

**Comment on application reference [fill in reference]**

**[name/organisation] [supports/opposes the refusal/approval of this application by X]**. The development poses an unjustifiable threat to fertile land of crucial importance for the creation of more equitable and sustainable local food systems. **[name/organisation]** cannot overstate the value of such land to our communities, our food supply, our health and our environment. The approval of such a development would set a dangerous precedent for further development **[details of area concerned]**

**The value of fertile land at [location] and beyond**

**[use this space to outline the fertile land at stake, linking the specific planning item with a wider call to defend the value of fertile peri-urban lands].**

*E.g. The proposed development would irreversibly destroy the fertility of a field of some 3 acres of fertile greensand land. The approval of the development would open the door to further developments on the 78 acre site at Sharnfold, where the erection of 400 dwellings had previously been discussed. It is thus appropriate for this comment to address not only the development in question, but also the value of Sharnfold farm as a whole, to defend the value of fertile peri-urban lands.*

1. **Local food security**

According to the [Government Food Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy) published in June 2022, the UK only produces 60% of its needs in food by value. Events of this year - notably the war in Ukraine, climate-related crop failures and the ‘cost of living crisis’ - have shed light on the ways in which fragile international food supply systems directly impact our communities. [According to a global research programme](https://shefsglobal.lshtm.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SHEFS_Fruit-and-Veg-Briefing-1-FINAL.pdf), in 2013, 32% of the UK's fruit and vegetable imports came from areas defined as "climate vulnerable", and 54% of fruit and vegetable supply came from countries likely to face high to extremely high water scarcity in the near future (2040). In order to build resilience, the government has underlined the importance of increasing domestic production, and [according to the Food Foundation Veg Facts](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/Pease-Please-Veg-Facts-2020-In-Brief-spreads-1.pdf), national fruit and veg demand could be fulfilled by converting just 0.65% of existing agricultural land to horticultural production. Peri-urban fertile land is key to this approach, creating simpler, more resilient supply chains for our towns. However, in the South East, over 3,000 (1.25%) hectares of Best/Most Versatile agricultural land has been developed since 2010, and 1.22% of the highest class (Grade 1) has been developed since 2010 ([source](https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Building-on-our-food-security.pdf)), threatening this pathway to future resilience.

**[Use this space to outline the agricultural potential or existing activity at stake and how the development threatens that production. Include historic details of land-use where relevant]**

*Sharnfold farm has a reasonably diversified agricultural activity, with various livestock and a substantial ‘pick your own’ horticultural area, contributing to the food security of the local area. However, the prospect of development on the Sharnfold site has already reduced the horticultural production of the farm at the site of development. Having produced vegetables for the local area for many years, the fields were converted to grazing following their purchase by the developer.*

A **[refusal/approval]** of this application would set a precedent to protect similar peri-urban horticultural sites and thus ensure that our fertile lands are being optimised for food security.

**2. Local food economy**

The preservation of fertile land against the threat of development is essential for supporting a thriving local economy. A [study based on Organic Lea](https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/oct22-quantify_benefits_fringe_farming/#:~:text=Converting%20just%201%25%20of%20peri%2Durban%20land%20to%20agroecological%20market,production%2C%20and%20160K%20FTE%20jobs.&text=A%20la%20OrganicLea.,area%20of%20productive%20land%20only.), a market garden in the ‘fringe’ of North East London, has shown that converting just 1% of peri-urban land to agroecological market gardening would lead to over 530K tonnes of fruit and veg (£3bn in production value) and 160K FTE jobs. Diverse agricultural activities such as those at [site] also provide economic resilience and varied employment opportunities accessible to town-dwellers as well as those living in rural environments.

**[Use this space to provide details of how the farm currently, historically or potentially contributes to the local food economy and local wealth. Useful stats:** [**a study by UWE**](https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/962807) **shows a local economic return of £3 for every £1 spent on local food; Producers involved in the local food economy employed on average 3.4 full-time workers compared to the regional average of 2.3 per farm, and employment per hectare in Community Supported Agriculture Systems is five times higher than the agricultural average (**[**source**](https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/From_field_to_fork___The_value_of_Englands_local_food_webs_interactive.pdf)**)]**

