



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2025

by K Townend BSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/25/3360757

Hollow Farm, Buckingham Rd, Gawcott, Buckingham MK18 4JD

- 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 & Mrs P Mason against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/02147/APP.
 - The development proposed is change of use from equestrian to mixed use of equestrian, business, and residential use. Demolition of existing equestrian buildings and the erection of single storey stables, storage barn, office, and dwelling house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the site is an appropriate location for the proposed stables, office, and dwelling having regard to the development strategy for the area and the accessibility of services and facilities;
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - the effect of the development on biodiversity.

Reasons

Policy, location, and accessibility

3. The appeal site comprises an existing stable block and associated buildings. The site is located outside of the settlement of Gawcott as identified in the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) 2013-2033. For planning purposes, the site is considered to be within open countryside where Policy S3 of the VALP, seeks to limit new development.
4. The proposal includes demolition of all of the existing buildings and the construction of new stables, office, and dwelling. The appellants' submission advises that the stables and office are proposed for a business use. Policy C2 of the VALP, in regard to commercial equestrian uses, promotes the re-use of existing buildings, and only supports an element of new building alongside re-use. The proposed development, as replacement of all of the buildings would, therefore, fail to comply with Policy C2 of the VALP.
5. Moreover, I have no business plan detailing the proposed equestrian business or whether the four stables proposed would be sufficient to sustain a financially

sound business. The proposal would result in halving the number of stables and the economic benefits of the development have not been quantified in the appeal submission. The lack of detail on the proposed business would also be contrary to Policy C2 of the VALP and, even if the stables were already in business use, this would not negate the need for the proposed development to be supported by a business plan.

6. I also have no evidence that the size of the office building, which would provide space for multiple staff, would be required for the size of the stable block proposed. Although the proposed office is not a large building, in the absence of evidence of the business use I cannot be certain that the business would justify the size of the office. For these reasons, the building would not comprise a small scale rural office and, as a main town centre use, proposed in an out of town location, Policy E5 of the VALP would require the submission of a sequential test. Given that it is not evidenced that the office would be a small scale rural development it would not benefit from the exception to requiring a sequential test set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
7. In the absence of detail of the business use, I have no compelling evidence that the proposed office would be growth of an existing business in a rural area, or diversification of a land based rural business, as is supported by the Framework. Neither do I have sufficient evidence that the scale of the office building, in terms of the size of the business space provided, is appropriate for its location or would constitute diversification of an existing business to gain the support of Policy D6 of the VALP.
8. The lack of a business plan also places into doubt that the existing leisure and recreational facility would be retained, and I also have no detailed evidence that the development would result in additional local employment. Moreover, if the office development were to secure additional employment this would increase vehicle movements, associated with staff, rather than reducing car journeys and carbon emissions. The appellants have drawn my attention to the office having the support of the Council Economic Development Team and the Parish Council. However, this support would not outweigh the need to consider the proposal against the adopted policies. The lack of a business plan leads me to place limited weight on the employment benefits of the development.
9. The use of the stables for private use only, by the occupants of the proposed dwelling, rather than as a business would bring the stable building in line with Policy C2 of the VALP. However, it would not alter my decision that the proposed office is not a small scale rural office and is not justified in this location.
10. Policy S7 of the VALP encourages the reuse of previously developed land in sustainable locations. The Framework defines previously developed land (PDL) as land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed).
11. Even if the existing stables are privately owned and only used for the owners' horses, the site has been developed with permanent structures. The hardstanding, associated with the buildings, forms part of the curtilage. Therefore, having regard

to the definition of PDL in the Framework, for the purposes of this appeal, the whole of the appeal site is PDL.

