

Planning Inspectorate Ref: APP/A2280/W/20/3259868

Medway Council Ref: MC/19/1566

**Land Off Pump Lane, Rainham
APPEAL by A C Goatham & Son**

Evidence of Richard John Lloyd-Hughes

Appendix RLH 02

Expected yields of fruit on Appellants' other holdings, comprising:

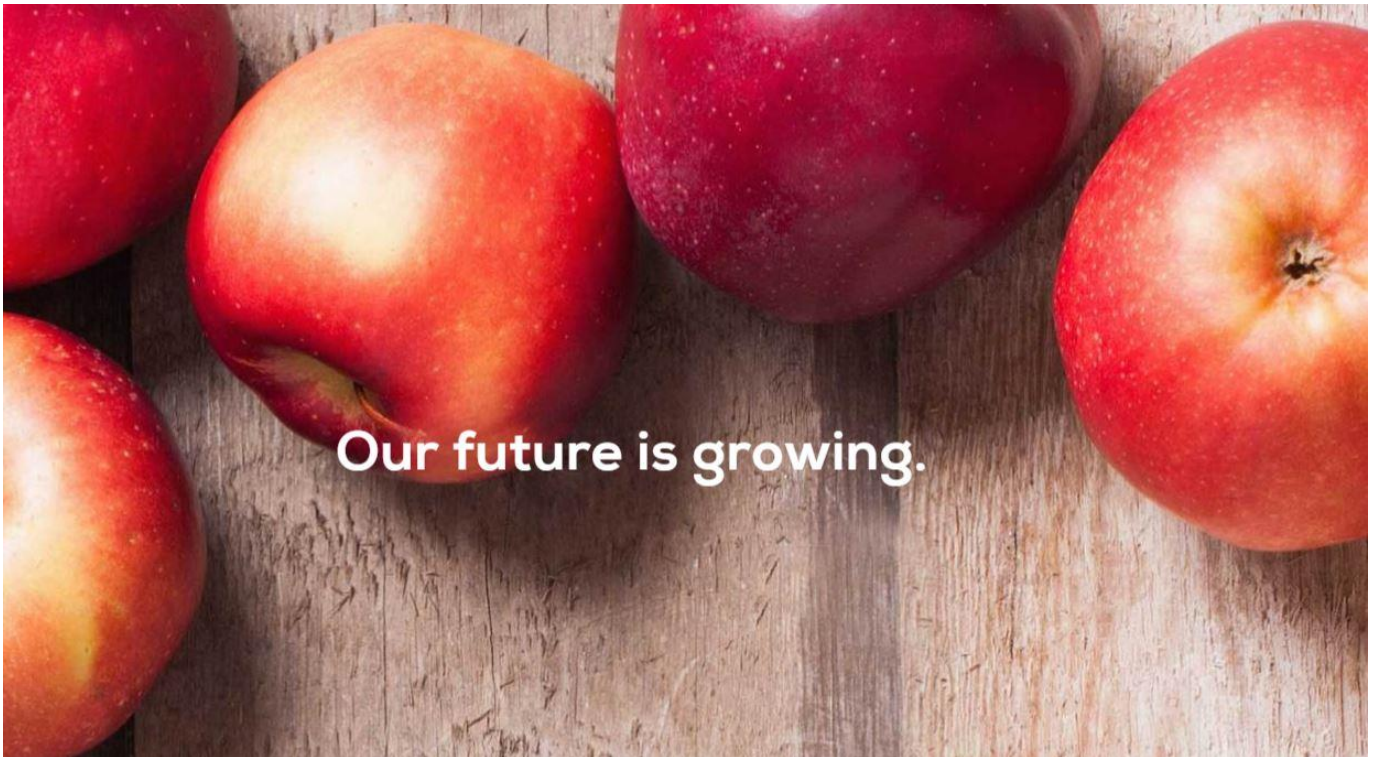
- Applicants' agents' Statement supporting application 20/502074 at Howt Green Farm, Bobbing, referring at **para. 4.9** to expected yields at New Green Farm, Shorne
- Applicants' agents' Statement supporting application 18/501312/FULL at Swanton Farm, Bredgar stating size of holding at **para 2.14** and at **para 5.5** expected yields, along with size and expected yields of Gibbens Farm




bloomfields
CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

**Lambert
& Foster**



SUPPORTING PLANNING STATEMENT

Howt Green Farm, Bobbing

May 2020

SUPPORTING PLANNING STATEMENT

In support of an application for the
Erection of two recreation halls for seasonal agricultural workers amenity facilities

at

Howt Green Farm, Sheppey Way, Bobbing, Sittingbourne, ME9 8QP

On behalf of

AC Goatham & Son

ISSUE DATE / REVISION	COPY REVIEWED BY	DATE COPY HAS BEEN REVIEWED
Supporting statement draft	BW	13.05.20
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, AC Goatham & Son to support a full planning application for the erection of two recreation halls for the seasonal agricultural workers at Howt Green Farm, Bobbing, Sittingbourne, ME9 8QP.
- 1.2. This Statement is to be read in conjunction with the following drawings submitted as part of this application:
 - Site location plan;
 - Existing site plan;
 - Proposed site plan;
 - Proposed floor plans; and
 - Proposed elevations
- 1.3. This Statement provides an assessment of the context of the site and its surroundings, including the physical, social and economic characteristics as well as a critique of the relevant policies of the statutory development plan for Swale Borough Council and national policy under the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance.
- 1.4. Howt Green Farm is located midway between the villages of Iwade (approximately 1 mile) to the north east and Bobbing (approximately 1 mile) to the south west.
- 1.5. Howt Green Farm is a top fruit farm extending to 72.7 ha and comprises of three atmospheric controlled cold stores, a modern general-purpose agricultural building, reservoir, 32 seasonal workers mobile homes as well as irrigated orchards as shown in part on figure 1.

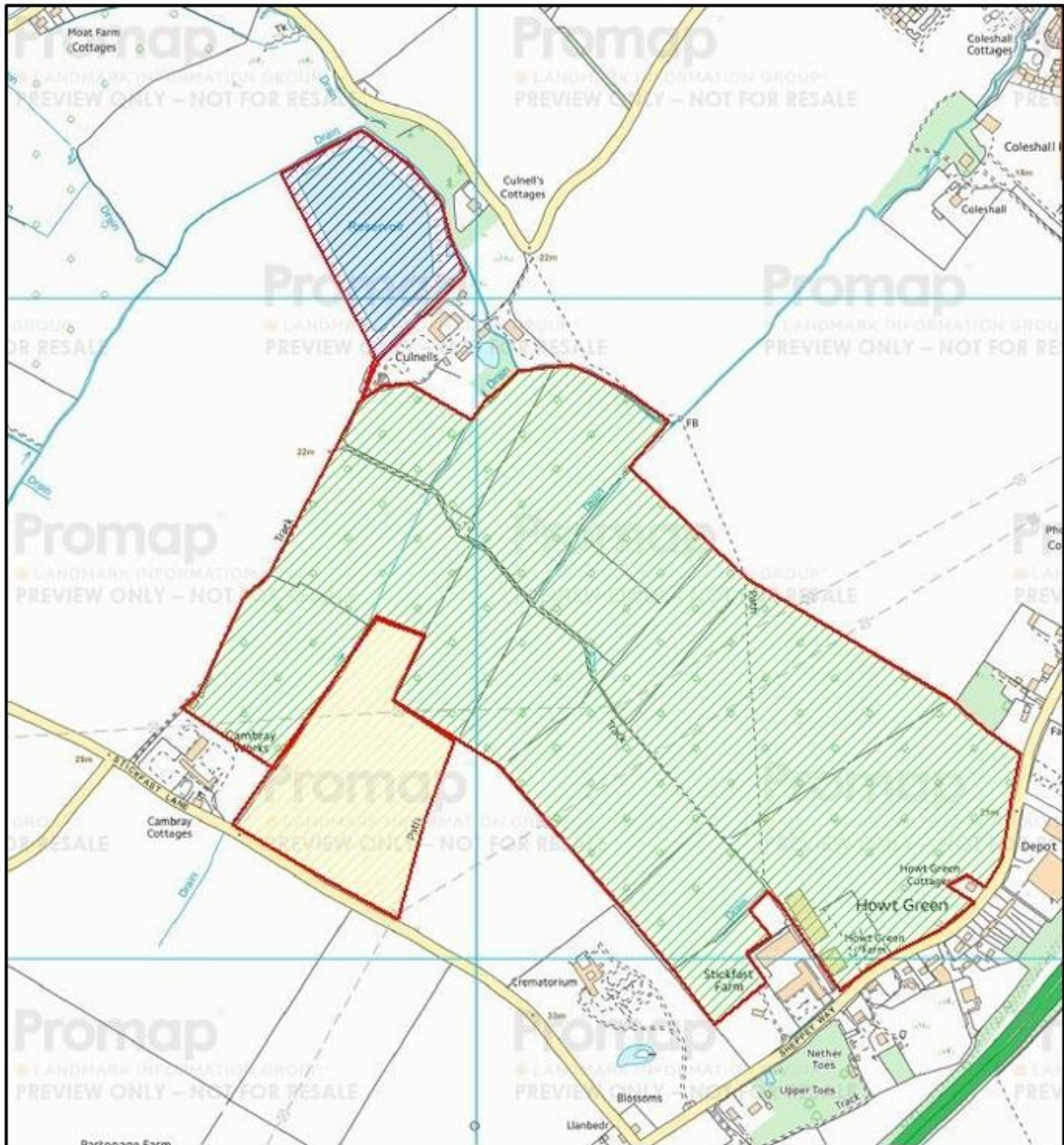


Figure 1 Howt Green Farm holding area

2. Proposal

- 2.1. This application seeks full planning permission for the construction of two buildings that will be used by the seasonal agricultural workers at Howt Green Farm for their recreational activities.
- 2.2. Howt Green Farm currently has 32 seasonal workers mobile homes, which are capable of accommodating up to 128 seasonal agricultural workers. These workers mobile homes are separated into two groups each containing 16 mobiles.
- 2.3. Two recreation halls are proposed at the site, with one for each of the mobile home blocks to provide amenity facilities for the workers.
- 2.4. The amenity facilities will ensure that the workers have a separate enclosed social area so that they have an area to gather together and socialise, separate to their caravans. The facilities will also help ensure that AC Gotham & Son remain an attractive employer to future and returning workers.

3. Background

General Industry Overview

- 3.1. The vast majority of topfruit handled in Kent and the UK, perhaps in the order of 75%, is done so by a small number of companies. This includes AC Gotham and Son.
- 3.2. These businesses have all had to adapt their growing techniques in recent years to replant orchards on new rootstocks at closer densities. This is to meet the demands of their customers (the supermarkets) who in turn are seeking to meet the demands of the general public (the consumer) for an increased volume of home-grown apples and pears, whilst maintaining an affordable pricing structure. As well as increasing volume by planting at higher densities, orchards are being replaced with higher yielding clones, whilst the introduction of wire networks encourages fruit growth upwards to better utilise space and allow fruit to be picked at two levels (top and bottom – the latter being done with specialist picking platforms). Again, increasing volume production per tree.

- 3.3. As a consequence, low yielding orchards (even if they are relatively young in the lifecycle of a fruit tree) are quickly becoming unsuitable and require replacement with more modern, higher yielding stock.
- 3.4. Similarly, consumer trends in variety preference has meant planting different varieties such as Gala from those previously favoured e.g. Russets and Cox. This has seen growers replacing orchards that have again not necessarily served a full life cycle in order to maintain contracts and meet the changing needs of the consumer. A recent example would be the Braeburn apple, which 5 – 10 years ago was understood to make up circa 20% of the demand from supermarkets. Today, this is believed to have reduced to about 5%, as varieties such as Gala which have a sweeter but comparably crunchy bite are favourable. This then means there is a surplus requirement of Braeburn stock on the market which in turn drives the price of the product down and therefore its viability. So, growers are either faced with the decision of continuing to grow into a market which has an over surplus (which in reality means continuing in an unviable manner) or grubbing orchards and replacing them with varieties which are highly in demand and which are forecast to stay.
- 3.5. The size, shape and colour of apples is also increasingly important to consumers and specific “grading” demands are put on growers by the supermarkets to grow particular classes of fruit; with optimum classes (e.g. Class I) commanding higher prices. Again, this puts added pressure on growers to, as far as possible, control the growth of apples on the trees. One of the main ways of doing this, is by controlling the level of water that can be available to a tree at certain times of the year and to achieve this, modern orchards require drip feed irrigation systems to be installed. Notwithstanding cost, this puts added pressure on the businesses labour to install these systems and to closely monitor them.

