
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 18 November 2025 and 10 December 2025

Site visit made on 19 November 2025

by R Aston BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/W2845/W/25/3367347

Land at Dale Farm, Maidwell, Northamptonshire NN6 9JE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs D Keir against West Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref is WND/2023/0046.
 - The development proposed is described as 'erection of a single dwelling and outbuildings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed and planning permission is refused for development described as 'erection of a single dwelling and outbuildings' at land at Dale Farm, Maidwell, Northamptonshire NN6 9JE.

Procedural and Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal results from the Council's failure to determine the planning application within the statutory period. The evidence sets out that had they been in a position to determine the application they would have refused it on the grounds of the proposal failing to benefit from local and national planning policy support for design of exceptional quality given its isolated countryside location, the effect on the character of the historic landscape and a failure to provide sufficient information in relation to ecology, archaeology and flood risk matters.
3. The hearing was adjourned at the end of the first day to enable clarification on the submission of application and appeal documents relating to those latter matters because it became clear following questioning that there were unclear and unresolved considerations that were capable of being material to my decision. These matters were incapable of being resolved overnight and the hearing resumed on 10 December 2025 with updated positions of the parties and further comments from the relevant consultees regarding flooding and protected species being submitted. A number of other additional documents were also received both prior to and after the hearing. Opportunities were given prior to and at the hearing for comments and overall, I find no party would be prejudiced by my consideration of them and I have therefore taken them into account in reaching my decision.
4. The description in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. However, it is clear that the proposal also includes: a new access and driveway; an extensive landscaping scheme, (including formal gardens, woodland planting, and creation of a lake); a ground-based solar panel array; and a remote wildlife

tower. The appellant and Council agreed at the hearing it should be determined on this basis and I have done so.

Main Issues

5. Given the above I have re-ordered the main issues in this appeal to be:
- Whether the proposal would be acceptable with regard to ecology (protected species) archaeology (sub-surface assets) and flooding (surface water drainage).
 - The effect of the proposal on the aims of policies which seek to direct the location of new residential development and whether there are other considerations such as in paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework sufficient to permit the proposal, including landscape character and appearance.
 - If conflict with the development plan, when taken as a whole is identified, whether such conflict is outweighed by other material considerations.

Reasons

Protected species

6. There was significant confusion between the parties at the hearing regarding the submission and consideration of an ecological appraisal with the application. A survey was carried out by the appellant in 2022 and reported on in December 2022. The application was made on 5 January 2023 but despite validating the application it was not until the summer of 2025 that the matter appears to have been discussed between the parties and a formal consultation response received. The relevant consultee formally objected to the proposal on 17 June 2025 but by then it would likely have been too late for any additional work to be undertaken by the appellant given optimal survey periods and an appeal against non-determination had already been submitted on 10 June 2025.
7. During the adjournment further comments were received as follows: *Section 3.4 states an initial site walkover was undertaken on the 24 March 2022 and an Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey on the 7 October 2022. The timing of the surveys was in sub-optimal survey seasons, which the report acknowledges (EA, Section 3.15). The ecological appraisal and any data from those surveys is considered out of date and sub-optimal. As such the report is inadequate ecological information to inform the decision-making process.*
8. Circular 06/2005 (the circular) advises that it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. It goes on to state that surveys should be carried out before planning permission is granted.
9. It has been suggested that there is not much to be considered on the site given its agricultural nature but the point is the evidence does not confirm this in any meaningful or acceptable way. From what I observed and heard there are sufficient potential habitats in the form of the watercourses, substantial mature hedgerows and in the surrounding area there are a variety of wooded copses and

rural buildings. In any event, those initial survey findings are now over three years old. There is not a finite 'line in the sand' relating to time periods for surveys and whether they become outdated, but relevant guidance¹ advises that the lifespan of such surveys of more than three years such a report is *'unlikely to be valid and most, if not all of the surveys are likely to need to be updated, subject to further assessment'*.

