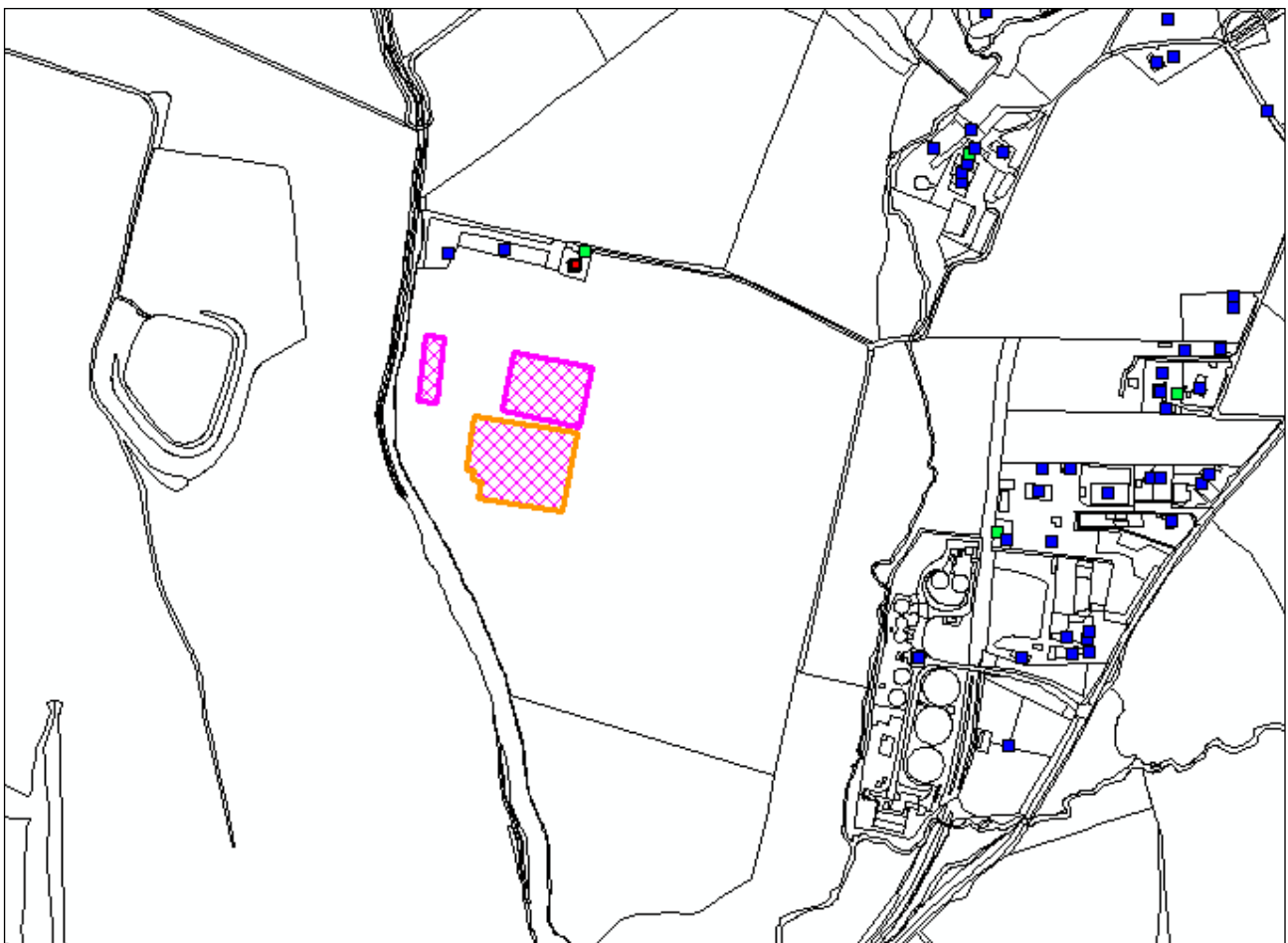


WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
PLANNING COMMITTEE

Case No: 20/01359/FUL
Proposal Description: APPLICATION FOR THE ERECTION OF POLYTUNNELS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF SOFT FRUIT AND BERRIES ON AGRICULTURAL LAND, PHASE II, (part RETROSPECTIVE)
Address: Ford Farm Botley Road Bishops Waltham SO32 1DR
Parish, or Ward if within Winchester City: Bishops Waltham
Applicants Name: Mr Graham Collett
Case Officer: Liz Marsden
Date Valid: 1 July 2020
Recommendation: Permit

