

Comment on appeal ref:6007555

Site Address: Land at E 437424 N228877 Chipping Norton Road Little Tew

Date: 14 June 2026

I am against the appeals proposals. I agree with much of the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) reasoning as expressed in the Delegated Report dated 16/10/25 but also wish to add my own thoughts. I'm clearly a layperson in planning matters but, as a resident of Little Tew, I hope that I can give some local perspective.

Summary

I note that the Design Review Panel, whilst offering some positive remarks about the proposals has not given this development unqualified endorsement.

My objection rests on the following grounds:

1. The appellant's proposals fail to satisfy the requirements of NPPF 84(e) because:
 - a. The proposals would extend the perceived settlement boundary of Little Tew and do not demonstrate the degree of isolation envisaged by Paragraph 84(e).
 - b. There remain questions about whether the design reflects the highest standards in architecture
 - c. The proposals would not help raise the standards of design more generally in rural areas
 - d. The proposals would fail to significantly enhance its immediate setting and
 - e. The proposals would not be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area
2. The proposals would cause harm to the setting of Little Tew Conservation Area.
3. The claimed public benefits are insufficient to outweigh that harm.

1a. The site is not isolated.

The LPA officer's report sidesteps the issue of whether the site is isolated as required if the matter is to be determined as a NPPF paragraph 84(e) house. The officer's report states that, *"the physical proximity of the site to the settlement of Little Tew is still a cause for concern and raises questions about whether or not it is truly isolated"* but then goes on to reject the application on other grounds in any event.

I do not know whether isolation will be a live issue in the inquiry but, in case it is, I make the following points:

- The proposed new development relates to two dwellings (the country house and the staff flat). Both of these would be too close to the settlement of Little Tew to be classed as remote.

I estimate that the staff flat would be only about 280 metres from Rymans Cottage (the nearest property accepted by the LPA as being within the village boundary) and the country house would be 412 metres away. In neither case could these reasonably be described as "remote". These houses would only be a few minutes' walk away from Rymans Cottage – in a dispersed village such as Little Tew this would class as close neighbours, not by any conceivable linguistic stretch 'remote'.
- Crucially, even if one took the view that the site was currently isolated, the very construction of the planned development would itself extend the village boundary and the dwellings

would then clearly lie within the village confines and not qualify as “isolated homes in the countryside”. Any large development on this site would infill the open countryside between Rymans Cottage and Quarry Barn (albeit on the other side of the road). Given that there would then be clear residential use (a grand country house, two road entrances, driveway and a stable block containing offices and staff flat plus the accompanying paraphernalia of daily life – gateways, dustbins, signage etc. along the road) it’s clear that Rymans Cottage would no longer represent an edge to the settlement and the perceived boundary of the village would extend at least to Quarry Barn. The proposed new country house and associated works would then be *within* the settlement, not remote from it.

1b. Questions remain regarding the quality of the architectural design

I understand that the LPA acknowledge that the appellant’s proposals constitute an outstanding piece of architecture in design terms and hence I don’t know if this factor remains a live issue. Again, in case it is, I make the following points:

- Aside from the country house there are also other very significant elements to this planning application and for some of these we have no idea of the plans at all.

The Design Review Panel makes reference to an absence of detail for the swimming pool and the lake, for instance, and there appear to be no plans (only artistic impressions) showing what the entrances onto the Chipping Norton Road would look like. Surely a typical planning proposal for a normal house would need to show this level of detail, let alone for an application that has such a high bar to meet. (I think the style of gateway onto the village road that abuts the site would have a dramatic impact on the way the development is perceived and should be a crucial element of any design that purports to be outstanding / offering significant enhancement of its setting.)

- I am also concerned about the staff flat in the stable block. My concern relates to the actual accommodation that someone will live in, not the form, siting and mass of the stable block itself. I appreciate this flat is intended as ancillary accommodation to the main house but it would actually be someone’s home. (Indeed this home would perhaps be occupied for longer periods than the main house as the latter will likely be owned by someone who would split their time between many homes). For the proposed development to be classed as outstanding, the staff flat (as in the actual living accommodation, not just the view of it in the countryside) presumably also has to be of sufficient quality. Clearly there is no suggestion that the design of the staff flat has to be opulent and imposing like the grand house, but it surely would need to be at least decent housing? However, as far as I can see there are literally no detailed plans for this flat despite some indications that there may be issues related to its design– the proximity of the stables to the kitchen, for example.

In my view the lack of detail about several aspects of the design means the appellant has not fully evidenced that the overall scheme reflects the highest standards of architecture.

