

PLANNING STATEMENT

New Green Farm, Lower Shorne, Gravesend, Kent

November 2022

PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

In support of a full planning application for the
**Construction of agricultural worker dwelling, including the provision of all
associated landscaping, biodiversity enhancements and drainage infrastructure**

at

New Green Farm, Lower Shorne, Gravesend, Kent

On behalf of

AC Goatham & Son

Bloomfields is the trading name of Lambert & Foster (Bloomfields) Ltd (company no. 08278915) an owned subsidiary of Lambert & Foster Ltd a Limited Company registered in England and Wales, No 10574225. Registered office 77 Commercial Road, Paddock Wood, Kent TN12 6DS.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This supporting Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of AC Goatham & Son for the provision of an agricultural worker dwelling and associated landscaping and drainage facilities at New Green Farm, Lower Shorne, Gravesend, DA12 3HL Kent. This application follows the submission and subsequent refusal of application 20210970 and seeks to provide an alternative scheme for the Council to consider whilst giving further consideration to land ownership changes in the locality.
- 1.2. New Green Farm is an agricultural holding which is situated to the north of Lower Shorne, Higham between the larger towns of Rochester and Gravesend.
- 1.3. New Green Farm was purchased in 2018 by AC Goatham & Son and currently extends to 67.5 hectares. A further 17.28 hectares of arable land is currently in the process of being purchased by AC Goatham & Son (see **Figure 1**), with the intention being that this will be planted with some 40,000 apple trees. In addition to this, cold storage facilities are planned at the site (see **Figure 2**), in order to reduce produce movements and allow for long term storage of the fruit generated on the holding.
- 1.4. The holding is not located within any landscape designated areas, other than the Green Belt and is situated within flood zone 1 with a low probability of flooding.
- 1.5. AC Goatham and Son farm land extending to some 2,400 acres located all over Kent. The business employs over 250 people on a full time basis, whilst there is a seasonal requirement for circa 1000 people across the business.
- 1.6. AC Goatham & Son are renowned award winning fruit growers, first established in 1947 and in their third generation of farming, with the fourth currently being 'trained up'. AC Goatham & Son are currently producing over thirteen varieties of apples and pears.

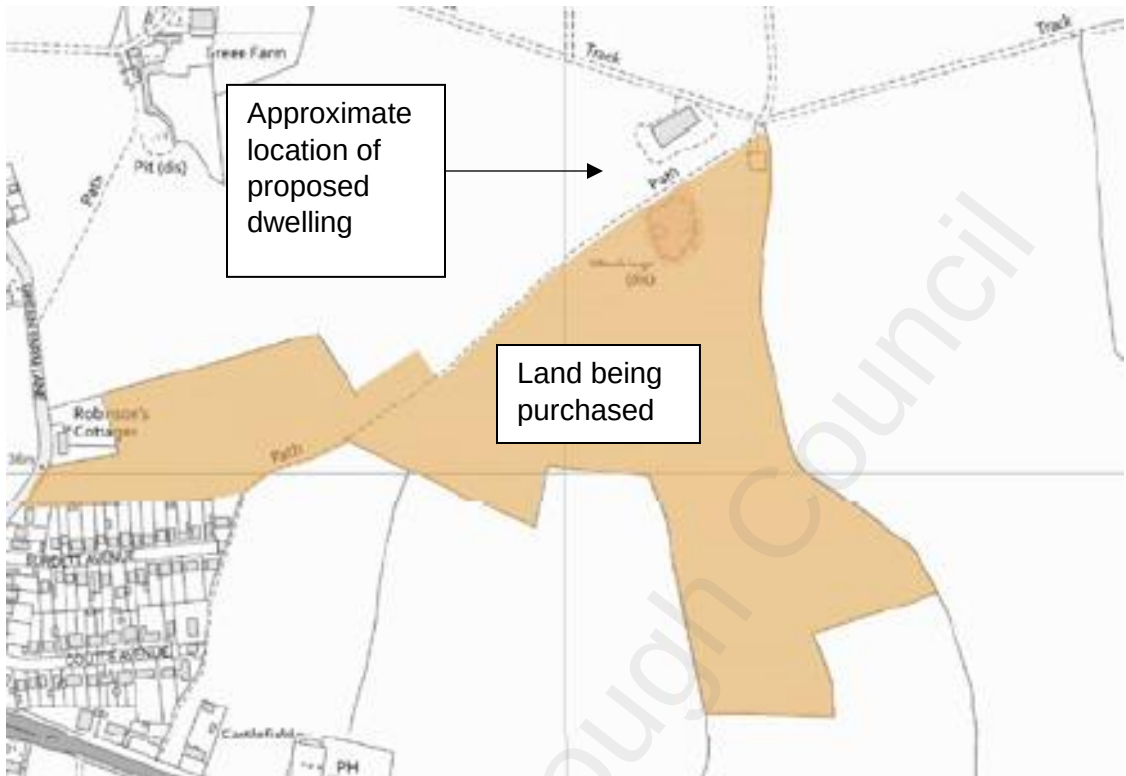


Figure 1:17.28 hectares of land being purchased by AC Goatham and Son

- 1.7. The varieties that have been planted at New Green Farm are Magic Star and Reveille. These are high yielding varieties which produced 1,300 bins for the harvest in 2021 and have produced 5125 bins for this year's harvest. This is forecast to rise to 11,100 bins by 2025. In the case of Reveille, this is a new apple variety introduced into the fruit market and which is wholly owned by AC Goatham and Son. This new variety of apple therefore needs extra monitoring and management in its development and production, given the additional cost and pressure associated with it. The 40,000 trees to go on the latest land purchase will be of the Jazz variety, which has different husbandry and timing needs compared to the other two varieties.
- 1.8. This application follows the issuing of Lawful Development Certificate that recognises the requirement for circa 24 seasonal workers to be on site for 9 months of the year to undertake orchard husbandry (for the 67.5 hectares). It also follows the refusal of an application to provide a farm manager's dwelling to allow the farm manager to reside on site. This application was refused for the following reasons:

“1. The proposal is considered to comprise an inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would introduce a significant expanse of built development and features into this open, agricultural site, causing substantial and permanent detriment to the openness of the Green Belt and conflicting with the purpose that this land is included within it. The very special circumstances put forward to justify the development in relation to an essential need for a rural worker to permanently reside at the site do not outweigh the harm resulting from the proposal by reason of inappropriateness, or any other harm. The development is therefore contrary to the requirements of paragraphs 11, 80, 137, 138, 147, 148 and 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, and Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014

2. The proposed dwelling would introduce an incongruous and obtrusive development, completely at odds with its surroundings, which would detract from the visual and spatial quality of this open agricultural landscape and would significantly harm the rural character of this site within the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. The development is therefore contrary to the requirements of paragraphs 174 and 179 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014, and the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment 2009.

3. The proposed dwelling would be in an unsustainable location for residential use and is therefore contrary to paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS01 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

4. In the absence of any information relating to the loss of Grade 1 agricultural land, the proposal fails to demonstrate the impact on this valued land and soil, contrary to the requirements of paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

5. The proposal fails to secure a contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites to resolve disturbance issues to wintering birds, and in the absence of this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the development fails to comply with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and paragraphs 174 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014”

- 1.9. Notwithstanding that it is considered that application 20210970 should have been approved the application for this dwelling is sought on the basis that the amended and supplemented position, size (a reduction by 29% in GIA) and agricultural justification is suitable in respect of the refused scheme.
- 1.10. A brief assessment of how this proposal seeks to address the reasons for refusal is given below:

Reason for refusal 1

“1. The proposal is considered to comprise an inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would introduce a significant expanse of built development and features into this open, agricultural site, causing substantial and permanent detriment to the openness of the Green Belt and conflicting with the purpose that this land is included within it. The very special circumstances put forward to justify the development in relation to an essential need for a rural worker to permanently reside at the site do not outweigh the harm resulting from the proposal by reason of inappropriateness, or any other harm. The development is therefore contrary to the requirements of paragraphs 11, 80, 137, 138, 147, 148 and 149 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, and Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014”

- 1.11. It is an accepted principle that New Green Farm requires at least 24 seasonal agricultural workers to manage the harvest, thinning and undertake seasonal tasks for the management of the 67.5 hectares. It is also accepted that this land management does not simply fall away when the more intensive seasonal tasks are over; the farm still needs to be managed all year round.
- 1.12. In order to provide year-round management a dwelling is being requested to provide accommodation for the farm's manager and his family. The farm will be managed by Ross Goatham and his wife Gayle Goatham, who are both Directors of the business and take an active role in farming. Their residence on site will between them and together with their sons allow them to undertake general day to day tasks such as orchard checks, irrigation checks, worker management as well as being on hand for emergencies and to respond to weather conditions.

- 1.13. The proposed location of this alternative scheme has been designed to be situated closer to the existing agricultural building and seasonal workers accommodation for reasons of security, whilst also being in close proximity to the position of the proposed cold stores (see Figure 2).

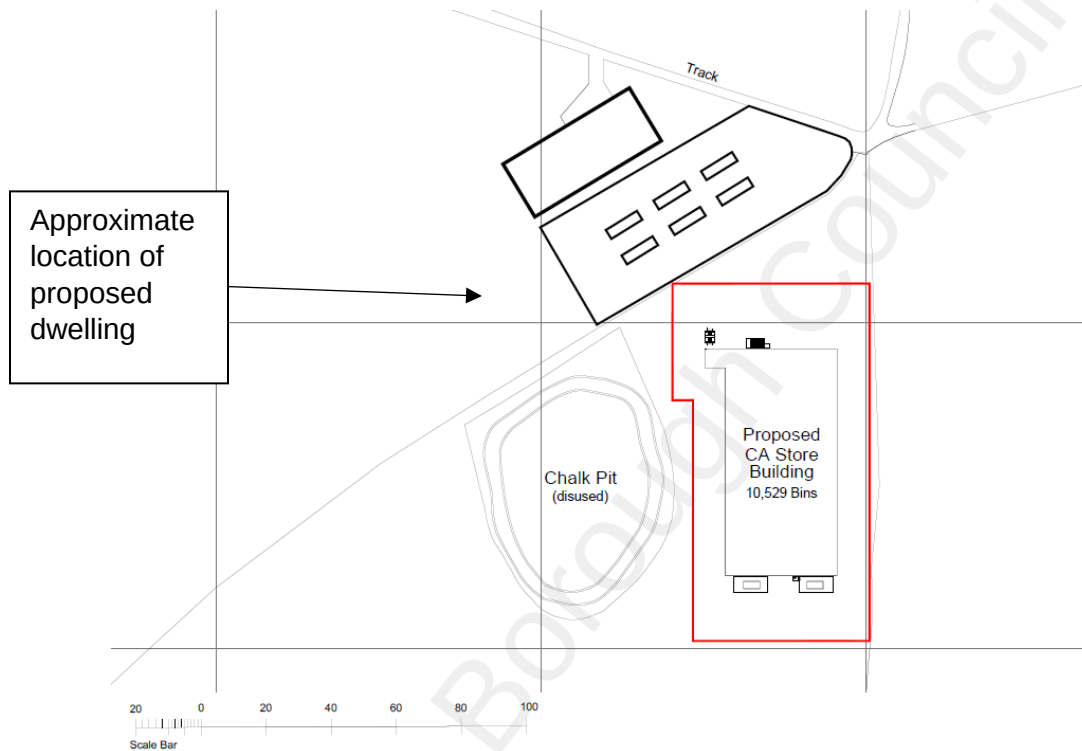


Figure 2 – Indicative plan showing location for proposed cold stores

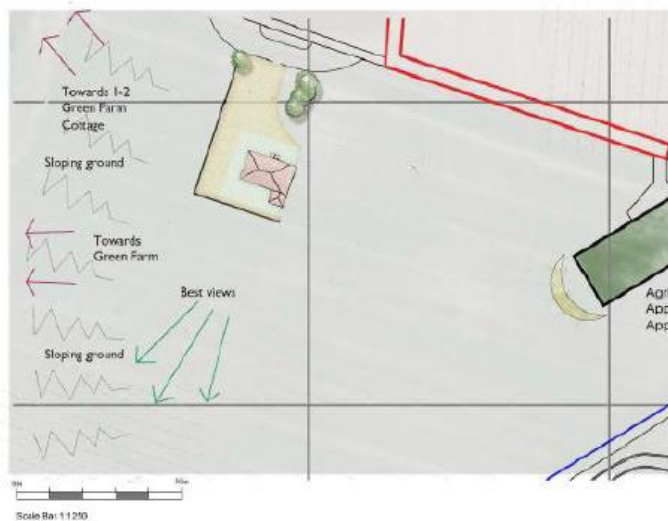
- 1.14. Whilst this ensures that the farm manager is situated closer to the farmyard for its management, it will also ensure that the dwelling will be provided close to existing built form, which will reduce the potential perceived impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.
- 1.15. The pre-application advice received from the Council considered that the proposal would be an ‘exception’ building that would be allowed within the Green Belt, with the advice stating “*Local Planning Authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt (paragraph 145 of the NPPF). However, **there are exceptions to this which, as in the case of this proposal, include: (a) buildings for agriculture and forestry [our emphasis].***”

