PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

REF NO: **BE/81/10/**

LOCATION: Land South of Groves Farm
Bersted

PROPOSAL: Seasonal polytunnels for soft fruit production (this application is the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment)

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICATION	Erection of polytunnels for soft fruit production of strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants over a 12 hectare area, 7.8m wide x 3.870m (x 10).
SITE AREA	12 hectares
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT DEN	N/A
TOPOGRAPHY	Predominantly flat. Slightly raised up from the road.
TREES	None of any significance affected by the proposed development.
BOUNDARY TREATMENT	Hedgerow screen along A259 and access track at Elbridge Cottages.
SITE CHARACTERISTICS	Large arable field. Bales of hay adjacent to Yeomans and Cattery. The site is well screened from the Road as it is approximately 35m from the road. There is a shed by the site access
CHARACTER OF LOCALITY	Predominately rural. There are polytunnels on the adjoining site to the east of the site entrance. Along the road frontage there is the Yeomans garage and a cattery. Close to a caravan park to the west.

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

None

REPRESENTATIONS

Representations received:

Bersted Parish Council

Bersted Parish Council: Awaited.

Comments on Representations received:

None

CONSULTATIONS

Environment Agency

Natural England
Parks and Landscapes

Consultations responses received:

Environment Agency: No objections subject to a condition regarding a buffer zone.

With regard to Flood Risk, no objection to the means of surface water run off control. Whilst the outfalls do not require land drainage consent we recommend they should be designed and constructed to ensure they do effect flows.

Natural England: Landscape and visual assessment - Natural England welcomes the submission as part of the EIA, however, do not wish to comment.

Birds and Reptiles - recommend the standing advice is appropriate to this proposal.

Biodiversity - there may be opportunities for the instalation of bat and bird boxes in accordance with PPS9 paragraph 14.

District Environmental Health: No objections.

Comments on Consultation responses:

Comments noted

POLICY CONTEXT

Designation applicable to site:

Outside the Built Up Area Boundary

DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Arun District Local Plan:	GEN3	Protection of the Countryside
	GEN7	The Form of New Development
	GEN12	Parking in New Development
	DEV3	Horticulture

PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

PPS1	Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS7	Sustainable development in rural areas
PPG13	Transport
PPS9	Biodiversity & Geological Conservation

POLICY COMMENTARY

The above policies combine to describe the criteria against which the application will be assessed particularly with regard to visual and residential amenity.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND/OR LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states:-

"If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

The proposal is considered to comply with relevant Development Plan policies in that it would have no materially adverse effect on the visual amenities of the locality or the residential amenities of the adjoining properties, nor would it have an adverse impact upon the established character of the surrounding area.

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is considered that there are no other material considerations to warrant a decision otherwise than in accordance with the Development Plan and/or legislative background.

CONCLUSIONS

PRINCIPLE

The site lies outside the Built Up Area Boundary and within the Strategic Gap of Bognor to Chichester where development is only permitted if necessary for the needs of agriculture and where landscape improvements are proposed. The proposal is for seasonal polytunnels for soft fruit growing of strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants covering an area of 12 hectares, leaving a 5m strip around the perimeter of the field. These will be screened by the existing hedgerow and there are proposals to enhance this. Between February and November polythene protection is required for the first growth. The polythene will be taken down between December and January.

COUNTRYSIDE POLICIES

PPS7 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS:
This policy seeks the protection of the countryside for its own sake. It is recognised that agriculture is important in the maintenance and management of the countryside. Local Planning Authorities should support proposals which encourage farmers to be competitive, sustainable and able to adapt to changing markets or to diversify.

In this case the use is for an intensification of soft fruit growing in reaction to meeting supermarket and consumer demands. The proposal is therefore considered to conform to countryside policy.

PPS9 BIODIVERSITY AND GEOLOGICAL CONSERVATON:
Local Planning Authorities should maintain and enhance the biodiversity conservation interests and prevent harm to these interests through development. Paragraph 14 states that development proposals are good opportunities for building in beneficial biodiversity as part of good design. Many species receive statutory protection and Local planning authorities should take measures to protect the habitats of these species from further decline.