1c. The proposals would not help raise standards of design more generally in rural areas.

The appellant appears to argue that if a design is “truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture” then it must, perforce, ‘raise standards of design more generally in rural areas’. Surely this would make this particular clause in NPPF redundant? Why include the stipulation that a design must also raise standards of design more generally if all truly outstanding

architecture does so inevitably? Clearly there needs to be something specific in a particular proposal to ensure standards are raised more widely.

This country house is an extraordinary design and would, if built, be an extraordinary construction. It is a niche project for the ultra-wealthy, requiring resources that few could afford, and the opportunities for it to influence new developments elsewhere, and thus raise standards more generally, would be very limited. Other people with similar resources would want a unique property of their own and those with more limited means would find the design features of this building irrelevant to their circumstances.

It has also been suggested that a Passivhaus-compliant classical country house could help inform the retrofitting of energy-efficiency measures in existing country houses, thereby raising design standards more broadly in rural areas. However, in practice, each historic or classical country house is likely to require a bespoke retrofit strategy. It is therefore questionable whether a new-build dwelling of this nature would generate any significant transferable knowledge or lessons that could be meaningfully applied to the retrofitting of existing properties.

The appellant has failed to demonstrate how a highly bespoke development of this nature would raise design standards more generally in rural areas.

1d. Significant enhancement of the immediate setting has not been demonstrated.

The South East Design Review Panel has made some positive comments about the scheme, but it has **not** endorsed the development and has not advised that the proposals meet the requirements of a NPPF paragraph 84(e) application.

Despite repeated requests from the Design Review Panel for an objective heritage assessment of the suitability of the site, no such assessment has been provided. The absence of this evidence leaves a significant gap in the appellant's case.

The appellant's argument that their proposals would significantly enhance the immediate setting is based on several false premises which I address below:

- i. **The site is not “currently low grade and low-value agricultural landscape” or “mainly poor-quality arable land with hedgerows and hedgerow trees in poor and declining condition”.** [Appellant's Statement of Case on Landscape and Visual Matters 3.44 & 4.25]

In my opinion the appellant team, in describing the site as “low grade, low value”, have seriously underplayed its current worth. The land is actually an attractive part of rural West Oxfordshire consisting of arable and grassland fields bound by historic hedgerows and dotted with mature trees. The photographs of the site on page 5 of the (unpaginated) Conservation Officer's report demonstrate this. In the opinion of many, it is already valuable and is considered to be landscape that is not easily significantly enhanced.

The land is in fact at least class 3 agricultural land. When it was sold to the current owner in 2018 the sales brochure (which I attach as Exhibit VGB1 at the end of this document) describes the “attractive rural setting” and how the land is bounded by mature hedgerows and has historically supported a range of crops such as cereals with some of the soils potentially suitable for sugar beet and potatoes.

If the land actually is now low grade and low value, consideration needs to be given to whether it has been deliberately degraded for some reason.

ii. **The views of the site from adjacent transport corridors are not “transient and low in value”.** [Appellant’s Statement of Case on Landscape and Visual Matters 3.46]

The appellant does not place sufficient weight on the harm to the setting which would be felt by people using the Chipping Norton Road. The developers wrongly class views here as transient – thinking only of cars driving past – ignoring the fact that this is a regular walking route for villagers. The fact that it is actually a destination point for many people taking their daily walks has been officially recognised by the installation of a public bench (over a decade ago) from which views directly over the site could be enjoyed.

I, and many others, take genuine pleasure in walking along this road. The open fields which would be transformed into buildings and parkland are currently valued for a landscape which provides an important contrast to the sense of enclosure one feels within the village itself. It’s by walking out of the village along the Chipping Norton Road that we can see into the distance. This is where we stop to appreciate views of extensive skies, distant treelines and wildlife in the fields.

The fact that this is a recognised walking route was recognised by the erection of the village’s Jubilee bench here (in 2012, I believe). The bench is positioned directly facing the proposed development site (approximately opposite the proposed northern driveway). There was a convenient low point in the hedge at the time and, although that is no longer evident (especially in summer) the bench is still a good spot to rest awhile and take in the open skies and the beauty of the rural location. There are still views of the site available once the hedgerow thins later in the year.