10. It was suggested at the hearing that surveys could be conditioned but the circular also advises that this should only be in exceptional circumstances, nothing exceptional was advanced by either party and I do not consider that to be the case here. The fact that the parties may agree on this approach is not exceptional or determinative as I must be satisfied as the decision maker that protected species would not be adversely affected. That position simply has and cannot be established by me as the decision maker as part of this appeal. Whilst I note the mitigation and enhancements proposed, in the absence of a proper understanding of the likely effects, I give such mitigation little weight and in reaching this view, I am mindful of the need to take a precautionary approach.
11. In the absence of the appropriate and up to date information the proposal would conflict with Policy BN2 of the West Northamptonshire Core Strategy (the CS) and Policy ENV5 of the Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2) (the LP) insofar as they require all proposals likely to affect biodiversity to assess their impact through an ecological assessment and include details of mitigation or compensation, where harm will be caused. The proposal would also conflict with the aims and objectives of The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) insofar as protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

Archaeology

12. North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) provided comments in April and October 2023 clearly stating that they agreed with the conclusions of the appellant's Desk Based Assessment (the DBA) that the potential for significant archaeological remains of prehistoric, early medieval or medieval date to be identified within the site is deemed to be low. Further, that any prehistoric or early-medieval settlement remains encountered have the potential to be of regional significance as they can contribute to Regional Research Framework Objectives. Any medieval assets are also likely to be of local significance.
13. The DBA also confirmed the potential for significant archaeological remains of Romano-British date to be encountered within the site which was deemed to be moderate. It was of no dispute that there is extensive evidence of Roman activity within the study area and the wider surrounding landscape. Any archaeological remains of this date also have the potential to be of regional significance. The DBA concluded that further archaeological survey of the site will be required to better define the archaeological potential and is clear that it *'is likely that this will require a geophysical survey in the first instance'*. It also confirms that the need for, and scope of, any further archaeological surveys should be determined in consultation with the *'LPA's Planning Archaeologist'*.
14. Further comments were received during the adjournment that *'heritage assets in the form of sub-surface archaeological remains have the potential to survive within the site and that any such remains are unlikely to be of heritage significance'*

¹ CIEEM Advice Note 'The Lifespan of Ecological Reports' April 2019.

equivalent to a scheduled monument NPPF fn. 68), although that potential cannot be ruled out entirely'. It is of no surprise therefore that a geophysical survey was originally requested prior to determination because of the potential to disturb below ground remains. If there is any reasonable prospect of archaeological remains within the site that could be adversely affected by development, then assessment and, if necessary, evaluation should take place before a planning application is determined. This is to be able to predict the presence of any remains and assess their potential significance.

15. In this appeal I do not have sufficient information to consider the impacts of the development on such assets and I am therefore unable to conclude with the necessary certainty what potential impacts there might be or whether appropriate mitigation would be achievable, including by condition. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy BN5 of the CS and Policy ENV7 of the LP insofar as requiring proposals to sustain and enhance sites of known or potential heritage or historic significance and demonstrate a clear understanding of the impacts.
16. Paragraph 207 of the Framework would also not be met insofar as it requires the level of detail to be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Further, where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, developers should submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

Flooding and Flood Risk

17. It is a similar context for flood risk and drainage matters where there is no dispute that the proposal requires an FRA given the size of the appeal site. I see no need to try and pick through the multitude of reasons on both sides why it was not until the afternoon of the hearing that revised technical work was put forward by the appellant, because during the adjournment the LLFA revised their response².
18. The LLFA maintain that the information is still not satisfactory in terms of drainage work. However, in lieu of a site-specific FRA the long-term flood risk map service shows that the proposal is not situated within an area at risk of flooding. There does appear to be a small area of fluvial flood risk near to the proposed access road, which the LLFA conclude could be mitigated through appropriate detailed design of the access road and approved as part of a Land Drainage Consent application. Further, that the site is not particularly constrained and the LLFA consider there is likely to be adequate space for the provision of any additional surface water attenuation that would be required to manage the additional runoff from the greater 1 in 200-year storm event, and to attenuate all runoff should infiltration rates demonstrate that soakaways are not viable.
19. It is reasonable to conclude that the information provided does not demonstrate that the proposed surface water drainage scheme for the development will adequately manage flood risk in accordance with Policy BN7 of the CS and ENV11 of the LP. However, In this particular case, the outstanding matters could be addressed through the use of planning conditions, which have been agreed and suggested. The comments, as a material consideration indicate a decision on this

² Dated 3 December 2025.

specific issue could, if the appeal were to be allowed, be taken other than in accordance with the development plan.

