

**DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

**FOR**

**THE PLANNING APPLICATION TO HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL FOR THE ERECTION OF  
POLYTUNNELS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE ESSENTIAL FOR TABLE TOP  
STRAWBERRY PRODUCTION**

**ON LAND AT**

**OCLE PYCHARD  
HEREFORDSHIRE**

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**June 2018**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

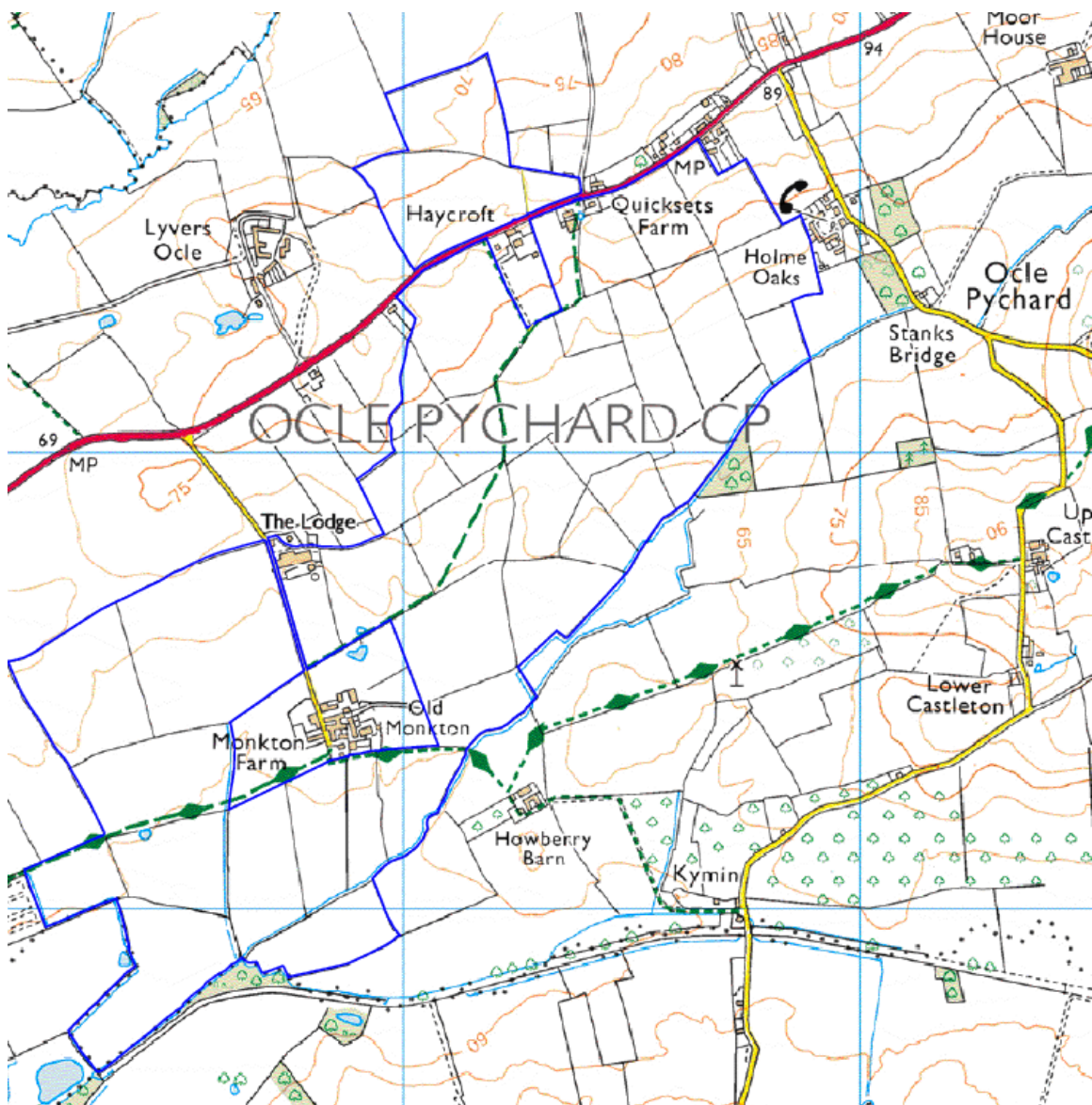
- 1.1 This report has been produced by Philip Plant of Mid West Planning Ltd and is based on the guidelines as set out in the CABE publication: 'Design and Access Statements: How to write, read and use them' 2006.
- 1.2 Philip Plant holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours Degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management and is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.
- 1.3 Philip Plant is the Managing Director of Mid West Planning Limited and is a former employee of ADAS and Acorus Rural Property Services.
- 1.4 This statement has been written on behalf of the applicant, Mr George Leeds, who is proprietor of Withers Farm Ltd & Withers Fruit Farm Ltd, which are based at Withers Farm, Burtons Lane, Wellington Heath, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 1NF. This Statement is submitted as part of a planning application to erect a series of polytunnels and associated infrastructure, including water attenuation ponds, access tracks, seasonal worker accommodation and landscaping, all essential for table-top strawberry production as part of the "whole farm plan" for fruit production at the Ocle Pychard site.
- 1.5 This planning application made following a pre-application enquiry with Herefordshire Planning Department and with advice from Herefordshire Highways Department.
- 1.6 This design and access statement should be read in conjunction with the other documents submitted with the planning application. These documents are: -

