

Employment and Enterprise 12 Horticulture

In West Sussex horticulture is the second largest industry after tourism and despite the recession continues to expand. The gross retail value of horticultural produce grown in West Sussex is estimated to be over £500m. It employs over 4,200 permanent employees and 7,000 seasonal workers. One of the points made in West Sussex Growers Association (WSGA) in their response to ADC Draft Local Plan was: WSGA accepts that older glasshouses can be less efficient and changes in cropping techniques can make their layouts less suitable. However, structures that may be redundant for high energy produce may remain economically viable for other crops and to regard them as 'temporary structures' detracts from the employment benefits of the considerable investment in the Horticultural Industry these sites represent.

See: *WSGA: Growing Together – Implementation Plan September 2011;*
WSGA Consultation Response On the Arun Draft Local Plan (2013-2028) dated 5th September 2012

Horticulture employs more people in the Barnham and Eastergate parishes than any other industry. It enjoyed tremendous growth and will require more land to be made available for the industry if the expansion is to continue as well as existing glasshouses to be retained. The two firms in Barnham and Eastergate parishes are Eric Walls and Fleurie Nursery. The area is part of the horticultural cluster with the other nurseries of the Farplant Co-op in Aldingbourne and Walberton.

Eric Walls Ltd

Grows tomatoes on 30 acres in Lake Lane, Barnham. Supplies Salisbury's and Waitrose. Employs 90 permanent staff (full time equivalent) and an addition 80 in summer. The firm would like to remain in the area if expands. (*Interview with Chris Walls director of Eric Walls.*)

Fleurie Nursery

They have four main sites: Yapton Road in Barnham, Barnham Road, Church Lane and Eastergate Lane in Eastergate Parish covering 70 acre – also 5 acres in Hook Lane, Aldingbourne. There are 25 full time employees and 25 seasonal (full time equivalent). The company would like to consolidate the sites into a single site with room for expansion. The over-riding priority is to get business security for the long term. Ideally the site would be as close as possible to the Farplant distribution centre in Walberton. (*Interview with Chris Tellright director of Fleurie Nursery*)

Farplants

The Farplants Group is the largest wholesale supplier of outdoor plants to Garden Centres and Garden Centre chains in the UK. The group now produces over 11 million plants a year on 70 hectares (170 acres) of mixed facilities with a retail value of over £50 million. Tremendous growth over 30 years since founded. Binstead Nursery, Fleurie Nursery, Star Plants, Toddington Nursery, Walberton Nursery make up the co-op selling pot plants. It employs 350 (full time equivalent) directly and another 150 indirectly (haulage companies etc) at the peak time which is Spring and Early summer. Over half of this number are permanent employees.

Contrary to popular belief employment in the horticulture industry is not necessarily a low wage job. Of the permanent staff only about 20% would be at or near the minimum wage (within 60p per hour). Temporary or agency staff are in this bracket. Higher salaries

are from the management, IT support, etc – plant growers need specialised skills as there are so many different plants being grown in addition they are required to supervise temporary staff and this reflects in salaries. Staff have a mandatory training programme and are encouraged to obtain further qualifications.

In the long term some or all of the nurseries would need to expand but as Farplants offices and finishing centre in Yapton Lane, Walberton so will need to be near this site. Problem of allocating land is that it needs to be accessible by road and such allocation have pushed up price to unrealistic levels. Competition for horticultural land also comes from developers hoping to build houses and from food producers who also benefit from the good light levels. One of the Farplant group had been approached by several such companies.

(Interview with Mike Tristram, director of Binstead nursery on member of Farplant Coop)

Arun District Council are quite explicit in their policy stating “Under-used or derelict glasshouses or polytunnels will not be considered suitable sites for the introduction of non-agricultural uses.”

(Policy Dev3 Horticulture)