

## REPORT SUMMARY

<b>REFERENCE NO - 17/503284/FULL</b>		
<b>APPLICATION PROPOSAL</b> Erection of Cravo greenhouses, general purpose agricultural storage building, water storage tanks, drainage works, construction of a reservoir and landscaping		
<b>ADDRESS</b> Church Farm Ulcombe Hill Ulcombe Maidstone Kent ME17 1DN		
<b>RECOMMENDATION -</b> The wording of Condition 5 (Landscaping) to be agreed by Members.		
<b>SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION</b> Members resolved to Grant planning permission at the adjourned Committee Meeting dated 16 November 2017 subject to the landscaping scheme as set out in the Urgent Updates (Condition 5) being agreed in consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons of the Planning Committee and Ward Members and the addition of a condition relating to the submission of a transport plan, again to be agreed in consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons of the Planning Committee and Ward Members.  Following discussion at the Committee meeting dated 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2017 with regard to the minutes of the 16 <sup>th</sup> November 2017 meeting, the wording of <b>in consultation with Ward Members</b> was re-enforced into Condition 5 and the Head of Planning and Development was given delegated powers to review and amend as appropriate the wording of Condition 5 (landscaping) in consultation with Ward Members and Councillor Harwood.  Following consultation on amended wording in relation to Condition 5 (landscaping) with the relevant parties there is a differing of opinion relating to the appropriate wording. As such Members are requested to make a decision regarding the two choices of wording of the condition.  The principle difference relates to whether the exiting conifer tree planting should be retained or removed.		
<b>REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE and URGENT ITEM</b> Due to the opposing views on the wording of Condition 5 (Landscaping) and the sensitivity of the proposed scheme, Committee Members, are requested to make a decision which wording of the condition would be appropriate.  The item is brought to Members as an urgent item as an Extension of time agreement for determining the application expires on 12 January 2018 and a decision needs to be made on the application.		
<b>WARD</b> Headcorn	<b>PARISH/TOWN</b> Ulcombe	<b>COUNCIL</b> <b>APPLICANT</b> G Charlton And Sons <b>AGENT</b> DHA Planning
<b>DECISION DUE DATE</b> 02/10/17 (EOT agreed 12/1/18)	<b>PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE</b> 07/09/17	<b>OFFICER SITE VISIT DATE</b> 05/09/17
<b>RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY : See attached Committee Report dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017</b>		

## 1.0 APPRAISAL

1.01 The Planning Committee, at the adjourned meeting dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 resolved to grant planning permission, subject to a minor amendment to Condition 5 and an additional condition relating to a transport plan. This principle resolution is not up for further discussion (for information a copy of the Committee report, Urgent Updates and printed Minutes is attached). The aim of this report and consideration by Members is to resolve the matter relating to the wording of Condition 5 (landscaping) whereby there is a differing of opinion between those members consulted as to whether the existing conifers should be removed or retained as part of the landscaping scheme.

1.02 The two suggested wordings of condition 5 (landscaping) are as follows :

- (i) Condition wording as per Urgent Update to meeting dated 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 (removing conifer planting)

*The development hereby approved shall not commence until a landscape scheme designed in accordance with the principles of the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Planning and Development, in consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons of the Planning Committee and Ward Members. The scheme shall show all existing trees, hedges and blocks of landscaping on, and immediately adjacent to, the site and indicate whether they are to be retained or removed and include a planting specification, a programme of implementation and maintenance and a 5 year management plan. The landscape scheme shall reflect the locations of the lines of hedges shown on the Planting Proposals Plan (LVA, Figure 3) but specify the removal of existing conifer species and their replacement with appropriate native hedgerows. The hedgerow species mix shall include a proportion of evergreen shrubs (Holly or Yew) and species which retain their leaves for a large proportion of the year (Hornbeam or Beech) to maximise the screening effect without compromising existing landscape character. The scheme shall also include a minimum 15m wide buffer area to the adjacent woodland areas, defined with post and rail fencing and planted with a mix of 55% *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), 10% *Ligustrum vulgare* (Privet), 10% *Prunus spinose* (Blackthorn), 15% *Rhamnus cathartica* (Purging Buckthorn) and 10% Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), planted at 1.5m centres and at a minimum height of 45-60cm.*

