

Proposed Temporary Christmas Grotto at Brookers Farm, Luddesdown

Planning, Design and Access Statement

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

- 1.1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of Vineyard Farms Ltd. It supports a planning application to seek permission to reuse the facilities erected on site for the approved temporary pop-up pub (ref. 20251012 and subsequently ref. 20260344) as a temporary Christmas Grotto between 1st November and 31st December 2026.
- 1.1.2 In addition, Vineyard Farms would also like to use the pop-up pub facilities for a single day in October for a community harvest event on 17th October 2026.
- 1.1.3 This statement provides an overview of the site, the proposed development, the relevant planning history and an appraisal of the proposed development against all applicable development plan policies as well as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other relevant guidance.

2 APPLICATION SITE AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

2.1 THE SITE

- 2.1.1 The site comprises part of a car park located south of Brookers Farm, and adjacent to Luddesdown Road, used by employees of Vineyard Farms Ltd associated with their viticulture (agricultural operations). The site also includes a small part of the adjacent field south of the car park footprint.
- 2.1.2 The site is currently being used as a 'pop-up pub' comprising a converted shipping container and a marquee whilst refurbishment works are taking place at The Lion pub a few hundred metres north of the site (planning ref. 20251012 and subsequently 20260344). The Lion pub is also owned by Vineyard Farms Ltd.
- 2.1.3 An OS plan and an aerial photograph showing the location of the site are provided as Figures 2.1 and 2.2 below.



FIGURE 2.1: SITE LOCATION PLAN



FIGURE 2.2: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SITE

2.2 PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

- 2.2.1 The site is located in the countryside, the Kent Downs National Landscape (formerly AONB), and the Green Belt.
- 2.2.2 The site is located within the West Kent Downs Landscape Character Area identified in the Kent Downs Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Update 2020 and within the Luddesdown Sub Area.
- 2.2.3 The site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1, meaning it is at the lowest risk of flooding.

2.3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.3.1 The proposed Christmas Grotto will re-use the 'pop-up pub' facilities which consists of a converted shipping container and an associated marquee. No external changes are required.
- 2.3.2 The internal spaces within the container and marquee will be used to sell food and wine from the Vineyard Farms Estate, host festive wine experiences, host a Santa experience and sell ancillary Christmas items such as Christmas trees and decorations.
- 2.3.3 The Grotto would be open 5 days a week (9am to 6pm Wednesday to Saturday and 10am to 4pm on Sunday) from 1st November until 31st December. The Grotto is intended to generate additional revenue for Vineyard Farms Ltd during the quieter winter months and particularly wine sales for the viticulture business. The Grotto will therefore act to support the agricultural business during typically quieter trading months.
- 2.3.4 In addition, Vineyard Farms would also like to use the pop-up pub facilities for a single day in October for a community harvest event on 17th October 2026.
- 2.3.5 As a result of the proposed use of the pop-up pub facilities, the facilities themselves would remain on site until the end of 2026 after which they would be removed.



FIGURE 1.3. SITE LAYOUT OF THE TEMPORARY POPUP PUB TO BE REUSED AS THE CHRISTMAS GROTTO

Design and Appearance

- 2.3.6 The Christmas Grotto will re-use the pop-up pub's 28 sqm converted shipping container which is finished in black painted metal. Black aluminium-framed double-glazed windows provide natural light. The dimensions of the container are as follows: 11m L x 2.4m W x 2.5m H.
- 2.3.7 The pop-up pub marquee will also be reused. The marquee is green in colour (with clear window panels) with the following dimensions: 18m L x 6m W x 3.1 H.

Landscaping

- 2.3.8 Small sections of hedgerow and planting installed as part of the car park were removed to facilitate the shipping container. The hedgerow was to be replaced immediately following the expiration of the temporary permission for the pop-up pub, but this would now be delayed until after the Christmas Grotto has been removed from site after 31st December.
- 2.3.9 A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment was completed and a strategy to achieve a demonstrable 10% net gain implemented as part of the pop up pub to reflect the installation of the shipping container and marquee on a small area of grassland. The re-use of the pop-up pub facilities will have no further impact on BNG.

Access and Parking

- 2.3.10 Access to the pop-up pub will be via the existing car park entrance from Luddesdown Road. Vehicles will continue to use the existing parking facilities, which currently provide a total of 56 spaces. The proposal results in a minor temporary loss of 4 spaces.
- 2.3.11 Existing access arrangements and circulation remain unchanged, ensuring safe and convenient use for all visitors.