*E.g. As well as selling meat reared on-site, Sharnfold’s Farm Shop supports other local producers by providing them a market for their produce, giving them an alternative to supermarket contracts that increasingly squeeze farmer income. In a local food retail context dominated by supermarket chains, Sharnfold Farm Shop provides a rare opportunity for local residents to buy locally grown produce, which increases local wealth. Indeed,* [*a study by UWE*](https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/962807) *shows an economic return of £3 for every £1 spent on local food in the local economy. The proposed development and the precedent it sets threatens the common wealth of fertile land in the interest of the developers.*

*Furthermore, Sharnfold Farm creates opportunities for agro-tourism based on a local agricultural identity. Through activities such as ‘pick your own’, farm trails, and the café, Sharnfold Farm draws visits from the surrounding area and beyond. The development threatens the rural character of the whole site, and thus risks to undermine this aspect of the local food economy.*

**3. Local food community**

As British farmland has become increasingly industrialised, our opportunities to access working farms has diminished, along with our connection to rural activities as an increasingly urban population. **[farm]** is a rare point of access to agricultural lifestyles which are a crucial part of our local culture and heritage. **[include an example of how the site in question links to heritage/cultural connection]**

Furthermore, the health and well-being of our communities are intrinsically linked with access to healthy diets and healthy relationships to food. Our communities are suffering from the increasing disconnection with food, with 19,000 premature deaths UK-wide associated with a lack of veg in our diets according to [a Food Foundation report](https://www.foodsensewales.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/06/Peas-Please-Veg-Facts-2021.pdf). Food partnerships work to connect communities with experiences of healthy food production, striving to improve children’s access to sites which grow food and can offer this experience at a young age, so that children can grow up loving healthy food and connecting to our natural diet.

**[use this space to draw a direct link of how the site supports/could support community health, weather by natural connection or supply of fresh produce]**

*E.g. The approval of this development would pose an existential threat to the pick-your-own site and farm trails at Sharnfold which are currently doing so much to facilitate this connection with food for children.*

**4. Local food for the planet**

As you will be very aware, Wealden District, Eastbourne Borough and East Sussex County Council have issued a climate emergency. In 2019, [the global food system was responsible for 31% of greenhouse gas emissions](https://essd.copernicus.org/articles/14/1795/2022/essd-14-1795-2022-discussion.html), with a diverse range of sources of emissions inside and outside the farm gate, from food transport, to fertiliser production, to land-use conversion and more. The [National Food Strategy](https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/) highlighted that UK food-systems emissions are falling at over half the rate of the UK economy, and almost all of the reductions (-13% from 2008 to 2018) have come from energy conversion and efficiency. Furthermore, [according to a 2021 study by Chatham House](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/2021-02-03-food-system-biodiversity-loss-benton-et-al_0.pdf), 86% of at-risk species are directly threatened by agriculture. The current food system is a disaster for the planet and undermines the net zero targets at national, regional and district level.

Diversified agricultural activities such as those at **[site]** can promote healthy soils that act as a carbon sink as well as regulating water and temperature at a local level. The development would destroy these ecological functions and their associated benefits. Furthermore, developments on peri-urban farmland undermine localised supply chains, increasing food miles and their associated emissions, given that [conventional supply chains are associated with 3x the GHG emissions of a small scale box scheme](https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/6/4/1913/htm). Reliance on globalised supply chains also increases food waste at different levels of the production and, with farm-level waste due to cosmetic standards is ~7.4%, and due to supermarket overproduction demands is 10-16% according to [a study by Feedbac](https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Farm_waste_report_.pdf)k. The **[approval/refusal]** of this development would thus undermine **[planning authority]**’s climate and environmental obligations.

**In conclusion [planning authority]** has every reason to protect peri-urban fertile lands, rather than allow them to be eroded in the interest of unsustainable developments. The use of brownfield sites and innovative redevelopment ideas within existing urban areas must be the way forward. The expanded profits of a small number of developers simply cannot continue to be placed above the community, our environment, food supply, food security and public health. The development is in direct contradiction with **[person/organisation]**’s mission to make healthy, sustainably produced food available to all, and as such we object to the application.

On behalf of **[organisation]**

Contact: **[name & email]**

*This document was prepared by Nancy Wilson on behalf of Eastbourne Food Partnership, September 2023*

*This document was prepared by Nancy Wilson on behalf of Eastbourne Food Partnership*

*Please direct any questions to info@eastbournefoodpartnership.org.uk*

