

Planning Enquiries

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From: donotreply@herefordshire.gov.uk
Sent: 03 February 2015 11:46
To: Planning Enquiries
Subject: Planning application comment was submitted

The following is a objecting comment on application P143665/F by Anne Lightbound:

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1. The huge expanse of polytunnels would create an adverse impact on the landscape. Whilst the views of the site are limited from some nearby viewpoints, there has been little consideration from more distant points. This needs to be considered as part of the application. The view of the site from the A4137 is of major importance and it would be many years before the proposed hedge reached sufficient height to screen the polytunnels. This development is of a large scale, and the cumulative impact causes harm to the landscape character. The proposed development would be out of place in terms of scale, height, form and appearance, failing to protect the openness and intrinsic qualities of the countryside and failing to respect its character.
 2. The Flood Risk Assessment indicates that there is no flood risk to nearby properties and that the development would not create a flooding problem in the area around the site. This area is already susceptible to flooding and the run-off from the plastic coverings would increase the flooding risk to unacceptable levels. The applicant has virtually dismissed the flood risk, and has therefore offered very little mitigation or active management techniques of the uncontrolled, high velocity, water run-off. Most of the water will not be absorbed into the field, as stated in the application, and the risk has been greatly underestimated. This is contrary to UDP policies S2, DR4, and DR7. I therefore suggest that the application should be refused on the grounds of severely increased flood risk in an area that is already susceptible to flooding. If the applicant is successful in gaining planning permission, I suggest that a condition is attached to the permission requiring the applicant to fully indemnify all residents who are adjacent to, and downhill from the site in the event of flooding. If the applicant is satisfied that these properties will not flood following the erection of the polytunnels, there should be no reason for him to hesitate in offering this legal and binding reassurance to residents.
 3. There is immense concern with the implications of the increased use of irrigation to the growing crop with the consequential run off to adjoining land. This has the potential to put adverse amounts of water and nutrients into the drainage systems and then into the Garron Brook. There is also the potential to exacerbate the areas that already flood at Biddlestone. Each time there is a flood at The Gamber and the Garron bridges, 11 properties will be cut off to emergency services. Photographic evidence is available to illustrate the amount of flooding that occurs after heavy rain should they be required. The runoff from 35 hectares of covered land will also add to the flooding.
 4. The applicant states that some of the water will flow into what the report calls the 'Village Pond.' This pond is described by the applicant as an attenuation pond, but the pond is privately owned and the owners do not wish their pond to be used as an attenuation pond. This pond, along with another pond within the development site is the home of Great Crested Newts, a protected species. The waste water from irrigation, that is highly likely to be contaminated with nitrates, phosphates, fungicides etc. may flow into this so-called attenuation pond and contaminate it. This is completely unacceptable. The Great Crested Newts cannot move home to another pond, and MUST be protected in their existing home. This application is contrary to UDP policy NC5. I suggest that the application is refused on the grounds that the development would adversely affect a protected species. There is a suggestion in the application that the water may

already be contaminated as a result of previous agrochemical use on the site, although no evidence whatsoever has been provided to substantiate this claim. Due to the presence of protected species (Great Crested Newts) the ponds, catchments and water courses that this development would discharge into should be tested PRIOR to any development work commencing. The water in the ponds and other water courses or catchments should then be subjected to regular testing at appropriate intervals, should the development be permitted. These should be fully independent tests, commissioned by Herefordshire Council and paid for by the applicant. Checking the water for contamination levels may also be of benefit to the applicant. If the water is found to be contaminated prior to the start of development (as suggested in the report) then he would have some protection from accusations of contamination in the future, if contamination is found when the polytunnels are in use, but not at elevated levels. Establishing a baseline for water contamination would be useful for all concerned.

5. Very little consideration has been given to the impact on biodiversity on the site. The polytunnels will cause a loss of habitat for many species. Whilst bats, a protected species, may still have trees and hedgerows, the insects on which they feed will be severely depleted in numbers due to loss of their own habitat – the meadows and old orchards. The polytunnels create fragmented habitat areas, which isolate and damage protected species. This is contrary to UDP policy NC1. If the development was permitted, I suggest that wildlife corridors are created. This could be in the form of new hedgerows and trees within the site, of densely planted mixed native species. In addition, a 50 metre buffer zone between the boundary of each residential property and the polytunnels should be created, consisting of densely planted mixed native woodland. This should be fenced off from the polytunnels to ensure that the area of woodland is retained and that it does not revert to another use, such as equipment storage. Upper Heath Wood is a Special Wildlife Site, so a 100 metre fenced buffer zone should be created and planted with densely planted mixed native woodland. An enforceable commitment should be made to require that this planting would commence within 6 months of the approval of planning and would be completed within a further 6 months. These measures would not only help to mitigate the effects of loss of habitat and impact on biodiversity, but would also help to screen the development from both visual impact and noise.

