Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2025

by A Phillips MPlan BA CertHE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/25/3367232
Dovecote Farm Hepworth Road, Thelnetham, Suffolk IP22 1JH

- 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 Ms Vanessa Woodward against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
- The application Ref is 25/0426/FUL.
- The development proposed is conversion of existing buildings into one dwelling and one Holiday Letting Unit

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The West Suffolk Local Plan 2024-2041 July 2025 (Local Plan) has been adopted since the Council determined this development. I have considered the appeal against the policy requirements of the new Local Plan, which the appellant has had chance to comment on.

3. The Council was asked to confirm if it now benefited from a 5 year housing land supply. The Council responded to state that it was confident it did have one, though its annual update will be published in early Autumn.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
   - Relevant policies for the location of housing in line with the Council's spatial strategy and its accessibility to services and/or facilities.
   - effect on the character and appearance of the local area.
   - provision of external amenity space for future occupants.
   - provision of parking.

Reasons

Spatial strategy and accessibility to services and/or facilities

5. The proposal is seeking to convert two agricultural barns into a dwelling (House A) and a holiday let (House B). The site is in a relatively remote rural location and is accessed off a country lane.

6. Policy LP26 of the Local Plan allows for the replacement or conversion of buildings in the countryside for tourist accommodation, though does not allow for an open market

dwelling. Therefore, the Holiday Let building can be acceptable in principle while the dwelling is unacceptable in principle under this policy. In addition, there is no requirement for tourist accommodation to be in proximity or to have sustainable transport to services or facilities. However, this policy also states that the existing building must be structurally sound. While I could not enter House B, I was able to enter House A and noticed part of the roof was in poor condition. Further to this, the submitted structural report is now nine years old and is unlikely to provide an accurate reflection of either building's structural quality. Therefore, the proposal does not comply with this policy.

7. It is noted that Policy LP27of the Local Plan that relates to tourist accommodation does require the site to be close to a settlement and have access to public transport, cycling and walking links. However, Policy LP26 of the Local Plan regarding House B is the primary policy, as the proposal relates to re-use of a building in the countryside.

8. Policy LP16 of the Local Plan is the primary policy for House A, which again requires the building to be structural sound and as stated above I have concluded that this has not been demonstrated. In addition, the policy requires marketing for at least 12 months. The evidence before me provides very limited marketing information and on this basis the proposal does not comply with Policy LP16.

9. Very limited evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this site has a realistic fallback position under Class Q of the General Permitted Development Order to be developed as two dwellings. On this basis only limited weight is given to a potential fall back position.

10. I therefore conclude on this issue that the proposal does not comply with the spatial strategy of the Local Plan. On this basis for the reasons stated above the proposal does not comply with Policies LP16 and LP26 of the Local Plan, which both control how redundant buildings in the countryside are reused. The National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (Framework) paragraph 117 places priority on sustainable means of transport and given the rural location of the site there would be limited opportunity for people to walk or cycle to services and facilities and there would likely be conflict between pedestrian and cyclists with vehicles along Hepworth Road, which is both narrow and unlit.

Character and appearance

11. The existing buildings are of very limited architectural merit that add little to the character or appearance of the countryside. In addition, the buildings are not prominent in the street scene.

12. House A and House B would both be of a simple architectural style, though would provide a visual improvement regarding materials and respects the agricultural built form in the locality.

13. On this issue I conclude that the proposal would preserve the rural character and appearance of the countryside. On this basis the proposal would comply with Policy LP9 of the Local Plan in this regard, which seeks to create a sense of place while having regard to its local context.

External amenity space

14. House A and House B would be required to share the same external amenity space. The provided space would not be sufficient or benefit from a decent level of

privacy, specifically for House A. Even if the two proposed houses were sold together, this would not overcome the lack of private amenity space that future occupants would have access to.

15. I therefore conclude on this issue that the proposal does not provide sufficient external amenity space for future occupants. On this basis, the proposal does not comply with Policy LP9 of the Local Plan in this regard as it requires new homes to have adequate space and privacy.

Parking provision

16. The plan submitted for my consideration only shows two parking spaces located adjacent to House A. While there could be sufficient space adjacent to House B, given the rural location of the site the proposal does not currently demonstrate sufficient parking for two dwellings.

17. I therefore conclude on this issue that the proposal does not provide sufficient parking provision. On this basis, the proposal does not comply with Policy LP44 of the Local Plan, which seeks all developments to provide adequate parking.

Planning Balance

18. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

19. The Council cannot for the purposes of this appeal demonstrate a deliverable five year supply of housing land as required by Paragraph 78 of the Framework. Consequently, paragraph 11 d) of the Framework, which is a material consideration of significant weight, is engaged. It states that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

20. The site's access is within flood zones 2 and 3, though the buildings to be converted are both within flood zone 1. On this basis, it is not considered that footnote 7 of 11d of the Framework is engaged. However, there is concern that emergency services might struggle to reach the site. While this could partially be mitigated by a condition requiring a sprinkler system, this still moderately weighs against the application as this would only cover a delay in the fire service reaching the site.

21. The Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The proposal is not in accordance with the aforementioned policies of the Local Plan, with the harm to the amenity of future occupants from lack of privacy, lack of parking provision and the proposal conflicting with spatial strategy of the recently adopted Local Plan. For these reasons, the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

22. The Framework promotes residential development where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities and acknowledges that this might be in nearby settlements. The benefit of the two dwellings in supporting both services within the

village and nearby settlements is limited. There is also likely limited economic benefits during the construction phase.

23. However, I have concluded that there would be significant harm due to lack of privacy to future occupants and lack of parking on the site. In addition, the lack of suitable access to footpaths for pedestrians to safely walk into the village and the heavy reliance on private motor vehicles significantly weighs against the application. Finally, the limitations of emergency services potentially accessing the site further adds moderate weight against the proposal.

24. The adverse impacts would, therefore, significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

25. For the reasons set out above the appeal does not succeed.

A Phillips

INSPECTOR