



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 24 June and 13 October 2025

Site visits made on 24 June and 13 October 2025

by Matthew Jones BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/W/24/3355854

Land to south of High Street/Church Road, Wick

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Horizon Construction Bristol Ltd against the decision of South Gloucestershire Council.
 - The application Ref is P24/01732/PIP.
 - The development proposed is described as *'infill residential development of a minimum/maximum of nine self-build dwellings'*.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for Costs

2. During the hearing the Council made an application for costs against Horizon Construction Bristol Ltd. That application is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The proposal is for permission in principle (PiP). The Planning Practice Guidance advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The PiP consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or PiP stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second, 'technical details consent' (TDC) stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
4. The scope of the considerations for PiP is limited to location, land use and the amount of development put forward. The amount of residential development should be expressed as a range, indicating the minimum and maximum number of new dwellings. In this case, the description on the application form limits the range to no more or less than nine dwellings. I have determined the appeal on this basis.
5. The Council's third reason for refusal relates to the potential effect of the proposal on archaeology. However, during the appeal process the Council accepted that this is a matter that could be addressed within a TDC application and withdrew this reason for refusal. I have no reason to reach a contrary view.

Main Issue

6. The main issue therefore is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development, with particular reference to:

- the effect of the proposal on the setting of the Grade I listed building Wick Court;
- whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
- the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and
- whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Wick Court

7. The appeal site is part of a large field to the south of the A420, one of the main roads through the settlement of Wick. Much of Wick extends along the A420, but the nucleated core of the modern village is directly to the north of the site, and most of Wick's services and facilities are close by. To the immediate west is an industrial estate, which grew from a former corn mill. Around 120m to the south is Wick Court, from which the site is separated by the River Boyd.
8. Wick Court is a circa 17th Century dwelling. Listed at Grade I it is a designated heritage asset of the highest significance. Wick Court's significance principally derives from its remarkably well-preserved exterior and equally well-preserved interior; it is a largely complete example of a minor country house of its period.
9. Public views of Wick Court are possible along the A420. These views are heavily filtered by the trees which line the River Boyd's banks, and so are largely restricted to the barer, less leafy months, and even then they are limited. Even so, the appellant's photographic evidence shows this relationship in January, with Wick Court, with its distinctive, faded ochre render walls, gabled roof profile and various window openings clearly identifiable from the A420 across the appeal site.
10. The estates and surrounding landscape settings of 17th century country houses held significant importance to their owners and occupiers both in the way they were practically used and as symbols of their power and wealth. Compared to the building itself, Wick Court's once large historic estate is significantly less well preserved, and in ownership terms now amounts to little more than three acres.
11. The layout of the former estate is illustrated by a 1712 engraving by Johannes Kip. The engraving is obviously not an entirely accurate historic record, but from it, and later survey mapping, one can deduce that the more formal aspect of Wick Court's grounds was focused to its south and east, with the expansive land to its north set out more functionally as parkland or farmland within which was the historic mill site.
12. The appeal site was an integral part of the northern area of the estate. However, whilst currently undeveloped, the evidence shows that the wider field was previously planted as an orchard, a large part formed a mill race and pond, and the more open area to the north where the appeal site is concentrated contained avenues of trees. There was also an intervening period of use as a car park. The openness of the field, and the filtered views of the listed building that this openness provides, are therefore a much more modern and likely incidental construct and not planned to convey Wick Court's significance to the public.

13. Nonetheless the field does just that. Its natural and undeveloped character provides an echo of its historic appearance and role within the estate. Sitting in its immediate foreground, the field effectively acts as a natural, rural plinth to the listed building when viewed from the appeal site and from the A420. The field's openness and its absence of buildings also provide Wick Court with a degree of remoteness from other development that one would expect for a country house of its status. This sense of rural 'breathing space' can be experienced from the A420, from within the appeal site, and also from the house itself, when stood in the area near its (current) front door, looking northeast under the tree canopy out across the river.
14. It follows that the site makes a positive contribution to the significance of Wick Court both in terms of its evidenced part of the historic estate but also visually in the way it frames and offers an important rural context to the house. The importance of this contribution is not diminished but rather enhanced by the harmful way in which the burgeoned built form of the modern industrial estate has conspicuously imposed itself upon the setting of the listed building. The same can be said for the modern encroachment of Wick and the noise and activity generated by the A420.
15. Whilst I am mindful that my assessment is taking place at the initial PiP stage, the development of nine dwellings on the site would invariably diminish and urbanise the important rurality and separation that Wick Court retains and indeed deserves. The semblance of the appeal site as part of the historic rural estate would be lost.
16. The public perception of the listed building as a high status 'country' house and its immediate rural context would be reduced by blocking the views through the site from the A420. Views would be retained from the area of the A420 to the east near the former Carpenter's Arms. However, these residual views would be heavily influenced by the immediate proximity of the proposed development.
17. It follows that the scheme would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of Wick Court. Given that the harm would be tempered by the filtered and seasonal nature of the views of the house, it would place in the middle of a sliding scale of that harm. Even so, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) informs us that great weight should be given to a heritage asset's conservation and that any harm to heritage assets requires clear and convincing justification. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.
18. Where less than substantial harm would occur, this should be weighed against the public benefits of a scheme. In this case, that balancing exercise must take place within the context of s.66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Inter alia, it states that when considering whether to grant PiP for a development which affects a listed building's setting, the decision maker shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving that setting.
19. The Council can only currently demonstrate a 4.41-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Given that the emerging local plan for the area is at an early stage of preparation, having not yet been examined, it is unlikely that the shortfall will be addressed any time soon. There is also a clear undersupply of self-build plots. The scheme would make important contributions to addressing both shortfalls. It would provide short- and long-term local economic benefits and environmental benefits associated with any additional planting. These public benefits attract significant weight but fall short of overcoming the great weight I give to the harm that would arise to a designated heritage asset of the highest significance.