- 3.6. Another way of controlling the growth of apples on the tress is to significantly increase labour levels in an orchard to thin trees more regularly and “train” fruit on the wires and to ensure orchards are harvested at optimum times. This improves the grading level of the end product but obviously comes with increased levels of labour demand and cost. Those businesses not giving such attention to their orchards are not being favoured by the supermarkets as the end product is not consistent (which is what ultimately sells with the consumer) and it is therefore becomes increasingly difficult to service and maintain supply contracts. Understandably, this puts added pressure on the applicant for the requirement for additional labour.
- 3.7. The development of rootstocks, planting at closer densities and using wire networks all mean that yields per hectare are considerably higher than they used to be. However, more trees not only mean there is more stock to plant, thin and harvest (which means more labour), harvest volumes per hectare increase which mean the need for infrastructure to support this consequentially increases. This applies to:
- workers accommodation (where the industry norm is the provision of accommodation for the seasonal period to attract workers);
 - the number of fruit bins;
 - the extent of buildings to store increased levels of equipment;
 - the extent of cold storage;
 - the extent of onsite water storage facilities and irrigation systems; and
 - the extent of grading and packing facilities (and areas associated with storage of packaging).
- 3.8. Understandably, increased levels of labour, infrastructure and equipment all comes at an increased level of cost for growers which, as far as possible, sees the pooling of resources on “hub farms”, increased economies of scale and dependence on securing longer term contracts to enable a degree of security for inward investment.

Home Grown Produce

- 3.9. On the 31 May 2018, DEFRA released their 2017 Horticultural Statistics. Although it is appreciated that this covers various sectors of the horticultural industry, certain elements expressly relate to the topfruit industry.
- 3.10. In the report it can be identified that, despite intentions to increase the quantity of home-grown fruit, the stark reality is this is minimal (17%) when considered as a % of overall consumption. This is a 1% drop on 2016.
- 3.11. On 27 June 2019 further statistics based on 2018 production were released by DEFRA. This reported that “*Home production contributed 16% of the total UK supply of fruit in 2018, a decrease from 17% in 2017*”. As highlighted in the graph below.

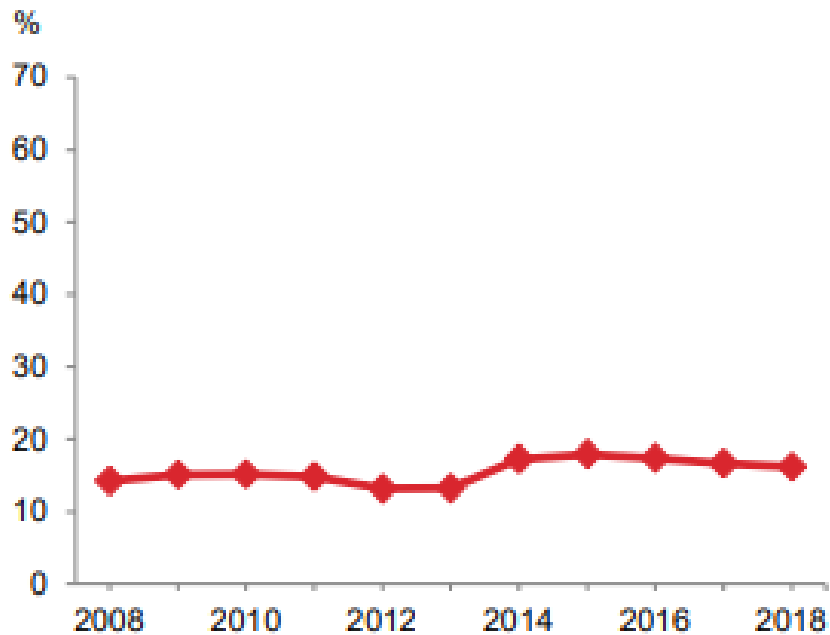


Figure 2 Graph taken from the Horticultural Statistics released on 27 June 2019

- 3.12. DEFRA's 2018 report observed that *"After a relatively mild autumn followed by a cold start to the year, the mild warm weather in March encouraged rapid bud development so that by early April the season was about ten days earlier than on average. The earliness remained throughout the season to give one of the earliest harvests on record. Late frosts in April adversely affected early blossoming fruit, with the degree of damage varying between regions."*. However, the 2019 DEFRA report commented that *"the first four months of 2018 were often very cold with temperatures being below average, which resulted in growth starting at least two weeks later than usual. From June onwards the summer weather was hot and dry which bought forward the normal harvest date of cops. It is very unusual for top fruit crops to start the season with late bud development and then go on to have an early harvest"*. In both cases this showcases the unpredictable and different labour demands that can occur year on year.
- 3.13. The 2018 dataset recognised the increasing demand for home grown produce which increase its share to 43%, compared to 33% in 2017. Whilst it was also recognised that yield of top fruit was higher in 2018 than 2017, although it was also identified that the 2018 hot weather did adversely affect some fruit sizing.
- 3.14. 2018 saw the highest fruit export levels on record, worth £156 million, a 3.7% increase on 2017. In the case of apples, export levels increased by 9,000 tonnes (approximately 29,700 bins), compared with 2017 levels. Not only does this show case that the demand for homegrown produce is high, but there is an increasing demand for British fruit outside of our own country. This puts obvious demands on the supply chain to maintain and advance levels of production, which in turn only emphasises the labour demand to service such provision.

- 3.15. The 2017 dataset shows that apple and pear UK production, excluding cider apples and pears, of some 284,000 tonnes (c.937,200 bins), being dessert apples (c. 181,000 tonnes / 597,300 bins), culinary apples (c. 80,000 tonnes / 264,000 bins) and pears (c. 24,000 tonnes / 79,200 bins). The 2018 datasets show that UK production, again excluding cider apples and pears of some 269,300 tonnes (888,690 bins), being 170,500 tonnes of Dessert apples (562,650 bins), 71,100 tonnes of culinary apples (234,630 bins) and 27,700 tonnes (91,410 bins) of pears; an overall drop in production by 14,700 tonnes (58,510 bins). In a time when the demand for home grown fruit and fruit for export is increasing, whilst production last year evidently decreased, this again puts extra burden on demand for increasing levels of production and therefore associated labour.

The Fruit Growing Season

- 3.16. The fruit growing season commences after harvest period - which is usually completed by the end of November - and will begin with the removal of old/dead or dying trees and their subsequent replacement with new stock through till early February.
- 3.17. The labour requirement during the planting season is high for a couple of months, especially during the early years when trees are being closely monitored to ascertain whether they are taking to their new environment.
- 3.18. Across the business, when new orchards are planted, the opportunity to incorporate the latest technology in drip feed irrigation is now taken; whilst the trees are now planted on a wire network to optimise growth and increase yields.
- 3.19. Pruning will occur post-harvest through to the end of March.
- 3.20. The main spraying cycle then commences from March through to the end of June as does the preparatory work in anticipation of the harvest period commencing in June and ending in November. This can include thinning but also the reinforcement and repair of wire networks.
- 3.21. The harvest period has the greatest labour requirement though the fruit season and it is during this time from June to the end of November that staffing levels will be at their highest both on the farms and in packhouses.

4. AC Goatham and Son's Existing Farm Business

The Company

- 4.1. AC Goatham & Son are one of the largest growers of apples and pears in the UK. They farm over 2,400 acres of land all for top fruit (apples and pears) over 16 freehold farms and 13 farms rented on long term agreements across the south east. It is understood that 1 in 4.5 home grown apples and 1 in 3 conference pears sold in Britain is grown and supplied by one of AC Goatham & Son's farms or partner farms.
- 4.2. AC Goatham and Son have been trading for 67 years (currently spanning three generations of the Goatham family). Over this time, they have focused on extending the fruit growing season to substitute foreign fruit with home grown fruit and producing quality produce at affordable prices. To achieve this, the business has introduced new varieties of apples to allow harvest to start earlier, improved growing methodologies to increase yields and introduced cutting edge cold storage technology to allow for fruit to be stored longer through the year.

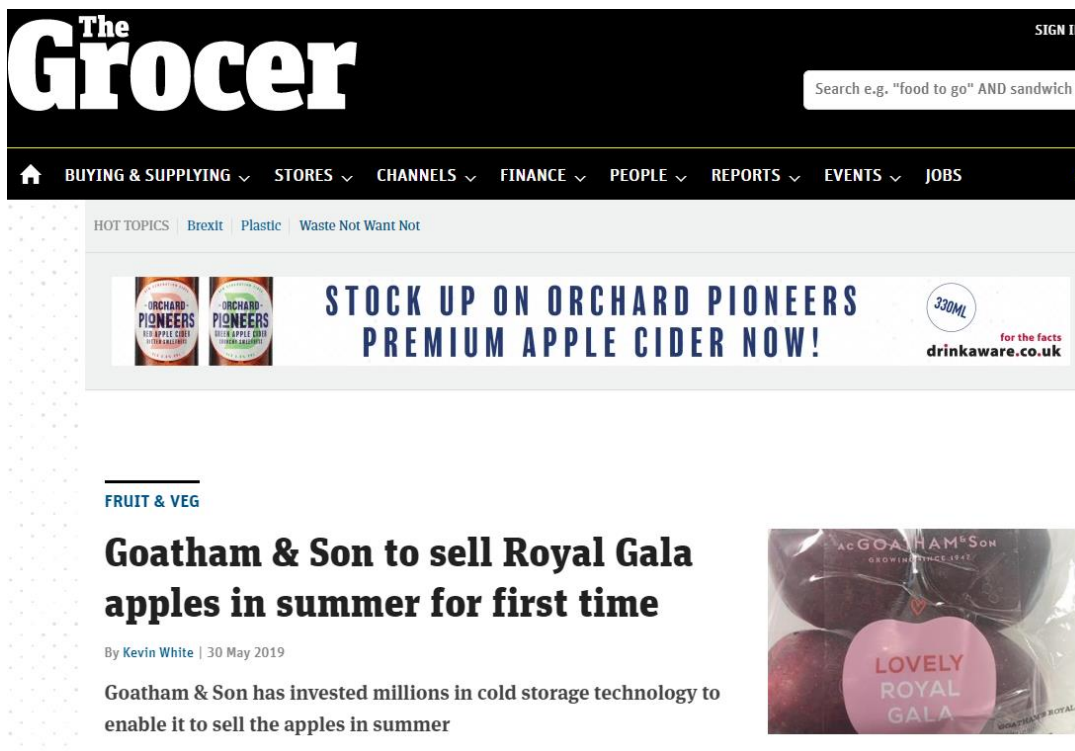


Figure 3 - Extract from *The Grocer* (May 2019) reporting on AC Goatham and Son's introduction of UK grown apples being available in the summer as a consequence of improved cold storage being erected.

