



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2025

by Mr R Walker BA HONS DIPTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W2845/W/24/3357036

Land at Manor Farm, Bull Inn Close, Weedon Bec, Northamptonshire NN7 4GD

- 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 Redinvest LTD against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 2023/8017/FULL.
 - The development proposed is 4 new dwellings for older persons.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As part of the appeal the appellant has submitted an Environmental Noise Assessment (ENA), a letter from Ecolocation, and a Tree Survey Report & Impact Assessment and accompanying letter in response to the reasons for refusal. The Council and third parties have had the opportunity to comment on these as part of the appeals process. Moreover, alterations to the plans submitted with the appeal showing step free access to the properties and internal alterations are minor alterations that maintain the appearance of the proposal. Given the nature and limited extent of changes, I am satisfied that no party has been prejudiced by their submission at this stage.
3. The Council has referred to Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). This requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of “preserving or enhancing the character or appearance” in a Conservation Area (CA). However, the appeal site lies outside of a CA and the consideration of its setting does not therefore apply within current legislation as Section 72(1) specifically refers to buildings or other land in a CA.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development with particular reference to the housing strategy for the area;
 - The effects of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including any effects on the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets and on protected trees;
 - Whether the proposal would provide acceptable living conditions for future residents of the development with particular reference to accessibility, noise and disturbance; and

- The effects of the proposal on biodiversity.

Reasons

Housing Strategy

5. Policy S1 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (JCS) sets out the distribution of development, seeking to direct housing so that it is concentrated primarily in, and adjoining, the principal urban areas of Northampton and Daventry. Policy R1 of the JCS sets out the spatial strategy for the rural areas, which will be guided through the rural settlement hierarchy, and it sets down several criteria for residential development.
6. Weedon Bec is identified as a primary service village in Policy RA1 of the Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2) For Daventry District (Local Plan). The appeal site lies outside of, but adjacent to, the confines boundaries of the settlement as defined in the Council's Policies and Inset Map for the Local Plan. This means that the site is treated as open countryside for the purposes of applying the relevant development plan policies.
7. From the evidence before me, the site was historically associated with Manor Farm and, due to the nature of the vegetation and adjacent housing, the term "open countryside" is not a particularly apt description. Instead, it denotes that the site is not within a town or village identified as part of the settlement strategy in the Local Plan. New development in the countryside is permitted where it is related to specific forms of development as set down in Policy RA6 of the Local Plan. These include, amongst other things, development that otherwise accords with policy RA1. In this regard, Part B of Policy RA1 sets down circumstances where development outside the defined confines will be acceptable.
8. One such circumstance is where the housing land supply is less than five years. The appellant has disputed the Council's housing land supply figure but has not provided substantive evidence regarding the sites it has cast doubts over. In this regard, there is not the evidence before me to reach a conclusion that the Council does not have a 5-year supply of housing land.
9. Whilst there is broad support for providing housing for older people, there is no substantive evidence of an identified need through an up-to-date Housing Needs Survey or Housing Needs Assessment in this settlement. As such, whilst the appellant raises concerns regarding the 2019 village survey, in the absence of robust local evidence I am unable to conclude that the scheme would meet the circumstance of criterion B ii in Policy RA1 with regards to the need for housing for people over the age of 55.
10. Moreover, whilst I'm told that the Post Office in the village closed in 2019, there is no firm evidence that the scheme is required to support an essential local service that may be under threat. As such, even if the Parish Council has concerns about the confines boundary for the settlement and the future of services and facilities there is little information before me on this matter. I am unable to therefore to conclude that the scheme would meet the circumstance of criterion B iii in Policy RA1. Moreover, the scheme would not fall to be assessed against any of the other circumstances in Policy RA1.

