

**CONSTRUCTION OF HORTICULTURAL PACK HOUSE
AT SEFTER FARM PAGHAM ROAD BOGNOR REGIS
WEST SUSSEX PO21 3PX**

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT.

PREPARED FOR BARFOOTS FARMS LTD

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE PROJECT

The project proposal is for the construction of a new pack house for horticultural produce at a site owned by Barfoots Farms Ltd near Bognor Regis in West Sussex. The site is located in a rural area close to the existing processing buildings which package a range of 'semi exotic' vegetables' which are currently largely field grown. Vegetable trimmings generated by the building would be used as part of the feedstock for the existing anaerobic digestion plant, and this will in turn help to power the building. Water used for washing within the pack house will be treated through a constructed wetland, which is to be installed to the north of the building, and is included within this planning application. Rain falling on the pack house will be stored in a reservoir to provide irrigation water for crops. There will consequently be a low environmental footprint as a result of the development.

1.2. LOCATION

The proposed site for the development is located to the West of the north- south road which links Runcton with Pagham. This lies in a part of the Chichester Plain which is a well established horticultural area, with a series of glasshouses and associated packing buildings lying to the north of the site at Merston, Tangmere and Runcton. These enterprises make use of the favourable levels of sunlight which occur in the area, which are typically some of the highest in the UK.

The location of the proposed pack house and the constructed wetland are shown on the location plan at figure 1.

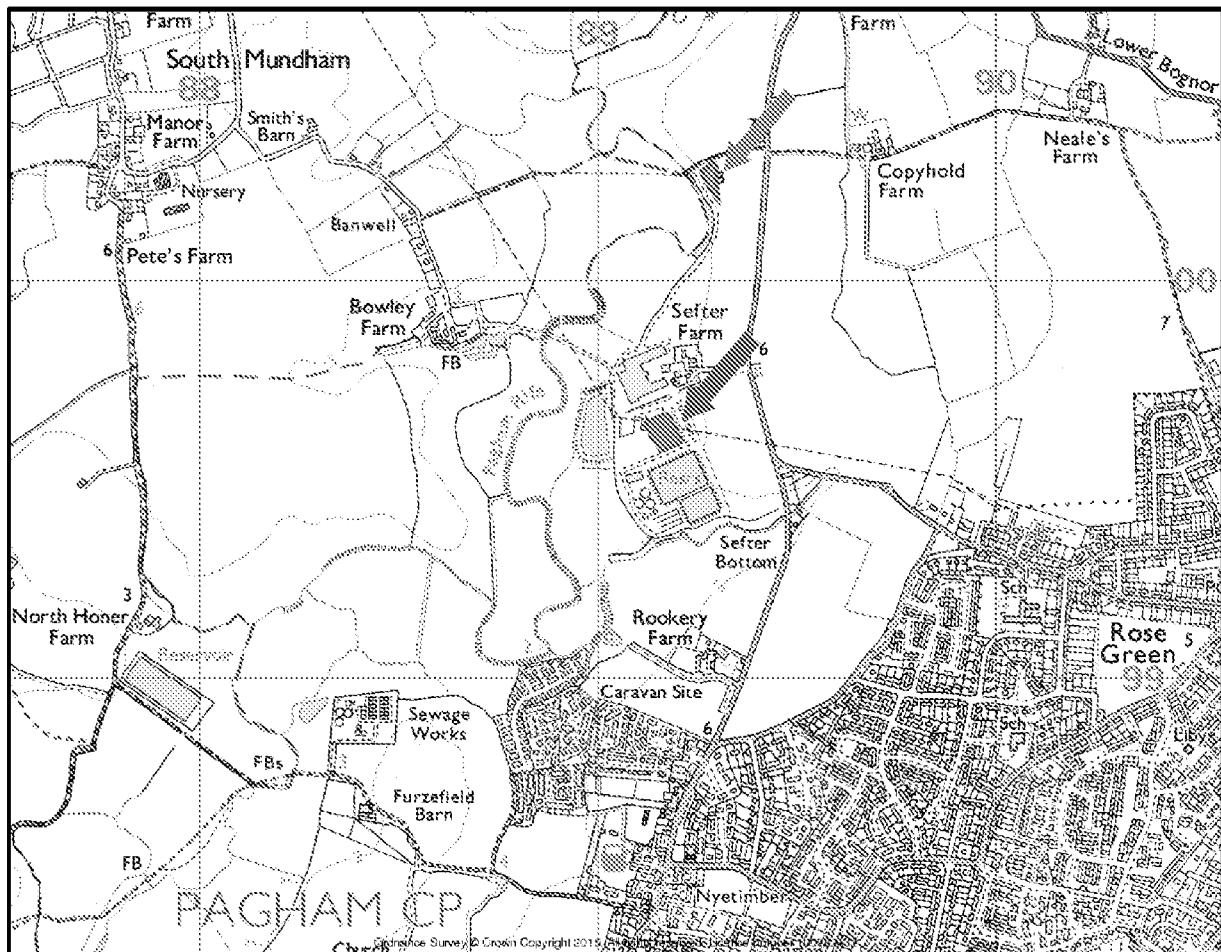


Figure 1: The site location to the west of the minor road between Runcton and Pagham , pack house toned green. Constructed wetland toned blue.

1.3. THE SITE

The existing pack-house site has a good road access from the Runcton-Pagham road, which is used to move crops for processing, and deliver processed food. The site for the proposed pack house is to the south west of this access road. The site is broadly flat at between 3.7 and 5 M AOD but slopes gently southwards to the Pagham Rife which flows south and west into Pagham Harbour. Much of the site is currently used for parking and lies at an elevation of approximately 5 metres above Ordnance Datum. The position of the proposed building is shown on the aerial photo at figure 2 below, and oblique view from google earth at figure 3.



Figure 2: Aerial Photograph. The location of the proposed pack house is toned green.



Figure 3 Oblique aerial view, site for pack house dashed red. Site for constructed wetland arrowed

1.4. THE PROPOSED PACK HOUSE AND CONSTRUCTED WETLAND

The proposed pack house will be used to process a range of crops. This means that the height needs to be sufficient to accommodate similar machinery to the existing processing plant into the buildings to the north. The new building will be rectangular in plan form, with a footprint of 74 metres by 100M and a height of 10.4M {15.4AOD}. Access will make use of the existing road connections. Precipitation which falls on the building will be drained to an existing irrigation storage reservoir which is situated to the west of the site. The constructed wetland will cover an area of approximately 3500M² and is broadly triangular in shape, to fit into an area of unused land on the edge of a cropped field. Spoil excavated to form the wetland will be placed predominantly on the western side which will then be planted with native trees and shrubs.

1.5. RELEVANT LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

It is understood that the proposed development will need to comply with the requirements of the current adopted 2004 Arun Local plan (which is used for decision making pending the adoption of the current draft) as well as the draft plan which is pending inspection.

The October 2014 plan will be given progressively more weight after the completion of the plan inspection which is currently being scheduled.

Various relevant policies from the draft plan are also included at Appendix 1, these include a horticulture policy which states that :

Policy HOR DM1

Horticulture

1. New glasshouse, poly-tunnel and associated pack-house development will be permitted provided that:

a. It is of a height and bulk which would not significantly damage the character or appearance of the surrounding landscape, unless it can be demonstrated that the need for a larger scale development is outweighed by the economic benefit of the scheme to the rural economy;

b. It relates sympathetically to the natural, built and historic environment;

c. Pollution to soil, water or air generated from the development into the surrounding environment, including the cumulative effects, is within regulated acceptable limits;

d. Long public views across substantially open land are retained where the landscape value is defined as major or substantial for the corresponding Landscape Character Area in the Arun Landscape Study

This report seeks to independently assess the scale of the landscape character effects, and whether there are significant effects on public views (visual effects), in accordance with the draft policies.

The report explores the relevant effects in two strands by firstly seeking to analyse the potential effects of the development on the landscape character of the area, and secondly by assessing whether the development will cause significant visual harm. These are two subtly different issues. Landscape character is a quality which is of significance in its own right, whether it is visible from the public domain or not, whereas visual impacts relate primarily to public views and viewpoints. Further explanation of these and other relevant terminology are included in Appendix 2.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the effects of the development, have been undertaken in accordance with national guidance produced jointly by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The approach described needs to be adapted to suit the nature of the development and the character of the countryside within which the development is to be sited. This is explained further in Appendix 3.