It is somewhat galling for locals to be told that the views we will lose are only transitory when there has literally been a seated viewpoint provided at this exact location for well over a decade!

iii. **Views of woodland do not inevitably provide a higher quality visual experience than existing views and the proposals are, contrary to the appellant’s claims, inconsistent with Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape study’s key recommendations for this landscape** [Appellant’s Statement of Case on Landscape and Visual Matters 4.23 and 4.25]

The appellant is keen to point out that significant woodland planting is being proposed and asks us to look on this as a positive. However, lining the Chipping Norton Road with dense woodland to enclose the land is emphatically not an enhancement. Currently villagers walking that route enjoy the glimpses into and over the fields because it contrasts with the enclosed, tree-lined areas elsewhere through the village.

The appellant goes so far as to claim that the proposals are consistent with Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study’s key recommendation for the character type, Farmland Plateau, - *‘Safeguard and enhance the open, sparsely settled character of the landscape whilst maintaining and strengthening its pattern of hedgerows, stone walls, small woodlands and tree belts’*. The proposals literally would do the complete opposite, in that the open, sparsely settled character of the landscape would be built upon and enclosed. The OWLS recommendation is that the character of the landscape be safeguarded. It’s looking for maintenance and enhancement of existing features not recommending that all open land be enclosed woodlands and tree-belts.

It's relevant to note that the final Design South East Design Review Panel Report is also uncomfortable with the sense of enclosure which would be caused by the Appellant's proposed planting – see paragraphs 2.4 to 2.6

iv. The new development would indeed be “overly urbanising”. [contrary to the Appellant's Statement of Case on Landscape and Visual Matters 5.22]

Looking specifically from the perspective of the route in and out of the village along the Chipping Norton Road, it is clear that there would be an urbanising impact if the development was built. The appellant's Heritage Statement is explicit that the stable block, for example, has been specifically located *“in the full knowledge that it would be part of people's experience on approach into the village.”* (12.7) In addition to the views of these stables, office and staff flat there would also be glimpses of the main house, two conspicuous entrances with gates, driveways and paraphernalia of domestic life – bins, letterboxes etc. This would run contrary to the planning requirement to conserve what is important about the village. The council's 'Proposals for Preservation and Enhancement: Little Tew' lists *“Expansion and ‘suburbanisation’ of rural settlements and roads.”* as one of the relevant factors that threaten the landscape setting of Little Tew's Conservation Area.

Given that the new development would infill the space between Rymans Cottage and The Meetings Farm, albeit on the other side of the road, and given the dispersed nature of Little Tew's settlement (where it is characteristic for roads to be lined by trees on one side with housing on the other) the impact of the development would lead to a sense that the village had expanded – with no great change in settlement pattern from The Meetings farm right through the village.

Again, this is harm to the immediate setting, not enhancement.

v. Planning decisions should not place undue weight on the visual impact of the proposals once the trees have matured in fifteen to thirty years' time. Consideration must also be given to the impact of the development as built.

The appellant emphasises that many of the features of the development will be hidden once the screening trees have grown after fifteen or more years and rather glosses over the impact in year one.

It is important, however, that assessments of whether the project is urbanising, whether it enhances the immediate setting, whether the visual impact would be sensitive to the surrounding area and whether it might harm the conservation area are also based on the project as delivered, not solely on the basis of a future landscape scenario.

If a development cannot meet the planning criteria for more than fifteen years then the harm that would accrue throughout those years has to be given significant consideration.

vi. The change from agricultural landscape to formal parkland would not be a positive change.

The appellant acknowledges that their development would change the character of the area but argues that such a change would be beneficial because parkland and estate farmland are

valued landscapes in contrast to the existing agricultural land which the appellant wrongly categorises as low quality.

In addition to the fact that, as already discussed above [1d(i)], the land is currently not low grade, it's important to note that this attractive, productive open farmland is also an important landscape feature of the area. The land is valued for its productivity as well as for the open rural character it lends to the area and for the evolved history of farming and land ownership which it reflects.

However attractive parkland can be, and however characteristic it is of the wider landscape, it does not follow that converting agricultural land to parkland is inherently a benefit. If it replaces that which was valued and then dominates a landscape inappropriately, conversion to parkland is quite properly to be seen as a negative transformation, not one that enhances its immediate setting.

Overall, I believe it is hard to sustain the argument that the appellant's proposals enhance the immediate setting at all, never mind *significantly* enhance it. NPPF paragraph 84(e) rightly sets a very high bar in this regard and, in my opinion, and in the opinion of many Little Tew residents, this development falls far short. It is pertinent to note that Little Tew Parish Meeting has held many well attended public meetings to address these proposals and, in every instance, the development has received unanimous opposition. Amongst the people who would live in the immediate setting of this proposed development no one has suggested that its impact would be enhancement – quite the opposite.

1e. Would the proposed development be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area?