- 1.16. This advice confirms that a farm manager's dwelling would be considered to be a building that is considered to be covered by the exception policy and therefore appropriate in the Green Belt. Furthermore, the advice concludes *"...as the proposal stands, it is possible that the justification provided within the supporting Planning Statement may be adequate to support the principle of the proposal, although it is apparent that no attempt has been made to address point (iv) of Policy C10. As such, only if the supporting information provided within the subsequent application adequately addresses all the points set out within the NPPF and Local Plan policies, including C10, could the planning application be considered acceptable in terms of the proposed agricultural dwelling and the associated impact on the openness of the Green Belt, such that it could be seen to accord with paragraph 145 of the NPPF. Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy and saved Policy C10 of the Local Plan First Review."* In this case, it is therefore implicit that all matters, save for consideration of point (iv) of Policy C10, were addressed in the pre-application submission and assuming therefore that point (iv) of Policy C10 were adequately satisfied further justification would be given. In application 20210970, Policy C10, let alone criteria (iv) of Policy C10 is not a reason for refusal and it therefore falls that the principle of the proposal should be supported having regard to the above Council comments.
- 1.17. It is put forward that the Council have historically recognised that the proposal falls within the exception policy. Furthermore, that very special circumstances exist for a rural worker to reside at their place of work, which aligns with national planning policy in respect of development within the Green Belt. In addition to this, it is put forward that the dwelling is proposed in a location which will not have an impact upon the openness of the Green Belt, as it will be situated close to existing agricultural built form following the advice of the Council.
- 1.18. The first reason for refusal expressly identifies that the proposal would cause *"substantial and permanent detriment to the openness of the Green Belt and conflicting with the purpose that this land is included within it"*. This point is strongly contested and the applicant's track record for buying farms and planting them with orchards shows their long-term commitment to agriculture and the protection of the farm as a managed landscape. This ultimately leads to the preservation of the landscape as opposed to the uses that otherwise don't offer this beyond agriculture and which may surely therefore *"conflict with the purpose of the land"*.

Reason for refusal 2

“The proposed dwelling would introduce an incongruous and obtrusive development, completely at odds with its surroundings, which would detract from the visual and spatial quality of this open agricultural landscape and would significantly harm the rural character of this site within the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. The development is therefore contrary to the requirements of paragraphs 174 and 179 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014, and the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment 2009.”

- 1.19. Consideration has been given to the landscape and landform at the farm and its position in relation to the surrounding existing housing. The dwelling's position that was proposed as part of the previously refused scheme, was considered by the Council to be most suitable at pre-application stage. Bloomfields offered two locations for the Council to consider at pre-app as shown in **Figure 3** overleaf, with Sketch Scheme 1 initially being the Council's preferred location.
- 1.20. The pre-application enquiry states *“As part of this pre-application submission, two possible location options have been provided with sketch scheme 1 being the preferred location.”* The proposed location of the building was then put forward in this location to align with the Council's requirement. Subsequent pre-application advice in relation to the design on the proposed dwelling, re-iterated that the location of the dwelling was suitable.
- 1.21. The follow up pre-application advice states *“The additional information relating to the proposed materials of the dwelling and the hard and soft landscaping have been designed to pose as little impact as possible in response to my original comments and appear to have been kept to minimum in order to retain the openness and not to create the appearance of separate dwelling that does not relate to the agricultural use of the land.”*
- 1.22. The pre-application advice goes on to conclude that *“Overall, it is considered that the proposals are acceptable and would not be harmful to the landscape setting, and would accord to the requirements of paragraphs 124, 127 and 170 of the NPPF (2019) and Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Core Strategy (2014).”*



SKETCH SCHEME 1



Proposed position of Scheme 1 - dwg - 03.20.SK04

SKETCH SCHEME 2



Proposed position of Scheme 2 - dwg - 03.20.SK05



Good views, not so near neighbouring property and the land is flatter.

Figure 3 - Sketch location options presented to the Council at pre-app

- 1.23. It is not understood how the Council can advise upon the design and location of a dwellinghouse to inform the submission of a planning application, and then subsequently use this advice to form the basis of a refusal.
- 1.24. In order to overcome this reason for refusal, this application seeks to provide the dwellinghouse closer to the existing built form at the site, whilst also responding to the topography of the land and importantly following a telephone conversation with the Council on 5 September 2022 (copy of email confirming this conversation is attached as **Appendix 1**).

- 1.25. The land profiles of the area, looking to the site from roughly the ‘four compass points’ and overlooking housing developments, are provided within **Appendix 2**. These land profiles demonstrate how (on all viewpoints apart from to the north) the proposal site is situated at a lower land profile in comparison to the surrounding area, with intervening higher land between the existing housing and the proposal site. This natural topography, combined with the planting and growth of orchard trees as well as the landscaping that will be provided as part of the scheme, will ensure that the proposal is not readily visible.
- 1.26. It is therefore put forward that the proposed position of the amended scheme will be well screened within the landscape and would also not be situated within the open part of New Green Farm, being closed situated adjacent to the existing built form as was most recently indicted would be preferred by the Council as per **Appendix 1**.

Reasons for refusal 3

3. The proposed dwelling would be in an unsustainable location for residential use and is therefore contrary to paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS01 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

- 1.27. The location of the proposed dwelling has been designed to be situated where it is needed for the management of the farm holding. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 80 sets out an exception policy for the location of dwellings in more isolated locations within the countryside, which is considered to be more applicable to this proposal. This proposal, like the previously refused scheme, seeks to provide accommodation for a rural worker (and one that has majority control of a large farm business) to live at permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF actively encourages this, where there is an essential need.

- 1.28. Considerable care has been taken to demonstrate that there is an essential need for the farm manager to live on site, in the same way that they do on seven other farm holdings within the previously refused scheme as well as later within this supporting planning statement. This will not be repeated at length here, but rather summarised as the accommodation being provided on site to allow a suitably skilled and qualified person to be on hand to respond to all weather emergencies, irrigation faults, supervise and manage the work force whilst also providing year-round security.
- 1.29. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is no essential demand in terms of animal welfare and there are technological advancements which could allow for some remote irrigation, weather and security monitoring this does not provide the ability for a person to be on site to deal with these demands in real time.
- 1.30. Whilst the welfare of animals needs to be monitored at all times, the exacting nature of irrigation practices and the damage that can come about from a failure to a large crop can be just as catastrophic. Although no harm to life will occur in the same way as monitoring animals, the fall out from an irrigation leak or lack of supply can have untold impacts upon yields, which in turn impacts the ability to supply produce that is of the amount, type and quality that the consumer demands. This can result in consequential fines from retailers in not meeting orders and jeopardizes the ability to bid successfully for supermarket contracts when they come up. This is just one example which demonstrates why it is no less essential for a rural worker to live on site at all times, at a large apple growing holding in comparison to other farming practices.
- 1.31. What is accepted on this holding though and more widely in the industry (both for the applicant and other growers) is the need for seasonal workers for extended periods of time through the year (usually around 9 months) to undertake agricultural activities. This very point is supported by the fact that the Council accepts the requirement to locate mobile homes on site to meet the labour requirements of the business and in connection to the management of the 67.5 hectares. A point highlighted in the conclusion of application 20210275, which set out *“While the proposal is in a Green Belt location it is considered that the need for the accommodation of workers for the agricultural holding is sufficient to justify the provision and retention of caravans.”*. It is not unreasonable therefore to expect to have a manager on site to deal with staff.

1.32. What has become even more apparent since Brexit, Covid and now the war in Ukraine is just how difficult it is to get agricultural workers (see **Appendix 3** for several headlines confirming this). This point has been further supported in the report prepared by The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee to the House of Commons on the 'Labour shortages in the food and farming sector' on 29 March 2022 and published on 6 April 2022 (see **Appendix 4** for full report). This report highlighted a number of key points, which are summarised below:

- *"The food and farming sector has been suffering from acute labour shortages due principally to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. In August 2021, the number of vacancies was estimated to be 500,000 out of 4.1 million roles in the sector."*;
- *"We found that labour shortages across the sector were causing crops to go unharvested anddisruption to the food supply chain's just in time delivery model"*;
- ***"The Government needs to make a step change in how it engages with industry, taking seriously the concerns they raise and acting promptly on them – this should help prevent any future intervention being "too little, too late" [our emphasis];***
- ***"The Government must work with industry both to tackle the immediate labour shortage facing the sector and to develop a long-term labour strategy that combines the development and deployment of new technology with attractive education and vocational training packages to entice British-based workers" [our emphasis];***
- ***"We conclude then (as we do again now) that much more needed to be done to attract domestic workers" [our emphasis];***
- *"Witnesses also made clear the significant toll [morale and well-being] these [labour] shortages were having on those still working in the sector."*;
- *"...the food and farming sector did not have access to the abundant supply of domestic labour that had been expected"*;

- *“Covid-related shutdowns had, in some ways, been helpful to the food industry as it had released people from other sectors to work in food supply chain jobs. They [The Provision Trade Federation and the UK Seafood Industry Alliance] added that, once the economy had begun to recover from the pandemic, “the underlying stresses and strains within the system have become both more visible and more acute”;*
- *“The evidence we have received leaves us in no doubt that labour shortages, caused by Brexit and accentuated by the pandemic, have badly affected businesses across the food and farming sector. If not resolved swiftly, they threaten to shrink the sector permanently with a chain reaction of wage rises and price increases reducing competitiveness, leading to food production being exported abroad and increased imports. We are also extremely concerned about the impact this is having on the well-being and mental health of people working in the sector.”;*
- *“We cannot find people and all we are doing is poaching one another’s staff”;*
- *“The Food and Drink Federation noted that “margins in the UK’s food and drink supply chain are extremely low” so high operating costs – such as increased wages will have to be passed through the supply chain and onto consumers”. The National Farmer’s Union highlighted that this would result in “demand destruction for domestically produced product in favour of imported product, which has much better access to labour””;*
- ***“The Government should not have been “waiting for the data” before taking any action. It should have had contingency plans to mitigate the fairly obvious risks and developed specific measures far sooner in response to first-hand accounts being provided by the sector. The whole Government needs a step change in how it engages with industry, taking seriously the concerns they raise and acting promptly on them” [our emphasis];***
- *“The NFU’s horticultural survey for the peak month of July which showed a “34% shortfall in available labour”;*
- *“in 2021 two-thirds of such visas [Seasonal Worker] were issued to Ukrainian nationals and 8% to Russian nationals”;*

- “At present, many British workers are not strongly attracted to roles in the food supply chain, particularly seasonal work”;
- “the sector needs to shift its focus away from immigration and toward domestic workers....While not able to deliver results overnight, a greater focus on the development and deployment of technology combined with **attractive educational and vocational training packages to attract British-based workers** reduce the sector’s dependence on overseas labour.” [our emphasis];
- “**The evidence we have taken leaves us in no doubt about the seriousness of the issues facing the food and farming sector** caused by labour shortages. These include food security, animal welfare and the mental health of those working in the sector.” [our emphasis];
- “The Government must radically shift its attitude and work together with the sector to devise solutions that speedily help address the problems it faces, in the short term, medium and long-term to help the UK’s food industry and enable it to thrive. Failure to do so risks shrinking the sector and leading to higher food inflation at the price of the UK’s competitiveness, thereby making the country more reliant on food imports as we export our food production capacity – as well as the jobs it supports – abroad”;

1.33. What is apparent from The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee report to the House of Commons was that before the Ukrainian war, circa 74% of the seasonal worker workforce were made up of Ukrainians and Russian’s. What is therefore acutely apparent is that what was undoubtably a difficult situation pre-war has now become obscenely difficult to work in. This has not only created a greater reliance on existing staff (including managers) doing more on site between less people over longer days; but it puts extra pressure on the business’s Directors to retain existing staff, to ensure maximized efficiency in delivery outcomes and ensuring a harmonious level of comradery and work ethic among existing workers.

