



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2026

by Laura Bartle BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 May 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/25/3376887

Land off Bridge Street, Thornborough, Buckinghamshire MK18 2DW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Ms Rachel Avery against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council - North Area (Aylesbury).
 - The application Ref is 25/01936/PIP.
 - The development proposed is described as 'application for permission in principle for the erection of a minimum of two and maximum of three dwellings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and permission in principle is granted for residential development comprising a minimum of two and a maximum of three dwellings at land off Bridge Street, Thornborough, MK18 2DW in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/01936/PIP, dated 25 June 2025.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has two stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second 'technical details consent' stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted¹. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the site is a suitable location for housing, having particular regard to the Council's development strategy and access to services, facilities and public transport options; and,
 - the effect of the proposed land use on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area, and Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.

¹ PPG Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

Reasons

Location for housing

5. The site lies at the edge of Thornborough, which is categorised as a smaller village under Policy S2 of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (LP). The LP describes such settlements as having relatively poor access to services and facilities, while acknowledging that some limited development may be appropriate. This approach is reflected in Policy D4, which supports small-scale housing proposals where, amongst other criteria, sites are located within the existing developed footprint of the village or are substantially enclosed by existing built development.
6. Forming part of a larger field and having frontage to Bridge Street, the site lies between a converted barn and a partially laid track providing access to The Maltings and adjacent fields. The site is undeveloped and therefore does not continue the stretch of built form along Bridge Street beyond The Maltings. To the west of the site, on the opposite side of the road, the land is also undeveloped. As such, the site does not fall within the developed footprint as defined in Policy D4, nor can it reasonably be described as substantially enclosed by built development. Consequently, the proposal conflicts with the locational requirements of LP Policy D4.
7. Turning to access considerations, services and facilities in Thornborough are limited to an infant school, preschool, village hall, recreation ground, village pub and 2 places of worship. It would be likely, therefore, that occupiers of the development would need to travel further afield to access most of their work, education and other services and facilities for day to day living needs. Trips would likely be to Buckingham, approximately 3.5 miles away.
8. The village is served by a bus connection to Buckingham, however it is limited to one morning weekday service. Whilst the bus stop and the other of the village's limited facilities are in reasonable walking distance of the site there is no footpath in its immediate vicinity. Further, the road to the village is an unlit single carriageway that transitions from a 60 mile per hour speed limit to a 30 mile an hour speed limit just beyond the site and on the approach to the village. Consequently, pedestrians would have to walk along the grass verge for a short part of the journey. A public footpath would provide an alternative route to the village via adjacent fields, but this would be a longer walk and its attractiveness would likely be reduced during wet weather. It is also unlit. The provision of a new footway along the site frontage would not fully mitigate these connectivity deficiencies.
9. Drawing these matters together, very limited alternative travel choices are available and future occupiers of the proposed development would be likely to rely on the private car for most day-to-day journeys. The limited scale of the proposal reduces the absolute number of trips that would be probable. For the above reasons I conclude that the proposal would not provide future occupants with access to facilities including healthcare, education, employment, retail and community facilities as is required by Policy S1 of the LP. Nor would it encourage greater use of more sustainable forms of transport. Hence there would be conflict with Policies S1 and T1 of the LP.
10. Accordingly, the site would not be a suitable location for housing having particular regard to the Council's development strategy and access to services, facilities and

sustainable modes of transport. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policies S1, S2, D4 and T1 of the LP.

Proposed land use

11. Mature hedgerow and tree planting along the northern and western boundaries provide a strong sense of enclosure to the site when viewed from Bridge Street. More open views are available from the public footpath to the south. At longer distances to the east, views are curtailed by dense boundary vegetation associated with the wider field and the undulating topography. Notwithstanding this degree of visual containment, the site remains wholly undeveloped and contributes to the intrinsic rural character of the area and to the countryside setting of the village.
12. The Council has identified that the site lies within the Thornborough-Beachampton Great Ouse Tributaries Landscape Character Area 4.4 (LCA), assessed as being in very good condition. This character area is described as having a coherent pattern of landscape elements, underpinned by a largely intact historic hedgerow network which contributes positively to its overall character and sense of place.
13. The introduction of two to three dwellings on the site would increase the scale of development at this edge of Thornborough and would involve the loss of part of an open field. While the existing hedgerow boundaries would likely be retained and additional landscaping could provide some screening, the site's peripheral location, together with its separation from the main body of the village, would result in encroachment into the countryside. By introducing a noticeably more built-up form of development at the village fringe, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside landscape. These visual impacts would, however, likely be relatively localised and the key features that contribute to the LCA would not be undermined to any perceptible or significant degree. The level of this harm would therefore be limited.
14. Policy S3 of the LP indicates that development on unallocated sites in the countryside, as in this case, should generally be avoided. This applies particularly where development would compromise the character of the countryside between settlements and lead to their coalescence. While the proposal is located within the countryside and would result in a degree of harm to its character, as discussed above, it would not lead to the coalescence of settlements. As such, both elements of the policy which require development to be expressly avoided are not engaged. Nevertheless, the principle of introducing new development in the countryside runs counter to the overarching objective of Policy S3 to restrain such development. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policy S3.
15. Turning to the proposed use and its effect on agricultural land, it is not in dispute that the site has not been in productive agricultural use since 2007. Policy NE7 nonetheless seeks to protect best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) and adopts a criteria-based approach where development would result in the significant loss of such land. No agricultural land classification assessment accompanied the application. However, the Council considers the site to comprise Grade 3 land. Even if further assessment were to demonstrate that the land is BMV, the main parties agree that the proposal would not constitute significant development. In these circumstances, an agricultural land classification assessment would not be determinative, as criteria (a) and (b) of Policy NE7 would

not be engaged. Accordingly, while the absence of an assessment conflicts with Policy NE7, the resultant harm is very limited.

