

Agenda Item 46.

Application Number	Expiry Date	Parish	Ward
191112	11 October 2019	Finchampstead	Finchampstead South

Applicant	Mr Slavchev
Site Address	Manor Farm, Finchampstead RG40 3TL
Proposal	Full planning application for the erection of 25No polytunnels (retrospective)
Type	Full
Officer	Simon Taylor
Reason for determination by committee	Major application (> 1 hectare in area)

FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Planning Committee on Wednesday 9 October 2019
REPORT PREPARED BY	Assistant Director – Place

SUMMARY
<p>This application seeks retrospective approval for the erection of 25 polytunnels as part of the wider soft fruit production within a 36.3 hectare farm known as Manor Farm. It is operated by EU Plants and is roughly bounded by Jubilee Road, Dell Road, Lower Sandhurst Road and Cricket Hill/Longwater Road.</p> <p>The polytunnels each measure 7.7m (width) x 3m (height) and 75m-120m (length) within an area of 2.2 hectares. It complements the existing 4.85 hectares of polytunnels already on the farm, resulting in a total of 7.05 hectares or 19% of the total land holding. They are used for the propagation of baby strawberry plants.</p> <p>The Planning Statement submitted as part of this application acknowledges that retrospective planning application 161194 for 10 polytunnels across one hectare in the south eastern corner of Manor Farm was to be the final phase of polytunnel construction. However, a new contract for an additional 110,000 strawberry plants for late 2019 was agreed, primarily to prepare for potential border and tariff issues that are likely to arise with Brexit uncertainties.</p> <p>The polytunnels are located on the southern slope of the hillside at the northern end of the farm. They are readily visible in wider views of Blackwater Valley from the Finchampstead War Memorial intersection and along a 190m length of Jubilee Road. A Landscape Visual Appraisal was submitted at the request of the Council and whilst it is readily apparent in views from the public domain and there is a clear and pronounced impact upon the landscape character, the impacts are outweighed by the benefits of increased production of sustainable local produce and no objection is raised, subject to additional low level screening in Condition 2, details of glare and noise minimisation in Condition 3 and the removal of the sheeting for six months of the year in Condition 4.</p>

PLANNING STATUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countryside • Opposite Listed Building (Finchampstead War Memorial) • Ancient Woodland (along eastern boundary) • Grade 3 agricultural land classification • Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (5km zone)

- Flood zone 1
- Classified road
- Farnborough Aerodrome consultation zone
- Heathrow Aerodrome safeguarding zone
- South East Water consultation zone

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee authorise the GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following conditions and informatives:

Conditions

1) Approved details

This permission is in respect of the plans numbered RAC/8369/1, dated May 2019 and RAC/8369/2 and RAC/8369/3, dated April 2019. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless other minor variations are agreed in writing after the date of this permission and before implementation with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

2) Landscaping details

A scheme of landscaping (which includes species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees/shrubs to be planted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority within one month of the date of this planning permission. As a minimum, it shall include low level screening along the northern boundary with Jubilee Road and The Ridges and native hedge (including evergreens) between the northern end of the polytunnels and the upper reaches of the slope. The landscaping is to be shown at 3–5 years from planting in a north-south cross section through the site and must demonstrate the angle of view from the war memorial intersection so as to demonstrate the optimum screening of the polytunnels and retention of wider valley views.

Planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting and seeding seasons following the date of this permission.

Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the date of this planning permission) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure adequate planting in the interests of visual amenity and to protect the character and public views of the countryside.

Relevant policy: NPPF Section 15 and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21.

3) Materials details

To ensure no adverse glare or noise disturbance, details of the polytunnels (including the steel structure, fittings and polythene sheeting) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority within one month of the date of this planning permission. Where required, changes are to be implemented within three months of the discharge of this condition and thereafter maintained for the life of the development.

Reason: To protect neighbouring properties from adverse glare and noise disturbance and road users from adverse glare and to ensure a satisfactory form of development in the countryside

Relevant policy: NPPF Sections 9 and 15 and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP11.

4) Months of use of polytunnels

The polytunnels hereby permitted shall not be covered with the polythene sheeting between 1 July and 31 December each year. During this time, the polytunnel sheeting is to be stored in a manner that is first agreed in writing by the local planning authority within one month of the date of this planning permission.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the countryside.

Relevant policies: NPPF Section 15 and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP11.

