

## Planning Officer's Report - LDCA December 2019

<b>APPLICATION</b>	<b>2019/52</b> – Proposed coffee picker Eco-Lodges, water storage ponds, container storage shelter & pump house for Hunt's Vale Coffee Estate Development.
<b>PERMISSION SOUGHT</b>	Permission in <b>Full</b>
<b>REGISTERED</b>	15 July 2019
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Axel Oberem
<b>PARCEL</b>	FP0117, AF0349 & AF0350
<b>SIZE</b>	25.9 Acres (104843m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>LAND OWNER</b>	Axel Oberem
<b>LOCALITY</b>	Hunts Vale, Gordon's Post, Alarm Forest
<b>ZONE</b>	Green Heartland
<b>CONSERVATION AREA</b>	None
<b>CURRENT USE</b>	Vacant Private Land (a residential house exist on the land)
<b>PUBLICITY</b>	The application was advertised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Independent Newspaper on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2019</li><li>▪ A site notice displayed in accordance with Regulations.</li></ul>
<b>EXPIRY</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2019
<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>	Objection received from a member of the public
<b>DECISION ROUTE</b>	<del>Delegated</del> / LDCA / EXCO

### A. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

1. Water Division	No Objection
2. Sewage Division	No Objection
3. Energy Division	No Objection
4. Fire & Rescue	No Response
5. Roads Section	No Objection
6. Property Division	No Response
7. Environmental Management	No Response

Report Author: P. Scipio

Report Authorised by I. Mohammed (CPO)

Report Date: 04 December 2019

Application: 2019/52

8. Public Health	No Response
9. Agriculture & Natural Resources	No Response
10. St Helena Police Services	No Objection
11. Aerodrome Safe Guarding	No Response
12. Enterprise St Helena (ESH)	No Objection
13. National Trust	No Response

## B. DEVELOPMENT DETAILS SUMMARY

The proposed development forms part of an ECO- friendly Coffee Farm within the Green Heartland on the property known as Hunt's Vale. The proposal seeks to develop Hunt's Vale into a coffee estate with all the amenities needed for a successful business to help enhance St. Helena's coffee and tourism industry. Special care and effort has been made to ensure that the whole development is as ECO- friendly as possible and contributing towards a zero carbon emission setup.

The development will include two coffee picker ECO lodges, one containerised processing and storage facility, two water storage ponds and a pump house. Building Footprint of the proposed development is as follows:

Eco Lodge 1	:	344m <sup>2</sup>
Eco Lodge 2	:	276m <sup>2</sup>
Pump House	:	10.7m <sup>2</sup>
Container storage shelter	:	208m <sup>2</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>	:	<b>838.7m<sup>2</sup></b>
Plot Coverage	:	0.8%

