



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 December 2025

by A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/M2270/W/25/3373745

Holmewood Farm, Badsell Road, Five Oak Green, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 6QR

- 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 Raymond Doig against the decision of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/03071/FULL.
 - The development proposed is campervan storage area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the change of use of land to a hard surfaced motorhome storage area including construction of perimeter fencing; construction of wildlife pond; associated landscaping, at Holmewood Farm, Badsell Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 6QR in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/03071/FULL, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Preliminary Matters

2. At the time of the appeal a new Local Plan was emerging. It has now been adopted. Both main parties have addressed relevant policies from the (then emerging) Local Plan in their submissions, and I am content that any alterations to the relevant policies have made no material difference to any argument advanced by either party. As a result, I have not found it necessary to seek further comments.
3. I have used the description of development from the application form in the banner heading above, but used the description from the decision notice and appeal form in my decision, as it is more accurate and comprehensive.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site (the site) includes an equestrian paddock and a hard surfaced storage area. It is at the southern edge of a cluster of development that includes a collection of barns, a sand school, stables, and external storage areas for caravans.
6. The boundary of the High Weald National Landscape (the NL) aligns broadly with Crittenden Road, some 740m to the south of the site. With reference to the Landscape Assessment and supplementary rebuttal prepared for the appellant by

Studio Engleback (dated October 2024 and September 2025 respectively), the question has arisen as to whether the site is in the setting of the NL.

7. The land between the site and the NL (the land) is largely undeveloped and mainly comprises further equestrian paddocks, belts of woodland, and fields. It benefits from features which are also core characteristics of the NL as described in the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024-29), in that much of it is a quintessential English pastoral landscape, possessing a sense of history and timelessness, and offering rurality and tranquillity. In this respect, the land and the NL somewhat blend into each other.
8. Much of the land visible from the appeal site is within Character Area 13, defined in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2017) (SPD) as having strong associations with the NL. Key qualities in this respect are listed as including the rising slopes to the south of the area, which provide an important transition to the NL, and a network of ancient routeways through the area which continue into the NL.
9. I found the land, which slopes upward to the south, to provide a particularly pleasing vista, indicative of attractive rural landscapes beyond. This may be appreciated from a public right of way (PRoW) that runs alongside the site and leads to the NL.
10. At the same time, the shape of the land is such that there is no direct intervisibility between the NL and the site. Whilst the PRoW leads to the boundary of the NL, it does not appear to carry on into it. Indeed, it does not appear to connect to any route into, much less key destinations within, the NL. As such, it provides only a limited functional link.
11. The site itself is an unremarkable open paddock, part of which is hardsurfaced and used for open storage. At the time of my visit various items of machinery, equipment, and aggregate were placed there. These are visible from the land around, including from the PRoW. I have been given little reason to think the hardsurface and storage use are unlawful, or that the number, height, or position of items stored is restricted or controllable. Moreover, the site is immediately adjacent to the cluster of development mentioned above, connected to it by a central access track. It is readily appreciable as a continuation of that cluster.
12. Taking all of the above into account, I find that the site is distinguishable from the rest of the land. Whilst the open parts of the former make a small contribution to the positive characteristics of the latter, overall, the site is more connected with the working, commercial character of clustered development that adjoins it. It is part of that cluster in visual and functional terms and is readily perceived as such from the land around, including from the PRoW. For these reasons, I find that the site is not part of the setting of the NL.
13. The appeal scheme includes the creation of a hardsurfaced yard, enclosed by metal fencing and gates. Caravans would be stored therein. The scheme would increase the spread of development southwards over what is currently open land. Whilst landscaping is proposed to screen the development, I have been provided with little to show me that it would hide it altogether. Even if it is possible to do so, it may require a form of planting at odds with the characteristics of the land; On this, I note the advice in the SPD against using conifer hedges. Overall, the storage use and development would likely be visible from the surrounding land

including the PRow. This would be to the detriment of the rural aspect of the site and the area, though that harm would be mitigated to a degree by the landscaping.

14. At the same time, both the site and surrounding area include built development and commercial uses, particularly on the adjoining cluster. Whilst this includes agricultural and equestrian activities, it is not limited to them. The existing lawful caravan storage is prominent, and the appeal scheme would be consistent with that established aspect of local character.
15. The details of the proposed landscaping would be agreed between the main parties, such as to result in good quality planting. The change this would bring to the undeveloped parts of the site does not, in isolation, justify the appeal scheme, simply because those parts are not unattractive at present. It would, however, do much to hide the existing storage area and to improve views of the cluster beyond, particularly from the land to the south and from the PRow.
16. I note that the proliferation of urban fringe land uses including machinery storage/haulage, particularly on the flatter land around Paddock Wood, is listed as an area detractor in the SPD. Whilst the appeal scheme may reasonably be described in such terms, so too may the existing storage area at the site and parts of the adjoining cluster. Given how prominent these existing developments are, and the apparent absence of controls over the use of the existing storage area, the positive effect of the proposed landscaping is a notable benefit.
17. Overall, I find that the proposed development would not have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would comply with Policies STR8, EN1, EN18, and EN19 of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (2025), which require development to enhance rural landscapes, and be accompanied by an integral landscaping scheme. In respect of Policy ED4, the Council has not cited non-compliance with criteria 1, 4, or 5 and I see no reason to see matters differently. I find the appeal scheme would comply with criteria 2 and 3 in that it is not visually at odds with the area, as described above.

Conditions

18. The Council has provided a list of suggested planning conditions, which I have considered against paragraph 57 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and advice contained in the Planning Practice Guidance. In addition to the standard conditions, I have imposed conditions requiring agreement over surface materials, hard and soft landscaping, and ecology and biodiversity enhancements to ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development and an appropriate contribution to biodiversity. A condition prohibiting external lighting is necessary to ensure that the development does not become harmfully prominent after dark.
19. I have not found it necessary to impose a condition restricting activities at the site to those listed in the description of development, as any material change in that respect would require planning permission and so be subject to control.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, the appeal is allowed.

A Knight

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and details:

Plan 3398 01 B - Existing and Proposed Site Plans and Details of Fencing.
Flood Risk Assessment for Planning, Ref 94457-Madgwick-Holmewood Farm.
- 3) Full details of the materials to be used for the hardsurfacing of the compound shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before such surfacing is implemented. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 4) No development shall take place until a fully detailed scheme of hard and soft landscaping has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall show any existing trees, hedges and blocks of landscaping on and immediately adjacent to, the site and indicate whether they are to be retained or removed. It shall fully detail any tree protection measures and new planting, and shall include a planting specification, a programme of implementation and a 5 year management plan. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 5) Any tree planted in accordance with the conditions attached to this permission, or in replacement for such a tree, which within a period of five years from the date of the planting is removed, uprooted, destroyed, dies, or becomes, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, seriously damaged or defective, shall, in the same location, be replaced during the next planting season (October to February) by another tree of the same species and size as that originally planted, except where an alternative proposal has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to that planting season.
- 6) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a scheme for the mitigation of impacts on ecology and biodiversity enhancements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme, including the mitigation and enhancement recommendations and a timetable for implementation, shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and thereafter retained.
- 7) No external lighting shall be erected at the site.

Schedule Ends