

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	250504
Address:	Manor Farm, Eu Plants, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TS.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 32no. polytunnels (retrospective)		
Type of Development:	Major All other developments		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
☐ No objection
☒ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

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.

- **Winding rural roads and leafy sunken lanes** enclosed by grassy banks with bracken, furze occasionally running through 'tunnels' created by the mature trees, typically ash, create a sense of enclosure and seclusion.
- **A tranquil rural landscape** with an experience of dark skies.
- **Expansive views from vantage points across the surrounding lowlands** of the Blackwater River valley to the south which contrast with the wooded and enclosed character in other parts of the area and to the adjoining forested landscapes of the Finchampstead Ridges.

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- **Elevated ridgeline** which provides a backdrop to the wider lowland landscape in the Blackwater Valley as well as expansive views out over the surrounding landscapes.

Key Issues

- Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture

Landscape Strategy is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the hedgerow network and the woodland habitats. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

The site is located on a site that slopes steeply from the north where it is adjacent to B3348 Jubilee Road which to the east of the site has a fine view of the Blackwater River Valley landscape. The southern site boundary is along Lower Sandhurst Road where there is native trees and hedgerow screening, To the west there is a wide tract of land that separates the site from Cricket Hill where there are 2 layers of screening of trees and hedgerows, and more mature trees against the area of operation within the site. To the east is Dell Road a narrow steeply winding lane where the wooded land slopes steeply to the west. The site is well screened in the wider landscape but the nature of its operations and the effect of the bright white polythene of the polytunnels can only be mitigated by planting and not totally screened from the view particularly in the winter where the polythene covering are required to protect the plants inside from frost.

The proposal is retrospective for 32 polytunnels and year round sheeting to protect the soft fruit from wild birds, as inclement weather.

The polytunnels are 7.7m wide and the length of the polytunnels vary in length between 45m – 100m, and have a maximum height of 3m. Currently there is total length of polytunnels at the site is 5.93km across 9.2 ha of land, The overall area of the site is 36ha and the application amounts to an increase of 1.94ha within the overall 36ha of the site.

Although the polytunnels are usually covered between January – June this is dependant of weather conditions and a flexible approach to covering the tunnels is requested to react to weather conditions, and should not be time restricted.

The polytunnels are erected in the field and comprise a series of metal hoops slotted into metal legs which are screwed into the ground.

As the soft fruit farm is an existing operation and polytunnels have been erected and covered over a period of time and there is good screening on the whole around the site – I have no objection in terms of adverse impact on the landscape despite its high quality. It has been possible over time to provide screening in the wider landscape and this should be an ongoing practice of the applicant ensuring the site is screened as much as possible by using native trees and hedges. The view from Jubilee Road is the clearest view – particularly in the winter where there is little vegetation on the trees. There are Poplar trees planted along most of the boundary. Enhancement of the hedgerow to site northern site boundary is possible and I note there are gaps where it may be possible to add more tree planting (although this is outside of the application site boundary).

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
CL4 – Further enhancement to the northern boundary screen.			
Date:	3.4.25	Signed:	B. Crafer