5) Limitation of activities

The strawberry plants housed within the polytunnels, hereby permitted, shall be used as parent/mother plants for propagation only and shall not to be used for picking of fruit.

Reason: To avoid adverse impact on the public highway and associated activities.

Relevant policy: NPPF Section 15 and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP6.

Informatives

1) Discharge conditions

The applicant is reminded that this approval is granted subject to conditions which must be complied within one month of the planning permission. Retention of the development hereby approved without complying with these requirements may be outside the terms of this permission and liable to enforcement action. The information required should be formally submitted to the Council for consideration with the relevant fee. Once the details have been approved in writing, the development should be maintained (or modified where required) only in accordance with those details.

2) Discussion

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations,

including planning policies and any representations that may have been received. This planning application has been the subject of positive and proactive discussions with the applicant in terms of addressing concerns relating to landscape and visual impact with the submission of a Landscape Visual Appraisal.

The decision to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF is considered to be a positive outcome of these discussions.

PLANNING HISTORY		
App Number	Proposal	Decision
227/1949	Calf house buildings	Approved 16 June 1949
AG/2006/7094	Agricultural building	Approved 27 March 2006
AG/2010/1446	Agricultural barn (prior approval)	Approved 19 July 2010
AG/2011/2110	Irrigation reservoir (prior approval)	Approved 28 October 2011
AG/2011/2616	Irrigation shed (prior approval)	Approved 13 January 2012
CLP/2012/0189	20 polytunnels (1.85ha) (certificate)	Refused 25 April 2012
F/2011/2620	20 polytunnels (1.85ha), ditch and hardstanding	Approved 22 May 2012, subject to sheeting being installed January to June only (Condition 9)
F/2012/0039	Use of barn for two caravans for seasonal workers and installation of sewage treatment plant	Approved 3 October 2012, subject to a three year limit and use by EU Plants only
F/2013/1493	Plant irrigation frame (retrospective)	Approved 11 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 26 November 2015
153434	3 agricultural cold store buildings	Approved 3 March 2016
160643	12 polytunnels (0.61 ha) (retrospective)	Approved 25 May 2016
161194	10 polytunnels (1.02ha) (retrospective)	Approved 15 June 2016
160655	Agricultural worker's dwelling	Approved 19 January 2017

SUMMARY INFORMATION	
Site Area	36.3 hectare farm
Plot Area	2.2 hectares
Land use	Agricultural
Area of polytunnels prior to this application	4.85 hectares (13% of farm)
Current area of polytunnels	7.05 hectares (19% of farm)

CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
WBC Environmental Health	No objection.
WBC Ecology	
WBC Conservation	
WBC Tree and Landscape	No objection, subject to additional landscaping details in Condition 2 to partly screen the polytunnels when viewed from Jubilee Road.
WBC Highways	No objection is raised on the basis that the proposal would not lead to any increase in traffic movements on local roads.

REPRESENTATIONS	
Finchampstead Parish Council	No objection is raised but the spoiling of the view is 'unfortunate'.
Local Members	No comments received.
Neighbours	<p>The application was consulted to neighbours from 28 May to 18 June 2019 and a site notice was installed from 30 May to 20 June 2019.</p> <p>Submissions against the application were received from the following properties:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Bolney House, Jubilee Road, Finchampstead RG40 3RU 2) Bolney House, Jubilee Road, Finchampstead RG40 3RU (x2) 3) 4 Merryweather Close, Finchampstead RG40 4YH 4) Ridgewood, Dell Road, Finchampstead RG40 3TD 5) Dell Road, Finchampstead RG40 3TB (no house specified) 6) Dell Road, Finchampstead RG40 3TB (no house specified) 7) The Ridges, Finchampstead RG40 4YH (no house specified) 8) The Ridges, Finchampstead RG40 4YH (no house specified) 9) 1 Blackwater View, Finchampstead RG40 3TF 10) Fair Green, Longwater Lane, Finchampstead RG40 4NR 11) Moor Green House, Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead RG40 3TH 12) Lower Sandhurst Road (no specific address supplied) <p>The submissions raised the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too close to the war memorial • Heritage and religious significance of the memorial is affected <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The impact upon the Grade II listed war memorial is acceptable, as noted in 'Heritage and Conservation'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polytunnels are highly visible, unsightly and will affect views • Landscaping is inadequate, particularly in winter months • Would be better located on flat land <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The application was supported by a Landscape Visual Appraisal and it is agreed that the location and appearance of the polytunnels is acceptable, subject to additional landscaping in Condition 2, which includes evergreen cover. Refer to 'Character of the Area' for further commentary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glare and distraction will disrupt drivers <p><u>Officer comment:</u> Details of materials are required in Condition 3 and this includes reference to glare.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of business will lead to additional HGV movements on small country lanes

Officer comment: The retrospective proposal is not perceived to result in any increase in traffic movements, as is discussed further in 'Highway Access'.

