



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 October 2025

by K Reeves BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P1615/W/25/3367926

**The Stables, Road from Blaisdon Lane to Velthouse Lane, Blaisdon,
Gloucestershire GL17 0XT**

- 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 Anthony Evans against the decision of Forest of Dean District Council.
 - The application Ref is P1218/24/FUL.
 - The development proposed is conversion of existing barn to self-build residential dwelling, including removal of storage containers and shed, with associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. In the banner heading above, I have adopted the description of development set out in the Council's decision notice, as the appellant confirmed their acceptance of the amended wording.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site is a suitable location for new residential development having regard to the development plan's spatial strategy and access to local services and facilities;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and the setting of the Blaisdon Conservation Area; and
 - the effect of the proposal on protected species.

Reasons

Location

4. Policies CSP.4, CSP.5 and CSP.16 of the Forest of Dean Core Strategy Adopted Version 2012 (CS) collectively direct housing to defined settlements, with a hierarchy based on sustainability and access to services. Policy AP.1 of the Forest of Dean Allocations Plan 2006 – 2026 (AP) reinforces this by requiring development to be sustainable and appropriately located.
5. The appeal site lies outside the settlement boundary of Blaisdon and is designated as countryside under the development plan. No substantive evidence has been advanced to demonstrate that the scheme would meet an essential local housing

need. The proposal therefore conflicts with the spatial strategy established in Policies CSP.4 and CSP.16.

6. Policy CSP.5 affords priority to the redevelopment of previously developed land (PDL). The policy does not expressly restrict such land to settlement boundaries and, on its face, applies equally to PDL in the open countryside. The appeal building has an existing equestrian use and therefore meets the National Planning Policy Framework's (the Framework) definition for PDL. Given that Policy CSP.5 supports the principle of re-using PDL, the proposal therefore finds support from this policy.
7. There is disagreement between the main parties regarding whether the appeal building's equestrian use has ceased. The Council has provided evidence that the building continues to serve an equestrian function. Although the appellant contends that the use is no longer operational, no substantive case has been made to disprove the Council's position. On the evidence before me, I am not satisfied that the appeal building is redundant or disused. Consequently, Paragraph 84(c) of the Framework is not determinative in my consideration of the appeal.
8. Although the appeal site is not situated a great distance from the edge of Blaisdon, the absence of a footway and street lighting along the lane renders walking to the village both unattractive and potentially hazardous, particularly during hours of darkness or inclement weather. The lane is subject to a 60mph speed limit and, combined with its narrow width, this significantly diminishes the suitability of cycling between the site and the settlement. In any event, Blaisdon itself offers only a limited range of services and facilities, comprising a public house, a village hall and a church. Consequently, future occupiers of the proposed development would be reliant on settlements further afield to meet their day-to-day needs.
9. There is a bus stop within the village served by a route connecting Gloucester and Cinderford. However, the appellant acknowledges that the service operates at a limited frequency. Moreover, reaching the bus stop from the appeal site requires walking along the lane that I have already found to be unsuitable as an alternative to private car use. Consequently, future occupiers of the development would be reliant on the private motor vehicle to meet their day-to-day needs, and the proposal would not advance the sustainability objectives of the development plan.
10. I note that in a recent appeal relating to land at Malswick¹, the Inspector found that Policy CSP.5 could operate independently to support the reuse of previously developed land in the open countryside. In that case, Policies CSP.4 and CSP.16 were set aside on the basis that they refer specifically to development within settlements. However, unlike the appeal before me, Policy AP.1 did not form part of the Inspector's considerations. This distinction is significant as Policy AP.1 underpins Policy CSP.4, and together they seek to focus the majority of new development within towns, villages and clusters that possess an appropriate level of services, facilities and employment opportunities.
11. In this context, I consider that Policy CSP.5 must be interpreted alongside the wider CS framework, including Policies CSP.4 and CSP.16, and the requirements of Policy AP.1. I therefore attach determinative weight to the settlement hierarchy and countryside protection policies and I do not accept that Policy CSP.5 provides

¹ Appeal reference APP/P1615/W/25/3363086

standalone support for residential development in this location. Moreover, the accessibility to sustainable transport options in the Malswick case differs materially from the circumstances before me. The Malswick appeal decision does not, therefore, alter my assessment of the site's suitability.