- 4.3. Retail customers are increasingly looking toward consolidated sites for distribution of fruit to them. Not only is this logistically easier to manage but it helps keep the overall cost of British fruit down so that it becomes affordable for the consumer. This allows it, from a price perspective, to compete with the imported fruit which is much cheaper to produce (even after factoring in import costs) due to differences in soil and climate conditions.
- 4.4. It is envisaged that operational requirements will continue to be consolidated for the future. There is a discernible trend of considered future reinvestment in other, comparatively preferential sites. This has allowed AC Goatham and Son to embrace Flanders Farm as an 'agricultural hub' in Medway - as supported by Medway Council when they approved the move of the packhouse from Street Farm to Flanders Farm over 10 years ago. Elmstone Farm serves as the hub for the farms managed by the business in the east of Kent, whilst Howt Green Farm is considered the hub farm in Swale.
- 4.5. In recognition for it being at the forefront of its industry the business has won a number of accolades in recent years, including, but not limited to:
- in February 2017, the business was once again awarded "Top fruit grower of the year" at the UK Grower awards. The business was also a finalist across categories open to the entire horticultural industry including, "*Best Production Manager*", "*Edible Grower of the year*" and for the "*Best Business Innovation*";
 - in March 2017 AC Goatham & Son won the award for Kent Invicta "*Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year*". In October 2017, AC Goatham & Son won the Farmers Weekly *Specialist "Crop Grower of the Year"* award for their work in reviving the fortunes for British Conference Pear; and
 - AC Goatham & Son scooped top prize in the East Kent Fruit Society annual Top Fruit Competition, for "*Orchard of the Year*", "Best Orchard under 1,000 trees", "*Most Commercial Orchard*" and for "Best Dessert apple".

- 4.6. Reinvestment in the business in the eight years ended 2018 has been £63.4 million through their whole business (not just Medway) to ensure they meet the future needs of their staff, growers, suppliers and customers. In Medway alone £10 million was expended on the first packhouse at Flanders Farm, Hoo. This reinvestment continued and following approval in 2015 another £10 million was spent in expanding the facility further. A further 17,010 bins of storage facility were approved at Flanders Farm at the end of 2018 which will see yet more investment amounting to somewhere in the order of £5 million.
- 4.7. The business was granted planning permission for a major development scheme at Swanton Farm in Maidstone in early 2019 for a storage facility capable of storing 20,000 fruit bins and adopting the latest technology. This project in the Borough of Maidstone was recognised as being of national importance. Again this will likely see another £5 million reinvested to support the businesses growing operation.
- 4.8. Chavereys Accountants report that in 2018 actual GVA for the business was £26.8 million. This is forecast to rise to circa £39.9 million by 2028.
- 4.9. The location of A C Goatham and Son farms (owned and rented) are shown in Figure 3 below. This includes New Green Farm, in Gravesend which was purchased in November 2018. This holding extends to 67.5 hectares and is forecast to produce a further 10,500 bins of fruit.

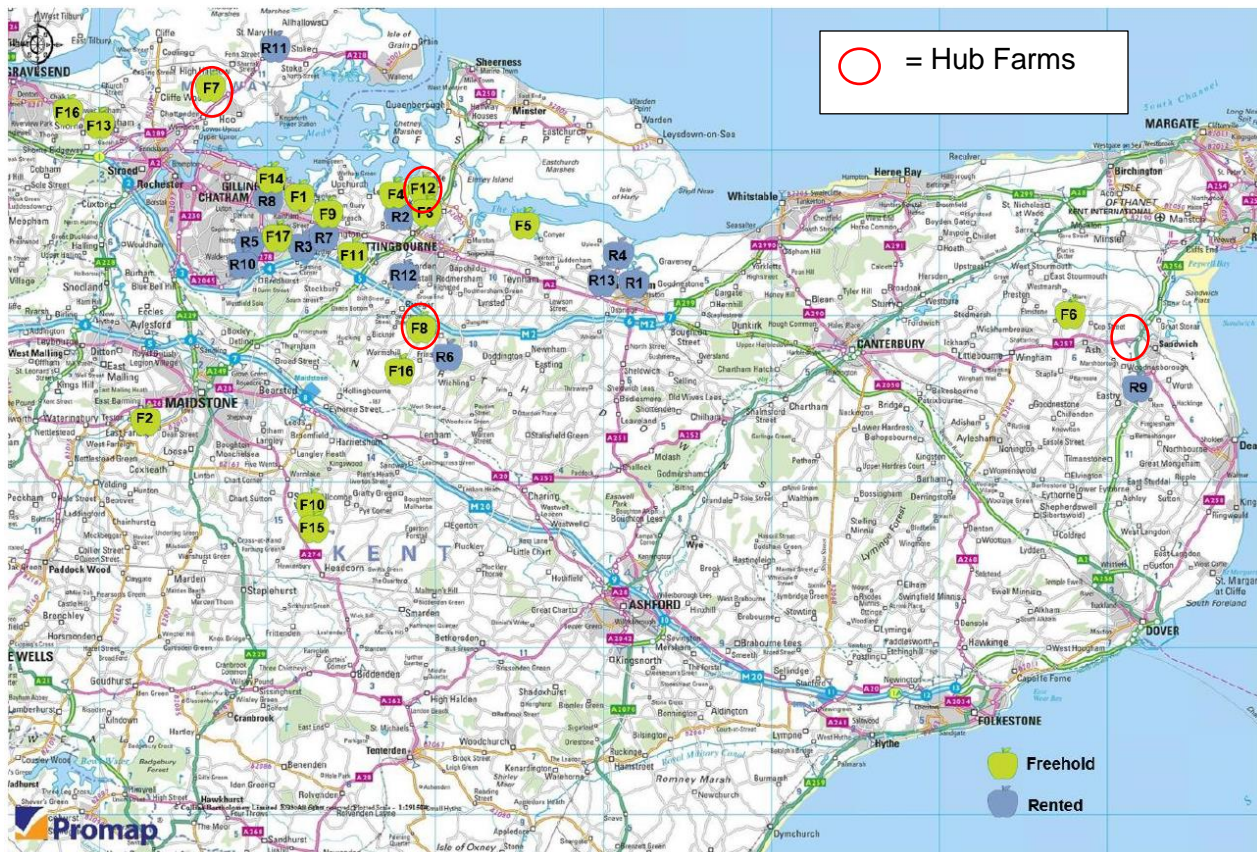


Figure 4 - Plan indicating location of AC Goatham Freehold and rented farms

4.10. Irrespective of any perceived planning constraints on specific sites, it is not feasible or logistically possible to provide the infrastructure required to make each farm 'self-sufficient' in storage term needs, accommodation provision, machinery and equipment and/or buildings necessary to store such equipment and machinery. We are not aware of any of the leading commercial topfruit farmers operating like this. Instead, to remain competitive, topfruit farms are dependent on either limiting their farms to within a very close proximity to each other or having a hub farm system to service the needs of a range of holdings in close proximity in order to make fruit growing commercially viable. The use of the hub farms also allows businesses to serve any rented farms they have; which business and lenders are understandably reluctant to invest in or borrow against.

- 4.11. AC Goatham and Son is no different and it operates a hub farm system which allows it to concentrate cold stores, accommodation for labour and storage of machinery in central locations across the south east. This, as far as practically possible, allows labour and equipment to be pooled and shared. This reduces capital outlay and also limits the potential loss of orchard as a consequence of limiting infrastructure on every site. Such an approach allows the business to remain competitive using economies of scale, whilst also reducing capital investment in infrastructure to a need only basis.
- 4.12. The hub farms with key infrastructure serving the business are:
- Elmstone Court Farm, Canterbury (F6 on Figure 3 – Dover District Council);
 - Howt Green Farm, Bobbing (F12 on Figure 3 – Swale Borough Council);
 - Swanton Farm, Bicknor (F16 on Figure 3 – Maidstone Borough Council); and
 - Flanders Farm, Hoo (F7 on Figure 3 – Medway Council)
- 4.13. Having hub farms can solve logistical issues in terms of pooling labour and equipment together whilst also offering site security for equipment, plant, infrastructure and stored commodity.

Fruit handling

- 4.14. Last year the business dealt with a throughput of circa 130,000 bins of top fruit (equivalent to circa 43,300 tonnes).
- 4.15. This spring, 220,000 new fruit trees will have been planted across the business in one season, with further plans for the next 5 years for in the order of 800,000 to 1,000,000 fruit trees to be planted.
- 4.16. Based on existing planting with increased yields and forecast planting, this is set to rise 171,396 bins by 2023.

Staffing

- 4.17. This season, AC Goatham and Son are estimated to employ in the order of 900 - 1,000 staff. Of this there are some 450 full time equivalent staff across the business with the rest being made up of the seasonal labour required to plant and thin trees as well as harvest and pack the apple and pear crops grown across the business.
- 4.18. With developments such as those proposed, derivative employment benefits co-exist with worker education benefits. Conspicuous, indirect employment benefits arise from development analogous to that proposed. In 2017 it was considered that AC Goatham & Son's employment has indirectly influenced the creation of 1,200 jobs in Kent.
- 4.19. In 2018 AC Goatham and Son have continued to support extensive levels of staff training, including; training for 20 first aiders, 56 forklift drivers and/or pump lift handlers, under 40 other plant/specialist equipment handlers and 49 food industry certificates.

5. Planning History

- 5.1. In 2007 planning permission was granted for a cold store building with reference 07/1388, with a second cold store building and extension to provide office, toilets and laundry facilities provided in 2013 with reference 13/0501. In 2016 permission was granted for a cold store building, building extension for agricultural storage purposes as well as an irrigation lagoon and electricity substation with reference 16/507789.
- 5.2. In 2011 planning permission was granted for the provision of 16 seasonal workers caravans, hardstanding extension, soil bund and landscaping with reference 10/1570. In 2014 an appeal was allowed following a refusal for a further 16 mobile homes for seasonal workers, with the location of this being amended by the 2016 approval with reference 16/507788.
- 5.3. Alongside the provision of cold storage, general purpose storage and offices as well as the creation of seasonal agricultural workers accommodation, there have been a number of applications for a temporary portacabin building to provide laundry facilities for the agricultural workers with references 13/0728, 16/507231 and 17/500877.

- 5.4. As can be seen from the planning history, provision needs to be made for the seasonal agricultural workers amenities as currently they only have laundry facilities. In order to ensure workers welfare, happiness and be an attractive employer to ensure workers will want to work and return to the farm each season, recreational facilities are an important mainstay on farms.
- 5.5. The widespread reduction in seasonal workers due to Brexit, improved home country wages as well as the current worldwide pandemic, places an even greater pressure upon agricultural businesses to be attractive to secure workers from the decreasing workforce pool. Having competitive wages, up to date accommodation, amenity and recreational facilities as well prioritizing welfare are now requirements to remain attractive employers.

6. Design and Access Statement

Use

- 6.1. The proposed buildings are required to provide seasonal agricultural workers recreational facilities. This will include, but not be limited to, a social area, internet connection, games consoles as well be furnished with seats and sofas. This will enable the workers to socialize with each other in a covered building, outside of their mobile homes.

Amount & Scale

- 6.2. The buildings measure 6.1 metres wide by 7.3 metres long and will be 2.8 metres high. Two buildings are proposed, with one building for each of the mobile home camps. Each building measures 44.53 square metres, so they are very small in scale.

Layout

- 6.3. The first recreation hall is proposed to west of the top mobile home camp which is situated to the north west of the farm yard. The second recreation hall is proposed to the south west of the lower mobile home camp which is situated to the south east of the farm yard. This is shown in figure 5.

