

PLANNING STATEMENT

Car park for the use of Vineyard Farms employees

Site: Brookers Farmyard

Prepared by: DHA Planning Ltd

Date: 24/02/2023

1.1 Introduction

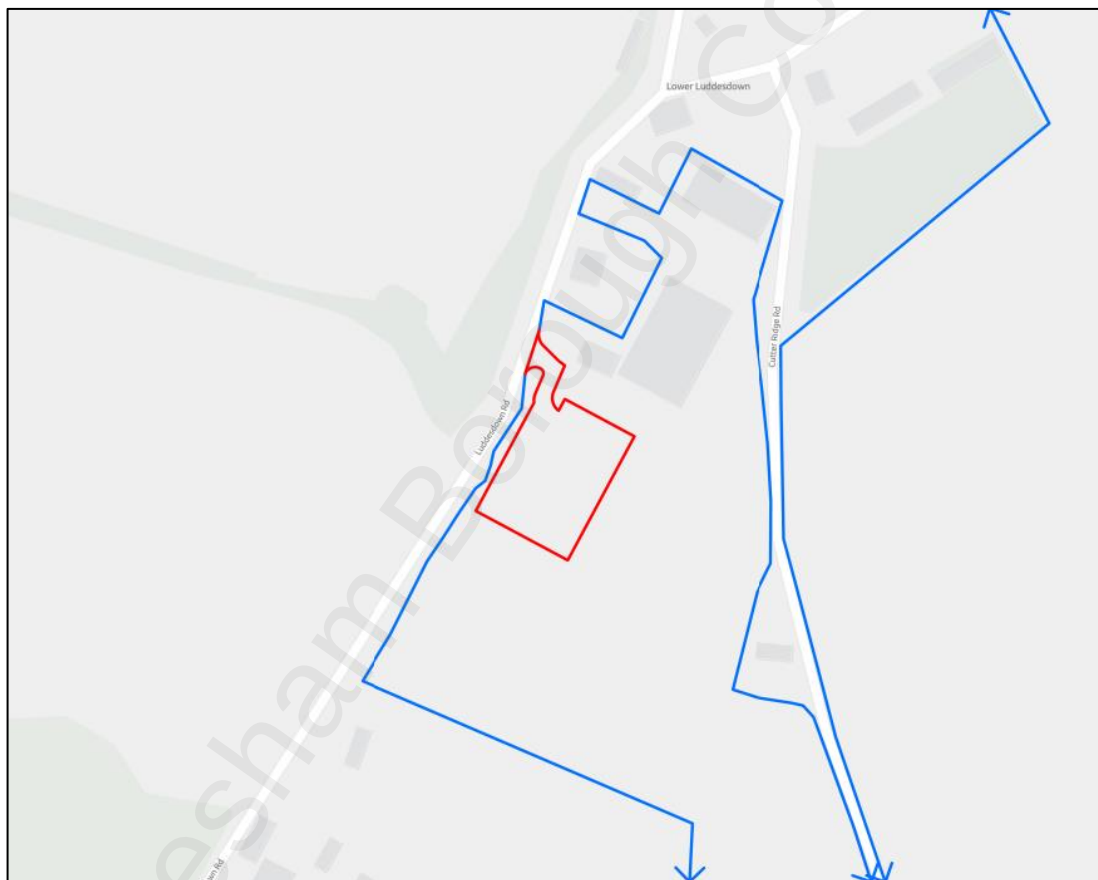
- 1.1.1 This planning statement has been produced by DHA Planning to support an application for the necessary engineering works to construct a formal car parking area for Vineyard Farms Ltd office, winery and vineyard workers, to support their work in growing grapes and producing and selling wine.
- 1.1.2 We note that cars already park in the field subject of the application. This does not amount to a change of use as the parking is by persons employed in agriculture and as such is incidental to the agricultural operation. We do however note that the engineering works themselves do require the submission of an application.
- 1.1.3 In making this application we make reference to the 'Millington' case where it was established that work relating to the production of wine from grapes grown on a farm near Shrewsbury amounted to 'agriculture'. We submit that on the same basis, the use as intended does not amount to a material change of use such that it is only the works to change the external appearance that require the submission of a planning application. Matters such as the use itself and impacts such as parking do not therefore fall to be considered as part of this application, as they amount to agricultural impacts.
- 1.1.4 Vineyard Farms Ltd are based in Luddesdown, Kent, and are the largest organic vineyard and the largest single vineyard site, with some 1600 acres of vineyards, woodland and pastureland.
- 1.1.5 Vineyard Farms vision is to become to UK's largest producer of English sparkling and still wines. In order to do this they have invested significant sums in infrastructure vineyards and people. At the heart of their vision is operating in the right way, and this means that they farm organically, sustainably and create the right environment for their people and workforce.
- 1.1.6 The Applicant intends, as part of a 'Brexit good news story', to improve the English economy by creating jobs, providing investment and putting Kent on the map for the fast growing industry of English wine.
- 1.1.7 The Applicant has as stated already made use of the field for parking. However, what has been found is that during the winter months, the ground varies between being saturated and muddy and frozen and rutted. As a consequence, and in order to prevent the need for workers care to be parked on what is a relatively narrow highway, the Applicants wish to provide a high quality car park area. In order to ensure the scheme is appropriate to the sensitive location the Applicants have