12. I acknowledge that the site is outside the settlement of Gawcott. However, I saw at my visit that there is a footpath on the opposite side of the road. This is separated from the highway for most of the journey into the village by a grass verge. At the time of my visit, it was also well-maintained and fairly level. The walk to Gawcott would be approximately ten minutes with the walk to the bus stop around thirteen minutes. The village is identified in the VALP as a 'medium village' which are moderately sustainable locations which have key services and facilities.
13. In my judgement Gawcott is within walking distance of the appeal site and it would be possible, safe, and sufficiently pleasant to walk to access bus stops and the public house. Buckingham, which is a larger settlement, is within cycling distance and would provide access to other services, facilities, employment, and education. Moreover, I have no compelling evidence that the cycling journey to Buckingham would not be safe. The site is not isolated from the nearest settlements and is sufficiently well-related to the settlement, even though it is in the countryside. Consequently, the appeal proposal would not be wholly reliant on private vehicles to access services and facilities and would support the use of alternative means of travel. I, therefore, find that, given its status as PDL, the appeal site is in a sustainable location.
14. The proposed new dwelling would be in the countryside, which is resisted in Policy S3 of the VALP. Nevertheless, it would not be isolated development. Moreover, although it is within walking and cycling distance of Gawcott other open fields would provide a gap between the site and the village, and also between the site and Buckingham, to ensure that the development would not result in the coalescence of the two settlements.
15. The proposed dwelling would, therefore, result in the redevelopment of PDL in a sustainable location, as is supported by Policy S7 of the VALP. Nevertheless, the support in Policy S7 would not outweigh the harm I have identified from the lack of business justification for the office building.
16. For the above reasons, even though I find that the site is in a sustainable location, it is not an appropriate location for the proposed commercial stables and office building having regard to the development strategy for the area. The proposal would, therefore, fail to comply with the requirements of Policies C2, D6 and E5 of the VALP which, taken together, seek to ensure that commercial equestrian developments are supported by a business plan, seek to promote the re-use of existing buildings and only permit new buildings alongside re-use, require new employment development to be appropriate to its context, and require a sequential test for main town centre uses not within defined town centres.

Character and appearance

17. The existing buildings are clustered along the roadside edge of the site. They are an eclectic mix of building types, materials, and styles. From the main road they are partially screened, however, they are visible from a gap in the hedgerow which is the access to the neighbouring site and visible on the approaches to the site, over the existing hedge. The existing buildings are visually harmful to the character and appearance of the area due to their poor condition and mixed materials.

18. The proposed office and stables would be in a similar location to the existing buildings. However, the proposed dwelling, albeit on PDL which previously contained a horse walker structure, would be on land where there was no permanent structures or any substantial mass and, therefore, on land which currently appears as part of the countryside around the buildings. The proposed dwelling would extend into land which has the characteristics of the countryside, even though it is not grazing land. This would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would not reflect the physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings, even if the proposal would be similar to a traditional farmyard layout.
19. The design of the dwelling and stables are not, in my judgement, overly domestic. However, there is no justification for the size of the roof or the overall height of the dwelling which, from the images provided by the appellants, would be taller than the storage barn. Moreover, the roof would dominate the building and appear excessive and there is no evidence before me that the roof needs to be of the size or shape proposed to enable the use of solar tiles. The office building would have a domestic appearance and scale but would be a low level building with simple fenestration and low pitched roof, which would not be uncommon in the countryside. Nevertheless, there is no design relationship between the three buildings proposed and each would look as if it has been designed separately rather than as part of a redevelopment proposal. This lack of a design approach to the development would be visually harmful and would not improve the character and appearance of the area, contrary to the appellants' assertion.
20. The height of the buildings, and that they are spread further across the site than the existing buildings, would mean that they appear to have a greater massing, even if I accept the appellants' calculations on volume. The 25-30% increase in volume limit for replacement buildings within the Green Belt is not relevant to this case as it is not within the Green Belt. Furthermore, the limit in Policy S4 relates to increase in volume over the original building rather than the existing building whereas the appellants are seeking to argue a volume increase over the existing buildings.
21. The proposed buildings would be visible on the approach to the site from Gawcott and also visible to pedestrians using the footpath on the opposite side of the road. They would be more prominent than the existing buildings and would appear to extend further into the countryside. Additional hedge planting and allowing the hedge to grow taller would reduce the effect, as too would the blank rear elevations facing towards the road. Nevertheless, the buildings would continue to be visible and harmful to the character of the area.
22. Overall, even though the appeal site is not within a conservation area, the Green Belt, or an area of outstanding natural beauty, it is within the countryside and the massing, design, layout and visual appearance of the buildings would be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area and would not improve the condition of the existing poor landscape noted within the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment.
23. For the above reasons, the appeal proposal would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area contrary to the requirements of Policies BE2 and NE4 of the VALP. Collectively these policies seek to ensure that all new development respects and complements the physical characteristics of the site and its

surroundings, and the natural qualities and features of the area, seek to recognise the character and distinctiveness of the landscape, minimise impact on visual amenity, respect local character, and ensure that development is not visually prominent.

