



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 January 2026

by E Brownless BA (Hons) Solicitor (non-practising)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 June 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/J0540/W/25/3365234

Land west of Main Street, Southorpe, Peterborough

- 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 A Dennis of Walcot Estate against the decision of Peterborough City Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00125/FUL.
 - The development proposed is a change of use of agricultural hardstanding for the siting of 18 self storage containers.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The description of development cited on the application form was a 'change of use of agricultural hardstanding for the siting of 7 self storage containers'. The appeal form and the Council's decision notice refer to a 'part retrospective application for the change of use of agricultural hardstanding for the siting of 18 self storage containers'. A revised description of development was agreed in writing by the local planning authority and the appellant and the application was determined on that basis. I have therefore amended the description of development in the banner heading above. I have omitted the words 'part retrospective application' as these are not a description of development.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:-
 - i) whether the proposed development is in a suitable location with particular regard to development plan policies concerning the location of development within the countryside;
 - ii) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - iii) the effect of the proposed development on highway safety.

Reasons

Suitability of location

4. Policy LP2 of the Peterborough Local Plan (2019) (LP) sets the overarching spatial strategy for the district and establishes a settlement hierarchy. Any site that lies outside of the hierarchy, such as the appeal site, as it is located outside of the village

envelope of Southorpe, is considered to be within the countryside for planning policy purposes and where development is limited to a small number of exceptions. The supporting text to this policy sets out that, among other things, an aim of the policy is to protect the landscape character of the countryside.

5. One such exception that is of relevance to this appeal is development which is in accordance with LP Policy LP11. Part G to LP Policy LP11 concerns agricultural diversification and allows for farm based diversification proposals which will support the applicable farm enterprises and provided that the development is in an appropriate location for the proposed use (criterion z), is of a scale appropriate to its location (criterion aa) , and of a scale appropriate to the business need (criterion ab). There is no dispute by the Council that the appeal scheme is capable of being considered as a farm-based diversification scheme; the appellant explains it would generate a modest income that would help support the wider farm estate.
6. The local area is typically characterised by a gently rolling agricultural landscape comprised of sweeping and open arable fields, with hedgerows and expanses of woodland such that the area of countryside within which the appeal site is located comprises a predominantly rural, open character and appearance.
7. The appeal site is located in an area well beyond the edge of the village of Southorpe. Notwithstanding that the appeal site has been developed through the installation of a hardstanding base, the appeal site largely retains an open and spacious character which makes a positive contribution to landscape character and openness.
8. At the time of my site visit, a number of storage containers had been sited upon the hardstanding in a row towards the rear and one edge of the site. As a consequence of the siting of these storage containers on an otherwise open parcel of land that is largely free from built form, other than hardstanding, the spaciousness and openness of the site has been significantly eroded. The proposal would see the introduction of additional similar container units up to a maximum number of 18, which would form a continuation of the existing row of container units. This would represent a further erosion of the spacious, open rural character of the site. Consequently, I find the proposed use and location of the appeal scheme would result in a significant increase in urbanising form across the site, resulting in an encroachment into the countryside to the detriment of the rural landscape.
9. Although the development would be predominantly screened from public viewpoints, this does not overcome the harm that would be caused as a result of the encroachment into the countryside. The appeal scheme therefore fails to accord with the criteria (z) and (aa) of Policy LP11 such that the appeal scheme does not fall to be considered as an appropriate agricultural diversification scheme supported by Part G to LP Policy LP11. Given that the appeal scheme fails to satisfy the aforementioned criteria, I have not needed to give any further consideration to criterion (ab). In the absence of being a category of development permitted within the countryside as set out in LP Policy LP11, or one of the exceptional categories of development permitted within LP Policy LP2, the appeal scheme conflicts with the aims of LP Policy LP2 to protect the landscape character of the countryside.

