning Department promotes email correspondence as it is the quickest, easiest and most environmentally friendly way of contacting us.

Contact us at [planning@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:planning@westoxon.gov.uk).