



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 January 2026

by N Perrins MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/X1118/W/25/3374699

Springfield Farm, East Stowford, Chittlehampton EX37 9RU

- 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 & Mrs N Cook, against the decision of North Devon Council.
 - The application Ref is 80029.
 - The proposed development is the erection of a general purpose agricultural building and associated access track.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) whether there is a functional need for the proposed development and the location is justified, (ii) the effect of the proposed development on the landscape character of the area, and (iii) biodiversity.

Reasons

Functional need and location

3. The appeal site comprises approximately 42.58 acres of pastureland situated in open countryside northeast of East Stowford. The site is enclosed by a ring fence and accessed from the public highway through a recently constructed gate entrance and track. The appellants operate an established dairy enterprise primarily based at North Hele Farm near Buckland Brewer, around 17 miles from the appeal site.
4. The proposal comprises the erection of an agricultural building to provide a dedicated, bio-secure youngstock unit to support and serve the appellant's dairy enterprise. Youngstock are currently spread out across different rented locations, although specifically where these are is not provided in the information before me. The appellant, supported by their vet and the Council's Estate Manager, states that a dedicated building to house youngstock would ensure requirements for animal welfare are met. With Springfield Farm having its own holding number separate to Hele Farm, the proposal would also enhance the resilience of the farming operation, particularly to reduce the effects of TB restrictions should they arise.
5. Policy ST02 of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011–2031 (LP) requires development to be sited to minimise greenhouse gas emissions and travel demand.

Policy ST07(4) limits countryside development to that which meets local needs and necessarily to be located there. Policy DM14 supports rural economic development only where it meets one of a limited set of criteria, including a requirement that the use has a strong functional link to local agriculture. These policies align with Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which supports sustainable rural business growth.

6. There is no dispute between the parties that a functional need exists for additional youngstock accommodation to support animal welfare and biosecurity, including in the event of a TB outbreak. I am also satisfied that the information before me demonstrates that there is unlikely to be sufficient additional space at North Hele Farm for the proposed building due to forage land requirements. However, the existence of a functional need for a youngstock building does not, in itself, justify a building in the proposed location when assessed against the relevant planning policy requirements.
7. In this regard, the appeal site is located around 17 miles from the main farm. This is a significant distance, which would result in round trips between the two holdings, when required, taking more than an hour to complete. Given the daily management requirements associated with youngstock permanently located on the site as is proposed, such as feeding, bedding, welfare monitoring and general husbandry, there would likely be frequent comings and goings to the site including some travel still being needed between the two holdings.
8. The appellant contends that current operations already require regular movements, which would be exacerbated if the proposed youngstock building were to be located at North Hele Farm. It is also stated that vehicular impact arising from the proposal would be minimal and be less harmful than the current arrangement that requires youngstock to be housed and moved across various rented sites. However, no objective transport analysis has been submitted to substantiate these assertions and be able to reasonably compare the proposal's relative impact to the existing situation. Accordingly, the argument that the proposed development would improve operations and movement across the holdings is not adequately substantiated by the evidence before me.
9. Additionally, claims that the appellant has already made significant efforts to address climate change through independent countryside stewardship schemes are not backed by enough data or details to allow for a meaningful comparison with the climate impact of movements from the proposed development.
10. I acknowledge that the appellant has appointed a new member of staff who lives around six miles from the site and expected to provide for a local presence that could help reduce traffic movements and distances to and from the site as well as to maintain youngstock welfare. However, I can only give this limited weight as staffing arrangements are inherently changeable and cannot be relied on as mitigation over the lifetime of the development. Additionally, while there is reference to a management system being put in place for the site, no details are provided to be able to assess its effectiveness in complying with the ST02 policy requirements to minimise greenhouse gas emissions and travel demand.
11. The appellant contends that land closer to the main holding is rarely available and a lack of supply resulted in the purchase of Springfield Farm. However, while I acknowledge the letter provided by a local agent in this regard, the purported lack

of suitable sites closer to North Hele Farm is not supported by any objective evidence such as records of attempted purchases, land market data or any comparative assessments of other potentially available sites. Therefore, without objective supporting evidence, it has not been definitively established that the appeal site is the sole viable or suitable location for the proposed livestock building and TB isolation unit that would justify overriding concerns about its location away from the main farm and related transport activity.

