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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 December 2025

**by V Goldberg BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 February 2026

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**Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/25/3373293**

**Land at Monkshatch Copse, Puttenham Golf Club, Heath Lane, Puttenham GU3 1AL**

- 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 Puttenham Golf Club against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/P/00505.
  - The development proposed is conversion of golf course building to a residential dwelling and associated landscaping works following the demolition of two existing buildings, and associated works to the adjacent bridleway to facilitate vehicular access.
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**This decision is issued in accordance with section 56 (2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended and supersedes that issued on 20 January 2026.**

### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading and decision above is taken from the decision notice and appeal form rather than the application form, as this best reflects the proposal. This amendment was agreed with the appellant during the application process.
3. The parties refer to the bridleway being widened. Whilst the description of development refers to works to the bridleway, the drawings do not illustrate a change to its width. For clarity, this decision is based on the submitted drawings which show no change to the width of the bridleway.
4. On 16 December 2025, the Government published a consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Whilst broad changes to the structure of the Framework are proposed as part of this consultation, these proposals could be subject to further change and can only be given very limited weight at this stage. It has therefore not been necessary to consult the parties on the changes, and in reaching my decision, I have had regard to the Framework published in December 2024.

## Main Issues

5. The main issues are:

- whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to any relevant development plan policies and the Framework;
- the effect of the proposal on Ancient Woodland;
- the effect of the proposal on protected species (bats) and their habitat;
- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having particular regard to the effect on the Surrey Hills National Landscape (NL);
- whether the proposal would be a suitable location for a dwelling;
- whether the proposal includes sustainable design and construction principles;
- whether the proposal would result in the loss of an area of designated open space; and
- whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the Very Special Circumstances (VSC) required to justify the proposal.

## Reasons

### *Whether inappropriate development*

6. The site is located within the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the Framework sets out that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in VSC. Paragraph 154 of the Framework states development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless exceptions apply.
7. One of the exceptions is the partial or complete redevelopment of Previously Developed Land (PDL), including a material change of use to residential or mixed-use, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), provided it does not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Policy P2 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2015–2034 (Local Plan) aligns with the Framework and stipulates that the Green Belt will be protected against inappropriate development in accordance with the Framework.
8. The parties agree that the site constitutes PDL, it is therefore necessary to consider whether the proposal would cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal would reduce the overall development footprint on the site through the demolition of the Nissen hut and tin shed, together with a reduction in hard surfacing. While the conversion of the larger barn to a dwelling would result in a modest increase in eaves and overall height, its footprint would remain unchanged. These alterations would increase the barn's visual

prominence, but given the increase in overall height is marginal, this difference would not materially harm the openness of the Green Belt.

9. Although the existing Nissen hut and tin shed are in a dilapidated condition, they detract from the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt. Their removal, together with the introduction of a formal parking and turning area, would significantly reduce the bulk and mass of built form on site and enhance its visual openness.
10. A post and rail fence with a native hedge is proposed to enclose the residential garden to the front and side of the dwelling. Given the significant existing vegetation around the site, the introduction of a vegetation covered post, and rail fence would have no greater impact on openness than the current surrounding vegetation. Whilst the use of the proposed garden area would likely involve the introduction of some domestic paraphernalia, this would likely have less of an impact on openness compared to the buildings that would be removed as part of the proposal.
11. Reference has been made to the proposal requiring the adjacent public bridleway to be made suitable for vehicular access. Concerns have been raised that this would involve widening and surface improvement works along a significant length of the bridleway. However, the red outline on the location plan does not indicate that any physical alterations to the width of the bridleway are proposed. Furthermore, any surface improvement works, could be controlled by condition and would not lead to substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
12. The Council have considered the proposal against further exceptions in the Framework including Grey Belt and the reuse of buildings that are of a permanent and substantial construction. Given that the parties agree that the site comprises PDL and the scheme would not result in substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, it has not been necessary to consider further exceptions.
13. For the above reasons, the proposal constitutes the redevelopment of PDL that would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and the proposal would be compliant with Policy P2 of the Local Plan.

#### *Ancient Woodland*

14. An area of ancient woodland lies north of the appeal site. Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat and Government advice advises that proposals should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres from the boundary of ancient woodland to avoid root damage. It further advises that development proposals, including gardens, within a buffer zone should not be approved. This guidance aligns with the Framework which seeks to avoid the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats.
15. The proposed site plans indicate that the rolled gravel access would adjoin the ancient woodland and therefore fall within the required 15-metre buffer zone intended to safeguard this irreplaceable habitat. While the appeal statement asserts that the submitted plans demonstrate an exclusion zone, no such zone is clearly delineated on the drawings. Furthermore, the application is not supported by an arboricultural statement to confirm that the access would avoid root damage to this irreplaceable habitat.

16. For the reasons above, from the information before me, I am not satisfied that the extent to which ancient woodland may be affected by the proposed development has been satisfactorily addressed. Accordingly, the proposal would be likely to have a harmful effect on ancient woodland bordering the site. On this basis, there would be conflict with the nature conservation aims of Policy P6 of the LPDMP and paragraph 193 of the Framework.