- Wildlife habitat will be lost

Officer comment: There are no unreasonable ecological impacts, as noted in 'Ecology'.

- Will affect property values

Officer comment: This is not a relevant planning consideration.

- Is within an Area of Special Landscape Importance

Officer comment: The designation of the site as an Area of Special Landscape Importance no longer applies. Regardless, the importance of the landscape has been considered in 'Character of the Area'.

- The last application was determined to be the last requirement for polytunnels
- The sheeting for the polytunnels was initially only for six months a year

Officer comment: The above comments are correct but do not form a basis for the refusal of the application. Refer to a further explanation in 'Principle of Development'.

- Use of single use plastics

Officer comment: The polytunnels do not consist of single use plastic and the storage of the plastic between July and December is subject Condition 4.

- Application is retrospective

Officer comment: The Council has the ability to grant retrospective approval.

- Hedgerow has been removed

Officer comment: It is unclear which hedgerow has been removed but the recommendation in this application is subject to Condition 2, which requires landscape details, including an enhancement of landscaping along the northern boundary with Jubilee Road.

- Cannot sustain additional industrial activity

	<p><u>Officer comment:</u> The use remains agricultural in nature and subject to Conditions 2-5, the additional polytunnels represent a well-managed approach for the farm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a sustainable development <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The installation of polytunnels is used to increase yields, protect against damage from adverse weather conditions and extend the growing season and this allows for increased UK production and a reduction in the reliance upon imports. On this basis, it represents a sustainable approach to farming.</p> <p>Submissions for the application were received from the following properties:</p> <p>13) Court Cottage, Jubilee Rd, Finchampstead RG40 3SD 14) Ridge End, The Ridges, Finchampstead RG40 3SY</p> <p>The submissions raised the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for a profitable local business • Is not a traffic hazard <p><u>Officer comment:</u> The above comments are noted, including that the retrospective proposal allows for business growth.</p>
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APPLICANTS POINTS	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The polytunnels are required to allow the enterprise to continue growing and meet customer demand • The plant husbandry requirements of the enterprise require the controlled growing environment provided by polytunnels • The scale of the proposed development results in an area of 6% covered by polytunnels on the land holding. This will result in a total 19% of the land holding being used for polytunnels • The polytunnels are of typical design and are sited on an area of low lying land which will minimise visual and landscape effects • The proposal is in compliance with National and Local Planning Policy supporting a sustainable rural enterprise

PLANNING POLICY		
National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Core Strategy 2010	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
Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	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
Borough Design Guide SPD	Section 9	Rural and Settlement Edge

PLANNING ISSUES

Description of Proposal

1. The application involves the erection of 25 polytunnels consisting of a steel frame and polythene sheeting, aligned in parallel rows generally north/south in arrangement across a 2.2 hectare area at the northern end of the farm. The polytunnels have a height of 3m, width of 7.7m and variable length of 75m-120m. They are used to house a total of 110,000 strawberry plants that are growing on elevated tables. The plants will then be propagated on site and sold as part of the EU Plants business. The strawberry plants are then planted on other sites for growing of strawberries by other farmers.
2. The supporting documentation indicates that the frames are permanent and will be covered in polythene from January to June dependent on weather conditions. No new access tracks are proposed and no trees have been removed.
3. The polytunnels and tables have already been constructed/installed and the application is retrospective. It follows an initial enforcement investigation in January 2019 (reference RFS/2019/084829).