## C. PLANNING OFFICER'S APPRAISAL

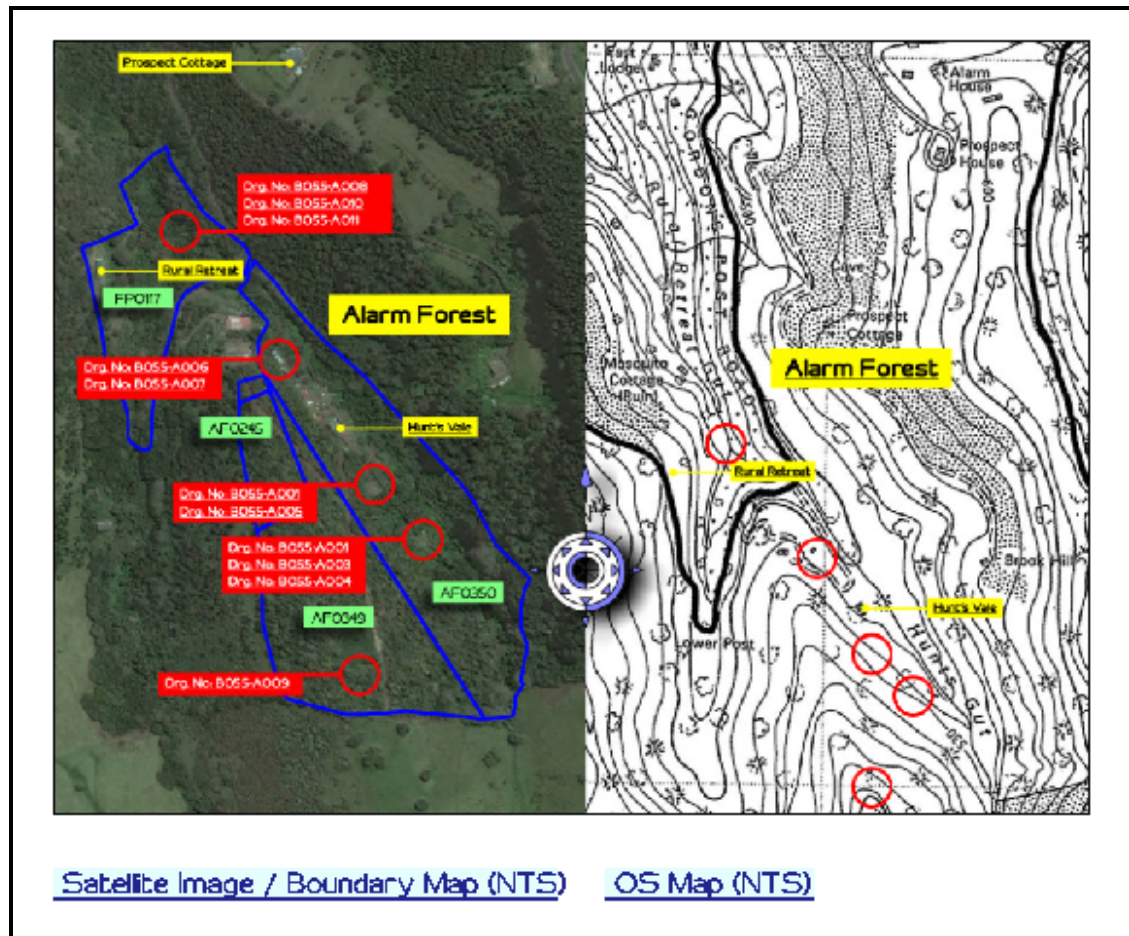
### LOCATION & ZONING

The site is located in the Francis Plain and Alarm Forest registration section. It is within the property known as Hunt's Vale and Rural Retreat. The boundary which makes up the property at Hunt's Vale and Rural Retreat consists of four parcels, FP0117, AF0245, AF0349 and AF0350. In total, this equates to 26.84 acres (108,618m<sup>2</sup>). In respect of this application, 1.26 acres will be developable land, and 25.58 acres will be undevelopable with as much as possible used to grow coffee.

**Zone Restrictions:** The proposed Hunt's Vale Coffee Estate is situated in the Green Heartland Zone with restrictions on built development in general, controlled extensions to existing buildings and other forms of development which do not involve built structures which will be judged on individual merit with the aim of preserving the Green heartland. Due to the nature of the proposal, the site will encompass commercial agriculture with water storage facilities, tourism related development and

employment opportunities, and therefore much of the Land Development Control Plan (LDCP) Policies will apply.

Diagram 1: Location Plan for Entire Development



**Site:** The layout of the entire proposal is largely dictated by the natural topography of the Hunt's Vale Estate.

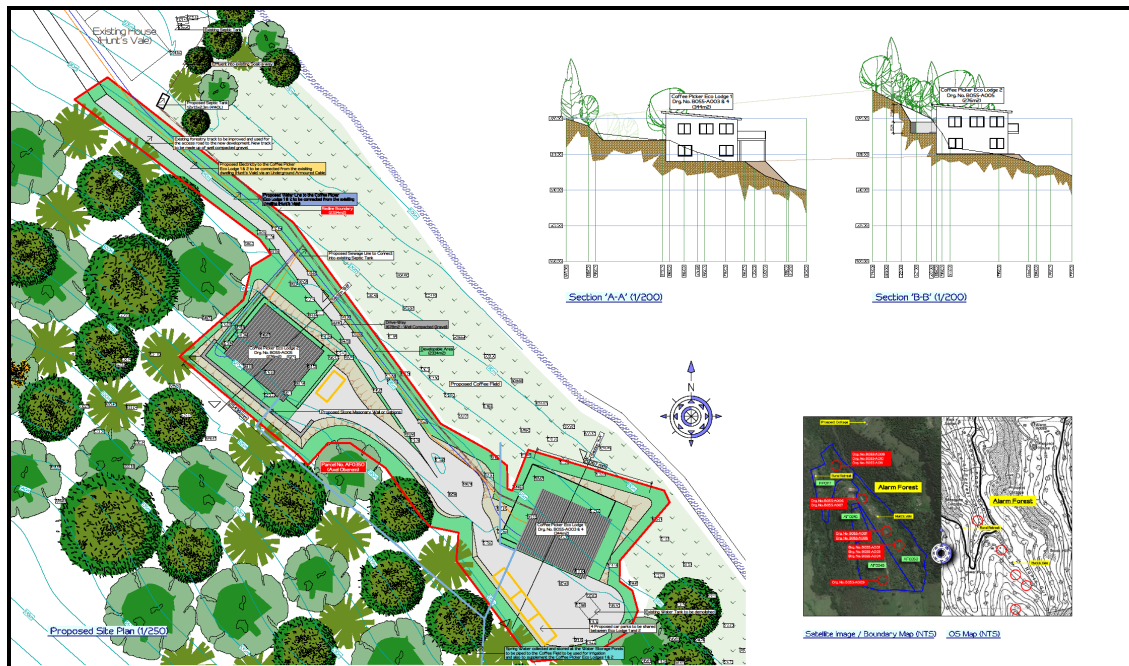
The proposed development has been designed to ensure that; as fewer trees as possible would be removed or affected, existing Scrub be cleared and the proposed development would be situated with considerable care for the land in order to concealed it within setting and avoid visual intrusion within the National Park and from the surrounding areas. This complies with LDCP Green Heartland policy: *"Tourism-related development within established forest areas in the form of Eco-lodges that will, as an element of the development proposal, remain forested sufficient to conceal the development from any viewpoint within the Diana's Peak National Park or visible in any view towards the National Park from a public road or public place."* [Policy **GH.2, (b)**].