Link to Planning Documents : [Planning documents](#)

Pre Application Advice: No



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General Comments

Councillor Miller, request for application to be determined by Planning Committee, see Appendix 1

Additional landscaping assessment and plan received 18.09.20

Site Description

The site is located in the north western corner of Ford Farm, the total area of which is around 38ha. The farm is comprised primarily of open fields, with a dwelling and large barn set along the northern boundary close to the vehicle access to the site. The poly tunnels, both existing and proposed, are set to the south of the barn and occupy an area of around 4ha (including gaps between the rows of tunnels and circulation space around them), with the remainder of the land being used for grazing.

The land of the farm slopes from a high point in the north western corner, down toward the south and east where it is bounded by the River Hamble, which separates it from a sewage treatment works. There are belts of trees along the northern and western boundaries of the farm and a new hedge has been planted along the eastern side of the location of the existing and proposed poly tunnels.

Vehicular access to the site is via a narrow road from Botley Road which serves a few residential properties and an industrial estate located to the north east of the site. There are public footpaths along both the western and eastern boundaries of the site.

Proposal

The application is for the retention of a number of poly tunnels (on an area of 0.74ha), and the future erection of a further set of tunnels to the south of the existing which will occupy an additional area of around 1ha. These tunnels are in addition to those which have been permitted in 2019 (an area of 1.86ha) which were erected in 2018 in connection with the applicant's new soft fruit production enterprise. The poly tunnels are principally used for growing strawberries and raspberries.

The poly tunnels are lightweight, curved, structures, the highest point of which is 3.7m high and constructed from a series of metal hoops, across which the clear plastic covering is drawn.

Relevant Planning History

17/02773/APN - single poly tunnel - prior approval not required - 09.11.2017

19/01944/FUL - Erection of tunnels for the production of soft fruit and berries on agricultural land (RETROSPECTIVE) – Permitted 20.11.2019

Consultations

WCC Service Lead for Environmental Services - Landscape and Open Space – Landscape - No objection. These are non-permanent structures and whilst there are views to south and east these are limited by hedgerows. Site can be viewed from two adjacent footpaths, but is already partially occupied by poly tunnels and scale of the additional units unlikely to change views to the extent that it would be significantly detrimental in an agricultural setting. The additional planting that is proposed will be

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important in helping to screen the proposal.

HCC Surface Water Management – No objection subject to condition

HCC Highways – No objection. Satisfied that the arrangements for the transport of workers and produce will not have any significant highways impact,

Representations:

Bishops Waltham Parish Council

- No objection in principle but landscaping should be provided to minimise visual intrusion and improve biodiversity

3 letters received objecting to the application for the following material planning reasons:

- Retrospective application
- Will result in increase in traffic out of an already difficult turning
- Increased visual intrusion of this blot on the landscape
- Inadequate landscaping has been put in
- Should be reducing the use of plastic
- Plastic is not removed between growing seasons

3 letters of support received (provided by applicant).

- Increased demand for 'out of season' soft fruit, with customer preference for locally grown produce
- Poly tunnels provide optimum growing micro-climate which lengthens the season and reduces the need to import
- Poly tunnels protect fruit from wind and rain which adversely affects fruit quality and reduces the need to use chemicals and pesticides
- Enable the farm to grow its business for the economic benefit of the area

Relevant Planning Policy:

Winchester Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy
DS1, MTRA4, CP8, CP16, CP14, CP20

Winchester Local Plan Part 2 – Development Management and Site Allocations
DM1, DM15, DM16, DM17, DM18, DM23

National Planning Policy Guidance/Statements:
National Planning Policy Framework

Planning Considerations

Principle of development.

The site is part of an existing farm and represents the diversification of the farming activities which are generally acceptable under policy MTRA4 of LPP1 and the NPPF, subject to their impact on the character and landscape of the area and neighbouring uses.

Policy CP8 relates to economic development and diversification and information has been provided to illustrate how the poly tunnels are essential to the productivity of the

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enterprise, in enabling a longer growing season and a better quality of fruit with the protection afforded by the covering reducing the risk of diseases spread by wind and rain. The proposals will support the local economy with increased employment and the expansion of the horticultural and agricultural business in accordance with this policy.