An Ecology Statement has been included with the application. This includes landscape enhancements that will enhance the habitat potential for biodiversity. An assessment was made to identify if there was any evidence of protected species, badgers, reptiles and amphibians, breeding birds and bats. There was evidence of birds who's habitat would be expected on arable fields is found within 1m squared of the site, including partridge, corn bunting and sky lark, as well as hedgerow birds. As the site has been laid to lettuce , celery and wheat in recent years, the arable field margins are not considered to support a Priority BAP habitat of value. Bird nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. With regard to bats, the mature oak trees are capable of supporting bat roosts, however, it is not considred that the proposed development

would disturb these roosts. The watercourse are considered to be too shallow to support water vole, but potentially could be used as a winter refuge. There was no evidence of badgers. Brown hare has been seen on the site by the owners of an adjacent site. It is considered that there is very little shelter to sustain reptiles.

In summary, the proposal does not include removing any trees or hedgerow, but rather to enhance the planting. This is considered to offer an opportunity to enhance the opportunities of biodiversity by land management. Therefore it is considered that the proposal would not result in any loss of habitat resulting in damage to the ecology of the area. The proposed enhancements would add to the potential for habitats.

DEV3 HORTICULTURE:
New glass houses and polytunnel development will usually be permitted provided that there is no adverse impact on the surrounding landscape and that adequate water resources are available and surface water drainage exists or can be provided. In this case the site is close to a reservoire. Two new drainage ditches will be constructed to provide runoff attenuation and part of the required storage, with the majority of storage being accommodated within the proposed leg row swales. Full details have been submitted in the Flood Risk Assessment.

AREA 10 STRATEGIC GAPS:
The site lies within the strategic gap Bognor Regis to Chichester. Within the strategic gaps, development will only be permitted if it is demonstrated to be necessary to meet the requirements of the development plan and that attention is given to the long term enhancement of the landscape. The proposal below includes enhancements to the hedgerow and copse.

JUSTIFICATION FOR POLYTUNNELS

The proposal is for 12 hectares of polytunnels which is a considerable area. Fruit growing is an agricultural activity; however, such an extensive coverage of the land with polytunnels requires a justification.

The application states that to meet supermarket requirements soft fruit has to be grown to precise specifications. Polythene protection allows a 60% reduction in pesticide use, and it allows early and late growing to provide an alternative to imports from Spain and California. Therefore this is a sustainable alternative.

The microclimate in the Chichester Plain is ideal for early soft fruit production. The site is located close to a reservoir and is well screened by existing hedgerow. The farmland margins around the site will be seeded with wild flower mixture.

The proposal is a diversification of the existing agricultural holdings and therefore meets the criteria set out in PPS7.

LANDSCAPING
The polytunnels are 7.8m wide with a maximum height of 3.9m in the summer and 2.8m in the spring. The polytunnels will run west to east in a line with the natural gradual slope of the land. There is hedgerow along Chichester Road effectively screening the site. Internal boundaries are marked by hegerow and mature trees. It is proposed to extend the hedgerow with new native hedgerow planting along the south westerly corner extending to adjacent to the reservoire. In

addition it is proposed to strengthen the gaps along the A259 with native hedgerow and also to establish a small copse to the north of the site to replace woodland features and enhance biodiversity by regenerating black poplar trees.

SUSTAINABILITY

The use of polytunnels contributes positively to a reduction in food miles as it allows fruit production for eight months rather than the natural short summer season. This is good for the economy as it limits the import of fruit from abroad. It reduces the need to transport the produce thousands of miles to supermarkets. The proposal therefore meets the sustainability criteria of PPS7.