Site Description

4. 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. To the north, the farm is readily visible in wider views across towards Blackwater Valley from the intersection of The Ridges and Jubilee Road.
5. On the farm are two areas of buildings – in the centre of the farm (which includes an agricultural worker's dwelling) and towards the southern end near Lower Sandhurst Road (which includes seasonal workers accommodation). There is 4.85 hectares of existing polytunnels concentrated in the south eastern corner of the farm with open farmland, access tracks and reservoirs occupying up the rest of the farm.
6. It is bounded on Lower Sandhurst Road and Jubilee Road by hedgerow, partial or otherwise. It is also framed by a sporadic collection of residential dwellings in the countryside, including along the western side of Dell Lane, equestrian facilities along the western boundary, the village of Finchampstead to the west beyond and Blackwater Lakes across Lower Sandhurst Road to the south.

Principle of Development

7. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development

Plan. Policy CC01 of the MDD Local Plan 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.

Definition of development

8. Section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 notes that development means the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land. This is distinct from the use of any land and buildings for the purposes of agriculture, which is not development as outlined in subparagraph (2)(e).
9. The polytunnel structure comprises of a steel frame, with polythene sheeting and table tops in which the strawberries are grown. The polytunnels are between 75m and 120m long and 3m in height and with 25 rows, afford a prominent size. The polytunnels and the tables are affixed to the ground, there is no intention for them to be moved and there is a large amount of manual labour involved with the construction of the structure. With the exception of the sheeting, they are also intended as permanent elements. On the basis of the above, the erection of the polytunnels and the tables represents development. This is consistent with the conclusions reached in the officer report for CLP/2012/0189 and in subsequent planning applications.

Location within the countryside

10. The site is within the countryside with the site located 385m to the east of the limited development location of Finchampstead although Manor Farm itself extends roughly to the settlement edge.
11. 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 83 of the NPPF requires consideration of the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.
12. 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.
13. The polytunnels are visible in the views from Jubilee Road to the north but as noted in 'Character of the Area', the harm is not unreasonable. It is a typical agricultural element that is increasingly used for soft fruit production and for this reason, it does not appear adversely out of place in the rural setting and does not represent an adverse encroachment or expansion of development. It is therefore consistent with the intent of Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy.

Expansion of business

14. Manor Farm was acquired by EU Plants Ltd in 2011 and now grows strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. Supporting documentation with the most recent planning approval (161194, approved 15 June 2016) noted that *‘Due to a significant increase in orders, the applicant has brought forward polytunnel construction to the maximum desired level on the farm. With all tunnels in place, the farm will be able to grow 3 million strawberry tray plants and 2.5 million raspberry cuttings. The 3 million strawberry plants grown in the tunnels will be enough to plant out in the strawberry fields at Manor Farm’* and that *‘The block of polytunnels now proposed represents the final phase of polytunnels required on the farm’*. (underlined emphasis added)
15. This application clearly represents a further expansion of the business beyond what was stated in the previous application. The reasoning is the signing of a new contract for an additional 110,000 strawberry plants per year. This is primarily due to uncertainties of the Brexit process, including the possibility of a ‘No Deal’ departure that poses significant unknown constraints for the imports of soft fruits from Europe. It will avoid the need to bring in plants from outside sources and maintain a supply of production of plants for sale, whilst reducing the number of vehicles bringing plants to the farm.
16. On its own, the additional polytunnels represents a demonstrated ongoing growth of a viable farming enterprise and the expansion of the existing framing operations is actively encouraged by paragraph 83 of the NPPF. On this basis, there is no objection to the expansion. When considering the reasoning behind the additional expansion, no additional objection is raised as the business case and the market environment has changed.
17. The previous application also referred to the fact that the sustainability of the farming operations relies upon a balance of open field growing and propagation in polytunnels. At the time, it incorporated 13% of the farm within polytunnels and this has increased to 19% under this application. There is no reason to dispute that this balance remains acceptable.

Character of the Area

18. 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.
19. From a landscape perspective, Policies CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan require consideration of the landscape character and paragraphs 170(a) and (b) of the NPPF state that development should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a) *Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*

b) *Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*

20. Prior to the erection of the polytunnels, the farmland comprised open countryside and their construction represented an interruption to the rural backdrop that is visible across the valley from Jubilee Road and The Ridges. However, it is also framed to the north and east by woodland, which gives it a semi enclosed appearance. The main public vantage points include an approximate length of 190m of Jubilee Road/The Ridges that follows the ridge and when approaching from the north over the crest of Jubilee Road. Views from the pedestrian footpath on the southern side of the road are also interrupted. It is less visible from other areas in the valley, including Dell Lane and not readily visible from Lower Sandhurst Road. There are some distant glimpses from beyond the general vicinity of Manor Farm.