11. I therefore find that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for the proposed development with particular reference to the housing strategy for the area. As such, I find conflict with the requirements of Policies S1 and R1 of the JCS and Policies RA1 and RA6 of the Local Plan, when taken together and in so far as they relate to this matter. These policies are broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), to the extent that they seek to promote sustainable rural development and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The conflict with these policies would bring an in-principle policy harm.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site is a parcel of land, which was previously garden land associated with the former Manor Farm house but is now characterised by maturing trees, boundary hedgerows and unmanaged ground vegetation such as brambles and some piles of rubble. This combination gives the site a somewhat unkempt appearance when viewed within the site and from its access point. However, in more distant views and from the A5, where the trees and hedgerows are the predominant features, it has a more attractive verdant character. Here, the height and density of the trees and hedgerows provide a soft buffer to the adjacent housing and settlement edge of Weedon Bec as it transitions into the open countryside and fields to the south east.
13. The Council consider the Manor Farm buildings to constitute a Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA). The glossary of the Framework establishes that NDHAs are 'those identified by the local planning authority'. Moreover, advice is given in the Planning Practice Guidance¹ regarding the ways in which NDHAs could be identified. This says that in some cases, local planning authorities may also identify NDHAs as part of the decision-making process on planning applications, for example, following archaeological investigations. In this regard, even though it has not been included formally within a local list, that does not preclude the Manor Farm buildings from being considered a NDHA.
14. The Manor Farm building group was grade II listed but has since been delisted. I'm told that the group was redeveloped to housing with elements of conversion but with approximately only 15% of the original building fabric remaining. I do not have the full details of the extent of this. However, from my observations, due to the materials, layout, and appearance of the group it maintains its historical interest as the site of the former listed farm group. This is sufficient, in my view, and from the evidence before me to constitute a NDHA. The appeal site was historically undeveloped and formed part of the garden associated with the Manor Farm house. In this regard its soft verdant undeveloped qualities as it transitions to the open agricultural fields beyond, make a positive contribution to understanding the historical narrative of the farm group, its setting and thus its significance as a NDHA.
15. The site is positioned close to, but outside of, Weedon Bec CA, the Grand Union Canal CA and the Flore CA. The appeal site is most closely linked physically and visually with the settlement of Weedon Bec. The Weedon Bec CA, in so far as it relates to this appeal, is characterised by its surviving street pattern, and roots as a historic farming community. In this regard, the historic farm buildings and the

¹ Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723

agricultural setting of the CA contribute positively to its character and thus significance as a designated heritage asset. Accordingly, the contribution that the appeal site makes to the setting, and thus significance of the Manor Farm NDHA, also contributes to the setting of the Weedon Bec CA.

16. The Flore CA is located on rising ground to the north east of the appeal site and is characterised by its rural landscape, traditional buildings and linear street pattern. Views can be achieved from the A5 near the appeal site. However, given the appeal site's position adjacent to Weedon Bec on the south western side of the A5, and the presence of the petrol station development to the north east I do not consider the appeal site to contribute positively or negatively to the setting of the Flore CA. and thus its significance.
17. The Grand Union Canal CA is a distinctly long CA following the canal infrastructure, which in so far as it relates to this appeal is characterised by the canal, and grassy towpath bordered by trees. It can be seen from the A5 as a linear raised feature dominated by trees. These trees contain views from within the CA, such that only glimpses can be achieved of the appeal site. The appeal site's position divorced from the CA and with the adjacent housing and A5 corridor is such that the appeal site's verdant qualities makes neither a positive or negative contribution to the setting of the CA, and thus its significance.
18. The proposed development of the site would erode the soft verdant qualities of the site due to the extent of vegetation removal and pruning works to the retained planting around the proposed building group. Due to the height, bulk and massing of the proposed built form, and close proximity to the south eastern and north eastern boundaries, the resulting development would be highly visible. This would be the case even with the proposed planting which would take time to establish and would not, in my view, screen the development.
19. Moreover, there are trees that would be in very close proximity to the proposed dwellings. As such, I consider that there would be future pressure to undertake works, such as removing overhanging branches. This would be a direct consequence of a more active use close to the Root Protection Area of trees. This adds to my concerns regarding the change in character that would ensue from the proposed development of the site.
20. The result would be the erosion of the verdant soft undeveloped qualities of the site as it transitions into the open countryside with a scheme that would create a harder edge to the settlement. Moreover, the development of the historically undeveloped parcel of land, with a scheme designed to replicate a converted barn would confuse the legibility of the layout of the former Manor Farm building group, its setting and thus significance as a NDHA. Taken together, this would also incrementally erode the contribution that the appeal site makes to the setting of the Weedon Bec CA.
21. Given the distances and visual inter relationship between the appeal site and the Flore and Grand Union Canal CAs I find that the proposal would not harm the setting and thus the significance of these heritage assets. The absence of harm in these respects weigh neither for nor against the proposal.
22. I therefore find that the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including on the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets and on protected trees. The harm would be at

odds with the requirements of Policy BN5 of the JCS and Policy ENV10 of the Local Plan, when taken together and in so far as they relate to this main issue. These say, amongst other things, that development of poor design that does not add to the character and quality of an area and the way it functions will not be supported. I will return to this, in terms of the Framework's balancing exercises in my Heritage and Planning Balance.