FLOODING ISSUES AND DRAINAGE

The site is in Flood Zone 1 and the proposal is for development greater than 1 hectare. Therefore an FRA has been submitted with the application. Run off from the polytunnels will flow into new drainage ditches through throttle pipes that will restrict the rate of flows. The FRA concludes that in this less vulnerable flood zone, the proposal will not result in any net loss of flood plain storage, and will not impede water flows or increased floor risk elsewhere. As stated above, two new ditches will be constructed to provide run off attenuation. Leg row storage (which consists of a dam created by sand bags to store the flow of run off). The polytunnels generate 100% runoff, however, as soon as the water hits the ground infiltration and evapotranspiration will start to attenuate the flow. The new drainage will feed into the existing drains and will require consent from the Environment Agency by way of a license. The Environment Agency have raised no objections.

HIGHWAY ISSUES

The proposal does not include any changes to the existing access and no change is proposed to the existing route of vehicles transporting fruit to a packinghouse. Therefore it is not considered that the proposal would result in a loss of highway safety.

SUMMARY

The proposal to diversify into intensive soft fruit growing is not considered to result in any loss of visual amenity or any significant impact on the countryside. The p It is considered the proposal would not result in any significant impact on flooding or highway safety.

Therefore it is recommended that the application is approved subject to the following conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE CONDITIONALLY

1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2 The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans holding plan 0810.10, site plan 0810.11 and elevations 0810.12.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of amenity and the environment in accordance with GEN7 of the Arun District Local Plan.

3 The development hereby permitted shall not be carried on until details of landscape enhancements as proposed in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment are submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and have been planted in accordance with the approved plans. In the event that any such trees or shrubs die or become seriously damaged or diseased within a period of 5 years following planting they shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with policy GEN7 of the Arun District Local Plan.

4 In the event of the polytunnels for which permission is hereby granted ceasing to be used for agriculture or horticultural purposes, as defined by Section 336(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, they shall be demolished and removed from the site and the land restored to pasture or arable cultivation within 3 months of the cessation of such use or within such extended time as may be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: The site lies in a rural area where development unrelated to the essential needs of agriculture and/or forestry would not normally be permitted in accordance with GEN2, GEN3, DEV3 of the Arun District Local Plan.

5 Prior to the commencement of development a scheme for the provision and management of a buffer zone alongside the watercourses shall be submitted to and agreed in writitng by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme and any subsequent amendments shall be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include plans showing the extent and layour of the buffer zone and details of any footpaths, fencing or lighting.

The buffer zone needs to be a minimum of 3 metres wide measured from bank top for the whole extent of the site. Bank top is defined as the point at which the bank meets normal land levels. This zone should be without structures, hard standing, footpaths, fences or overhanging development such as balconies and should not include domestic gardens or formal landscaping. The buffer zone needs to be designed and managed to develop this natural character and left as a natural area for wildlife.

Reason: Development that encroaches on watercourse has a potentially severe impact on their ecological value. This is contrary to government policy in PPS1 and PPS9. Land alongside watercourses is particularly valuable for wildlife and it is essential this is protected. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive also stresses the importance of natural networks of linked corridors to allow movemnt of species between suitable habitats and promote the expansion of biodiversity. Such networks may also help wildlife adapt to climate change.

6 INFORMATIVE:
If it is proposed to culvert, infill, obstruct or divert a watercourse then under the terms of

the 1991 Land Drainage Act (Sectuib23) the prior written consent of the Envrionment Agency will be required. It should be noted that there is a presumption against culverting unless it is required for access.

7 INFORMATIVE: Summary of Reasons for Grant Article 31 Development Management Procedure Order 2010

SUMMARY
This planning permission is granted because it complies with the policies listed below in that the development would not cause any material adverse effect on visual or residential amenity on the surrounding area and its character and there are no material considerations to indicate otherwise.

RELEVANT POLICIES

LOCAL PLAN: GEN3, GEN7, GEN12, AREA 10, DEV3

NATIONAL POLICIES: PPS1, PPS7, PPS9

This is only a summary of reasons for granting to comply with Article 31 and full reasons appear in the Officer report.