This report is structured as follows:

Section 2 describes the site and location as it currently stands. This baseline analysis sets out the existing landscape character, the landform and associated extent of visibility of the site. It includes views of the site from a number of key viewpoints and describes the nature of the views, their context and the potential viewers, or receptors.

Section 3 assesses the potential effects of the development on the character of the landscape, and the views into the site.

Section 4 considers the scale and significance of the effects, and whether it is possible to mitigate the effects.

The conclusions confirm the scale and significance of the effects of the development on the landscape after mitigation measures are included in the assessment. It finally confirms whether the proposals meet the criteria of the local plan policies described above.

2. BASELINE ANALYSIS

2.1. LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

The site is located within an area which is not subject to any landscape designations, the nearest nationally designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is the Chichester Harbour AONB, at Birdham approximately 5.4 kilometres to the west. The South Downs National Park is located further to the North at Strettington approximately 8.4 KM from the site.

2.2. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The process of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been developed over a period of some thirty or more years by landscape professionals as a way of classifying and analysing landscape.

Current government planning practice guidance refers to and supports the LCA approach. This was originally developed and supported by the Countryside Commission, and its successor organisations, the Countryside Agency and Natural England, which have funded the application of this process on a national and regional scale.

Landscape Character assessments are designed to 'nest' one above the other such that more detailed description and analysis is provided at the regional county and local scales.

At a national level this part of West Sussex has been included within the *South Coast Plain* Character area. Certain *Key Characteristics* of the area which are listed and described (and are relevant to the site) include:

Major urban development's including Portsmouth, Worthing and Brighton linked by the A27/M27 corridor dominate much of the open, intensively farmed, flat, coastal plain. Trees are not a dominant feature - there are some small woods and a few windswept individual trees in the farmland or the occasional poplar shelter belt. A pattern of large arable fields, defined by low hedgerows, are often interspersed by horticultural glasshouse 'estates' and isolated remnants of coastal heath.

West Sussex County Council commissioned the production of a landscape character assessment of the county in 2003 and this identified the area around the site as being part of the Chichester to Yapton Coastal plain character area. This was followed by *A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape* which listed a landscape vision for the South Coast Plain area which included the following relevant aims:

A strong network of woodlands and hedgerows forms green corridors within the gaps between the coastal towns, providing informal recreational opportunities and helping to connect the towns and their residents with the wider landscape. Productive farmland and permitted horticultural uses are set within a strong landscape framework of woodlands, shelterbelts and hedgerows. Agriculture adopts sympathetic farming and land management methods, contributing to landscape renewal and biodiversity, including conserving wetlands and pastureland.

A further relevant document which was produced as part of this series, and supplements the character assessment work is a set of county wide landscape management guidelines which provide advice on ways to achieve the vision in relation to landscape change. These guidelines for the Chichester to Yapton coastal plain character area include the following relevant recommendations with the authors underlining of particularly relevant text:

Create a new, large scale tree and hedgerow framework which complements the open intensively farmed landscape, whilst maintaining significant views of Chichester Cathedral, the South Downs and local features
Maintain and strengthen field boundaries such as hedgerows and shelterbelts
Link up existing remnant hedgerows and tree lines to re-establish coherent field boundaries and wildlife corridors
Restore and strengthen the landscape of the gaps between settlements

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Encourage landscape enhancements around villages and on their approaches, especially those approaching settlements.

These guidelines are relevant to the next section of the report, which addresses the proposed development.

Finally at the district level the area was included in the Arun Landscape study 2006, which considered the capacity of the District to accommodate development. The site is situated within the *Sefter Bottom – Elbridge Coastal Plain (LCA 7)* character area which was judged to have a low to medium capacity to accommodate development. The key characteristics of the character type are described as :

Intensive arable farmland

Relatively large fields across relatively flat or very gently undulating landform

Field boundaries tend to be drainage ditches and/or fences

Weak/remnant hedgerow structure in places, with few mature trees

Long views to downs to north

The whole area is judged to have a slight landscape value but to have a substantial level of sensitivity to development.