- 1.34. The significant shortfall in the usual labour sources has resulted in having to explore other employment streams alongside other competing industries. This has led to employing staff coming from a greater number of countries from around the world which increases the problems associated with language barriers, cultural differences, staff loyalty and concerns relating to those that are less familiar with the agricultural tasks required of them.
- 1.35. As a consequence, this increases the level of onsite support to manage teams of workers, resolve disputes, supervise closely, implement operations and provide increased levels of training. Furthermore, it appears well documented that the level of uptake by British workers of agricultural jobs is diminishing whilst it is clearly set out that *“The whole Government needs a step change in how it engages with industry, taking seriously the concerns they raise and acting promptly”*.
- 1.36. The provision of an onsite dwelling not only provides an attractive and necessary package to offer enticement of British workers, it is seeking to provide an environment that encourages and facilitates the growth of the next generation of British farmers and all the while offering and serving a functional requirement that ensures the daily agricultural tasks that are necessary can be undertaken to the required standard as and when the unpredictability of the agricultural business demands. Without which, the applicant is not only compromising a single season of fruit provision but future provision which has the ability to reduce the level of home grown produce available, increase a dependence on imported produce (which can produce a larger environmental footprint), increased the price of fruit, jeopardize the business contracts that currently exist and may exist in the future, ensure a managed landscape and provide local employment.
- 1.37. It is therefore contended that an agricultural dwelling on site has the ability to limit these problems, reduce the mental pressure and stress for the farm manager and create a positive situation that goes some way to supporting the industry, safeguarding the growth of healthy fruit, managing a landscape and supporting the next generation in their education of agricultural practices.
- 1.38. It is strongly put forward that the proposal site will provide accommodation for a rural worker, at their place of work, which overcomes any other policy concerns about the unsustainable nature of a location.

Reason for refusal 4

- 1.39. *“In the absence of any information relating to the loss of Grade 1 agricultural land, the proposal fails to demonstrate the impact on this valued land and soil, contrary to the requirements of paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.”*
- 1.40. The proposal and the previously refused scheme seeks to ensure that the Grade 1 agricultural land, which is highly valued by the business and applicant, can be managed so that the valued land and soil can be used at its most efficient for food production.
- 1.41. As set out previously and in more detail below in the statement, there is a need for the applicant and their family to reside on site to manage the holding. The apples grown at the holding are as a consequence of the fertility and value of the land and soil and the apples cannot be grown and harvested without labour and management. It is therefore put forward that the farm manager’s dwelling is an essential aspect of to maintaining and making use of the Grade 1 agricultural land.
- 1.42. This alternative scheme seeks to reduce the amount of land that will be lost for agricultural production and also provide the dwelling closer to the main farmyard, which will keep the reduced land productivity to one area. It is put forward that by its very nature, the proposal which seeks to ensure effective management of the holding, will ensure that the agricultural land and soil can be maintained and utilised.

Reason for refusal 5

- 1.43. *“The proposal fails to secure a contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites to resolve disturbance issues to wintering birds, and in the absence of this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the development fails to comply with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and paragraphs 174 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014”*

- 1.44. Should the Council consider that this application can be approved, or the Planning Inspectorate consider that the appeal should be allowed, the appropriate contribution towards strategic mitigation measures for the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar sites will be secured by way of a legal agreement.

2. Industry background

General Industry Overview

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. 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. To ensure orchards perform at their optimum they need to be closely monitored and suitable action taken depending on weather patterns to optimize yields, but also fruit size. Monitoring fruit size is critical. as this dictates whether contracts continue or not as customers require specific fruit sizes for optimum prices. It is therefore imperative that the business can monitor water application, thinning, pruning, harvesting and disease in each tree to optimize its growing ability. This is extremely time consuming and is wholly weather dependent so requires last minute decision making to be done. The pressures for completing this at times when labour shortages are well documented is even more imperative.

- 2.4. Similarly, consumer trends in variety preference have 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.
- 2.5. Nowadays, 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. This increases the pressure of labour demand, changes in variety and operational procedure which generally happen with increased levels of spontaneity and which require far greater levels of attention and management than ever before, to manage volatile commodity and labour markets.
- 2.6. 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. These are monitored several times a day, early in the morning and late at night. Pipe leaks must be prevented as these, when added to particular weather patterns, can destroy the fruit on trees, whilst blockages and freezing must be prevented to ensure continuity of supply and to prevent crop loss.

- 2.7. 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.
- 2.8. Understandably, this puts added pressure on farmers for the requirement for additional labour and the ability to make appropriate decisions based on specific weather patterns at short notice.
- 2.9. 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).

- 2.10. The recently released Food Strategy by the government seeks to ensure that the necessary infrastructure can be provided across all food production and processing sectors within agriculture. The strategy promises to ensure that the planning system will respond to the demands of the growing infrastructure at all levels. It is important to consider that this top level Food Strategy needs to give planning for food the support and policy platform that is needed.
- 2.11. Higher staffing levels across all of the labour intensive jobs requires greater levels of staff management. When you factor in that seasonal staff are principally made up of people from a number of different countries this can be even more time-consuming given language barriers and the time needed to train and monitor staff.
- 2.12. The pandemic only added to the pressures associated with managing workforces on site. Not just in terms of arranging and keeping a workforce but in putting in place safety measures to ensure optimum safety conditions amongst the seasonal workers who are classified as key workers. Translating and controlling Covid rules has been extremely time consuming on site's whilst travel limitations reduces the ability to move between farms (a contingency also put in place to ensure that one outbreak doesn't shut down the entire business).
- 2.13. The reality is there has been a reduction in the ability to obtain and retain staff across the whole industry which has put extra pressure on existing staff to work longer hours as and when weather permits. In turn, this has stretched the management teams across the business and put extra emphasis on site management to operate efficiently and be able to respond immediately as needed based on the needs of the business and weather.
- 2.14. The Food Strategy acknowledges that there has been a significant shortfall in seasonal agricultural labour and that they need and will be putting measures in place to ensure that this can be increased. Whilst this is a welcomed initiative at a national level, on a more personal level within the AC Goatham & Sons business, time and care is being given to ensuring that the business can attract, retain, train and allow staff (whether that be seasonal or full and part time) to flourish. This can only be accomplished in environments which provide support and stability, whilst having people on hand at all times. This proposal would duly provide this.

Home Grown Produce

- 2.15. On the 19th May 2022, DEFRA released their 2021 Horticultural Statistics. Although it is appreciated that this covers various sectors of the horticultural industry, certain elements expressly relate to the topfruit industry.
- 2.16. In the report it can be identified that, home produced fruit has fallen in value to £917 million, a decrease of 12% compared to 2020, with production volumes falling by 12% to 576 thousand tonnes).
- 2.17. The report prepared by DEFRA set out that *“Home production contributed 15% of the total UK supply of fruit in 2021, down from the 202 figure of 16%”* As highlighted in the graph below.

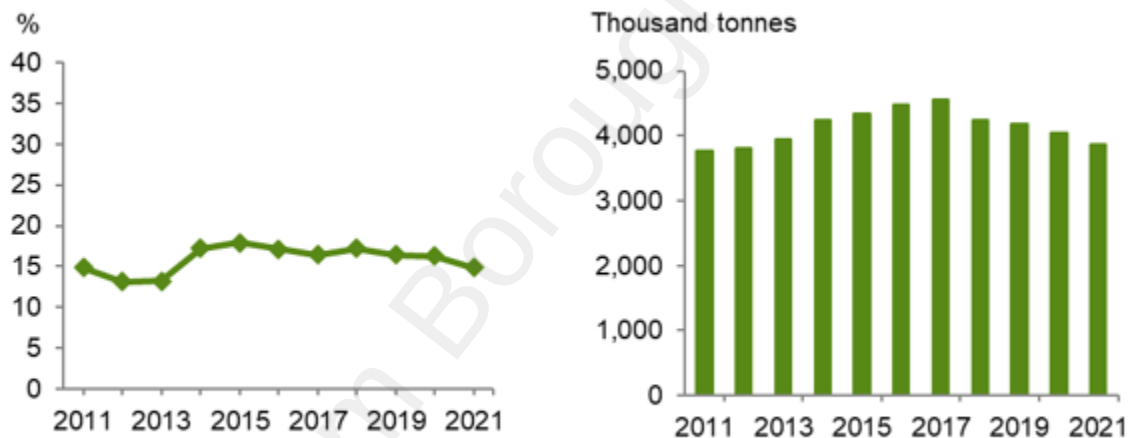


Figure 4 - Graphs taken from the Horticultural Statistics released on 19th May 2022

- 2.18. The fruit production fell by 12% to 576 tonnes, with the total area for fresh fruit also falling in 2020 by 2.8% to 34 thousand hectares when compared to 2019 as shown in Figure 4 above.
- 2.19. DEFRA's 2022 report observed that *“The value of orchard fruit decreased by 15% to £287m and soft fruit decreasing by 12% to £575m. The value of dessert apples decreased by £3.6m to £154m in 2021, a 2.3% decrease on 2020. The value of culinary apples fell by 47% in 2021 to £43 million.*

- 2.20. *“Rain and snow in the first weeks of February delayed planting of fruit trees and soft fruit crops. Continuing cold weather though to late March hindered bud break and early crop development, with the season starting over a week later than the long-term average and remained that way for the rest of the crop year. Regular frost in spring and heavy rain in the summer months damaged flowering fruit crops and reduced yields.”* This showcases the unpredictable and different weather and labour demands that can occur year on year.
- 2.21. The 2021 dataset recognised that the total supply of fruit fell by 4.4% to 3.9 million tonnes in 2021, with home production falling by 8.3%. The value of orchard fruit decreased by 15% to £287m but the value of pears dropped by 13% to £20m.
- 2.22. Fruit exports (including re-exports) were worth £63 million in 2021, a 66% decrease on the 2020 highest export value on record. Volumes of exports fell by 66% to 37 thousand tonnes (a drop of 120 tonnes from 2020).
- 2.23. This only serves to highlight the significant problems in the horticultural sector at the moment where production levels are down, fruit values are down, weather patterns entirely sporadic and unpredictable and when coupled with recognised labour shortfalls, even more stressful and pressured for the farm manager trying to undertake farm husbandry that ensures the future of the business can continue. An onsite pressure can help overcome many of these concerns that are developing putting the applicant in the best position possible to safeguard the future of the business.

The Fruit Growing Season

- 2.24. 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.
- 2.25. 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.
- 2.26. 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.

- 2.27. Pruning will occur post-harvest through to the end of March.
- 2.28. 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.
- 2.29. 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 packhouse.
- 2.30. In terms of staffing provision, the Government has identified the limitations of the seasonal worker's permit scheme which is already running at a deficit in term of numbers of workers needed to service the needs of the agricultural market. And despite having expanded the number of permits available is seeking to further limit these in the future – a matter currently being reviewed. However, it is the 6mth seasonal worker permit that has caused extra logistical problems for the business and the husbandry needs of the business, albeit for seasonal workers does extend beyond the 6 month period meaning that it is not uncommon for the business to in effect require changeover of seasonal workers on farms.
- 2.31. To ensure effective handovers and transition this requires additional onsite presence to reduce logistical pressures, ensure sufficient handover and to facilitate integration and suitable training. The Government's intention to therefore reduce the levels of permits (as per The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report to the House of Commons on the 'Labour shortages in the food and farming sector' – **Appendix 4**) only increases the importance of wholly effective management on site to ensure efficient production levels but importantly suitable management to, as far as possible, support staff retention.

3. Company Background

- 3.1. 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.
- 3.2. AC Goatham and Son have been trading for circa 70 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.
- 3.3. 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*".

- 3.4. 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. 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.
- 3.5. 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.
- 3.6. New Green Farm is not only being planted with new orchard stock which comes at considerable cost (loosely estimated at £11K per acre or over £1.89 million for the 67.5 hectares farm), it is being planted with a new flagship variety of apple which aims to provide the UK with a home grown variety to challenge the pink lady apple. To date, this apple variety has received significant investment both in terms of off farm research and development, cultivation and growth as well as it's planting out and stocking at New Green Farm. The care of newly planted orchards requires intensive monitoring by experienced staff members as set out within our original supporting statements like 'conventional' varieties such as Gala, Braeburn, Jazz etc. This care is even more profound when the farm is the leading grower of a new variety which is being relied upon for market success. The ability for an experienced staff member to reside on site to manage the seasonal workers, staff members who work on site all year round as well as be responsible for the day to day overseeing of the farm to include, orchard walking, irrigation and spraying management.

- 3.7. With completion nearing on a further 17.28 hectares an estimated £470,000 worth of further investment (in addition to the £1.89 million) on site and in the landscape is anticipated to provide additional fruit for the business. It is imperative that this investment can be physically implemented when the sale is complete but then maintained to safeguard the investment itself. This will require an additional workforce in addition to those already accepted as needed on site. In turn this provides for an even greater management presence on site.
- 3.8. Out of the 17 farms owned by AC Goatham and Son 7 currently have permission for or utilise managers dwellings on site. All of these farms contain worker accommodation on site, orchards and agricultural buildings, with some of these farms also containing cold storage. These are comparable to New Green Farm in that machinery is stored on site and workers are accommodated for up to or exceeding nine months of the year.
- 3.9. Of the ten remaining owned farms, three have immediate farm managers dwellings planned so that there is a manager on site all year round for the purposes of managing the workers, orchards and being on site in terms of security for machinery stores and cold storage. Alongside the proposal at New Green Farm (which is included within these three and is the most advanced at planning stage), pre-application enquiries and work is being undertaken to progress plans for farm managers dwellings at Swanton Farm and Flanders Farm. There are also plans to provide a larger farm manager's dwelling at Howt Green Farm. These farms all contain and have permission for seasonal farm workers accommodation and agricultural buildings and require a farm manager on site.
- 3.10. The seven owned farms that remain do not have any farm manager's dwellings on site because they only contain orchards and are smaller in area than the farms where the managers dwellings exist. This doesn't mean that there is no daily management of workers needed, but rather either it is not considered necessary to provide a farm worker on site all year round or that it is not the most pressing of current needs for the business (which is focusing the assessment of need around where large work forces are present, significant investment has or is occurring or exists, where sites have had historic problems e.g crime/ trespass or where crop loss or failure to establish has the highest detrimental impact on the business). The business needs to prioritise funds and facilities where they are most needed.

