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/25/3368681
Land South of Fen Road Industrial Estate, 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 25/00543/PIP.
- The development proposed is for up to 2 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.

6. Policy LP9 supports development proposals within the built-up area 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 and, among other things, recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

7. Pidley occupies a slightly elevated position within a broadly flat landscape. The landscape to the north of the settlement and in the vicinity of the appeal site is defined by small fields of grassland with larger arable fields beyond. The landscape is punctuated by some dispersed buildings, shelterbelts and small woods, hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees.

8. Housing within the settlement is mainly set close to the road and clustered around the 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.

9. Some development extends short distances along roads leading from the two clusters, including along Fen Road, at the northern edge of the settlement. Housing along Fen Road becomes increasingly dispersed and set back from the road beyond the Fen Road Industrial Estate. On the southern side of Fen Road, the established pattern of housing markedly ends with 8 Fen Road (No 8), with only Capricorn House and Cedar Wood on the same side of the road beyond, and at notable distance from, the appeal site. Both these houses are distinct from the main cluster of houses at the village centre and, in part, due to their spacious gardens and substantial tree planting, have the appearance of houses within open countryside.

10. The appeal site is a broadly rectangular area of open grassland. It is bound on the north and west by a mixture of post and rail fences, hedgerows and trees. The southern and eastern boundaries are unmarked and open to grassland beyond. As such, the site appears as an arbitrary parcel of land within a much larger open grassland field lacking visual and spatial containment. While houses fronting onto Warboys Road are visible from the appeal site, the intervening open grassland and garden boundary hedges results in clear visual and spatial separation between the two. Therefore, the site forms part of a series of open grassland fields with a spacious and verdant character which coalesce with similar elements in the surrounding landscape.

11. As such, the appeal site appears detached from the main built-up areas of the settlement and relates more to the countryside than to the built-up area of the settlement. Neither would it be seen as a transitional continuation of the built edge of the village as it is distinctly separated from No 8 by an intervening paddock.

12. Hence, the proposal would not integrate into the established pattern of development in the village. Moreover, development of the appeal site would significantly undermine the currently complementary relationship between the compact built form of the settlement and the intrinsic character and beauty of its countryside setting. In addition, the appearance, landscaping and paraphernalia associated with up to two dwellings on the site would encroach into, and have an adverse urbanising effect on, the countryside setting of the settlement.

13. 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.

14. 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 that where it is not it should recognise and contribute positively to the character, identity and beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

15. 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 to the north of the appeal site. The appellant suggests that the appeal site is better located for housing in terms of its proximity to the village centre. While this may be the case, the appeal site occupies a different location and is visually and spatially divorced from the built-up area of the settlement, open to the wider landscape across much of its boundaries and relates closely to open countryside. In this context the two sites are significantly different and so this matter 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.

16. I acknowledge that the appeal site is not within a conservation area, nor would it likely affect designated heritage or ecological assets or protected species. I also note that the site is at low risk of flooding and that comments from statutory consultees have not raised substantial concerns about the scheme. However, these matters are neutral points that make no difference to my overall conclusion.

17. Matters relating to massing, landscaping, layout and architectural style, biodiversity gain and impacts on adjacent trees would be addressed at the TDC stage. However, these details alone would not guarantee a complementary and harmonious form of development, particularly given the context of the appeal site, and are not sufficient to allow the appeal because of the harm I have identified.

Planning Balance

18. 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.

19. The Council have confirmed that they do not currently meet the Housing Delivery Test and, in the evidence before me, 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.

20. 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 two additional dwellings to meet the housing need in the district through a more efficient use of land in the countryside would be limited.

21. 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

22. 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