

## **Filming at Black Park Country Park.**

You will probably have seen Black Park Country Park in Buckinghamshire on many occasions, even if you have never visited in person, such is the volume of TV and film footage shot at the park. Here Tim Williams explains the film friendly approach that has contributed to a bumper year for filming at this much loved location.

Black Park is located between Uxbridge in West London and Slough. The park backs on to Pinewood Studios and has been a popular film location since it doubled for Transylvania in the early 1950's Hammer Horror production Dracula. Since then several James Bond films have been shot in the park, as have a number of the Harry Potter series and countless other feature films and TV programmes. There are many reasons why the park has become such a popular film location, these include:

- **The parks close proximity to London and the major film studios.**
- **A Positive film friendly attitude towards filming.**
- **The park's profile within the industry.**
- **The parks adaptable appearance.**
- **On-site access.**

## **Benefits to the park.**

There are major benefits to be gained from filming, as well as the direct income generated, if it is managed positively and if it is appropriate for the site.

- **Visitor interest.**

Seeing sets being constructed and watching filming taking place can be a very exciting bonus for visitors to the park, especially children.

- **Publicity and profile.**

Filming can be a good marketing tool, for example recently part of the new James Bond film was shot in Black Park. A press release by the film's production company gave out a list of locations. As a result of this we have had an ITV production about Bond locations visit the park and also an article about the Bond locations in the Saturday Times, all for free!

- **Benefits-in-kind.**

Apart from the odd free baseball cap the park can also benefit from improvements to infrastructure, especially from larger film productions. Many of the main trackways through the park have been re-surfaced by film companies as part of re-instatement work after filming, resulting in them being in much better condition than prior to filming taking place.

### **The down side**

As with everything there are also negatives. These can be minimised by thorough preparation prior to filming to ensure that you are fully aware of what is going on and that the production company are aware of rules and restrictions. Keeping visitors informed is also important, this can easily be forgotten, but putting up a sign indicating where the filming will take place can avoid potential conflict situations.

#### **Site Damage.**

Filming can cause significant damage to sites if not managed properly or if the site is not suitable for filming. Filming in Black Park mainly takes place in a few areas where we know the site can handle the pressure put upon it.

#### **Intrusion.**

Filming is intrusive and does change the character of the site while a film unit is in residence. Regular users will feel this the most.

#### **Vehicles on site.**

By far the biggest single problem and point of conflict between visitors and film units is the speed of vehicles in the park. No matter how many signs you put up or how many phone calls you make to the location manager, film unit vehicles find it impossible to stick to our on-site speed limit of 5mph.

### **How to be film friendly.**

The aim of the film friendly approach is to make people who deal with filming as part of their job more aware of the need of the industry and give guidance on how to deal with production companies and filming related issues.

On the road to becoming more film friendly it is worth considering some of the following as it will avoid problems further down the line:-

- Try and offer a one-stop shop service, you should not be passing a production company interested in filming from one department to another.
- Wherever possible it is best to have only one person as the main point of contact for filming.
- Your contact should be prepared to be contacted even if they are not actually at work as the film industry does not work nine to five Monday to Friday!
- It is important that questions relating to filming can be answered on the spot and any information that is requested is provided quickly. Many productions are on very tight schedules, if you delay in providing information then you could lose the production.
- The person managing filming needs to be empowered to make decisions such as reducing filming fees, allowing filming in different areas and locations, and they will need to be able to signing contracts and location release forms.
- You should ensure that filming duties are recognised in their job description as managing filming takes time, it is not something that should be an add-on.
- A set of scaled charges that relate to the type of production is important, it is acceptable to charge large productions such as feature films more than a children's television program. It is also important to differentiate between whether the production is actually filming or preparing the site to film, industry standard is that preparation days and strike days (clear up) are 50% of the filming fee.
- Never treat a film production as an open cheque book, always stick to you set scaled charges unless the production wish to do something exceptional in which case you should discuss this with them first.

If you are interested in developing filming further your local film commission is always a good place to start, they can do thing like add you to location databases, provide information on local demand for location, and help you in setting up things like contracts, charging schedules etc.

With the current high level of filming activity in the UK there is a constant demand for locations which seem to be growing. The benefits to Black Park have been well worth the time invested in ensuring that filming is approached in a positive and professional manner, and I would encourage other site manager to consider the adoption of the film friendly approach.

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