- 3.11. New Green Farm has been heavily invested in recently in terms of new orchard planting and growth, which needs considerably more care and management than an existing more-mature orchard. The ability to have a senior member of the team on site to ensure that this care is given and monitored after such a considerable investment has been prioritised by AC Goatham & Son at this time, whilst the other farms are also being worked upon.
- 3.12. Previously, mention has been made of the fact that the various houses at other farms do not have agricultural occupancy conditions and are smaller in size. It is re-iterated that this consideration does not preclude the fact that a farm manager is required at New Green Farm and that in order to attract and retain a farm manager, suitable accommodation is needed. The ability to provide accommodation is supported within the NPPF which also reinforces the ability to provide a rural worker's dwelling for someone who takes a majority control of a farm business. This application seeks to provide this with reliance upon the fact that it is essential for a manager to live at New Green Farm permanently for its management, to deal with emergencies and for reasons of security.
- 3.13. It is again re-iterated that the Council have accepted that it is essential for seasonal workers to reside on site for nine months of the year. The farm does not lie dormant and require no management or security for the three months that remain of the year, a presence is still needed on site for the day-to-day management of workers and the farmland, to respond to emergencies and as a presence to deter crime.
- 3.14. On another application which was subsequently approved (Ref 20/00425) made in Dover DC relating to one of our client's farms which had mobiles on site, the agricultural consultant (the same person who comment on application 20210970) identified that:
- "The farm manager's accommodation would be located close to the mobile homes. The submitted statement argues that "This will ensure that there is a manager on site to monitor and support the occupiers of the mobile homes during work and leisure hours, whilst also providing a manager who is on site at all times for the overall management of the farm", and "The ability to house a manager on site will ensure that someone is always there to oversee farm operations day and night, as well as any essential emergencies, whilst also having the provision of separate space".*

- 3.15. In this case, the agricultural consultant recognised the “considerable benefit” offered by a dwelling on site. We would therefore respectfully ask Gravesham BC to weigh up, like Dover did, all the facts of the case before reaching its determination. This would include the importance of New Green Farm having the new pink variety where significant new investment has occurred (which was not the case on the Dover Farm), the ability to educate the next generation, the ability to react to and deal with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops, the ability to offer security (in theft and fire terms), the ability to manage significant staff levels effectively for the majority of the season and to also undertake daily operations.
- 3.16. Finally, we would identify, as we have in our previous submission, that in this particular case the proposal will assist the education of the next generation of fruit farmer’s (the applicant’s two sons) allowing them to learn and experience first-hand from their parents and around their school commitments – something that is vital if the industry wishes to retain the future custodians of our landscape and British grown produce; in an industry where this is diminishing. A point recognised in The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee’s report to the House of Commons and provided at **Appendix 4**.
- 3.17. In early 2022 a fire broke out in a mobile home on another local farm managed by the application (see the pictures below at **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**). In the case of the fire, someone was on site and able to pick the matter up and manage the situation quickly. We do not wish to claim that having a dwelling on site would remove the risk of fire entirely, but, being able to react quickly and manage the situation has reduced the impact of what could have been. In health and safety terms the provision of a dwelling on site greatly improves the chances of identifying these sorts of issues earlier and therefore give one every chance of keeping any possible damage to a minimum.



Figure 5 – Photo showing worker's accommodation that was damaged by a fire.



Figure 5 – Photo showing worker's accommodation that was damaged by a fire.

- 3.18. 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.

Fruit handling

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

Staffing

- 3.22. Last season, AC Goatham and Son employed in the order of 1150 staff across all of their farms and sites. 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. The ability to provide workers accommodation on site, provides a more attractive employment prospect than the potential for a lengthier commute.
- 3.23. The same principle applies for management positions across the site. The ability to provide workers accommodation means the business can retain and attract good staff at all levels (a problem recognized in the report provided at **Appendix 4**). To assist with this, given the long and unpredictable hours associated with the work together with the 'supply and demand' curve it can be difficult to retain staff as the business needs to be able to provide attractive packages. This includes the ability to provide accommodation, which is not in the form a mobile home.

- 3.24. AC Goatham and Son continue to support extensive levels of staff training, including; training for:
- Food Safety,
 - First Aid,
 - Fire Marshals,
 - Vehicle Banksman,
 - Reach Truck, Fork Lift and Pallet Truck Driving,
 - iHASCO,
 - HACCP,
 - COSHH,
 - CDM Training,
 - Chainsaw,
 - Scissor Lift,
 - PAT Testing,
 - Tractor Safe Stop,
 - JCB
 - PA1, PA2 and PA3 training.
- 3.25. AC Goatham & Son have also recently begun working with Evergreen Training to offer apprenticeships to employees to encourage continued learning in the workplace, with all of the in-house training being accredited also. This ensures that the hard work and training undertaken by the workforce is recognised as they will gain accredited qualifications.

Worker's accommodation

- 3.26. AC Goatham & Son, as previously set out, operate on a hub farm system to support their numerous holdings, whilst also providing accommodation for farm workers and farm managers on as many as their farms as possible.
- 3.27. As set out on numerous occasions, having farm workers on site reduces the costs associated and negative welfare implications of transporting workers to and from farms, whilst also ensuring that workers can be on site for emergencies and respond to weather requirements.
- 3.28. The need to have managers on site to supervise the farm workers naturally follows this, so that suitably skilled individuals can be on hand to support, manage and deal with the day to day running of the farm.

- 3.29. Out of the owned and rented farms by AC Goatham & Son, 9 farms have houses on them which house senior managers and farm technicians for the business. Permission has also been granted for further houses on a number of sites which are being utilised and developed for farm managers.
- 3.30. AC Goatham & Son have recognised the requirement to offer and provide their workers, whether it be seasonal or senior staff members an attractive and beneficial remuneration package. For those in senior positions this can include a house on the site where they work, which also provides security, support and to ensure the effective operation of the farm.
- 3.31. In more recent years AC Goatham & Son have been actively seeking to provide more seasonal workers accommodation and amenity infrastructure as well as accommodation for senior workers with the approval of 3 houses on two different farms, with another being prepared for submission in the last 18 months
- 3.32. These manager dwellings ensure that there is suitably skilled agricultural practitioner on site where the agricultural processes require 24 hour attention to limit the potential for crop loss, to maximize yields, regularise fruit sizing, to manage and instruct the team on a daily basis, to walk the orchards to ready for the next days instruction, to deter and prevent as far as possible crime on the sites, to manage the daily Covid protocol and ensure continuous compliance with rules, and importantly to act as point of contact for members of the public.
- 3.33. This application seeks to replicate this pattern, for one of the firm's Directors, at a recently purchased farm where further neighbouring land is currently being purchased and where inward investment for new and unique orchard stock has been considerable, criminal damage has already occurred on site and where monitoring from a senior staff member is of paramount importance.

- 3.34. Mr Ross Goatham, his wife and two sons currently live in Hoo St Werburgh which is approximately 8 miles away from New Green Farm by car, this is obviously not a distance where one is within 'sight and sound' to react to emergencies when they happen on site. Works to and decisions to be made about irrigation failures, weather conditions for spraying etc need to be made on site and normally without delay. The proposed dwelling is functionally suited to allow Mr and Mrs Goatham the ability to make these decisions and react to emergencies between them, whilst also still being within a 7-mile distance of the business headquarters if either of them needs to be there.
- 3.35. The Covid 19 outbreak and ongoing management in light of this has meant that, as with all other jobs, where work can be undertaken from home AC Goatham's staff are doing so. Where orchards can be managed on site, without the need for floating managers and the transportation of the workforce, this has been utilised. Providing a farm manager's dwelling at New Green Farm ensures that the farm can be appropriately managed. In order to be suitably distinct from seasonal workers, to offer suitable remuneration and to meet the long term need this is not provided in the form of temporary accommodation.
- 3.36. At New Green Farm, no such facilities or convertible buildings exists, so thought was given to the most suitable manager's dwelling and its occupier. The requirement for specialist monitoring at New Green Farm coupled with a lack of accommodation close by or on-site required AC Goatham to provide accommodation in the form of a new dwelling.
- 3.37. Mr Goatham and his wife, Mrs Gayle Goatham both actively 'farm' and work for the business. In these recent and currently difficult times, the decision was taken by the business for Mr and Mrs Goatham to take up residence on New Green Farm to cover the needs of the business (which would have otherwise only been occupied by another senior person) both to meet the needs of the business (they currently don't live on one of the farms but in Hoo St Werburgh). They can closely monitor the orchard and the farms workings, whilst working from home for any additional 'business' requirements. Further and importantly their two sons take an active interest in the farm so being on site will enable them to learn their trade daily alongside their normal schooling with the ability to walk orchards, identify pests, learn optimum spraying conditions, picking and pruning techniques as well as irrigation management all from their home.

- 3.38. Flanders Farm is still accessible for any meetings or activities which require on site presence by Mr and/or Mrs.
- 3.39. The day to night management of orchards and cropping is undeniable and is set out in more detail in the coming sections, proving that it is essential for someone to reside on site all year round rather than just be a convenience. Lambert & Foster have undertaken a market appraisal to establish whether this need can be met by someone residing close to the site. This report is included at **Appendix 5** and sets out that no suitable accommodation is currently available.

4. Planning History

- 4.1. In January 2019 prior notification (with reference 20181247) was approved for the erection of an agricultural building at the holding, with associated hard standing, to store machinery and equipment (Tractors, Hedge cutter, Toppers, Mowers, Sprayers, Forklift Fruit Trains, etc) required to serve the holding. This was approved as there were no other buildings to provide secure weatherproof storage. This building has since been erected.
- 4.2. After erecting the building there have been several thefts and break in attempts at the site. These have included the following:
- Diesel Bowser stolen (April 2019)
 - Theft of a roller and attempted theft of a 360 digger (19th May 2019).
 - At least one attempted break in to the mains electrical cupboard next to the tractor shed (July 2019)
- 4.3. A new access track and upgrading of an existing access on to Lower Road was approved with reference 20190154 was approved in April 2019. This too has also been provided on the site.
- 4.4. Further to this there are six caravans for seasonal agricultural workers (submitted under application reference 20200457) which have been recognised as being permitted development on site. These units will serve some of the labour requirements on the site.

- 4.5. In 2021 planning permission was granted for the storage of these mobile homes in situ plus all associated operational development needed to provide hardstanding and a sewage treatment plant with reference 20210275.
- 4.6. When not occupied, the mobiles will remain in situ for three months where they should be monitored to prevent theft or vandalism of the units. With each unit costing circa £7,000 - £10,000 this is not an insubstantial capital cost to protect. When taken with the capital value of the building and its contents there are considerable assets on site which require monitoring and safeguarding as far as possible. The presence of someone on site all year around helps prevent this as far as possible.
- 4.7. In 2022 planning permission was refused for the construction of a dwelling to provide accommodation for the farm manager and their family including the provision of all associated landscaping, biodiversity enhancements and drainage infrastructure with reference 20210970. This application seeks to overcome the concerns of the previous application.

5. Pre-application advice

- 5.1. The pre-application advice that was issued by the Council considered the proposed agricultural farm manager's dwelling in relation to Gravesham Borough Council's policies, as well as national policy and guidance. An analysis of the compliance with these policies was provided by the Council, as well as a consideration of the additional information that would be required as part of any submission.
- 5.2. The Council considered that there would be adequate agricultural justification for the farm manager's house and that the size, type, design and location of the farmhouse would be appropriate within the Green Belt and landscape.