### *Bats*

17. The appeal site contains several derelict buildings and mature trees and is enclosed by woodland. The bridleway providing access to the site is lined with mature trees and vegetation. The buildings and trees within and surrounding the site have the potential to support roosting bats.
18. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (Habitats Regulations) identify bats as European Protected Species (EPS). Regulation 9(3) of the Habitats regulations requires a competent authority to have regard to the requirements of the associated Directive so far as it may be affected by the exercise of its functions. This includes any proposal that might lead to the deterioration or destruction of the breeding sites and resting places of EPS under Article 12(1)116. This includes bats and the places that they roost, irrespective of whether or not they are present at the time the development is carried out.
19. Whilst a provisional environmental assessment (including a Phase 1 bat survey) has been submitted, it focuses on the derelict buildings within the site and does not address the potential for bats to roost in trees on or adjacent to the site. Given that these trees could be affected by the formation of the proposed access and parking areas and considering historic evidence of common pipistrelles and licensable activity in the area, the request for additional surveys is both reasonable and necessary. Furthermore, the presence or absence of protected species, and the extent to which they may be impacted by the proposed development, should be established prior to granting planning permission. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to require further surveys by planning condition.
20. For the reasons above, from the information before me, I am not satisfied that the extent to which EPS may be affected by the proposed development has been satisfactorily addressed. Accordingly, notwithstanding that Natural England has not been consulted, the proposed development would be likely to have a harmful effect on ecology. There would therefore be conflict with Policy P6 of the LPDMP insofar as it requires proposals to protect and enhance priority species and habitats.

### *Character and appearance of the area and effect on NL*

21. The site lies towards the eastern end of Puttenham Golf Club and is in a state of significant disrepair. It contains a range of dilapidated structures which have been used in connection with the maintenance and operation of the golf course. These buildings include a large barn with pitched corrugated metal roof and brick walls, a long narrow Nissen hut, with brick walls and curved corrugated metal roof, and a tin shed adjoining a brick-built outbuilding, both in poor condition and partially collapsed.

22. The site lies within the NL and an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). In addition to the dilapidated structures, it contains numerous mature trees and is largely enclosed by woodland and the fairways of the adjacent golf course. This creates a strong sense of enclosure and a verdant, natural character, reflecting some of the defining qualities of the NL, such as gently undulating landform, sparse settlement, and areas of woodland. These features contribute to a verdant and visually attractive environment, reinforcing the area's high landscape quality. The site also lies close to Monks Grove, a row of detached residential properties visible from the golf course.
23. The amended duty on relevant authorities in respect of their interactions with statutory purposes of National Landscapes, requires relevant authorities in exercising or performing any functions in relation to National Landscapes, to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of these areas. This aligns with Policy P1 of the Local Plan which states that the NL will be conserved and enhanced to maximise its special landscape qualities and scenic beauty. This is reiterated in the objectives of the Surrey Hills Management Plan 2020-2025.
24. The submitted Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) concludes that, overall, the proposal would have a beneficial effect on the local landscape, with the positive impact increasing over time. This conclusion is supported by several factors: the removal of existing dilapidated buildings, the reduction in built form within the site and the introduction of landscaping. Taken together, these measures would enhance the character and quality of the site and its surroundings. On this basis, I agree with the findings of the LVA.
25. While the proposal would alter the character and appearance of the large building by changing it from a disused barn to a dwelling with an associated domestic curtilage, the transformation would deliver visual benefits that would outweigh the loss of the existing informal nature of the site. This is primarily because the removal of dilapidated and partially collapsed structures would eliminate elements that currently detract from the site's appearance. In addition, the existing barn, which is in a neglected state, would be upgraded and its footprint retained, ensuring the building remains proportionate within its setting. The introduction of landscaping and a post and rail hedge would also soften the development and integrate it more effectively into the surrounding area. Collectively, these measures would significantly reduce the site's current negative impact and enhance the NL.
26. Concern has been raised that the proposal would create an overly domestic appearance, with parking area, rooflights and window openings negatively affecting dark skies, and increased domestic and delivery traffic harming the tranquillity of the NL. However, the site forms part of an active golf course and is located close to residential properties along Monks Grove. Given this existing character, level of activity and lighting, the limited additional movements and light spill generated by a single dwelling would neither negatively affect the character and appearance of the area nor would it result in a significant adverse impact on tranquillity.
27. For the above reasons, the proposal would conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area and the natural beauty of the NL. It would therefore be compliant with Policies D1 and P1 of the Local Plan and Policy D4 of the Guildford Local Plan: Development Management Policies 2023 (LPDMP). These policies

seek to conserve and enhance the NL to maximise its special landscape qualities and scenic beauty and achieve high quality design, that responds to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is set.

