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Plans for £150m Essex greenhouse complex submitted to local council



The 100-acre development from Rivenhall Greenhouse will be capable of producing 30,000 tonnes of tomatoes per year.

Plans for a “unique” £150m greenhouse complex in Essex have just been submitted to Essex County Council.

The 100-acre development by Rivenhall Greenhouse near Braintree will be capable of producing 30,000 tonnes of tomatoes per year, equating to circa 7.5% of current imports, or about 6% of domestic consumption. The site could also grow a combination of other vine crops including cucumbers, peppers, chillies or aubergines, which are all predominantly sourced from southern Spain and north Africa, areas increasingly on the frontline of climate change, extremes of weather and energy insecurity.

An accompanying vertical farming facility, built inside a hangar at the former RAF Rivenhall, will also produce an additional 375 tonnes of lettuce, under the developer’s proposals, or 54% of Essex’s annual consumption.

Speaking to The Grocer last week, Rivenhall Greenhouse project director Ed Moorhouse said the submission of its plans to the local authority was “a critical milestone” in the development of Rivenhall into “a leading UK and European fresh produce growing facility”.

The business had already had positive discussions with UK retailers about reshoring supply of fresh produce, Moorhouse added, citing concerns over the security of supply following last October’s devastating floods in Valencia, while last week’s Iberian power outage also demonstrated the fragility of long supply chains and the sourcing of fresh produce from southern Europe and north Africa.

“If or when those types of floods hit [key growing region] Almeria, what are the odds the EU could introduce export restrictions on its produce?” he suggested.



The sprawling Rivenhall complex is being developed alongside a separate integrated waste management facility by waste company Indaver at the former air base, which was later used as a quarry, with the latter set to provide heat, carbon dioxide and electricity to the greenhouses, to ensure that an “optimum growing environment can be maintained for the year-round production of fresh produce”.

The two companies said the collaboration represented a new operating model for the UK horticultural industry, in a move away from imported hydrocarbon dependency to a circular model utilising sustainable heat, captured CO₂ and on-site generated electricity.

“Key to the project is the ongoing collaboration with Indaver and the development of a new low-carbon horticultural energy model,” said Moorhouse. “This will set a new benchmark for UK horticulture, delivering a blueprint for the accelerated reshoring of UK fresh produce production.

“We look forward to working with Essex County Council in the coming weeks and furthermore to delivering our plans to create local green jobs, whilst reinforcing UK food security and resilience in an increasingly uncertain world.”

Indaver has recently submitted planning permission for a carbon capture usage and storage facility to supply the greenhouses with circa 20,000 tonnes of recycled clean CO₂ per year.

“We believe our project represents a forward-thinking approach to energy efficiency and sustainability and it represents a significant step in our commitment to reducing carbon emissions and supporting the transition to the circular economy.”

Micheál Geary, Indaver’s Commercial and Business Development Director

The new site will also provide approximately 420 full-time roles once the greenhouses are fully operational, with an expected 80 additional seasonal staff and over 300 indirect jobs within the wider supply chain.

The development also includes a biodiversity net gain strategy that will deliver wetlands, flower meadows and tree planting, alongside additional footpaths and bridleways.

Pending due planning process, financing and construction, the site could be operational by 2027, the companies said.