Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2026

by S Hubbard BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date:

2 March 2026

Appeal Ref: 6001331
Land South of Manor Farm, Main Street, Old Weston PE28 5LP

- 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 permission in principle.
- The appeal is made by Harriet Developments Ltd against Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application Ref is 25/00573/PIP.
- The development proposed is residential development for up to 9 dwellings.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

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 permitted[1]. 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.

4. The Council did not determine the application. However, it has indicated that had it been able to issue a decision, it would have refused permission due to the location and amount of development being unacceptable. These matters are reflected in the main issues identified below.

5. The description of development states 'up to 9 dwellings'. However, the application form indicates that both the minimum and maximum number of dwellings proposed is 9. I have therefore determined the appeal on the basis that the proposal is for 9 dwellings.

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

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:

   i) 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

   ii) the effect of the amount of development proposed on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area.

Reasons

Location for housing

7. Policy LP2 of the Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (HLP) sets out the Council's strategy for development and the distribution of growth. In part, it is informed by HLP Policy LP9, which supports development within the built up area (BUA) of a defined 'Small Settlement', subject to a number of criteria being satisfied. The latter policy also supports development well-related to the BUA where it accords with specific opportunities allowed for through other policies of the HLP.

8. Old Weston is designated as a Small Settlement by a table supporting HLP Policy LP9. However, the site comprises part of an open, agricultural field that forms part of a network of fields that extend into the countryside where any development is more sporadic. It is separated from the residential area of the settlement by a group of barns, vegetation and a watercourse. Consequently, the site constitutes countryside, and therefore not within or well-related to the BUA. Furthermore, even if the site were to be considered well-related to the BUA, I have not been made aware of any specific opportunities for the proposed development allowed through other policies of the HLP. Accordingly, the proposal conflicts with Policy LP9.

9. Moreover, HLP Policy LP10 states that development in the countryside will be restricted to limited and specific opportunities provided for in other policies of the HLP. There are no policies in the HLP which specifically allow for open-market housing, such as that proposed, in the countryside. Therefore, the proposal is also contrary to Policy LP10.

10. Old Weston benefits from a village hall, church and a public house. Whilst these facilities are only a short distance from the site there is no lit footway connection to them. The road to the village is the main B660 which transitions from a 40 miles per hour speed limit to a 30 miles per hour speed limit within the vicinity of the site. Accordingly, it would not be safe for pedestrians to walk in the road and it would not be practical to walk on the verge given its narrowness and the presence of vegetation. Accordingly, there would not be a safe option for future occupants to access these facilities by foot. Future occupants would need to travel to other nearby and higher-order settlements to access other services and facilities, such as employment opportunities, shops, education and healthcare. According to the parties there is a bus service to Huntingdon which is limited to Monday to Friday but there is no footway connecting the site to the bus stop in the village.

11. The appellant states that there is a 'dial a ride' service which serves the village. While it has been put forward that this provides residents with access to nearby settlements, including Thrapston, Spaldwick and Huntingdon, limited details have

been provided as to the frequency or timing of this service or where the pick-up location would be in order to determine whether this would be a convenient service and a realistic alternative to the use of private vehicles.

12. Paragraph 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) acknowledges that sustainable transport solutions may differ between urban and rural areas. However, given the lack of suitable options available, there would likely be a daily reliance on private vehicles to access many services and facilities. Paragraph 115 of the Framework states that when assessing specific applications for development, sustainable transport modes should be prioritised and safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. Therefore, the proposal would be in conflict with paragraph 115.

13. Paragraph 83 of the Framework states that in rural areas, housing should be located where it will maintain or enhance the vitality of rural communities. Whilst the provision of new housing on the appeal site could provide a modest level of support to local services and facilities in the village, this support would likely be diminished by the lack of pedestrian connectivity between the site and those services and the associated inconvenience of travelling to them. As discussed above, services in other nearby settlements would likely require a private vehicle to access them. Consequently, the lack of convenient links would likely reduce the potential of the proposal to contribute meaningfully to the vitality of those communities.