### *Location*

28. The appeal site is in a rural location, surrounded by green spaces and woodland, and is close to the A3, a major dual carriageway. Whilst the site is not within walking distance of key services, Policy ID3 of the Local Plan does not require proposals to be in a sustainable area. Instead, it requires developments to make the most of sustainable transport opportunities given their size, characteristics, and location.
29. Given the site's proximity to the A3, it is inevitable that private car use will form a significant part of travel to and from the development. However, this does not conflict with Policy ID3, which recognises that sustainable transport options vary depending on a site's location. The site is close to a strategic main road, dwellings on Monks Grove, and forms part of a golf course regularly accessed by users. As such, it benefits from good connectivity and cannot reasonably be considered an unsuitable location for the proposal.
30. For the above reasons, the proposed dwelling would be in a suitable location. It would therefore be compliant with the aims of Policy ID3 of the Local Plan insofar as it requires proposals to make the most of sustainable transport opportunities given their size, characteristics, and location.

### *Sustainable Design and Construction*

31. Policy D2 of the Local Plan and Policy D14 of LPDMP promote sustainable design and construction practices where applicable. They require proposals to demonstrate that embodied carbon emissions have been minimised, that energy efficiency and carbon performance of existing buildings are enhanced, and that measures such as Site Waste Management Plans and water efficiency provisions are incorporated.
32. The submitted Energy Demand and Sustainability Statement demonstrates that the proposal would adopt a fabric-first approach, exceeding current Building Regulations Part L standards through enhanced insulation, low U-values, improved airtightness, and energy-efficient glazing. These measures would significantly reduce energy demand and carbon emissions.
33. The proposal also incorporates low-carbon technologies, including an air source heat pump with advanced heating controls and solar photovoltaic panels. The inclusion of 0.6 kWp of solar PV will provide 5.54% of the dwelling's total energy demand and achieve a 12.93% reduction in carbon emissions.
34. In addition, the statement confirms that daily water consumption would not exceed 110 litres per person, meeting water efficiency standards. Commitments to minimise embodied carbon through material selection, further demonstrate alignment with sustainable construction principles.
35. Although the Council's reason for refusal refers to Policies D15 and D16 of the LPDMP, these policies primarily relate to new buildings rather than conversions and are therefore not directly relevant to the proposal. While the Council disputes that the large barn is capable of conversion, the application seeks permission for

conversion and is supported by a report from a Civil Engineer confirming that the building is structurally capable of being converted.

36. For the above reasons, the proposal would include sustainable design and construction principles. It would therefore comply with the objectives of Policy D2 of the Local Plan and Policy D14 of the LPDMP.

### *Designated Open Space*

37. Policy ID5 of the LPDMP seeks to safeguard open space in accordance with Local Plan Policy ID4 (Green and Blue Infrastructure). Annex 2 of the Framework defines open space as “all open space of public value, including not only land but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which provide important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as visual amenity.” Local Plan Policy ID4 expands this definition to encompass all open space within urban areas, land specifically designated as open space on the Policies Map, and land or water identified in the Council’s Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment (2017) as providing opportunities for recreation and sport.
38. Although the site does not currently function as open space, the supporting text to Policy ID5 advises that open space includes land that is not publicly accessible but nevertheless contributes to public visual amenity. The site lies within an area designated as open space in the Local Plan, and the application is not accompanied by evidence addressing the policy requirements relating to the loss of this designated open space. While the site’s contribution to public visual amenity is limited, Local Plan Policy ID4 requires any loss to be justified. Accordingly, the conflict with the development plan attracts modest weight.
39. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would result in the loss of an area of designated open space. It would therefore be contrary to Policy ID5 of the LPDMP and Policy ID4 of the Local Plan.

### **Other Matters**

40. The Council notes that the appeal site lies within the 5km–7km buffer zone of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, but this matter is not addressed further in the committee report and does not form a reason for refusal. As the appeal is dismissed for other reasons, there is no need to consider this issue further.
41. The proposal would deliver a net gain of one dwelling, which would make a positive contribution to housing supply within the borough, particularly as the Council does not have an up to date five-year Housing Land Supply. However, the Framework indicates that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the application of policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusing the proposed development. Irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland are an example of such areas, and the proposal is contrary to the relevant policies of the Framework regarding ancient woodland.
42. The appellant cites Questors Barn as a comparable scheme that received planning permission in 2020. While this site is located relatively close to the appeal site, it is not in the same location as the proposal. Consequently, the circumstances differ significantly, particularly in relation to the proximity of ancient woodland and the

presence of trees within and around the appeal site that are suitable for roosting bats. These factors mean that Questors Barn cannot be considered directly comparable to the appeal scheme.

43. It is noted that the appellant sought clarification on various matters during the application, however, it is not mandatory for a Council to enter into discussions with an appellant during the determination period. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that all information required to determine a scheme is submitted with the application.
44. While the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would conserve and enhance the NL, this would not negate the need to comply with other aspects of the development plan.

### **Planning Balance and Conclusion**

45. The proposal would positively develop a dilapidated site, contribute to the Government's aim of boosting housing supply and conserve and enhance the NL. These benefits carry significant weight in the planning balance.
46. On the other hand, the adverse impacts I have identified in respect of the loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland, harm to EPS and the loss of designated open space would be significant and irreversible. This is due to potential destruction of habitat that cannot be recreated, the potential harm to species afforded statutory protection and the permanent loss of designated open space. Consequently, these adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal in this case.
47. The proposal therefore conflicts with the development plan and material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised the appeal is dismissed.

*V Goldberg*

INSPECTOR