



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 October 2025

by G Bayliss BA (Hons) MA MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/25/3367211

Hill Farm Barn, Water Lane, Renhold, Bedford MK41 0JH

- 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 James Gill against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/02059/S73A.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of paddock land to residential curtilage land.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal seeks approval for the change of use of paddock land to residential curtilage. This development has already occurred. Furthermore, I am conscious that other works have taken place on this land, including the construction of a swimming pool, other structures and hard surfacing, but it does not appear that the appellant is seeking planning permission for these other works. In my decision, I will therefore predominantly consider the change of use which has been applied for but will make some reference to the other works which have taken place and the current appearance of the site.
3. The appeal site lies close to Hill Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) requires special regard to be had to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The Council's first reason for refusal mentions that harm would be caused to the significance of Hill Farmhouse, primarily because of the erosion of the agricultural setting of Hill Farm Barn, which formed part of the historic farmstead.
4. The Council's appeal statement indicates that it is satisfied that Hill Farm Barn is not a curtilage listed structure associated with Hill Farmhouse. On that basis, it now contends that the development has not harmed the significance of Hill Farmhouse through any erosion of the barn's setting. However, taking account of my statutory duty, I must consider the broader heritage context. While Hill Farm Barn may not be curtilage listed, it remains historically associated with Hill Farmhouse as part of the original farmstead. Regardless of its listing status, Hill Farm Barn contributes to the environment in which the listed building is experienced and understood, thereby supporting its significance. Likewise, the surrounding agricultural land, including the appeal site, forms an integral part of that historic setting and reinforces the farmhouse's significance. Accordingly, I

shall consider the effect of the development on the wider setting of the listed building.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the significance of a Grade II listed building and a scheduled monument.

Reasons

6. The evidence indicates that, until recently, the appeal site was part of a field lying immediately to the west of Hill Farm Barn. Within the northern corner of the field is Howbury ringwork and medieval trackway, a scheduled monument. The area in the vicinity of the appeal site has a distinctly rural feel, characterised by agricultural land subdivided by hedges and fences, groups of mature trees and dwellings scattered in the landscape. The land slopes gently southward, offering generally open views to the north and west of the appeal site.
7. The list description for Hill Farmhouse (Ref:1321205) mentions, amongst other things, that the building dates from the 18th century and is a two-storey farmhouse with an L-shaped plan, constructed mainly in roughcast over a timber frame with a tiled roof. It also describes the arrangement of openings and architectural features. In relation to this appeal, I consider the building's significance to derive principally from its function, historic fabric, and architectural detailing.
8. As explained above, the historic farm buildings and surrounding agricultural landscape collectively form part of the historic farmstead and are integral to the significance of Hill Farmhouse. During my site visit, I observed that Hill Farm Barn has been sensitively converted in a manner that retains its agricultural character thereby aiding the understanding of its original function and its relationship with Hill Farmhouse. Similarly, the domestic curtilage, prior to the development subject to this appeal, was contained close to the buildings and to Water Lane allowing the agricultural land to the west to extend practically up to the former farm buildings. Although I did not observe clear intervisibility between the appeal site and Hill Farmhouse, changes to the appeal site nonetheless have the potential to affect how the historic farmstead is seen and understood within the landscape, and may therefore affect its significance.
9. Howbury ringwork and medieval trackway is a scheduled monument (List Entry 1009627) (the monument) which the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies as a heritage asset of the highest significance. The list entry describes, amongst other things, that the monument is a well-preserved earthwork representative of medieval fortifications built and occupied from the late Anglo-Saxon period to the later 12th century. It explains that the ringwork castle comprises an earthen bank enclosing a circular area which is breached by two entrances and surrounding the ringwork is a ditch which has become partly infilled. It also describes the associated medieval driveway and traces of trackway and poorly defined earthworks alongside, suggesting that the land was cultivated during the medieval period. Historic England comments that ringworks are a rare monument type nationally and considers that this ringwork is the best preserved in Bedfordshire.

