

MARLOW FILM STUDIO – POSITION STATEMENT

The Marlow Society seeks to represent everyone who enjoys this beautiful Thames-side town and the nearby parishes as places to live, work, shop or just visit. The Society's charitable aims are broad:

- o Protection and improvement of the public environment
- o Promotion of high standards in planning
- o Education about geography, history and architecture of the area

BACKGROUND

Dido, a property development company, has speculatively bought parcels of land immediately east of the Marlow bypass and south of the Bourne End road. All this land is not only designated green belt but is also part of the area agreed in the Local Plan in which a country park is being created.

The company proposes to build 'Marlow Film Studio'.

The scale of the proposed development is greater than anything previously built around Marlow - at least the area of our existing business park. It would be a large change in this part of the valley of the River Thames.

Transport

Traffic already flows at capacity at key times on the A404, making it difficult for Marlovians to get to and from work. Slow traffic on the A4155 east-west route makes pollution levels high in Marlow, recognised by the air quality management area.

Marlow is under-served for bus routes and there are no direct links to the Handy Cross coach hub or to a railway station.

Limitations of track layout allow only one through train service an hour between Marlow and Maidenhead for connection to London Paddington. The peak time half hourly service has to include a change at Bourne End. Marlow station is about one and a half miles from the proposed Studios site.

The developer agrees that the majority of the thousands of people working on site (typically 3000 a day) when a production is underway would make their own independent way there - so the need for two 750-space multi-storey car parks. Production working hours may not fit well with public transport times. For comparison when fully occupied between 3000 and 4000 people work at Globe Park and Marlow International.

Nature

The fields and lakes north of the Thames between Marlow and Bourne End are green belt. This designation is to protect against ribbon development along routes between communities, and provides a breathing space for this already densely developed area.

Save Marlow's Green Belt has highlighted the animal and plant riches in the area proposed for development. Paths criss-cross the site and are well used by walkers and anglers. Security needed to protect equipment, actors and intellectual property during film production would necessarily block access to working areas.

Living spaces

The Westhorpe Park community is right beside the proposed development. Residents' lives would be seriously impacted by a working studio and would be affected too during its construction.

The development would be likely to directly change the rural character of both Little Marlow village, where light pollution is one particular concern, and of the immediately adjacent Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Indirectly the studio could be felt more widely as the valley's infrastructure and services are under strain now. Particular worries are sewage handling and flood protection. The massive development visible along the A404 at the entrance to Marlow wouldn't help attract tourist visitors.

Employment

Access to West London is important for the studio facilities already concentrated in the home counties. Producers know that their regular skilled workforce will be able to commute from London to whichever studio has been hired by the production company from a facility provider like Dido. Only a limited number of site services jobs may be filled by the facility owner-operator.

Marlow High Street businesses would be unlikely to benefit. As the sketch plans show, the studio complex would be pretty much self-contained. If skilled workers did move here the already difficult housing situation for Marlovians would be worsened. As recognised in the Local Plan, geography prevents much more house building.

This type of development would boost employment and the economy nationally, but as it does not offer local advantages it should be located in areas of the County where expansion is planned on brownfield sites, or to a less fortunate part of the country to support 'levelling up'.

CONCLUSION

The Exec committee has consulted with Members, who have raised these points. The Society's leadership is persuaded that the proposed development would not benefit Marlow and the nearby parishes.