



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 November 2025

by H Whitfield BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/K2610/W/25/3371612

Heath Farm, Norwich Road, Little Plumstead, Norfolk NR13 5JG

- 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 David Murrell of D&C Murrell Ltd against the decision of Broadland District Council.
- The application Ref is 2024/2773.
- The development proposed is described as “change of use from agricultural to mixed commercial use”.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application form indicates that the development has commenced, and I observed during my site visit that a building has been constructed on the appeal site which appeared to accord with the submitted plans. However, I observed that hard standing had been laid around the building and mesh fencing had been installed, neither of which feature on the Proposed Block Plan. Notwithstanding the development that has taken place on site, for the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal based on the submitted plans.
3. Prior approval was granted in January 2024 for the construction of a building on the appeal site for purposes reasonably necessary for agriculture within an agricultural unit under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (the GPDO). The Council contends the building was not constructed in accordance with the approved details as additional windows and doors have been installed and it has not been used for agriculture. It therefore considers the existing building may be unlawful and has assessed the application based on a different development to the one the appellant has applied for.
4. However, it is not for me, under a Section 78 appeal against a refusal of planning permission, to determine whether the existing building is lawful. It is open to the Council to consider enforcement action under Part VII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, independently to, and irrespective, of the outcome of this appeal. As such, I have determined the appeal based on the plans before me and the description of development sought by the appellant.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:

- the suitability of the location for the proposed development having regard to the site's accessibility to sustainable transport; and
- the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area having particular regard to the site's rural location.

Reasons

Accessibility to sustainable transport

6. The appeal proposes the conversion of the building to B8 storage and distribution use. No end user has been identified within the evidence and there are no details of predicted staffing levels or likely vehicular movements from the site. However, it would not be unusual for a building of this scale in B8 use to have staff working from the site and vehicles travelling to and from it for purposes inherent to its intended use.
7. I note the site is located adjacent to Heath Farm and thus is not isolated. However, there is no dispute between the parties that the site lies outside of any defined settlement boundary, within the countryside. The Council states the site is approximately 0.6 miles from Little Plumstead and 2.2 miles from Rackheath. Norwich Road is subject to the national 60mph speed limit and has no streetlights or footpaths for the majority of its length. There is no evidence before me that the site is served by any means of public transport.
8. To access the site from nearest settlements on foot or by bike, employees or visitors would have to walk or cycle along the highway. However, given the lack of footways, streetlighting and the speed of traffic on Norwich Road, it is unlikely that employees or visitors would choose to travel regularly on foot or by bike to access the site, particularly in hours of darkness or inclement weather. Thus, site users would be reliant upon travelling by private vehicles.
9. Policy GC3 of the Broadland District Council Development Management DPD (2015) (the DM DPD) provides support for the conversion of buildings for employment uses on sites outside of any defined settlement boundary which is not predicated on the site being accessible by sustainable modes of transport. However, Policy 6 of the GNLP states that on sites beyond existing settlements and in locations not well served by public transport, development should exploit any opportunities to make the location more sustainable. Policy GC4 of the DM DPD also states that proposals should pay adequate regard to being accessible to all via sustainable means including public transport.
10. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that in supporting a prosperous rural economy, sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport. However, the Framework goes on to state that in these circumstances it is important to ensure that the development exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). Therefore, while the Framework seeks to support the rural economy through the conversions of buildings and agricultural diversification, such support is not unequivocal. Instead, the Framework supports *sustainable* growth and advocates for opportunities to improve accessibility by sustainable means.
11. I have no information before me relating to the anticipated employment levels or staff vehicle movements to and from the site and how this would relate to the existing

agricultural use of the building. Therefore, I cannot be certain that these would be comparable and would not result in an intensification of private vehicular movements to and from the site. While the Highway Authority have raised no objection to the development on the account of highway safety, the site's poor connectivity to nearby settlements nevertheless points to it being in a location where sustainable travel modes could not be prioritised. Even though the proposal is put forward as an agricultural diversification scheme and would re-use an existing building, based on the evidence before me, the development is likely to be car dependant, and the appellant has not demonstrated whether any opportunities exist to make the location more accessible and sustainable.

12. My attention has been drawn to developments which the appellant considers set a precedent for the appeal scheme. However, I have very limited information before me relating to these cases and therefore cannot be certain whether the circumstances leading to their approval are directly comparable, noting that the Council advise the site at Railway Farm is situated much closer to the settlement of Rackheath and the Black Barn Farm site is adjacent to the settlement boundary of Salhouse. As such, these cases do not alter my findings on this matter.
13. For the above reasons, I conclude that the site would be an unsuitable location for the proposed development having regard to the site's accessibility to sustainable transport, contrary to Policy GC4 of the DM DPD which requires developments pay adequate regard to being accessible to all via sustainable means including public transport.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site relates to a parcel of land containing a large, green, metal clad building which is located on a stretch of Norwich Road, set in mainly open countryside where fields are interspersed with areas of trees and woodland. Nearby development comprises sporadic commercial and agricultural buildings of varying scales, some of which have been converted to alternative uses. In the vicinity of the appeal site, Norwich Road is bound by hedgerows. The building is set back from the highway behind an established hedgerow, however, due to its scale it is visible and prominent when travelling along Norwich Road.
15. Within the Rackheath and Salhouse Wooded Estate lands character area, the Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2013) seeks, amongst other things, to conserve and enhance landscape structure and character.
16. The site lies outside of any defined settlement boundary, within the countryside, where Policy GC3 of the DM DPD states that proposals for the conversion of buildings for employment uses will be permitted where the building is capable of conversion without substantial alteration. The supporting text goes on to explain that in such cases, the conversion should not be detrimental to the character of the building or the surrounding area. Policy 6 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (2024) (the GNLP) also provides support for rural enterprises through the conversion of rural buildings, and the development and diversification of agricultural land and other land based rural businesses to support the economy.
17. The appeal scheme proposes the conversion of the building to B8 storage and distribution use. No alterations to the existing building are proposed as part of this appeal. The building is of modern construction and there is nothing in the evidence before me to suggest that it is incapable of conversion. While the building is large, overtly modern in appearance and prominent when travelling along the highway, it is

clustered with development on the adjacent site and does not significantly encroach into the wider field. It is also of a scale, form and appearance that is typical of modern agricultural buildings seen in the countryside and in the surrounding area.

18. Notwithstanding the dispute between the parties relating to the fenestration arrangement, given no alterations are proposed to the appearance or positioning of the building as part of this appeal, there would be no greater effect on the character or appearance of the area arising from its conversion to an alternative use in principle. I accept that in some cases, such proposals may result in an intensification of use of a site, associated paraphernalia such as fencing, car parking and external storage which could have consequential effects on the character and appearance of an area. However, the extant agricultural use could similarly result in vehicles or machinery manoeuvring or being stored to the front of the building. Moreover, in this case, the parking of vehicles to the front of the building and the enclosure of the site with fencing would not be dissimilar to existing developments I observed on Norwich Road. Thus, it would not be out of character in this particular context. Precise details of vehicle parking/turning areas and means of enclosure could also be secured by a suitably worded condition.
19. The Council refers to the effects of the development not being mitigated for by the need for the development to be sited in a rural location. However, the policies cited by the Council in its reason for refusal do not require a need for a rural location to be demonstrated for the conversion of a building outside settlement limits.
20. For the above reasons, I therefore conclude the development would not harm the character or appearance of the surrounding area. This accords with Policies EN2, GC3 and GC4 of the DM DPD, Policies 2 and 6 of the GNLP and Policy 7 of the Great Plumstead, Little Plumstead and Thorpe End Garden Village Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2034 (the NP) which together and amongst other things, seek to ensure developments are well designed, sensitive to their surroundings, protect local landscape character and the appearance of an area.

Other Matters

21. The Council has not identified any adverse effects on living conditions or highway safety arising from the development. However, compliance with the development plan in these respects is a neutral factor.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

22. The appeal scheme would deliver economic and employment benefits to the rural economy. However, given the scale of the development, any economic, social or environmental benefits associated with the scheme would be limited and would not outweigh the harm I have identified.
23. Therefore, for the reasons given above, the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Accordingly, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

H Whitfield INSPECTOR