21. In short, the polytunnels are at the highest point on the farm and in the most visible location, both because of the extent of view lines and proximity to road users and pedestrians on the road network as well as from several surrounding residential properties. The white colour of the polytunnels represents a clear contrast to the rural countryside and there is potential for glare to contribute to this impact.



Proposed



Previous

22. The site is split between two Landscape Character Areas - N2 in the south and M2 in the north. The polytunnels are in the northern M2 section of the site, on the upper slopes of the Blackwater River Valley affording views south across the

valley and more confined views north of the B3348 and scattered dwellings on the rising slope to the north in Finchampstead Village.

23. The M2 character area 'Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands is a high quality area as a result of the strong character and good condition. It has a distinctive sense of place making a strong contribution to the overall landscape character, particularly the distinctive ridge, woodland and heath. The good condition is the result of the well-managed and maintained landscape elements. The future landscape strategy is to conserve the existing character continuing the active management of all the elements. It has a high sensitivity with a low capacity for change particularly given the ridgeline and its views of the river valley which is the most sensitive of all.
24. When considering the landscape impact, it requires a consideration of the best location within the farm. Accordingly, at the request of the Council, the application was accompanied by a Landscape Visual Appraisal (LVA), which has been reviewed by the Council's Trees and Landscape Officer.
25. The LVA considers the sensitivity of the site to be medium, which is '*an area with a well-defined sense of place and/or character in moderate condition; or an area valued by designation at a local or regional level; or a partly damaged feature of high intrinsic value; or an intact feature of moderate intrinsic value [such as prominent trees or tree groups which contribute to the character of the site, screening of views, landscape or historic landscape pattern]; a landscape or feature which is partially tolerant of change of the type identified.*'
26. Whilst some of the reasoning is contested, there is no dispute with the conclusion. It also concludes that there are no significant residual effects anticipated beyond 2.5km and that the overall magnitude of change would be minor adverse because there are no landscape features of value, polytunnels are a characterising feature of the landscape and the retrospective proposal does not introduce any new elements. Minor adverse is where there is '*a perceptible change to the view, but which would not materially affect the composition, the appreciation of landscape character or the ability to take in or enjoy the view*'.
27. The LVA concludes that given the medium sensitivity of the landscape receptor and the minor landscape magnitude of change, the predicted overall residual level of effect on the landscape of this part of the Manor Farm landholding would be at most minor adverse when mitigation planting has become established. To its benefit, the LVA argues that the location of the development area is on rising ground, is set into the local topography and benefits from a high degree of screening of mature trees and hedgerow limiting visibility. Where the development is seen, it is in the context of the existing established landscape pattern of the soft fruit farming operation.
28. The conclusions of the LVA are not disputed but it is reliant upon additional hedgerow planting and it will take 3-5 years for the hedgerow to establish and for the harm to be alleviated. Accordingly, Condition 2 requires enhanced screening at a slightly lower level than the existing road screening, which would be acceptable in both retaining the intermittent views of the river valley from the higher vantage points, including the war memorial whilst reducing the visibility of the polytunnels.

29. The officer reports for the two most recent applications for polytunnels from 2016 noted that they do not overwhelm the landscape. These polytunnels were in a different area of the farm but the conclusion remains consistent. They are now commonplace elements within the rural countryside and their existence does not overwhelm from the character of the countryside. Whilst the harm is not eliminated, it is limited to the foreground and is adequately screened. On this basis, an alternative location for the polytunnels is considered unnecessary.
30. Furthermore, the polytunnels in the south eastern corner of the farm have year round use and are not subject to any seasonal restriction relating to the plastic sheeting being removed between July and December. However, because of their more prominent location, there is sufficient justification for Condition 4 to be applied in this case, which limits use to between January and June only. It is suggested that the sheeting will be dropped between the polytunnels outside of these months. However, there is a lack of clarity and potential for continued visibility of the sheeting and Condition 4 therefore requires further details regarding its storage within one month of this determination. Furthermore, to be in compliance with this condition, it would also require its removal until January 2020.