Living conditions

23. The amended plan submitted with the appeal shows how the design would meet the accessibility standard of M4(2) of the Building Regulations for it to adequately meet the needs of the proposed age group of older persons. Moreover, the ENA submitted with the appeal confirms that the noise and disturbance from traffic along the A5 road could be mitigated by keeping windows closed and using a mechanical ventilation systems or passive ventilation system.
24. The Council has not commented on the ENA or the amended plan. Based on the evidence before me, and my observations on site, I am satisfied that with the mitigations outlined in the ENA, the effects from noise and disturbance along the A5 road would not be unacceptable. Moreover, I am satisfied that the homes would be designed in a manner that would be suitable for the intended users.
25. I therefore find that the proposal would provide acceptable living conditions for future residents of the development with particular reference to accessibility, noise and disturbance. As such, I find no conflict with the requirements of Policy BN9 of the JCS or Policy ENV10 of the Local Plan, when taken together and in so far as they relate to this main issue. These say, amongst other things, that development that is of a high quality and, in particular, proposals of an exemplary and innovative design that reflect and integrate with the surrounding area and create a strong sense of place, will be supported. High quality design is achieved by, amongst other things, protecting the amenity of new and existing dwellings and not compromise the function of existing surrounding uses.

Biodiversity

26. The letter from Ecolocation seeks to clarify the biodiversity enhancements sought as part of the scheme. There is no dispute that the development would result in a biodiversity loss of 39.68% prior to the proposed mitigation. However, as part of the scheme the appellant proposes a series of enhancements including planting of good quality mixed scrub and native tree planting. These, the appellant indicates would result in a net gain in biodiversity of 16.36%.
27. The Council has not commented on the submission within the appeal. On the evidence before me, I am satisfied that a biodiversity net gain could be achieved, and I see no reason why full details of the biodiversity enhancements and landscaping could not be secured by way of a condition were I minded to allow the scheme.
28. I therefore find that the proposal would not have an unacceptable effect on biodiversity. As such, I find no conflict with the requirements of Policy BN2 of the JCS or Policy ENV5 of the Local Plan, when taken together and in so far as they relate to this main issue. These say, amongst other things, that all proposals likely to affect biodiversity will be expected to assess their impact through an ecological

assessment and include details of mitigation or compensation, where harm will be caused.

Heritage and Planning Balance

29. The Framework's approach to the harm to the NDHA, is that it is taken into account with a balanced judgement made. The harm to the CA would be localised and at the lower end of the spectrum, as such, would be less than substantial in the context of paragraphs 214 and 215 of the Framework. In accordance with paragraph 215 I must balance that less than substantial harm against the public benefits of the proposal. This classification of harm does not mean that it is diminished though. The Framework identifies that great weight should be given to designated assets' conservation, the weight increasing the more important the asset. Therefore, although the harm to the setting of the CA would be very small, it carries great weight.
30. Turning to the public benefits. The scheme would provide social benefits from four new houses for the elderly garnering support from both the Framework and Policy H1 of the JCS. This would boost the supply of housing in a location near a level of services and facilities commensurate with the role of the settlement, and with good access to areas of recreation, such as along the canal. There would also be economic benefits too from the spending of future occupiers in the local area, as well as from the construction works. This would stimulate employment, the commissioning of services, and the retention of building craft skills. Irrespective of the five-year housing supply situation and the absence of a specific housing need for the site these are benefits that carry a moderate degree of weight. The benefits to biodiversity carry modest weight given the small scale of the development.
31. I have found that the proposal would provide acceptable living conditions for future residents of the development with particular reference to accessibility, noise and disturbance. However, this is an expectation of the planning system and therefore not a benefit. Moreover, the absence of harm in relation to other considerations, such as highway and pedestrian safety, are matters that weigh neither for nor against the proposal and do not constitute public benefits.
32. I have been referred to various appeals and developments, but I do not have the full details of the schemes before me. Moreover, planning policy has evolved since these decisions. I have in any case considered the appeal proposal on its own merits based on the evidence before me.
33. Drawing the above together, overall, the weight that I ascribe to the public benefits that would result from the proposal, would not be sufficient to outweigh the great weight that I attach to the harm I have identified. Moreover, the harm to the setting of the NDHA, would in my balanced judgement be unacceptable, notwithstanding the benefits of the proposal.
34. I have found that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for the proposed development with particular reference to the housing strategy for the area. The proposal would conflict with the settlement strategy and there would be an in-principle policy harm due to the subsequent conflict with Policies S1 and R1 of the JCS and RA1 and RA6 of the Local Plan. Moreover, the proposal would have harmful effects on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including from the effects on the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets and on protected trees. This would bring conflict with Policy BN5 of

the JCS and Policy ENV10 of the Local Plan. The proposal would therefore conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole.

Conclusion

35. Overall, the material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan.
36. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

Mr R Walker

INSPECTOR