Biodiversity

24. The appeal proposal includes biodiversity net gain (BNG) measures. These include new areas of amenity grassland, new hedgerows, and a new water feature. Several of these features are outside of the red edge of the application site and would, therefore, be considered as off-site BNG.
25. Nevertheless, the Environment Act 2021 does not require BNG to be provided exclusively on the appeal site and off-site provision can include land within the blue line boundary.
26. There is no reason within Policy NE1, the Framework or the Environment Act 2021 that BNG cannot be provided within the blue edged area or that the red edge needs to be amended to include the BNG. I, therefore, find that the appeal proposal would not adversely affect biodiversity and would comply with Policy NE1 of the VALP which, amongst other matters, seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity and secure net gains.

Other Matters

27. There is no disagreement between the parties that the Council is not able to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites when measured against the local housing need. There is disagreement as to the actual figure, nevertheless, there is agreement that there is not a five year supply and paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is engaged.
28. As recognised by the Framework, the countryside is protected for its intrinsic character and beauty, and development should be sympathetic to the context and character of the area. Policies BE2 and NE4 of the VALP are broadly consistent with the Framework in that regard. Policies C2, D6 and E5 of the VALP are also broadly consistent with the Framework in supporting rural enterprises, including equestrian uses. However, in the absence of evidence of the business use the appeal proposal would not benefit from the policy support. Consequently, I have given the conflict with the policies in the development plan significant weight and the proposed development conflicts with the development plan, as a whole.
29. The proposal would accord with the Framework which seeks to boost the supply of housing. It would also be deliverable within a short timeframe and would provide economic benefits both during and post construction. However, although I afford significant weight to the provision of new houses, as only one dwelling is proposed this benefit is limited when weighing the merits of the scheme. I therefore afford significant weight to the limited benefit the development would make to addressing the housing shortfall.
30. There would also be some benefits from the potential reduction in vehicle movements, providing that the occupier of the site worked in the proposed office building and currently visited the stables. However, the vehicle movement numbers and miles travelled provided in the appellants addendum suggest that the stables would no longer attract any vehicle movements, which conflicts with the

proposal being for commercial stables. Furthermore, there is no background to the existing commuting figure provided. I, therefore, find that the reduction in vehicle movements is not a significant benefit and only give this matter limited weight.

31. The re-use of PDL is a benefit. However, although PDL is prioritised for redevelopment, the benefit is outweighed by the harm to the character and appearance of the area. Although the proposal would remove existing unsightly structures the development proposed would also be visually harmful. The provision of BNG is a benefit though I only give this moderate weight in the overall balance.
32. The appeal site is close to the settlement of Gawcott, within walking distance of the village facilities and within cycling distance of Buckingham. I acknowledge that the appeal site is not isolated but this is a neutral matter rather than a benefit of the scheme. The evidence before me also indicates that the proposal is for a self-build dwelling. However, there is no mechanism within the appeal submission to secure the scheme as self-build, such as a completed legal agreement, and as such I give this matter limited weight.
33. The offers proposed in the draft planning obligation are not fully detailed. Neither do I have any planning policy justification for any of the offers put forward and I cannot be certain that such a planning obligation would meet the tests for legal agreements. I have, therefore, given very limited weight to these as benefits.
34. On the other side of the balance, the proposal would result in environmental harm from the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would also undermine the Framework's aim of promoting rural businesses. These adverse effects would be significant, and I afford them significant weight. Even though Policies S1, S2 and S3, which seek to guide new housing to within settlements, are afforded limited weight, the harm identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits that would arise from the development, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour does not apply.
35. The appellants have referred to the Council not seeking to work with them to achieve a positive outcome. However, the conduct of the Council during the consideration of the application does not affect my findings on the main issues or the planning balance.

Conclusion

36. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

K Townsend

INSPECTOR