researched National Trust style car parks. The scheme and intended site layout is based on a scheme at Ightham Mote and materials and construction are to be as selected for that project.

- 1.1.8 An application will follow shortly for the works to the agricultural building to be converted into an office to manage the agricultural activities of Vineyard Farms Ltd.

1.2 Application Site

- 1.2.1 The site is located within Luddesdown Village, to the south west of Brookers Farm. The field does not have immediate residential neighbours with farm buildings between the area of the car park and the nearest dwelling.



SITE LOCATION PLAN

- 1.2.2 There is a Grade II listed building 'Brookers Farm' located approximately to the north of the site, beyond the Brookers Farm buildings but a combination of distance and intervening buildings mean that the proposal will have no impact on the setting of that building.
- 1.2.3 The site is located within the Kent Downs AONB, and within the Green Belt.

1.3 Planning History

- 1.3.1 There is no planning history associated with the application site.

1.4 Proposed Development

- 1.4.1 This proposal seeks to provide a car park ancillary to the viticultural activities of the applicant, Vineyard Farms Ltd. The car park will be use strictly for employees and visitors of Vineyard Farms.
- 1.4.2 The Applicant intends moving all Office based staff to Brookers Farm, by increasing office space within one of the farm buildings, or by provision of a new farm office. As the grape and consequential wine production increases, it is expected that employment will also increase significantly.
- 1.4.3 The car park is shown for 60 spaces. This is expected to enable all staff and visitors to be accommodated without the need for on highway parking.
- 1.4.4 As we have stated, the layout and design of the car park is based on the design used by the National Trust for their sites and the precise detail is the same as that used for Ightham Mote.
- 1.4.5 At the present time the Applicants are investigating lighting systems and will present further detail if lighting is to be installed.
- 1.4.6 The main access way into and around the car park will be tarmac, but the large majority of the car park will be with a crushed stone material rolled in to ensure a rural appearance, with plastic insets to delineate parking.
- 1.4.7 A substantial amount of planting is intended.
- 1.4.8 A total of 60 spaces are shown which will also include ev charging spaces and disabled provision, albeit those using wheelchairs will be directed to use the space available within Brookers Farm itself.

1.5 Planning Policy Framework

Policy Overview

- 1.5.1 Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act and Sections 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.
- 1.5.2 For the purpose of this planning application, the development plan comprises of policies from Gravesham Local Plan (2014), Saved Policies (2014). There are some "saved policies in the 1994 Local Plan, but that document is now such an age that they are considered of negligible weight. In any event policy related to the AONB and GB is set out in the Core Strategy and NPPF.
- 1.5.3 The Council are also in the process of preparing a Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan, and ran a consultation at Regulation 18

(Stage 2) during October – December 2020. Given the Development Plan is at a relatively early stage of production, limited weight is afforded to it.

- 1.5.4 In addition to the development plan, the Government's updated National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF' or 'the Framework') was published in July 2021. The NPPF sets out the Government's requirements and policies for planning in England and must be treated as an important material consideration. Other material considerations include relevant adopted Supplementary Planning Documents.
- 1.5.5 This chapter therefore highlights the aspects of the NPPF and Development Plan that are relevant to this application.

Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- 1.5.6 The following policies are deemed relevant for the application.

- Policy CS01 – Sustainable development.
- Policy CS02 – Scale and distribution of development.
- Policy CS07 – Economy, employment and skills
- Policy CS09 – Culture and Tourism.
- Policy CS10: Physical and Social Infrastructure
- Policy CS11 – Transport.

Supplementary guidance

- 1.5.7 The following documents have been adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Kent Design Guide
 - SPG4: Kent Vehicle Parking Standards
 - Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Paragraph 11 states that plans, and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means: c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Building a strong, competitive economy

- 1.5.8 Paragraph 81 states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.