10. The monument assimilates well within the surrounding landscape yet remains identifiable due to its elevated position within the field and the presence of a cluster of mature trees. Based on the evidence before me, including the list description, I consider that the significance of the monument mainly derives from its preserved features, its layout and historic function, and archaeological remains which have the potential to yield information about past civilisations. Its significance is not limited to what is visible or experienced directly on site, but also includes the contribution made by its wider setting.
11. The monument is mainly experienced from the surrounding rural context. Despite some background noise from the nearby dual carriageway, the site has a feeling of remoteness. Standing towards the top of a slope, shrouded by trees, it has an expansive rural context with views mainly of surrounding fields, woodland and a few scattered rural buildings. The land falls away towards the river reflecting its historic function as a defensive structure. The Hill Farmhouse farmstead, including the appeal site, forms part of this southerly view.
12. Although the appeal development does not physically affect the heritage assets, the Framework advises that any harm arising from development within their setting should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 213). The appeal development has resulted in part of the paddock alongside the dwelling being used as domestic land. During my visit, I observed that the appeal site did not appear clearly demarcated and was part of an area clearly in domestic use spilling out into the wider field in an arbitrary fashion. Even setting aside the current physical features on the appeal site, the change of use of this land to residential garden would be harmful to the setting of the heritage assets. In this prominent location, jutting out into the field from the former farm building, the replacement of part of the field with domestic paraphernalia and activity, even whilst retaining the site's openness, would harm the way that the former barn is experienced and understood. It would also harm the remote, rural setting of the monument which includes surrounding earthworks indicating historic cultivation. The clear distinction between the countryside and land associated with the built development would, and has, been eroded. That harm would still occur even if the appeal site were a sensitively landscaped domestic area or if permitted development rights were restricted as the agricultural character could not be assured.
13. Furthermore, the outdoor swimming pool, gazebo and other structures together with hardstanding present on the appeal site highlight the type of domestic development that could, and have, taken place on the appeal site. This demonstrates the visual harm which can be caused to the surrounding character of the landscape, eroding the way that the heritage assets are viewed and appreciated. Therefore, harm has been caused to the significance of the Hill Farmhouse farmstead and to the monument of Howbury ringwork and medieval trackway.
14. Hill Farm Barn already appears to have a reasonably sized domestic curtilage, including additional land close to the access road, which the Council has recently approved. It is therefore not clear why additional garden land has been absorbed into the plot, especially in such a prominent location in the landscape. A small part of the land within the red line boundary may already have approval for residential use but this is only a narrow strip alongside the building compared to the size of the area subject to this appeal.

15. Although the development is largely screened from public view, views are achievable from neighbouring property and land. Also, designated heritage assets are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether public views or access to the sites can be gained. Also, in the context of this appeal, the interrelationship between the two heritage assets and the surrounding landscape is particularly important to their significance. Whilst a condition could be attached to an approval to require landscaping to screen the development, it would not be appropriate to hide a development which is fundamentally unacceptable in planning terms. In any event, this measure would not remove the harmful change to the agricultural character of the site. Although the Appellant suggests that there would be no additional construction on the appeal site, the harm arising from the current development is already clear to see.
16. The Appellant refers to Policy 65 of the Bedford Borough Local Plan (2020) (BBLP), relating to the reuse of rural buildings in the countryside. However, the conversion has already taken place and therefore it is not relevant to this decision. In any event, this policy requires a residential curtilage to relate well to the existing building and landscape which it does not.
17. Regardless of the planning status of the outdoor swimming pool and other ancillary structures erected on the appeal site, the change of use of the land has had a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the significance of a Grade II listed building and scheduled monument. The additional structures on the site add further harm to that already identified. Therefore, in relation to the heritage assets, the expectations of the Act are not met.
18. Paragraph 212 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of those assets and any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. In relation to both the listed building and the monument I find the harm in the context of the significance of the heritage assets, in the language of the Framework, to be at the lower end of 'less than substantial' in this instance. This commands considerable importance and weight and is not to be treated as a less than substantial objection to the proposal. Furthermore, harm to a scheduled monument as an asset of the highest significance weighs significantly against the development. The Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
19. Whilst the additional domestic area is clearly beneficial to the appellant, I regard this as a private rather than a public benefit. Moreover, I have been given no evidence that the continued viable use of the appeal property as a residential dwelling, or its maintenance, is dependent on the development, as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence.
20. Given the above, I conclude that the public benefits would be of insufficient weight to outweigh the great weight to be given to the harm to the designated heritage assets. As such, the development would not comply with the Framework. In addition, there is no clear and convincing justification for the harm to the significance of the heritage assets. Furthermore, I have found harm to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, there would be conflict with BBLP Policies 7S, 28S, 29, 30, and 41S. These seek, amongst other things, to

ensure development sustains the historic environment and preserves or enhances the setting of heritage assets as well as recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, the development would conflict with the development plan, when read as a whole. Material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Having considered all other matters raised I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

G Bayliss

INSPECTOR