**ECO Lodges:** The position of the Coffee Picker ECO Lodges are situated to best utilise the existing slope of the land to minimise excavation and site works. Their positions are ecologically important to the development and are ideally positioned on site. Additional growth will be encouraged around the sites where any excavation is

proposed, particularly around ECO Lodges 1 and 2. However, most of the land will be covered by coffee trees.

The proposed regrading and resurfacing of the existing forest track to the ECO Lodges will be finished with a well compacted stone base to provide a more natural look and provide suitable drainage of surface water. This also creates a “safe pedestrian and vehicular access”, which complies with the LDCA **Roads and Transport Policy: RT.1 (d)**.

**Diagram 2: Site Plan (ECO-Lodges 1 & 2)**



**Pump House & Water Storage Ponds 1 & 2:** The Pump House position on site is as close as possible to the water storage pond in which it will draw its water feed. This area is in the valley (Rural Retreat Gut) downstream of the Hunt’s Vale Natural Spring, which is located near the southernmost point of the Estate. The Pump House site is completely surrounded by trees and vegetation which will do well to conceal the small structure.

The second water storage pond (Site 2) will be situated at the Southern side of Hunt’s Vale Estate, which also will be surrounded by trees and vegetation. This is the ideal site for the pond to distribute the collected spring water throughout the Estate, considering that at this stage the spring water is not efficiently been utilised. Currently the water comes out of the ground and drains back seeping through underneath the main road and creates a swamp in Rural Retreat Gut.

The proposed pond locations on site creates the best position for harvesting and storing of the now wasted water.

There are no other developments downstream of the spring. Below the Hunt’s Vale Estate is Rural Retreat Gut, and then the Briar’s Gut. There are no dwellings or catchments in this area. Thus this proposal complies with the LDCA **Policy W.3:**



“Where a private water supply is proposed using a borehole, development permission will be granted only where it can be demonstrated that it will not prejudice supplies to other development in the area”.

The water from this natural spring and subsequent storage ponds will be piped below ground to supply the coffee farm as well as other landscaping areas within the development site thus alleviating swamp areas due to free flowing streams.

Diagram 3: Site Plan (Pump House)