14. The appellant refers to a permission in principle granted in Keyston[2], in which the Council afforded weight to the contribution that the future occupants of an additional dwelling would make to the viability of local services. However, I have not been provided with any details of this permission in order to draw meaningful comparisons and thus it does not lead me to alter my conclusions regarding the appeal scheme.

15. The site was submitted as part of a 'call for sites' associated with the emerging Local Plan, and initial feedback indicated that the site might be 'suitable' for residential development of up to 10 dwellings. I have not been given any specific details of this exercise or its conclusions. However, the Council have advised that this formed part of a larger parcel of land and therefore the findings of this exercise are not directly applicable to this proposal. The Council also advised that the site has not been taken forward in the emerging Local Plan, which is at an early stage of preparation and thus attracts limited weight in any case. Consequently, this matter does not lead me to alter my above findings.

16. In conclusion, the site is not a suitable location for housing, having particular regard to the Council's development strategy and access to services, facilities and public transport options. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policies LP2, LP9 and LP10 of the HLP.

Character and Appearance

17. The site comprises a spacious open field which is physically separate from the BUA of the settlement and makes a strong contribution to the intrinsic rural character of the area.

[2] 25/00607/PIP

18. The development pattern of the village is mainly linear. The residential area of Old Weston closest to the site comprises predominantly large, detached properties with a low-density character. Most dwellings are set back from the street and benefit from large back gardens. This gives the character of the settlement a spacious quality, enclosed only by trees and other vegetation.

19. The provision of nine dwellings on the appeal site would result in a development which would appear significantly more dense than the nearby residential area and there would not be scope to secure the qualities which contribute to the character and appearance of the area, such as the space between buildings, landscaping and large gardens. Notwithstanding the existing screening and potential for further screening, given the site's location near the edge of the settlement and its detachment from the residential area as described above, the amount of development proposed would have a harmful urbanising or suburbanising effect on the fringe of the village and the surrounding countryside.

20. In conclusion, the amount of development proposed would be harmful to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to Policy LP2, LP10 and LP12 of the HLP which, amongst other matters, require development to contribute positively to the area's character and identity.

Other Matters

21. The Council has confirmed it can demonstrate 3.68 years of deliverable housing sites. In that context, the provision of nine additional homes is a benefit of the scheme. There would be economic benefits associated with the scheme from the construction phase and from expenditure from future occupants of the proposed development which could help support the vitality of nearby rural communities. Additionally, there may be benefits from increased community infrastructure levy receipts. The appellant has indicated that the scheme could mitigate surface water flooding for land to the north of the site. However, insufficient detail has been provided on this in order for me to come to a view as to the extent to which this may weigh in favour of the proposal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

22. In the context of the absence of a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, A rigid application of HLP Policies LP2, LP9 and LP10 would further frustrate housing supply. However, the policies are consistent with the Framework insofar as they seek to direct development to locations with access to services and facilities. I therefore attach significant weight to the conflict with these policies in this respect. Furthermore, the conflict with the elements of these policies which seek to protect character and appearance, together with Policy LP12, which are consistent with paragraphs 135 and 187 of the Framework, is afforded significant weight. Overall, the conflict with Policies LP2, LP9, LP10 and LP12 of the HLP identified above, means that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when read as a whole.

23. As the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is therefore engaged. 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. Therefore, in these circumstances, the Framework states 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 as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

24. Given the limited scale of the scheme and the number of dwellings proposed, the sum of the schemes benefits as detailed above weighs moderately in its favour.

25. The harm resulting from the site's limited accessibility to services and facilities by sustainable modes is in conflict with the Framework's policies for directing development to sustainable locations. I have also found harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area which conflicts with the Framework's policies on securing well-designed places. These harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme as discussed above when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

26. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and the material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

S Hubbard

INSPECTOR