*Reason: In the interests of landscape, visual impact and amenity of the area and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development*

- (ii) Condition wording removing reference to the removal of existing conifer species (retaining conifer planting)

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*the lines of hedges shown on the Planting Proposals Plan (LVA, Figure 3) and include the supplementing of the recently planted conifer hedgerow with appropriate native hedgerows and trees. The hedgerow species mix shall include a proportion of evergreen shrubs (Holly or Yew) and species which retain their leaves for a large proportion of the year (Hornbeam or Beech) to maximise the screening effect without compromising existing landscape character. The scheme shall also include a minimum 15m wide buffer area to the adjacent woodland areas, defined with post and rail fencing and planted with a mix of 55% *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), 10% *Ligustrum vulgare* (Privet), 10% *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn), 15% *Rhamnus cathartica* (Purging Buckthorn) and 10% Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), planted at 1.5m centres and at a minimum height of 45-60cm.*

*Reason: In the interests of landscape, visual impact and amenity of the area and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development*

## **2.0 Applicants supporting comments** (relating to condition wording (ii) and retaining the conifer trees)

Dealing firstly with the existing Conifer tree planting these are proposed to be retained and will be managed to a height of approximately 5 metres to ensure that they do not overwhelm the proposed native species hedge/tree planting referred to below. We acknowledge that these are non-native species but we point out that Conifers already exist on the boundary of the eastern field and also in large numbers in the vicinity of the church and grave yard. Furthermore and importantly the conifer trees will provide a shelter-belt/wind break on this exposed hillside site from the cold and drying winds particularly in early spring for the orchards and the new fruit cropping systems. In addition the conifers will provide protection to the native species tree and hedgerow from the cold northerly winds in the early part of the year.

The strong and dense evergreen foliage of conifers trees are especially effective at providing year-round shelter and this sheltering effect makes conifer attractive to nesting and roosting birds and other wildlife. The conifers are therefore beneficial both from an agricultural and wildlife perspective.

We confirm that in addition to the existing conifer planting, it is proposed to plant a mixed native species hedge with occasional standard trees on the south side of the existing conifer shelter belt to soften close and long views of the shelter belt and to enhance biodiversity. To help maximise pollinator populations on the farm site the following hedge and tree species are proposed:

Hedge: Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Spindle, Dog Rose, Guelder Rose, Holly and Dogwood. Standard trees will include Yew, Beech and Hornbeam.

## **3.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

### **3.01 Cllr Prendergast** (in support of condition wording (i) and removing the conifer trees)

Strongly objects the retention of the newly planted conifer screening for the following reasons (summarised) :

1. The removal of the conifers was integral to the decision making process at the committee meeting, this was set out in the drafted condition and presentation by Officer's.

2. The conifer shelterbelts will have no impact in protecting the fruit trees due to the direction of the prevailing winds
3. Leylandii have an extensive and very shallow root system – given that the conifers have been planted on a raised bund, concerns regarding the survival of any additional native hedge planting. The land in front has already been heavily compacted by vehicle movements, and the eastern boundary is a public footpath with no space for the new native hedging.
4. Leylandii are also notoriously “thirsty” – and the rainwater from the greenhouses will be collected for the reservoir. Concerns regarding the survival of the trees.
5. Quote from the Wildlife Trust website - “The spread of Leyland Cypress at the expense of planting native trees and hedges has not been great news for our wildlife, diminishing nectar and berry sources and suitable nesting areas”.
6. The draft Kent Tree Strategy is not adopted by the Council (referred to in other Councillor comments)
7. Disagree with the conclusion that : “in long views will be indistinguishable from the yews in the church yard” this fails to take into the account that the site is in an LLV, setting of a Grade 1 heritage asset and bounded by various public rights of way including the Greensand Way.

**3.02 Cllr Harwood** (in support of condition wording (ii) and retaining the conifer trees)

Supports the retention of the conifer hedging for the following reasons (summarised):

- Agree with the retention of the conifer hedging for agricultural reasons (on the condition that it is screened by mixed native hedgerow planting with occasional hedgerow trees to enhance long views and maximise biodiversity).
- The topography of the Greensand Ridge means that it is very exposed to cold and drying winds early in the season and before deciduous trees and shrubs come into leaf which can damage fruit tree flower buds, the conifers would provide protection.
- Conifers provide a valuable sheltered nesting resource for many birds species
- The draft Kent Tree Strategy states within its trees and woodland on farms section that conifer windbreaks should be screened with native mixed hedgerows.