Location and paragraph 84 e) of the Framework

20. The parties agree that the site should be considered as isolated for the purposes of local and national planning policy which require that planning decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless certain circumstances apply. I have no reasons to disagree. Policy RA6 of the LP refers only supporting certain development in the countryside and at part iii. refers to individual dwellings of exceptional quality and innovative design, although the latter is no longer part of the exceptions within the Framework.
21. National policy makes an exception for isolated homes where the design is of exceptional quality in that it meets the criteria in paragraph 84 e) of the Framework. This test has two limbs. The first is that the design is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas. The second is that it would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. A proposed development must meet both limbs of the test to qualify under the exemption.

Paragraph 84 e) i

22. The use of the term outstanding is not defined in the LP or the Framework. Taken in its ordinary meaning and in my experience a longstanding and widely used definition is 'something which is *'clearly very much better than what is usual'* or has *'unusual qualities'*. It could also be reasonably defined as something *'standing out'*, *'impressive'* or *'striking'*. To add *'truly'* simply imposes an emphasis on that being true.
23. The essence of the proposal's principal building is formed in the great tradition of an English country house but the appellant states it does not seek to be an object building in that tradition as it is not designed to be full of grandeur in the classical tradition. However, the appellant considers whilst it would be grand and unapologetic it is more inspired by local references of building form and material using simple symmetry and materiality. It would also contain a traditional pitched roof and proportionate fenestration.
24. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) sets out the detailed principles driving the design which focus on this ambition to deliver a modern reimagination of the English Country House and a new dwelling for an estate, consisting of some 1000 acres of mainly arable farmland but also agricultural and equestrian buildings and uses. The proposal evolved through the Council's pre-application process including consultation with an independent Design Review Panel (The Traditional Architecture Group or TAG) on three separate occasions.
25. The use of design review and early engagement with such panels in the evolution of the scheme is encouraged by the Framework. Feedback from the initial consultations with the TAG appear to have informed and been incorporated into the design. There has clearly been a considered and genuine design process that has resulted in this scheme, including consideration of alternatives. I have carefully considered the final report of the TAG group and I have noted that the scheme has received some support from that design review process. Those views are also

given by experienced Architects but ultimately they are only one set of opinions and I heard opposing opinions from the Council's design and heritage professional officers at the hearing and ultimately must form my own view based on the evidence before me and my own observations.

26. A 2.5 storey house utilising land levels to provide 3 storeys to the rear with a sunken formally landscaped terrace and garden it would be largely finished in stone with red brick elements. It would be composed from a simple rectangular form with a red brick wing comprising an orangery and with attached 4 bay 1½ storey garage block. Three pitched roof dormer windows would be set at equal distances apart within the centre of the natural slate roof planes. The eastern elevation also features a full height stone chimney feature.
27. Turing to associated outbuildings, to the rear would be a 2-storey building which is indicated as being entertainment space, constructed from a brick lower storey with stone upper storey and a copper roof and lantern feature. A 2-storey stone gatehouse building would be located on the entrance to the courtyard driveway constructed from stone with quoining. A separate and substantial stable block containing 10 stables, storage, tack and hay storage rooms on the north side, set around a courtyard and with a footprint comparable to the principal building is proposed. On its southern side would be groom accommodation and parking formed by an interesting 2 storey part red brick, part Oak weather boarded structure under a steep slate roof.
28. The outbuildings would attempt to create focal nodes with interesting towers, pinnacles and vented cupola features. The materials would include coursed rubble stone walls, worked quoins and string courses for the house and adjoining wings and lower storey elements in brick.
29. The tradition of English Country Houses is often wrongly equated solely with the height of the British Empire and the Palladian influence on architecture but it is a much longer tradition dating back to earlier times traced back to the Norman Conquest of 1066, when new landowners established manor houses as both homes and administrative centres. Grand estates then evolved from these more defensive structures and functioned as far more than simple homes – they were centres of influence, markers of social standing, and venues for the intricate theatre and growing luxury of British country life.
30. Each age has its own desires, needs and resources and that amongst other things, as an object such a building also needs to be a family home. From the evidence before me, it also would be the centre of the wider equestrian and agricultural rural enterprise operated by the appellant in the locality. The TAG group is correct that it is a skilled exercise in balancing choices for such an architectural approach at the design stage whilst seeking to retain the historic excitement of classical traditions and reflect contemporary life. It is also a balance of judgment at the decision-making stage as to its success.
31. The proposal focuses on an attempt to carefully re-calibrate traditional devices in its arrival, combination of small buildings, the grand level of local vernacular and ordered association of the house with nature. The DAS refers to picking up on the characteristics of many of the surrounding estates and a desire to avoid an over dominating or overbearing effect.

