



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 March 2025

by **B Plenty BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/M2840/W/24/3348739

79 Ecton Lane, Sywell, Northampton NN6 0BA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr David Bletsoe - Brown against the decision of North Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref is NW/24/00145/FUL.
 - The development proposed is a single storey storage building.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for a single storey storage building at 79 Ecton Lane, Northampton NN6 0BA in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref NW/24/00145/FUL, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area,
 - The effect of the proposed development on highway safety, with particular regard to the access and the capacity of the local road network, and
 - The effect of the proposal on archaeological interests.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site is part of a large residential estate consisting of a main house and several subsidiary buildings, accommodating a range of ancillary uses. These subsidiary buildings are loosely clustered together, to the front and side of the main dwelling. The estate includes a woodland of around 24 hectares. It is bound by mature trees and hedge planting to most boundaries, and located adjacent to, but outside the settlement boundary of Sywell. The appeal site consists of a parcel of land beyond the existing warehouse within an open area of land, adjacent to a paddock and the woodland. The site, being currently undeveloped, makes a positive contribution to its countryside setting.
4. The appellant's Forestry Report¹ explains that the woodland is stocked with predominantly broad-leaved trees, with a generally uniform age of 80-100 years.

¹ Forestry Report, by Nicholson's, July 2024

The report explains that parts of the woodland show signs of disease in the form of ash die back and sooty bark disease on the sycamore trees. Nonetheless, most trees are deemed to be in good condition with healthy well-formed canopies. The tree management undertaken within the woodland is reported to consist of the clearance and removal of trees that have either failed due to wind-blow or have died. It is stated that the appellant clears around 80-100 cubic metres of fallen wood per annum which amounts to about 1% of the current number of standing trees.

5. It is then explained that the material harvested is predominantly used as fuel for the main house, holiday lets and hot tubs, with additional logs being sold to the public through the appellant's premises in Kettering. The Report lists a range of vehicles and equipment that the appellant seeks to secure within the building, I noted these during my visit which were being stored outdoors. The report also explains that in terms of future sustainable tree management, there is a desire to undertake more extensive silvicultural interventions requiring formal felling with the consent of the Forestry Commission. The appellant is developing a Woodland Management Plan for submission to the Forestry Commission, on this basis. The proposed building would be used for the storage of vehicles and equipment and to provide space for the drying of converted firewood product in relation to these activities. It would also provide covered conditions for the processing of wood in winter months.
6. The proposed building would be significantly longer than the existing warehouse but would appear to otherwise be similar to its width and general height. Despite its size, the building would not be especially overt from wide views, being recessed from the highway and largely screened by existing boundary planting and other buildings. It would be evident in some private views from first-floor windows of houses along Ecton Lane, but these would be distant and with the main woodland forming a backdrop. As such, whilst large, when considered within the context of the extensive site and the existing subsidiary buildings to the main dwelling, the scale of the proposed building would not appear out of character with the existing context of built form.
7. The residential character of the estate is partly informed by its overall size, including substantial areas of associated fields and woodland areas, that contribute to its overall character. When considering the amount of existing buildings, the scale of the main house and the overall size of the estate it presents an atypical residential character. In addition, the appellant's active management of this large woodland creates the requirement for equipment, machinery and storage that further emphasises the atypical character of the site. Also, it has been demonstrated that there is a clear need to store this equipment within a secure, weatherproof space.
8. Therefore, I find that the management and maintenance of the woodland creates a need for substantial equipment and vehicles, that should reasonably be stored within a secure facility. Therefore, despite the large scale of the proposed building it would be proportionate to the management of the woodlands and the resultant storage needs and the residential character of the site, having a limited commercial component. As such, the atypical character of the estate, which would remain predominantly residential in character, would be retained.

9. Accordingly, the proposed building would not materially erode the residential character of the site within this countryside setting. As such, the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, the proposal would comply with policies 8(d)(i) and (ii), 11(2)(d) and 25(1) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy [2016] (CS) with respect to matters of character and appearance. These seek, among other matters, for development to respond to a site's immediate and wider context and its local character and for the council to support sustainable opportunities that seek to develop and diversify the rural economy.