Heritage and Conservation

31. The Grade II listed Finchampstead War Memorial occupies a deliberately prominent position at the intersection of Jubilee Road and The Ridges. Poor Ridge Cottage on Dell Road is also a Build of Traditional Local Character and it lies 50m to the east although it is separated by a ribbon of ancient woodland.
32. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that development must ensure the preservation of any nearby listed building, including its setting, Paragraphs 192-196 of the NPPF require consideration of the harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset and Policy TB24 of the MDD Local Plan requires the conservation and enhancement of Listed Buildings, including their views and setting. Policy TB26 of the MDD Local Plan also requires the retention and enhancement of the traditional, historical, local and special character of a Buildings of Traditional Local Character and their setting.
33. There is no in-principle objection on heritage and conservation grounds. The polytunnels are sited significantly below the level of the war memorial and adequately separated by a distance of 25m, inclusive of the the roadway, fencing and landscaping. They are visible in views when standing at the war memorial. However, as the polytunnels serve an agricultural purpose within an agricultural paddock, they are not out of character for the area and the impact upon the listed item, including its purpose as a monument of reflection and remembrance and its wider setting on a prominent intersection, is not unreasonable. The Council's Conservation Officer concurs, noting that whilst the polytunnels are visible in immediate views, they are partly screened by vegetation and are not evident in wider views with no direct visual impact on the direct setting of monument

34. There is adequate separation and a significant coverage of woodland to the eastern side of the farm boundary such that there is no apparent impact upon the adjoining Building of Local Traditional Character.

Neighbour Amenity

35. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy aims to protect neighbouring amenity.

Dominance and light

36. The polytunnels sit within the south facing slope of the farm, have a height of 3m and occupy an area of 2.2 hectares. They will be visible from various vantage points, including from neighbouring residential properties but there is no unreasonable neighbour amenity impact in terms of dominance or loss of light because of the separation distance of at least 130m when measured to the nearest property to the west, existing tree coverage in the ancient woodland to the east and the change in topography to the north and across the wider area.

Views

37. There is an interruption to the landscaped and rural views from various residential surrounding properties, including from properties that adjoin the eastern boundary of the farm on the western side of Dell Lane.
38. However, the findings of the LVA are concurred with and because of the level of vegetation cover in the immediate boundaries of the farm and on neighbouring properties and for the same reasons outlined above in 'Character of the Area', the impact is not such that would render the application unreasonable. The LVA determines that the magnitude of change in the views for residents is assessed as moderate adverse during construction, reducing to minor adverse (locally moderate adverse immediately after and when mitigation planting has become established. The residual level of effect on these high sensitivity receptors is therefore generally moderate-minor adverse, locally major-moderate adverse.
39. As more than 75% of the farm remains as undeveloped farmland, the rural countryside remains the dominant appearance and the polytunnels fit suitably within its backdrop. On this basis, no objection is raised although this is subject to Condition 4 relating to the storage of the sheeting when not in use.

Glare and noise

40. Because of the expanse of polythene sheeting and its orientation on the southern face of the hillside facing towards the sun, there is potential for ongoing glare and it is important that this be minimised, particularly as any glare can affect properties across substantial distances. There is also the potential for ongoing noise disturbance from the clattering of the steel fittings and flapping from the polythene sheeting in the wind although it is likely that this would dissipate through distance. Details of methods to deal with these factors forms part of Condition 3.

Highway Access

41. Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy requires the mitigation of any adverse effects upon the local and strategic transport network, an enhancement of road safety and no highway problems or traffic related environmental problems.
42. The retrospective proposal represents a 6% increase in the area of the farm that is covered by polytunnels and will allow for the growing of an additional 110,000 mother plants per year. These are transported in 11,300 poly bags, each 1m long, which will have initially resulted in additional traffic movements. However, post planting of the mother plants, the expansion of the polytunnels does not correspond with any noticeable increase in traffic movements, including HGVs.
43. Whilst the polytunnels adjoin Jubilee Road, access to and from Manor Farm is via Lower Sandhurst Road in the south. Surrounding roads have a limited width, including a 6 foot 6 inch width restriction at the junction of Cricket Hill and Longwater Road. Issues of limited access and increased traffic generation on local roads has been raised by several residents. However, as is demonstrated below, as there is not increase in vehicle movements, there is no additional adverse traffic movements and no change to access routes.
44. The existing (pre application) farming operations includes the movement of some HGVs associated with the movement of materials and plants from the farm. Given that agricultural uses are allowed and that the proposal does not significantly increase vehicle movements, the Council's Highways Officer currently raised no objection on traffic terms.
45. This retrospective proposal involves the propagation of mother strawberry plants for use within the farm. It will allow for the growth of baby strawberry plants on site and this removes the need for importing strawberry plants regularly each season and would help maintain a continued supply of plants within the farm.
46. Plants would continue to be exported from the farm to be used for growing strawberries elsewhere but there is also the reduction in vehicle movements associated with plants being brought onto the farm. As such, there will not be any increase in traffic movements, including of HGVs, because the need for continued intake of plants is removed. Movement of the plants within the farm will be accommodated within existing farming operations.
47. On the basis of the above, there will be no change in staffing levels or daily farming hours, existing access within the farm will be unchanged and there will be no material change in vehicle movements across the season or likely interruption to existing traffic flows within surrounding roads. Condition 5 is applied to ensure that the polytunnels are used for propagation of plants rather than picking, with the latter arrangement envisaged to create additional vehicle movements.
48. Several submissions have raised concerns of glare affecting vehicles along Jubilee Road and The Ridges. Consistent with comments made in 'Neighbour Amenity', there are no in-principle objections but it is prudent to seek additional details to ensure that there is no adverse short or long term impact to the visibility of motorists on the highway network. This is detailed in Condition 3. On this point, a review of accident data shows that whilst the intersection is problematic and has