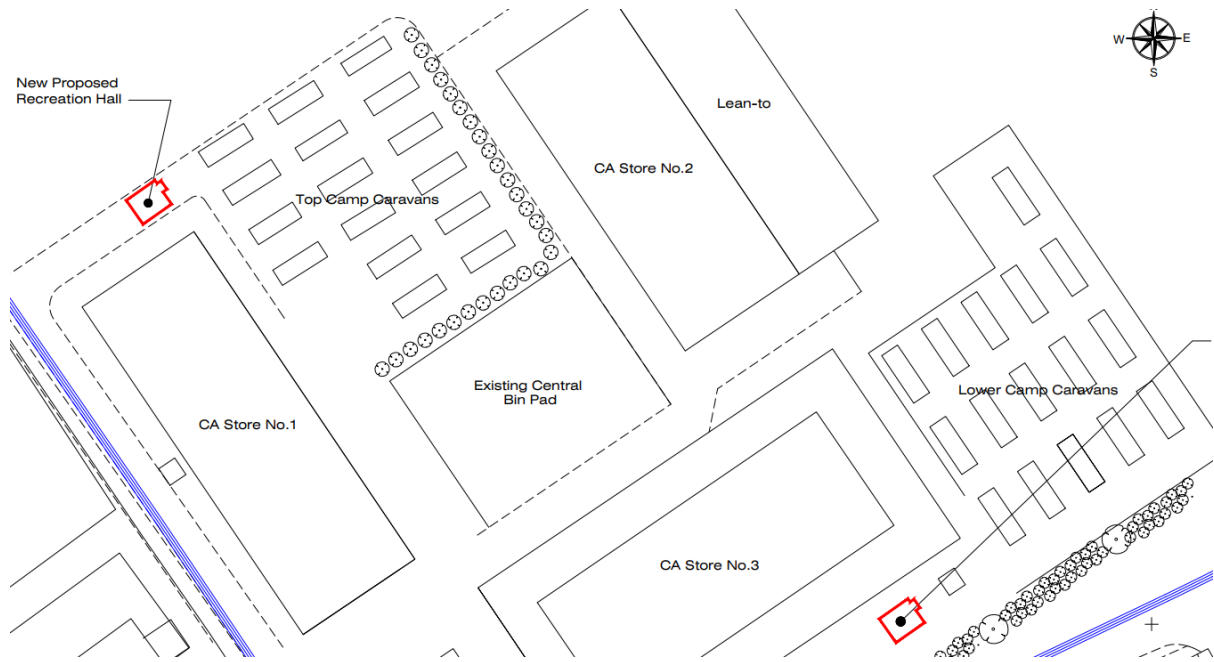


Figure 5 Proposed locations of recreation halls

Appearance

- 6.4. The recreation halls will comprise of steel framed composite panel boxes which will be olive green in colour to match the existing buildings on site. All external steel work will be painted olive green to match also. The roof will be composite panels in goosewing grey, with the doors and windows being UPVC in goosewing grey also.

Landscaping

- 6.5. The existing landscaping on site is well established and capable of screening the existing infrastructure where necessary. There are no proposed additions or alterations to this. The proposal buildings will also be placed among the existing farmyard and will be the same colour as the existing buildings, so no further landscaping is considered to be necessary.

Access

- 6.6. Howt Green Farm is currently accessed from Sheppey Way; there are no proposed changes to this arrangement. The proposal does not require any additional or altered access arrangements and will not cause any change in the amount or type of traffic accessing the site.
- 6.7. The recreation halls will be accessed internally within the farm yard by the workers on foot.

7. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF)

- 7.1. Paragraph 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework says that, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This is echoed earlier by Paragraph 7 which states: *“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.”* This proposal comprises sustainable development which is essential to AC Goatham & Son in being able to carry out their business and in a viable manner.
- 7.2. It is recognised that when considering what constitutes sustainable development in accordance with paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the policies in the Framework need to be taken into consideration as a whole. It is submitted that the proposed development at Howt Green Farm constitutes sustainable development and one which is of benefit to the agricultural enterprise.
- 7.3. Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework refers to supporting a prosperous rural economy. Paragraph 83 states *“Planning policies and decisions should enable:*
- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
 - b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;”*

The proposed development will provide facilities for the labour requirements of the applicant’s expanding agricultural enterprise and their aim to provide British apples and pears to the British consumer. It will also enable them to maintain their attractiveness as an employer and prevent a significant inconvenience and expense that would be incurred by the loss of workforce This proposal therefore supports the local and British economy.

- 7.4. It is quite clear that the NPPF places great importance on the contribution that agriculture makes to the rural economy and correspondingly provides support for its growth and expansion. The proposed development at Howt Green Farm will support the ongoing expansion and improved efficiency of a business which plays a significant role in the rural economy in Kent, the south east and nationally having regard to the topfruit industry.
- 7.5. AC Goatham and Son are one of the largest topfruit growers in the UK and reinvestment in the business in the eight years ended 2018 has been £63.4 million through their whole business to ensure they meet the future needs of their staff, growers, suppliers and customers. Chavereys Accountants report that in 2018 actual GVA for the business was £26.8 million. This is forecast to rise to circa £39.9 million by 2028.
- 7.6. This proposal is therefore pivotal in being able to support the continued reinvestment of the business locally, however, this is impossible if the applicant cannot harvest their product due to a labour shortfall. To ensure that there is no loss in workforce, AC Goatham & Son need to remain as attractive employees, whilst also ensuring worker welfare. The proposal helps provide this.
- 7.7. At paragraph 91(c) it is acknowledged that decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which support access to healthy food. The provision of agricultural workers amenity facilities, which in turn attracts and retains workers and thus enables and supports the growth and harvesting of top fruit, would duly support such a national vision and policy requirement.
- 7.8. Paragraph 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework advises that inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at high risk. Howt Green Farm and the proposal site is not in an area that is at risk from flooding as demonstrated by figure 6.

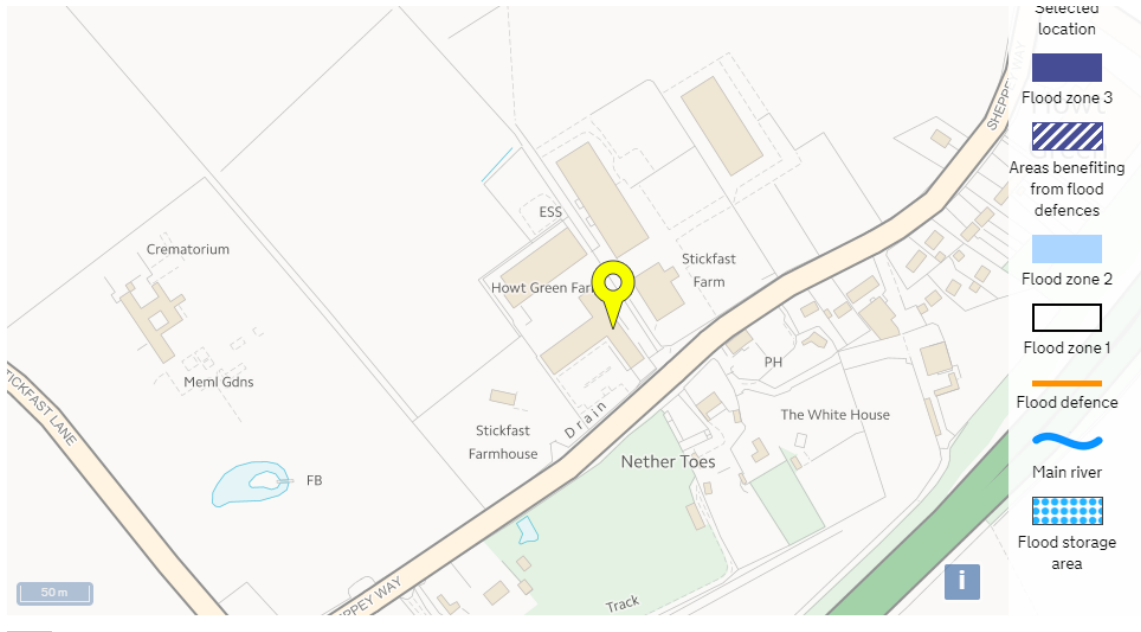


Figure 6 Flood map for planning

- 7.9. Recognition of the wider benefits of trees in the form of “natural capital”, “ecosystem service”, beauty, character and economic benefit is acknowledged at paragraph 170 of the NPPF. The proposal enables such support, as the labour associated with the business can ensure not only a managed landscape, but most importantly, a landscape which can be managed in a viable way – without which, management would not occur.
- 7.10. Importantly, paragraph 171 identifies the adoption of a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing natural capital at “a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries”. The proposal achieves this by supporting the workers that are managers of the land.

Swale Borough Council Bearing Fruits

- 7.11. It is considered that the relevant policies from Swale Borough Council’s Bearing Fruits local plan include:
- ST1 Delivering sustainable development in Swale
 - CP1 Building a strong competitive economy
 - DM3 Rural economy

- DM14 General development criteria
- 7.12. Policy ST1 considers the ways in which development can be delivered in the Borough in a sustainable manner, in accordance with the NPPF. Like the importance that the NPPF gives to the economy, the first point of Policy ST1 requires that all development proposals should *“Build a strong competitive economy by meeting needs for inward investment and indigenous growth on allocated and suitable sites, including meeting the needs of under-represented sectors;”*
- 7.13. The proposed recreation halls will allow AC Goatham & Son to attract and retain agricultural workers throughout the various farming seasons. The importance of worker welfare, facilities and associated infrastructure to ensure that the social aspect of workers lives is catered for as well as providing suitable accommodation is now an essential part of larger scale farming. The pressure to attract workers is more keenly felt due to the significant reduction in workers availability.
- 7.14. Core Policy 1 also considers the importance of the economy in the Borough. Specifically, CP1 point 8 states that development proposals should: *“Address future challenges to the agricultural and woodland/forestry industries with sustainable and appropriate proposals to create new markets and greater resilience;”*
- 7.15. One of the current challenges facing the top fruit agricultural industry, as well as other sectors, is Brexit and currently the global pandemic. The threat to labour supplies, alterations in imports and potential shifts in market trends are all challenges that the agricultural industry are already facing. In order to overcome these challenges, the efficiency of the holding and yields is even more profound. The ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce that return year on year to AC Goatham & Son and don't choose to work elsewhere will ensure that these challenges can be better faced and British produce can be grown to supply the nation. Less reliance on imported food is considered to become even more of a priority for the UK, with the pressure being brought to the farmers to ensure that competitive pricing can be made whilst also still retaining profit margins and yields.

- 7.16. Alongside this ‘new’ threat, the industry is also facing challenges in terms of food transparency, cheaper imports, changing legislation and a general decline in pollinators. In order to ensure that the production of top fruit remains profitable and competitive, growers have to produce high yields, with little waste on as cheaper margin as possible as well as keeping up with demand. To achieve this, alongside the new high yielding strains of fruit, efficient machinery and technological advancements there has to be the backbone of reliable labour to work the machinery, as well as the facilities in place to facilitate the efficient management.
- 7.17. The heavy reliance upon manual labour for all aspects of jobs in the top fruit year needs to be met with adequate facilities to house and keep this labour happy, which in turn produces an efficient workforce. The proposal will contribute towards keeping the workforce happy, motivated and will provide for modern welfare standards.
- 7.18. Policy DM3 specifically considers the rural economy, with specific reference to the agricultural sector being given in the preamble to the policy at paragraph 7.1.17 which states: *“For the agricultural sector, the industry has highlighted the need for it to keep pace with the changing context brought about by climate change, food security, food miles, the decline in pollinators, global markets, major food retailers and changing legislation/guidance. These may bring about demands for facilities such as large scale crop storage facilities and new growing techniques. Policy DM3 supports farmers to respond to these challenges.”*
- 7.19. Policy DM3 then goes on to say *“Planning permission will be granted for sustainable growth and expansion of business and enterprise in the rural area.”* As considered above, this proposal would facilitate the sustainable growth of AC Goatham & Son’s business at Howt Green Farm, as well as across its wider holdings. The ability to retain and attract workers will ensure that AC Goatham & Son can function and expand. This will also ensure that Howt Green Farm can contribute to points b. and d. of policy DM3; namely *“extend the growing season or improve the reliability and availability of local crops;...increase the availability of locally grown food sold direct to the consumer...”*

- 7.20. Policy DM14 is Swale Borough Council's policy which covers general development criteria. It is considered that this proposal accords with these criteria fully, in that it would accord with all policies contained within the development plan; specifically those relating to agriculture and the rural economy (point 1). The proposal also contains the necessary information for the Council to consider the application, in accordance with point 2.
- 7.21. It is also considered that the proposed buildings are well sited and are of a design, scale and appearance that is sympathetic to the locality as it is situated within the main farm yard area adjacent to built form and the buildings have been design to be the same colour and finish as the existing buildings. The buildings are proposed at a suitable distance away from any residential properties to ensure that there is no impact upon residential amenities. The ability to provide an enclosed amenity space will further ensure that any external socialisation and potential noise associated with this is further minimized.
- 7.22. The proposed buildings are also small in scale, fit for purpose and are akin to a wide range of agricultural buildings across the borough and wider landscape. The green colouring of the buildings will ensure that they will blend in with the landscape which is already well screened.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. This application is for the provision of two small buildings to provide two recreation halls for some of the seasonal agricultural workers that reside in the 32 mobile homes on site.
- 8.2. The recreation halls will provide amenity space and facilities for the workers to socialize in an enclosed space outside of their mobile homes.
- 8.3. The recreation halls are small in scale and have been designed to match the existing agricultural buildings on site being olive green and grey in colour.
- 8.4. This proposal sites are well placed to host the buildings; are well screened, in close proximity to site's existing built form and the mobile homes they will serve as well as being at a suitable distance away from any residential properties to ensure that there is no perceived impact upon residential amenities.