- Planning Support Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Landscape Capacity Study
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan
- Sealed drainage System Plan and Specification
- Ecological & Resource Protection Assessment
- Ecological Enhancement & Resource Protection Policy
- Archaeological Desk Based Assessment
- Economic Need and Impact Statement
- PL -01 1:10 000 A3 Land Ownership Plan
- PL -02 1:2500 A0 Location Plan
- PL -03 1:2500 A0 Site Plan - As Existing
- PL-03A 1:2500 A0 Site Plan - As Existing with Aerial Photograph Overlay
- PL -04 1:2500 A0 Proposed Layout of Polytunnels
- PL -04A 1:2500 A0 Proposed Layout of Polytunnels with Aerial Photograph Overlay
- PL-05 1:2500 A0 Landscaping Details
- PL-05A 1:2500 A0 Landscaping Details with Aerial Photograph Overlay
- PL -06 1:500 A0 Lodge Farm Seasonal Workers Accommodation
- PL -06A 1:500 A0 Lodge Farm Seasonal Workers Accommodation with Aerial
- PL -07 1:1250 A2 Lodge Farm Seasonal Workers Accommodation Block Plan
- PL -08 1:100 A0 Highway Farm Infill Building (Existing Arrangement)
- PL -09 1:100 A0 Highway Farm Infill Building (Proposed Arrangement)
- PL -10 1:500 A2 Highway Farmyard Block Plan
- PL -10A 1:500 A2 Highway Farmyard Block Plan with Aerial Photograph Overlay
- PL-11 1:2500 A0 Proposed Surface Water and Irrigation Run-off Drainage for Polytunnel Development
- PL -12 1:50 A3 Proposed Polytunnel Cross-Sections
- Plans 02969-01 & 02969-02 Visibility Splay West & Visibility Splay East Access

## 2. BACKGROUND AND PROPOSED USE

### Location of Site and Background Information

- 2.1 The Ocle Pychard site has recently been purchased by the applicant, Mr George Leeds of Withers Farm, upon the disposal of Herefordshire Council small holdings in 2017. Mr Leeds operates Withers Farm Ltd, a large and well-established fruit farm at Wellington Heath, near to Ledbury. Prior to the purchase of the Ocle Pychard Land, Withers farm has expanded since being founded by Mr Leeds' father Allen in 1958 to 380 acres of owned and rented land, comprising of 51.8 Ha. of strawberries, 19.02 Ha. of blueberries, 8 Ha. of apples and 9.71 Ha. of kiwiberries.
- 2.2 Withers Farm Ltd is one of the UK's leading producers of top quality strawberries, blueberries and kiwiberries. Withers has been an industry leader in the production of strawberries using table top and coir bags, this system allows for easy picking, controlled growing and coir is an environmentally friendly alternative to peat.



**Plate One:** - Plan showing land owned and farmed at Ocle Pychard outlined in blue.





### Community Consultation

- 2.6 A public meeting was held on 27th March 2018 at the Burley Gate Village Hall to present the proposals for the whole farm plan to the local community. Approximately 70 people turned up to the event.
- 2.7 Ocle Pychard Parish Council was contacted and invited to the public consultation meeting. In addition, Councillor J.G. Lester, Mr Giles Blackmore, Chairman Ocle Pychard Parish Council, and Mr Simon Wells, Vice Chairman Ocle Pychard Parish Council were invited by letter to attend the meeting. A notice was put on the village notice board well in advance of the meeting and neighbours were contacted directly.
- 2.8 The event was considered informative in providing the community with the rationale behind the proposals and details of the overall development of fruit production at Ocle Pychard. Attendees were invited to write comments at the meeting. The nine written comments received from members of the public were mixed. Verbal comments were generally very positive and enthusiastic, particularly about the reinstatement of traditional apple orchards, woodland establishment and need to maintain economic prosperity, employment opportunities and an up-to-date farming industry in Herefordshire. People who were not supportive focussed on industrialisation of farming, highway concerns and the potential loss of views from private property. All comments submitted at the meeting can be found at Appendix Three of the planning support statement.

### The Proposal

- 2.9 The proposal is to erect a series of 8.2m span polytunnels in multi-span blocks as depicted in plate two above. There will be 11 blocks of tunnels (A1 –A8 & A10-A11), with associated access tracks and drainage of surface water to the attenuation ponds.
- 2.10 In summary the proposed development comprises: -
- The erection of 19.71 Ha of polytunnels with all-year round covers.
  - The erection of 17.31 Ha of polytunnels with seasonal covers. (Covers on from 1 Feb-15 Nov)
  - The development of two surface water attenuation ponds and underground drainage system to convey surface water to them.
  - The installation of a closed drainage system including underground storage tanks for collection of water from the table-top growing areas.
  - The installation of permeable farm access track network.
  - The siting of 72 caravan pitches for seasonal workers with mini sewage treatment plant, and worker facilities within existing farm buildings at Lodge Farm.
  - Landscaping, including ecological enhancement measures.
  - Erection of a loading bay and infill building for chiller and cold storage at Highway Farm.
- 2.11 The area within the application site is 64.60 Ha, of this 37.02 Ha will be covered with polytunnels, the remaining 27.58Ha will be used to provide seasonal workers campsite, worker facilities, cold storage, access tracks, ecological, landscaping and water management enhancement measures.
- 2.12 A prior notification for an irrigation reservoir (180712), and hedgerow removal notification (181510) were made to Herefordshire Council which has effectively given planning consent for the construction of an irrigation reservoir at the Ocle Pychard site. The development is part of the overall scheme for the farm, but it is outside of the planning consent for polytunnel development now sought.



- 2.13 A separate planning application will be made for the conversion of two existing agricultural buildings at Lodge Farm to dwellings that will be used to accommodate permanent agricultural workers/managers involved in the farming operation.



**Plate Three:** - Existing polytunnels with covers on at the Withers Farm.



**Plate Four:** - Table-top strawberry production at Withers Farm.



- 2.14 Proposals for the Ocle Pychard site include a seasonal workers' caravan site on field A15 to the south of Lodge Farmyard. Worker facilities and manager's office will be sited within the existing range of buildings at Lodge Farm. Please refer to plan reference Ocle Pychard PL-06 for more information.