Design/layout

Whilst the erection of the poly tunnels has resulted in a greater level of ground coverage by structures these are grouped together, with the poly tunnels set close to the large livestock shed in the north west corner of the farm, retaining the uncluttered and open fields that make up the significant majority of the farm. The poly tunnels are functional in design and appropriate to modern agricultural methods and do not therefore alter the character of the farm. The question has been asked as to whether it would be possible to use a different colour or more matt polythene, which could reduce the visibility of the tunnels. However, they are designed to maximise the light within the tunnels and it is understood that, whilst experiments have been carried out into the effectiveness of alternative materials, the only comparable solution is a bright yellow colour, which it is not considered would be preferable or less intrusive.

Additional justification for the location of the tunnels is due to the fact that the south facing slope enables maximum daylight hours for the plants and the proximity to the existing barn also enables the rainwater runoff from the roof of the barn to be stored and used in drip-watering the plants, with the power required being provided by the solar panels on the barn roof.

Impact on character of area

The land on which Ford Farm is located slopes down from the highest point in the north west to the south and east. The siting of the poly tunnels in the north west corner is therefore in the most prominent part of the site and, due to the white appearance of the translucent polythene covering the tunnels, results in them being visible from public vantage points along Botley Road to the south and east. There are also footpaths along the western and eastern boundaries of the site from which the tunnels can be seen. However, even with the proposed block of tunnels to the south of the site, the nearest distance to the road is in excess of 300m and there is a belt of trees along the roadside which ensure that the tunnels are only glimpsed rather than being in full view. It is also proposed to plant a new hedgerow along the eastern side of the tunnels which will provide a windbreak and also serve to screen the tunnels.

Whilst the tunnels are in close proximity and clearly visible from the footpath to the west, they are at a sufficient distance to ensure that they do not encroach onto or unduly enclose the footpath so as to be overbearing in views from that path. The nearest point of the footpath to the east is in the region of 140m away. Furthermore, given the rural nature of the location of the path, it is to be expected that agricultural structures will be visible. It is not considered that the development will detract unduly from the rural or landscape character of the area and it is therefore in accordance with policies CP20 of LPP1 and DM23 of LPP2.

Impact on neighbour amenity.

Other than the agricultural dwelling serving the farm the nearest residential property to the east is over 600m from the site and is not directly affected by the proposal in terms of loss of light or immediate outlook. The existing tunnels are visible in views from the house, made more apparent by the reflectivity of their material, though at the distance

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that they are located they cannot be said to be unduly intrusive in the outlook from these properties. The limited visual impact that they have will be further reduced by the increased landscaping that is to be planted, which will obscure the majority of the existing poly tunnels. The additional tunnels that are proposed are set further down the hill and would be screened from the house by existing belts of trees.

The proposed block of poly tunnels will be closer to properties to the south, along Botley Road, though again these are at a good distance (over 500m) from the nearest tunnels and will be effectively screened by the belt of mature trees along the roadside.

Landscape/Trees

A hedge has been planted along the eastern side of the poly tunnel site in accordance with a condition on the previous planning consent. It was however apparent at the time of the site visit that this was not thriving due, in large part, to very dry conditions and despite an irrigation hose. Given the visibility of the site from the east, additional planting along this hedge line is proposed, including 3m high standard trees of various species to provide a more immediate screening effect and to reinforce the hedgerow. This landscaping will serve to reduce the visual impact of the tunnels from the nearest residential properties.

Highways/Parking

Additional information has been provided about the traffic generated by the site, in the light of the increased number of workers that will be required to pick the crops on a daily basis during the growing season. The proposal generates little additional vehicular traffic, with pickers being transported to the site by minibus and the daily harvest being packed, on site, into a single refrigerated vehicle. There are therefore no objections on highways grounds.

Other Matters

- Ecology. The poly tunnels have minimal impact on the biodiversity of the area. Their construction enables them to be removed and the land restored entirely and their design allows access through them by wildlife. The provision of a new hedgerow will create new habitat and the introduction of bees into each tunnel to provide early pollination, strengthens the indigenous insect population.
- Due regard should be given to the Equality Act 2010: Public Sector Equality Duty. Public bodies need to consciously think about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. The weight given to the Equality Duty, compared to the other factors, will depend on how much that function affects discrimination, equality of opportunity and good relations and the extent of any disadvantage that needs to be addressed. The Local Planning Authority has given due regard to this duty and the considerations do not outweigh any matters in the exercise of our duty.