- i. **The landscape proposals are not sensitive to the defining characteristics at both the site level and that of the surrounding area** [contrary to the Appellant's Statement of Case on Landscape and Visual Matters 4.6]

As described in the district council's Landscape Character Assessment, (LCA) this area of West Oxfordshire is characterised as *having "an attractive and unspoilt, rural character with few distracting influences"* (p25). The proposed development site covers three types of landscape as defined in the LCA with the vast majority of the land classed as either 'open valleys and ridges' or 'semi-enclosed limestone wolds'. Both these landscape types are visually sensitive *"particularly to tall or prominent structures such as ...large buildings"* (p25).

The construction of 16,000 sq ft house together with a 3,600 sq ft stable block (containing office and another dwelling) plus on-site roadways, gardens, a swimming pool, a field of solar panels and managed parkland, would constitute a prominent structure, prove to be a distracting influence and impair the unspoilt, rural nature of the land.

Rather than respecting the elevated, exposed nature of this landscape and the benefits that accrue from its intervisibility, the developers seek to screen key views and add substantial wooded backdrops, thereby ensuring this visually prominent landscape becomes enclosed.

This proposed enclosure together with the construction of substantial buildings and a change from farmland to managed parkland is not respecting the local character of the landscape as defined by the LCA. It is demonstrably not in accordance with the NPPF para 84(e) stipulation that any development be sensitive to the defining character of the area.

Indeed, I note that the change envisaged by the appellant is so dramatic that, were it to go ahead, the land could no longer be described as ‘Open Valley and Ridge’ or ‘Limestone Wold’ etc. – all the site would fall into the category of ‘Parkland and Estate Landscape’. A clearer indication that the proposals are insensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area would be hard to find – the development would literally *change the definition* of the area’s character.

ii. The design of the proposed house and associated buildings is not sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

In contrast to the appellant’s proposed design, Little Tew’s architecture is generally functionally based, without over-ornamentation, stylistic features or showy elegance. The proposed development (an even more embellished design than its predecessor) is out of keeping with typical Little Tew buildings with respect to style, height and mass. Local Plan Policy OS2 requires that, “development in the small villages, hamlets and open countryside will be limited to that which ... respects the intrinsic character of the area”.

The developers argue that there are classically styled houses in nearby villages and across the county and they then cherry-pick aspects from these to justify particular architectural features in their proposals. However, by specifically looking at a wide area and by concentrating upon fine houses in the classical tradition, they have missed the very aspects of the immediate local area – specifically Little Tew – which make this area distinctive. Indeed even the Design South East Design Panel who are essentially complimentary of the design (albeit with severe reservations about the location) indicate some qualms about how the appellant defines the “local area” [4.6 DSE Design Review Panel Report 19/12/25]

This insensitivity to what makes Little Tew distinctive is particularly important because the proposed development is not sited in remote countryside: It would effectively extend the Little Tew village boundary and become a part of the village environs. It’s not sufficient therefore to argue that the development would be sensitive to the wider area of West Oxfordshire, or even that it is in keeping with the style of nearby Great Tew, if it fails to respect the distinctiveness of the settlement which it would essentially form part of.

A significant part of Little Tew’s distinctiveness is specifically the contrast with its neighbour, Great Tew. Little Tew is described in its Conservation Area Character Appraisal as having a *“highly distinctive unspoilt and slightly unkempt character”* which stands in *“striking contrast to the more picturesque, managed and manicured feel of Great Tew”* [p2] yet the appellant is completely insensitive to this aspect of local distinctiveness. This is evidenced by the fact that the introduction to the Design and Access Statement partly conflates the two villages, describing them both as *“self-consciously picturesque environments”* [1.4]. This demonstrates that the appellant has misunderstood the real character of the village and its immediate environs. The appellant’s heritage statement attempts to argue that the village is no longer *‘unkempt’* [10.8 Heritage Impact Assessment], however, it then somewhat disproves its own contention by captioning photograph c with, *“This view typifies the description in the Council’s Conservation Area Appraisal of the village having an unkempt appearance.”* [p.40]

I note that the appellant’s failure to take into account this important aspect of Little Tew’s Conservation Area Appraisal contravenes Policy OS4 in the Local Plan, which states that these documents are among the *“key tools for interpreting local distinctiveness and informing high design quality”*.

I note too that Policy OS4 also states, “*New development should respect the historic, architectural and landscape character of the locality, [and] contribute to local distinctiveness.*” The proposed development fails to meet the requirements of both national and local planning policy.