8.5. The proposal accords with and gains support from local and national planning policy. It is respectfully requested that this application be approved.



SUPPORTING PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

for

Application for the provision of a cold store, concrete hardstanding, irrigation lagoon and associated engineering operations and the upgrading of an existing track and access

in connection with

**SWANTON FARM
BICKNOR ROAD
BICKNOR
SITTINGBOURNE
KENT
ME9 8AT**

March 2018

01892 831600 | www.bloomfieldsltd.co.uk
77 Commercial Road | Paddock Wood | Kent TN12 6DS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

**Lambert
& Foster**



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. We are writing on behalf of our client AC Goatham & Son to submit a full planning application for the provision of a cold store, concrete hardstanding, irrigation lagoon and associated engineering operations and the upgrading of an existing track and access (“the development”) at Swanton Farm, Bicknor Road, Bicknor, Kent ME9 8AT (“the farm / holding”).
- 1.2. The development is proposed at the farm’s existing yard which is located to the south east of the hamlet of Bicknor, which is situated between the towns of Maidstone and Sittingbourne.
- 1.3. Swanton Farm was purchased in 2017 by AC Goatham & Son and extends to 107.05 hectares, with the view to expanding their top fruit production. This includes the intention to plant 44,049 Cameo trees over 15.5 hectares of land and 14,771 gala trees over 4.25 hectares in 2018 alone. In the following 5 years that will follow, the plan is to then plant a further 106,000 trees on the surrounding orchards at Swanton Farm.
- 1.4. The farm’s yard contains 20 caravans for seasonal agricultural workers (approved under application 13/1055) located behind an existing agricultural building. In December 2017 prior approval was granted for an agricultural storage building with reference 17/505361. The building permitted under application 17/505361 is yet to be built.
- 1.5. At the time of writing, a Certificate of Proposed Development (18/500202) for fifteen mobile homes for seasonal agricultural workers is yet to be determined on site. However, in considering the provision of the mobile homes, relevant reports, undertaken by specialist consultants have assumed the 15 units to be in existence to enable any perceived cumulative impacts to be assessed.
- 1.6. The location and extent of the proposed development is shown on the plans accompany this application.
- 1.7. This Statement is to be read in conjunction with the following plans and documents submitted as part of this application:

Plans

- Location Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-260 Rev D)

- Block Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-250 Rev E – Sheet 1 of 2)
- Block Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-250 Rev E – Sheet 2 of 2)
- Existing Levels Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-253a Rev A)
- Proposed Floor Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-251 Rev F)
- Proposed Building Elevations and Section (Ref No ACG&S-SF-252 Rev E)
- Proposed Levels Elevation (Ref No ACG&S-SF-254 Rev C)
- Proposed Levels Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-253 F)
- Roof Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-262 Rev A)
- Upgraded Entrance Plan (Ref No ACG&S-SF-261 Rev C)

Documents

- Flood Risk Assessment with Drainage and SUDs Strategy, including Appendices 1 to 10 – RSPD.
- Drainage Site Layout (Sheet 01) – RSPD.
- Pond Sections (Sheet 02) – RSPD.
- Transport Assessment (Jan 18) including Appendix A to D – Crosby Transport Planning.
- Plan of Proposed Access (Dwg Ref P1790/02) – Crosby Transport Planning.
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Jan 2018) including Appendices 1 to 10 – Harper Landscape Architecture LLP
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (February 2018) including Appendix A to C
– K B Ecology

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. AC Goatham & Son are one of the largest growers of apples and pears in the UK. Swanton Farm is just one of 26 farms that now make up the farm business known as AC Goatham & Son. It is understood that 1 in 4.5 home grown apples and 1 in 3 conference pears sold in Britain is grown and supplied by one of AC Goatham & Son's farms or partner farms.
- 2.2. In February 2017, the business was once again awarded "*Top fruit grower of the year*" at the UK Grower awards, and the business was also a finalist across categories open to the entire horticultural industry including, "*Best Production Manager*", "*Edible Grower of the year*" and for the "*Best Business Innovation*" award for their growing methods.
- 2.3. In March 2017 AC Goatham & Son won the award for Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year.
- 2.4. In October 2017, AC Goatham & Son won the Farmers Weekly Specialist Crop Grower of the Year award for their work in reviving the fortunes for British Conference Pear.
- 2.5. Again in 2017 amongst various other specific awards, AC Goatham & Son scooped top prize in the following categories for fruit grown on its Maidstone Farm at Sutton Valance in the East Kent Fruit Society annual Top Fruit Competition:
- Class D Dessert – for its Zari apple;
 - Most Commercial Orchard;
 - Best Orchard under 1000 trees/acre; and
 - Orchard of the Year.
- 2.6. In acknowledgment of their ability to be at the forefront of research and development to promote the growth and consumption of British top fruit, AC Goatham & Son have historically been allocated grant funding to improve the yield of UK Pears using optimisation of pollination. This work is being done in association with The East Malling Trust and Robert Mitchell Farms. AC Goatham & Son were short listed from 56 applicants to undertake this work. Funding was awarded for the use of modern cold store technology at one of their other farms.

- 2.7. Over the last eight years, AC Goatham & Son have reinvested £30 million through their business to ensure they meet the future needs of their staff, growers, suppliers and customers. £10 million was spent on the first packhouse at Flanders Farm, Hoo. This reinvestment will continue following the approval of application MC/14/3063 in 2015 and which will allow for a further packing, grading and storage facility to be erected at Flanders Farm in Medway. Having been opened by HRH Princess Ann in December 2017, this project is now complete and will have seen AC Goatham and Son investing another £10 million into supporting the horticultural industry and the promotion of British produce in the last year.
- 2.8. It is estimated by Chaverys Accountants that, in conjunction with their growing partners, annual GVA of the business was circa £13 million last year. This is forecast to rise to circa £28 million over the next 20 years. This is anticipated to equate to 7% of all the GVA from farming in Kent.
- 2.9. Chaverys Accountants record that in 2014 AC Goatham & Son had contributed an estimated £100 million to the Kent economy in the last eight years.
- 2.10. With developments such as those proposed, derivative employment benefits co-exist with worker education benefits. Last season AC Goatham & Son employed 251 full time staff and 450 seasonal staff. Conspicuous, indirect employment benefits arise from development analogous to that proposed. It is considered that AC Goatham & Son's employment has indirectly influenced the creation of 1,200 jobs in Kent. 60 of AC Goatham & Son's staff have studied for NVQ qualifications in 2016 with six being fruit grower trainees.
- 2.11. This season, AC Goatham & Son will employ 312 full time staff, and in the order of 900 seasonal staff. This is a result of AC Goatham & Son's continuing expansion of their farming business through buying land and renting on long term agreements. Taking on Swanton Farm in 2017 being a recent example. At the last season and into this year (not therefore including training support prior to this), AC Goatham and Son have continued to support extensive levels of staff training, including; training for 20 first aiders, 56 forklift drivers and/or pump lift handlers, under 40 other plant/specialist equipment handlers and 49 food industry certificates.
- 2.12. By next year it is estimated that AC Goatham & Son will have a throughput of just under 133,321 bins of top fruit, with this being forecast to rise to 171,396 bins by 2023. The increase in fruit production generates a requirement for more seasonal agricultural workers and storage facilities.

- 2.13. In the 2018 season, 58,820 new trees will be planted across Swanton Farm, with further plans in the next 5 years to then plant a further 106,000 trees in surrounding fields.
- 2.14. Of the 107 hectares of land forming Swanton Farm, approximately 1 hectare of this comprises the existing yard and building with a further half hectare being made up of pasture and scrubland. The remaining area of the farm is land being planted with orchards, or currently intended for planting with orchards.

3. Pre-application advice

- 3.1. In line with the recommendations of the National Planning Policy Framework it is recognised that early engagement with the Local Planning Authority in the form of pre-application advice can be beneficial.
- 3.2. Having commissioned a range of specialist reports to assist in the preparation for meeting the applicant's requirements it has become apparent that the requirements of the business are such that the scheme proposed appears the most considerate location to locate the facility behind existing (or approved, but not yet built) infrastructure and away from the existing limits to built development, whilst retaining proximity to the existing farmstead and remaining central within the holding.
- 3.3. The topography of the land has equally somewhat dictated the natural flow of surface water run off to provide an irrigation lagoon required by the applicant. The proximity of this feature, which the specialist consultants recognise as having biodiversity potential is located closer to the properties at Bicknor.
- 3.4. On 8 February 2018, the applicant's land agent, Lambert and Foster wrote to Mr Peter Moore of Bicknor Parish Council to arrange a meeting to discuss the applicant's intention at Swanton Farm. It is intended that a meeting will take place at everyone's soonest convenience. This should allow the requirement for the proposal to be understood and will also provide the Parish Council with the opportunity to ask questions about the proposal and how the scheme has been designed following an appraisal of the site.

- 3.5. A stream of grant funding has become available on a first come first serve basis which has put significant pressures on the requirement to have this application submitted without delay. Regrettably, this has limited the time available to the applicant to submit a pre-application advice request to Maidstone Borough Council and wait for their response before considering onward options.

4. Planning History

- 4.1. In 2013 planning permission was granted for the siting and overwinter storage of 20 seasonal worker caravans, with reference 13/1055. This was submitted by the previous owner of Swanton Farm.
- 4.2. Details to discharge the conditions for the 13/1055 permission were subsequently submitted and approved.
- 4.3. In December 2017 prior approval was granted for an agricultural storage building with reference 17/505361.
- 4.4. On 11 January, a Certificate of Lawfulness (ref 18/500202) was submitted to the Maidstone Borough Council for the location of fifteen mobile homes for seasonal agricultural workers. The target determination date for this is 8 March 2018.

5. The Proposal

- 5.1. This application is for the provision of a cold store, concrete hardstanding, irrigation lagoon and associated engineering operations and the upgrading of an existing track and access.
- 5.2. The location and extent of the proposed cold store, concrete hardstanding, track, access and irrigation lagoon can be seen on the Proposed Site Plans.

Use

- 5.3. The cold store will be used to store apples and pears grown and handled by the applicant. The double span building will contain 25 cold store chambers, which will facilitate the storage of 20,575 bins of top fruit in the building.

- 5.4. The building's use will not just allow for fruit storage but will enable AC Goatham and Son to target very late season sales due to the advanced technology being used within the facility. This will also enable AC Goatham and Son to target the removal of imported apples during the summer months by being able to identify specific batches of fruit at harvest across its own farms and its considerable grower base and store these in this most modern storage facility for the maximum amount of time and thus displacing imported fruit abroad in the summer months.
- 5.5. **Swanton Farm is forecast to produce 16,500 bins of fruit by 2023 with the significantly smaller Gibbens Farm (which extends to 35.33 hectares and is located just 1.3 miles to the north via Swanton Street) forecast to produce 4,200 bins of fruit by 2023.**
- 5.6. The facility will also serve as a potential back-up store if other stores in the applicant's control break or need repairing and for facilitating potential additional storage in heightened harvest periods for other farms in the locality. This of course has the added advantage of reducing dependence by the applicant and the partner farms on third parties for "overspill" and emergency facilities which is cost saving allowing retained inward investment.
- 5.7. The concrete hardstanding and new accessway will be used by farm vehicles, including the principle use by HGV for collecting fruit to take it to the businesses packhouse at Flanders Farm in Medway.
- 5.8. The lagoon will not only serve as a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDs) for dealing with all surface water run-off, it will also serve as a holding lagoon to be used to irrigate the surrounding orchards.