The site also abuts the *Rose Green Coastal Plain (LCA 6)* character area which was judged to have a high capacity to accommodate development.

It should be recognised that the descriptions above are for a relatively extensive and variable area, and that there are tendencies for certain characteristics to be absent from some local areas, whilst others may be present, particularly where the land parcel concerned abuts an adjoining character area.

A more local character assessment of the immediate area has been undertaken as part of the assessment process and in accordance with the methodology described earlier. This found the following key characteristics:

An established grouping of farm buildings set back from the main road within a broadly flat area of arable land which is largely hidden from the adjoining road network by newly planted and established tree planting and highway hedging.

a broadly rectilinear pattern of field boundaries formed by ditches, reservoirs rife and hedgerows but some of these are in poor condition.

The adjoining packhouse, digester tanks, overhead cables and other buildings associated with the farm detract from the rural character adding to the human influences affecting the site area

Whilst there has been some planting to the northern and eastern site boundaries the planting has yet to become fully established and the farm complex is still partially visible from the east, particularly in the winter.

In addition to the proximity to Rose Green and Pagham, the busy local road network, and the presence of an existing pack house complex have tended to reduce the existing rural character locally, and therefore at a local level the site area would be considered to be less sensitive than the substantial level that the Arun landscape capacity study suggests. This study identifies the site area as being within an area of slight landscape value.

2.3. TOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

The site is underlain by brick-earth deposits overlaying gravels deposited after the last glaciations. Local variations in the depths and nature of these deposits have contributed to minor variations in height and landform in this part of the coastal plain with a maximum variation of the order of 1 to 2 metres. The land around the site is broadly level and drains southwards via the Pagham Rife and a network of slow moving agricultural ditches, into Pagham Harbour. A branch of the Pagham Rife is situated immediately to the south of the site.

2.4. HISTORICAL PATTERNS AND FIELD BOUNDARIES.

Research in to the history of the local landscape has shown how the landscape of the area has evolved over the last century. Figure 4 below is an extract from 1933 Ordnance survey mapping which shows the prevailing pattern of field boundaries at that time.