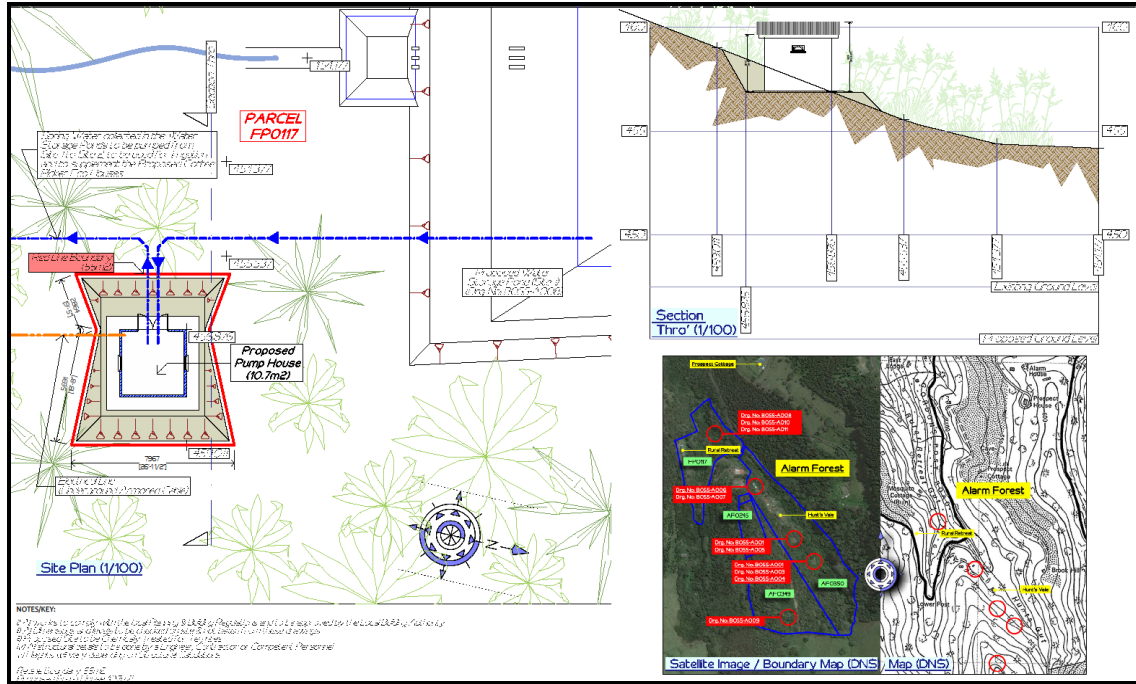
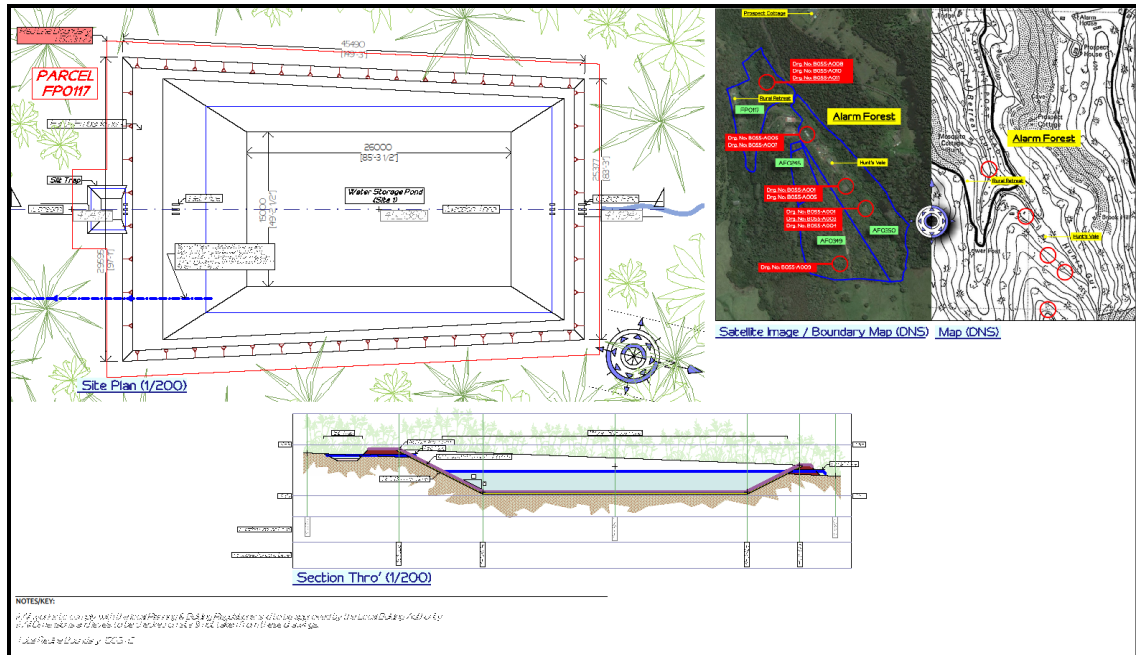
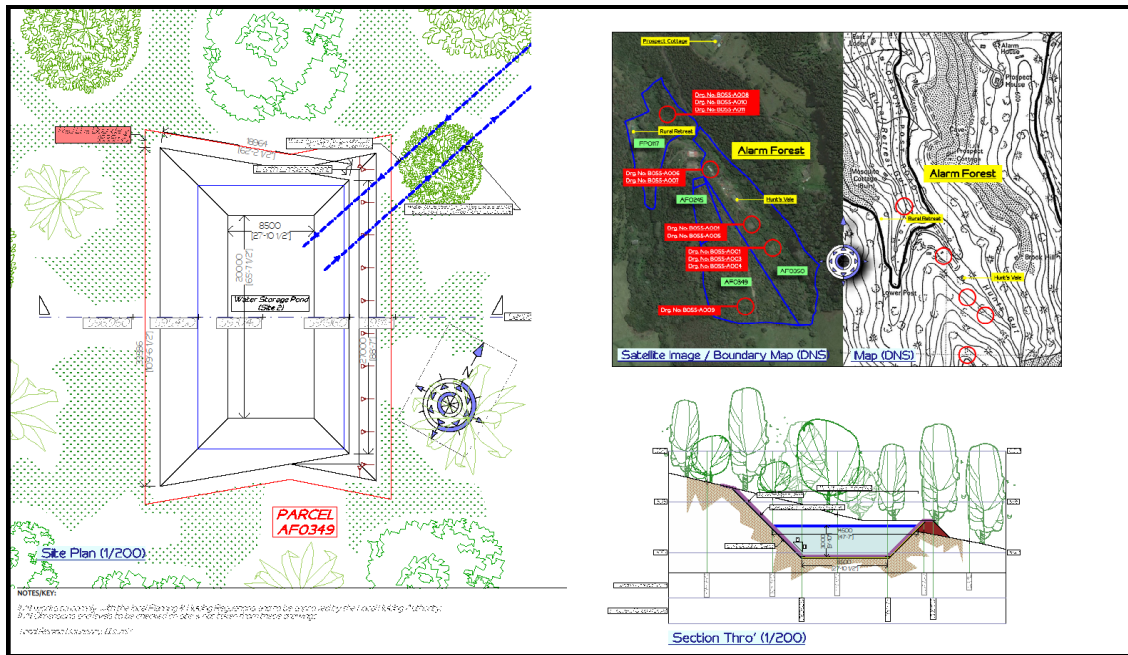


Diagram 4: Plan (Water storage pond 1)



