

REPORT TO THE EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	11 th October 2012
Application Number	E/2012/1047/OUT
Site Address	Dairy House, Puckshipton, Beechingstoke, Pewsey SN9 6HG
Proposal	Demolition of part of formal dairy building and conversion and alterations to remaining building to form 2 no. three bedroom and 1 no. two bedroom dwellings
Applicant	Mr Mark Noble
Town/Parish Council	BEECHINGSTOKE
Grid Ref	409834 158621
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Victoria Cains

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

This application has been called to committee at the request of the Division Member, Cllr Brigadier Robert Hall.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the recommendation that the application be refused.

2. Report Summary

This is an outline planning application. The main issues to consider are therefore:

- The principle of residential development in this location;
- Whether the scheme can be considered a rural exceptions site;
- The lack of affordable housing, and
- The impact of the scheme upon protected species and habitats.

3. Site Description

This application relates to the former dairy building at Puckshipton Farm, Puckshipton, Beechingstoke. The building was constructed in the 1950's and as the farm no longer operates as a dairy farm the former parlour unit has become surplus to requirements. The building is part of a wider complex of farm structures and sits at the front of the site facing the roadside.

The site lies within the open countryside of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty between the villages of Beechingstoke to the north-west and Hilcott to the east. The site can be found by taking the left hand turning to Chirton when heading in an easterly direction on the A342 heading out of Devizes (approximately 4.5 miles). One then travels through the villages of Chirton and Marden. Approximately 0.75 miles after exiting Marden a right hand turning onto Yards Lane can be found. The application site is approximately 500 metres on the right hand side of Yards Lane. Plate 1 shows the site in its wider context and plate 2 shows the application site in relation to the complex of farm buildings.

