



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 June 2025

by **C Rose BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/24/3354427

Agricultural building at Neale's Field, Winterborne Houghton, Blandford Forum DT11 0PG

- 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 and Mrs Holland against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref is P/FUL/2024/00459.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of an existing agricultural building to 1 x two-bedroom (C3) dwellinghouse with associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. During the course of the appeal an updated version of The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on the 12 December 2024. In light of this, the main parties were given the opportunity to comment on any implications for the appeal. I have taken the responses into account.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the appeal site provides a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to local and national policy for the re-use of existing buildings, with particular regard to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area.

Reasons

4. Policy 1 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 January 2016 (LP) reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the Framework. LP Policy 2 sets out the Core Spatial Strategy for development. It defines the countryside as the areas outside of the defined boundaries of the four main towns, Stalbridge and the larger villages. There is no dispute between the main parties that the site lies in the countryside outside of the settlement boundaries for the four main towns, and outside of Stalbridge and the larger villages. I have no reason to disagree.
5. LP Policy 20 states that in the countryside housing development will only be permitted if it is of a type appropriate in the countryside as set out in Figure 8.5, that includes the re-use of redundant or disused buildings. For clarity, the proposal does not fall under any other type of development permitted by the policy.
6. LP Policy 29 relates to the re-use of buildings in the countryside. This policy states that proposals for the re-use of buildings for residential purposes in the countryside

will be permitted provided that the existing building is permanent; is of sound construction; does not give rise to the need for another building, re-uses its existing scale, height and depth; will result in satisfactory living conditions; would not impact on the viability of existing services and facilities; with any extension modest in scale; and does not require an extension to the curtilage of the existing building. The building is permanent with a Structural Report demonstrating that it is of sound construction. There is no dispute between the main parties that the proposal complies with the other criteria listed above, and I have no reason to disagree.

7. Nevertheless, LP Policy 29 also states that the re-use of buildings for non-occupational residential purposes should avoid the creation of new isolated dwellings unless there are special circumstances and will only be permitted where it would enhance the immediate area. Furthermore, LP Policy 29 states that applications will be assessed against the re-use being achieved without the need for complete or substantial reconstruction, subject to not having an adverse impact on its surroundings with the building meriting retention and not including any ancillary uses such as open storage
8. The appeal site is physically separated from the nearest settlement of Winterbourne Houghton. Even having regard to its relatively close location, it is physically and visually separated by a footpath, hedgerow and open land off a private road. As a result, the appeal site and building are spatially and physically separate and remote from the settlement and therefore in an isolated location.
9. Furthermore, the settlement of Winterbourne Houghton has a very limited range of services and facilities, and I have not been advised of any publicly available bus routes serving the settlement. Moreover, the closest larger village of Winterbourne Stickland is a considerable distance from the site with the most direct pedestrian and cycle route via generally single width and narrow roads without pavements and lighting that would make such journeys unattractive for most and reliant upon the use of a motor vehicle. As such, the appeal site is not in an accessible location.
10. With regard to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, as mentioned above, to comply with LP Policy 29 it must be demonstrated that the residential re-use of the buildings would enhance their immediate setting. I note that this part of the policy is consistent with paragraph 84 of the Framework and consider the setting of the buildings to be the surroundings from which they are visible. That is the land surrounding the buildings including the adjacent fields and public right of way (PROW) running through the southern part of the field in the appellant's ownership.
11. The adjacent fields and PROW are generally open and undeveloped with the immediate setting of the building being rural in character comprising generally undeveloped countryside interspersed with agricultural buildings and occasional residential buildings. Paragraph 189 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty of National Landscapes. This is reflected in LP Policy 24. The site falls within the Dorset National Landscape.
12. The infilling of the open frontage to the existing building, introduction of large, glazed windows and the likelihood of associated items commonly found in large gardens, such as garden sheds, greenhouses, garden furniture and children's play equipment, would significantly change the appearance of the building and its

setting. Furthermore, the extent of works would require substantial reconstruction with the exception of the structural frame to the building. Although the building is not particularly unusual, uncommon or of any particular architectural merit justifying retention, as such requirements are not found within paragraph 84 of the Framework, I do not find that this automatically means that a structurally sound building cannot merit retention and re-use.

