

Farmer puzzled by fury over polytunnel plans

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COUNTRYSIDE to the north of East Peckham could soon be covered in plastic polytunnels.

Hugh Lowe Farms wants to cover 444 acres of land, between Seven Mile Lane and the A26, in plastic to produce thousands of tonnes of strawberries each year.

It is part of a 1,315 acre proposal to cover the six parishes of East Peckham, Hadlow, Mereworth, West Peckham, Wateringbury, Hadlow and Platt.

A football pitch is two acres - meaning the area covered above East Peckham alone is the same as the turf on 222 full size grounds.

Hugh Lowe Farms says the tunnels would keep them competitive and up with demand for fresh fruit.

But they are being vigorously opposed by

parish councils, residents, the Environment Agency and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

East Peckham Parish Council chairman Peter Crawford told the Kent and Sussex Courier: "The parish council has put forward a number of objections.

"The soft fruit growers say they need these polytunnels to remain competitive but we believe the excessive use of polytunnels has quite a number of drawbacks."

The land to be covered to the north of East Peckham is leased or owned by Hugh Lowe Farms and covers Peckham Place and Court Lodge Farms.

The CPRE says the tunnels are visually detrimental, are too close to homes, and will not conserve nor enhance habitat, while the EA is worried about flooding in the area.

But Hugh Lowe Farms owner Marion Regan

said: "We've had a lot of support from people over this. We are a great source of employment to the local economy.

"A lot of people who work for us also live here, so it's their home as well.

"We are not asking for anything new. I mean, we're in the Garden of England.

"We're quite surprised this vehement opposition has sprouted up, but we are taking their views very seriously and listening to what they have to say."

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council said a decision would not be made before June.

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