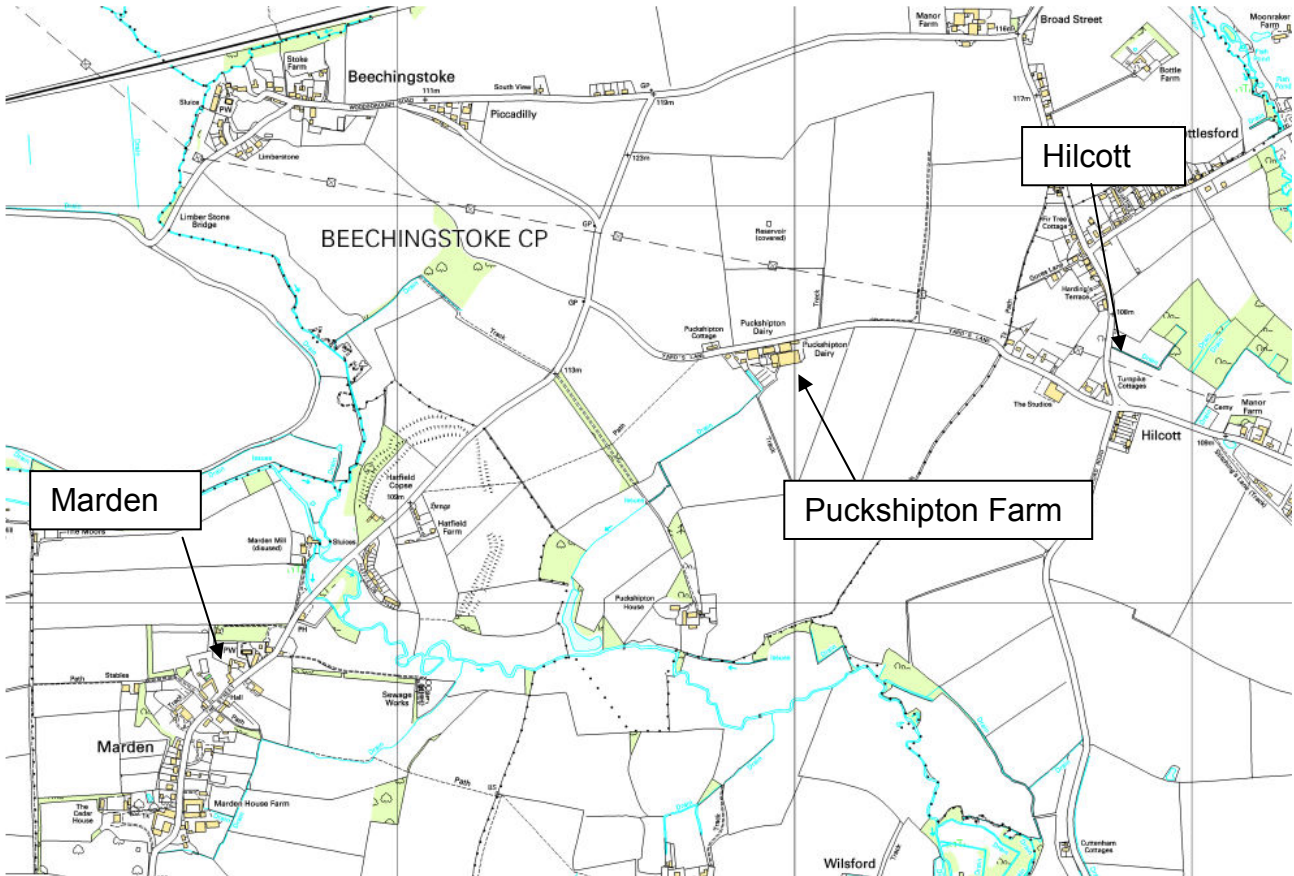


Plate 1: Planning application site location map

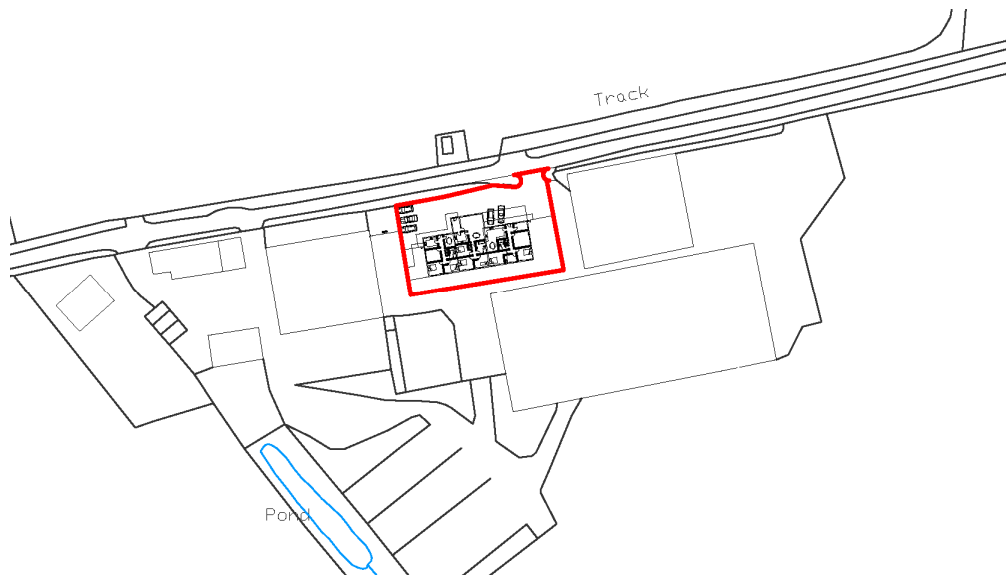


Plate 2: Planning application site



Plate 3: Street view of application site

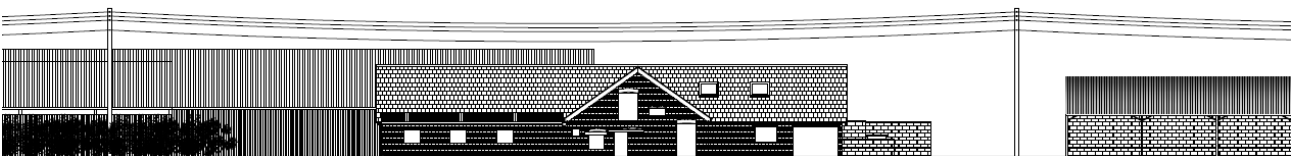
4. Planning History

There is no relevant planning application history. Pre-application advice was provided where the agent was informed that the application was contrary to both national and local planning policy and thus unacceptable in principle.

5. The Proposal

This application proposes to convert the former dairy building to three dwellings (2 x three bedroom and 1 x two bedroom) with associated parking to the front and gardens to the rear. The existing access is to be narrowed and the grass verge reinstated. Plate 4 shows the submitted plans depicting the existing and proposed view from the roadside.

Existing View From Road



Proposed View From Road



Plate 4: The existing and proposed views of the site as seen from the roadside

6. Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the general planning policy of central government. Of particular relevance to the determination of this application is section 6 regarding delivering high quality homes, section 11 relating to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment as well as the general emphasis on sustainable development running throughout the document.

Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan: DP3 regarding the development strategy for residential development and DP9 regarding the re-use of buildings within the open countryside.

Kennet Local Plan: Policy HC26 regarding housing in the open countryside, policy HC32 relating to affordable housing provision in rural areas, HC33 regarding rural exception sites and Policy PD1 regarding general development and design principles.

Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre-submission Document (February 2012): This holds limited weight at the present time as a material consideration but this weight will strengthen as the document progresses towards adoption (estimated early 2013). The key policies are Core Policy 1: Settlement Strategy, Core Policy 2: Delivery Strategy, Core Policy 18: Pewsey Community Area, Core Policy 43: Providing affordable homes, Core Policy 44: Rural Exception Sites and Core Policy 48: Supporting rural life.

7. Consultations

Wiltshire Council Ecology: No objection but recommends that a condition be added to any permission ensuring that the enhancements for bats and birds will be included within the development as detailed in the ecological report.

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service: No objection, general fire safety advice provided.

Wiltshire Council Highways: Recommends that this application be refused on highway grounds for the reasons given below:-

1. The proposed development located remote from services and employment facilities and being not well served by public transport, would be unsustainable in that it would increase the need to travel, especially by car.
2. The proposed development makes inadequate provision for parking within the site and would lead to indiscriminate parking to the detriment of the safety and convenience of users of the development.

The Parish Council have been consulted on this application. At the time of writing this report no response had been received. Any which are subsequently received will be reported verbally.

8. Publicity

No neighbour comments had been received at the time of writing this report. Any which are subsequently received will be reported verbally at the meeting.

9. Planning Considerations

a) The principle of residential development in this location

Puckshipton Dairy lies, in planning terms, within the open countryside. It is situated in a very isolated location between a number of villages which themselves have limited facilities and are of a very small scale and in some cases too small to even accept additional housing themselves (in line with emerging Core Strategy planning policy). The only other dwellings that are close by are a few sporadic former farm worker cottages which one assumes previously related to Puckshipton Farm. Both national and local level planning policy is explicitly clear in that new housing within the

open countryside is to be highly restricted and only to be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Policy HC26 of the Kennet Local Plan states that:

“Outside of the Limits of Development defined for the villages listed in Table H.4 and outside of the existing built up area of the villages listed in Table H.5, new residential development will only be permitted in the following circumstances:

- a) To provide accommodation for the essential needs of agriculture or forestry or other employment essential to the countryside as established in Policy HC27;*
- b) To provide holiday accommodation from the conversion of an existing building; or*
- c) Where the conversion of a listed building to residential use is the only economic means of retaining the historic structure.*

Provided that the development does not affect the character of the local landscape”.

The proposal does not meet any of the above criteria and, as such, is contrary to policy HC26. Your officers do not consider there to be any material considerations to justify overriding the policy position. The emerging Core Strategy (which although has limited weight is a material consideration) does not differ in this policy stance and specifically refers to the reuse of redundant agricultural buildings in Core Policy 48. This states:

“Proposals to convert redundant agricultural buildings for employment and tourism uses will be supported where it satisfies the following criteria:

- i. the buildings have architectural merit, are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding, and only modest extension or modification which preserves the character of the original building*
- ii. the reuse would lead to the viable long-term safeguarding of a heritage asset*
- iii. the use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas*
- iv. the building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure*
- v. the site has reasonable access to local services and*
- vi. the use meets identified local needs for employment.*

In exceptional circumstances, where there is clear evidence that employment or tourism uses can not be made viable, residential development may be appropriate where it meets the above criteria and has reasonable access to employment”.

It is again considered that the scheme does not conform to the emerging policy position as the scheme does not meet any of the above criteria. The building is of contemporary construction (1950's) and although of brick construction it is neither listed nor a non-designated heritage asset.

This policy approach is again reiterated at the national level. The golden thread of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The emphasis for development to be sustainable is reiterated throughout the whole document and heavy emphasis is placed on this. Paragraph 55 of the NPPF specifically states:

“...Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as:

- the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside; or*
- where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets; or*
- where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting...”.*

The only criteria that could be considered relevant is the latter point relating to the enhancement of the immediate setting. Although the building is disused and has not been well maintained over the recent years, it is viewed against the backdrop of the group of farm buildings and is a typical agricultural structure found within the rural environment of the AONB. It is a small scale agricultural building within the rural setting and it is neither in a dire state of disrepair or of such

visual harm to its immediate setting within the AONB to justify overriding the established policy thrust. Any enhancement to “tidy” up the site would not override the strong policy objection to three dwellings in such an unsustainable location.

If Members were of the view that the enhancement to the immediate setting was of such a benefit to allow a dwelling in this isolated location in line with paragraph 55 of the NPPF then they are advised that only the minimum number of dwellings (i.e. 1 or possibly 2) to achieve this should be permitted. This is particularly because of the very unsustainable location. However, the preference in policy terms would be for this building to be re-used for employment purposes or holiday accommodation – both through the conversion of the building. Both of these alternative uses would also achieve the same degree of visual enhancement to the immediate setting with the “tidying up” of the building and its grounds, and your officers therefore consider these uses should be explored (as advised at the pre-application stage).