**3.03 Cllr Munford** (in support of condition wording (ii) and retaining the conifer trees)

I agree (with condition to retain conifer trees)

**3.04 Ulcombe Parish Council** (comments summarised)

- Topography of the site and surrounding area is such that the conifer hedging would need to be a height of 20m to provide appropriate screening. The conifer hedging should not be restricted to a height of 5m (as suggested in the agents statement)

- There is an existing row of deciduous pollarded trees 3m high behind the row of conifers on the northern side.
- Conifers not ideal but they have the virtue of being fast growing ,evergreen, and a windbreak.
- There is a row of 20 - 30m m high poplar trees screening the applicant's polytunnels on the east side of Ulcombe Hill at Hill Farm providing a good level of screening.
- Applicant doesn't own the field to the south of the conifer hedge. Suggest that if the conifer hedge is removed then the neighbouring owner would plant their own conifer hedge. Better to retain the existing conifer hedging and allow for planting of deciduous hedging to the south.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.01 The comments and responses above put forward arguments for both the retention and removal of the recently planting conifer trees. Members are requested to make a decision as to whether the wording of the landscaping condition should include the removal or retention of the non-native conifer trees.

#### 5.0 RECOMMENDATION – Condition 5 should be worded as (i) or either (ii) (in bold below)

- (5 i) The development hereby approved shall not commence until a landscape scheme designed in accordance with the principles of the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Planning and Development, in consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons of the Planning Committee and Ward Members. The scheme shall show all existing trees, hedges and blocks of landscaping on, and immediately adjacent to, the site and indicate whether they are to be retained or removed and include a planting specification, a programme of implementation and maintenance and a 5 year management plan. The landscape scheme shall reflect the locations of the lines of hedges shown on the Planting Proposals Plan (LVA, Figure 3) but specify the removal of existing conifer species and their replacement with appropriate native hedgerows. The hedgerow species mix shall include a proportion of evergreen shrubs (Holly or Yew) and species which retain their leaves for a large proportion of the year (Hornbeam or Beech) to maximise the screening effect without compromising existing landscape character. The scheme shall also include a minimum 15m wide buffer area to the adjacent woodland areas, defined with post and rail fencing and planted with a mix of 55% *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), 10% *Ligustrum vulgare* (Privet), 10% *Prunus spinose* (Blackthorn), 15% *Rhamnus cathartica* (Purging Buckthorn) and 10% Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), planted at 1.5m centres and at a minimum height of 45-60cm.**

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- (5 ii) The development hereby approved shall not commence until a landscape scheme designed in accordance with the principles of the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Head of Planning and Development, in**

***consultation with the Political Group Spokespersons of the Planning Committee and Ward Members. The scheme shall show all existing trees, hedges and blocks of landscaping on, and immediately adjacent to, the site and indicate whether they are to be retained or removed and include a planting specification, a programme of implementation and maintenance and a 5 year management plan. The landscape scheme shall reflect the locations of the lines of hedges shown on the Planting Proposals Plan (LVA, Figure 3) and include the supplementing of the recently planted conifer hedgerow with appropriate native hedgerows and trees. The hedgerow species mix shall include a proportion of evergreen shrubs (Holly or Yew) and species which retain their leaves for a large proportion of the year (Hornbeam or Beech) to maximise the screening effect without compromising existing landscape character. The scheme shall also include a minimum 15m wide buffer area to the adjacent woodland areas, defined with post and rail fencing and planted with a mix of 55% *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), 10% *Ligustrum vulgare* (Privet), 10% *Prunus spinose* (Blackthorn), 15% *Rhamnus cathartica* (Purging Buckthorn) and 10% Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), planted at 1.5m centres and at a minimum height of 45-60cm.***

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Case Officer: Rachael Elliott

NB For full details of all papers submitted with this application please refer to the relevant Public Access pages on the council's website.