- 5.3. The pre-application advice concluded that *“Overall, it is my informal opinion that there may be **adequate justification for the principle of an agricultural dwelling** in this location and the proposed dwelling could be of an appropriate design and finish that would not be detrimental to the Green Belt or Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Assessment, nor would it have a detrimental impact on the residential amenities of the surrounding properties. Therefore, **subject to conditions of occupancy relating to the agricultural use of the land, the proposal is considered to be an appropriate development in accordance with the above policies and guidance** [our emphasis].”*
- 5.4. The location of the proposed dwelling and the design and layout of the proposal was also considered to be appropriate by the Council, with a choice being made from two sketch design proposals. The proposed location of the farmhouse was taken forward, with the proposed design and layout taking roots from the local vernacular. This advice is contained within **Appendix 6** and formed the basis of the previous application.
- 5.5. Following the consideration of this initial advice from the Council, further advice was sought specifically about the design of the house. The advice received is contained within **Appendix 7**.
- 5.6. The Council considered that the siting design of the proposal was acceptable and would not be harmful to the landscape setting and would accord with the requirements of paragraphs 124, 127 and 170 of the NPPF (2019) and Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Core Strategy (2014). It is therefore somewhat frustrating and puzzling that the design and setting that the Council considered to be acceptable and compliant with these policies, then became reasons for refusal. Notwithstanding the applicant reserving such a position at appeal, the applicant is also keen to find a compromised position with LPA that may give them the opportunity to review their position.
- 5.7. This application seeks to overcome these reasons for refusal, by reducing the size of the dwellinghouse considerably and also proposing is adjacent to the existing agricultural building and seasonal workers accommodation to further reduce its potential impact upon landscape character. But, by also explaining the extent of additional land ownership currently being purchased by the applicant together with tier plans for the provision of on-site cold store storage.

- 5.8. This application also seeks to provide sufficient information for the Council to demonstrate that it is essential for a rural worker to reside on site. A brief summary in response to Richard Lloyd Hughes is given below for ease of reference.
- 5.9. As set out in the preceding background sections, AC Goatham & Son provide both seasonal and senior staff/Director accommodation at a wide number of their owned and rented holdings and are constantly aiming to broaden this coverage. It would be unrealistic for AC Goatham & Son to have accommodation on site at all of their holdings at this time, given the recent purchase of some orchards and the size of some holdings. It is also unrealistic to expect that AC Goatham & Son would not seek to make use of holdings which have existing accommodation for rural workers, or utilise all means of the planning system to provide barn conversions (whether under full planning powers like at Elmstone Court Farm, or via permitted development under Class Q) to provide for farm managers accommodation.
- 5.10. It makes good business sense and prudent use of the planning system to purchase and utilise holdings already with farm managers accommodation in place, or seek to provide this under any planning means. The means to providing and using the accommodation to manage the holding at a managerial level does not alter the fact that there is an essential need for staff members to reside on site at various different holdings.
- 5.11. AC Goatham & Son are actively working towards improving their staff accommodation in general overall, as well as ensuring that a residential presence can be provided on all relevant sites in order to deal with the supervision of day to day orchard management and cropping.
- 5.12. As with every business, the provision of new facilities, ventures and expansion the process does not materialise overnight even without the restrictions of planning permission. Priority is currently being given to holdings where:
- new varieties of apples are being grown;
 - new orchards are planted;
 - where there are higher staffing levels on site for most of the year;
 - where capital value on sites is high;

- where crime on sites has been high; and
 - where no permanent on site accommodation currently exists
- 5.13. This not only safeguards existing infrastructure investments as far as possible, but it safeguards the capital investment of the crops planted recently which require the greatest degree of monitoring.
- 5.14. Mr and Mrs Goatham and their two sons currently live in Hoo St Werburgh which is approximately 8 miles away from New Green Farm by car; this is obviously not a distance where one is within 'sight and sound' to react to emergencies when they happen on site. Works to and decisions to be made about irrigation failures, weather conditions for spraying etc need to be made on site and normally without delay. As Managing Director of the business Mr Goatham would be ideally situated to be on site to make these decisions and react to emergencies, whilst also still being within a 7 mile distance of the business headquarters to deal with any daily queries that may arise there and which cannot otherwise be dealt with remotely.
- 5.15. The Covid 19 outbreak and ongoing management in light of this has meant that, as with all other jobs, where work can be undertaken from home AC Goatham's staff are doing so. Where orchards can be managed on site, without the need for transportation of the workforce, this has been utilised. Providing a farm manager's dwelling at New Green Farm ensures that the farm and its associated seasonal staff are not left to be remotely managed and quick decisions can be made accordingly.
- 5.16. At New Green Farm, no existing permanent dwellings exist on the site and no buildings which are suitable for conversion exists as has been at other holdings, so thought was given to the most suitable manager's dwelling and its occupier. The requirement for specialist monitoring at New Green Farm coupled with a lack of permanent accommodation within sight and sound of the existing infrastructure has seen the need to offer permanent accommodation at New Green Farm.

- 5.17. Mr and Mrs Goatham both actively 'farm' and work for the business and they can then closely monitor the orchard and the farm's workings, whilst working from home for any additional 'business' requirements. Their two sons take an active interest in the farm so being on site will enable them to learn their trade daily alongside their normal schooling with the ability to walk orchards, identify pests, learn optimum spraying conditions, picking and pruning techniques as well as irrigation management all from their home.

6. Proposal

- 6.1. It is proposed that a new farmhouse is provided at New Green Farm for onsite security and for the farms management. The farmhouse proposed has been designed to provide accommodation for the farm manager's family who are also employed by or involved with the farm enterprise of AC Goatham and Son and respond to the previous reasons for refusal.
- 6.2. The farmhouse proposed will provide 4-bedroom family accommodation for the farm manager (a Managing Director of AC Goatham & Son and directly involved in the farming enterprise) his wife (also a Director and employed by AC Goatham & Son and also directly involved in the farming enterprise), as well as their two sons who are taking an active interest in the business to become the fourth generation of this family run farming business. The farmhouse would provide on- site security and management whilst also ensuring that the Managing Director and his wife are in able to bring up their two sons with a natural and hands on approach to the business; learning on the job as part of their everyday life. This will facilitate the 4th generation of the Goatham family working in the business in due course.
- 6.3. As part of the pre-application enquiry and previous submission several locations were considered for a dwelling having regard to the location of the orchards, the existing building on site, proximity to neighbours, views of the dwelling from surrounding locations, proximity to the various site accesses, being central within the holding, site topography and given the obvious consideration for the future occupants in terms of light levels and outward views.

- 6.4. The previous location, although dictated by the Council originally, was deemed unsuitable and formed part of the Council's reason for refusal. This proposal seeks to provide a farmhouse of a similar design, whilst less in volume and in much closer proximity to the existing agricultural building and seasonal workers accommodation to ensure that the perceived impact upon the openness of the Green Belt is negated.



Figure 6 Plan indicating proposed location for dwelling

- 6.5. The proposed dwelling would be accessed via the existing access granted under application reference 20190154. This access is the main route used by large HGV's and farm vehicles, so the dwelling's location is well suited in this respect being close to the existing infrastructure. The dwelling would also be located to be in close proximity to the cold store facilities that are planned at the site, so that any emergencies and monitoring of the stores can be undertaken whilst being close at hand.

- 6.6. The proposed dwelling will contain four bedrooms, a farm office downstairs with an open plan kitchen and dining room, with a much-reduced floor space. There is a downstairs toilet and utility room, with upstairs hosting a family bathroom and 1 en-suite bathroom for the master bedroom.
- 6.7. Notwithstanding that the size of the floor area in application 20210970 was considered to be acceptable, this latest proposal has reduced the size of GIA by some 75 metres (29%).
- 6.8. The dwellinghouse would be finished in a high standard of materials to match the style of the surrounding properties and vernacular. This would comprise imperial handmade stock brick, spicer handmade clay tiles with purpose-built joinery with 12mm heritage glass panels above stone cills. Doors would be made from iroko wood with 12mm heritage glass, with the bi-fold doors being made out of timber on an aluminum frame.
- 6.9. Alongside the dwelling a driveway, parking area, native planting and softly landscaped garden is proposed. This includes a mixed English native hedge and chestnut post and rail boundary fencing.
- 6.10. The provision of a farm dwelling on site will not only serve as additional farm security, but it will more crucially meet the functional needs of the business in terms of labour demand and management.
- 6.11. As a result of the aforementioned AC Goatham & Son have a requirement to provide a farm manager's dwelling at New Green Farm in order to continue to not just serve as security but as a requirement to manage the labour workforce throughout the year, undertake management and general farm operations on site and at unsociable hours, respond to emergencies all year round and to serve as a point of contact for the local community should they have any concerns relating to the holding. The approval of the storage of the seasonal workers mobile homes onsite and in-situ when unoccupied also brings a further requirement for a farm manager to reside on site all year round. The increased security that will be required when no seasonal workers are residing onsite will be keenly felt with six empty mobile homes.

7. Agricultural activities

7.1. There are many agricultural activities associated with top fruit (apple and pear) farming. These can be broadly split onto three different categories, including, but not limited to:

- General land management;
- Farm Management; and
- Orchard management

7.2. The various 'subsections' associated with the respective categories are then further expanded on below. Again, it should be recognised that this is not a comprehensive or exhaustive list.

General land management

7.3. There are many general farm operations that are required to be undertaken throughout the year. Included within these are:

- hedgerow management comprising replanting and cutting;
- headland and field margin management to encourage biodiversity, retain accesses to fields and avoid undue erosion and compaction (to include mowing and spraying);
- track maintenance to ensure routes remain adequate for vehicle accesses without undue soil erosion and the filling of potholes (fruit when picked is delicate so to optimise profit, movement should be limited when in fruit bins – hence the greater dependence on filling potholes);
- vermin and pest control;
- fence and gate repairs;
- building maintenance and ongoing repairs; and
- irrigation and land drain management.

Farm management

7.4. In modern agricultural businesses a great range of management activities need to be undertaken, this can include but is not limited to:

- Completing and partaking in fruit audits by customers (retailers) and by other Statutory and Non-Statutory bodies e.g The Rural Payments Agency, DEFRA, LEAF etc);
- Health and Safety Audits;
- Providing data retailers to report on forecast and actual carbon counting;
- Sourcing new equipment and machinery;
- Farm Accounting;
- Liaising with the packhouse, cold storage managers;
- General admin and marketing;
- Payroll Management (the business employs circa 250 full time staff and, in the region of 1000, other staff working through the year and on a seasonal basis);
- Planning spray programs and keeping spray records;
- Grant Scheme and Match Funding applications;
- Subsidy application through the RPA;
- Soil Audits and the preparation of Soil Management Plans; Fruit bin repairs (circa 10,500 bins for this unit alone by 2025);
- Liaison with staffing agencies as necessary to source additional workers depending on seasonal requirements;
- Co-ordinating staff logistics – where needed to get additional staff to and from the site and between farms;
- Co-ordinating fruit logistics – to get fruit to and from this site and other sites into stores;

- Co-ordinating bin logistics (circa 10,500 by 2025) – to get bins to and from site and to and from packhouses depending on variety; and Co-ordinating machinery and equipment logistics – to get appropriate equipment and machinery to and from sites as needed; and
 - Taking and arranging daily deliveries to and from the farm for farm equipment, parts, fertilizers, tree stock, wire network, etc
- 7.5. Whilst Mr and Mrs Goatham has planned to assume the roles on of overall site manager at New Green Farm (as opposed to finding someone else for the role), the pressing need for Mr and Mrs Goatham to be on site has become even more apparent since Covid 19. Currently, Mr Goatham would visit Flanders Farm in Hoo St Werburgh which is the main headquarters for the business and where the company packhouse is. However, given the obvious biosecurity matters being undertaken access to this facility is significantly restricted to ensure strict hygiene protocol and limited visitations. This has meant that like most, Mr and Mrs Goatham have had to undertake work from their current home.
- 7.6. Having a dwelling on site at New Green Farm will allow the early morning team briefing to occur on site to manage the orchard teams at New Green Farm and to respond accordingly to any on site management issues, whilst the applicant can, as far as possible, also work around these issues throughout the day to address the other needs of the business which can be conducted from the farm office to be provided in the dwelling. Then, once the conventional office hours are over Mr and Mrs Goatham together with their sons can continue to address any further site matters or management – which can often be, completing planting programs; training fruit; thinning trees, pruning, managing irrigation, finalizing spray responsibilities, mowing, harvest etc ready for the next day. Finally, the orchards can be walked so the applicant can then assess and prepare what needs to be done for the next day early morning briefing.