It is also worth drawing members’ attention to a very recent (14th September 2012) appeal decision in the northern part of the county. A proposal for the conversion of a residential annex in the open countryside to a separate dwelling at Hook was refused and dismissed at appeal. In his report, the Inspector states that “The NPPF makes clear that sustainable development has 3 dimensions, 1 of which is a social role which aims to create a high quality built environment with accessible local services. NPPF paragraph 17, while encouraging the re-use of existing resources, states that patterns of growth should be actively monitored to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling ... the NPPF [and other saved LP policies] make clear that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development of which accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling to everyday goods and services is an important consideration”. In this decision statement, the Inspector is clear that development must be sustainably located in line with the NPPF. The application site is significantly isolated from the main settlements and larger villages with the future occupants of the dwellings being reliant on car based travel. This is contrary to all planning policy thrust and the scheme is therefore considered unacceptable in principle.

b) Whether the scheme can be considered a rural exceptions site

The design and access statement refers to the proposed dwellings as being low cost and low energy so as to keep rents as low as possible. The stated intention is to rent these properties out to local residents. A policy context does exist to permit affordable housing in locations that would otherwise be considered unacceptable. Policy HC33 of the Kennet Local Plan and Core Policy 44 of the emerging Structure Plan both permit small groups of housing (less than 10) for affordable housing on sites which would not normally be used for housing. Not only must the housing meet a genuine identified local housing need and be provided through a Registered Provider but the site would also have to be adjacent or well located to an existing settlement and this simply isn’t the case here. The site is not therefore considered to be a rural exceptions site and the development is not considered acceptable for this reason.

c) The lack of affordable housing

Policy HC32 of the Local Plan states that the local planning authority will seek to negotiate the equivalent provision of general market homes and affordable homes on all proposed housing sites in the villages subject to evidence of local housing need. The emerging Core Strategy policy 43 requires all development on sites of 4 dwellings or fewer to provide a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing.

However, in this instance and based on the current housing register the demand for affordable housing in this location is weak at the present time. There is therefore no evidence to require an element of affordable housing in line with HC32.

In respect of the Core Strategy and its requirement for a commuted sum, it would be unreasonable and premature to refuse on these grounds at the present time because this plan has not been adopted and holds limited weight as a material consideration. Furthermore, there are outstanding

objections to core policy 43. Your officers do not therefore recommend that the application is refused because of the lack of affordable housing or because of the lack of a commuted sum.

d) The impact of the scheme upon protected species and habitats

The survey of the existing building was carried out within the optimum period for bat activity. No emergence survey was conducted as part of the survey; however, the consultant ecologist has indicated that there are no suitable roosting places within the interior of the building. It is not necessarily agreed that the same can be said of the exterior; however, the available small roosting places that may exist on the exterior would offer opportunistic roosting for individual or very small numbers of bats only. It is therefore considered very unlikely that the conversion of the building would result in significant adverse effects on local bat populations.

The county ecologist has therefore recommended that should permission be granted, a condition requiring the enhancements for bats and birds as detailed in the report by Malford Environmental Consulting to be carried out.

10. Conclusion

This application is clearly contrary to planning policy at all tiers (both adopted and emerging). The site is in an extremely isolated location and is not a sustainable approach to development. The scheme is therefore contrary to policy HC26 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011 and core policies 1 and 2 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre-submission Document (February 2012). Your officers do not consider there to be any material considerations to justify overriding this established policy stance and the application should therefore be refused.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be REFUSED for the following reason:

- 1) The site lies in an isolated location within the open countryside where policy HC26 of the Kennet Local Plan (saved policy) restricts new development to that which is essential to the countryside (e.g. agriculture), holiday accommodation and residential development when it is the only economic means of retaining a listed building. The proposed development of three dwellings does not represent a form of development permitted by HC26 and it is therefore unacceptable in principle.

The guiding principle behind policy HC26 and the local plan is the overarching theme of "sustainable development" which seeks to direct development to the most sustainable locations. This guiding principle to the settlement strategy is reinforced by policy DP3 of the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan as well as policy contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

The scheme is therefore unacceptable in principle and would be contrary to the guiding principles of sustainable development, setting an undesirable precedent within the area and the county as a whole. The proposal would therefore be contrary to policy HC26 of the Kennet Local Plan, DP3 of the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan as well as the settlement strategy contained within the emerging Wiltshire Core Strategy. The proposal is also contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework which sets sustainable development at the core of national planning policy.

Appendices: None

Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report: None