### **3. AMOUNT & SCALE**

- 3.1 The area of land within the red line is approximately 44.53% (64.60 Ha.) of the total land available. The area to be developed with polytunnels within this planning application is 37.02 Ha.
- 3.2 The area of proposed polytunnel coverage (37.02 Ha.) represents approximately 25.52% percent of the total land area (145.07 Ha) farmed by the applicant at Ocle Pychard.

### **4. LAYOUT**

- 4.1 Mr. Allan Moss of Allan Moss and Associates Ltd initially carried out a Landscape Capacity Study for Mr Leeds to determine which if any parts of the site would be suitable in landscape terms for polytunnels. Please refer to plan reference "Ocle Pychard LCS-01" which depicts the extent of land deemed to be suitable for polytunnels and includes exclusion zones for flood risk areas and residential exclusion zones for more information at Appendix One of this statement. Clearly the land most suited to polytunnel development is the lower lying land to the south of the site, which is outside of flood zones 2 and 3. This land was identified and put forward in the pre-planning application enquiry to Herefordshire Council, and used in the public consultation event.
- 4.2 Plan "Ocle Pychard PL-04A" submitted as part of this application shows the layout of the scheme, overlaid onto an aerial photograph of the site and surrounding area. This is particularly useful when viewing the proposal as it shows the proposed development in the context of the adjacent buildings at Lodge Farm, Highway Farm, and in the wider landscape.
- 4.3 Plan "Ocle Pychard PL-05A" depicts the landscaping scheme layout and environmental enhancement measures proposed, including the gapping up of hedges, hedgerow translocation, new woodland planting, buffer zones and wetland areas.
- 4.4 Within the red line area there are two attenuation ponds; Pond One has a surface area of 12,769m<sup>2</sup> and, Pond Two has a surface area of 17,175m<sup>2</sup>. The location and sizes of the ponds have been determined by Miss B. Easdon; Hydrologist, of Hydro-Logic Services (International) Ltd. who prepared the Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan.
- 4.5 As a result of Miss Easdon's assessment, surface water management will be incorporated in the proposal. Rainwater will be collected from impermeable surfaces and piped to the two attenuation ponds where it will be released in a controlled manner to provide a Sustainable Drainage System. Please refer to the Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan, and the plan "Ocle Pychard PL-11 Poly tunnel Drainage" for full details.
- 4.6 As mentioned above, the successful prior notifications for the irrigation reservoir and hedgerow removal and proposed commercial apple orchard planting should be seen as



part of the overall scheme layout, but outside of the scope of this planning application. A total of 18.51 Ha. of commercial apple orchard are in the process of being planted. The variety is Junami which are planted on a post and wire system at 1m tree spacing, and 3.5m between rows. Please refer to plan reference "Ocle Pychard PL-04" and plan with aerial photography reference "Ocle Pychard PL-04A". for more details.

## **5. LANDSCAPING**

- 5.1 Following the completion of the Landscape Capacity Study and the public consultation event, Mr. Moss then went on to assess the potential visual impact and impact the proposed scheme may have on the landscape.
- 5.2 Allan Moss's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment submitted with this planning application identifies a changing landscape adapting to continuing modernisation of agricultural practices over time. The quality of the landscape is assessed as being "medium". Adaptation includes the loss of traditional orchards over time which has resulted in the weakening of the landscape character. The scheme has resulted in the opportunity to re-create commercial apple orchard enclosures which are characteristic of the historical Ordnance Survey Maps up to the mid-20th century, to strengthen the landscape character.
- 5.3 In addition, much land has been put into resource protection buffer zones along watercourses, with wildflower mixes and pollen and nectar mixes, wide grassy field margins and wetland areas, which together with the introduction of the attenuation ponds and new hedges and tree planting provide ecological improvements to both habitats of wild animals and to the protection of natural resources. Nigel Baskerville of Christopher Seabridge and Associates has prepared a report entitled "Ecological & Resource Protection Assessment" which identifies protected species and habitat on and near to the site which could be affected by the proposal. A further report by the firm entitled "Ecological Enhancement & Resource Protection Policy" sets out ways that the scheme can be implemented to protect and enhance wildlife habitat and natural resources.
- 5.4 The landscaping scheme specifies the planting of traditional native broadleaf trees to form a buffer between the campsite and adjacent properties. The 1889/91 and 1966 historic Ordnance Survey maps depicted in the planning statement also depict a number of traditional fruit orchards at Ocle Pychard and Monkton, a feature that will be reintroduced as a result of this proposal.
- 5.5 The detailed landscaping specification and management plan can be found on plan reference "Ocle Pychard PL-05" & plan with aerial photography reference "Ocle Pychard PL-05A".