32. However to my mind here in lies an inherent contradiction because the country houses referred to are not comparable to the scale of this proposal and were not supposed to be hidden or revealed in the landscape, albeit parts may do so and are screened by landscaping and other built form at certain points. Roofs were not designed to be seen to emphasise the walls and Gravitas of the building. Overall, and for perhaps understandable reasons they are much more bolder expressions of the resources, wealth and architecture of that time. Respecting such 'beautiful'³ buildings whilst not copying them is a very challenging exercise.
33. The dwelling would be constructed from Porotherm clay block walling. This is an engineered modern clay block walling system with traditional values. It is virtually dry construction and has a high strength, thermal efficiency and lower embodied carbon than concrete and steel. It also brings positive impacts on air quality and water saving using 95% less water than cementitious blocks. The building would have a vernacular external appearance but constructed from much greater thermal efficiency than would be typical of such homes.
34. Although innovation is no longer part of the paragraph 84 test it is retained elsewhere in the Framework and should still be considered as it is an important component of the design considerations. Geothermal feasibility has also been undertaken but the statement reads as a very general strategy and the contained capital carbon calculations are acknowledged as being high level and would need to be revisited as design develops⁴. The strategy is also clear that the site is varied in terms of sources and that a closed or open loop system could be a 'viable option' for the site.
35. The overall strategy to include mixed native broadleaf planting and coniferous woodland planting would seek to provide carbon neutrality of the building after approximately 6 years and beyond there would be a net reduction in carbon emissions. As part of the wider enterprise a Biochar system would be proposed but with details only being provided orally at the hearing. The use of such a system would have sustainability benefits in terms of its own use of resources. The measures are intended to minimise the amount of energy the building requires to function with wider sustainability benefits but they are not necessarily new ideas or particularly original and creative.
36. The ancillary buildings, whilst taking their design inspiration from local vernacular agricultural buildings, are also essentially fairly basic and functional designs constructed in typical materials. I have noted the point and observed that the design, through the placement of the various outbuildings, references the layout of farmsteads in the area around courtyards with various degrees of enclosure.
37. However, this is a well-established practice for designing buildings in rural areas and the appeal scheme would not add anything novel or unique to this approach. Reflecting local materials and artisanry is part of the local vernacular building tradition. Further, the appreciation of the building would be diluted by the close proximity of the stable block building, to which the eye would be drawn to, along with the sympathetic but somewhat unremarkable gatehouse even in noting buildings may have once been present in this part of the site.

³ Foreword of DandA Statement.

⁴ Page 138 of Energy Strategy DandA Statement.

38. The appeal proposal would ultimately present as a relatively large, detached country house drawing some inspiration from larger estates in the area but ultimately repackaged into a more domestic and manageable scale for use as a family home and as the centre of a wider rural enterprise.
39. Local distinctiveness is about far more than brick colour, brick type, and the brick bond used. Consideration of local distinctiveness can and should include the height, width and depth of buildings, the roof form and pitch and eaves details, fenestration and solid to void ratios, amongst other things. This is clearly a well thought out and considered scheme for a proposal that I regard would be a good example of how a country house could be reimagined and interpreted for a more modern age respecting elements of local distinctiveness.
40. However, at its heart it is neither one or the other and it would sit somewhere in between the great tradition and a proposal that rightly respects local vernacular and distinctiveness but is not remarkable in any particular way. I share the Council's view it lacks boldness and in some ways, originality in its design so it should not be regarded as truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards of architecture.
41. Turning to the consideration of raising standards of design more generally in rural areas, I acknowledge that the dwelling would be an interesting and attractive building to live in, particularly given the proximity of the natural environment. I can also appreciate that to some it would be a building of interest to particular parties in terms of design, construction and advances in building technology and energy efficiency.
42. Conditions have been agreed between the parties to secure a Craftsmanship Demonstration and Community Engagement Plan, requirement for collaboration with local educational institutions and a post completion craftsmanship record. Giving some benefit of the doubt to the appellant, it would, subject to the conditions, help to educate and therefore could raise standards of local vernacular design.

