



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 July 2025

by **Laura Cuthbert BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/24/3356053

Coneygar Farm, Shutes Lane, Buckhorn Weston, Dorset SP8 5HZ

- 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 P Drummond against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref is P/FUL/2024/00654.
 - The development proposed is Conversion of stables to residential dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for Conversion of stables to residential dwelling at Coneygar Farm, Shutes Lane, Buckhorn Weston, Dorset SP8 5HZ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref P/FUL/2024/00654, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr P Drummond against Dorset Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matter

3. Since the appeal was made, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 12 December 2024. I have taken the revised Framework into account as part of the determination of this appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed development would provide a suitable location for housing, having particular regard to the relevant policies relating to the re-use of buildings in the countryside, notably the effect on the immediate setting of the area and whether the existing building is disused or redundant.

Reasons

5. The appeal site lies in the open countryside, outside of any recognised settlement limits. Presently, the site consists of a stable block of permanent construction, with cream rendered block work walls, with timber weather boarding above, and a natural slate roof. It is served by a separate vehicular access from Shutes Lane and has an existing area of hardstanding to the front. It is currently associated with the main dwelling of Coneygar Farm, which lies to the east of the stable block, which is a large dwelling, finished in render and timber boarding. A menage sits to the north of the stable building and a stone outbuilding lies to the south.

6. At the time of my site visit, the stable block was vacant. I note from the Council's evidence that they observed it being in use for domestic storage and I did observe domestic items on the hardstanding. Nevertheless, the building was not being used as a stable block, and it appeared that it hadn't been used as such for some time.
7. Policy 2 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (NDLP) (adopted 2016) states that outside the defined boundaries, the remainder of the District will be subject to countryside policies where development will be strictly controlled unless it is required to enable essential rural needs to be met. Policy 20 of the NDLP clarifies that development in the countryside will only be permitted if it is of a type appropriate to the countryside, as set out in the relevant policies of the Local Plan. The re-use of redundant or disused buildings is identified in the supporting text to Policy 20 as being an appropriate type of development in the countryside.
8. In addition, Policy 29 of the NDLP sets out a list of criteria with which proposals for the re-use of buildings in the countryside should comply if they are to be permitted. The Council consider that the proposal would fail to achieve criteria c, d and g of Policy 29.
9. The parties agree that the proposal would be in an isolated location. Therefore, under the terms of criterion 'd', the proposal must be supported by national policy as a special circumstance. Paragraph 84 of the Framework sets out these circumstances which includes where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting. Criterion 'g' of Policy 29 reiterates the need for the residential re-use of a building in the countryside to enhance the immediate setting.
10. As accepted by an Inspector in an earlier appeal¹, I recognise there is no definition of 'enhance' in either the Framework or in Policy 29, although I note the allegation of the Council that there wouldn't be 'enough' of an enhancement. Nevertheless, whether the proposal enhances its immediate setting is a matter of planning judgement.
11. The existing stable block currently sits relatively unobtrusively in its immediate setting. However, whilst the timber and light coloured render allows it to be similar to the main dwelling, due to the siting of the stable building on a slightly higher ground level than the main dwelling, the cream render is stark from viewpoints along Shave Hill and also, although to a lesser degree, from Shutes Lane.
12. The application of timber boarding would assist the proposal being read as a 'conversion' of a former stable building. Therefore, rather than this having a neutral impact as set out by the Council, I consider that this would be an 'enhancement' to the building. Furthermore, the proposed planting, in the form of a new hedge and some orchard planting adjacent, would further assist in assimilating the proposed use of the appeal site into its immediate setting, with the planting sensitive to its rural surroundings. The landscaping would also assist in delivering wider biodiversity benefits.
13. The proposal would represent the sympathetic conversion of the stable building. Whilst some new openings are proposed, these have been sensitively designed and positioned, with the majority of windows and doors arranged where there are existing openings. The scale and form of the building would remain fundamentally