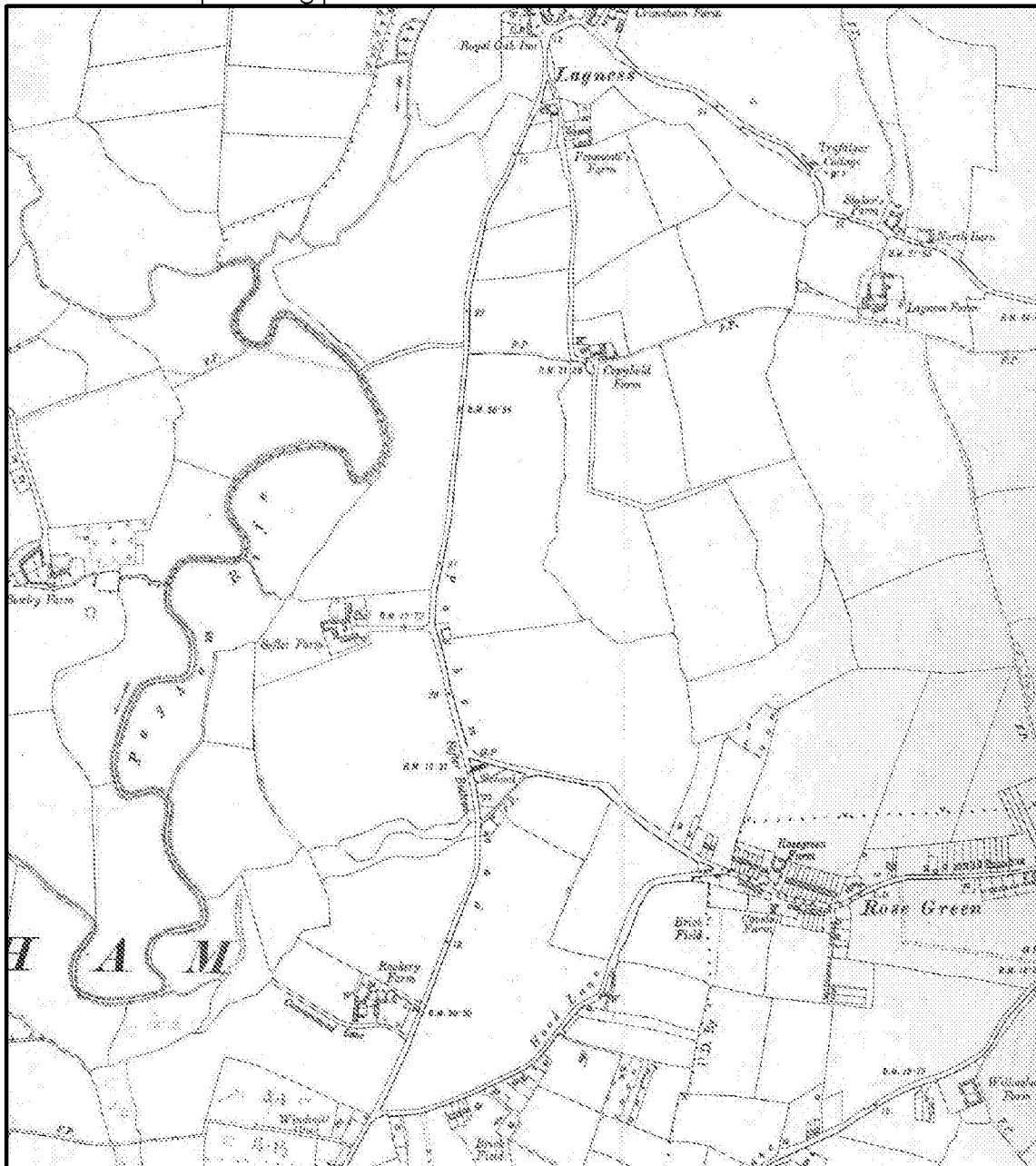


Figure 4: 1933 OS mapping of the site, which shows the pattern of agricultural field boundary ditches and hedges at that time.

2.5. CURRENT EXTENT OF SITE VISIBILITY

The proposed pack house is to be located to the south of a number of existing pack house buildings reservoirs and to the north of the site of the anaerobic digestion plant. The photographs at Appendix 4 illustrate views into the site from the various areas from which the complex is currently visible. Given that the pack house is to be located in a situation where it will be screened by existing buildings / reservoirs from the north and south, these are largely restricted to the, east and west of the site.

The various areas affected are shown on the plan at Figure 5 indicating whether there is likely to be a significant view of the proposed site. A radius of 1 kilometres is shown from the centre of the proposed pack house. This broadly indicates the extent from which a complex of this size

could be clearly visible. Beyond this distance it is considered that views of a building complex of this size are not likely to be significant in a flat landscape of this nature.

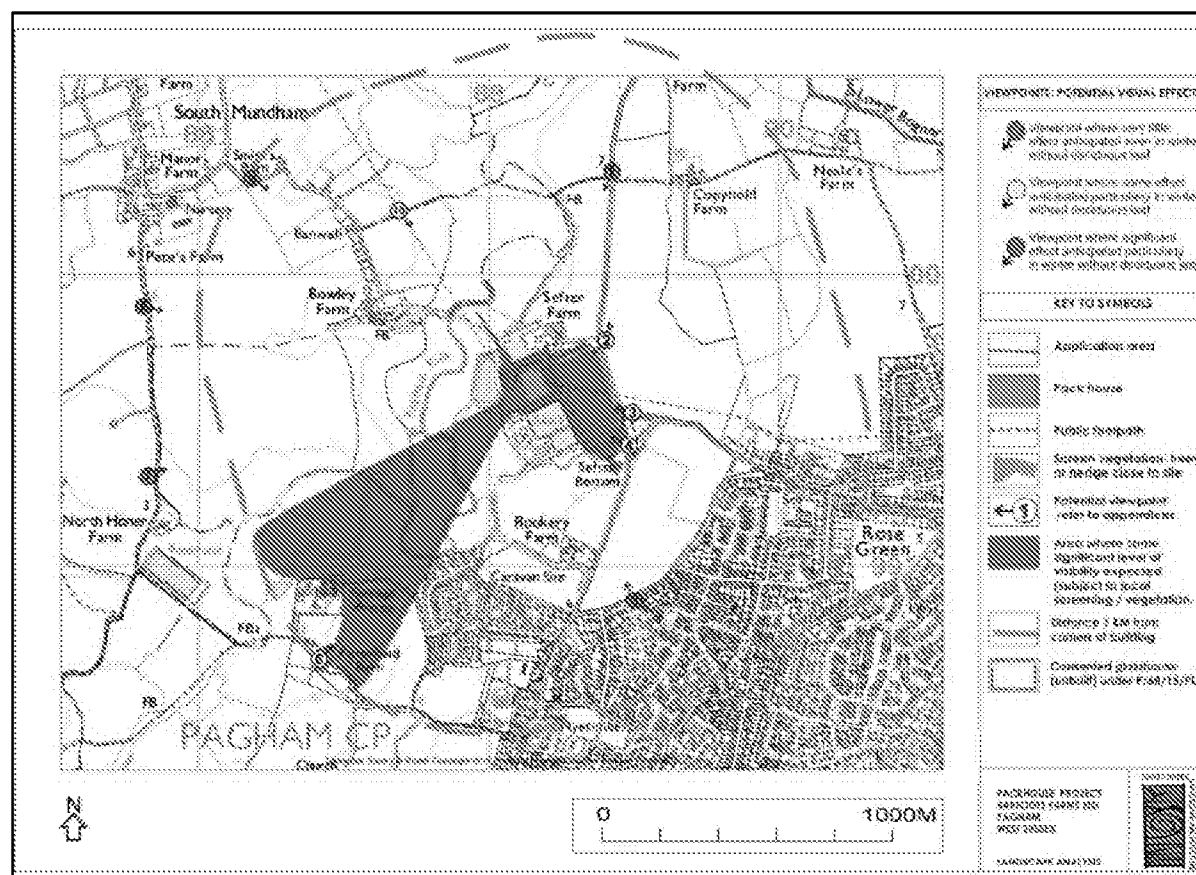


Figure 5: showing the potential visibility of the site from the adjoining public realm

2.6. NATURE OF VIEWS AND RECEPTORS

The views into the site in its current form from the public domain are restricted by a combination of the existing pack-house buildings, AD plant, reservoirs trees and hedges. Views from the Pagham Road are partially restricted by existing roadside trees and hedging, although there are three main gaps; at the entrance to the farm from Pagham Road, from the entrance to the private footpath from the Rose Green Road junction, and from Sefter Bottom. All of these locations will have some views of the new pack house, although very limited views. The areas with potential views are marked with purple tone on Figure 5 and key viewpoints where it is likely that significant views of the pack house would be visible from the public realm have been identified. The photographs at Appendix 4 and the likely receptors are described at Table 1 in Appendix 7.

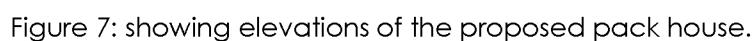
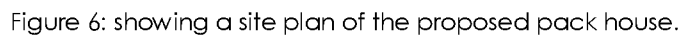
The primary potential visual receptors of the newly constructed pack house are likely to be drivers and cyclists using Pagham Road to the east of the site, which will see the pack house through gaps in existing hedging, primarily in winter.

Views from local residential properties at Sefter Bottom have also been considered and, whilst it has not been possible to visit these properties as part of this study, it is not considered to be likely that there would be any significant visual impact on ground floor views(or the principle rooms which planning inspectors consider to be most significant in terms of their sensitivity) from these properties. This is because the properties all appear to have tall timber fencing facing the road, and or significant hedging or shrub planting to screen the sides of their gardens which abut the road.

The visual impacts on areas where people are enjoying the countryside or their residential properties are normally considered to be more significant than those affecting people who are driving along a road. Footpath walkers will also see the new building from the south west, near

Furze field barn, and to the north west from near Banwell. Both of these locations are over 650Metres from the proposed building at a distance where the scale of the visual effects will be very limited. As Pagham Road is a relatively busy road with no pavement, there are unlikely to be many walkers along the road.