Paragraph 84 e) ii

Would it significantly enhance its immediate setting?

43. The first requirement of the second part of the test is not that the proposed dwelling would not cause harm to the setting or would improve the appearance of the area but that it would significantly enhance its immediate setting or put another way would it enhance the setting in a sufficiently important way as to be worthy of attention.
44. I asked at the hearing how the development would do this. The response can be summarised that it would frame views, have a positive effect on biodiversity and with significant planting, retaining the natural characteristics of the site. The proposal is clearly part of a wider estate of some 1000 acres, of which it lies to the south of including dwellings and working equestrian uses. The majority is arable farmland and I have no doubt the appellant has a history of seeking to improve the natural environment through planting of trees and replacement hedgerows including involvement in a countryside stewardship scheme.

45. Landscaping associated with the immediate area around the dwelling would include formal gardens with a strong geometric emphasis and structural planting. There would be a formal lawn, sunken garden and kitchen garden, orchard and other productive areas. A pond and rill would lead from the orangery to the formal pond further south. Formal planted avenue of clipped trees giving views of the entertainment space building. In terms of these garden areas that would be used in association with the occupation of the principal dwelling it is a well-considered and designed approach that would provide a high level of amenity for occupier of the dwelling.
46. Beyond the formal gardens, a new woodland pasture and meadow is proposed to the southeast and north, in a linear row adjacent to the existing PRoW. Approximately 500 metres to the north of the house, on a high ridge point in the landscape, a wildlife tower is proposed. To the rear of the house where the land falls, a small pond would be transformed into a large lake, and beyond that, an open field would be planted to form traditional parkland. Plantations would be introduced along with a bog garden and an Oak arboretum with heavy standard Oak to the southeast. Existing boundaries would be retained and enhanced with mixed native hedgerows.
47. The buildings would be accessed via a long and winding drive that would pass through newly planted woodland and cross the bridleway before arriving at the house. Structural planting along the route of the driveway is designed to create a 'hide and reveal' approach but its meandering route lacks formality and whilst acknowledging the approach in my view would be akin to an agricultural track as opposed to an approach to a truly outstanding dwelling. This is somewhat reflected by the modest and bland pair of brick pillars at the entrance.
48. Whilst I accept that a great deal of attention has gone into the design and concept of the appeal scheme, it would nonetheless introduce a substantial amount of built development and hard surfaces as well as more formal, managed, landscaping into an area which is characterised by open agricultural fields. Whilst not inherently harmful, agricultural fields are an important component of the landscape of the area, so it is hard to see how replacing part of this field with an extensive group of buildings and hardstanding of a domestic character and appearance, even with additional landscaping could be an enhancement of its immediate setting.
49. The wildlife tower or 'Owl' House is included no doubt with good intentions but in character and appearance terms whilst an attractive structure its scale and siting on the ridge and given its form and appearance the eye would be unacceptably drawn to it in views from the surrounding area and in particular the adjoining PRoW. There is nothing substantive before me regarding any former cottage that existed in this location but in any event this would be a very different landscape feature. Given the immediate landscape character and appearance of the area I observed, even in combination with any views of wind turbines evident to the north and wider historical precedents it would be a somewhat incongruous feature.
50. Overall, there would be a strongly perceived and not fully harmonious change to the open rural character of the site and its immediate setting that would not represent a significant enhancement to it.

Would it be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area and landscape character?

