Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 September 2025

by C Mayes CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/25/3368678
Land east of Gloucester Barn, Fen Road, Pidley

- 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 Mr David Hopkins against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application Ref is 25/00544/PIP.
- The development proposed is for up to 3 dwellings.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. 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 2 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 2 stages.

3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent (TDC) application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

5. The strategy for development in the Council area is set out in Policy LP2 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, May 2019, (the LP). This policy seeks, among other things, to direct development toward the district's traditional market towns and most sustainable centres. The LP identifies Pidley as a small settlement but does not provide a defined boundary.

6. Policy LP9 supports development proposals within the built-up areas of small settlements or on land well related to the built-up area subject to specific criteria. Where land relates more to the surrounding countryside development falls to be assessed under Policy LP10 which provides limited support for development in the

countryside. Among other things, Policy LP10 recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

7. Pidley occupies a slightly elevated position within a broadly flat landscape. Housing within the settlement is mainly set close to the road and clustered around the two primary junctions of Warboys Road with High Street/Oldhurst Road and Warboys Road with Fen Road. Small fields, with a verdant and spacious character, extend either side of Warboys Road and visually separate the two principal parts of the settlement. This land extends the character of open countryside to the centre of the village.

8. The landscape to the north of the settlement consists primarily of grassland and arable fields punctuated by some dispersed buildings, shelterbelts and small woods, some hedgerows and scattered trees. A sparse shelterbelt marks the northern edge of the settlement stretching westward from Fen Road to the Church of All Saints. This feature, together with largely undeveloped land behind properties fronting onto Fen Road, including the appeal site, creates a verdant and spacious transition from the settlement to open countryside. While some development extends along Fen Road beyond the Fen Road Industrial Estate it becomes increasingly dispersed and set back from the road, reinforcing the area's open and rural quality.

9. The appeal site itself is a roughly triangular parcel of predominantly open grassland, with some hardstanding and a metal storage shed. It is enclosed by a mix of fencing, hedging and scattered trees. Although adjacent to Gloucester Barn, with a similar level of containment, the open fields between Warboys Road and Fen Road referred to above, visually coalesce with the appeal site to provide continuity of rural character across Fen Road. As a result, there is contiguity of elements of spacious, verdant countryside character and the site plays a significant role in the visual transition from the built form of the settlement to open countryside. Therefore, the appeal site is more closely related to the countryside than the built form of the settlement.

10. Hence, the development of this plot with up to 3 dwellings and associated features, including landscaping and domestic paraphernalia, would urbanise the plot. The proposal would introduce built form at the edge of the settlement adjacent to open land, which would significantly dimmish the contribution the appeal site makes to the countryside setting of the settlement and harm the rural character of the area.

11. Notwithstanding the above, the appeal site is within walking distance of the village hall, public house, community centre and bus stop. I also recognise that reliance on private vehicles is expected to be greater in rural areas. Therefore, the site would provide adequate access to the limited and dispersed local amenities and services available in this location.

12. Nevertheless, for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the site would not be suitable for residential development having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development. The scheme would conflict with Policies LP9, LP10 and LP12 of the LP, which require, among other things, that development should be located within the built-up area of a small settlement and, where this cannot be achieved, recognise and contribute positively to the character, identity and beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

13. I acknowledge the planning history of the site and note the recent grant of outline planning permission (25/00259/OUT) on land between Gloucester Barn and Fen Road. As this permission is in outline, I have no details of layout, scale or landscaping proposed. However, while sharing a boundary with the appeal site, there are fundamental differences with the appeal site, including the relationship between the commercial buildings to one side and Gloucester Barn to the rear. The appeal site occupies a different location and is visually and spatially divorced from the settlement, open to the wider landscape across much of its boundaries and more closely related to open countryside than the built-up area of the settlement. As such, the context of the outline permission differs significantly to that of the scheme before me, and so the extant permission on that site does not lead me to a different view in this case. In any event, each scheme must be considered and determined on its own merits.

14. In addition to the matters addressed above, concerns have been raised regarding several matters. These include the effect of the proposal on biodiversity, landscape quality, highway safety and environmental health matters. These are all matters which would be addressed as part of the TDC, where layout and design would be assessed and are not, therefore, considerations to be dealt with at this stage

15. I note the letter of support for the proposed development, and I acknowledge that sensitive design and appropriate landscaping may mitigate minor harm arising from development, and that such matters would be addressed at the TDC stage. However, the opinions expressed do not alter my conclusion nor I do consider that such measures would effectively overcome the significant harm that would arise from the scheme.

Planning Balance

16. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The proposal is not in accordance with the aforementioned policies of the LP, with the associated conflict reflecting harm to the character and appearance of the area. For this reason, the development conflicts with the development plan as a whole and should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

17. The Council have confirmed that they do not currently meet the Housing Delivery Test and can only demonstrate a 3.94-year supply of housing land. Consequently paragraph 11(d) of the Framework should be applied. Paragraph 11(d) explains that in these circumstances, 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.

18. The proposal would make a positive contribution to housing supply, with associated social and economic benefits during the construction period and once the dwellings are occupied. However, the scale of development proposed means the contribution of up to three additional dwellings to meet the housing need in the district would be slight.

19. In the particular circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the proposed development would have a significant and detrimental effect on the character, identity and beauty of the countryside and, thereby, the character and appearance

of the area. As such, the conflict with policies in the LP should be given significant weight. Consequently, the adverse impacts significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

Conclusion

20. The proposal would conflict with the development plan, when considered as a whole, and there are no material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, that indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Mayes

INSPECTOR