3 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

3.1.2 For the purpose of this planning application the relevant development plan documents comprise the following:

(1) Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

(2) Gravesham Local Plan First Review Saved Policies (1994)

3.1.3 The following Local and National Planning Policies are considered most relevant to the proposal:

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

Policy CS01 Sustainable Development

Policy CS02 Scale and Distribution of Development

Policy CS07 Economy, Employment and Skills

Policy CS09 Culture and Tourism

Policy CS11 Transport

Policy CS12 Green Infrastructure

Policy CS18: Climate Change

Policy CS19: Development and Design Principles

Gravesham local plan first review (1994) – saved policies

Policy T1 Impact of Development on Highway Network

Policy T4 Impact of Development on Highway Network.

3.2 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

National Planning Policy Framework

Decision Making

- 3.2.1 Paragraph 39 states that local Planning authorities should approach decisions proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

Building a strong, competitive economy

- 3.2.2 Paragraph 88 states that 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;
 - (c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and
 - (d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

- 3.2.3 Paragraph 89 states:

“Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.”

Promoting healthy and safe communities

- 3.2.4 Paragraph 98(d) seeks to ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise and are retained for the benefit of the community.

Promoting sustainable transport

- 3.2.5 Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual

cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

Protecting Green Belt land

- 3.2.6 Paragraph 143 sets out the five purposes of Green Belt. These are:
- (a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - (b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - (c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - (d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - (e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 3.2.7 Paragraph 153 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

- 3.2.8 Paragraph 189 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of National Landscapes.
- 3.2.9 With respect to habitats and biodiversity, paragraph 193 says that when determining applications, local planning authorities should apply the principles that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.
- 3.2.10 Equally proposals that conserve or enhance biodiversity to seeking net gains should be supported and encouraged.

4 PLANNING APPRAISAL

4.1 OVERVIEW

- 4.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.1.2 In determining whether the proposal accords with the development plan, the following issues are considered:
- Principle of Development
 - Green Belt Assessment
 - Landscape impacts and The Kent Downs National Landscape
 - Other Matters
 - Access and Highways
 - Ecology
 - Flood and Drainage
 - Residential Amenity and Noise

4.2 PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 4.2.1 There is no development plan policy that expressly relates to or addresses the principle of the development proposed.
- 4.2.2 Policy CS07 (Economy, Employment and Skills) of the development plan states:
- The Council will support proposals that promote the appropriate expansion and diversification of the rural area economy. Support will be given to the conversion of rural buildings to employment use/live-work units where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and where it accords with policies in this plan, in particular relating to Green Infrastructure.*
- 4.2.3 Whilst the proposed development does not provide permanent expansion or diversification of the rural economy, it does help provide revenue for a rural agricultural business, helping to generate income during the quieter winter months and increase the resilience of the business and the jobs it sustains. In that regard, the principle of the proposed development is not materially different from the approved pop-up pub.
- 4.2.4 We, therefore, believe that the principle of the proposed development is supported by the development plan and the NPPF, subject to consideration of the impact on the Green Belt and the Kent Downs National Landscape amongst other material considerations.

Green Belt Assessment

- 4.2.5 Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy states that in the rural areas of Gravesham, development will be supported within rural settlements. Outside these settlements, including proposals to maintain and diversify the rural economy, development will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt.
- 4.2.6 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in Very Special Circumstances. 'Very Special Circumstances' do not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 4.2.7 The proposed development does not neatly meet any of the specific exemptions listed in paragraph 154 of the NPPF and is therefore in principle 'inappropriate' development in the Green Belt. Notwithstanding this the proposed development does not, quite clearly, compromise any of the five purposes of the Green Belt set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF.
- 4.2.8 As inappropriate development in the Green Belt, very special circumstances are required to justify the proposed development in this location. However, as established in case law, very special circumstances need only be sufficient to outweigh the degree of harm caused by the proposal. In this instance, the temporary nature of the Grotto further limits any potential impact, ensuring that the development will not result in permanent changes to the openness or character of the Green Belt.
- 4.2.9 The very special circumstances in relation to the proposed development are as follows:
- **Supporting the rural economy.** The proposal will help to generate seasonal supplementary income during the quieter winter months principally driving sales of wine grown on the estate facilitated through Christmas activities and ancillary goods. In doing so, this helps support the economic prosperity of the business, particularly through seasons, as well as the security of the jobs the business provides.
 - **Temporary and reversible impact.** The impact of the proposed development would be time limited to 2 months after which the marquee and container would be removed, and all landscaping will be reinstated. No hardstanding or permanent foundations are required and shortly after its removal there will be no evidence of its previous existence.
- 4.2.10 Taken together, these factors constitute very special circumstances that are considered to outweigh any limited and temporary impact on the Green Belt.

