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Design and access statement for proposed plastic clad tunnel structures at Norfolk House Farm, Gedney Marsh, Spalding PE12 9PB.



1. Background

The proposed development comprises a block of plastic clad greenhouses in a field currently in continuous arable production, immediately to the west of Norfolk House Farm.

The applicant is a well established local company, with the Piccaver family having over 100 years of farming history in the area. The company employs over 60 full time staff, with around 150 seasonal staff.

The proposal is for 2.5 hectares of tunnels, these being of the so-called Spanish Tunnel type, with the plastic cladding sheets removed for the winter months (Nov – Feb inclusive). They comprise galvanised steel legs that are screwed into the ground, with steel hoops attached to these, and longitudinal gutters over posts. The whole is clad with clear polyethylene sheet.

2. Rainwater and drainage

Rainwater is harvested via the gutters and drainage system (see separate document: “Drainage”).

All water is retained and the impact on local flood risk and on the IDB drainage system will be positive, since flow will be reduced due to the buffering and retention of collected rain water.

3. Economic justification

This application is beneficial in many respects: it reduces imports and assists in both our local and national economy; it provides work and employment, not just directly but indirectly through many other businesses such as service ones, many of which are located in this area. Agriculture forms a highly significant component of the local economy, and current trends indicate that this is likely to increase. The agricultural workforce also forms the stable core of the community, not moving from place to place for work every few years.

As evidenced by supermarket buyers' strategies British consumers are demanding more locally produced produce, which this site already helps to supply and this facility will increase that. Local produce such as this also helps reduce food miles and the associated environmental impact. In other respects tunnels are good for the environment, for example water use, a key measure of sustainability in this region, for tunnel grown crops is likely to be less than 10% of that required for outdoor grown ones. The added control that can be achieved means that pesticide use is also reduced, as is waste (tunnel grown crops achieve >80% Class 1 compared to 50% outdoors). Additionally they help farmers to cope with the variation to our climate that appears to be happening due to climate change.

Tunnels such as these form an important part of the agricultural economy now, and they are one of the ways that UK agriculture can compete with intensive competition from low wage economies overseas, whilst also meeting the ever increasing demands from consumers for uniformity and out of season produce.

4. Access and service

All access to the tunnels will be via the farm's existing internal road network, so there will be no alteration to existing farm access from the highways.

The normal working hours on the farm are 07.00 – 18.00 Monday to Friday, and 07.00 to 15.00 on Saturday, although as with all agricultural businesses there are exceptions due to weather or harvest requirements.

Vehicle movements are all within the normal operating hours.

5. Visual impact

There are few residential properties in the locality, and the development is screened from the road by an existing hedge (2m tall) and woodland blocks.



Similar scenario to proposed - Spanish tunnels behind hedge, showing both without cladding (hoops only visible) and with.

6. Planning policy

The National Policy Framework 2012 supports a dynamic rural economy.

The South Holland Local Plan states that development is acceptable if there is no impairment to residents' lifestyles, and if it conserves natural resources and energy. This development does conserve both energy (greater yield per unit of energy input) and water, and there are no significant negative impacts to residents, plus the positive impact from a viable local economy.

The site retains all the recent improvements by tree planting to landscaping that the company has undertaken.

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