10. Since support for the appeal scheme from LP Policies LP2 and LP11 is not forthcoming, a consideration of other policies within the development plan is therefore relevant. One such policy is Policy LP4 of the LP, which is permissive of '*other employment proposals*' outside of General Employment Areas, Business Parks or allocated sites subject to certain criteria being met. Among others, other employment proposals need to show the scale of the proposal is commensurate with the scale and character of the existing settlement, there is no significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and there is no significant adverse impact on the local highway network.
11. Since I have found that the appeal scheme is located well beyond the edge of the settlement and represents an encroachment within the countryside which fails to protect rural landscape character, the scale of the proposal is not therefore commensurate with the scale and character of the existing settlement. In addition, I have addressed the impact of the appeal scheme on highway safety later in this decision letter and I have concluded that the proposal fails to demonstrate that there would not be a significant adverse effect on the local highway network. As such, LP Policy LP4 does not provide support for the appeal scheme.
12. Overall, I conclude that the appeal site is not a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to local planning policy for the location of new development within the countryside. The proposal would fail to accord with LP Policies LP2, LP4 and LP11, the requirements of which I have set out above. In addition, the appeal scheme would fail to accord with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024)(Framework) insofar as it requires development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural business to be sensitive to its surroundings and avoid unacceptable impacts on local roads¹.

Character and appearance

13. I note that the storage containers would be a dark green colour to assist in blending them within the surrounding rural environment. I also note that due to distance to the highway and nearby properties, and the presence of nearby vegetation including wooded blocks and hedgerows, views of the appeal scheme from the public domain are constrained. The Council sets out that there is '*not one particular vantage point from the public realm where harm is attributed from*' and the appellant's evidence is that the containers would be '*largely invisible within the wider landscape*'. This accords with my observations at the site visit. As such, the visual impact of the proposal would give rise to very limited localised harm.
14. Policy LP16 requires development proposals to contribute to local character and distinctiveness and to respond appropriately to the established landscape setting and pattern of development. LP Policy LP27 similarly seeks to ensure that development within the countryside is sensitively located and designed, having regard to character and qualities of the surrounding landscape.
15. The appeal site lies within the Nassaburgh Limestone Plateau (NLP) which is characterised by a predominantly rural landscape comprising woodland, agricultural fields, and dispersed settlements within a gently undulating topography. Although the Council has referred to the 'prestigiousness' of the area, I take the appellant's point that the NLP is a landscape typology rather than a policy designation. Nonetheless, the proposed development would introduce a

¹ National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 88(b) and 89

commercial storage use into this countryside location, representing a form of development that is not characteristic of the prevailing land uses or landscape context.

16. The proposal would give rise to vehicle movements associated with the delivery, collection and storage activities operating from the site. Even if a 'low level' of activity were to occur, as has been suggested by the appellant, such movements would introduce additional comings and goings within an otherwise quiet rural environment. The associated activity, noise and disturbance would detract from the tranquillity of the surrounding countryside and would reinforce the commercial character of the use. As a result, the proposal's effects would extend beyond the physical presence of the containers themselves, further harming the rural character and setting of the landscape. Whilst additional planting could be secured through the imposition of an appropriately worded planning condition, this would not overcome the harm described above.
17. I have had regard to the appellant's contention that the storage containers are 'transient' and whilst they would not be permanently affixed to the ground and are, by their nature, capable of being moved, the containers would remain in situ for the foreseeable future as part of the operation of the site and would be experienced as a permanent feature in the landscape. In this respect, their substantial size, utilitarian appearance and the extent of their presence across the site is of greater relevance to the assessment of landscape and visual effects than the fact that they could theoretically be relocated. I therefore afford only very limited weight to the appellant's argument regarding their transient nature.
18. Having regard to the nature, scale and appearance of the proposal, I find that it would result in a significant urbanising influence that would erode the rural character of the site and its surroundings. Consequently, the proposal would fail to conserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area and would conflict with the objectives of LP Policies LP16 and LP27, the requirements of which are set out above. There would also be conflict with the Framework's aims to achieve well-designed places that, among other things, are sympathetic to local character including landscape setting.

Highway safety

19. PLP Policy LP13 sets out, among other things, that development will only be granted where appropriate provision has been made for safe, convenient and sustainable access to, from and within the site by all user groups and it would not result in a severe impact on any element of the transportation network including highway safety. This aligns with the aims of the Framework which requires safe and suitable access to sites to be achieved for all users.
20. The appeal site is accessed from an existing private access track which is unlit, includes a limited width, an absence of formal passing places or dedicated pedestrian facilities. Although the track is fairly straight, it is long and includes a bend at its far end towards a number of residential dwellings positioned close to the junction of the track with Main Street. Given its length, narrow width and the bend in the track, visibility is restricted for vehicular and non-vehicular users. Given the narrow nature of the track, based upon my observations at the visit, it is unlikely that two vehicles would be able to pass each other simultaneously. This is likely to lead to one vehicle having to reverse to find a suitable passing place and

any such manoeuvres are likely to be to the detriment of highway safety for all users.