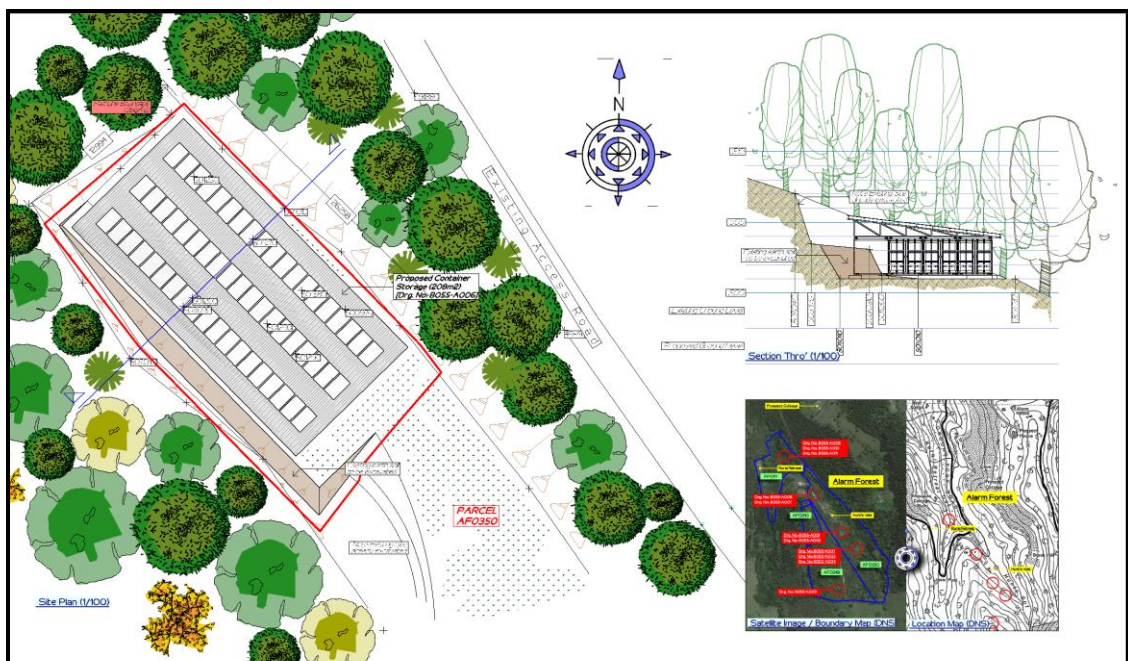
**Diagram 5: Plan (Water storage pond 2)**



**Container Storage Shelter:** The position of the Container Storage Shelter on site best utilize the land that had already been excavated some years earlier by the previous owner. This site is enclosed by trees on three sides and thus creates an area of concealment thus complying with the LDCP **Policy: GH.2(b)**.

A suitable access already exists to this site and minimal site works are therefore required. The scale of the buildings and the location in relation to the Coffee Farm are ideally suited.

**Diagram 6: Site Plan (Container storage shelter)**



There is an existing established private access road on site which is connected to the main highway. This 180 meter section of road ends at Hunt's Vale Cottage. An existing 178 meter section of forestry track runs from the cottage to the site of the proposed ECO Lodges which will be upgraded. A further short 26 meter section will be the only new road to be constructed. This new road will allow access to Coffee Picker ECO Lodge 2. The upgraded and proposed road will vary in size (width) from 2 - 2.5 meters. Appropriate turning bays will also be included.

Parking is shared between ECO Lodge 1 and 2. There will be a minimum of four parking spaces available, complying with LDCP **Policy: RT.7**.

It is proposed that Black Solar LED Outdoor Post lights will border the full access road to the ECO Lodges. These will be spaced at approximately 15 – 20 meter intervals. There will also be a signage of a traditional design. They will have an automatic dusk to dawn operation. Each solar LED bulb will have an output of approximately 80 lumen of light. The proposed lights will meet with the Dark Skies requirements.

**PROPOSED** The Proposed Entire Development will become part of an ECO-Friendly Coffee Farm, with an endeavour that all structures be part of a Zero Carbon Emission Energy Management Plan. Where possible, the development will focus on sustainable energy; mainly solar.

Presently about 3500 coffee seedlings have been cultured, 10,000 are proposed to be transplanted. This level of proposed agricultural development creates a viable and profitable business with a specialist export market and subsequently generates employment and increased revenue for St. Helena, thus complying with the LDCP Green Heartland and Agriculture & Forestry Policies that promotes commercial agriculture in the Green Heartland. This also accords with the Government's Economic Development Strategy.

**ECO LODGE 1 & 2:** The Coffee Picker ECO Lodge buildings will be two story, three bedroom accommodation units.

Lodge 1 measuring 16 x 14 meters including the deck will become part of a phase one development. Lodge 2 measuring 13.5 x 11.5 meters including the deck will be completed in phase two. The roofs will be of a Mono-Pitch design which will face northward to allow the roof mounted Photovoltaic system to work most efficiently. The height of the building at the rear will be 3.6 meters and 5.8 meters in the front.

The Lodges are designed to be sensitive to its location. Although the building designs and locations focus on their solar roof efficiency, the chosen locations are hidden away from public roads. In addition they blend with the surrounding forest and will also blend with the future planted coffee trees.