Supporting a prosperous rural economy

- 1.5.9 The NPPF objectives seek to support the development of rural business, paragraph 84 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;
 - 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.
- 1.5.10 Paragraph 85 is clear that 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 sustainable transport

- 1.5.11 Section 9 is clear that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of development proposals, including assessing the potential impacts of development on transport networks and addressing the patterns of streets and parking in order to contribute to high quality places.
- 1.5.12 Paragraph 111 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Proposals affecting the Green Belt

- 1.5.13 Paragraph 147 is clear that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 1.5.14 Paragraph 149 is clear that buildings for agriculture is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is an exception.
- 1.5.15 In addition, local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location is an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt (Paragraph 150).

1.6 Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

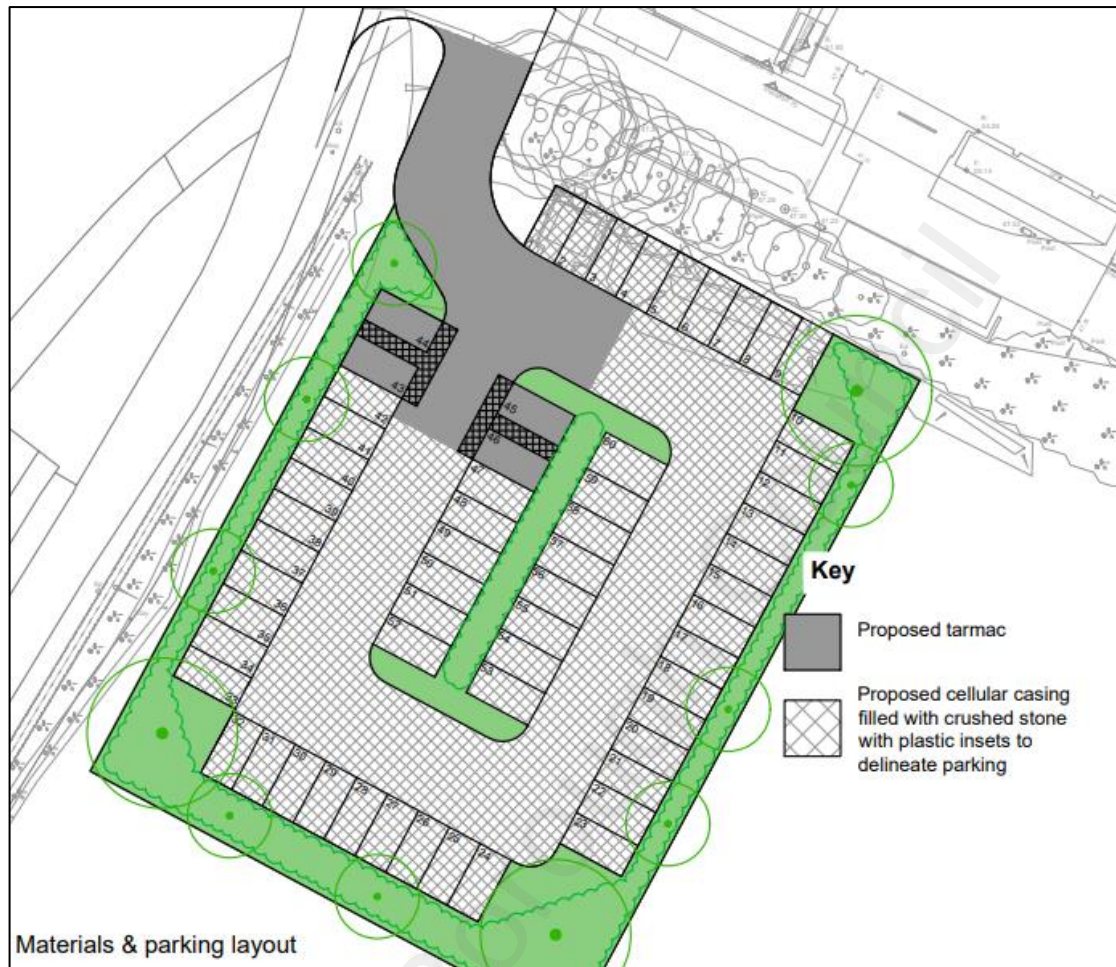
- 1.6.1 The proposal is for the provision of engineering works to effectively formalise the use of an agricultural field for the parking of vehicles associated with the agricultural business activities of Vineyard Farms Ltd.
- 1.6.2 The parking is for the employees working in the office, in addition to winery and vineyard workers; and visitors to the winery.
- 1.6.3 As we have explained above, the “Millington” case makes it clear that such activities are Agriculture.
- 1.6.4 Also as stated, employees are already using the field, albeit with the very wet weather this has become an issue, both due to the soft ground, but also from the perspective of potential for deposition of mud onto the highway.
- 1.6.5 As has already been stated, Vineyard Farms Ltd are based in Luddesdown, Kent, and are the largest organic vineyard and the largest single vineyard site, with over 1600 acres of vineyards, woodland and pastureland.
- 1.6.6 As the applicant seeks to become the UK’s largest producer of English sparkling and still wines, it is inevitable that the space required for workers at Brookers Farm will increase and the aim is to relocate all office based workers to Brookers Farm in the very short term.
- 1.6.7 The Applicant does not want to cause any concerns with the local resident population by forcing workers to park on what is a typical rural road adjacent to Brookers Farm and is committed to ensuring the facility utilises a rural design approach. It is for that reason that the scheme follows principles used in the design of National Trust car parks, such as that for Ightham Mote.
- 1.6.8 Vineyards and wine-making have long been considered an agricultural use. Indeed, as clarified in the Case of ‘Millington vs Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the regions’ in 1999, it is clear that vineyards, wine-making, wine tasting on site, vineyard tours and cellar door sales, all fall within the definition of an agricultural use. As an extension of this, this includes a car park necessary to facilitate this use.
- 1.6.9 As set out above, as the use itself does not require a planning application, car parking does not strictly fall to be considered. As stated, cars are already parked in part of the field. This arrangement will remain unaltered albeit this application will allow for works to provide a ‘year round’ parking facility.
- 1.6.10 Policy CS02 is clear that development outside settlements, including proposals to maintain and diversify the rural economy, will be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in this plan, while Policy CS07 is clear that the Council will support proposals that promote the appropriate expansion and diversification of the rural area economy.
- 1.6.11 In addition, Policy CS09 is clear that the Council will seek to maximise opportunities for expansion in cultural and tourism activity, including to support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses,