13. Together with the change of use of the existing land to create a domestic parking and turning area, it would give the building and land around the building a clearly more residential character and appearance. Together, these changes would erode the agricultural character and appearance of the site and the immediate setting of the buildings. This would be the case despite the retention and provision of landscaping as this would add to the managed residential appearance of the site.
14. Although agricultural buildings of the form and scale of the existing building are often part of the rural landscape, for the reasons given, the dwelling would appear incongruous and cause substantial harm to the character and appearance of the designated area when viewed from the PROW and land nearest the site.
15. Whilst the utilitarian shape of the building would remain, it would lose much of its current agricultural appearance and character. Although the proposal would improve biodiversity net gain and provide an opportunity to improve energy efficiency in accordance with LP Policy 3, these matters would not enhance the immediate setting of the proposed development which is derived from its open, agricultural, rural character.
16. Overall, the proposals conflict with Policy 29 when read as a whole. For the reasons given, the site does not provide a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to local and national policy for the re-use of existing buildings, with particular regard to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. As a result, it conflicts with LP Policies 1, 2, 4, 20, 24 and 29, the aims of which I have outlined above. For the same reasons, the proposal is contrary to rural housing policies in the Framework.

Other Considerations

17. The benefits of the development include making use of existing structures; the provision of a new dwelling to meet rural housing needs, improving the buildings' energy performance, economic benefits from construction and the provision of biodiversity net gain. However, given the proposal is for a single dwelling, these benefits would be limited.
18. My attention has been drawn to two nearby proposals¹. However, as the evidence before me indicates that these were for replacement dwellings and ancillary buildings, they are subject to different local plan policies and are not directly comparable to the appeal proposal. Furthermore, I am required to consider the appeal on its merits.
19. The LP dates from 2016 but the weight to be attached to it does not centre on its age. Paragraph 232 of the Framework makes it clear that due weight should be given to existing policies according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. I have therefore considered whether LP Policies, 1, 2, 4, 20, 24 and

¹ 2/2020/1082/FUL and 2/2020/1188/HOUSE

the various criteria in Policy 29 are 'out of date' and as a whole consistent with the Framework.

20. As LP Policy 1 closely reflects the wording in Paragraph 11 of the Framework, it accords with it and carries substantial weight. LP Policy 2 defines settlements and countryside based on their range of services and facilities. While the amounts of development allocated to different locations and related settlement boundaries will need to be reviewed as part of the emerging local plan, the general approach of strictly controlling open market housing in the countryside is consistent with the provisions of the Framework that seek to actively manage patterns of growth and focus development on locations which are or can be made sustainable. As a result, the general approach to development in the countryside in LP Policy 2 is consistent with the Framework, and it carries moderate weight.
21. LP Policy 4 seeks to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and landscape character and conserve and enhance the natural beauty of National Landscapes. This is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 15 of the Framework and as such carries substantial weight.
22. The Framework seeks to restrict the development of isolated homes in the countryside to a limited number of circumstances and requires that development which would re-use redundant or disused buildings enhances its immediate setting. LP Policy 20, and LP Policy 29 criteria (d) and (g) are therefore consistent with the Framework and conflict with it attracts substantial weight. Criterion (f) to LP Policy 29 is also consistent with the Framework's approach as it simply requires that the redundant or disused status of the buildings is confirmed. Compliance with it has substantial weight. Criteria (a), (b), (c), (e) and (h) to LP Policy 29, whilst providing relevant local guidance, are more onerous than set out in the Framework. Compliance with them therefore carries moderate weight. Criteria (i) to (m) of LP Policy 29 are also consistent with the Frameworks objectives. However, as parts of Policy 29 are not consistent with the Framework, conflict with the policy as a whole carries moderate weight.
23. As there are no policies in the development plan which positively favour development of this kind in this location and as the proposal would be contrary to the policies referred to above, I conclude that there would be conflict with the development plan as a whole.
24. The Inspector's report on the Council's 5 Year Housing Land Supply Annual Position Statement 2024 (APS) confirms that the Council has a housing land supply of 5.02 years. This is the most up to date, independent confirmation of the housing land supply and carries substantial weight. However, whilst I have found parts of LP Policy 29 to be more onerous than the Framework and therefore carry less weight, when considered as a whole, the most important policies for determining the appeal are not out-of-date for the purposes of LP Policy 1 and paragraph 11d) of the Framework. Therefore, paragraph 11d) is not engaged.
25. This is the case despite evidence and a subsequent appeal decision² indicating that following the expiry of the APS in October 2025, the Council will be in a very serious position in relation to demonstrating a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. While this is a material consideration of some weight, in light of the appeal proposal causing substantial harm to the character and appearance of the site and

² APP/D1265/W/3353912

surrounding landscape and location reliant upon the use of a motor vehicle, and given that I attach substantial weight to this harm and to the conflict with LP Policies 1, 2, 4, 20, 24 and 29, the adverse impacts would in any case significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits from a single dwelling.

Conclusion

26. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

C Rose

INSPECTOR