Highway issues

10. Ecton Lane is a residential road with a 30mph speed restriction within a village setting. The lane has occasional streetlights and a narrow footpath on the side opposite to the appeal site. The residential estate, that the appeal site is within, has two access points onto the lane, consisting of a main access and a secondary access. Views for emerging vehicles, in both directions, are generally clear and unobstructed from both access points.
11. The proposed development seeks to use the main access. The appellant asserts that the proposal would not create any additional vehicle movements above and beyond those already created by the general management of the site. It is noted that the management works to the trees would continue to need to take place with or without the proposed building. On this basis the appellant states that vehicle movements associated with the use would take place in either event. Furthermore, the appellant states that less wood would be transported off-site, to be kiln dried, as it is anticipated that this will be able to take place on site. This would reduce the overall vehicle movements associated with the activity. I am therefore unconvinced that the additional building, proposed to be used in connection with an existing activity, would materially increase vehicular movements on and off site, or generate a need for a Transport Assessment.
12. The residential estate accommodates a range of ancillary uses, including holiday lets and the logging activity, that would lead to a range of different types of vehicles using the access. Based on the limited scale of each individual activity, and without the benefit of contradictory evidence, it seems that the access can readily accommodate the different types of traffic movements described by the appellant without causing conflict in the highway. For a similar reason, it is unlikely that the proposed building would increase traffic within the highway to an extent that would affect the capacity of the highway network as it would be used to store only wood and existing machinery. Moreover, a condition could be applied to ensure that the building is only used in a manner that would be for incidental storage purposes in association with the existing dwelling.
13. The application indicates that some large vehicles will be required to enter the site to collect dried wood for sale off-site. However, such movements could be undertaken from the main access without causing undue disturbance in the highway and would be likely to be infrequent based on the details within the submitted evidence.
14. Accordingly, in consideration of the submitted evidence, there is no clear reason that a transport assessment would be necessary to consider the highway effects of the proposal. Furthermore, the proposal would not result in material harm to

highway safety or have an adverse impact on the highway network capacity. As a result, the proposal would comply with CS policies 8(b)(i) and (ii) and the National Planning Policy Framework, with regard to highway safety. These seek, *inter alia*, for the Council to resist development that would prejudice highway safety and to only refuse development that would create an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

Archaeology

15. The proposed building would be sited on an area of open undeveloped ground. The Council identifies that the site shows evidence of cropmarks adjacent to the western boundary of the site and has sought the proposal's foundation design to determine the impact of sub-surface works. The appellant advises that the previous use of these within the site comprised of silica sand mining and the stripping of top-soil for the nearby menage. However, I understand that the development impacts would be limited to piling, similar to the approved works undertaken for the recently approved adjacent warehouse building.
16. Following consultation from the appellant on those terms, the district archaeologist replied² that the need for further archaeological assessment would be disproportionate to the potential risk to archaeological remains. Consequently, the archaeologist has concluded that no archaeological submission would be required. Taking this evidence into account, the risk to disturbance to archaeological remains would be limited and there is no compelling reason to require any further archaeological assessment of the site.
17. As a result, the proposal would not have an adverse impact on archaeological remains. Accordingly, the proposal would accord with CS policy 2(d) which requires proposals to demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of the impact of development on heritage assets.

Other Matters

18. Interested parties have raised concerns as to the environmental effects caused by the use of the proposed kiln on local residents and animals. A kiln is proposed to be installed in the proposed building to aid the wood drying process. The Council's Environmental Protection officer was consulted on the proposal and has raised no objection subject to a ground contamination condition. Any proposed burning of material on site would need to comply with environmental legislation and any local air quality requirements. As such, matters of air pollution would be suitably controlled by other legislation.
19. It has also been raised that the type of log store proposed is not needed and a different design would be just as effective. The concerned comment states that Government advice recommends that some rainwater encountering wood for home fires would not be an issue. Whilst these points are recognised, these considerations would not offer the security, and do not preclude an alternative wood storage solution, as sought by the appellant.

Conditions

20. I have considered the use of conditions in line with the guidance set out in the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and I shall take the Council's

² North Northamptonshire Council Archaeologist, 3 July 2024.

suggested conditions into consideration. I have imposed the standard conditions with respect to timeframe and approved plans as advised by the PPG for clarity and certainty [conditions 1 and 2]. A condition is necessary with respect to the provision of materials in the interests of the character and appearance of the area [3]. Furthermore, it is necessary to require the building to remain incidental to the use of the dwelling to maintain the residential character of the site [4] and to ensure unexpected contamination is properly managed to protect the living conditions of future occupiers of the site [5].

Conclusion

21. The proposal would accord with the development plan, when taken as a whole, and there are no material considerations that indicate the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. As such, the appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted subject to the attached conditions.

B Plenty

INSPECTOR

Schedule of conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing no's Drawing number 24014-AD-OS Rev A - Site Location Plan and Drawing number 24014-AD-01-00 - Proposed Plans.
- 3) Prior to their first use on site samples of the external materials, to be used in the construction of the development, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details or such other materials that have been submitted and approved.
- 4) The single storey storage building- hereby approved shall be used only for incidental storage purposes in association with the existing dwelling known as 79 Ecton Lane, Sywell NN6 OBA and for purposes ancillary to the enjoyment of that dwelling. It shall not be used as a separate unit and no separate curtilage shall be created. It shall not be let, sold or otherwise occupied separately from the main dwelling.
- 5) If, during development, contamination not previously identified is found to be present at the site then no further development (unless otherwise agreed in writing with the LPA) shall be carried out until a remediation strategy detailing how this contamination will be dealt with has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The remediation strategy shall be implemented as approved.

End of conditions