51. The site lies within the Hemplow Hills, Cottesbrooke and Brington Special Landscape Area (the SLA) which is characterised by undulating open fields with small woods and copses capping the high points. This landscape also forms the wider setting of a number of listed country houses and with associated registered historic parks and gardens. Lamport Hall is approximately 3km to the east; Cottesbrooke Hall is approximately 2.2km to the south-west; Haselbech Hall is approximately 2.5km to the north-west; and Kelmarsh Hall 4km to the north.
52. The site lies roughly in between Lamport and Cottesbroke Halls and I observed a largely agricultural area of countryside dotted with tightly nucleated and attractive yellow stone villages, typical of this part of Northamptonshire. At the hearing it became clear that the Council considered the SLA as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset given its character of isolated country estate houses in a historic rural agricultural and sporting landscape. The Council referred me to encroachment of the proposed development into this landscape would result in a loss of the sense of spacing and isolation of existing country houses in the landscape. Further that it would erode the legibility of the historic context of the country houses and their wider estates and farming lands.
53. It was unclear to me whether this was ultimately a consideration of the setting of those designated heritage assets or was an in-principal objection to the addition of an isolated rural house in this particular landscape. I return to my statutory duty below but the Council did not object on this basis and for the purposes of this part of the decision I consider the matter of landscape character as being inherently interwoven with whether the proposal would be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the area, so I have considered both in this issue.
54. In a historic landscape of isolated country houses the proposal would sit as an isolated large rural property in the open countryside and within landscaped grounds. As an interpretation of a more modern but domestically scaled country house associated with a smaller estate, spatially and visually it would sit somewhere between the more modest historic properties of the nucleated villages and rural dwellings on their outskirts and the much larger historic country halls, houses and their associated estate. The landscape character in this area is strong with open agricultural fields, sloping topography and with fields bound by mature hedgerows and trees and interspersed with wooded copses.
55. Being of a modern construction and with significant amounts of built form in this location the proposal would be artificially imposed upon the site rather than growing from the ground as the appellant contends. For a significant period until landscaping begins to serve its intended purpose it would be clearly legible and prominent in some views where once open fields existed. There would also be an underlying incongruity between the overall form and scale of the dwelling, and the extent and gradient of earthworks required to assimilate the dwelling onto the existing topography.
56. From a limited number of viewpoints there would be some slight erosion of the ability to appreciate the historic farming land that once may have supported the estates. However, given the history and evolution of such houses as set out above I have some difficulty in agreeing that such a proposal could never be sensitive to

the defining characteristics of this particular SLA, which includes the historic landscape character. There is no moratorium in principle for new country house estates no matter the scale.

57. Overall the approach and detailed proposals would, in some ways, be sensitive to these characteristics but nevertheless, would still cause some limited to modest harm to the character and appearance of the appeal site and landscape character of the SLA. The proposal would be in conflict with Policy BN5 of the CS and Policy MD4 of the Maidwell and Draughton Neighbourhood Development Plan insofar as they require such landscapes to be conserved and enhanced, the special qualities of the District's areas of high quality landscape which are designated as Special Landscape Areas to be protected, including cumulative impacts.
58. The SLA is not a designated heritage asset. In such cases the Framework is clear that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, in this case the SLA, should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. I return to this below.

Conclusion on paragraph 84 e)

59. This proposal would undoubtedly be a very good standard of architecture but more of a good example of how vernacular architecture and local distinctiveness in this part of the Northamptonshire countryside can be reinterpreted and reimaged as opposed to a statement dwelling of the highest standards of architecture. A somewhat safe approach to such a proposal the design would fall short of being truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards of architecture.
60. Although enhancements are proposed the proposal, as a whole, is not fully informed by, or responds sufficiently positively to, a robust understanding of the sensitivity of the site's immediate landscape context, topography and constraints. The proposal would not result in a significant enhancement of its immediate setting. I have found sensitivity in some regards so it would not be totally in conflict with that requirement but the proposal would still result in some limited to modest harm to the character and appearance of the appeal site and the SLA.
61. This might well be a site where a building of the necessary design requirements could be accommodated, but however a good example of a large country property this proposal has the potential to be, the failure to meet two of those strands in paragraph 84 e) i and ii means the design should not be regarded as being of exceptional quality. I appreciate that other design professionals take a different view and acknowledge the considerable time and effort of the appellants and their team in the design approach. Further, that my views will come as a disappointment, but this does not alter my reasoning or conclusions on this issue.
62. The appeal site would not therefore be a suitable location for new residential development having regard to the development plan and, in particular, whether the proposal constitutes design of exceptional quality. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy RA6 (iii) of the LP and paragraph 84 of the Framework. No other exception in that paragraph was put before me by the parties. Nonetheless,

as an example of good quality of design the Framework still remains a material consideration to which I return to below.