2. Impact of the proposed development on Little Tew’s Conservation Area

The negative impact that the proposed development would have on Little Tew is even more pertinent because the heart of the village, as a Conservation Area, is classed as a ‘heritage asset’ to which the planning authority is required to pay special attention. The aim should be to enhance its character and appearance and avoid harm, including harm from development within its setting. [NPPF paragraph 206]

The developers appear to argue that constructing a country house adjoining the village would be in keeping with the heritage of the Conservation Area because many villages do have country houses and parklands so located. This is to miss the point about the distinctiveness of individual places. Country houses with their historic parklands and estates do indeed form part of West Oxfordshire’s character but this is because they have evolved through specific historical processes over centuries. This is completely different to a new, imitation historic country house and estate being imposed on a landscape in the twenty-first century.

Little Tew’s actual history – including its relationship with the Great Tew Estate – has dictated the layout of its fields and the development of its settlement pattern. In the twenty-first century, to add a country house to this mix (moreover, a country house which apes the architecture of bygone centuries) would be highly confusing to the way in which the local landscape and architecture would be interpreted and experienced.

A clear example of the appellant’s acceptance that the proposal would influence the way local history is understood and experienced can be found in their own Heritage Impact Statement. At paragraph 9.6, it is suggested that The Meetings Farm would, by virtue of its proximity to the proposed development, “*take on the qualities of a home farm*”. This statement implicitly acknowledges that the proposed country house would alter the perceived historical relationship between existing buildings and the surrounding landscape. Such a change would be inappropriate. The Meetings Farm possesses its own distinct history, and its significance derives from its genuine historical development with both the landscape and the village. That significance should be understood on its own terms, rather than through an artificial association with a newly created estate.

More broadly, heritage conservation is not limited to the preservation of physical features. It also encompasses the ability of people to understand and appreciate the authentic historical development of a place. Where a new development alters that understanding by creating misleading historical associations, harm to heritage significance can arise even where historic buildings themselves remain physically unaffected.

The Meetings Farm is merely an explicit example identified by the appellant’s own evidence. The proposed construction of a formal country house and estate, deliberately designed to evoke an historic origin, would inevitably influence how the history of the wider village is perceived. This effect could extend to buildings within the village too, including designated heritage assets. The development would introduce a narrative suggesting that Little Tew had historically evolved in

support of this country house. By superimposing a new and fictitious estate hierarchy onto the village, the development would create a false impression of Little Tew's origins and evolution.

The proposal would also distort understanding of the village's historic relationship with the neighbouring estate at Great Tew, which forms part of the genuine historical context of the area. In essence, the proposal would manufacture a misleading historical narrative for Little Tew. This would be harmful to the village's sense of place and to the ability of residents and visitors alike to understand its authentic historical development, matters which the Conservation Area designation seeks to protect.

Given the appellant's own acknowledgement that The Meetings Farm would acquire new perceived qualities as a consequence of the development, it is difficult to reconcile that position with the wider contention that the proposal would not disrupt public understanding of the local historic environment. The evidence advanced by the appellant demonstrates precisely the opposite: that the development would materially alter how the history of the area is experienced and understood.

Despite the appellant's claim to the contrary, the fields which surround Little Tew's Conservation Area (including the application site) do form part of its setting. The argument that the proposed site forms part of the 'context' of the Conservation Area rather than its 'setting' is challenged by the Design Review Panel and is at odds with the definition of 'setting' in the NPPF glossary as being *"the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced"*. In Little Tew, we experience the enclosed, tucked-away feel of the village itself surrounded by agricultural fields. The appellant's claim that the "setting" of the village is its intimate enclosed quality is disingenuous and was rejected by the Design Review Panel. The village's physical setting is patently the land which surrounds it, and this setting is agricultural, not designed parkland. The appellant consistently gives insufficient weight to the role of the surrounding agricultural landscape in understanding the historic development and significance of Little Tew. The Design Review Panel was very clear: its March 2024 report reads,

"The impact of the proposal on the setting of Little Tew will be a key component when considering the planning application; however, we remain unconvinced by many of the conclusions of the presented Heritage Statement – several of which do not appear to be substantiated with evidence." (1.3) and "The Heritage Impact Assessment is ambiguous in its description of the proposal's potential impact on the setting of Little Tew – appearing to describe the agricultural context of the village as distinct from the setting of the conservation area. The surrounding fields, however, form part of the historic development and significance of the village, meaning that the agricultural landscape is fundamental to the setting of Little Tew" (1.4)

The final report of the Design Review Panel from December 2024 reinforces this point. *"The primary concern regarding the scheme remains focussed on its impact on the setting."* [summary p. 5]. The report makes clear, at paragraph 1.3, that, *"The setting does not require intervisibility. The historic relationship between places is also part of the setting. The village has been developed over centuries and the historic connections significantly predate the placement of parliamentary enclosures."* and *"Whilst the applicant argues that the proposal is not within the setting, this contradicts the definition of setting as set out within the document 'The setting of Heritage Assets' by Historic England."*

It is clear to me that the planning officers were correct in 2022 and again in their recent decision on this application, in determining that the proposed development site did indeed lie within the

setting of the Conservation Area and therefore harm to that setting must be avoided – unless there are overriding public benefits.

