

Don't wrap countryside in plastic

- Plans for huge sheeting on farmland
- Landowner attempts to quell fears

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OPPOSITION is growing against plans to put up polytunnels over a huge swathe of farmland across six parishes.

Hugh Lowe Farms wants to expand its soft fruit growing business.

But Lib Dem county councillor Trudy Dean, Kent Green Party and a growing number of local

residents are against the idea, claiming there could be serious implications for the countryside. Bosses at the farm, which has been run by the same family for more than 100 years, say the plans do not dramatically change what is already happening.

Marion Regan, from the farm, said: "This is an existing business and we are not proposing a massive change."

The planning application is for the placing of "agricultural polytunnels comprising steel hoops covered with clear plastic sheeting".

It states the tunnels would be rotated and that

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no more than 432 acres (33 per cent) of the land would be covered with tunnels in any one year.

Cllr Dean said she was worried about large areas of countryside disappearing under plastic.

She said: "Residents living nearby have also suffered from noise of plastic flapping in the wind, and of rain falling on the tunnels.

"I have seen the result in other counties of shreds of plastic from polytunnels turning the countryside into a rubbish tip. Planning authorities would need to be vigilant about the disposal of waste materials.

"The application from Hugh Lowe Farms so far does not address this problem."

Hazel Dawe, who chairs the Kent Green Party, claimed more needed to be done to make the application more environmentally friendly, including provision for waste storage, collection of recyclable waste and use of low reflective polythene.

She said: "While existing hedge and shelter belts are mentioned, there are no proposed additions to screening to minimise landscape impact. There is no provision in the application for large-scale collection and use of rainwater, which should be a requirement for any development of this type."

People who live in and around West Peckham have formed a group, Landscape Matters, and set up a website, www.strawberryfieldsforever.org.uk/



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frameset2 to voice their objections. Group chairman Jim Simpson said: "Primarily we object to Hugh Lowe Farms' application to covering green fields with polytunnels, an area equivalent to the size of 242 Wembley football pitches, around our beautiful village and surrounding area. This is not agriculture, it is fruit factory farming."