## **6. APPEARANCE**

- 6.1 The site of the proposed polytunnels has been selected following an initial assessment of the impact such development may have on the landscape. Once potential polytunnel sites had been identified through the Landscape Capacity Study a more detailed and site specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was undertaken by Mr Moss to consider the appearance and impact of the proposal in the landscape. This report has been submitted as part of the planning application. The subsequent Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment carried out by Mr Moss assesses the impact of the development on the landscape as being "moderate adverse" to "minor/moderate

adverse”, and the overall visual impact to nearby properties is considered to be “minor adverse”, and “negligible adverse” for all other properties.

- 6.2 The LVIA recommends a number of landscape mitigation & enhancement measures at chapter 14 which have been adopted as part of the scheme and can be secured by way of a suitably worded planning condition if necessary.

## **7. ACCESS**

- 7.1 The proposal does not necessitate any new accesses to the highway. Access will remain to the fields through Highway Farm, and from Monkton Farm Lane to the west. Access was a large consideration when Mr Leeds first looked at purchasing the site. During the pre-planning application enquiry to Herefordshire Council a number of site visits took place with Senior Planner, Mr Roland Close, and with Mr Adrian Smith, Area Highways Engineer Development Control (Central) for Herefordshire.
- 7.2 The use of this existing farm access points to the highway were the preferred choice and therefore a full assessment of the suitability of these access points was made before the farm was purchased. On the advice of Herefordshire Highways Department, Mr Leeds obtained the services of specialist highway consultants Phil Jones Associates who in collaboration with Herefordshire Highways Department obtained highway boundary data and undertook four speed surveys by Automatic Traffic Count (ATC) in locations on the A465. The locations of the speed check positions are shown on the Phil Jones Associates plans attached at Appendix Two. As a result of the information obtained with the ATCs it was agreed with Herefordshire Highways team that the visibility splays based on DMRB (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges) ‘one step below’ - equivalent to 160m, terminating 1m from the edge of the nearside kerb/carriageway edge would be acceptable.
- 7.3 Initial Advice from Mr Smith, dated 29 June 2017, stated that some improvements to Lodge Lane should be considered. However, because Lodge Farm is no longer a working dairy farm with feed lorries, milk lorry, AI van, silage trailers and manure spreaders etc. using the Lodge Lane on a regular basis, and the land at Monkton Farm and Old Monkton now being farmed by Mr Leeds, it is clear that heavy farm related vehicle movements will reduce significantly. The proposed campsite will operate using a mini-bus service to take workers to Hereford for shopping and on their days off. Workers will either walk to the strawberry fields or be taken by farm vehicles without having to go on the public highway.
- 7.4 Harvested fruit will also be moved via the internal farm access track network, from the field directly to the cold store and chiller unit at Highway Farm. Fruit will then be moved by articulated lorry from Highway Farm to Wye Fruit packhouse at Ledbury. No more than two lorries per day, in peak season.
- 7.5 The nature of the site and development does not lend itself to a requirement for inclusive access arrangements without prior warning. Should the need arise, inclusive access can be provided quite easily because the tunnels have wide, level openings at regular intervals, farm buildings have wide openings, and seasonal worker caravans can be adapted for inclusive access if required.

