



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 September 2025

by H Miles BA (hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/A2280/W/25/3363259

Ringshill Farm, Wouldham Road, Borstal, Rochester, Medway ME1 3TP

- 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 Tom Gore against the decision of Medway Council.
 - The application Ref is MC/23/2159.
 - The development proposed is sui generis uses, open storage and the stationing of 30no. self-storage containers and proposed landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. It appears that the open storage and stationing of self storage containers has already taken place. For the avoidance of doubt, the fact that some development has occurred has not altered my decision. However, the term 'retrospective application' has been removed from the banner heading so that the description relates to the act of development.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Kent Downs National Landscape.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is within the Kent Downs National Landscape (previously the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB), and I give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in this area, which has the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. I have a duty to seek to further the statutory purposes of the National Landscape which are conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the areas designated.
5. The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Update 2020 identifies the site as being within the Medway Valley Character Area in the Eastern Scarp Sub-Area, which is characterised by cultivated arable land along scarp foot, and large arable fields on lower slopes. It is also within the 'Kent Downs – Medway, Western & Eastern Scarp area of the Landscape Assessment of Kent (2004) and the 'Wouldham Scarp East and Wouldham Marshes' character areas of the Medway Landscape Character Area Assessment (2011). These are characterised by features including intensively cultivated fields, a large open landscape with few

hedgerows, gently undulating arable farmland and sparse, remnant hedges leading up to wooded ridges.

6. Prior to this development taking place, the appeal site was an open field associated with the farm. This agricultural use and character, along with the open, green characteristics made a positive contribution to the important features of this landscape area, as set out above.
7. The appeal scheme introduces 30 shipping containers to this site. These are utilitarian structures, coloured green, with little detailing or articulation. Although flat roofed and single storey, together they occupy a considerable footprint and result in an industrial appearance with a large, bulky, built form. In addition, the scheme includes areas used for external storage which at the time of my site visit included numerous vehicles, tyres and scaffolding poles. The appeal scheme proposes that three open storage areas would be enclosed with 2.4m high palisade timber fencing. However, this solid style of fencing would be uncharacteristic of this rural location and this development would add to the utilitarian, urban appearance of the site.
8. The development is seen in the context of the existing farm buildings and activity. However, the appeal scheme increases the scale of the area covered by built development, and with an urban appearance.
9. Landscaping has been planted around the edge of the site, which includes native trees and hedgerows. This provides some screening although at present the storage containers are visible through this landscaping. However, additional planting is proposed with the appeal scheme. The planting would have a positive effect on landscape character in restoring hedgerows and field boundaries. Whilst it provides some screening, which would increase as it matures over time, even with additional planting and gapping up, I am not satisfied that the landscaping would fully screen the storage areas and containers, particularly when trees are not in leaf.
10. The submitted Landscape Visual Appraisal concludes that there is a moderate impact during landscaping installation with a low impact within 10 years, once mitigation planting has established. Also, from the most visible points along public rights of way, there is a moderate to high impact, reducing to a moderate impact in year 10, inclusive of the proposed landscaping. Therefore from public view points there would be a harmful impact and the degree of harm is reliant on the proposed landscaping obscuring views of the proposed development, which would be seasonal.
11. The appeal scheme would restore hedgerows and field boundaries around its perimeter. However, the proposed development is a clearly built up form and use and results in an urban character across the majority of the appeal site. This unacceptably erodes the open farmland appearance of the land across a large area. Overall, this development would undermine the important landscape character of this area and would be harmful to the landscape and scenic beauty of this area. It would not conserve or enhance the nationally important Kent Downs National Landscape and I give great weight to this matter.
12. Therefore, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Kent Downs National Landscape. As such, it would be contrary to Policies BNE1, BNE25, BNE28 and

BNE32 of the Medway Local Plan (2003) (LP). Together these require appropriate design which maintains the rural character including with regard to farm diversification. As well as conserving the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB.

13. Policy BNE27 of the LP mainly relates to the re-use of buildings in the countryside. Consequently, the policies above are more relevant to the development proposed.

Other Matters

Farm diversification

14. The proposed development would contribute to the diversification of Ringshill Farm. The sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas and the diversification of agricultural rural businesses are supported by the Framework. The Kent Downs Management Plan, Third Revision 2021 to 2026 also supports farm diversification activities if they help achieve the vision aims and principles of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.
15. Ringshill Farm makes an important contribution to the rural and agricultural character and appearance of the area. The appellant engages with environmental schemes including the Higher Tier Countryside scheme which aims to protect and enhance the natural environment by increasing biodiversity, improving water and air quality, and improving the landscape character. As well as the Sustainable Farming Incentive which takes actions that support food production whilst protecting and enhancing the environment.
16. The farm has already undertaken diversification activities by converting redundant farm buildings into commercial space (LPA ref MC/19/2789) and letting land for grazing horses and dog walking. Along with adding value to the hay business by accessing the regional equestrian market. In addition, the storage areas are generally let to local business, albeit there is no mechanism to secure a local connection.
17. The appeal scheme would further diversify the farm business and provides a regular, stable income at a time when farm support payments are diminishing, costs are increasing and agricultural markets are volatile due to external factors and climate change. The development would therefore contribute to the financial viability of the farm. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the development proposed for this appeal is required in order that this farm would remain viable. As such, the development would make a moderate positive contribution to this important use.
18. Policy BNE28 of the LP is supportive of farm diversification, where certain criteria are satisfied. These include that the development will not harm rural character and is appropriate to its rural surroundings. For the reasons above, the proposed development would not satisfy these criteria, as such this policy does not weigh in favour of the development proposed.

Heritage

19. There are Grade II listed buildings at Ring's Hill farmhouse and barn. Their significance appears to derive from their age and historic appearance. I have visited the appeal site and I agree that due to the distance and other buildings in between there would be no harm to the setting of these listed buildings. Nevertheless, the lack of harm to heritage assets would be a neutral factor.

Other Matters

20. My attention is drawn to an application for storage containers which was permitted (LPA ref: MC/22/2108). However, this was for a smaller development of 18 containers, and whilst it was in the National Landscape there is no evidence before me to indicate that the circumstances, including the screening from existing buildings, is similar to that before me now. As such, this does not alter my conclusions.

Planning Balance

21. The proposed development is for farm diversification which includes the associated benefits as set out above. However, I give great weight to the harm to the character and appearance of the Kent Downs National Landscape. Therefore, the moderate benefits would not outweigh this harm.

Conclusion

22. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Consequently, for the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

H Miles

INSPECTOR