communities and visitors where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and where it accords with policies in this plan.

- 1.6.12 As is evident from the above, local policy is clear that there is support for the growth of rural businesses, subject to according with national green belt policy and other policies in the plan.
- 1.6.13 With regards to national policy on development in the Green Belt, paragraph 149 (a) of the NPPF states that buildings for agricultural uses are regarded as an appropriate building in the Green Belt. As stated above, the provision of a car park to support the viticultural activities of Vineyard Farms Ltd is considered agricultural in nature.
- 1.6.14 Notwithstanding the above, paragraph 150 (c) outlines that local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location is not inappropriate provided it preserve its openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Clearly, by the nature of the vineyard location and where the farm operations are based from, the siting of the car park in this location is a necessary requirement. Visually the car park will have a limited impact on the openness on the area, and will be mitigated with suitable landscaping.
- 1.6.15 On the basis of the above, there is clearly an acceptance to the principle of the works to provide a car park.
- 1.6.16 The suitable expansion and growth of rural businesses and the rural economy is supported by the Council, and the provision of a surfaced car park to enable all year parking (which employees are already using), will allow Vineyard Farms Ltd to continue growing.
- 1.6.17 In any event, given that the proposal is simply a move from one agricultural use to another, the application only seeks permission for the required operational works. We therefore turn to consider visual impact.

Design and layout

- 1.6.18 The car park material will be a crushed stone type finish and sensitive to the countryside setting.
- 1.6.19 The proposal will include 60 spaces, and the detailed design is based on the design model of Historic England that it uses as rural locations such as Ightham Mote.



Proposed car park layout

Ecology

1.6.20 In order to support the application a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out by KB Ecology.

1.6.21 The report made the following conclusions:

- (1) Amphibians – with the land take under 0.5ha, no impact is expected onto Great Crested Newts.
- (2) Reptiles – Due to the low likelihood of reptile presence on site, a precautionary mitigation strategy is recommended.
- (3) Birds – Although a breeding bird survey is not deemed to be necessary, on the basis that the site contains suitable habitat for breeding birds, consideration should be given to the timing of the clearance works, if any is to take place.
- (4) Hazel Dormouse - No hedge/tree clearance is proposed on site and therefore no further work is recommended with regards to dormice.
- (5) Badgers - No impact is expected onto badgers and thus no further work is recommended for this species.

(6) Bats – No impact is expected and no further work is recommended.

(7) Other species – There is some potential for hedgehogs, therefore any areas where mammals could be sheltering should be hand searched prior to disturbance.

1.6.22 Subject to suitable mitigation measures, the proposal is therefore considered acceptable from an ecological perspective.

1.7 Conclusions

1.7.1 This Planning Statement has been produced by DHA Planning, on behalf of the applicant, Vineyard Farms Ltd. The statement has been produced to support an application for the operational works to provide a car park for Vineyard Farms Ltd employees and visitors.

1.7.2 Vineyards and associated wine making activities (including the provision of an associated car park) are recognised as being covered by an agricultural use, and therefore no change of use is required.

1.7.3 Notwithstanding that, the provision of transport infrastructure is an acceptable form of development in the green belt where its located is demonstrably justified.

1.7.4 On the basis of above, it is therefore respectfully requested that planning permission is therefore granted.