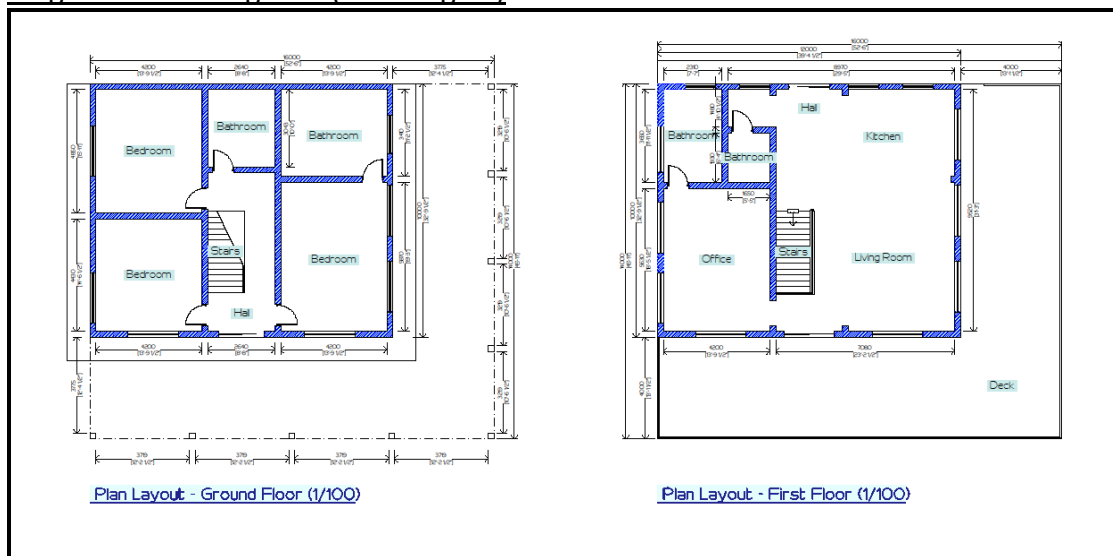
The lodges are designed to be as energy efficient as possible, with renewable energy from their roofs, water supply harvested from the spring, large double glazed windows

for the maximum amount of natural light and wall blocks which are entertaining the most modern requirements on thermal and damp proof. The primary building material, the LIAPLAN Blocks are manufactured from Lias Clay which gives the Blocks its energy saving properties.

The LIAPLAN Block building material will be of the highest standards, using virtually no cement and are non-water absorbent, which makes it possible to build permanent structures in probably the dampest area of the island. Although being non water absorbent, the building blocks have the density of construction timber and therefore doesn't leave any larger carbon footprint.

The sewage from the proposed ECO Lodges will be connected to a new septic tank and soak-a-way system, design and specification to be approved by the Chief Planning Officer.

**Diagram 7: Building Plan (Eco Lodge 1)**



**Diagram 8: Elevations (Eco Lodge 1)**



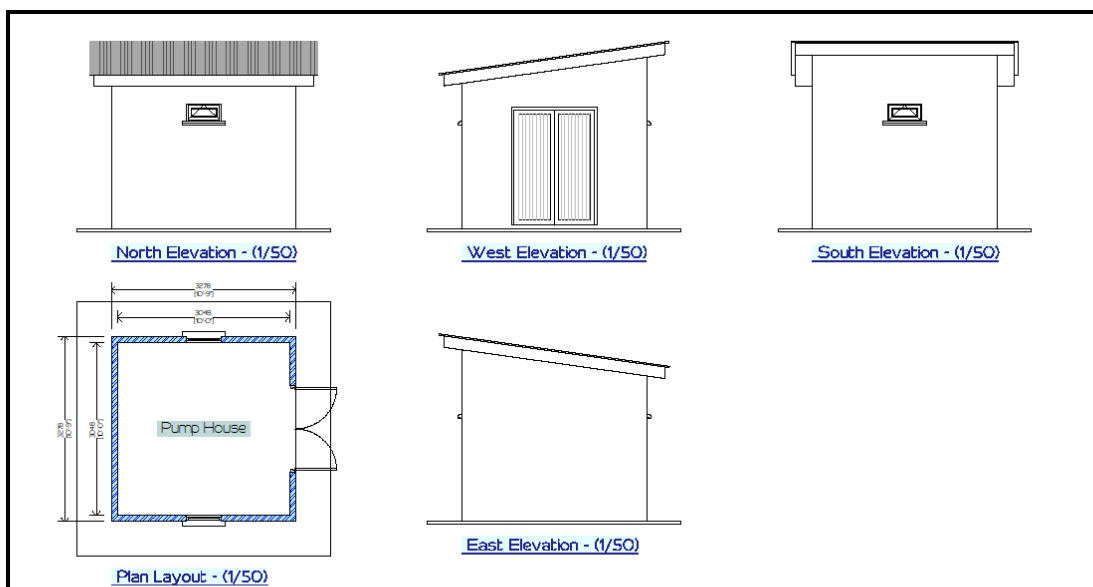


**Diagram 9: Building Plan & Elevations (Eco Lodge 2)**



**PUMP HOUSE:** The proposed Pump House will be a small building, measuring 3.3 x 3.3 meters with a north facing mono-pitched roof. Height: 3.4 meters at the rear and 2.8 meters at the front. This building will provide protection for the water turbine (pump) which will be used to pump the stored water from the lower water storage pond to the upper pond. Power to the Pump House will come via an underground armoured cable, which will be connected to the electricity supply at Hunt’s Vale. Permission to cross the public road has been granted by the Roads Manager of the Infrastructure & Transport Directorate.