12. Accordingly, I find the location of the site to be unsuitable for new residential development, having regard to the development plan's spatial strategy and the limited access to local services and facilities. While the proposal would involve the reuse of previously developed land and thereby accords with Policy CSP.5 of the CS, it conflicts with Policies CSP.1, CSP.4 and CSP.16 of the CS, together with Policy AP.1 of the AP. Taken as a whole, the proposal would therefore be contrary to the spatial strategy and sustainability objectives of the development plan.
13. The Council's locational reason for refusal references Policies AP.4 and AP.5 of the AP. However, these policies concern matters of design quality, historic character and local distinctiveness. As they do not address the spatial distribution of development or the suitability of locations, they are not determinative in relation to this main issue.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site lies immediately adjacent to the Blaisdon Conservation Area (CA). National policy seeks development within the setting of designated heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. The site occupies a modest yet important position at the edge of the CA, within a transitional landscape of open fields, limited built form and agricultural or equestrian activity. This setting mediates the shift from village to countryside and reinforces the CA's historic relationship with its rural surroundings. By retaining a low-key, functional character that reflects traditional land use, the site contributes to the CA's significance as a rural settlement defined by agricultural heritage and a strong connection to the wider landscape.
15. Whilst the site is largely screened from the road, save for views through the gated entrance, it remains clearly visible from the public right of way across the adjoining field. The proposal would remove existing buildings. However, these structures are agricultural in form and not inherently discordant with the rural character of the setting. Their removal would therefore deliver only limited benefit to landscape character and appearance. In contrast, the introduction of a residential dwelling, detached from any visual relationship with the village, would domesticate the site and impose an urbanising influence upon this part of the CA's setting. The likely presence of domestic paraphernalia within the garden, items not constituting operational development, would further compound the harm to the character and appearance of both the landscape and the CA's setting.
16. Accordingly, the proposed development would result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area and to the setting of the CA. Consequently, it conflicts with Policies CSP.1, CSP.4, CSP.5 and CSP.16 of the CS, which collectively require development to respect and enhance local distinctiveness, securing high-quality design that conserves heritage assets and protects the historic character and setting of settlements. It would also be contrary to Policies AP.1, AP.4 and AP.5 of the AP, which reinforce this framework by requiring proposals to demonstrate sustainability through the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets, defining settlement boundaries to safeguard the

historic form and setting of villages, and restricting development beyond those limits to prevent encroachment into heritage landscapes.

Heritage balance

17. The proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the setting of the CA and thereby the significance of the CA. In terms of the Framework, the harm identified to the heritage asset in question would be less than substantial. The Framework requires development proposals which lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
18. The Malswick appeal decision has highlighted the Council's significant under-delivery of housing. The five-year housing land supply was recorded in that appeal as between 1.93 and 2.45 years. The Council has not disputed those figures, and I am therefore content to rely on them. I am also conscious that national policy within the Framework supports measures to increase the overall supply of homes.
19. The scheme would deliver a single self-build dwelling to the district's housing stock through the reuse of an existing building. Whilst the Council has a substantial shortfall in housing delivery and there is a national drive to boost housing supply, the proposal would only provide a single residential unit. As such, the weight to be attributed to the contribution of a self-build dwelling on PDL, which would help meet the local housing delivery targets, would be tempered to a moderate level.
20. The proposal would also generate short-term economic benefits during construction and longer-term economic and social benefits through the occupiers' contribution to the local economy and community life. Biodiversity gains would arise from the incorporation of a sedum roof and native planting, alongside a modest improvement from the removal of existing buildings. Nevertheless, given the limited scale of the scheme, these benefits carry only limited weight in the overall heritage balance.
21. Weighing against these benefits is the less than substantial harm to the setting of the CA and its historic significance. I acknowledge that the site is not overtly visible from the public realm, except for views from the nearby public right of way and through the gated entrance to the site, and that the proposal is small scale. Whilst this means that the extent of harm to the designated heritage asset's setting is at the lower to moderate end of the spectrum, the Framework establishes that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.
22. When weighing the great weight to be given to the conservation of the designated heritage asset against the collective moderate weight to be attributed to the benefits that would arise from the scheme, the overall benefit would not be sufficient to outweigh the identified harm to the setting of the CA.

