



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 August 2025

by **Les Greenwood MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D0515/W/25/3367015

Balcony Farm, South Brink, Wisbech PE14 0RP

- 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 T Forster against the decision of Fenland District Council.
 - The application Ref is F/YR25/0003/F.
 - The development proposed is conversion and alterations to existing barn with erection of a detached double garage, existing store to be demolished.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The Council refused the appeal application for 3 reasons. Following the receipt of comments from its ecological advisor it has effectively withdrawn the third reason, regarding ecological impact. I have no reason to disagree with this revised position, which aligns with the appellant's submitted ecological assessment.
3. The Council confirms that its first reason for refusal should refer to paragraph 84c of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), rather than 80c.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - i) The suitability of the building and location for a conversion into a residential dwelling; and
 - ii) The effect on the safety of public highway users.

Reasons

Residential conversion

5. The appeal building is a brick barn with a corrugated metal roof located in a fairly remote countryside location, well outside of Wisbech. The proposal is to convert the barn to a dwelling, with a new, taller roof to accommodate bedrooms at first floor level. Vehicular access and a detached double garage would also be provided.
6. Fenland Local Plan (LP) policy LP12 Part B supports the conversion of buildings in the countryside subject to the proposal meeting a set of 4 criteria, including that the building should be: (a) of significant architectural or historic merit and intrinsically worthy of retention in its rural setting; (c) capable of conversion with minimal

- alteration; and (d) structurally sound and capable of conversion without any significant rebuilding.
7. This is a relatively plain, functional example of a traditional brick barn. Although it is not of any particular architectural quality or distinction, it sits well in its rural position and is part of the history of this rural area. The appellant's historical report suggests that it likely dates to the late 18th/early 19th century. Although it is not tied into any notable aspect of local history, I find that the proposal complies with criterion (a) of policy LP12B.
 8. The barn is clearly in very poor condition, however, with walls leaning badly and other signs of deterioration. The appellant's structural survey advises that conversion of the barn to residential use would require reinstatement of a significant part of the superstructure, including some walls and the floor. The proposal also includes complete replacement of the roof. Extensive rebuilding would therefore be required, creating what in practice would likely be more a new building than a conversion, in conflict with criterion (d) of policy LP12B.
 9. Furthermore, the proposed conversion would alter the existing building substantially, enclosing open sections, creating a large number of new openings and changing the roof line. The resulting building would be a much different structure and more domestic in character. Criterion (c) of policy LP12B is therefore not met, either.
 10. I also note that, like much of the general vicinity, the building sits within a high flood risk area. The Environment Agency has not objected to the proposal subject to conditions including that floor levels would need to be set at least 500mm above existing ground level. I have not seen any section drawings or other information to show how this requirement could be accommodated while still providing 2 levels of accommodation. It therefore could be that further alterations would be needed to meet the terms of this condition. This reinforces my conclusion in relation to criteria (c) and (d) of policy LP12B.
 11. The barn is in an inherently inaccessible location on an unlit rural lane with no footways, where most or all future occupiers would need to rely on the private car for day to day journeys. The creation of dwellings in such locations can only be justified in certain circumstances, including the conversion of appropriate rural buildings. Although LP policy LP12 is supportive of rural conversions in general, the proposal would not accord with 2 key criteria of the policy. I conclude that the building and location are not suitable for a conversion into a residential dwelling. The proposal conflicts with LP policies LP12 and LP15 and Framework paragraphs 84c and 110, which aim to ensure that development is located to maximise accessibility and to help increase the use of non-car transport modes, with only limited exceptions for barn conversions. The Council also refers to LP policy LP2 here, but that policy's emphasis on health and well-being does not appear to be directly relevant.

Highway safety

12. This part of South Brink is a narrow, single track, one way lane. There is said to be an existing access to the site, but this area is overgrown and drops down sharply from the lane. The submitted speed survey confirms that traffic along the lane is very light and that 85th percentile speeds are around 37 mph. On this basis the

County Highway Authority (CHA) advises that the appropriate visibility splay can be measured from a reduced 2.0m set-back instead of the standard 2.4m. The CHA asks for a visibility splay to the north (towards oncoming traffic) of 2.0m by 91m. No substantive argument has been put forward to support the provision of a lesser visibility splay here.

13. Although similar visibility splays (2.4m by 65m and 1.86m by 120m) are shown on the proposed site plan, it is not clear that either of these, or the CHA's requested splay, can be achieved within land controlled by the appellant and/or in the public highway. It appears that provision of an adequate visibility splay would likely rely on land controlled by others. Both of the illustrated splays cut across the frontage of the nearby house at 118 South Brink, tight up to the building, so that any obstructions at the front of that property could block visibility, despite the road being straight.
14. The traffic survey report further suggests that there is no record of accidents nearby, but no evidence has been submitted to demonstrate this. The absence of accidents in the past would not in itself justify a sub-standard residential access in any case.
15. On the basis of the submitted information I find that there would likely be insufficient intervisibility for drivers leaving the site and highway users approaching the site. I therefore conclude that the proposal would prejudice the safety of public highway users. It also conflicts with LP policy LP15 and Framework paragraph 115, which aim to ensure that safe and suitable access is provided to sites.

Conclusion

16. The proposal is supported by Wisbech Town Council. I take this into account in favour of the proposal. I nevertheless find that the proposal conflicts with the development plan and that there are no other matters which would indicate a decision in conflict with that plan. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Les Greenwood

INSPECTOR