

APPENDIX A to MDA Covering Letter dated 29th January 2024

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

EIA Screening Opinion Request

**BIRDWORLD LTD AND HASKINS GARDEN CENTRE LTD,
Forest Lodge, Farnham Road, Holt Pound, GU10 4LD**

1. The Application Site and Surrounding Area

Birdworld and Haskins Forest Lodge are located on the western side of the A325 which runs between Petersfield and Farnham. The site lies outside any settlement policy boundary, but the nearest village is Holt Pound to the northeast. Birdworld and Forest Lodge extend in total to 13.54 ha, with an extensive range of buildings, ancillary structures, parking areas and landscaping.

2. The Proposed Development

Improvements to, and new facilities at Birdworld to include a new Entrance Building, Play Barn, Conservation and Breeding facility and an external Adventure Play Area. The re-development of Forest Lodge Garden Centre to include the demolition of the existing garden centre and the adjoining Plant Style structures to create a new garden centre (with covered and open sales areas, restaurant, plant, and warehouse). New service areas and car parking for both operations accessed from a new roundabout on the A235. The closure and removal of the existing Forest Lodge access. Enhanced landscaping throughout

3. Screening Opinion Request

This request for a Screening Opinion is to determine whether or not the development should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The proposed development does not fall within any category identified at Schedule 1 of the current EIA Regulations. It is considered that the proposed development may fall under Paragraph 10 (b) of Schedule 2 of the Regulations which identifies “urban development projects”. These are either located on sites in excess of 1.0 hectares, provide more than 150 dwellings, or accommodate an overall area of more than 5 hectares, as being development, which *may* require an EIA.

However, it is only to be considered an EIA development for the purpose of the Regulations if the proposed development is judged *likely to give significant environmental effects*, applying the criteria in Schedule 3, which considers the characteristics of the development, the location of the development and the characteristics of any potential impact. These are considered in turn below.

The Characteristics of the Development

The key characteristics of the development are as follows:

- The application proposes the redevelopment of an existing garden centre and improvements to a leisure/tourism facility.
- The application site comprises previously developed land in a semi-rural setting.
- The new buildings have been designed to a high standard (BREEAM Excellent) and significantly improve the operational layout of Birdworld and the Garden Centre.
- The proposals will result in the loss of some trees, but these will be replaced and significantly enhanced through a quality landscape scheme. None of the protected trees are affected. The Bio-Diversity Net Gain for the proposed development will deliver a net gain for habitats of 12.36%, as well as a net gain in hedgerows of 27.41% and 74.65% for watercourses.
- In terms of flood risk, the site is in Zone 1, where the risk of flooding is low. The SUDs attenuation provided will significantly reduce the peak flows from the site and reduce flooding risk to the surrounding areas. The Drainage Strategy will incorporate biodiversity aspects in combination with the landscaping and ecology plans for the site.
- The existing site entrances for both the Garden Centre and Birdworld are not designed to current standards and leads to considerable conflict between customers and delivery vehicles.
- The new site entrance via the new roundabout on the A325 will comply with current standards and improve safety on this stretch of road.

The Location of the Development

The application sits on the edge of the urban area next to a busy A road. The site is characterised by mature landscaping on the boundaries and in the adjoining residential gardens.

Land to the west falls in the Alice Holt Forest and is classified as an ancient woodland. A buffer zone of 15 m runs between the proposed development and the woodland.

The site adjoins the South Downs National Park and as advised in the NPPF, development within their settings should be sensitively located and designed to avoid adverse impacts on the designated areas. This has been carefully considered as part of the design process for the application.

Overall, the application site is not considered to be located within an overly environmentally sensitive area given the mature planting within the site and on the boundaries. As such it does not warrant being considered as EIA development.

The Potential Impact of the Development

The supporting information that has been submitted in respect of this application addresses all of the key characteristics of the development to demonstrate that it will not give rise to any significant environmental effects.

- **Design and Access Statement** – This considers the scale and massing of the proposal and demonstrates how the proposed development is an improvement upon the existing in terms of enhancing the setting for the garden centre and significantly improving the safe operation of the business.

- **Planning Statement** - This sets out the overall benefits of the proposals, especially in terms of the assured future for Birdworld as a key leisure attraction in the area.
- **Transport Assessment and Travel Plan** – This considers the potential effect of the development on the surrounding road network. It confirms that the development will not have a significant effect on traffic generation in the area and that the new access off the new roundabout accords with all the required standards. The accompanying Travel Plan sets out the sustainable transport methods for both sites and provides details of how this will be managed.
- **Ecological Site Assessment** – This report has identified the presence of bat roosts in the existing buildings and therefore the requirement to set out mitigation measures for replacement roosting facilities within the development. It also calculates that there will be net gains in biodiversity above 10%.
- **Arboricultural Report** – This provides a full checklist of the trees on the site, indicates the trees that will be removed and notes that none will be of very high quality.
- **Landscape Appraisal** – This considers the principle landscape and visual constraints and opportunities and then reviews the likely landscape and visual effects that would arise from the implementation of the development proposals. It concludes that the scheme will not generate harmful and unacceptable effects for the identified views.

Having regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations, and the indicative thresholds for EIA development, it is not considered that the development should be EIA development. This opinion is reinforced by the wording of paragraph A18 of Circular 02/99 which provides that an 'EIA is unlikely to be required for the redevelopment of land unless the new development is of a significantly greater scale than the previous use, or the types of impact are of a markedly different nature or there is a high level of contamination'. As such, it is our view that any matters arising from the above proposals can be properly assessed through the planning application process in the absence of an Environmental Statement being undertaken.

We trust that we have provided you with sufficient information to allow you to register and consider this planning application as well as issuing a Screening Opinion as requested. This is an exciting, well designed and high-quality development. It has received wide ranging support during the consultation process and will make a significant long-term contribution to the local economy.

MDAssociates

29th January 2024