3. The claimed public benefits are insufficient to outweigh that harm to the conservation area.

The appellant's claims that the public benefits to the development outweigh any harm deserve to be scrutinised carefully:

a. The appellant claims significant landscape enhancement as a public benefit but, as discussed at 1d(vi) above, the transformed landscape would be a considerable *disbenefit* and is in itself one of the harms which would need to be offset if this scheme was to go ahead.

b. The appellant claims construction of a native tree nursery would be a public benefit.

We are told the native tree nursery will “*Allow for trees to be provided for local community projects as well as further onsite planting.*” [paragraph 5 Martin Leay’s “Summary of Benefits” paper.] Whilst I doubt if many people would object to such a provision, one really has to question how valuable this “public benefit” truly is.

There has been no community consultation about the need for a nursery, no call from community projects for more tree planting and no details of what actual use the tree nursery could be. In short this very minor offering would not be a significant factor to weigh in the balance when considering the harms of this project.

I also note that the developers were encouraged to offer benefits of this sort by the design review panel to mitigate the harms of the project. The final review panel report welcomes “the community woodland” idea but this tree nursery falls far, far short of being a community woodland since that would, at the very least, imply access to a woodland by the community.

c. The appellant claims that the biodiversity net gain envisaged by the project would be a public benefit.

I am unable to find any final report from the County’s ecologist recommending approval of this scheme and it’s clear from the final LPA officer’s report that, even at the point of planning determination (after the applicant’s ecology team had made many revisions to their documentation), the baseline biodiversity information was deemed inaccurate by the LPA. I note the intensive, detailed criticism of the appellant’s biodiversity methodology raised in the reports from Bioscan and ask the inspector to take great care to question the developer’s biodiversity net gain (BNG) claims to ensure they are truly reflective of a realistic ecological outcome.

Even taken at face value, however, the BNG claims raise questions and the inspector is invited to look beyond the headline percentages and consider the following factors:

- BNG calculations are highly sensitive to the baseline used and there are questions here about whether baseline habitats have been allowed to degrade over time. (see 1d(i) above)
- Any newly created habitats could take decades to establish. What happens during the establishment period and how will the site be managed during those decades to ensure ecological management in line with current commitments?
- A large future gain does not compensate for immediate habitat loss. Especially so when some habitats cannot be recreated. These proposals involve the destruction of almost

200m of hedgerow. This despite the fact that the appellant accepts *“The hedgerows are considered to meet the criteria for habitats of ‘principal importance’ as listed within Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. It is considered that some of the hedgerows may also meet the ecological criteria for ‘important’ hedgerows under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997. Given the above, hedgerow habitats are considered to be of ecological value within the local to district level.”* [paragraph 3.2.4 Ecological impact Assessment & Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment April 2024]

The appellant was informed by the LPA at the 2021 pre-planning stage that this particular hedgerow should be retained but has ignored this advice as seen by the email from Stuart McIver, planning officer, 15/11/21, *“The siting of the dwelling bisects a central hedgerow and would therefore reduce the connectivity through the landscape for protected species. There are a number of records of roosting bats to the north of the site and therefore bats, as well as other protected species, are likely to use this hedgerow as a wildlife corridor. I would therefore recommend that the removal of this hedgerow is avoided.”*

d. The appellant claims the outstanding design and architecture would be a public benefit, raising standards of design in rural areas.

It is not accepted that the design of this development is a public benefit. I have argued above [1e] that the project would be insensitive to the local area and would not raise standards more widely in rural areas [1c]. In any event, regardless of the quality of the architecture or its location, it is clear that the classical country house style has intrinsic drawbacks. As the Design Review panel Points out, *“The [appellant’s] heritage statements suggest that the architecture expresses the attributes of historic country houses including continuity, status, authority and control. The qualities of status, authority and control are not ones that most people would value today.”* [paragraph 1.5 Design Review Panel 19/12/24]

The Local Authority’s conservation officer’s report also makes reference to the *“discriminatory and bigoted past represented by the classical country house”* [page 9 of the unpaginated March 2025 report] and that, given that such properties are associated with expressions of wealth, power, privilege and, in many cases, the slave trade, she refers to the importance of assessing the proposals on their own merit within the 21st century planning system.

e. The appellant claims that the project would support traditional skills and the creation of apprenticeships and thus be a public benefit.