Protected species

23. A preliminary ecological appraisal was undertaken in March 2025. It found that the appeal building is of negligible suitability for day roosting bats but there is potential for night roosting bats and the site falls within 'Zone A' with regard to the Wye

Valley & Forest of Dean Bat Sites Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is classified as being a very sensitive location. The appraisal itself identified potential night-roost use by lesser horseshoe bats and commuting routes along the hedgerows, underscoring the ecological sensitivity of the site.

24. The appraisal recommended that bat activity surveys are carried out, along with appropriate survey methods, to determine any use of the building as night roosts. Bats are a European Protected Species, and their protection is governed by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Regulations). In addition, the appraisal noted potential risks to other protected species, including great crested newts and dormice, which require targeted survey work and proportionate mitigation. In the absence of such surveys, it would not be possible to quantify the extent of use or to demonstrate that the proposal would avoid harm to protected species.
25. Despite the appraisal's recommendation, no bat activity survey has been submitted with the application or appeal, nor has sufficient evidence been provided in respect of great crested newts or dormice. The appellant relies on pre-commencement conditions to secure further ecological survey work. However, national guidance is unequivocal that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent to which they may be affected by development, must be established prior to the grant of planning permission. Circular 06/2005's reference to "exceptional circumstances" does not cover a case where survey recommendations have not been followed and the site lies within Zone A of the Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Bat Sites SAC, a location of acknowledged sensitivity.
26. In the absence of survey evidence, I cannot conclude that the proposal would avoid harm to European Protected Species or comply with the relevant legal obligations. Nor has sufficient information been provided to demonstrate that the proposal would have no adverse effects on the integrity of the Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Bat Sites SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. To defer survey work to conditions would prevent all relevant ecological considerations from being addressed at the decision-making stage, contrary to both the Regulations and the Framework.
27. For these reasons, it has not been demonstrated that the proposed development would avoid adverse impacts on protected species or their habitat. Consequently, the proposal conflicts with Policies CSP.1 and CSP.2 of the CS and Policies AP.7 and AP.8 of the AP, insofar as they require that development protects and enhances biodiversity, avoids ecological harm, and ecological impacts are assessed and mitigated, with sensitive sites and designated areas given particular protection. Furthermore, the proposal fails to discharge the necessary evidential burden, and permission cannot be granted on the basis of incomplete ecological information.

Planning Balance

28. I have found that the location of the site is unsuitable for new residential development, having regard to the development plan's spatial strategy and the limited access to local services and facilities. Additionally, the proposal would result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area and to the setting of the CA and it has not been demonstrated that the proposed

development would avoid adverse impacts on protected species or their habitat. Consequently, the proposal conflicts with the development plan, when taken as a whole.

29. The Council accepts it cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. In these circumstances, Paragraph 11(d)(i) of the Framework states that permission should be granted unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Designated heritage assets, which include conservation areas, are an example of such areas/assets.
30. The proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the setting of the CA. As set out in my Heritage Balance, I have found that the collective public benefits associated with the proposed development would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm identified to the CA. The harm to the significance of the CA, which is not outweighed by the above identified public benefits, means that the heritage policies in the Framework provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Paragraph 11(d)(ii) is therefore not engaged.
31. As such, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out at Paragraph 11 and the policies of the Framework do not indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

32. For the reasons given above, 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. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

K Reeves

INSPECTOR