



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 July 2025

by **E Worley BA (Hons) Dip EP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 08 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/25/3359792

Barn at Three Bridges, Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire SN6 6PW

- 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 John Hartshorne against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2024/03272.
 - The development proposed is the conversion and change of use of existing barn to create x3 holiday lets and associated works.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. An undertaking under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 has been submitted as part of the appeal, which confirms the appellant's willingness to make the required financial contribution to mitigate the effects of the development on the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation. I shall return to this matter later.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the site is a suitable location for the proposed holiday let accommodation.

Reason

4. The appeal site comprises a parcel of land which fronts Ashton Lane. It is occupied by a modern steel framed barn and is surrounded by open countryside, including a lake immediately to the rear of the site. The appeal proposal would see the conversion of the barn to 3 units of holiday let accommodation.
5. There is dispute between the parties as to whether the building itself is lawful due to the way in which it was permitted and its subsequent use. The Council contend that the building has not been used for its intended purpose for agricultural storage, and there is little substantive evidence submitted as part of the appeal to address the Council's concerns in this regard. My attention has also been drawn to the planning history of the site, in particular the refusal to grant prior approval for the conversion of the building¹ based on its existing use, which gives some credence to the Council's concerns.

¹ LPA Ref: 14/05054/PNCOU

6. The site lies beyond a settlement boundary, in an area of open countryside. Core Policy 39 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy adopted January 2015 (WCS) sets out that outside the Principal Settlements and Market Towns, tourist and visitor facilities should be located in or close to Local Service Centres or Large and Small Villages and, where practicable, be located in existing or replacement buildings. Further, in exceptional cases tourist development may be supported away from the Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large and Small Villages where it can be demonstrated that specific criteria are met. The first of which requires evidence that the facilities are in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction.
7. There are a variety of tourist attractions in the surrounding area, including Cotswold Water Park. However, even if visitors to the site could benefit from access to these, they comprise attractions managed by other parties. Furthermore, while it is the appellant's intention that the adjoining private fishing lake would be offered for use by those staying in the proposed holiday lets, it has not been shown that the lake, as a standalone facility, is open and available for public use, or that it would itself constitute a countryside attraction. As such, in the absence of any substantive evidence in that regard, it has not been demonstrated that the proposed holiday let accommodation would be in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction.
8. Core Policy 39 of the WCS also requires that site has reasonable access to local services and a local employment base. The nearby village of Ashton Keynes, which is identified as a 'Large Village' in the WCS, has facilities including a public house, village shop and bus stop. Despite the relatively short distance, walking to Aston Keynes from the site would not be particularly pleasant or convenient, due to the nature of the route, in particular with regard to the speed of traffic along the B4696 immediately to the front of the site, which is also devoid of footpaths and streetlights. Notwithstanding this, the appellant has provided details of cycle route locations in and around the Cotswold Water Park. The appeal site is located close to Cycle Route 1, which encompasses a 20km circular route which passes settlements including South Cerney, Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes, nature reserves and Neigh Bridge Country Park.
9. Thus, while it is unlikely that future visitors to the site would walk to the nearest services and facilities, they may cycle giving the proximity to the identified route and would therefore not be wholly reliant on the private motor car to access nearby services and amenities during their stay. Consequently, the site would benefit from a degree of accessibility to the surrounding area by means other than the car and would therefore have reasonable access to local services in the nearby villages. I am also mindful of guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas.
10. Even if Core Policy 39 of the WCS is supportive of new build tourist development, where it is not practicable to re-use existing buildings, the proposal would fail to accord with criterion i) of Core Policy 39 for the reasons set out above. I therefore give limited weight to the suggested fallback position of the potential for the construction of a new holiday let building. Furthermore, given that it has not been demonstrated that the building is lawful, the proposal would not benefit from support from Core Policy 48 of the WCS, which supports the conversion and re-use rural buildings for employment, tourism, cultural and community uses, where they satisfy the criteria listed.

11. The proposed development would benefit from some accessibility to local services by means other than the private car, however, in the absence of any evidence that it would be in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction, the site would not be a suitable location for the proposed holiday let accommodation. Therefore, while the proposal would not give rise to conflict with Core Policies 60 and 61 of the WCS, in so far as they seek to encourage the use of sustainable transport alternatives, it would fail to accord with the aims of Core Policies 39 and 48 of the WCS and consequently Core Policies 1, 2 and 3, which set out the settlement hierarchy in relation to the location of new development.

Other Matters

12. The proposed development would offer social and economic benefits through increased tourism and associated local spend in the area and in that regard would reflect the aims of the Framework which support a prosperous rural economy. It may also reduce travel further afield by less sustainable means, such as air travel. However, any benefits in that regard would be limited given the scale of the development, for 3 units of holiday accommodation.
13. While the conversion of the existing building may be preferable in terms the re-use of existing resources, which is encouraged by policies within the Framework, for the reasons set out above I cannot be certain that the building itself is lawful.
14. The absence of harm in relation to the character and appearance of the area, highway safety and flooding are normal expectations of new development and therefore of neutral weight.
15. The appeal site is within the Zone of Influence of the North Meadow & Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is subject to pressures from recreational disturbance. Had I been minded to allow the appeal, it would have been necessary to establish whether the proposal on its own or in combination with other projects would likely have significant environmental effects on the integrity of the SAC and if any mitigation had been appropriately secured. However, it has not been necessary for me to consider this in this case, as a finding that the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, with or without any mitigation, would be at best a neutral matter.

Conclusion

16. The proposed development would offer benefits to the local economy, there would also be opportunities for visitors staying at the site to access services and facilities nearby by means other than the private car. However, set against this, the holiday let accommodation would not be in a suitable location having regard to policies in the development plan relating the location of new development. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the approach of the Framework, to outweigh it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

E Worley

INSPECTOR