6. Noise has not been given sufficient consideration in the application. Plastic coming loose and flapping in the wind, rain on plastic, noise from machinery and buildings, and noise made by the workforce both during working hours and from social hours would cause a very significant increase in noise in the area. Biddlestone is a small hamlet and the increase in noise from a development of this size is disproportionate to the rest of the surrounding, relatively peaceful, area. If permission is given for the development, there must be an enforceable condition attached which regulates the times when noise generating activities can take place.

7. The application proposes to create a new access onto the A4137. This is contrary to the UDP policy T8 which states that new access onto the strategic network will not be encouraged and should not inhibit the strategic function of these routes. The A4137 is a very dangerous main road. It would be a serious Highway Safety issue to allow a vast increase in traffic on this road, in particular, lorries accessing and leaving the site. Furthermore the main road adjacent to, and near the site is extremely hazardous for pedestrians. The applicant states that water for irrigation would be extracted from the Gamber. If this is the case, then this water would presumably be transported to the site using water bowsers, creating more traffic. The applicant also states that the new access would entirely replace the existing access to the site west of Biddlestone hamlet, which henceforth will revert to an emergency access only. How is an emergency access defined? If there is not a clear definition, this access could become used more frequently as time progressed. This access should either be removed completely or the emergency use should be clearly defined and an enforceable condition attached to the permission, if it were granted.

8. The SDP (4.7) states that the applicant must show clear evidence that the development is necessary in terms of providing direct benefits in relation to local services or facilities. At a meeting of Llangarron Parish Council on 27/01/2015, one councillor assured us that the fruit pickers would NOT leave the site at any time whatsoever, except to be taken by bus to a supermarket. The development would therefore not be supporting any local businesses, only a national supermarket.

9. The parish councillor also stated that the development would contain a shop for the fruit pickers to purchase from. There is no mention of a shop in the application. If a shop were to be on site, then it must not be built without the necessary planning permission and should be made to comply with any appropriate hygiene regulations. An on-site shop would mean that workers were not contributing to the local economy by spending money in local shops and businesses.

10. If it is correct that fruit pickers would not be allowed to leave the site, then I would suggest that this is in breach of human rights laws. If they ARE allowed to leave the site, then there is a safety issue with large numbers of people walking on a main road with no pavements. If the workers are allowed to have cars, there would be a safety issue with cars entering and leaving the site. The applicant does not specify a car parking area for fruit pickers. If the development is to be considered, this needs to be properly addressed before permission is given for development.

11. The application form states that there WOULD be pedestrian access to or from the public highway, which contradicts the information given by the parish councillor. The information relating to workers entering and leaving the site needs to be clarified.

12. The application does not state that the plastic will be removed from the hoops (and stored out of sight) during months when the crops do not need to be protected. It should be a condition of planning permission that all polythene is removed from the metal hoops during specified winter months to help minimise the visual impact. The operational convenience of leaving the plastic in place is outweighed by the need to reduce visual impact and minimise the noise from flapping plastic and rain on plastic for local residents.

13. A condition of planning should be attached that requires prompt removal of waste plastic to an appropriate recycling facility. There should also be an enforceable condition that plastic is to be removed promptly to an appropriate recycling facility if the growing operation ceases.

14. The application refers to an existing SAWA. However, the existing SAWA is only a small area with around 10 to 12 derelict caravans. This bears no relation to accommodation needed for 240 fruit pickers. The application must not be considered until a further application has been submitted for the accommodation required by a large number of workers. This new application must contain details of noise assessment (including regulation of times when noise generating activities can take place, such as playing radios etc.), lighting, toilet blocks, foul sewage treatment, social/recreational facilities, washing facilities and other utility buildings, and vehicle parking. None of this is included in the current application so it is impossible to have an understanding of the full extent of the development. A comprehensive assessment of all relevant planning issues cannot be made in the absence of this information and the application should not be considered until it has been submitted.

15. QUOTE."2.1.7 The so-called 'table tops' comprise a horizontal trough, supported at a height of about 1 metre by a row of single legs, laid out in parallel, with some six rows in each tunnel. A soil-less growing medium, contained in 'growbags', is placed in the trough and the plants are inserted into this. The area beneath and between the table tops is simply grassed". Why is there a need to place these structures on Grade 1 land that could be better used to grow necessary food. It would be much better to put these structures on less favourable agricultural land.

16. There is no mention of how water would be obtained to irrigate the growing plants. If it is from ground source this will have a direct bearing upon other bore holes in the locality. Total clarity is required. Should bore holes be used for irrigation purposes (or other purposes) an independent, professional assessment should be carried out on the potential impact of these bore on others in the locality and the cost of the assessment paid for by the applicant.

17. Regarding the Pump House and associated Water Storage Tanks, there has been no consideration as to retrieved water is safe to put back onto a harvested crop that is not subject to washing. This needs to be addressed.

18. The Planning application yellow signs were put up incorrectly: they were not placed adjacent to any of the fields appertaining to the said application. This may have contravened the correct procedures for notification of planning to the locality.

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