Size and Layout

- 5.9. The main double span building will measure 69 metres in length by 69 metres in width (a total of 4,761 square metres). At its widest on the north elevation, the building will measure 75.45 metres due to the provision of an electrical component room (which measures 15.8 metres in length – creating a total room area of 101.91 square metres). The total floor area covered by the building therefore equates to 4,863 square metres. The layout of this building with respective dimensions can be seen in drawing ACG&S–SF-251 (CA Store Building Floor Plan).

- 5.10. The building will measure 12.5 metres to ridge and 9.45 metres to eaves. The height of the building will allow fruit bins to be stored 9 bins high, with further room for unstacking. The internal ceiling height of the stores will therefore be 8.5 metres. Access to the roof void for servicing will be available at the front of the site via a standard staircase with mid landing at the front of the site with further exits being provided at the rear of the building by spiral staircases given the proximity of the chiller units and the requirement to leave a clear working area around these. The extent of these dimension can be seen in drawing ACG&S-SF-252 (CA Store Building Elevations and Section).
- 5.11. A 10-metre-wide grey concrete apron will be provided either side of the building on the east and west elevations to allow for vehicular movements to the rear of the store and for servicing. Four chiller units will be provided to the rear (south) of the building away from the public highway and screened behind the building to serve the stores and these will be provided within 5 metres of the building. Extending beyond this, will be a concrete apron extending 10 metres. A concrete apron extending 26 metres will be provided in front of the building to serve as the unloading area and to operate as a turning area for farm vehicles and the unloading of fruit bins and equipment. The area of hardstanding in front of the building has been designed to meet the front of the building permitted by way of application 17/505361. The extent of the hardstanding surrounding the proposed building can be seen in drawing ACG&S-SF-251 (CA Store Building Floor Plan).
- 5.12. The new road which extends from the hardstanding at the front of the building, will be finished in grey concrete to match. This will measure 7 metres in width and will extend for approximately 170 metres in length before reaching the existing access at the north east of the site. The extent of this can be seen in drawing ACG&S-SF-261 (New proposed entrance details).
- 5.13. The location of the building was given some consideration within the site to ensure that it was centrally located within the farm, accessible to the local road network and of course the surrounding orchards.

- 5.14. The chosen location near the existing mobile units and farm buildings not only keeps the existing built form closer together but in the proposed location the existing infrastructure on site (and already approved in historic applications) can be used to screen this larger proposal from the hamlet of Bicknor. Locating the building to the west of the existing infrastructure would not have achieved this. This would have also brought the proposed operation and associated vehicular activity closer to the hamlet. The proximity to the mobile units not only serves as a security feature on site, but it allows staff to be on hand to deal with any emergency issues relating to the stores (e.g power loss).
- 5.15. Similarly, the orientation of the building was chosen to reduce the perceived impact from the public highway and so that the building would not appear as large when glimpsed between the existing established hedgerow, compared to if the building was turned through 90 degrees and one would then see a continuous ridge line at 12.5 metres in height.
- 5.16. The location of the building has also been chosen so that it can be sunk into the landscape to reduce its perceived impact and following a recommendation coming forward from the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment. The extent of the land levels surrounding the building are shown in drawing ACG&S-SF-254.
- 5.17. The natural topography serves the design well, to allow a gravity fed drainage system to operate for dealing with any run off (as shown in the specialist report undertaken by RSPD and accompanying this application).
- 5.18. Another contributing factor to the proposed location of the building has been the provision of electricity into the site, which enters directly to the north and by the building permitted by way of application 17/505361. This is why the Electrical control room is located at the north west corner to the building.
- 5.19. In functional terms the latest building allowed in application 17/505361 will also work well with the proposed agricultural store which it will face it.

Appearance

- 5.20. The double span, steel frame building will be finished in vertical cladding with single skin angular profile plastic coated steel sheets. The lower part of the building will be finished in Olive Green sheeting, with the upper part being finished in Moorland Green colour sheeting. The extent of this can be seen in the Elevation drawings provided in support of this application (ACG&S-SF-252).
- 5.21. The roof will be clad with single skin corrugated fibre cement sheets. These will be light grey in colour. Four roof lights, the location of which are shown in the Roof Plan (ACG&S-SF-262) will be provided in the Electrical Control room. Louvres are to be provided on the north and south elevations of each of the building's spans to facilitate air flow around the facility.
- 5.22. All doors are to be finished in the opposite shade of green (Olive Green / Moorland Green) to the walls they are set in. So, for example, doors in the lower part of the building will be finished in a Moorland Green colour. The location of the doorways can be seen on the Elevation and Floor Plans provided (ACG&S-SF-252). This will comprise a roller shutter door (with personnel door in) in each of the building's spans on the north and south elevations. Where necessary, this allows vehicles going into the store to leave via the opposite end – this has the added advantage of meaning, if necessary, chambers either end of the building can also be filled at any one time. The separate use of roller shutter doors also means that temperatures inside the building's can be regulated as far as possible as required. A personal door will be provided in the east and west elevations. Both of these lead to plant rooms, which themselves have access to the roof voids for servicing/ maintenance, as required.
- 5.23. Grey concrete will be provided at the site for the hardstanding to the upgraded entrance. This is not only functional as a finished surface but is synonymous in appearance for a rural site access.
- 5.24. Electric security gates are to be set back from the site entrance (to the south of the existing hedgerow) to allow vehicles to pull off the road, whilst serving the obvious purpose of acting as a security feature. The gates will measure 8 metres in width and are to be painted green in colour. The surfaced entrance will tie in well with an existing access to orchards on the east side of the holding, meaning vehicles wont need to use the public highway to access parts of this farm for management purposes.

Landscaping

- 5.25. A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been carried out in respect of the proposed development by Chartered Landscape Architect, Nick Harper, Partner of Harper Landscape Architecture LLP and a lecturer in Landscape Architecture and a member of three design panels.
- 5.26. A copy of the LVIA report, which has been undertaken during the winter period when there are no leaves on the trees, accompanies this application.
- 5.27. This LVIA has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, 2013, by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management.
- 5.28. The LVIA has been used to inform the design process and offer mitigation proposals having regard to the landscape character and visual impacts.
- 5.29. Having regard to the Landscape Character areas of the borough, it is recognised that the aim of the Bicknor area is to “*conserve and reinforce the very distinctive pattern of orchards, by avoiding their permanent loss through grubbing up and ensuring they are managed and replanted*”. Whilst it is accepted there is a small loss of orchard area as a consequence of this proposal, this is offset elsewhere as some of the previous arable fields to the east of the site are to be planted with orchards. It is considered that the planting of 58,820 at Swanton in 2018 and further plans in the next 5 years to then plant a further 106,000 trees in surrounding fields demonstrates the applicant’s commitment to preserving such a landscape character whilst offering reinforcement of this. The proposal is of course a requirement of being able to ensure this landscape is retained as such.
- 5.30. The report recognises that the building would not be incongruous in the area (as seen in the foreground of Viewpoint 12 in Appendix 3 of the LVIA) and whilst it is of course accepted that the amount of built form is increased, any perceived impact would be offset by the large amount of mitigation planting proposed.

- 5.31. The LVIA report acknowledges the site's location within the AONB; commenting at figure 7.12 that, "*The Site is judged to be **Medium Sensitivity** as it is a working agricultural landscape in the AONB. The Magnitude of Landscape Impact is judged to be **Low** as the development would be perceived as a just perceptible change to the landscape. As such the overall Significance at a local level is judged as **Minor**. In this case whilst mitigation is of limited weight it has been proposed in order to offer landscape and biodiversity enhancements to the landscape.*"
- 5.32. The specialist LVIA report gives due regard to the National Character Area recognising that whilst the Landscape Sensitivity is judged as High given the AONB status, the Magnitude of Impact is judged as Low (just perceptible long term change) and the Landscape Effect is therefore of Negligible Adverse/Not Significant; recognising "*the development would be perceived as an almost indiscernible new element.*"
- 5.33. The LVIA considers the proposal from 16 different views, two being considered near distance, thirteen being medium and one being a long distance view. In all of these cases the perceived impact of the proposal is considered Not Significant at completion and after mitigation planting.
- 5.34. Consideration is of course given to local residents and it is accepted that a very limited number of houses in Bicknor and to the north of the site may have some visual impact from first floor windows towards the site (with Captain's farmhouse opposite potentially having views at ground floor level across Bicknor Lane, through the established poplar hedge and beyond the agricultural building permitted in 17/505361). However, it is professionally considered that these views across Bicknor Lane, above the obscuring Bicknor Lane Poplar hedge and seen within the context of other similar existing buildings would not be significant.
- 5.35. The LVIA considers the matter of lighting but concludes at figure 7.86 that "*there may be an incremental increase in lighting at night but this would be seen as a minor addition to that which exists at present and is judged as Not Significant.*"
- 5.36. The LVIA report duly gives consideration to any perceived cumulative impact, but these are judged as "Not Significant", as justified at figure 4.10 of the report.

5.37. Giving due regard to all matters, the qualified report concludes that *“the proposed development is essential to ensure the agricultural practises continue to be commercially viable. It is judged that the development would be in line with planning policy. The landscape character and visual impacts are judged as Not Significant. Once planting would have established there would be significant effective screening which would offer landscape and biodiversity enhancements. As such it is judged that there are good grounds, with regard landscape character and visual impact, for a planning consent to be granted by Maidstone Borough Council for the development as proposed.”* .

5.38. Section 7 of the LVIA sets out the comprehensive Mitigation strategy, which the applicant is agreeable to. The specific detail of which including planting plan, densities etc is proposed to be dealt with by way of condition. However, this would include hedging provided with 25% Ilex aquifolium (Hawthorn) and a 75% mix of the following species:

- Acer campestre (Field Maple),
- Carpinus betulus (Hornbeam),
- Cornus sanguinea (Dogwood),
- Fagus sylvatica (Beech),
- Ilex aquifolium (Holly), and
- Prunus spinosa (Blackthorn).

5.39. As part of the proposal, a taller block of woodland type indigenous species to screen views in from Bicknor and the prow bridleway (KH 166), to include the following species would be proposed;

- Acer campestre (Field Maple);
- Corylus avellana (Hazel);
- Fagus sylvatica (Beech); and
- Quercus robur (Common Oak).

- 5.40. As part of the landscape proposal, the existing Poplar hedge would be managed to grow up for greater height to assist screening the obscured partial views from Swanton Farm, Bicknor and prowl KH 165.
- 5.41. A new reservoir, which also serves as an irrigation lagoon and SUDS would be utilised to become an ecological enhancement feature with terraced waterside edging and wetland/edge/marginal and aquatic planting.
- 5.42. As per the recommendation set out by the drainage consultant and in the separate report accompanying this submission titled *Flood Risk Assessment with Drainage and SUDs Strategy*, the banks of the new lagoon shall be covered with coir erosion control matting to prevent any potential scour or such like and to aid the growth of selected grasses and other plant life to encourage future biodiversity potential.