Other Matters

63. After discussion at the hearing and clarification of the Council's case my attention was drawn to Lamport Hall a Grade I listed building (List Entry: 1054842) and Cottesbrooke Hall, a Grade II listed building (List Entry: 1001028) which lies to the west a similar distance from the appeal site. The Council did not object on the basis of setting and I have therefore been provided with very little information in respect of the significance of these buildings. This notwithstanding I have a statutory duty.
64. I observed when I visited the site and area that these buildings are located a significant distance from the appeal site. There is very limited and fleeting intervisibility between them and the appeal site due to topography, landscaping and tree cover and the configuration of publicly accessible routes and spaces. Even if there were some historical connection between either and the appeal site, any contribution that the appeal site might make to understanding the significance of those buildings is negligible and limited to simply being part of the broader rural/agricultural landscape within which they sit. From the evidence before me and from what I saw at the site visit, I find there would be no harm to the setting of these designated heritage assets from this particular proposal.
65. My attention has been drawn to other examples of rural dwellings and the approaches taken by the Council, including during the application stage. However, I have not been provided with the full details and in any event, these do little to assist given there is an inherent level of subjectivity in such cases given the considerations put forward in support of the proposal and which require site specific judgments to be made. For these reasons, those examples and any frustrations from the application stage do not alter my views.

Planning balance and conclusion

66. The harm and conflicts I have identified mean the proposal should be regarded as being in conflict with the development plan, when read as a whole. I have also found conflict with various aspects of the Framework in terms of meeting the exceptions for isolated homes in the countryside, protected species and sub-surface and non-designated heritage assets.
67. The proposal would still provide a bespoke family home and would result in an attractive and enjoyable living and working experience. It would make a minor contribution to the Council's housing supply with high levels of energy efficiency both domestically and linked to the wider estate it would form the base of. Notwithstanding my findings with regard to the exceptions in paragraph 84, I still give weight to the proposal as an innovative design with likely high levels of sustainability that could help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, in accordance with paragraph 139 of the Framework. However it is tempered because of my findings on conflict with other government design guidance in the Framework for this isolated site and ultimately the proposal would not fit in with the overall form and layout of its surroundings.

68. The erection of such a dwelling would also have modest economic benefits through the employment of labour and resources during its construction and future spending in the local economy. This carries a small degree of weight given the scale of the proposal. There would also be some positive benefits to the local construction community from the conditions relating to helping raise standards of design.
69. However, these material considerations would not outweigh the harm and conflicts with the development plan, as a whole and the Framework that I have identified. There are no other material considerations that indicate a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore conclude that having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed and planning permission refused.
70. Paragraph 3.1.2 of the Procedural Guide: Planning Appeals – England states that *‘The person making the appeal (‘the appellant’) should be confident at the time they make their appeal that they are able to make their full case’*. Despite some failings on the Council’s part that was not the case in this appeal with regard to the first main issue(s). Consequently, even if I had found with the appellant in terms of the design issues my findings with regard to protected species and sub surface assets would still have resulted in the appeal having to be dismissed and planning permission refused.

R Aston

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Barry Waine – Barry Waine Planning

Scot Masker – Masker Architects

Kevin Brown – Collaborative Architecture

Jonathan Evans – Pegasus Group

Paul Stamper – Paul Stamper Heritage

Professional qualifications not given or recorded.

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Tim Cantwell – Principal Planning Officer

Raj Sahoo – Design Officer

Rachel Booth – Conservation Officer

Professional qualifications not given or recorded.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Mr and Mrs D Keir – The appellants

Jan Macieg – Traditional Architecture Group

DOCUMENTS AND PLANS SUBMITTED TO THE HEARING

1. Matters Outstanding statement of the LPA dated 25 November 2025.
2. Appellant's response dated 26 November 2026.
3. Further LLFA response dated 3 December 2025.
4. Further Ecologist response dated 4 December 2025.
5. Agreed suggested planning conditions dated 17 December 2025.