The plan and elevations of the pack house are shown on the illustrations below at figures 6 and 7 as well as on the larger scale drawings in Appendix 5.



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The drawings show how the ridges of the proposed pack house will be 10.4 metres high, which will match the existing buildings to the north. In most respects the proposed building is very similar to that approved under reference 144/06 in January 2007, which has subsequently lapsed.

3.2. CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS ON THE SITE.

Construction access to the site would be via the existing entrance from the Pagham Road. There are no plans to remove existing trees or hedging as part of the construction of the pack house which is sited on flat area used for parking. An existing screen mound which prevents views of the car parking area will be removed however and the loss of this will have a limited visual effect from the receptors on Pagham road. Plans for mitigation work to this area will be described later.

An area of wetland is to be constructed as part of the scheme in order to assist with the final treatment of process water. The site for this has been carefully chosen and is included at Appendix 9. Although situated close to footpath 130 the proposed embankments will hide the area from the footpath, as will proposed planting. As a result this item of the project is considered to have a very limited/ slight adverse visual and landscape character effect.

3.3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER EFFECTS

The construction of the pack house would add a further element to the existing group of buildings. There is inevitably an adverse landscape character effect resulting from the construction of the additional building with the height and the area adding to the scale of effect. Judgement of the scale and significance of the effect is considered within the table in Appendix 6, and takes account of the sensitivity and value of the area based on the Arun landscape capacity study. Based on table A at Appendix 3, the magnitude of change is considered to be of a low level, and the sensitivity has been judged to also be of a medium level locally (although the whole of the wider area has a substantial level of sensitivity in the Arun study). Therefore the overall scale of significance of the effect is considered to be of a minor level.

3.4. POTENTIAL CHANGE IN CHARACTER OF VIEWS

The views into the site which have been mentioned earlier and are illustrated in Appendix 4 will change as a result of the construction of the pack house. The table at Appendix 7 analyses the current nature of the view and suggests the level of impact, following the lettering system used in Figure 5. Judgement of the level of impact is based on a combination of distance, proportion of the view which will be affected and the extent that the target will be screened by existing vegetation. The terminology is described further in Appendix 2.

3.5. VISUAL IMPACTS ON VIEWS AND RECEPTORS

The site is relatively well screened from the north and south by existing features. There are also a number of trees to the west, and new planting to supplement the hedge along the east side of the area. Consequently the site is generally well contained apart from some relatively localised viewpoints which have been identified to the east through gaps in roadside hedging. Longer distance views from the footpaths crossing to the north and south permit some limited views of the building, one is through a gap between trees and an existing building, the other is along the route of an HV cable which runs beside the existing pack house building. A total of 5 'worst case' viewpoints were identified as being subject to some level of adverse visual effect. These included three which were subject to minor to slight level effects and two which were considered to be subject to minor level effects. The overall level of effect is therefore considered to be of a minor to slight level of adverse visual effect.

It will however be possible to reduce the level of effect in the longer term by undertaking mitigation works. These proposals are described later and illustrated at Appendix 8.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. SENSITIVITY OF RECEPTORS

In assessing the visual effect of the proposals, the extent of areas from which they are visible, and the sensitivity of the receptors need to be considered. The receptors of the views include:

- A high number of drivers on Pagham Road and Rose Green Road , but only via glimpsed views,
- Limited numbers of residents who may be able to see the pack house from the upper window of their properties to the east of Pagham Road at Sefter Bottom
- Limited numbers of walkers and cyclists who use Pagham Road and footpaths 130 and 100.

As explained earlier a higher weighting would be given to 'active receptors' such as walkers, riders or cyclists who are more able to appreciate views and the environment than motorists . They are also more likely to be walking or cycling for recreational purposes and more aware of views and the countryside, from a slightly higher viewpoint. Whilst residents of neighbouring properties would also normally receive a higher rating, impacts on ground level rooms and gardens are considered most significant, and it is considered that existing hedges and trees would prevent most views from this level.

In summary therefore whilst there are some limited visual impacts in certain areas, the number of active receptors is restricted, and most views are at least partially screened by existing vegetation.

