

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	242449
Site Address:	Eu Plants, Manor Farm, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TS
Expiry Date:	21 November 2024
Site Visit Date:	8 November 2024
Proposal: Full application for the erection of 5no. 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

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

CONSULTATION RESPONSES
Internal
None

External

None

REPRESENTATIONS	
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Finchampstead Parish Council	No objection
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Ward Member(s)	No comments received
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Neighbours	No comments received
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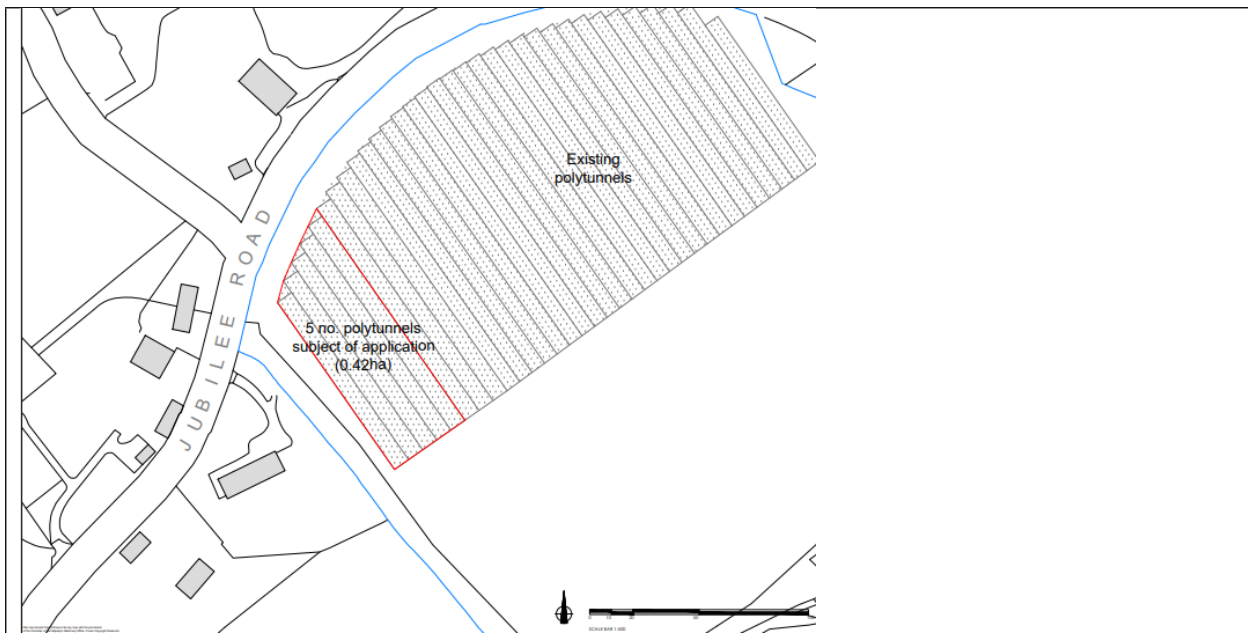
APPRAISAL

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 most recently 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. This current application seeks retrospective planning permission for a further 5 polytunnels in this section of the site, adjoining the existing polytunnels.

The Proposed Site Plan, displayed below, demonstrates how the recently installed polytunnels relate to those previously erected.



The block of 5 polytunnels is specifically for the propagation of raspberry plants and the benefit of providing the covered cropping area is said to allow the applicant to produce a supply of British grown raspberries a month earlier than the typical outdoor harvest.

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.

The retrospective proposal represents a sustainable rural enterprise because the polytunnels protect against adverse weather conditions, allow greater control of temperature and increased yield. It also allows for more efficient movement of plants and protection from the weather for workers. In doing so, 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.

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.

Prior to the erection of the polytunnels over the course of 2016 and 2019, 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.

The 5no. polytunnels relevant to the current application would represent an infill development to the existing polytunnels towards the north of the site and would have a limited impact in comparison to the recent applications for polytunnels from 2016 and 2019. In all previous assessments, it was noted that the polytunnels do not overwhelm the landscape, which remains the case with this smaller development.

In summary, polytunnels are now commonplace elements within the rural countryside and their existence does not deter from the character of the countryside in this instance. In any case, the majority of the farm remains as undeveloped farmland and this remains the dominant view, while the polytunnels fit suitably within its backdrop.

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: The additional 5no. polytunnels are the same height as those previously permitted. They are reasonably separated from the adjacent dwellings on Jubilee Road, such that there would be no unacceptable loss of light or overbearing impact to the nearby sites.

Any increase in noise generated from the development, either through an intensified use of the farm or through the flapping of the polythene sheeting, would dissipate through distance, such that there would be no added impact to neighbouring residents.

Other Matters: The application in 2019 (ref: 191112) included a condition which sought to control the development, by restricting the use of the polythene sheeting outside of the winter months. Notwithstanding this, it should be noted that not only is the current application seeking permission for a smaller number of polytunnels, but also that the aforementioned condition has since been formally removed.

In consolidation with the above, it is not seen prudent to impose any such condition on the currently application.

The landscaping scheme planted in accordance with applications 191112 and 200719 is sufficient to mitigate the current development and prevents a need for any further landscaping details to be submitted in accordance with the current application.

Conclusion: For all the above, the proposal is acceptable, and the application is therefore 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:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	14 November 2024
Earliest date for decision:	22 October 2024

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	14 November 2024