



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 July 2025

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/25/3361783

Old Woodcutts Yard, Woodcutts Lane, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4JJ

- 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 Ryan Haigh of 778 Holdings Ltd against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref is P/FUL/2024/04190.
 - The development proposed is re-use of the existing barn to create a single dwelling house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Since the decision of the Council to refuse planning permission, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published. The main parties have had the opportunity to comment on this, and I have determined the appeal based on the current planning policy position.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the Framework and Development Plan policies, including the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt,
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, which is located within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs National Landscape,
 - whether the proposal would accord with the settlement strategy of the Development Plan for housing, and
 - if the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Green Belt

4. The proposal relates to an existing redundant former agricultural building. It lies within the South East Dorset Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the Framework makes

clear that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Such circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

5. Framework Paragraph 154 makes clear that new development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless an exception applies. One such exception, at paragraph 154(h)(iv) is for the re-use of buildings, provided that they are of permanent and substantial construction, preserve Green Belt openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Policy KS3 of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan (CELP), adopted April 2014, identifies the most important purposes of the South East Dorset Green Belt, but does not otherwise make requirements relevant to this proposal.
6. The appellant's structural assessments have found that the proposed roof cladding would be lighter than the existing covering, and that the current steel frame would remain an integral part of the proposal. As such, I do not doubt that the current structure is of permanent and substantial construction. Even so, Framework paragraph 154(h)(iv) requires that the proposal must also constitute a 're-use'.
7. Although not directly applicable to the proposal, Class Q of the General Permitted Development Order permits new exterior walls, windows, doors and roofs in respect of the change of use of agricultural buildings to dwellings. However, as confirmed by the Planning Practice Guidance¹, it does not permit any extent of rebuilding work that would go beyond what is reasonably necessary for conversion.
8. In this case, as well as new roof cladding, the proposal would involve the removal of the existing external metal sheeting, and the construction of exterior walls of timber between the steel columns. As a result, the extent of works would go beyond a 're-use', amounting to the erection of a new building, and thereby exceeding the Framework exemption in this respect. Reference has been made to barn conversions approved by the Council elsewhere within the Green Belt², but full structural details of these schemes are not before me, preventing meaningful comparison.
9. The proposal would be no larger than the existing barn, and planning conditions could restrict the future erection of outbuildings or extensions. The layout incorporates car parking and bin storage within the building footprint. Nevertheless, despite the existing ground levels, use of the land surrounding the building for domestic purposes, including by additional people, vehicles and associated paraphernalia, would have a small but negative effect on Green Belt openness hereabouts.
10. As CELP policy KS3 makes no specific requirements relevant to the proposal, I find no conflict with it. Even so, for the reasons given above, the proposal would not accord with Framework paragraph 154(h)(iv). The site would be accessed using narrow unlit country lanes, making the use of sustainable transport modes difficult, and no other Green Belt exemption has been made out. I therefore conclude that the proposal would constitute inappropriate development. I attach substantial weight to this harm, as required by Framework paragraph 153.

¹ Paragraph: 105 Reference ID: 13-105-20180615

² LPA references P/FUL/2024/00324 and 3/21/1389/FUL

Character and Appearance

11. Replacement of the existing unrestricted automatic lights with cowled, low-level lighting would benefit the dark skies, whilst light emissions would be limited for example by louvres and set-back glazing. The existing light-coloured metal cladding would be replaced with more regressive vertical timber cladding. The proposal would significantly reduce the amount of external hard surfacing, although I saw that much of this has already become overgrown and 'green'.
12. Large functional agricultural barns, as exists here, are an expected feature of the countryside. However, in this case, I have found that the extent of works necessary means that the proposal would be tantamount to a new-build dwelling. The proposal would have a similar utilitarian form to the existing building, albeit with cut-outs and deep eaves providing a degree of articulation.
13. Nevertheless, as a dwelling, the building would have a sizable mass and scale, thus appearing large and out of place, and failing to reflect the more modest and traditional character of nearby houses. Furthermore, the building and its proposed use would have a domestic appearance, including from new doors, windows and rooflights, and from the aforementioned residential paraphernalia. This would detract from the natural beauty of the area, and would be visible from public locations, for example from the entranceway, and in wider views from nearby rights of way.
14. For the reasons given above, the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, including the National Landscape. It would therefore conflict with CELP policies HE2 and HE3. These require a high quality of design and seek to protect and enhance the landscape character of the area. Having regard to Framework paragraph 189, I give this harm great negative weight.

Settlement Strategy

15. CELP Policy KS2 seeks to ensure that the location and distribution of development conforms to its settlement hierarchy. This identifies hamlets as the smallest form of settlement, where development is only allowed where functionally required to be in a rural area. There are a few dwellings, as well as other buildings, not far from the appeal site.
16. However, given their small number, the buildings do not constitute a settlement. Although the policy uses the word 'should', rather than must, I see no reason why its requirements would not apply here. Consequently, the site and the proposal falls outside of the scope of Policy KS2, and so does not accord with the settlement strategy. I have been referred to an appeal decision in Coleshill³, where building re-use was found to justify compliance with Policy KS2. That said, I have already found that the proposal here would go beyond just a re-use.
17. Having regard to the relevant case law⁴, given the proximity of other dwellings, the site is not far away from other places, buildings or people. On this basis, it is not 'isolated'. As such, Framework paragraph 84 does not apply.
18. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not accord with the settlement strategy of the Development Plan, conflicting with CELP policy KS2. That said, I am mindful

³ PINS reference APP/U1240/W/18/3214442

⁴ Braintree DC v SSCLG [2017] EWHC 2743

that the policy is not fully consistent with the Framework which, for example, supports the development of under-utilised land and buildings. Accordingly, I give this conflict only moderate negative weight.

Other Considerations and Matters

19. For the reasons already given, the policies in the Framework that protect the Green Belt and the National Landscape provide clear reasons for refusal. It follows that, regardless of the housing land supply position, Framework paragraph 11(d) and its presumption in favour of sustainable development is not engaged.
20. That said, the proposal would increase housing supply and make a positive economic contribution locally, for instance to the building industry. Its future occupiers would also make social and economic contributions, thus supporting community facilities. It would result in the efficient use of land, and could be delivered quickly. The proposal would provide mixed native hedging to the site boundaries and have further biodiversity gains such as the provision of bat boxes. Nonetheless, as a single dwelling, these benefits would be modest and so I give them limited positive weight.
21. The building is close to 2 Woodcutts Cottage, a Grade II listed building. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that I have special regard for the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest. The Council has not identified any harm to the listed building or its setting. Given the nature of the appeal site and the proposal, I have no reason to disagree in respect of this matter.
22. The proposal lies within an area where it may affect the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, which is part of the Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These are protected pursuant to the Conservation of Habitats Regulations 2017. Had I found no harm in respect of the main issues, as competent authority I would have carried out an Appropriate Assessment in respect of the potential effects on the SAC and SPA. However, as the balance of considerations is against the proposal, this matter need not be considered any further in this case.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

23. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the terms set out by the Framework. For the reasons given above, I find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.
24. For the reasons given, there would be conflict with the Development Plan, read as a whole. It would also conflict with the Framework. No other material considerations have been shown to have sufficient weight to outweigh this conflict. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR