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**Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside**

Fiona Dunning  
Development Control  
East Hertfordshire District Council  
Wallfields  
Pegs Lane  
Hertford  
SG13 8EQ

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (by email)

Dear Ms. Dunning,

**Applications Nos.3/20/1456/FUL, 3/20/1457/FUL, 3/20/1459/FUL and 3/20/1460/FUL for the Erection of Polytunnels, agricultural storage building with incorporated office and respite area, creation of new access and formation of hard standing and associated parking, siting of 2 no. water storage tanks on Land off Ford Lane, Aston, Stevenage, SG2 7HG**

Though submitted as separate applications, these constitute one proposal and, with minor modifications, are a resubmission of applications 3/20/0688/FUL and 3/20/0694/FUL withdrawn by the applicant earlier in the year.

The most significant change is that the applicant, as we requested in our objection to the previous applications, now specifies a sewage treatment plant to be used for the treatment of effluent from the proposed office and storage building. This will apparently discharge into a drainage field. Neither the precise location of the plant or the drainage field is specified. Consequently we continue to have concerns regarding possible contamination of the River Beane. The Beane is served by the aquifer into which any drainage field would percolate. As we pointed out previously any discharge of, albeit treated, effluent is likely to add unacceptable levels of nutrients leading to higher risk of eutrophication.

In the current version of the Planning Statement, the applicant now acknowledges the River Beane as a chalk stream, but does not seem to understand the relevance of that designation. The English chalk streams are of international importance and their ecology unique. The river is subject to a catchment management plan, intended to improve the flow and water quality, among other objectives. Any development which may impinge on the river must not be detrimental to those objectives. The application makes no recognition of this fact. The East Herts District Plan advises (23.5.1) that SUDS play an important role in the reduced degradation of chalk streams. A thorough and rigorous SUDS approach, in advance of planning permission, would be the minimum to be expected in this questionable venture.

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None is submitted. The proposal would not preserve or enhance the water environment contrary to Policy WAT3 of the adopted plan.

We accept that the proposal is for agricultural development and there are no provisos attached to paragraph 145(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework. However, as we have said in our response to the previous applications, the Beane Valley is a sensitive landscape in which this development will appear as an intrusive element. The applicant proposes to mitigate this harm through the provision of a tree belt to screen it from Ford Lane. However, the development will be prominent from a series of vantage points throughout the valley. In our view a more substantial screening proposal is required which will reduce the impact of the structures and this should form a condition of any approval.

We are not convinced of the long-term viability of this enterprise. Unfortunately, the submitted Business Plan has not been placed in the public domain and we cannot comment on it. However, it is a material consideration on which the Council will have to form a judgement before determining the application.

Yours sincerely,

David Irving