been subject to traffic collisions in the past, there are no recorded collisions since the erection of the polytunnels.

Trees

49. Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan requires the protection of green infrastructure networks and existing trees. The polytunnels are located on open countryside and have not necessitated the removal of any trees on the farm. Furthermore, the ancient woodland that adjoins the eastern boundary will be unaffected. On this basis, no objection is raised,

Ecology

50. Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.
51. The polytunnels are located in existing farmland and pose no real adverse localised ecological impact, including on the adjacent Ancient Woodland. Notwithstanding, Condition 2 requires additional screen planting to the northern boundary, which will be able to support additional birdlife and other wildlife. Despite its retrospective nature, the Council's Ecology Officer does not raise objection and on this basis, the retrospective proposal is acceptable in terms of Policy TB23.

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

52. Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy states that where development is likely to have an effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA), it is required to demonstrate that adequate measures to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects are delivered.
53. Manor Farm is within 5km of the TBH SPA but the scope of the works are agricultural in nature and are minor whereby there is no foreseeable impact upon the SPA. The retrospective proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CP8.

Flooding

54. Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding. The site and access thereto is located within Flood Zone 1 and the polytunnels represent no additional flood risk or vulnerability. It is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC09.

Drainage

55. Policy CC10 of the MDD Local Plan requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow. Whilst the polytunnels are non-permeable in nature and there would have been an increase in runoff as a result of their initial construction, there is no foreseeable short or long term impact upon existing on-site water infiltration into the soil as there is ample turf around the structures and

ample separation to neighbouring properties. It is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC10.

Waste

56. Policy CC04 of the MDD Local Plan requires adequate internal and external storage for waste and recycling. As noted in 'Highway Access', the additional polytunnels represents an expansion of the farm operations. However, given the aforementioned explanation of what the polytunnels will be used for, it is unlikely that there would be any increase in waste generation within the farm and the existing waste management arrangements are considered to be acceptable.

Contamination

57. There is no known contamination in the area.

Community Infrastructure Levy

58. The application is not liable for any CIL payments

Employment Skills

59. Policy TB12 of the MDD Local Plan states that proposals for major development should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills Plan to show how the proposal accords opportunities for training, apprenticeship or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills required by developers, contractors or end users of the proposal.
60. The application is retrospective in nature and involved a limited construction phase that can be undertaken within the scope of the existing farming operations. Furthermore, the farm employs a collection of seasonal workers based upon demand. On this basis, it is not subject to any Employment Skills requirements.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)

61. 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.
62. 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.

CONCLUSION

63. The construction of the polytunnels has resulted in a clear alteration to the landscape in a prominent viewpoint of the Finchampstead Ridges. However, it also represents a sustainable enterprise and an appropriate intensification of an existing business. Whilst the proposed landscaping in Condition 2 will not entirely eliminate any views of the polytunnels, these are characteristic features of the

agricultural landscape and are an expansion of the existing development on Manor Farm. Any discernible harm to the character of the area or neighbour amenity are adequately addressed by Conditions 2-5 and when weighing the planning balance, the social, environmental and economic benefits are outweighed by the mitigated harm.