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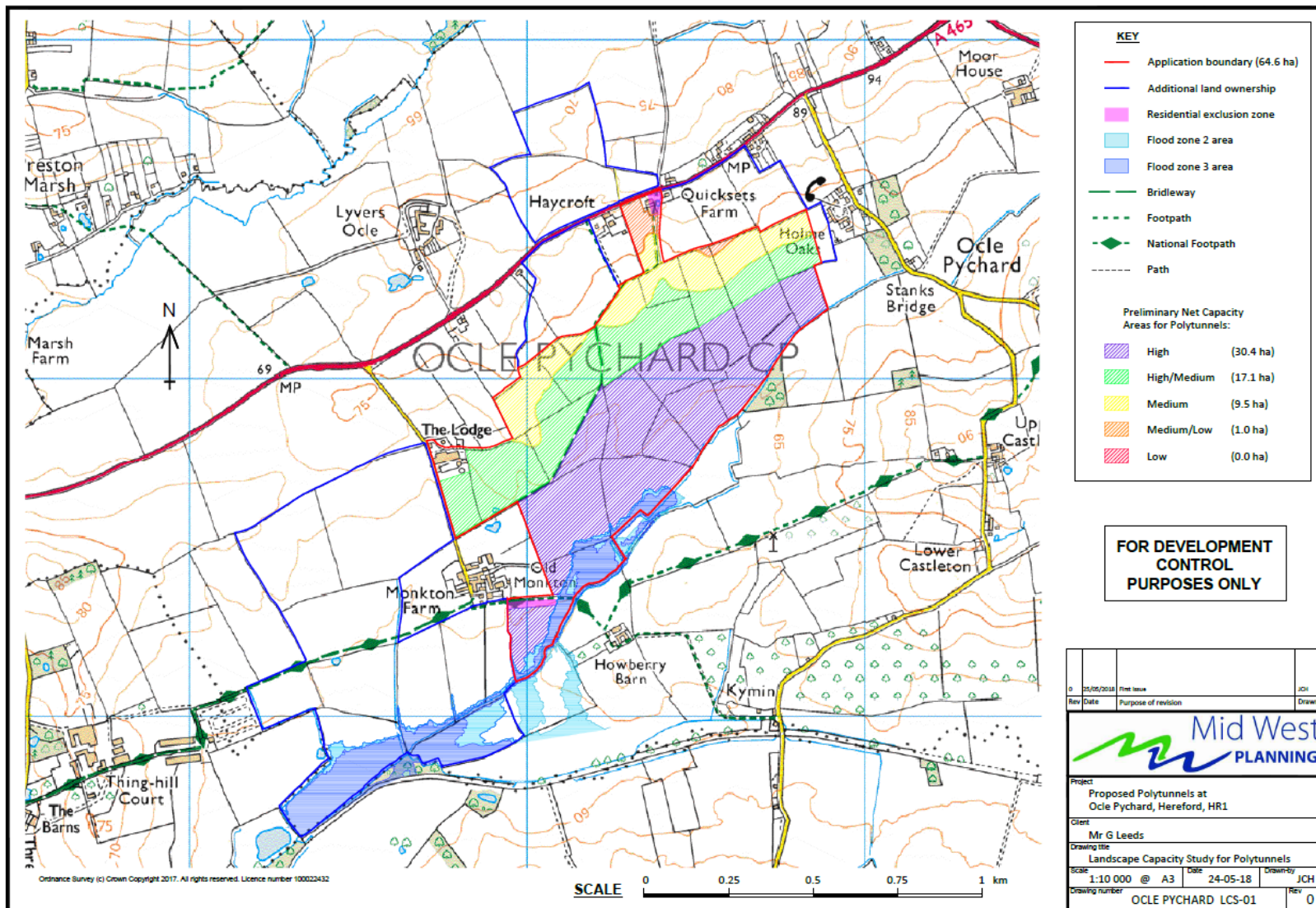
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June 2018

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **LANDSCAPE CAPACITY STUDY PLAN LC-01**





## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **HIGHWAY VISIBILITY SPLAY PLANS**