20. Consequently, the proposal would have an unacceptable effect on the setting of Wick Court. It would conflict with the heritage related aims of Policy CS9 of the Core Strategy (Adopted 2013), Policy PSP17 of the Policies, Sites and Places Plan (adopted 2017) (the PSPP) and the Framework.

Inappropriate development

21. The appeal site is within the Green Belt. Paragraph 142 of the Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Paragraph 154 goes on to explain that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it meets a listed exception. Policies CS5 and CS34 of the Core Strategy are consistent with the Framework insofar as together they seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development in line with the provisions of the Framework.
22. Of relevance to my assessment is exception e) in Paragraph 145: limited infilling in villages. This phrase is not further defined in the Framework, and so whether a proposal meets its terms is a matter of planning judgment, with each scheme to be assessed on its site-specific merits and against the character of the village in question. In this case, Wick is experienced as quite a large, long and in places expansive village, particularly the ribbon development along the A420. Given such, I agree that there is the potential for as many as nine dwellings to constitute limited development within Wick, in the right circumstances, in the Framework's terms.
23. Equally, however, the journey along the A420 has rural elements, and one does not always perceive the land to the south to form part of the village. To the west of the industrial estate there is a very clear distinction between housing in the village to the north of the A420 and what is overtly open countryside to the south. The industrial uses lend themselves to this rural fringe narrative, as does the highly verdant and undeveloped character of the appeal site. Moreover, during the Winter months views are possible through the trees to the wider landscape, which connects the field to the surrounding countryside. For these reasons, the appeal site does not fall within Wick but rather is in the countryside, albeit it forms an area of countryside with an intimate relationship with the adjacent village.
24. It was put to me at the Hearing that the site would infill a logical gap between the industrial estate and the new housing at the former Carpenter's Arms site. However, on the ground the gap reads as being defined by its boundary with the A420 and extends from the industrial estate all the way across the field to where the River Boyd passes under the highway further to the east. This means that the scheme would develop only part of the gap, and so infilling would not occur. Overall, then, whilst as many as nine dwellings could be considered limited within the context of Wick, the scheme would not infill a gap within the village.
25. The Framework also provides that under certain circumstances the development of land which is defined in the glossary as 'Grey Belt' is not inappropriate. Given that I have found that the application of policies in the Framework that relate to designated heritage assets would provide a strong reason for refusing the development, the appeal site cannot be found to comprise Grey Belt land.
26. It follows that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Openness

27. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. The openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect.
28. Given that the field is fundamentally open, development of the site with nine dwellings and their typical trappings, such as enclosures and vehicles, would likely have a significant effect on the spatial aspect of the Green Belt's openness. Conversely, I agree that, given the generally high level of containment of the field from the surrounding Green Belt owing to the trees to the south and Wick to the north, the effect on the visual aspect of openness would be much more limited.
29. Nonetheless, the Framework advises that substantial weight be given to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and any other harm and that is the weight I shall apply to the loss of openness in this case.

Other considerations / very special circumstances

30. The Framework states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances and very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
31. In addition to the aforementioned public benefits of the scheme, I also recognise that the site is in a location where future occupants would have adequate access to services and facilities. I further acknowledge that, given the extent of Green Belt within South Gloucestershire, it is likely that some areas of the Green Belt will have to be developed one way or another to meet the identified need for housing in the area going forward. This is reflected in the emerging development plan, including with potential allocations around Wick itself.
32. In this context, the other considerations in favour of the scheme are significant. However, they do not compare to the substantial weight that I attribute to the harm to the Green Belt through inappropriateness, harm to openness, and also the harm that would arise to the setting of Wick Court. It follows that the very special circumstances necessary to justify the scheme do not exist.
33. Consequently, the proposal would conflict with Policies CS5 and CS34 of the Core Strategy and the Framework insofar as they seek to prevent inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless under very special circumstances.

Conclusion on main issue

34. Drawing this main issue together, I conclude that the site would not be suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Other Matters

35. Some of the ancillary structures around the more intimate parts of Wick Court form an additional two Grade II listed buildings. They are (i) Wall and Doorway about 10 Metres Northwest of Wick Court and (ii) Garden Walls, Attached Summerhouse and Gate Piers Attached to Southeast of Wick Court. Logically, the site is also within both of their settings and so I must consider how they would be affected.

36. However, I consider that the significance of these two buildings is primarily derived from their relationship to Wick Court and the way in which they define the use and extent of Wick Court's more immediate garden spaces. Given such, I do not consider that the proposed development would harm their respective significances, and their individual settings would be preserved.

Planning Balance

37. Given my findings above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan when read as a whole. Whilst the absence of a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites draws me to Paragraph 11 of the Framework, I have already found that the harm to the setting of Wick Court means that the application of the heritage related policies within the Framework provides a strong reason to refuse the proposal. Paragraph 11 d) ii) of the Framework is therefore not engaged.
38. In their totality, the other considerations before me, including the Framework, do not indicate that I should make a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

39. For the reasons given above, and taking all other matters raised into account, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Matthew Jones

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mr Hugh Richards	Counsel
Mr Kit Stokes	Planning Agent
Mr Ed Oakley	Heritage Specialist
Mr Adam Hughes	Landscape Specialist

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mrs Marie Bath	Development Manager
Mr Ian Gething	Conservation Officer

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Cllr Bronwell Dyson	Wick and Abson Parish Council
Mr James Wattmore	Local Resident
Mr Andrew Fraser	Local Resident

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED DURING THE HEARING

1. Engraving of Wick Court (1712) by Johannes Kip
2. Historic England publication 'The Setting of heritage Assets'.
3. Council's costs application