



Application for change of use of land for siting of 14 caravans for seasonal agricultural workers

Supporting Statement

Daffodils are one of Cornwall's largest industries

"With their sunshine yellow petals and iconic trumpets, daffodils have long been admired. But, how did the humble spring flower become so iconic in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly?"

Daffodil growing dates back well over 100 years and, although Cornwall isn't the flower's ancestral home, it is one of the best places in the world to grow it - which is why no other one location can produce different varieties like trumpets, tresambles and tazettas.

Cornwall has also contributed greatly to the daffodil's development, with many new breeds and scientific advances taking place down here. Our daffodil farms are now some of the largest and most efficient anywhere, exporting throughout the UK, Europe and the USA.

Whilst the resilient yellow flower survived both World Wars and flourished between them, the Transportation of Flowers Act, which came into force in 1942, halted exportation and growing. Growers from the Scilly Isles, who relied on daffodil cultivation to survive, didn't give up easily – sending scented narcissi (part of the daffodil family) to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who declared: "These people must be enabled to grow their flowers and send them to London –they cheer us up so much in these dark days."

Today, Cornwall is the world's largest producer of daffodils growing over 30 million tonnes of bulbs each year. Associated with the spring months (although the Isles of Scilly can enjoy them from as early as November) daffodils make the perfect Mother's Day present, Easter gift and are brilliant for brightening up your home."

by Sue Bradbury | Feb 20, 2015

Varfell Farms Ltd, formerly known as Greenyard Flowers UK and Winchester Growers, is a world leading grower, distributor and packer of daffodil flowers and bulbs, and the biggest single daffodil enterprise in the UK. The company grows on 2,881 acres of land located across Cornwall and processes 500 million stems annually from its main site at Varfell, near Penzance. We are a specialist breeder with a unique daffodil business which includes an exclusive range of early and late flowering varieties and has an unrivalled variety in terms of seasonality. The company employs over 650 people during the harvest.

It is estimated that Varfell Farms process 35% of the annual global daffodil crop with annual sales revenues of over £15million.

The extensive customer base covers the majority of the high street retailers, we also export to Europe, USA, Dubai, Singapore and Japan.

This year (2021) has been unprecedented time for the daffodil industry with a lack of labour leading to a large proportion of the UK's daffodil crop going unharvested and being left to rot in the fields. The NFU's survey of growers showed the lack of labour has resulted in 24.4% (274.9 million stems) of daffodil flowers being left in fields unpicked across the UK. The lack of labour resulted in 12% of



Varfell Farms crop being unpicked, while this was a major cost to our business and reduced profitability it was less than other growers. A significant contributor to Varfell attracting workers was the high quality and standards of accommodation it has on the farm. However, currently Varfell can accommodate only 45% of their seasonal workforce on-site.

We are confident and have a clear strategy and vision to grow our field-based production by up to 30% over the next 5 years. This will require further investment but in the light of Brexit and an overall reliance on UK sourced produce, gives us the confidence to make the investment.

As the business has grown so have our requirement for labour and accommodation. The medium-term aim has been to increase the capacity of on farm accommodation.

As part of our strategy, it is business critical that we can provide safe and secure accommodation for our seasonal workers for future years.

Historically the farm's housing needs have been achieved with a combination of accommodation on the farm and the utilisation of local camp sites, holiday accommodation and surfer lodges. However, the availability of suitable local accommodation is reducing year on year and we have been travelling further afield with much of our accommodation having been as far as Newquay and Bodmin. Much of this accommodation is now unavailable, either because it is staying open to meet holiday demand, doesn't have the necessary planning permission for seasonal workers or is closed for the winter months.

Covid-19 and the risk has brought this up the agenda, in 2020/21 due to the policies and practices Varfell put in place covid-19 has been well managed resulting in only 2 cases of coronavirus. The policies and practices stopped any spread of the virus and allowed the team to isolate the cases and stop the virus from spreading among the rest of the employees.

In tandem with decreasing availability the of accommodation is the quality of available accommodation, and the need to ensure accommodation is of suitable standards to meet FPC (The Fresh Produce Consortium) and other customer specific standards.

The current accommodation at Varfell allows us to accommodate 45% of the seasonal workers required. To continue to attract the workforce needed Varfell needs in increase the accommodation required. As a land based grower, we struggle with finding enough local seasonal labour, we have to go further afield. In this respect we are no different to other larger farming business in the area and across the UK and indeed across Europe and the rest of the world.

(The BBC recently published an article showing UK farmers to need 'thousands of foreign worker' next summer as the Pick for Britain campaign hadn't fulfilled requirements to harvest crops with local labour <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-54712374>)

The remaining workforce is made up of local residents and we are actively recruiting, and continue to seek locally based workers.



That said, in 2020 Varfell ran a local recruitment campaign to attract pickers. Although this attracted 250 applications, we were only successful in recruiting 20 people into jobs, and of the 20 recruited, only 2 stayed more than 3 weeks.

Another significant advantage for housing workers on the farm is that it will reduce the travel time for the workers. This reduces the impact on the road networks, and also reduces pollution to the environment. Moreover, whilst being more efficient from a business and environmental perspective to house workers at Varfell, it also offers the workers stability and a better quality of life.

The additional 14 caravans proposed in this application will allow us to accommodate a further 56 pickers on site (@ 4 persons per caravan). The caravans are to be located on land close to the existing caravans that is surplus to our operational requirements; comprising a concrete pad formerly used for polytunnels and the site of a former store building. This additional on-site accommodation is important to the sustainability and resilience of the business, given the vulnerability in over-relying upon off-site accommodation, the quality and availability of which cannot be relied on from year to year.

Flower Picking

Each of the 500 million stems processed are hand-picked between December and April, the farm then moves into summer cut flower varieties. The farm employs 52 staff permanently and peaks in harvest to 650.

Every stem needs to be picked by hand. The flowers emerge at different timings within the field and the crop is picked 4-6 times by hand to delicately select the flower at the correct growth stage, enabling the flower to open evenly when the customer places the bunch in a vase. The leaf canopy around the flowers also needs to be protected when the flowers are harvested as after the flower harvest the leaf canopy provides energy to the bulb to create next seasons flowers. Due to the timing and the delicacy needed it is not possible to mechanically harvest daffodil flowers.



The land we Farm

2881 acres in West Cornwall.



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Worker Profile

52 fulltime permanent employees

Seasonal Workers required based on 48 hour working week:-

December	650
January	650
February	650
March	450
April	400
May	10
June	62
July	65
August	62
September	26
October	5
November	100

Total external contractors

December	7
January	7
February	7
March	7
April	7
May	1
June	7
July	10
August	10
September	4
October	2
November	1

Your Sincerely


Farms Director

August 2021