Access

- 5.43. The site is currently accessed via a gated farm entrance onto the adjacent rural lane which runs from Swanton Street to the hamlet of Bicknor. Visibility to the west from the access is constrained, but with vehicle volumes and speeds being low vehicles can marginally encroach into the Highway to enhance visibility. A conclusion reached by the Highway Engineer, Paul Crosby of Crosby Transport Planning in his report provided to accompany this application.
- 5.44. Some 240 metres to the east, is a further gated vehicular entrance which leads to a track that forms part of the perimeter of the orchards allowing vehicles to enter for associated management operations. Visibility from the eastern access are recognised by the Highway Engineer as “*very good, with splays of 60 metres to the northeast and in excess of 90 metres to the west*”, and that, “*the achievable visibility splays from the proposed access would be more than adequate for the local traffic conditions*”.
- 5.45. Consequentially, it is the eastern access that is proposed to be used as part of this proposal. This has the added advantage of moving the majority of the vehicle movements at the site further away from Bicknor and closer to the Swanton Street junction which leads to Bredgar to the north (where the applicant’s farm, Gibbens Farm is) and Hollingbourne to the south.

5.46. As part of this proposal, the existing access to the east has been reconfigured to accommodate the swept paths of the largest vehicles (16.5 metres) anticipated to use the proposed facility. This would result in these vehicles not needing to use the west access. As recognised in the Highway report, this would improve the amenity for Captain's house located to the north of the site, whilst serving the added advantage of separating out movements of smaller vehicles. The extent of such improvements is shown in the plans provided in the Crosby Transport Planning report and titled Proposed Access Arrangements and Visibility Splays (Ref P1790/01); Proposed Access Arrangements (Ref P1790/02) and Vehicle Swept Path (P1790/TRK01).

Transport and Highway Impacts

5.47. The Transport and Highway impacts are given due consideration in the report prepared by Paul Crosby BEng FCILT MCIHT and which accompany this application.

5.48. Swanton Farm is AC Goatham & Son's largest farm in the Maidstone area, whilst being well related to the extent of farms associated with AC Goatham and Son both in Swale and Maidstone. It is well related to the surrounding road network.

5.49. The Highway Report correctly observes that there is currently no storage facility at Swanton Farm and this means therefore that at harvest, fruit needs collating into the main yard area before then being transported out by HGV's across various sites to stores across Kent (although these are insufficient and in short supply – discussed below). This is recognised by the Highway consultant as unsustainable as well as having the added effect of concentrating movements into a much shorter period.

5.50. With the new storage facility at the site it is recognised that there would be added gains of not only improving the sustainability of operations, but dispersing the traffic movements throughout the year.

5.51. In considering the emptying of a chamber, it is forecast that this would result in 6 HGV arrivals and 6 departures a day. The Highway consultant duly considers this as having "*a negligible effect on the local road network*", as per paragraph 6.9 of the Highway report.

- 5.52. In conclusion, it is recognised that in highway terms this development (or when considered together with the provision of mobile homes) would not have “*a material impact upon the safety and operation of the adjoining highway network, let alone be ‘severe’ or generate ‘significant movements’ to warrant refusal as per the local and national policy. Consequently, it is concluded that the proposal would be entirely acceptable on transport and highway grounds.*”
- 5.53. As such, it is duly considered that the proposal would not give rise to any adverse transport impacts or the safety and convenience of the nearby highway. It is our view therefore that this is in accordance with Section 4 of the NPPF; Promoting Sustainable Transport and the relevant policies of the local plan.

Lighting

- 5.54. A detailed lighting design has not been finalised as yet but it is envisaged that focused flood lights with side shutters will be implemented above the sectional doors.
- 5.55. Low level bulk head lights will likely be used at the entrances to the plant room and across the front of the building. The pedestrian bulkhead lights will be motion activated to provide safe pedestrian access from the plantroom and across the front of the building.
- 5.56. The focused flood lights will only be used in the hours of darkness to provide safe loading and unloading conditions to and from the transport vehicles and will be controlled via manual switches.
- 5.57. Following the recommendations set out by the Ecologist, KB Ecology, due regard will be given to Appendix C of the Preliminary Ecology Appraisal on the provision of lighting.
- 5.58. It is proposed that a more detailed lighting scheme is duly dealt with by way of condition.

Flooding and Drainage Matters

- 5.59. As part of this proposal a Flood Risk Assessment and SUDs Strategy has been undertaken and developed by Jamie Finch MCIHT of RSPD. This is provided, complete with separate appendices as part of this submission.
- 5.60. This report recognises that the site is located within Flood Risk Zone 1 and which is therefore classified as Less Vulnerable in accordance with NPPF Technical guidance has a less than 1:1000 annual probability of flooding.
- 5.61. It is recognised as part of the report that there are no surface of foul water sewers in the vicinity and is not therefore considered a risk to the development or to the existing infrastructure on site.
- 5.62. Groundwater flooding is not considered as a risk to the development proposal and it is confirmed that *“There are no other sources on or off site that are thought to be a flood risk at the site”*.
- 5.63. Page 8 of the report recognises that the use of the irrigation lagoon introduces *“a sustainable method of farm irrigation, without needing to rely on local potable water supplies”*. At a time when water is become a resource that needs to be used more effectively, proactive management of this resource is considered a positive step for the business in become more “self-sufficient” in the way in which it operates.
- 5.64. The use of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) by the applicant to manage perceived flood risk *“does not increase flood risk elsewhere, by retaining surface water generated from the impermeable surfacing on site”*. A point identified by the specialist consultant.
- 5.65. The report also confirms that *“There are no foreseen residual impacts to neighbouring properties or the surrounding area in relation to flood risk as a result of the proposed development scheme”*, whilst, *“There are no additional residual flood risks to the property following the implementation of the flood risk management measures”*.
- 5.66. The report goes on to recognise *“On the basis of the findings of the report, it is recommended that no objection should be raised to the development proposals on the grounds of flood risk”*.

- 5.67. Based on testing undertaken on the site, it is considered that the site “*lends itself well to a method of infiltration, which has been confirmed in the geotechnical investigations report*”; whilst “*there is a very good depth of unsaturated zone, ensuring an excellent level of filtration*”.
- 5.68. The drainage scheme designed on the site is such that it is equal to or less than the greenfield runoff rate for all storms, up to and including 1 in 100 year return period plus 20% climate change, while still assessing the effect of the 40% climate change.
- 5.69. The irrigation pond provided will be oversized with a storm capacity of up to 3,250m³ to ensure good water supplies can be maintained, whilst still allowing ample storage room for high rainfall events. This will have sloping banks at a 1:3 gradient to allow safer access and egress for maintenance when required.
- 5.70. Infiltration on site has been designed with the appropriate factor of safety, in accordance with CIRIA Publication 753 “The SUDS Manual”, and the BRE Digest 365; being designed to half empty within 24 hours.
- 5.71. Run off from the concrete road will drain to infiltration trenches and surface water gullies with trapped outlets. Where water has not drained directly to infiltration trenches, water will drain to a surface water sewer and enter a trapped catch pit before entering the infiltration pond serving the network. These methods offer treatment processes for the benefit of de-silting and reducing the risk of any hydrocarbons entering the network.
- 5.72. All inlets to the lagoon will incorporate scour protection slabs to prevent undermining and trenching of the embankment.
- 5.73. The proposed design layout for proposed system leading to the lagoon is set out in the Site Layout Plan (Sheet 01) provided as an Appendices to the main drainage report.
- 5.74. A section of the proposed lagoon called Pond Sections (Sheet 02), is similarly provided as part of the RSPD report.
- 5.75. No foul water is generated as part of this proposal.

6. Need for Storage

Why Store Apples

- 6.1. Apples need to be carefully stored to provide market availability over many months. The quicker an apple can be put into a store after it has been picked the longer it will last.
- 6.2. For storage of a month or two they can be satisfactorily stored in high-quality cold stores where the temperature and moisture levels are accurately controlled to the correct level for that particular variety.
- 6.3. When longer storage times are needed to satisfy the market and customer demand, Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storage is required. The fruit is stored in a cold store like with other store types, but, to reduce the natural breathing rate of the fruit so they last longer, the oxygen in the air surrounding the fruit is significantly reduced. This is achieved by fully sealing the room, and, by using automatic equipment to control the Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide in the surrounding air to the values needed for the product and cultivar that is being stored. Using this method fruit can be kept in a very good condition for extended period of time.
- 6.4. CA Stores have also helped meet the longer term need to preserve fruit, since legislative changes in storage preparation have taken place with the withdrawal of post-harvest anti-fungal products such as DPA (which was applied as a drench before storage).
- 6.5. Partners in Produce Ltd have historically summarised the top fruit season situation well, stating, *"If we were not to manage the release of fruit onto the market, prices would be below the cost of production through the volume available early in the season, Britain is striving for greater food security, the fruit industry is responding well in their adoption of new orchard systems and varieties and for the first time in over a decade, the national crop volume is rising. Efficient and environmentally low impact new build storage is essential if we are to continue to improve our market share, support food security and to meet the needs of our customer"*.

6.6. The provision of British produce in shops and wide media coverage of such demand by the general public only serves to highlight the increased demand for British produce to be available wherever possible. This point has only been emphasised by the country's desire to leave the EU and become more independent.

Development of new varieties

6.7. The article at **Appendix 1** and featured in the South East Farmer gives a good insight into the varieties of fruit that AC Goatham has been working to develop. These include the Cameo and Zari. 44,049 Cameo trees are due to be planted at Swanton Farm in 2018.

6.8. These varieties are being developed so they can be grown and stored for increased periods of time throughout the year to extend the availability of British fruit.

6.9. Not only does this increase the level of varieties going through the system it demonstrates how much of an industry leader AC Goatham and Son is and reiterates the requirement for CA storage.

Quantity of Topfruit

6.10. In the 2018 season, 58,820 new trees will be planted across Swanton Farm, with further plans in the next 5 years to then plant a further 106,000 trees in surrounding fields.

6.11. Swanton Farm is forecast to produce 16,500 bins of fruit by 2023 with the significantly smaller Gibbens Farm (which extends to 35.33 hectares and is located just 1.3 miles to the north via Swanton Street) forecast to produce 4,200 bins of fruit by 2023. The development will assist in meeting this need.

6.12. There are no storage facilities at Swanton Farm to store the fruit generated or forecast to be generated on this farm, whilst there is a shortfall across the business and Kent of modern CA stores.

6.13. By next year it is estimated that AC Goatham & Son will have a throughput of just under 133,321 bins of top fruit, with this being forecast to rise to 171,396 bins by 2023. The increase in fruit production generates a requirement for more storage facilities.

- 6.14. The proposed facility will serve as a potential back-up store if other stores in the applicant's control break or need repairing and for facilitating potential additional storage in heightened harvest periods for other farms in the locality. This of course has the added advantage of reducing dependence by the applicant and the partner farms on third parties for "overspill" and emergency facilities which is cost saving allowing retained inward investment.
- 6.15. This demonstrates that there is a clear need for additional storage for the business.

7. Planning Policy

Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan (2017)

- 7.1. In considering this application, consideration has had to be given to an extensive range of Local Plan policies, including:

Policy SP17 Countryside

- 7.2. Paragraph 4.95 in respect of Policy SP17 recognises there is "*...a need to ensure a level of flexibility for certain forms of development in the countryside **in order to support farming** [our emphasis] and other aspects of the countryside economy..*".
- 7.3. The policy then goes on to consider the fact that countryside has an intrinsic character and beauty that should be conserved and protected for its own sake, whilst also maintaining a level of flexibility to support farming and the various aspects of the countryside economy. The importance of agriculture is considered at paragraph 4.96 which states: "*Agriculture remains an important influence, fulfilling a number of important and varied roles in the countryside, contributing to the local economy, and managing and maintaining much of the valued landscape...However, in line with other businesses, agriculture needs to be able to react to new and changing markers and developments in technology.*"
- 7.4. The pre-amble to Policy SP17 then goes on to discuss the fact that agriculture in general is having to respond to the demand for produce to be available on a year-round basis and that this has the potential for adverse impacts from this intense use to be felt on the wider landscape and in terms of ecology and resources.