¹ Appeal Decision APP/D0840/W/24/3343017

- unaltered and would retain an agricultural character. The proposed works would, in my mind, improve the overall condition and appearance of the building.
14. The domestic curtilage would also not be readily discernible from most viewpoints, due to the existing and proposed boundary screening. It would also be proportionate to the scale of the stable building. Furthermore, the stable block is already served by its own access and there is already a clear demarcation between the stable block, hardstanding and the land immediately around the stable block, and that of the main dwelling. Consequently, the separation of the appeal site from the wider site of Coneygar Farm would be relatively straightforward and without any material visual harm.
 15. Whilst the introduction of domestic paraphernalia would have an impact, due to the scale of the domestic curtilage and it not being visually prominent in the landscape, any paraphernalia would not be materially harmful. Furthermore, the area around the stable building is already used for hardstanding, with various small agricultural vehicles and equipment on the surrounding land. As it would be seen alongside the main dwelling, and its own domestic curtilage, the proposal would not appear as particularly incongruous to the area.
 16. I also recognise that there is an extant planning permission to re-use part of the stable building as a pool house², which has not yet been implemented. Whilst I accept the notable difference between the pool house which would be linked to the main dwelling and that of a separate dwelling now proposed, the Council have already accepted the 'domestication' of the appeal site, albeit to a lesser degree.
 17. Therefore, when the above matters are considered as a whole, the proposal would result in the residential re-use of the building which would provide significant enhancements to its immediate setting, meeting the relevant test of both the Framework and Policy 29.
 18. In regard to criterion 'c' of Policy 29, I note that the appellant wishes to retain the menage. Consequently, the Council is not satisfied that the building is no longer required in case the onsite equestrian activity is re-established in the future. Whilst I appreciate the concern of the Council, the appellant has confirmed that the stable use of the building is redundant. Therefore, based on the evidence before me now, I do not consider that this is a sufficient reason to withhold planning permission in these circumstances. The Council are also concerned that the building is still required for domestic storage. However, this is not a lawful use of the building and was clearly a temporary use. Furthermore, my site observations were that even this use had recently ceased. Therefore, I am satisfied that use of the building as both stabling for horses and domestic storage are both redundant.
 19. As the Council determined that the proposal failed to compromise an acceptable re-use of a building in the countryside, it then led them to also refuse the proposal on the grounds that 'owing to the isolated location, lacking suitable walking routes, significant distance to nearby facilities, and likely reliance on use of the private car, the dwelling would be poorly linked to the nearest settlements'.
 20. I recognise the location of the proposal would be away from facilities and services and that future occupants would therefore likely be reliant on the private car. However, for the reasons set out above, I have found the proposal to be in

² Application Ref P/FUL/2022/02341

accordance with Policy 29. The very nature of Policy 29 is that it is one of the specific policy exceptions to the overall spatial strategy and therefore recognition that the re-use of a building in the open countryside is one of the acceptable ways to provide residential development in a rural area. Therefore, there is a balance to be struck between what is considered as acceptable rural development, such as the conversion of an existing building, whilst recognising the lack of available sustainable travel opportunities that exist in rural areas. Furthermore, the Framework itself recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable travel choices are going to vary between urban and rural areas.

21. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, the proposed development would provide a suitable location for housing, having particular regard to the relevant policies relating to the re-use of buildings in the countryside. The proposal would utilise a redundant stable block and would result in a significant enhancement to its immediate setting. It would be in accordance with Policies 1,2, 20 and 29 of the NDLP, as well as the objectives of the Framework, which, in combination, set out the specific circumstances where new housing in the open countryside would be supported, including the re-use of redundant buildings in the countryside where it would enhance its immediate setting.

Other Matters

22. The Parish Council has requested that a condition is attached to ensure that the proposed stable building and main house 'cannot be split up and sold as individual dwellings'. However, the proposal is for a separate residential dwelling. My reasoning above demonstrates that I have found the proposal to be in accordance with the development plan. Having regard to the 6 tests for planning conditions outlined in the Framework, a condition tying the proposed dwelling to the main house is not necessary to make the development acceptable and would not be reasonable in all other respects.

Conditions

23. A condition setting a time limit for commencement of the development is required by statute. It is appropriate that there is a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans for certainty. In the interests of highway safety and to ensure the proposal is served by adequate parking, a condition requiring the proposed turning/manoeuvring and parking areas to be constructed as shown on the approved plan is considered necessary.
24. It is also considered reasonable and necessary in the interests of habitats and protected species that the proposal is carried out in accordance with the submitted ecology report. Finally, a condition which secures the proposed soft landscaping works is considered reasonable and necessary in the interests of the character and appearance of the rural area.

Conclusion

25. For the reasons set out above, having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal is allowed.

Laura Cuthbert

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 nos:
 - 5198/D02 Rev B Location, Block & Roof Plans
 - 5198/S01 Existing Floor Plan & Elevations
 - 5198/D01 Rev C Proposed Floor Plan & Elevations
- 3) Before the development hereby approved is occupied or utilised, the turning/manoeuvring and parking shown on Drawing Number 5198/D02 must have been constructed. Thereafter, these areas, must be permanently maintained, kept free from obstruction and available for the purposes specified.
- 4) The development hereby permitted shall be implemented strictly in accordance with the recommendations and requirements in the ecology report titled Ecological Works, by Orb Ecology and dated 13th September 2022.

The development hereby approved must not be first brought into use unless and until:

- i. the recommendations detailed in section 7 of the approved report have been completed in full, in accordance with any specified timetable, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the local planning authority, and
- ii. evidence of compliance has been supplied to the local planning authority prior to the substantial completion, or the first bringing into use of the development hereby approved, whichever is the sooner.

The development shall subsequently be implemented entirely in accordance with the approved ecology report and thereafter the approved mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures must be permanently maintained and retained in accordance with the approved details.

- 5) The soft landscaping works detailed on approved drawing 5198/D02 must be carried out in full during the first planting season (November to March) following commencement of the development or within a timescale to be agreed in writing with the local planning authority. The soft landscaping shall be maintained in accordance with the agreed details and any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation.