
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 November 2025

by **S Harrington MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 08 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E3335/W/25/3370726

Stawley Wood Farm, Stawley Road, Stawley, Wellington, Somerset TA21 0HP

- 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 PJ Luard against the decision of Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref is 35/25/0003.
 - The development proposed is conversion of agricultural building into 1 No. dwelling, carrying out of associated external alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application form described the proposal as '*Conversion of agricultural building into 1 No. dwelling with associated external alterations and erection of a detached garage/workshop*'. However, the detached garage/workshop element was removed from the proposal during the application process and prior to the Council's determination. Consequently, I have removed this part of the proposal from the description of development in the banner heading shown above and determined the appeal on this basis.

Background and Main Issue

3. The Council has granted Prior Approval¹, in respect of the change of use of an agricultural building to 1 dwellinghouse and associated building operations (the Class Q fallback). A subsequent planning application², was submitted in relation to an amended scheme for the conversion of the same agricultural building. This application was refused by the Council on a single ground, and is now the subject of the appeal before me.
4. Consequently, the main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is located on a hillside to the rear of Stawley Wood farmhouse. The surrounding area is characterised by undulating agricultural land, punctuated by occasional scattered isolated farmsteads and dwellings resulting in a highly rural and tranquil character.

¹ 35/24/0008CQ

² 35/25/0003

6. In this context, I observed that the built form in the area tends to feature differing materials, scale and architecture that reflect the varied uses and ages of buildings, often resulting in clear distinctions between rural dwellings and utilitarian farm buildings. Existing agricultural buildings tend to be of a functional design that are typical of working buildings that could be expected within a rural location and are of inherently rural character. They therefore have an appropriate sense of place within the surrounding landscape.
7. I am told the appeal building was constructed 15 years ago. However, although featuring a slate roof and stone-faced elevations, it's timber clad gable incorporating a large door opening, as well as uninterrupted roof slope provides a more functional character and differentiates it from nearby residential built form, which feature domestic architectural details including pitch roof dormer windows.
8. The proposal, whilst mostly retaining the general form of the agricultural building, would feature a largely glazed front gable as well as two pitch roof dormer windows to the front roof slope which would significantly alter the appearance of the building. The glazed gable would appear as an eye-catching and contemporary feature, with both the glazed gable and dormer windows appearing as distinct residential features within a building of overall functional architecture.
9. These features would result in a design that fails to successfully reflect the functional character of agricultural buildings in the area and would distance the proposal from its agricultural context. Therefore, despite the use of natural external materials such as stone and slate, the proposal would lead to a dwelling which would not be strongly rooted in the previous utilitarian use of the site, nor sensitive to the rural landscape of the area.
10. Furthermore, even if landscaping would be incorporated, I observed that due to its hillside position, the proposal would be visible in the wider landscape in near views from a public footpath along the entrance track, as well as more glimpse views from the public highway network and the surrounding open countryside further afield.
11. However, the proposed eye-catching domestic features would result in the building being more prominent in the rural landscape, lack an appropriate sense of place and be harmful to the rural character of the area.
12. Accordingly, I find that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with policies CP1, CP8, DM1 and DM2 of the Taunton Deane Borough Council Core Strategy 2011 - 2028 (CS) and policies SB1 and D7 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP). Amongst other matters, these policies require proposals to maintain the quality of the rural environment, protect landscape character and create a high standard of sense of place.

Other Matters

13. Given that the appellant has previously applied for and gained prior approval for the Class Q fallback and has stated an intention to convert the agricultural building, I consider that there is a real prospect of the fallback development taking place. As such, it constitutes a clear fallback position against which to assess the appeal proposal.

14. The proposal before me would provide additional living space (including additional bedrooms and bathrooms) which could benefit future occupiers. Nevertheless, I have no evidence which would lead me to find that the Class Q fallback is of substandard floor space which would result in poor living conditions. Furthermore, although the appellant suggests that solar panels would be installed, these do not form part of the scheme before me. As such I am unable to conclude that the proposal would result in a betterment in terms of energy efficiency over the Class Q fallback.
15. However, the proposal would result in development with a more intricate domestic character and eye catching and conspicuous appearance than the Class Q fallback, which would remain more utilitarian and recessive in appearance and less harmful to the surrounding area. As such, and despite any betterment to future occupiers in terms of additional living space, the proposal would be materially worse in terms of its effect on the character and appearance of the area than the Class Q fallback.
16. The Council are unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply of deliverable housing sites and have stated that their supply is 3.1 years. In these circumstances the presumption in favour of sustainable development outlined in Paragraph 11d)ii of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) is engaged.
17. The proposal would achieve an increase in housing supply in a rural area where dwellings can support larger rural service centres, and within an area with an acknowledged lack of housing provision. Nevertheless, the benefit to housing delivery is modest given the small scale of the proposal for a single dwelling. Furthermore, there would be modest short term economic benefits from the conversion of the appeal building and further modest economic and social benefits from the future occupation of the dwelling and associated spending in the locality.
18. Moreover, I have also had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This requires me to consider the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it. Protected characteristics include a person's age. I understand that the appellant wishes to plan for his old age and have space for a carer to live in if required. However, I have very little evidence that such support could not be provided from elsewhere. Therefore, whilst I have given them very careful consideration, I ascribe these personal circumstances minimal weight.
19. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and is contrary to CS policies CP1, CP8, DM1, DM2 and SADMP policies SB1 and D7, and the development plan as a whole. The Framework is clear that new development should add to the overall quality of an area. It highlights that development should be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and the surrounding built environment. The development plan policies that the scheme conflicts with are broadly consistent with the Framework. As such, and due to the degree of harm I have identified, I give the conflict with these policies substantial weight.

20. While the proposal would align with the objectives of the Framework which seek to significantly boost housing supply and promote the effective use of land, I have found the contribution to housing supply to be a modest benefit alongside other modest benefits. Consequently, the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Therefore, the proposal would not represent sustainable development.
21. Finally, although I note the appellant's comments and concerns about the Council's handling of the application and previous applications at the appeal site, I have considered the proposal on its planning merits on the basis of the evidence before me and a recent site visit.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. No material considerations, individually or cumulatively (including the Class Q fallback), indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

S Harrington

INSPECTOR