

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	250504
Site Address:	Manor Farm, Eu Plants, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TS
Expiry Date:	2 June 2025
Site Visit Date:	2 April 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 32no. polytunnels (retrospective)	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- Countryside
- Ancient Woodland
- Grade 3 Agricultural Land Classification
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
- Flood Zone 1
- Classified Road
- Farnborough Aerodrome Consultation Zone
- Heathrow Aerodrome Safeguarding Zone
- South East Water Consultation Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets

Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document
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PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
227/1949	Calf house buildings	Approved: June 1949
AG/2006/7094	Agricultural building	Approved: March 2006
AG/2010/1446	Agricultural barn (prior approval)	Approved: July 2010
AG/2011/2110	Irrigation reservoir (prior approval)	Approved: October 2011
AG/2011/2616	Irrigation shed (prior approval)	Approved: January 2012
CLP/2012/0189	20 polytunnels (1.85ha), (certificate)	Refused: April 2012
F/2011/2620	20 polytunnels (1.85ha), ditch and hardstanding	Approved: May 2012
F/2012/0039	Use of barn for two caravans for seasonal workers and installation of sewage treatment plant	Approved: October 2012
F/2013/1493	Plant irrigation frame (retrospective)	Approved: December 2013
VAR/2013/1489	Variation of F/2011/2620 by deleting condition 9 to allow year round use	
152683	Variation of F/2012/0039 to remove the three year limit	Approved: November 2015
153434	3 agricultural cold store buildings	Approved: March 2016
160643	12 polytunnels (0.61 ha) (retrospective)	Approved: May 2016
161194	10 polytunnels (1.02ha) (retrospective)	Approved: June 2016
160655	Agricultural worker's dwelling	Approved: January 2017
191112	Full planning application for the erection of 25No polytunnels (retrospective).	Approved: October 2019
200719	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of planning consent 191112 dated 10/10/2019 RETROSPECTIVE. Conditions 2 Proposed landscaping scheme. 3 Materials.	Approved: April 2020
201428	Application to remove condition 4 of planning consent 191112 for the erection of 25 no. polytunnels. Condition 4 refers to the annual removal of the polythene sheeting from the polytunnels and its storage between 1st July and 31st December.	Approved: September 2020
242449	Full application for the erection of 5no. polytunnels (Retrospective)	Approved: November 2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to a condition
WBC Ecology – No comments

External

None

REPRESENTATIONS

Finchampstead Parish Council	No objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One letter received raising concerns on the following matters: - The retrospective nature of the application - Impact on a view - Impact on wildlife - Impact on neighbours privacy

APPRAISAL

Site Description: Manor Farm is a 36.3 hectare soft fruit farm roughly bounded by Jubilee Road, Dell Road, Lower Sandhurst Road and Cricket Hill/Longwater Road. The farm is readily visible in wider views across Blackwater Valley from the intersection of The Ridges and Jubilee Road. This is displayed in the image below:



Description of Proposal: Planning permission was granted through application 191112 (approved: October 2019) for the retrospective siting of a block of 25 polytunnels on land towards the north of the site. A more recent application was

approved in November 2024 (ref: 242449), which saw a further 5 polytunnels adjoin those approved in 2019.

This current application now seeks retrospective planning permission for the installation of a further 32 polytunnels, located on the field to the south of the existing tunnels. The Proposed Site Plan, displayed below, demonstrates how the recently installed polytunnels relate to those already granted planning permission.



The additional polytunnels have been erected to support and expand the existing soft fruits business that operates at Manor Farm. Specifically, they are for the propagation of blueberry plants. It is stated within the applicant's agricultural appraisal that this area of the site has already been used for the growing of blueberries (uncovered), however, the applicant is losing approximately 20 tonnes of the blueberry crop each year across the holding to wild birds eating or destroying them, with further disruption caused by adverse weather conditions.

Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site is located in the countryside and is therefore to be considered under Policy CP11 of the adopted Core Strategy, which seeks to control development outside defined settlement boundaries. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy does not permit development outside of development limits unless it involves, as this application does, a sustainable rural or recreational enterprise without excessive encroachment or expansion of development. Furthermore, paragraph 88 of the NPPF requires consideration of the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.

Whilst the quantum of development subject to this application is greater compared to that of application 242449, the principle of development remains the same. The retrospective proposal contributes to a sustainable rural enterprise, with the polytunnels protecting against adverse weather conditions and allowing a greater control of temperature and increased yield. Consequently, this allows for the production of more locally grown plants to meet projected future demand and reduces the reliance upon imported plants, which results in increased transportation and environmental costs. It is also consolidated within an existing, efficient farming operation, and allows optimum production of the produce.

In accordance with the above, it is considered that the development is acceptable in principle, complying with Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy.

Character of the Area: Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its layout, form and character and must be of high-quality design. RD1 and NR1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD also require that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the character and quality of the local area.

The site is located in the countryside and is within the 'Forest and Rides Valued Landscape, and in Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment Area N2 'Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland' which is a high quality landscape of modest sensitivity and a low capacity for change.

Prior to the erection of the polytunnels over the course of 2016, 2019 and 2024, the farmland comprised open countryside. Their construction initially represented an interruption to the rural backdrop that was visible across the valley from Jubilee Road and The Ridges, however, the polytunnels towards the north of the site are now a well-established feature of the farm and contribute towards the character of the Blackwater Valley.

As stated previously, the proposal represents a quantum of development greater to the previous installations of polytunnels on the site. In contrast to the 5 polytunnels approved through application 242449, the location of the polytunnels subject to this application are not an infill of the existing, but instead expand these features further into the open countryside to the south. Accordingly, when assessing the effect landscape character, the impact is undoubtedly greater.

Notwithstanding the above, it should be reiterated that polytunnels are now commonplace elements within the rural countryside and well established within the application site itself. In providing a view of the retrospective development, the WBC Landscape & Trees Officer has raised no objection as to the impact of the polytunnels on the high-quality landscape of LCA N2, emphasising the importance of the screening along the plot's boundaries in the form of native trees and hedgerows. A condition has been recommended and agreed that will see enhancements to this screening, particularly along the northern boundary, where views into the site are more prominent.

It should also be acknowledged that despite the relatively large number of polytunnels that form this application, the site itself is a 36.3-hectare plot of land. As such, the retrospective polytunnels only cover approximately 5% of the overall holding and do

not fundamentally alter the sites landscape. The majority of the farm remains as undeveloped farmland, and this is the dominant view.

Finally, whilst permission is not being sought on a temporary basis, it should be noted that the nature of the building operation associated with the installation of the polytunnels is not one that would have long term or adverse impacts on the environment. If required in the future, the ground could comfortably be restored back to its previous use as open agricultural land.

For these reasons, it is considered that the development would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area and would comply with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy and the advice contained within the Borough Design Guide.

Neighbouring Amenity: A neighbouring resident of the farm has raised an objection to the development, partly on the basis that it has led to the loss of privacy for nearby residents. The nature of polytunnels is one whereby the privacy of adjacent occupants is not compromised as there is no material change to the use of the land, nor is there any change to ground levels. Accordingly, there is no adverse impact upon neighbouring amenities.

Conclusion: For all the above, it is considered that the material benefits of the development far outweigh the limited landscape impacts. As such, with no other considerations that would justify the withholding of planning permission, the retrospective application is recommended for approval.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	30 May 2025

Earliest date for decision:	3 April 2025
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>JMM</i>
Date:	30 May 2025