Orchard Management

- 7.7. There are several operations on site which require routine management, oversight and supervision across New Green Farm, together with all the unplanned farming practices that need to be undertaken over the Farm to ensure good farming practice, whilst ensuring as far as possible continuity in supply both in terms of quality but optimized quantity.
- 7.8. To ensure that fruit yields can be optimized and 'grade outs' at packing stage are kept to a minimum, orchard management on site is essential. The range of tasks vary throughout the year and are will depend on the growth of the tree and of course the weather.
- 7.9. Ordinarily, orchard management operations will as far as possible be undertaken throughout the day, but of course there are many occasions when activities need to be commenced early in the morning or late into the night depending on weather patterns. For example, spraying may often need to be managed at unsociable hours when temperatures are reduced and wind speeds at a minimum.
- 7.10. As always in farming, the weather dictates what can occur and when. Other tasks associated with the orchard management include, but are not limited to monitoring pests and disease in the trees and fruit. It is important to inspect all trees regularly (at least once a week but ideally every other day) to pick up on any signs of detriment early so quick intervention can be carried out, as applicable. Apple canker observation is a good example of this. If spotted, Canker in trees should be dealt with immediately. This requires pruning or thinning back of branches to 15 cm below canker points and at times when the weather is appropriate. So thinning between period of damp or windy whether can be detrimental to the exposure of trees to canker, and thus the way to ensure it is kept out of orchards is daily observation of trees to then react soonest after Canker is spotted but in the right weather moment.
- 7.11. Mowing is a time-consuming operation for the business not unreasonably occurring on a weekly basis from March onwards. This can often occur late into evenings and must of course be reactionary to weather periods.

- 7.12. Tree thinning and topping is important to ensure and encourage optimum fruit growth for the year and indeed beyond that particular year. For example, a high blossoming tree, might forecast a lot of fruit. Whilst this might appear good, this is not necessarily the case. Orchard management is about the production of the right amount of fruit at the right size at the right time. Too much fruit can mean that the harvest will produce lots of smaller apples, which are not favored by the market and may also create logistic, harvest and storage problems. Whilst conversely large fruit in smaller quantities is not favored by the consumers and is therefore hard to sell.
- 7.13. This means that thinning at different times of the year is important and can even include thinning as soon as the blossom comes (which is for a limited window). Thinning is an art form and a heavy blossom thin will also have an effect on the quantity of fruit that the tree will produce the next year. Each tree therefore needs its own thinning attention, which over 167 acres is very time consuming, let alone when further consideration is given to the business's other holdings.
- 7.14. So whilst it is accepted the bulk of this work is undertaken by the seasonal staff, it still requires a high degree of expertise to ensure that this sort of operation is conducted properly – this requires the constant monitoring of the orchard and re-instruction and where necessary constant re-training to the seasonal workforce. This then requires vigilance when managing the team as the activities undertaken must be accurate and at optimum times.
- 7.15. Stake and wire replacement are important in tree growth and to ensure that the support system can offer the necessary support to the trees. As the trees grow and the weight of fruit increase this obviously puts extra strain on the supports which need to be monitored accordingly and repaired.
- 7.16. As the trees grow, they need to be trained on their support network and also pruned accordingly (whilst giving due regard to bud development at the same time) to create a “fruit wall” down the rows. This time-consuming operation improves the efficiency of the harvest not just in the immediate season but in seasons beyond. Again, whilst this work is largely undertaken by the seasonal workforce, it is imperative this is done properly as this can have significant impacts on the future of an individual tree and obviously an orchard.

- 7.17. Topping is also done in the fruit trees to reduce their height for the benefit of light filtration to the other rows (so as not to restrict sunlight and thus the growth of the tree and fruit) whilst also for improving the efficiencies at harvest. The aim is to ensure that orchard rows are ideally picked at no more than two height (i.e. the bottom half of the tree is picked at ground level, with the top half of the tree either picked from platforms or ladders) for reasons of time and money.
- 7.18. As the business grows eating apples and pears (rather than juicing), these are hand picked off the trees to reduce bruising and to offer the first part of the 'quality control' chain. This is obviously very time consuming and can require working long unsociable hours to get the job done as this window of opportunity is very weather dependent. Harvest can occur at short notice early in the morning and late into the night to avoid forecast rains, frost, winds and high temperatures. Again, whilst it is accepted that the seasonal workers do the bulk of this, supervision, vigilant monitoring of trees and the workforce (including assessing methodology or task operation) are important to intervene soonest if not being done right; and where necessary retraining, re-monitoring and constant correction occur repetitively at unsocial hours.
- 7.19. The irrigation lines need to be checked on a daily basis to ensure they are not just working to provide trees with water but to ensure that they are not leaking. Any leaks need to be fixed without delay to reduce water loss but to prevent overwatering of trees.
- 7.20. The on-site manager obviously needs to co-ordinate on a daily basis the operations that are being set for the team that day. On site presence helps to implement this, understand demands and respond to any emergencies. After the day is done, an assessment can then be made of the days progress and the orchards can be inspected to ascertain progress made and prioritized for the next day's operations.

- 7.21. The daily team instructions, daily operations (general, New Green Farm site specific, wider business and of course orchard specific at New Green Farm) and wider business management results in long days for Mr and Mrs Goatham who also try to balance life with their sons. Being able to reside on site therefore not just meets the functional requirement of the farm and wider business but as far as possible it supports a more favorable family environment. In turn this also has the added advantage of facilitating further learning opportunities to Master Arthur and Master Stephen Goatham respectively who can be 'taught the trade' on site ready for when they duly join the family business for its fourth generation.
- 7.22. All of these tasks, although undertaken by seasonal and other employees as well as by Mr and Mrs Goatham cannot be managed, understood and ultimately undertaken effectively without a manager on site to direct, manage and ensure quality control in all things. It is therefore essential to have a farm manager on site.
- 7.23. Further, it is recognised that one of the most deprived enterprises in terms of new market entrants (and age of retirements being so late) is agriculture where it is recognised that the future rests on the next generation who are reluctant and or unable to go into farming. In this case there is a fourth generation of the family showing an active interest in the family farming business and to best encourage, nurture and pass on knowledge it is undeniable that living on site is the best way to do this when all the realities of farming can be understood and experienced as they really occur i.e. not just in a 9 to 5.30 scenario.

8. Design and Access Statement

Use

- 8.1. It is proposed that an agricultural farm managers dwelling is provided on site to provide onsite security and most importantly management of New Green Farm which will house two of the businesses Directors and their family as detailed above. The farm managers dwelling is being put forward with an agricultural occupancy condition to secure this.

Amount, Layout & Scale

- 8.2. The proposed farm manager's dwelling has been designed to provide four bedrooms, to provide accommodation for Mr and Mrs. Ross Goatham and their two sons, whilst also providing a spare room for family visitors.
- 8.3. The house will contain an enclosed farm office an open plan kitchen and dining room with a separate sitting room, downstairs toilet and utility room. The house is proposed to include a cellar for additional storage space.
- 8.4. Upstairs four bedrooms are still being proposed with a family bathroom and the master bedroom having an en-suite. As previously set out, the overall area of the proposed dwelling is much reduced in size by some 29% (74.81 square metres).

Appearance

- 8.5. The proposed farmhouse will have a handmade clay tile roof, imperial handmade stock brick, purpose made joinery with heritage glass above stone cils. The doors will be purpose made from iroko wood with 12mm heritage glass.
- 8.6. The farmhouse has been designed to a high standard with a high standard of materials used to provide a modern insulated home but with a traditional design. The use of stock bricks, clay tiles and the sash style windows with stone cils will complement the local vernacular.

Landscaping

- 8.7. The landscaping proposed at the farmhouse centres around the planting of native hedging as a boundary treatment around the garden, access and parking area.
- 8.8. The driveway will be formed out of bonded pea shingle on a tarmac base. This will be extended to the parking area and the bin store as well as for access to the house.

Access

- 8.9. The existing access that was approved under 20190154 that has been provided on site will be utilised by the farmhouse. The access has good visibility splays and no alterations would be required to facilitate the farmhouse. A small length of driveway would be added to the existing internal access farm tracks to provide access to the farmhouse from past the agricultural building.
- 8.10. It is considered that the proposal would not alter the type or amount of traffic that currently use the access, as the farm manager and visitors use the access at the moment; a residential use will not exacerbate this. It is considered that an onsite presence will in fact reduce the traffic moment of the site as management will be on site to deal with any issues as and when they arise.
- 8.11. All the above access elements have, following the first and second pre-application submission as well as the consideration of application 20210970 been acceptable to the Council and KCC Highways and we would respectfully not therefore expect these to now feature as reasons for concern in this application.

9. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 9.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) puts huge emphasis on sustainable development with the economic objective of building a strong responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right place and at the right time. To support growth, innovation and improved productivity, by identifying and co-ordinating the provision of infrastructure. The importance of the economics role of sustainability is also accompanied by the social and environmental aspects of sustainability.

- 9.2. Importantly the social objective of sustainability seeks to “*support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the **needs of present and future generations**; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places...*” (our *emphasis*). This application seeks to ensure that a business can function in the present as a functional need for an on-site dwelling exists, whilst also providing care and training for the future farming generation.
- 9.3. Paragraph 9 requires that the sustainable objectives “*should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.*”
- 9.4. 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.
- 9.5. 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 New Green Farm constitutes sustainable development and one which is of benefit to the agricultural enterprise.
- 9.6. For decision making, the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that, where development plan policies are out of date, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The most relevant development plan policies of Gravesham Borough Council’s are not considered to be up to date given their drafting in 1994 and 2014 respectively. The policy guidance that they are based upon has been updated by the NPPF and NPPG, which should therefore be taken as the applicable policies.

- 9.7. As set out below, the proposal is considered to comply with the policies set out within the NPPF and there are no significant or demonstrably adverse impacts that would outweigh the benefits of the proposal.
- 9.8. Paragraph 38 states *“Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work 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.”* It is therefore clear that support should be given to this proposal, given that this would ensure that the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area would be supported by the provision of a farm manager’s dwelling at New Green Farm.
- 9.9. Paragraph 80 of The NPPF states that Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless certain circumstances apply. In this case, the relevant section of paragraph 80 is sub paragraph a), which states:
- “there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside”*
- 9.10. In this case the essential need is to:
- undertake and manage the farming operations that are needed at New Green Farm on a daily basis (see section above of agricultural operations for a more comprehensive list);
 - offer security at the site to prevent thefts, break in’s and acts of vandalism;
 - to be able to respond quickly to events such as fires that may occur;
 - monitor the irrigation systems that are in place to ensure they are working correctly and are not leaking (causing potential damage to other trees);
 - undertake headland and field margin management;

- be on site early in the morning to brief the farm workers on the days operations and continue to monitor progress throughout the day, assisting wherever necessary (whilst not taking away from the applicant's ability to monitor and run the rest of the business);
- work unsociable hours for spraying, thinning harvest etc to work around ad hoc weather patterns;
- walk the orchard at the end of each day to assess the progress made over the site, to assist in the preparation of the next morning's farm brief and to assess and monitor trees to deter against disease and predators (this will then inform the next day's operation);
- be on hand to act with emergency's where say frosts may be anticipated or hail storms are due – this may require crops to be picked last minute or considered for covering;
- to ensure that someone is on site throughout the peak season to sign in and sign out the different seasonal workers into their accommodation;
- to ensure seasonal workers are integrated well onto the farm with other seasonal workers from different cultural backgrounds and with language barrier;
- to oversee the training the seasonal workers to ensure they have adequate training for all the various tasks they are to compete e.g harvest, thinning, planting;
- to supervise and monitor the staff in their various agricultural activities to ensure they are correctly executing tasks, to ensure they are work efficiently but to ensure they are happy and supported in their roles to maximise staff retention;
- where there are difficulties with seasonal workers due to lack of productivity, cultural disagreements etc to take any appropriate action quickly so as to prevent team upset. This can result in relocating staff between holdings which then requires the subsequent checking in and reintroduction of new staff into the team; and
- to be able to monitor fruit in store once the new stores are erected.

9.11. When considering the NPPG guidance in relation to Paragraph 80a of the NPPF a number of considerations are set out, namely:

- *“evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work to ensure the effective operation of an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- *the degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- *whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- *whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site, providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*
- *in the case of new enterprises, whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.*
- *Employment on an assembly or food packing line, or the need to accommodate seasonal workers, will generally not be sufficient to justify building isolated rural dwellings.”*

9.12. As set out previously, there is a need for an on-site presence all year round 24 hours a day in order to deal with emergencies that could cause a serious loss in crops and produce and to ensure the effective management of an agricultural business. The extensive list of work to be undertaken as set out in Section 7 demonstrates this. Although there are no animal welfare concerns, the management and running of farm workers and 69.5 hectares of agricultural land with new orchards in addition to a further 17.28 hectares proposed for planting. To constantly manage and monitor the seasonal workers as they arrive and leave the site and to ensure their effective integration while delivering efficiency to meet the extensive labour problems being faced and as detailed above at figure 1.32.