Whilst apprenticeship opportunities are welcome, I am not of the view that this comes close to outweighing the harm of the proposed development. It would not be sensible policy to permit a project to proceed in an unsuitable location simply to provide an apprenticeship. Moreover, there is lack of detail and guarantees that such apprenticeships would indeed materialise. The appellant’s latest documentation [6.7.7 Appellant’s Planning Statement of Case] refers to “apprenticeship(s)” indicating that even the appellant does not know whether the plan is to create more than one apprenticeship.

There has been no evidence provided that specialist heritage skills are genuinely at risk without this scheme. I note that there are other projects in the area designed by the same architect which would presumably provide similar training and skills based opportunities.

It is also pertinent to note that the harm caused to the conservation area by this project would endure indefinitely whereas any employment and training opportunities would only last for the duration of the works.

f. The appellant claims that provision of a permissive footpath would be a public benefit.

The developers are now offering a permissive footpath to the south of the site and arguing that this benefit should be afforded moderate weight when balanced against any harm to the conservation area. [6.7.7 Appellant's Planning Statement of Case]

The creation of a public footpath on the site had been suggested by DSE from the start of their involvement as a public benefit to help mitigate the harm of the project. This was resisted by the appellant until finally they have offered a permissive footpath at the foot of their land. Again – as with the tree nursery – I don't expect people would object to the provision but it is a very minor benefit (set against significant harm). The path is not offered as a full-blown PROW and, being a dead-end, would have limited utility. We would have to question how such a footpath could be secured for the long term and how a landlord who was not genuinely welcoming of it could easily reduce its utility over the years.

The provision of such a footpath most certainly does not outweigh the heritage harm.

g. The appellant claims that sustainability and being the first design of a classical country house to achieve Passivhaus premium standard is a public benefit.

Much is made of the proposed house being an exemplar for achieving the Passivhaus Premium Standard in country house classical design, but where is the *public* benefit in this? There are unlikely to be numerous examples of new build classical houses constructed around the country and, if there were, such buildings are likely to be less sustainable than modern dwellings of a more compact design where energy saving and low carbon attributes can be the drivers of the architecture rather than here where they have to fight against the design.

Even if the development does meet the council's criteria for sustainable building per square metre and even if it can achieve Passivhaus Premium Standard, that still does not make it an actual sustainable project. To use so much of the world's resources to create such a building for the benefit of one household is actually the antithesis of sustainable.

Some consideration should be given to how sustainable country houses of this size really are in the twenty first century. So many have been demolished or sold as hotels (e.g. Heythrop) or lie for years in disrepair (repair that is only viable when funded by Section 106 funds – e.g. Great Tew). In the long term it is likely that this house would go the way of many other country homes and demolition or change of use would be the outcome simply because such homes are often not sustainable for one family to occupy.

h. The appellant claims that provision of a new dwelling where there is an acknowledged shortfall in housing land supply is a public benefit.

While this project would technically deliver one dwelling, in reality it is hard to argue it would do anything discernible to meet actual housing need. This property is highly unlikely to be used as someone's primary residence and is not of the type of housing for which there is a shortage in the area. This development does nothing to address the need for affordable housing, first time buyer accommodation and family housing, for instance, and could even

exacerbate shortages in those areas by diverting building resources from projects such as these.

In the context of West Oxfordshire's housing land deficit the delivery of this single luxury development would be of negligible benefit and would certainly not help mitigate the harms of the project.

Conclusion

The appellant's team failed to engage with the local community in line with NPPF paragraph 137. A meeting with the community after the design process and following the final Design Review Panel report does not constitute "*early, proactive and effective engagement with the community*" "*about the design and style of emerging schemes*" as required by paragraph 137. Given this lack of engagement, the NPPF makes clear that decision makers are entitled to look upon the application less favourably.

This proposed development fails to satisfy paragraph 84(e), particularly regarding isolation, enhancement of setting and sensitivity to local character. The proposal would cause harm to the setting of Little Tew Conservation Area and therefore conflicts with both national and local policy. The claimed public benefits are highly limited and do not outweigh that harm.