21. The proximity of a number of properties to the highway add further to these concerns. A number of residential dwellings are positioned at the end of the private track and close to the junction with Main Street, and the access to the appeal site would pass in close proximity to these properties, several of which have direct vehicular and pedestrian access onto the track. In such circumstances, any reversing manoeuvres required within the vicinity of these properties is likely to increase the potential for conflict between users of the track, to the detriment of highway safety for both vehicular and non-vehicular uses.
22. As the appellant advises that the track is used by '*large agricultural vehicles*', and since there is no suggestion that this situation would change, this is likely to further exacerbate the situation with regards to conflict along the track.
23. The proposal would intensify the use of the access route. According to the appellant, the proposal would generate some two trips per day, and five to ten trips at the weekend. However, these figures are derived on the basis of the storage containers being self-store units for personal use and which would be rented on a monthly basis. The appellant suggests they would be likely to be used by a family whilst moving house or utilised for storing surplus furniture, which would lead to infrequent visits by a family car or small van. However, the Council have pointed to the units being made available for commercial use given that the appellant's webpage is shown to indicate the units could be used for storage of retail stock. The appellant has not sought to dispute this. With this in mind, I am mindful that such a use is likely to have a different and more frequent pattern of vehicular movements and is more likely to include larger types of vehicles. Consequently, in my judgment, I consider it is likely that vehicular conflict would be likely to arise as a consequence of vehicles accessing and egressing the site at the same time together with agricultural vehicles using the track.
24. Whilst the appellant suggests that the appeal site would not be accessed by heavy goods vehicles and the existing hardstanding is stated to provide adequate space for vehicles to turn around, and to park within whilst loading and unloading, the submitted plan shows the turning area includes the private track and the area where it is proposed that vehicles should park within whilst loading and unloading. Parked vehicles are likely to cause an obstruction to turning vehicles and I therefore find that the proposal fails to demonstrate that adequate provision would be made for parking and turning manoeuvres.
25. No evidence has been provided to demonstrate that adequate visibility is available at the junction of the track with Main Street. As no visibility splays are shown on the submitted plans and taking account of the curvature of the road as it meets the junction and the proximity of built form in close proximity to the highway, I am unable to conclude that appropriate visibility splays can be provided. As such, it has not been shown that drivers egressing the access route would have adequate visibility in both directions, to see other road users and therefore avoid a collision.
26. Accordingly, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal scheme fails to demonstrate that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users and that the proposal would not have a significantly adverse effect upon the local highway network and highway safety. There would be conflict with LP Policy LP13

and the aims of Section 9 of the Framework, the requirements of which I have set out above.

Other Matters

27. No loss of habitat or adverse impact on biodiversity or ecology has been identified by the Council. There would be no adverse impact on heritage assets, flood risk, the mineral safeguarding area, or materially harmful effect on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. Since the appeal site is an area of hardstanding there would be no loss of agricultural land. However, the absence of harm is a neutral matter that weighs neither for nor against a proposal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

28. The appeal scheme would make efficient use of under-utilised previously developed land. It would enable the generation of a modest income to support the wider Walcot Estate business. The appeal scheme would meet the Framework's aims to support a prosperous rural economy and recognises that planning decisions should help create conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Furthermore, that significant support should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and the wider opportunities for development². In addition, the Framework explains that planning decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses³. These are all matters which weigh in favour of the appeal scheme and to which I attach moderate weight, taking into account the scale of development proposed.
29. In this instance, I have concluded that the proposed development would not be in a suitable location having regard to local planning policy for the location of new development within the countryside. In addition, there would be harm caused to the character and appearance of the area and the appeal scheme has failed to demonstrate that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users and that the scheme would not have a significantly adverse effect upon the local highway network and highway safety. These are matters weighing against the proposal and to which I attach significant weight in the planning balance.
30. Accordingly, I find that the material considerations weighing in favour of the appeal scheme do not justify a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.
31. As part of the appeal, the appellant has asked that consideration should be given to the granting of a temporary planning permission. However, the harms outlined above would still arise throughout the duration of a temporary permission and they would be no less significant merely because the development would be time limited. During that period, the development would continue to give rise to significant unacceptable impacts in conflict with the relevant policies of the development plan. A temporary planning permission is therefore not justified.
32. For the reasons given above, the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

E Brownless - INSPECTOR

² National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 85, 86

³ National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 88 (c)