**Diagram 10: Building Plan & Elevations (Pump House)**



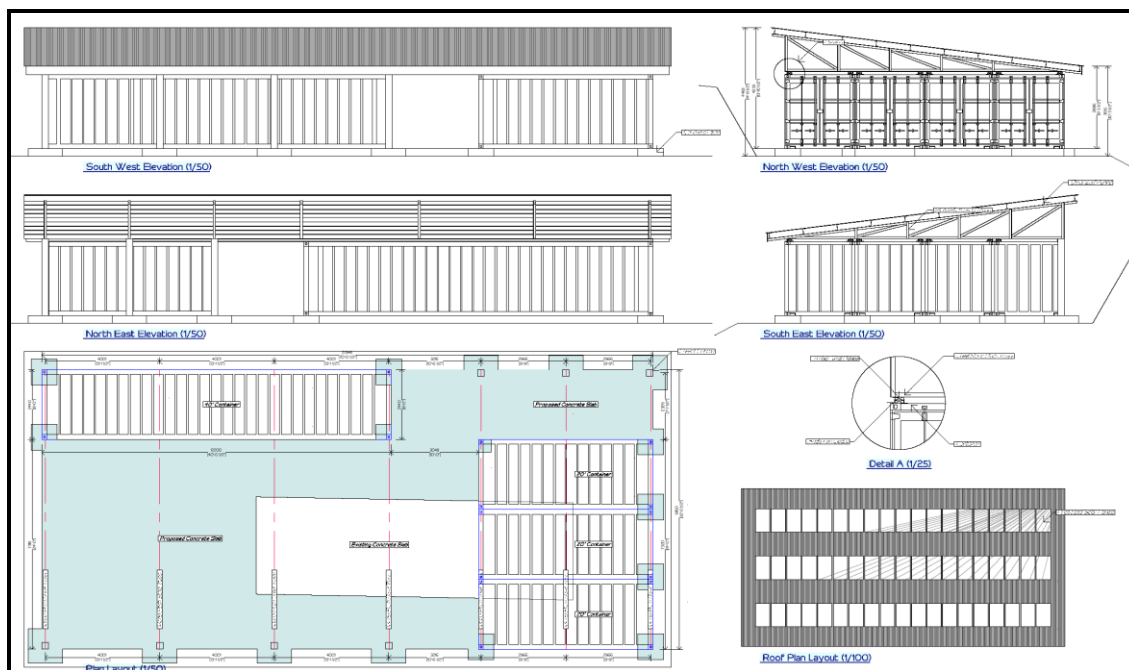
**CONTAINER STORAGE SHELTER:** The proposed Containerized Storage and Processing Shelter will be a Phase 1 development. This structure will consist of three 20 foot containers, and one 40 foot container. All containers will be Grey in colour, to comply with the Ordinance for Containers on St. Helena on an industrial site.

The containers will be protected by a steel framework shelter. This building will also have a Mono-Pitched roof which will contain a PhotoVoltaic setup to assist with the generating of energy for the Estate. The footprint of the building is 21.3 x 9.7 meters. The height will be 4.5 meters at the North East Elevation and 3.1 meters on the South West Elevation. The proposed roof covered workspace is imperative to the successful operation of the day to day coffee production under dry conditions.

The shelter is enclosed by trees on three sides and thus creates an area of concealment for the containers and the steel structure, thus complying with the LDCP **Policy: GH.2(b)**.

The containers are required to keep the produce and equipment air tight, free from vermin or contamination. The rest of the covered workspace is for every day production and work on farming and coffee appliances, thus complying with the LDCP **Policy AF.3:** “Development permission will be granted for agricultural buildings in the Green Heartland subject to **policy GH.4**” and “All such development shall be sustainably serviced including measures to avoid pollution and to conserve water and energy”

**Diagram 11: Building Plan & Elevations (Container Storage Shelter)**

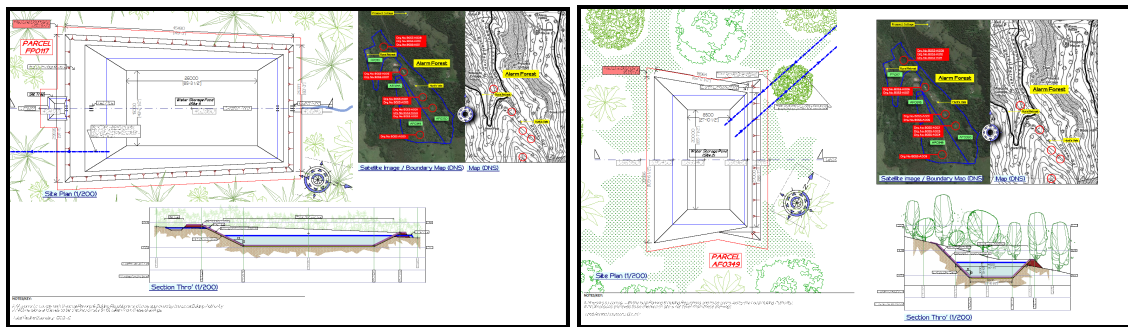


**WATER STORAGE POND 1 & 2:** The proposed two water storage ponds will be created to allow for the collection and storage of rainwater and groundwater from the onsite spring. The two storage ponds are located at the lowest and highest point of the

development. The pond at Site 1, measures approximately 45.5 x 29.5 meters, is situated at the lower side of the Hunt's Vale Estate, 452 meters above sea level. The second pond at Site 2 measures approximately 33.4 x 19 meters is near the highest point of the Estate at 595 meters above sea level.

