



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 March 2026

by **C Butcher BSc MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 May 2026

Appeal Ref: 6003746

Laxton Meadow Farm, Southam Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 3NQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Andrew Hill against the decision of Cheltenham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00539/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the change of use and conversion of an agricultural barn to a single self-build dwelling and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: (i) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; (ii) the effect of the proposed development on the living conditions of future occupiers, with regards to outlook and daylight; (iii) whether the existing building is suitable for conversion; and (iv) whether the proposal would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The existing barn comprises extensive areas of metal cladding. The appellant has noted that they have elected to incorporate a minimal number of window openings in order to preserve its existing character and minimise light spill. Clearly, metal exteriors are not unusual for barn conversions. However, in this instance, the minimal number of window openings, the lack of detailing on the elevations, and the consequent large expanses of blank metal, would give the dwelling an industrial type appearance which would not be pleasing to the eye. Moreover, the juxtaposition of an industrial style building set within a domestic plot, including the usual paraphernalia and trappings, would inevitably be seen as a strange and incongruous feature.
4. In addition, the plans show that the windows that would be incorporated would be an arbitrary arrangement of different shapes and sizes, resulting in an unbalanced appearance. This lack of consistency would again detract greatly from the building itself as well as the character of the immediate area. I also note that the windows on the rear elevation, which would serve bedrooms one and two, would be situated at slightly different levels above the ground. This would add to the unusual and incongruous appearance of the proposed dwelling and would be indicative of a poorly designed scheme.

5. I note that there are few, if any, views of the building from public vantage points. However, this does not mean that a poorly designed proposal is acceptable, or that it would not result in harm.
6. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such it would conflict with Policies SL1 and D1 of the Cheltenham Plan, July 2020 (the CP) as well as Policies SD4 and SD14 of the Joint Core Strategy, December 2017 (the JCS). Taken together, the relevant aspects of these policies seek to ensure that new development is well designed and that it preserves character and appearance.

Living Conditions

7. The main living room, as well as bedrooms two and three, would be single aspect with vertically aligned windows. Notwithstanding my concerns about the appearance of the windows, based on the approved plans, I am satisfied that the openings would be large enough to let in sufficient light and to provide a reasonable outlook that would not lead to a feeling of enclosure.
8. On that basis, the proposal would conform with the relevant aspects of CP Policy SL1 which seek to ensure adequate living conditions.

Whether Suitable for Conversion

9. CP Policy L2 enables the conversion of rural buildings to other uses, including where the building is structurally sound, and is capable of conversion without substantial alteration, extension or rebuilding.
10. To this end, the appellant provided a Structural Report as part of their original application material (Lark Cooper, February 2025). This was then updated to include further analysis in November 2025. The updated report concludes that the barn is in a satisfactory condition and that calculations have been undertaken which indicate that the existing structure and foundations are suitable to support additional loads associated with the conversion.
11. In reaching those conclusions, the report acknowledges that some repair work would be required to the external cladding and roofing material, as well as the concrete floor slab. During my site visit, I noted that minor repairs would be needed. However, such works are not unusual during conversions and, in this instance, would be fairly minor in nature. As a result of my observations, I can see no reason to disagree with the findings and recommendations of the Structural Report.
12. Given my conclusions in relation to character and appearance, the proposed development would clearly conflict with CP Policy L2(b). However, when looking at the suitability of the existing structure in isolation, the requirements of CP Policy L2(a) are met. During my site visit, I observed that the building was being used for storage. As such, it would not necessarily be regarded as being vacant or redundant as required by JCS Policy SD10(5). However, part 4 of the same policy sets out that housing development on sites outside of identified areas will also be allowed where there are specific circumstances or exemptions set out elsewhere within the development plan. As a result, the scheme's conformity with CP Policy L2(a) would also result in it being in conformity with JCS Policy SD10.

Green Belt

13. The approach to development within the Green Belt is set out within CP Policy GB1 and JCS Policy SD5. These policies refer back to the approach to Green Belt as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Paragraph 154(h)(iv) sets out that the re-use of buildings within the Green Belt does not represent inappropriate development providing that they are of permanent and substantial construction and that the proposal would not result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
14. From the evidence before me, and from what I observed on my site visit, it is clear that the existing barn is a permanent structure. Moreover, given my conclusions in relation to the submitted Structural Report, I am also satisfied that it is of substantial construction and would therefore not be tantamount to the creation of a new dwelling. Furthermore, despite the harm I have found in relation to character and appearance, and taking account of the potential for domestic paraphernalia and so forth, it is unlikely that the proposed conversion would have a greater impact upon the openness of the Green Belt than the current structure.
15. As a result, I am satisfied that the proposed development would conform with the relevant aspects of CP Policy GB1 and JCS Policy SD5 in that it would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

Other Matters

16. The final two reasons for refusal, as provided on the Council's decision notice, relate to the lack of mitigation in relation to the Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and the fact that the self-build nature of the proposal had not been secured. I note that a finalised unilateral undertaking (UU) has been provided to address these matters. In relation to the SAC, an appropriate assessment is only necessary where a proposal is being permitted. There is therefore no need for me to consider this particular matter further as the appeal is being dismissed for other reasons.
17. Notwithstanding the above, I do find that the UU meets the relevant tests for planning obligations in relation to securing the proposed dwelling as self-build and its subsequent exemption from Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

18. From the evidence before me, the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, with the current figure being just 2.69 years. In such circumstances the test set out in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework is engaged.
19. In this instance, the benefits of the proposal include the provision of a single new self-build home that would assist in meeting need in the area, provide support for local facilities, and create jobs during the construction phase. The proposal would also utilise previously developed land and could have some benefits in relation to biodiversity. Despite the level of shortfall in housing land supply, which leads me to attribute increased weight to the benefits, I still only afford limited weight to them overall given that they are relatively minor in nature.
20. I have concluded that there would be material harm to the character and appearance of the area, notwithstanding that I have not found harm in relation to

living conditions and Green Belt and have concluded that the existing building is structurally suitable for conversion. The support for the principle of development within the Framework, including making efficient use of land, is countered by the importance it places on the provision of development that is well designed and preserves character and appearance. In this instance, the harm would be significant and enduring.

21. As a result, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Consequently, for the reasons given, the proposed development conflicts with the development plan as a whole, and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, that outweigh the identified harm. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

C Butcher

INSPECTOR