- 9.13. AC Goatham & Son are one of the largest growers of top fruit, owning and renting 29 farms. The input to the local and national economy is set out below in this section and extends to £26.8 million with this forecasting to rise to circa £39.9 million by 2028. It is therefore put forward that the business will remain viable for the foreseeable future and a temporary permission would not be suitable for a trial period, as there is no temporary nature to the orchards growth and applicants business model. Further, with it being accepted that 24 workers are needed at the moment on site for 9 months of the year, it falls that they of course require proportionate management for the requisite period; but that outside of this period when they are gone the farm still requires daily active management. Furthermore, the expansion of the land holding, which itself will require additional labour and the plans to erect a cold store mean that the need will be even greater.
- 9.14. There are no buildings on site which can be converted to dwellings, so this is not achievable in this instance as it has been for numerous other farms.
- 9.15. Considerable research was undertaken by Lambert & Foster on behalf of the applicant to ascertain whether there was suitable accommodation nearby to the site between September 2020 and July 2021. The Market Report is included in **Appendix 5** and contains the results for this research and concludes that no such market accommodation exists in close proximity to or within sight and sound of New Green Farm. This point was accepted by the Council in application 20210970.
- 9.16. The farm currently lacks cold storage or fruit packing facilities but plans have already been made for the provision on new facilities. The farm manager's dwelling will therefore be required in connection with the provision of such facilities to ensure that the stores are functioning as required. A breakdown in the cold stores could otherwise result in an entire crop being lost, which in turn has the ability to affect the applicant's ability to deliver on their supermarket contract.
- 9.17. The proposed development will meet and provide facilities for the applicant's labour management requirements of its expanding agricultural enterprise and their aim to provide British apples and pears to the British consumer. This proposal therefore supports the local and British economy.

- 9.18. The NPPF requires that significant support is given to economic growth with paragraph 81 stating *“Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can **invest, expand and adapt** [our emphasis]. 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** [our emphasis]. The approach taken should allow each area to build **on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future.** [our emphasis]”. Of course in this case one of the significant weaknesses is already evidenced as being labour shortages, and the bringing on of the next generation of British farmers – two issues this proposal is able to help address.*
- 9.19. 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 New 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.
- 9.20. Supporting a prosperous Rural Economy as stated within Paragraph 84 of The NPPF highlights 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;
- 9.21. The provision of a dwelling on site would therefore be supported in policy terms by paragraph 84 points a) and b) as it assists in the expansion of this existing rural business making it possible to monitor and ensure optimum orchard growth and top fruit production and for the overall management of the land.
- 9.22. 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.

- 9.23. This proposal is therefore hugely pivotal in being able to support the continued reinvestment of the business locally, however, this is limited if the applicant cannot manage the farm and its staff effectively or provide the trees with the necessary husbandry attention during growth to optimize fruit quality and quantity.
- 9.24. At paragraph 92(c) it is acknowledged that decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which support access to healthy food. The provision of accommodation, its storage and the associated amenity facilities to support the growth and harvesting of top fruit would duly support such vision and policy requirement.
- 9.25. Section 13 of the NPPF sets out the policies to protect Green Belt land. Paragraph 138 sets out that *“Green Belt serves five purposes: 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 re generation, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”*
- 9.26. Paragraph 147 National Planning Policy Framework sets out that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances, due to the Green Belt designation. Paragraph 148 of the NPPF sets out that *“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘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.”*
- 9.27. Paragraph 149 considers when there are exceptions to this rule and sets out that *“A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are: a) buildings for agriculture and forestry...”*
- 9.28. It is therefore put forward that this application represents very special circumstances, where the requirement to house an essential rural worker to manage a 67.5 ha top fruit farm with an additional planned 17.23 ha, outweighs any potential harm to the Green Belt. In addition, the dwelling will be an agricultural tied dwelling and is therefore an essential new building for agriculture. This fact was accepted by Gravesham Borough Council in their pre-application advice.

- 9.29. Paragraph 159 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. The site is not located in an area which is at risk from flooding.
- 9.30. Recognition of the wider benefits of trees in the form of “natural capital”, “ecosystem service”, beauty, character and economic benefit is acknowledged at paragraph 175 of the NPPF. The proposal enables such support, as the management of 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.
- 9.31. Importantly, paragraph 175 identifies the adoption of a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing natural capital at “a *catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries*”; and that it exactly what this proposal delivers on.
- 9.32. In rural areas planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs to promote rural sustainable development, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. A location on site makes the farm operations possible which in turn ensures the countryside is maintained, people are employed and the landscape is producing a viable crop (which leads to the retained employment on site). It will ensure that the business owners can more readily service the wider needs of the business by limiting the time away from this principle farm they will manage.

Gravesham Local Plan

- 9.33. The Gravesham Local Plan is based on the first review which was adopted in 1994. In 2007 some of the policies were saved, this included Policy C10 relating to agricultural dwellings, the main consideration in this case. This policy makes and relies on policy which itself (Annex E of PPS7) has since been revoked as part of the NPPF.

- 9.34. Although this policy has not been identified as having “expired” in 2007 nor was it “replaced or deleted” in 2014 it is considered out dated due to its dependence on Annex E of PPS 7, which the NPPF has since revoked, and which has not since been supplemented in either the more recent 2019 NPPF update or in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) documentation.

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy

- 9.35. In September 2014 Gravesham adopted their Local Plan Core Strategy. This document recognises that agriculture is an important activity in Gravesham, occupying more than 70% of the land of the Borough.
- 9.36. Paragraph 2.7.1 recognises that Gravesham has the smallest economy in Kent, whilst having a slight fall in employment at the review period. Paragraph 2.7.2 goes on to recognise that Gravesham has relatively high unemployment compared with Kent, the south east region and nationally. The Core Strategy goes on to recognise that the lack of jobs leads to high levels of out commuting. This is why at 2.7.5 it is recognised that there is the need to improve the skill of the workforce and provide a greater number of jobs. The proposal would of course offer the opportunity for employment within the Borough on site.
- 9.37. The opportunities presented to the borough are set out at paragraph 3.2.9 of the Local Plan Core Strategy, with the Council claiming that by 2028, *“The character of the countryside and the diverse rural landscape will have been conserved and enhanced. Proposals that promote the appropriate expansion and diversification of the rural area economy will have been supported.”* Supporting proposals like this one are considered to be exactly what Gravesham need to do, to meet their claimed ambition in conserving and enhancing the landscape through continued farming and investment in the local economy in further job provision.

- 9.38. Again, the Council makes claims of wishing to respond to the challenges of climate change at paragraph 3.1.9, and the planting of this holding with trees will certainly help contribute to improving air quality whilst providing additional benefits to wildlife and protecting the landscape. However, in order for such a beneficial landscape to exist, it must be managed and to manage it appropriately and in a viable manner requires an onsite presence; one that is achieved with this dwelling.
- 9.39. Section 5.1.22 of Gravesham Borough Council's Local Core Strategy identifies that there are few major employment sites within the rural area and supply within or adjacent to the rural settlements, tend to be dominated by small sites. However, such sites do facilitate sustainable lifestyles by providing opportunities for people to live and work locally and they also help and support the delivery of local services. The provision of a dwelling on site is an exact endorsement of this point, supporting a live work unit but ensuring the delivery of local service and the long-term management of the countryside.
- 9.40. Policy CS07 considers Economy, Employment and Skill. Of particular relevance in this policy is paragraph 5.1.37 which sets out that *"The Council will support proposals that promote the appropriate expansion and diversification of the rural area economy."*
- 9.41. Paragraph 5.7.18 recognises the provision and retention of trees as being important. This proposal safeguards the provision of such, with Policy CS12 (Green Infrastructure) highlighting *"opportunities to enhance, restore, re-create and maintain habitats will be sought ...The overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The greatest weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and natural beauty."*

Draft Development Management Policies Document (DDMPD)

- 9.42. Currently at the Regulation 18 stage, the Council are hopeful that this document together with the Local Plan Core Strategy will update and complete the Local Plan in due course. This document identifies several policies which may, in due course be of relevance; although it is of course recognised that they are not yet formal policy.

- 9.43. Section 2 of the DDMPD considers Green Belt policy and in turn relates to the NPPF (discussed above). It recognises that development relating to agriculture is not considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 9.44. Paragraph 2.2.1 recognises that *“agriculture and forestry remain an important part of the rural economy that the Council continues to support”*. Policy DM1 recognises that new development related to agriculture will only be supported where it is reasonably necessary to sustain the agricultural enterprise to which it relates. Such is the case with this proposal as detailed in this submission. Similarly, when designing the proposal consideration has been given to the location of the proposed development to ensure its most suitable location having regard to functionality, security but of course to also minimize any perceived harm to the Green Belt.
- 9.45. Section 2.3 of the DDMPD considers the provision of new agricultural dwellings in the countryside referencing paragraph 55. However, the NPPF has since been updated and the relevant consideration should in fact be given to paragraph 80 as identified above.
- 9.46. The Council’s proposed Policy DM2 considers ‘very special circumstances’ as being a consideration. The Council’s view that the provision of an agricultural dwelling does not fall into the “buildings for agriculture” exception is unsupported. There is nothing in the 2019 or 2021 NPPF updates to confirm such, nor is there anything in the NPPG to clarify this point. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the functional requirement for such is a very special circumstance as set out above.
- 9.47. Proposed Policy DM2 considers whether alternative arrangements are available rather than providing a new dwelling. However, it is considered that there are none. There are no buildings on site that are suitable to meet the need or for conversion, there are no properties available locally that would meet the need, as, the need is to reside on site.
- 9.48. Notwithstanding this, a consideration of local properties is provided within **Appendix 5** which contains a market analysis by Lambert & Foster. This report concludes that there were and are not any properties for sale or available within sight and sound or in close proximity of New Green Farm, either fitting or not-complying with the criteria for the farm manager. This point was accepted by the Council in application 20210970.

- 9.49. The duration of the need is queried by proposed Policy DM2 and whether this is likely to persist in the future. Having recently bought the site and having invested heavily in it to date, the intention of the applicant is clear. Whilst the fact that the crop takes a while to come to fruition after considerable management and over time increases yields, the functional need remains. Since application 20210970, and at the time of writing, the applicant is buying a further 17.23 hectares and has made provision for a new cold store facility at New Green Farm. Both show further clear intention.
- 9.50. The size of the proposed dwelling is considered reasonably necessary to support the applicant's requirement for the need to manage this farm and the wider farm business together with the needs of the family. A point accepted in both pre-application responses from the Council. The dwelling's location and design have been considered to limit the perceived effect on openness, which having regard to the NPPG includes giving consideration to spatial and visual aspects, duration of the development and the associated degree of activity e.g. Highway, which in this case will be reduced as a consequence. Despite this, and our view that there is no adverse harm, the NPPG recognises ways in which perceived harm may be offset. This includes the provision of new green infrastructure, woodland planting, landscape enhancements, natural capital, improved biodiversity; all of which are delivered as a consequence of being able to continue to manage the orchards on this farm.
- 9.51. Proposed Policy DM2 sets out that where there is any doubt as to the established need in the future it may be beneficial to provide a temporary unit of accommodation in the first instance. We do not consider there to be any question of doubt, based not only on the investment already made on the site, but by the size and reputation of the applicant's business as one of the largest top fruit producers in the country and given the longevity of the crop planted which needs management.
- 9.52. It is accepted that an agricultural occupancy condition may be necessary to make the development acceptable.
- 9.53. Proposed Policy DM9 looks at agricultural land, recognising that development on land will only be allowed where there is a considered overriding need. This proposal to support the continued management of the surrounding agricultural land is considered acceptable.

10. Other material considerations

Towards a one nation economy: A 10-point plan for boosting productivity in rural areas (August 2015)

- 10.1. In August 2015, the Chancellor together with DEFRA released a paper designed to boost productivity in rural areas and recognising planning as a barrier to rural businesses.
- 10.2. In this document it is set out that the government's overall framework for raising productivity is built around two pillars:
 - Encouraging long-term investment in economic capital, including infrastructure, skills and knowledge;
 - Promoting a dynamic economy that encourages innovation and helps resources flow to their most productive use.
- 10.3. This proposal clearly supports and indeed underpins the longer-term investment that has been and will continue to be made by AC Goatham & Son. If this proposal is not supported it will impinge upon this.
- 10.4. This proposal also supports innovation through the growth of new fruit varieties and using innovative planting methods.
- 10.5. A farm manager's dwelling clearly helps AC Goatham & Son perform at their most productive, and this encouragement, coming from central Government must be given due consideration.
- 10.6. Page 14 of this Government report recognises that:

"employers in rural areas can face particular constraints in accessing the pool of skills they require. According to survey responses, businesses in rural areas are more likely than businesses in urban areas to have to outsource work, withdraw from markets and experience delays in developing new products and services as a result of skills shortages".
- 10.7. The presence of the dwelling prevents delays in services being delivered as AC Goatham & Son can support the needs of the business. The ability to house a manager on site will ensure that someone is always there to oversee farm operations day and night, as well as any essential emergencies, whilst also having the provision of separate space.