Conclusion

It is considered therefore that, whilst the location and design of the poly tunnels are such that they do have some adverse visual impact on the appearance of surrounding area, sufficient information has been provided to demonstrate their requirement and any limited harm is outweighed by the economic benefits to be

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derived from the expansion of this established agricultural business. In addition, the proposed hedge will serve to mitigate some of the visual impact and the proposal is therefore in accordance with policies of the Development Plan.

Recommendation

Permission, subject to the following condition(s):

Conditions

1. The additional landscape works, as set out in the Landscape Plan and Landscape Implementation and Management Plan, received 28.10.19, shall be carried out within three months from the date of this permission and in accordance with the approved details. If within a period of five years after planting any tree or plant is removed, dies or becomes, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, seriously damaged, defective or diseased another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally approved shall be planted at the same place, within the next planting season, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area

2. Should the tunnels no longer be required for the agricultural purposes that are specified in the supporting documentation, they shall be removed in their entirety and the land restored to its original condition.

Reason: The application is in a rural area where the retention of redundant temporary structures would not be appropriate.

3. The drainage system shall be constructed in accordance with the Surface Water Management Plan. Surface water discharge to the watercourse shall be limited to existing greenfield discharge rates. Any changes to the approved documentation must be submitted to and approved in writing by Local Planning Authority and Lead Local Flood Authority. Any revised details submitted for approval must include a technical summary highlighting any changes, updated detailed drainage drawings and detailed drainage calculations.

Reason: In order to ensure the satisfactory drainage of the site.

4. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

GC S1 - Site layout plan

Q4547 – Typical poly tunnel elevations

Landscaping plan received 18.09.20

Landscape Implementation and Management Plan received 18.09.20

Surface Water Management Plan

Reasons: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning

Informatives:

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1. In accordance with the NPPF, Winchester City Council (WCC) take a positive and proactive approach to development proposals, working with applicants and agents to achieve the best solution. To this end WCC:
 - offer a pre-application advice service and,
 - update applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application, where possible suggesting alternative solutions.In this instance additional information has been sought during the course of the application to address queries and concerns.

2. The Local Planning Authority has taken account of the following development plan policies and proposals:-
Local Plan Part 1 - Joint Core Strategy: DS1, MTRA4, CP8, CP16, CP14, CP20

Local Plan Part 2 – Development Management and Site Allocations: DM1, DM15, DM16, DM17, DM18, DM23

3. This permission is granted for the following reasons:
The development is in accordance with the Policies and Proposals of the Development Plan set out above, and other material considerations do not have sufficient weight to justify a refusal of the application. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning permission should therefore be granted.

4. It is recommended that the applicant refer to the HCC website [Hampshire flood and drainage techniques](#) for further information on recommended surface water drainage techniques.

Appendix 1

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**City Councillor's request that a Planning Application be considered by
the Planning Committee**

Request from Councillor: Stephen Miller
Case Number: 20/01359/FUL
Site Address: Ford Farm
Proposal Description: Erection of Polytunnels
Requests that the item be considered by the Planning Committee for the following material planning reasons: <p>The site can be clearly seen from the Botley Road and this is not consistent with the report. It is very visible even at this time of year and any expansion will make the situation worse. It is regarded by many people as an eyesore.</p> <p>It can be seen from two nearby footpaths and a similar matter was of great concerns to our officers on a recent application in Durley, which they opposed. The impact of this application will be far greater.</p> <p>The extra tunnels do not seem to add any extra jobs, which would imply the application can not be correct. How will the extra plants be cared for, picked packed and transported without extra labour.</p> <p>Item 6 of the code of practice states that the tunnels polythene should be removed for a minimum of 6 months, this does not seem to happen on the current ones, so how will this be done on the extra ones?</p> <p>It seems that this is the second retrospective application on this site in recent times. This sort of behaviour is a matter of great concern to residents across the district and was raised at full council by a member of the public and many councillors are also troubled by it and feel it is unacceptable. Therefore I believe that the full committee should debate this application.</p>