16. In conclusion, the proposed residential use would have very limited harmful effects on BMV agricultural land. However, I have found harm to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to Policies S3, BE2 and NE4 of the LP. These policies, amongst other matters, promote development that does not compromise the character of the countryside, and instead contributes positively to the area's character and identity through respect for natural qualities and features of the area.

Other Matters

17. As the appeal site forms part of the setting of a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Located on the other side of Bridge Street as the road curves into the village is the grade II listed building known as Tile Cottage². Based on the official list entry, in so far as is relevant to the appeal, its significance is principally derived from its architectural and historic interest as an early-18th century cottage. It has two storeys of whitewashed rubble stone façade with an adjoining single storey whitewashed brick extension.
18. The setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which it is experienced. The architectural interest of Tile Cottage is best appreciated close by on the southerly approach along Bridge Street, where it is set back obliquely from the road behind a low stone wall. The principal façade is orientated to the village and its rear garden enclosed behind high boundary planting along the roadside. Intervisibility between Tile Cottage and the frontage of the appeal site is weak and is further reduced by the curvature of the road.
19. New housing on the site would have some effect on the wider setting, as some of the dwellings would likely be visible in the background alongside existing development. However, there is no persuasive evidence before me to suggest that an appropriately sympathetic design could not be achieved at the technical details stage. I am therefore satisfied that the proposal would not adversely affect the setting or harm the significance of the listed cottage.
20. I have had regard to the comments made by interested parties; however, my assessment is confined to matters relevant to an application for permission in principle. In that context, there is no compelling technical evidence before me to indicate that permission in principle should be withheld on the grounds of highways, flood risk, drainage or impacts on protected species. Many of the concerns raised relate to matters that would be assessed at the technical details consent stage. Indeed, planning permission would not exist unless both permission in principle and technical details consent are granted.
21. It is undisputed that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. However, I have been directed to a recent appeal decision in which inconsistencies between figures resulted in a finding of between 2.44 and 3.62 years housing supply³. The Council maintain the view that it has 3.62 years of supply. Even if I were to accept that position, it still represents a

² List Entry Number: 1232358

³ Appeal reference: APP/J0405/W/25/3370338

significant shortfall against the five year target and I have not been provided with compelling evidence to demonstrate that the situation is improving.

22. The Council has suggested a number of informatives be included in the decision should the appeal be allowed, listing the plans and technical documents required to be submitted with a technical details application. This is not necessary.

Planning Balance

23. The proposal's conflict with the spatial strategy of the Council carries limited to moderate weight because the council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. The limited harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area is afforded limited weight. The loss of BMV and technical conflict with Policy NE7 attracts only very limited weight. Accordingly, when the development plan is read as a whole, there would be conflict.
24. In this case, the shortfall in the five year housing land supply means that the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out by paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is applicable. The application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance do not provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Accordingly, the Framework sets out that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies that it specifies.
25. The provision of two or three additional homes would be a benefit of the scheme and the Framework indicates that small and medium sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement for an area. The proposal would also give rise to short-term economic benefits during the construction phase, together with longer-term expenditure by future occupiers, at least some of which would be likely to support services in the local area to a modest extent. As such the proposal would contribute to the vitality of rural communities consistent with paragraph 83 of the Framework. While the Council's housing supply shortfall is significant, having regard to the limited number of dwellings proposed, I accord these benefits moderate weight overall.
26. LP policies S1, S2, S3, D4, BE2, NE4 and NE7 are broadly consistent with the Framework insofar as they seek to direct development to accessible locations, and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as well as its wider benefits. However, limited harm is identified in respect of the latter. Moreover, paragraph 83 of the Framework adopts a more balanced approach to housing in rural areas and provides some limited support for the proposal as discussed above. In that context a rigid application of the development strategy would only further frustrate housing supply, and thus overall, the conflict with it attracts limited weight.
27. Although access to services and facilities would mostly be made using private vehicles there would be some opportunity for future occupiers to use public transport for some trips as discussed above. Moreover, paragraph 110 of the Framework indicates that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Accordingly, I give modest weight to the harm that would arise from the degree of dependence on and related impacts from private motor vehicles, and the associated conflicts with LP policy T1.

28. Whilst there is harm arising due to the policy conflict referred to above, the Council is currently failing to deliver sufficient homes to meet the five-year housing land supply requirement. Overall, the adverse impacts attract modest weight. Consequently, I find that these would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits that would arise from the proposed development, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole. The proposal therefore benefits from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Conclusion

29. The proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is a material consideration which outweighs that conflict. Material considerations therefore indicate that a decision should be taken which is not in accordance with the development plan.
30. Accordingly, the appeal is allowed.

Laura Bartle

INSPECTOR