The chosen location of the water storage ponds will ensure that they blend in with the natural surroundings, being surrounded by the existing forest and marsh. The proposed water storage pond development complies with the LDCP Water Supplies Policies: **W1.(a) & W.3.**

Diagram 12 & 13: (Water storage ponds 1 & 2)



## REPRESENTATIONS

An Objection to this proposed development was received from Andrew Pearce on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2019, stating that the current proposal leaves many questions unanswered and should not be permitted as it stands. The objector listed the following concerns:

- Insufficient information, requests overall site plan showing entire development,
- The container storage shelter exceeds 50m<sup>2</sup> and the 2m height limit as per Green Heartland Policies.
- If the Eco-Lodges are to be used for accommodation for coffee pickers then it doesn't comply with the LDCP policy that states an Eco-Lodge must be solely for tourist use with a max of six month individual occupancy.
- The proposal does not indicate how the development will be hidden from view and designed to fit in the landscape.
- Concerns over the visibility of the solar panels.
- Concerns over the Eco-Lodge designs.

## OFFICERS COMMENTS

There are individual site plans for each element of the proposed development, however, each site plan can be assessed in conjunction with each other and reference to the location plan. It is possible to assess and visualise the entire site with all its different developments.

The container storage shelter sits below the 550m contour line and thus complies with LDCP Policy GH.4. The applicant has confirmed that the Eco-Lodges will be used solely and continuously for tourist use and that additional accommodation will be sort for coffee pickers during the picking season.

It is clear with details provided that considerable effort has been made to position the different structures among the trees and make best use of the topography to ensure concealment, see image below. It is inevitable that given the nature of the development and the topography of the area that it would not be possible to make the development totally invisible at 360 degrees.

Diagram 14: Drone Image development area



The concealment of the proposed development in amongst the trees will only allow sightings from directly above which is essential for solar panels to perform and operate at their optimum. The solar panels are not considered to be intrusive or unsightly. The proposed development makes the best use of the existing land with the minimum of excavation and to create the maximum roof surface for the solar panel system. The basic design and features for such building raises no design issues.

## **LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The relevant policies of the Land Development Control Plan (LDCP 2012 - 2022) that are applicable in the assessment of the proposed development are set out below and



have also been in the context of the report in the assessment of the various elements of the development.:

### **The Green Heartland**

- Natural ecology and tourism-related development... GH.2 (a & b)
- Form, scale, proportion and external materials follows traditional buildings and construction methods of the area, and no change to existing ground levels of 3m or more... GH.3 (a, b & c)
- Development related to commercial agriculture... GH.4 (a)
- Development concealed or blend into the landscape... GH.5
- Protecting and promoting established footpaths... GH.6

### **Agriculture and Forestry**

- Expansion of agricultural production... AF.1

### **Employment Premises**

- Business premises sufficient to meet the development needs of the island... EP.1

### **Tourism**

- Development to enable and encourage sustainable tourism... sufficient to drive the economic development of the island... T.1 & T.2

### **Water Supplies**

- Construction of storage facilities... W.1 & W.2

### **Sewerage and Storm Drainage**

- Septic tank construction... SD.4

## **OFFICER'S ASSESSMENT**

The proposal seeks to develop Hunt's Vale into a Coffee Estate with all the amenities needed for an agricultural business venture to promote and establish the Island's Coffee and Tourism Industry. The proposed development makes best use of the land and its topography to keep excavation to a minimum. The development also pays considerable care and attention to the location and individual sites to ensure there is minimal tree removal and to the use of existing trees and vegetation to conceal the development required for the operation of the coffee estate.

Special care has been taken and effort made to ensure that the whole development is as Eco-Friendly as possible and the development "a Zero Carbon Emission". The recycling of the spring water on site ensures that the Coffee Estate does not put additional load on St Helena's domestic water resources for irrigation.

With the use of PhotoVoltaic panels, solar energy will drive the water pumps on site and other appliances used in the coffee processing plant. Excess stored energy will be converted into electricity, e.g. for lights at night or charging of electric vehicles and appliances, resulting in minimal use of the domestic Electricity supply.

With the economic and environment vision that the Island has and with the potential to develop and grow a sustainable economy, it is imperative that developments such as this be supported. Whilst this development involves built structures in the Green Heartland, the carefully balanced approach to the development has ensured that it meets with LDCP Policies as highlighted throughout this report.

Development of the Island is paramount if it is to meet its primary objective of becoming economically independent and therefore development proposals such as these can deliver significant benefits and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity that the wider Island community can also benefit from.