- 7.5. The use of modern CA cold stores is a technological advancement in the top fruit industry to reduce the reliance on imported produce. These significantly extend the shelf life of produce, which means the market is less volatile in terms of produce being in abundance at one time of the year and then not around at others. It of course means that British produce can be available to consumers for longer through the year.
- 7.6. Policy SP17 has a number of criteria, the most relevant of which is figure 2, which states: "*Agricultural proposals will be supported which facilitate the efficient use of the borough's significant agricultural land and soil resource provided any adverse impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape can be appropriately mitigated.*" It is considered that this proposal complies with these criteria and that the correct balance between the efficient use of agricultural land is met with minimal impact upon the appearance and character of the landscape.

Policy SP23 – Sustainable Transport

- 7.7. This policy is considered as part of the Transport Statement undertaken by Crosby Transport Planning and accompanying this application. The proposal meets this policy through encouraging economic prosperity and improving accessibility and mode shift across the borough.

Policy DM1&2- Principles of Good Design and Sustainable Design

- 7.8. It is duly considered that the proposal has been well designed to meet the functional requirements of the business, but has been located in a location that been well considered having regard to the local environment, local neighbours, the topography of the land, proximity to services and the location of the local road network. The building's finish ensures the proposal serves its functional purpose, whilst remaining consistent in appearance to modern agricultural buildings which are coloured to blend into the local landscape.

Policy DM3 – Natural Environment

- 7.9. In line with Policy DM3 it is considered that the proposal has considered the natural environment. This is evidenced through the provision of a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, to assess the environment within which the proposal is being advanced. Both, together with input from the drainage consultant have influenced the development at this site.
- 7.10. The provision of a SUDS system, to not only serve the functional need of the business to have access to water, but at the same time utilise such a facility to manage surface water run-off and provide biodiversity enhancements should be seen as a positive contribution to this proposal.
- 7.11. The very fact that this development underpins the management of the wider landscape should of course not be overlooked, nor should the gain to be had from the forthcoming additional planting this year and over the next 5 years.
- 7.12. All the specialist reports recognise that mitigation can be provided to address any perceived harm to the natural environment.
- 7.13. To give further due consideration to the environment, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was commissioned by the applicant and this was undertaken by Ms Katia Bresso CEnv MCIEEM, director of KB Ecology Ltd. This comprehensive report is provided as part of this application. For ease however, the principle points of the report are set out below:
- *“No ponds were present on site or within 100m and only one pond is present within 1KM. Thus, due to the paucity of ponds in the general area and the distance to the nearest pond, it is judged unlikely that great crested newts would be present on site”;*
 - *“The site consists of an intensively managed orchard. Strips of grass are present between rows of apple trees but these strips are cut short and are unlikely to be used by reptiles.”*
 - *“Reptiles are unlikely to be present and thus would not be impacted by the proposed works”.*

- *“Although a breeding bird survey is not deemed to be necessary, on the basis that the site contains suitable habitat for breeding birds, consideration must be given to the timing of the clearance works”;*
- *“no further work is recommended with regards to dormice”;*
- *“No further works is recommended with regards to badgers”;* and
- *“No further work is recommended with regards to bats”.*

7.14. Giving due consideration to the timing of vegetation removal, as per the KB Ecology Appraisal, this will be outside of the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), whilst during the construction phase any excavation work will ensure that planks are added to holes to ensure mammals can escape should they fall in.

DM8 – External Lighting

- 7.15. Having regard to the policy set out at DM8, a minimal amount of lighting is proposed on site and whilst this will, by default, serve as a security feature, more importantly, it will serve as a safety feature to allow the safe unloading and loading of fruit bins.
- 7.16. It is considered that the location of proposed lighting will not dazzle or distract drivers and users of the highway.
- 7.17. The LVIA duly gives consideration to lighting, concluding at figure 8.37 that *“there may be an incremental increase in lighting at night but this would be seen as a minor addition to that which exists at present and is judged as Not Significant”.*

Policy DM21 – Assessing the Transport impacts of the site.

- 7.18. This policy is given due consideration in the Transport Report provided by Crosby Transport Planning and which is summarised above at Section 5.

7.19. In conclusion, it is recognised that in highway terms this development (or when considered together with the provision of mobile homes) would not have “*a material impact upon the safety and operation of the adjoining highway network, let alone be ‘severe’ or generate ‘significant movements’ to warrant refusal as per the local and national policy. Consequently, it is concluded that the proposal would be entirely acceptable on transport and highway grounds.*”

Policy DM30 Design principles in the countryside

- 7.20. Policy DM30, sets out a number of criteria that need to be met when development is carried out in the countryside. The first three criteria are relevant to this proposal, namely; “*i. The type, siting, materials and design, mass and scale of development and the level of activity would maintain, or where possible, enhance local distinctiveness including landscape features; and ii. Impacts on the appearance and character of the landscape would be appropriately mitigated. Suitability and required mitigation will be assessed through the submission of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments to support development proposals in appropriate circumstances,*”
- 7.21. In consideration of DM30(i) all the appropriate matters have been given due consideration and the function purpose the building serves in ensuring the surrounding landscape can maintain its distinctiveness as orchards should be supported.
- 7.22. The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to ensure that any impacts are suitably mitigated and that the scale of the development is appropriate. Due consideration is given the DM30(ii) and DM30(iii) and this is considered acceptable.
- 7.23. Having regard to policy DM30(iv) there is no building suitable for conversion, or to meet the modern facility needed to store fruit. In locality terms the building sits respectfully in the countryside, close the existing built form of the existing farm yard, but equally respectful of the limited local residents and local road network.

Policy DM 36 New agricultural buildings and structures

7.24. Notwithstanding our view that there are no negative impacts, paragraph 8.27 of Policy DM36's narrative sets out that any "*potential negative impacts should however, be seen against the benefit that an increased growing season can have for the rural economy and the increased period where locally grown produce is available thus reducing reliance on imported produce.*".

7.25. Policy DM 36 considers that new agricultural buildings or structures will be permitted on land in use for an agricultural trade or business providing that a number of criteria are met. For ease of reference, the criteria are considered in turn below;

"i. The proposal is necessary for the purposes of agriculture;"

This specialist cold store facility has clearly been designed to meet the required need for storing fruit and is typical in design terms of other facilities operated on other holdings by the applicant. The lack of storage facility for the quantity of fruit being handled having regard to forecast is clearly inadequate. The lagoon will have the added advantage of not just operating as a SUDS system but is considered equally necessary for agricultural purposes and to serve as an irrigation lagoon for the orchards. Section 6 above details the further agricultural need above.

" ii. The proposal will not have an adverse impact on the amenity of existing residents;"

As considered in the LVIA, the site is well screened from the road and wider landscape by the existing high hedges and topography of the land. The proposed landscaping will ensure that the character of the setting is conserved and that the amenity of local residents is not impinged upon. The "cutting in" of the building together with its finished colour assist in limiting any perceived impact.

The use of the new road and improved access will take vehicle movements further away from the nearest residents in Bicknor and closer toward Swanton Street. Whilst the provision of the cold store on site will disseminate vehicle movements throughout the year, rather than concentrating them into a much smaller period of time during harvest.

Notwithstanding our view that the associated use of the building does relate to intensive activity (as the whole point is to not open chambers but to preserve fruit until such time that is needed), the distance of the neighbours from the proposed development in any event is considered sufficient to not cause adverse harm to the nearest residents.

“iii. The building or structure would be located within or adjacent to an existing group of buildings, in order to mitigate against the visual impact of development, unless it can be demonstrated that a more isolated location is essential to meet the needs of the holding.”

- 7.26. The new building is proposed to the east of the existing farmstead and opposite buildings on the other side of the highway. This keeps the proposed structure adjacent to existing buildings and not therefore isolated.

National Planning Policy Framework (The NPPF)

- 7.27. The NPPF maintains *“that at the heart of the NPPF should be a presumption towards sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan making and decision making”*. The proposal at Swanton Farm comprises sustainable economic development which is essential to AC Goatham & Son’s expanding business, without such, there is a shortfall in storage space for the business and those dependent on it.
- 7.28. It is considered that the proposal would accord with the aims of the NPPF, which seeks to ensure that planning policies support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity. The increased employment offered by the business is not only essential to serve the increased quantities of fruit being generated, but there are clear gains to employee able to capitalise, through the business on training opportunities.

- 7.29. Paragraph 18 of the NPPF refers to building a strong, competitive economy whereby the government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity building on the country's inherent strength and to meeting the twin challenges of global competition and of a low carbon future. The proposed development will meet the labour requirements of AC Goatham and Son's expanding agricultural enterprise and their aim to provide British Apples to the British consumer and reduce the need to import fruit from other countries, therefore supporting the local and British economy.
- 7.30. Paragraph 28 of the NPPF maintains that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote strong rural economy local and neighbourhood plans should:
- Support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprises in rural areas, both through conversion of the existing buildings and well designed new buildings.
 - Promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses.
- 7.31. Paragraph 58 of The Framework says that development should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. Being able to have stores on site will support the planting of just under circa 56,000 trees in 2018, with this anticipated to rise by a further 105,000 in the following 5 years. This development therefore contributes beyond the short term.
- 7.32. Paragraph 161 of the NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should use their assessed needs of business and particularly relevant to this application the needs of the food production industry and any barriers to investment that planning can resolve. With a clear shortfall in adequate storage facilities, this proposal should be supported.

Other Material Considerations

Supplying Local food to Mainstream Customers (August 2008)

This report by Henry Brown and John Geldard recognised the benefits of local food hubs working well with the supermarkets. It was for this reason their recommendation was to divert public funding, where possible, toward strengthening existing food hubs. Such a view was clearly shown by DEFRA in 2008 when they backed AC Goatham and Son to the tune of £1.8 million to enhance their facilities. The provision of the new facilities will only help build upon this identified success.

A Report of the Fruit and Vegetable Task Force on increasing the consumption and production of domestic fruit and vegetables (August 2010)

- 7.33. This report identifies that sustainable food security and production is a priority following the release of the Food 2030 Strategy. It also recognises that food production is overlooked in planning policy which makes it difficult *“for planners to take this into account when weighing up complex and conflicting demands for land”*. As a result, those involved in the fruit industry are missing opportunities to meet contracts, apply for grants and generally be reactive to the market demand.
- 7.34. The task force *“felt strongly that improving the planning situation for food production is essential for many crops in order to compete against imports”*. This is certainly true for the top fruit industry and AC Goatham and Son in particular are trying to promote the consumption of British top fruit as far as possible during the season, whilst they are actively involved in research to develop fruit varieties that extend the availability of British fruit. This is assisted with improved cold storage facilities.
- 7.35. Figure 5.13 recognises that *“water used for irrigation makes a huge contribution to the rural economy”* as it has an important role to play in reducing the import of fruit. The onsite lagoon dealing with surface water but doubling as an Irrigation Lagoon helps support this.

7.36. Crucially, the report identifies that “*Well run local food hubs can simplify distribution, produce significant savings in carbon emissions and allow small producers to benefit from economies of scale*”. With Swanton Farm forming the hub of AC Goatham and Son’s operations in the Maidstone Borough, apples and pears can be consolidated at a central point as far as possible and then distributed collectively via a main road network. This assist the business and its partner farms in collectively being able to benefit from an increased economy of scale. This also helps take traffic off smaller road networks if cold stores are otherwise focussed on multiple farms.

CPRE’s Vision for the future of farming: The future of horticulture (2012)

7.37. This Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) document recognised that in 2010 the UK was only 38% self-sufficient in fruit, with apples and pear self-sufficiency being very low. They recognise this as being largely attributed to the massive decline in UK apple production, which almost halved between 1989 and 2003.

7.38. The applicant and its client meet the CPRE’s vision to “*commit to selling a much greater proportion of British produce*”.

8. Conclusion

8.1. This application for the provision of a cold store, concrete hardstanding, irrigation lagoon and associated engineering operations and upgraded track and access supports AC Goatham and Son’s growing business needs to manage and store the increased levels of fruit it is handling.

8.2. This proposal will help to serve the specific cold storage need in the Maidstone area and more directly at Swanton Farm, the operation hub for the business in Maidstone.

8.3. The proposal accords with local and national planning policy.

8.4. It is respectfully requested that this application be approved.