The Food Strategy

- 10.8. The Food Strategy report, as briefly alluded to earlier within the statement, recognises that the food industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, that offers employment, opportunity, investment and they give local areas a sense of pride and identify; going on to highlight the key point that *“None of our food manufactures could succeed without the farmers and fishermen who supply them with high quality produce”*. Our client, the applicant, being no such exception. The report recognises that *“there is more to be done with the government and industry working in partnership on a shared endeavor to promote healthier diets”*. Something that the provision of a farm manager’s dwelling would contribute to.
- 10.9. In the summary of key measures of the Food Strategy the government sets out that to deliver Objective 1 (A prosperous agri-food sector that ensures food supply in an unpredictable world and contributes to the levelling up agenda through quality jobs around the country) the government will *“support farmers to broadly maintain levels of domestic production through productivity gain.....enable growth in key sectors, including horticulture.....ensure the agri-food industry has the necessary skills to take advantage of new and emerging innovations”*; all things that this application would seek to achieve.
- 10.10. Approval of this proposal would wholly support Objective 2 of the Food Strategy which is *“To deliver a sustainable, nature positive, affordable food system that provides choice and access to high quality products that support healthier and home grown diets for us all”*. The proposal also supports the applicant in being able to meet Objective 3 of the Food Strategy which is *“To deliver export opportunities consumer choice”*.
- 10.11. The Food Strategy recognises that *“To further build the UK’s resilience to future crisis and shocks, we continue to monitor and strengthen the resilience of our supply chains and support our domestic production.....Going forward, we will engage with industry to understand and address barriers to uptake of risk management or other farming insurance products, recognising that effective business planning is a key enabler of resilience at the individual farm level”*. It is such recognition of safeguarding against risk management and trying to be resilient that is the consequence of this proposal made by AC Goatham and Son and one that should therefore, respectably, be looked on favourably. Such support for the application would meet the reports aim to *“reduce the offshoring of food production to countries that do not meet our high environmental and animal welfare standards”*.

- 10.12. It is identified that *“our resilient food supply will therefore rely on a competitive and productive domestic sector, including increased output in sectors with sustainable growth opportunities such as horticulture ...”* something approval of this application would wholly endorse.
- 10.13. It is further set out that *“Another part of supporting a thriving farming sector is to ensure that the animals and crops we keep and grow are healthy and well cared for, which also benefits the health and welfare of our own population”* – the applicant’s proposal helps achieve this facilitating greater levels of care in the growth of the top fruit crop.
- 10.14. The government has already announced the expansion of the Seasonal Worker Visa Route to 2024 and this is expressed as part of the *“Levelling up the food system by maximising growth opportunity”* part of the report. Following such an observation it is set out that *“Taking advantage of this [the Seasonal Worker Visa Route], we will work with growers to develop a world leading horticultural industry”*. Respectfully, if this aspiration is to become a likely reality provision needs to be made for those businesses already seeking to innovate within the horticultural sector such as AC Goatham and Son and who require support within their existing farming operations.
- 10.15. Further, in recognising that *“the sector cannot sustainably rely on migrant labour, especially in light of global pressures elsewhere, the government will also in the coming weeks commission an independent review to tackle labour shortages in the food supply chain”* [See Appendix 4]. This acknowledges the problems encountered in the existing system, which of course draws on the logistical problems the applicant has in sourcing labour. Whilst it is accepted that on site accommodation will not resolve the seasonable labour need, it does facilitate its better and easier logistical management being on site, whilst ensuring a happy work force can be overseen on site to provide every chance of retained staffing.
- 10.16. The aspirations of the Food Strategy to ensure food manufactures and providers *“have access to government support for innovation”* and to *“drive greater confidence, uptake and investment in new technology [in which we would also include new crop varieties]”* is admired; but the real proof will be on the actual ability to deliver on aspirations such as this – with the current proposal being one such example of support.

- 10.17. There is a most comprehensive and extensive section in the Food Strategy about “Healthier and Sustainable eating”, which highlights the current problems associated with obesity and lack of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption. The report goes on to clearly highlight that *“government needs to set the right expectation of industry, provide the right regulatory interventions, and support the necessary innovation to drive a healthier food environment”*. Supporting this planning application would contribute to delivering this, as the applicant can better safeguard both the quantity and quality of the fruit they grow, helping to make this more available to the market. Obviously, the greater the quality and quantity of market produce the more the cost to the consumer can ultimately reduce which should make healthy apples and pears more available to a wider range of consumers. This would clearly align with paragraph 2.1.11 that sets out *“Nutrition and sustainability are interrelated – we should not tackle either in isolation. The measures we now set out are aimed at supporting better informed food choices with the dual objective of shifting consumes towards healthier and more sustainable choices and promoting a supply response from the food industry, where food production and consumption become healthier and more sustainable”*.
- 10.18. Respectfully, if the government is committed to deliver on the conclusion of its food strategy, namely: *“This food strategy sets out government ambitions and priorities to create a more prosperous agri-food sector that delivers healthier, more home-grown and affordable diets for all, regardless of where people live or their income. The strategy identifies a number of measures to achieve this (summarised in the Executive Summary), targeting a variety of factors across the entirety of the food supply chain”*; then proposals such as those set out by the applicant must be supported.

Rural Planning in the 2020's

- 10.19. Released in July 2022, this piece of work was been endorsed by the President of the RTPI who sets out in his foreword *“I recommend anyone with an interest in the past, present and future of our rural communities uses the report as a **cornerstone of their work**”* [our emphasis]. The report goes on to recognise that *“Brexit is having most acute impacts in the farming sector”*, whilst *“changes to global climate are affecting growing seasons, in turn impacting upon the farming sector”*. In turn this sets out in the Executive Summary how *“this can lead to a need for more accommodation for seasonal workers, and/or more structures”* in areas where planning policy tends to restrict development. This only serves to recognise how the proposed accommodation is serving a growing need in an already very difficult industry with a high dependence on recognised seasonal worker presence.
- 10.20. It is recognised in the report that *“Planning needs to balance a myriad of competing claims in rural space, from housing through to habitat protection, flood management, biodiversity net gain and tree planting, to the effective management of landscape designations and the promotion of economic diversity.”*. As set out in the submission the proposal helps achieve this balance – a continuous presence on site of course means that this such activities can be given their full attention and appropriate times of the day and night depending on the needs of the orchard, the wider habitat of the farm and of course all the while working around the unpredictability of weather patterns which can mean most unconventional hours. This results not just in food production, but better landscape management and of course improved efficiency of the farm business.
- 10.21. The report sets out that *“Rural planning has a clear role to play in realising **the adaption potential of rural areas** and **supporting innovation** [our emphasis]”*. On behalf of our client, we have, relating to this application, set out how the need to be on site to support a new variety of apple being grown to fill a market hole in UK provision – in other words, innovation in the sector, which should clearly be supported.

- 10.22. In the key findings section of the report it is highlighted that *“Brexit has implications for the seasonal workforce whilst climate change will impact on growing seasons and the choice of crops. The combination of these factors will have implications for seasonal accommodation demand, placing new pressures on the housing stock”*. Whilst we are not claiming that the need for permanent residency is derived just from Brexit or Climate Change, the requirements are only further emphasised, as logistical management of seasonal workers and the corresponding agricultural activities are only becoming even harder to address with such prevalent factors. Thus, meaning the proposal is in effect serving a need that is being increasingly recognised as being more problematic.
- 10.23. Among the various other key findings it is set out that there is a *“30% reduction in the number of English Farms since 1990 and a corresponding increase in average farm size.....Brexit is likely to accelerate this rescaling of farming, with implications for the number, type and configuration of farm buildings and workers’ housing”*; something the applicant is witnessing. In economic terms the key findings set out that *“The only certainty is that **farming faces a period of acute uncertainty**”* [our emphasis]; only serving to demonstrate the need to support the application which allows the applicant to, as far as possible, control the management of their farm operations and fruit production to, as far as possible, safeguard against uncertainty. In further economic terms the report sets out *“...**planning will need to adapt to and support emergent economic realities**”* [our emphasis], with no finer example being set out in the applicant’s situation where there is significant economic pressure to not only ensure the success of a new apple variety, but to safeguard the journey to market by optimizing yields - which has the knock on effect of contract fulfilment with the supermarkets (failure of which results in fines or a lack of contract renewal in the future which clearly has major impacts on the industry) and the applicant’s farming business and the people it employs.
- 10.24. Having regard to the key findings relating to climate change the report recognises the variation in cropping times *“which affects the supply of foodstuffs and brings farmers in to competition with producers in other parts of the world. The **desire** by farmers **to maintain consistent supply, and protect crops from extreme weather, is driving increased demand for structures**”* [our emphasis]. This resonates exactly with what is being experienced with the applicant and in this case the demand for a house on site.

- 10.25. In looking at the impacts of Covid 19 on the rural environment, the RTPI report rightly highlights that *“emerging evidence suggests that many rural places are among the most vulnerable to Covid 19 health risks”*, with no exception being drawn in the case of this application as the report further identifies that *“a high share of the rural labour force is in essential jobs (e.g agriculture, food processing) coupled with a limited capability to undertake these jobs from home”*. This puts an extremely strong emphasis on the need to be at one’s place of work as a rural worker, which is exactly what this proposal is seeking to achieve.
- 10.26. The changing demographics of the countryside section of the report highlights some key points about the way in which young people perceive and are involved with the rural economy. In short it recognises that the average age of farmers has risen to 59, whilst also identifying that the lack of young people choosing to take up agriculture is a huge challenge to the sector. It is therefore re-emphasised how it has been set out in the application that this proposal greatly facilitates the growth and development of a next generation of farmers (in this case the applicants two sons) thorough learning on site which should not be discouraged; to the contrary, given the evident decline in succession it should be encouraged; which is made possible through this proposal.
- 10.27. In drawing its conclusions this RTPI report highlights that *“A more ‘balanced approach’ would start with an assessment of particular circumstances and needs, and consider the merits and contributions of development”*, and we would therefore urge the Council to reconsider this re-application in this manner whilst also taking heed of the RTPI reports point that *“National policy and local practice may need to be more flexible, in terms of judgements it makes over the merits of proposal, such as their form and location, in instances where they clearly deliver wider public benefits”*. In this case such public benefits have been highlighted on multiple occasions and include, but are not limited to, safeguarding food provision, encouraging self-sufficiency and less dependence on the need to import; supporting a business who are seeking to extend the English growing season as far as possible, support a business who is seeking to introduce new varieties of apple with longer shelf life; educating a next generation of farmers and managing an active farming landscape to provide not just food but environmental gain.

- 10.28. In conclusion, the release of both The Food Strategy and the Rural Planning in the 2020's paper both highlight the direction of travel that is planned and needed within the agricultural sector, with many of the ambitions being achievable where greater support can be given to those in the industry. In this case this is obtainable through supporting the planning application presented to the Council.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1. It is considered that the location for the proposed dwelling in terms of perceived landscape impact, security and to serve the functional requirement of the holding is considered to be justified and overcome the previous reasons for refusal.
- 11.2. The design and finish of the proposed dwelling has been thought out to be considerate of local design and to fit within the local landscape and vernacular. The size of the dwelling has been reduced (by 29%) to limit the perceived impact upon landscape character and openness of the Green Belt further and in addition to its relocation adjacent to the farmyard.
- 11.3. It is endorsed that the functional requirement for the dwelling has been comprehensively set out to demonstrate the essential need to be on site having regard to the farming operations that need to be undertaken, the supervision required for all the farm workers needed on the site, the need to review works undertaken during the day's activities to be able to then brief the team early then next morning, to assess and monitor the orchards to prevent disease or damage (faulty irrigation) and to offer site security.
- 11.4. The accepted need to have 24 workers on site 9 months of the year (in connection with the current 67.5 hectares) recognises in addition to that which will be required for a further 17.23 hectares, the labour requirements of this business for most of the year and it duly falls that this on site work force requires on site management through this period. This is delivered by the proposed dwelling and its ability to house a farm manager, and whose wife is also a farm manager.

- 11.5. In March 2022, The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in a report to the House of Commons entitled 'Labour shortages in the food and farming sector' identified the significant problems faced by farmers for finding and retaining staff, the mental health issues associated with labour issues and the problems of attracting and retaining British staff among various points. All issues the provision of an onsite unit can help address.
- 11.6. The proposal facilitates the opportunity for this 3rd generation family run, clearly successful, business to pass on to the 4th generation who are actively showing an interest in agriculture but would benefit from living this experience on site and taking in the realities of owning and running a farm.
- 11.7. Respectfully it is considered that this proposal should be supported with planning permission granted with conditions that are deemed to be appropriate to ensure the continued management of the agricultural holding.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1- Copy of email to Council dated 5 September 2022.

Appendix 2 - Google Earth Land profile extracts

Appendix 3- Press releases showing labour problems

Appendix 4- The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report to the House of Commons entitled 'Labour shortages in the food and farming sector'.

Appendix 5- Market Appraisal by Lambert & Foster

Appendix 6 - Pre-application response Feb 2021

Appendix 7- Pre-application response July 2021