12. In conclusion, while there is a need for a youngstock building, the evidence before me does not adequately demonstrate that the appeal proposal and its location 17 miles from the main farm is the only, and thereby most sustainable, solution. Accordingly, the proposal conflicts with Policies ST02, ST07, ST10 and DM14 of the LP and with the Framework's objectives for sustainable rural development.

Landscape character

13. While the site is not subject to any specific landscape designations it is identified as being within three landscape character areas¹. I understand these all broadly identify landscape character in the area as comprising rolling hills and undulating topography, supporting a mixture of active agricultural land uses. As I observed on my site inspection, while there are some limited examples of agricultural buildings visible in the landscape, the overriding character of the site and surrounds appears as tranquil, open and largely undeveloped valley farmland.
14. The proposed building would be built on elevated ground where the land slopes downwards in a south and south east direction. Its visibility from north, east, and west public viewpoints would be limited due to the land's topography and hedgerows. However, it would be more prominently visible from the expansive panoramic views to the south, albeit mainly from private land. Although its design is typical of a farm building, it would still appear as a large, isolated structure detached from any other development on a prominent hillside.
15. While cutting into the site would help to reduce the building's prominence in height terms, it would also have the negative effect of creating an overly engineered appearance to the site in an otherwise natural appearing landscape. Overall, I find that even with views being comparatively limited the siting and engineering works would negatively affect and harm the rural landscape character to a moderate degree. The proposed biodiversity measures and landscaping would not be sufficient to offset its visual impact given the building and associated works' overall scale and size.
16. Policy ST07(4) requires development to be necessary to justify being in the open countryside. Because the locational necessity for the proposed building in this specific location has not been robustly proven as set out earlier in this decision, the resulting visual impact of the proposed building on an exposed hillside would result in unnecessary and unjustified harm to the rural landscape character of the site.
17. I have also considered the findings of the appeal decision Ref: APP/W1145/W/24/3345837 provided by the appellant. However, the full details of that decision are not before me to reasonably conclude in size and design terms if it is directly comparable to this case. I also note that appeal decision Ref: 3345837

¹ National Character Area 149 (The Culm), Devon Character Area 14 (Coddan Hill & Wooded Estates) and Landscape Character Type 5D (Estate Wooded Farmland).

was mainly considering landscape impact as opposed to need and suitability of location, which are fundamental considerations in this appeal. Accordingly, the circumstances are not directly comparable for appeal decision Ref: 3345837 to provide justification for the appeal proposal and the harm identified.

18. For the reasons stated the proposal would result in unnecessary and unacceptable harm to the character of the landscape contrary to Policies ST04 and DM04 of the LP. The proposal's impact on the landscape is also contrary to Paragraphs 88 and 135 of the Framework that seek to enable well-designed new buildings in rural areas that are sympathetic to local character.

Biodiversity

19. I am satisfied from the information before me that the proposal would be able to meet its requirements for delivering a biodiversity net gain. I am aware the Council's Ecologist was also seeking an appropriately detailed Landscape Plan to provide further detail as well as questioning whether a more suitable location in the adjacent field. Whether there is a more suitable location for the building in the adjacent field is not before me.
20. Notwithstanding and in terms of biodiversity. I am satisfied that the submitted information provides sufficient detail that could enable the requested further information to be reasonably secured by condition had I found the appeal to be acceptable in all other respects. However, as I have not, I do not need to consider this matter further in this decision.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. The Local Plan provides support in principle for the rural economy. Similar support for the rural economy is set out in Paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). I recognise the benefits that the proposed development would have in this regard by providing a suitable facility for youngstock.
22. However, whilst I give weight to the benefits, the evidence presented does not demonstrate that there is a compelling justification for a new building on this open countryside site a significant distance from the main farm holding. Without the location having been demonstrated as being reasonably necessary and justified, there would also be unnecessary harm to the landscape from the proposed development.
23. Accordingly, I do not find that the overarching support for the rural economy as set out in the development plan and the Framework and other benefits identified provide sufficient justification to outweigh the harm identified in a countryside location where development is normally restricted.
24. For the reasons given above, the development is not consistent with the policies of the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations that would lead me to a different conclusion. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

N Perrins

INSPECTOR