



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 June 2025

by **D Wilson BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/24/3356388

Fishers Farm, Coldridge Copse, Shefford Woodlands, Hungerford RG17 7BP

- 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 Rooksnest Estate Limited against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/01731/FUL.
 - The development proposed is change of use of site from agriculture to B8 open storage including low aggregate storage clamps and the installation of portable building within existing building for office/staff welfare facilities.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site would be an appropriate location for the proposal having regard to the Councils development plan Policies and access by sustainable means of transport, and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Whether the appeal site would be an appropriate location

3. The appeal site is located within the open countryside where Policy ADPP1 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document Adopted July 2012 West Berkshire Local Plan (CS) is the overarching spatial strategy and states that only appropriate limited development in the countryside will be allowed, focused on addressing identified needs and maintaining a strong rural economy.
4. Policy CS9 of the CS concerns employment and the economy and amongst other things, seeks to retain a portfolio of sites for B8 uses in suitable locations. It states that proposals for industry, distribution and storage uses will be directed to the District's defined Protected Employment Areas, and existing suitably located employment sites and premises.

5. Any proposals for such uses outside these areas/locations will be assessed against a set criterion. Compatibility with uses in the area surrounding the proposal and potential impacts on those uses; and capacity and impact on the road network and access by sustainable modes of transport.
6. The appeal site is adjoined to an existing commercial use and the Council therefore accept that the proposal would be compatible with this use and as such, this criterion is met. However, the appeal site is located in an area where there are no footways, no access to a bus stop within a reasonable walking distance and due to the A338 being unlit and subject to a 50mph speed limit it would not be suitable for cycling. As such, access to and from the site would be reliant on the use of a private motor vehicle and the second criterion is therefore not met.
7. For the same reasons the proposal would be contrary to Policy CS13 of the CS which requires that development that generates transport impact will be required to improve and promote opportunities improve travel choice and facilitate sustainable travel particularly within, between and to main urban areas and rural service centres
8. I acknowledge the distance from the appeal site to Great Shefford, motorway junction and the existing premises under the appellant's control. I also note that the proposed use is unlikely to be located within a settlement or close to neighbouring properties. However, staff and customers would be totally reliant on the use of a private car to access the site which is against the aims of the Policies mentioned.
9. Policy CS10 of the CS concerns the rural economy and encourages proposals to diversify the rural economy. Proposals seeking the loss of such existing sites and premises must demonstrate that the proposal does not negatively impact upon the local economy, and the vitality and viability of the surrounding rural area. Proposals for appropriate farm diversification will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will make a long-term contribution to sustaining the agricultural enterprise as a whole.
10. The proposal would assist in the viability of the existing farm enterprise through diversification. The local rural economy would also be supported and more jobs would be created. However, limited information has been provided to demonstrate that the viability of the farm enterprise would be supported in the long-term nor the benefits to the local business that would occupy the site. For these reasons, Policy CS10 of the CS is not complied with in full.
11. I therefore conclude that the appeal site would not be an appropriate location for the proposed development. It would be contrary to Policies ADPP1, CS9, CS10 and CS13 of the CS. Amongst other things, these seek to ensure that proposals address identified needs and maintain a strong rural economy.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site is a large parcel of land with a steel framed agricultural building within the centre of the site. The appeal site is currently redundant, but its lawful use is for agricultural storage. The site is located next to an existing commercial business; however, the wider area is distinctly open and mostly consists of agricultural fields.

13. The appeal site is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (the National Landscape). Paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) seeks to ensure that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. Paragraph 189 requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes.
14. The appeal site is set back from the road and is largely screened from short distance views through hedgerows that surround the site. However, the vast and expansive open landscape that surrounds the site is identified as a special characteristic of this part of the National Landscape within the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment.
15. The introduction of the proposed commercial business would stand out in the context of the vast and expansive landscape through its use for storage as well as the proposed high fencing that would surround the site and modest increase in built form. I acknowledge that there are no public rights of way that intersect the appeal site, but this would not prevent long range views of the appeal site in the context of the open landscape.
16. The proposal would therefore not conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape, nor its character or special qualities.
17. I therefore conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would be contrary to Policy ADPP5 of the CS and Paragraphs 135 and 189 of the Framework. Amongst other things, these seek to ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting and that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes.

Other Matter

18. The proposed development would contribute towards an identified shortfall in storage sites within the district and also provide job opportunities. However, these benefits would not outweigh the harm identified.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

D Wilson

INSPECTOR