Landscape impacts and The Kent Downs National Landscape

- 4.2.11 Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy reflects paragraph 135 of the NPPF, which seeks to ensure that development adds to the quality of an area, is visually attractive, and is sympathetic to local character and history. Moreover, Paragraph 187 of the NPPF aims for development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

- 4.2.12 The proposed development is small in scale and time limited. The proposed development would be visible from short distant views from Cutters Ridge Road and Luddesdown Road but set within a dry valley that precludes long distance views of the site. Views of the proposed development would be seen in the context of the existing car park and the farm buildings of Brookers Farm behind. At the request of the Kent Downs National Landscape Unit the marquee installed as part of the pop-up pub is green to be less visible in the landscape and the same marquee is to be utilised as part of the Christmas Grotto.
- 4.2.13 The scale of the impact would be localised and negligible/low in magnitude for the 3 extra months the facilities would remain on-site. Following the 3-month period, the proposed development would be removed and the impact reversed and the site would return to its previous baseline.

4.3 OTHER MATTERS

Highways and parking

- 4.3.1 Access to the pop-up pub will be via the existing car park entrance from Luddesdown Road which has been recently constructed to contemporary highway safety standards.
- 4.3.2 Vehicles will continue to use the existing parking facilities, which currently provide a total of 56 spaces. The proposal results in a minor temporary loss of 4 spaces.
- 4.3.3 Existing access arrangements and circulation remain unchanged, ensuring safe and convenient use for all visitors.

Ecology

- 4.3.4 The proposed development will delay the replacement of a short section of hedgerow removed to install the container for the pop-up pub. This section of hedgerow would however be reinstated after 31st December 2026 resulting in only a minor delay in its reinstatement.
- 4.3.5 A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment was completed and a strategy to achieve a demonstrable 10% net gain implemented as part of the pop up to reflect the installation of the shipping container and marquee on a small area of grassland. The re-use of the pop-up pub facilities will have no further impact on BNG.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 4.3.6 The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and is not at risk of fluvial flooding. As the site is less than 1ha and in Flood Zone 1 no flood risk assessment is required to support the planning application.

Noise and Amenity

- 4.3.7 The pop-up pub would open 5 days a week (9am to 6pm Wednesday to Saturday and 10am to 4pm on Sunday).

- 4.3.8 The site is located 100m south of the pair of farm cottages at Brookers Farm. These are owned by the Applicant and tenanted by employees. Materials effects on residential amenity at this distance is not anticipated.
- 4.3.9 The Old Rectory that lies 150m south of the site is also owned by the Applicant. Material effects on residential amenity at this distance is not anticipated.
- 4.3.10 The next nearest property is grade II listed Brookers Farmhouse that is located over 200m north of the site beyond the Brookers Farm farmyard. Material noise impact at this distance is considered highly unlikely.

5 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

- 5.1.1 The Christmas Grotto will generate seasonal supplementary income during the quieter winter months principally driving sales of wine grown on the estate facilitated through Christmas activities and the sale of ancillary goods. In doing so, this helps support the economic prosperity of the business, particularly through seasons, and the security of the jobs the business provides.
- 5.1.2 The benefits to the local community, the Vineyard Farms Ltd business and the rural economy are considered to be supported in principle by the Development Plan.
- 5.1.3 These benefits are considered to constitute Very Special Circumstance that outweigh the very limited harm to the Green Belt during the three month extension to retaining the container and marquee in site and the very limited harm to the landscape and visual resource of the area that would occur over this temporary period.
- 5.1.4 There are no other known material circumstances that indicate that temporary planning permission for the proposed development should be withheld.
- 5.1.5 The benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the 'harms' and it is therefore kindly requested that planning permission be granted expediently.