4.2. SCALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS

The overall scale of the visual and landscape effects of the proposal which have been identified are considered to have a minor overall level of significance, after mitigation measures are included within the overall package of proposals.

4.3. MITIGATION MEASURES

The scheme was reviewed in the light of the landscape and visual impacts identified and proposals for mitigation measures have been developed. These consist of :

- Planting of a new agricultural hedge with standard trees to act as a buffer and to help replace the existing mounding to the eastern perimeter area between the site and the consented glasshouse area. This will also help screen the building from the viewpoints described on Pagham Road
- Addition of new screen planting to an existing southern western embankment which will help to close the view of the new building from viewpoint 6/ Furze field Barn area

These proposals are shown at Appendix 8.

4.4. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

The scheme also needs to be considered in relation to the consented glasshouse which was permitted under reference P/68/15/PL, and is situated to the east of the proposed pack house. If constructed the reservoir and glasshouse will screen the proposed pack house from the east, and proposed mitigation planting for the glasshouse would also help to screen the proposed building. Considering the cumulative effect of these proposals; in landscape character terms there would therefore be a further increase in the area and number of buildings. The mitigation proposals described will help the schemes to be more readily accommodated within the hedgerow landscape, therefore we judge the scale of the increase as contributing a potential slight level of increase in the scale of cumulative landscape character effects. The key issue being whether the change is of such a scale as to become a defining characteristic of the landscape character area; which we do not consider to be the case.

4.5. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed new pack house has been assessed in the light of planning policy requirements to address potential concerns regarding landscape and visual impacts. The extent and scale of both landscape and visual impacts are considered to be relatively localised and minor in scale

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and proposed mitigation measures will help to reduce these impacts within a period of between 4 and 7 years.

Considering the proposals in relation to the landscape policy context criteria listed earlier at section 1.5, with the most relevant being policy HORDM1 that the development will be permitted provided that:

- a. It is of a height and bulk which would not significantly damage the character or appearance of the surrounding landscape, unless it can be demonstrated that the need for a larger scale development is outweighed by the economic benefit of the scheme to the rural economy;
- b. It relates sympathetically to the natural, built and historic environment;
- d. Long public views across substantially open land are retained where the landscape value is defined as major or substantial for the corresponding Landscape Character Area in the Arun Landscape Study
- k. Proposals include full details of new landscaping, screening and of any trees or vegetation to be retained on the site; and

Addressing each of these policy requirements in order as follows:

a: Firstly it is our view that the proposed pack house is of a significant height and bulk, however it is of a standard modern height and size, which fits the current needs of the industry. The team has therefore sought to mitigate the potential impacts through judicious siting, which makes use of the relatively contained existing nature of the setting, situated between the existing pack house complex screening trees and the AD plant.

Although the existing roadside planting is not yet well established, with appropriate maintenance and supplementary planting this can very effectively screen the proposals from the road. The visual containment of the proposals and the setting which is already affected by the existing pack house, reservoirs and AD plant mean that we don't consider that the proposals will significantly damage the character or appearance of the surrounding (wider) landscape.

b In a similar manner, through the mitigation measures we have described, we believe that the **scheme can relate sympathetically to the natural environment**, through the proposed provision of additional planting which will provide enhancement of the natural habitat of the site and adjoining rife.

d The landscape value of the area is described as slight within the Arun landscape capacity study 2006. Long views are currently already constrained by the existing development. Consequently **the scheme as proposed meets this particular policy requirement**.

k The details of the proposed mitigation measures are shown on the separate planting proposals drawing. These use appropriate native species including a mixture of fast growing tree species such as willow and poplar to provide an initial effect, with slower tree species such as Oak to provide a longer term future tree structure. Shrubs and smaller tree species would include holly to provide some winter screening effect, as well as a diverse shrub mix including dogwood hazel hawthorn and blackthorn, guelder rose and briar.

In summary therefore whilst the construction of the proposed pack house would have some adverse landscape character and visual effects, these are minor in scale and have been minimised through judicious and appropriate mitigation planting, which seeks to provide landscape benefits to compensate for the adverse landscape effects of the proposed pack house and reed bed.

David Hares Dip LA CMLI
Monday, 04 July 2016