The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Viv Bennett

Heathcote House
Little Tew
Chipping Norton
Oxfordshire
OX7 4JE

Exhibit VGB1 – referred to in paragraph 1d (i) is attached overleaf

Comment by Viv Bennett on appeal ref:6007555

Site Address: Land at E 437424 N228877 Chipping Norton Road Little Tew

Exhibit VGB1

Relating to section 1d (i) of Viv Bennett's planning comment

This document is the 2018 sales brochure for land which now comprises the proposed site of the development



Land at Little Tew
Oxfordshire



LAND AT LITTLE TEW, OXFORDSHIRE



Productive arable land



**Land at Little Tew
Oxfordshire**



62 acres of arable and pasture land in a ring fence

- Productive arable land
- Permanent Pasture
- Dual road frontage
- Attractive rural setting
- In all about 25.08 hectares (61.97 acres)

For sale as a whole

Freehold with vacant possession



Banbury 01295 271555



banbury@fishergerman.co.uk



fishergerman.co.uk



LAND AT LITTLE TEW



Situation

The land is situated on the outskirts of Little Tew, a desirable village in North Oxfordshire. The land lies to the south of the A361 Banbury Road which allows direct transport links to Chipping Norton (3 miles) and Banbury (10 miles). The national road network can be accessed at M40 (11 miles). From Banbury there are mainline train services to London Marylebone and London Paddington. Soho Farmhouse is just 2 miles away.

Description

An attractive ring fenced block of mixed use land predominately in arable rotation. The land benefits from road frontage along the northern and eastern boundaries with a number of access points. The land is bounded in the most part by mature hedgerows. The arable land is generally level whilst the pasture land is southward facing. The land is divided into useable enclosures and is currently farmed under a cropping licence supporting a maize crop. Historically the land has supported a range of combinable crops including wheat, barley, and oilseed rape.

Services

There are no mains services currently connected to the property.

Basic Payment Scheme and Environmental Stewardship

Basic Payment Scheme entitlements are claimed and will be included within the sale. The entitlements are to be transferred from the existing licensee to the Landlord or as directed by the Landlord upon expiry of the cropping licence. The land is not subject to any environmental stewardship schemes.

In all about 25.08 hectares (61.97 acres)

Sporting, mineral and timber rights

The sporting and timber rights, so far as they are owned, are included in the freehold sale. The Vendor will retain the mineral rights below the surface of the land. The rights of working any such minerals will be included within the sale.

Soil types and Land Classification

The land is classified as Grade 3 according to the DEFRA Land Classification Maps. The soils are recorded as being of the Aberford and Wickham 2 associations. The Aberford soils are described as shallow, locally brashy, well drained calcareous fine loamy soils over limestone. Some deeper calcareous soils in colluvium. The Wickham 2 soils are described as slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged fine loamy over clayey, fine silty over clayey and clayey soils. Small areas of slowly permeable calcareous soils on steeper slopes. Both soil associations are suitable for the growing of winter cereals and grassland. The Aberford soils may also be suitable for the growing of sugar beet and potatoes.

Wayleaves, easements and rights of way

The property is offered subject to and with the benefit of any rights of way, both public and private, and all easements, wayleaves, covenants and restrictions, whether referred to or not. It is not believed the property is affected by any public footpaths or bridleways.

Tenure and possession

The freehold property is offered for sale by private treaty with vacant possession on completion subject to the existing cropping licence which expires on 16th October 2018.

Local Authority

West Oxfordshire District Council, Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, OX28 1PB T: 01993 861000. www.westoxon.gov.uk

Viewings

Interested parties may view the land during daylight hours with a copy of these particulars to hand. Please note this is a working farm and all precautions should be taken when viewing the land especially in relation to agricultural machinery.

Directions

From Chipping Norton head North East along the A361 towards Banbury, after approximately 3 miles turn right signposted Little Tew and Great Tew, after approximately three quarters of a mile turn right at The Meetings House towards Little Tew, the Land will be marked by a Fisher German for sale board.

Photographs taken July 2018. Particulars prepared August 2018.



LAND AT LITTLE TEW



Attractive rural setting



Approximate Travel Distances



Locations

- Chipping Norton 3 miles
- Banbury 10 miles
- Oxford 22 miles



Nearest Stations

- Charlbury 9 miles



Nearest Airports

- Birmingham 50 miles

Please note: Fisher German LLP and any Joint Agents give notice that: The particulars are produced in good faith are set out as a general guide only and do not constitute or form any part of an offer or any contract. No person within Fisher German has any authority to make or give representation or warranty on any property.

