

NPPF 2026

Case Officer: Lucie Turner

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Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on material and relevant changes in national planning policy since Wiltshire Council determined application PL/2025/09732. The Council acknowledges that the National Planning Policy Framework published on 17th August 2026 (NPPF 2026) is a new material consideration in the determination of this appeal and has considered the reasons for refusal in this context:

Refusal Reason 1:

Refusal Reason 1 relates to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the harm arising from the loss of openness and encroachment into the countryside.

The Council has considered Policies GB6 and GB7 of the NPPF 2026. Whilst Policy GB7 identifies certain forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, including some changes of use of existing buildings, the Council does not consider that the appeal proposal falls within those exceptions. As set out in the appeal statement, the residential occupation of the barn has resulted in the introduction of domestic paraphernalia and associated features, including an unauthorised summerhouse, which together have created a domestic curtilage and materially altered the openness of the site.

The Council remains of the view that the proposal would result in substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt and therefore does not satisfy the requirements of Policy GB7. Accordingly, the proposal continues to constitute inappropriate development under Policy GB6 and the Council's position in respect of Refusal Reason 1 remains unchanged.

Note that as the proposal is considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, Policy S5 is not engaged

Refusal Reason 2:

Refusal Reason 2 relates to the principle of residential development in the open countryside and the absence of any demonstrated essential functional need for permanent residential accommodation associated with the equestrian use of the site.

The Council acknowledges that the NPPF 2026 has replaced former paragraph 84 with a new national policy framework relating to development outside settlements, contained within Policies S3 to S5.

However, Policy S5(5) confirms that the policy does not apply to development proposals in the Green Belt, which should instead be determined in accordance with Policies GB6 and GB7. As set out in relation to Refusal Reason 1, the Council remains of the view that the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and does not satisfy the exceptions contained within Policy GB7. Accordingly, the Council does not consider that Policy S5 materially alters the assessment of the principle of development in this case.

The Council further notes that no substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate an essential functional need for permanent residential accommodation on the site. The appeal proposal therefore continues to conflict with Saved Policy H4 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan and Core Policy 48 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, which require such a need to be demonstrated before residential development in the countryside can be supported.

The Council's position is therefore that, whilst the national policy context has changed, those changes do not lead the Council to withdraw or amend Refusal Reason 2.

Refusal Reason 3

Refusal Reason 3 relates to the harmful effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and the Cotswolds National Landscape arising from the domestication of a previously rural equestrian site.

The Council has considered the updated provisions of the NPPF 2026 relating to Protected Landscapes. Policy N4 confirms that development proposals within Protected Landscapes should be limited in scale and extent and sensitively located and designed to avoid harm to their statutory purposes and special qualities. The policy further states that substantial weight should be placed on the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of these areas.

As set out within the appeal statement, the Council remains of the view that the residential occupation of the building, together with the associated domestic paraphernalia and unauthorised summerhouse, has introduced a domestic character into a previously rural equestrian site. The cumulative effect of these features has resulted in visual clutter and an erosion of the site's rural character which fails to conserve or enhance the special qualities, scenic beauty and tranquillity of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The Council therefore considers that the NPPF 2026 does not materially alter the considerations underpinning Refusal Reason 3. The Council's position remains that the proposal conflicts with Core Policies 51 and 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, with the aims of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and with national policy relating to Protected Landscapes.

Refusal Reason 4

Refusal Reason 4 related to the unsustainable location, where reliance on private vehicles would be inevitable.

The Council has reviewed the updated transport policies of the NPPF 2026. Policy TR3 continues to seek development that supports sustainable patterns of movement, limits the need to travel, particularly by private car, and provides a genuine choice of transport modes.

The Council remains of the view that the appeal site is poorly related to day-to-day services and facilities by sustainable modes of transport and that future occupiers would be heavily reliant on private vehicle use. Accordingly, whilst the relevant national policy references have changed, the concerns underpinning Refusal Reason 4 remain applicable and the Council's position remains unchanged

Refusal Reason 5

Refusal Reason 5 relates to the absence of sufficient information at application stage to demonstrate that the accommodation would provide suitable living conditions for future occupiers.

The Council notes that additional plans and layout information have been submitted as part of the appeal process. This information was not before the Council when the application was determined and therefore could not be taken into account in reaching the original decision.

The Council considers that Core Policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy continues to require development to achieve a high standard of design and provide appropriate living conditions for occupants. However, having regard to the additional information now before the Inspector, the Council accepts that the weight which can be attributed to this reason for refusal is reduced.

The Council's primary concerns remain those identified in Refusal Reasons 1, 2, 3 and 4 relating to the principle of development, Green Belt harm, landscape impact and locational sustainability.

Housing Land Supply and Conclusion

The Council acknowledges that the NPPF 2026 has replaced the former Paragraph 11 "tilted balance" approach and that this is no longer the relevant framework for determining the appeal. The Council's most recent housing land supply position remains 2.8 years and it has therefore had regard to Policy HO7 of the NPPF 2026, which states that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of providing homes that contribute towards meeting evidenced housing needs.

The Council accepts that the proposal would result in the provision of an additional dwelling and would therefore make a contribution, albeit modest, towards identified housing needs. This benefit weighs in favour of the proposal. However, the Council remains of the view that the appeal scheme constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt and does not satisfy the exceptions identified within Policy GB7. As such, the Council does not consider that Policies S3 and S5 provide support for the proposal.

The Council has reviewed the NPPF 2026 as a whole and considered the relevance of the updated policy framework to each of the reasons for refusal. Whilst the Council accepts that the weight attributable to Refusal Reason 5 is reduced in light of information submitted during the appeal process, the Council remains of the view that the concerns identified in Refusal Reasons 1 to 4 remain applicable. In particular, the Council continues to conclude that the proposal would result in inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would fail to demonstrate an essential functional need for residential accommodation in this location, would harm the character and appearance of the Cotswolds National Landscape, and would occupy an unsustainable location.

The Council therefore remains of the view that the proposal conflicts with the development plan and that the adverse effects of the development continue to outweigh its benefits. Accordingly, the Council's position in relation to the appeal remains unchanged

Note on Annex A

Paragraph 2 of Annex A of the NPPF 2026 states that development plan policies (or parts of those policies) which are materially inconsistent with the national decision-making policies of the Framework should be given very limited weight. It also states that policies should not be given reduced weight solely because they pre-date publication of the NPPF 2026.

The Council has reviewed the development plan policies relevant to this appeal and does not consider Core Policies CP1, CP2, CP15, CP50, CP51, CP57 or CP67 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, or Policy 6 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2, to be materially inconsistent with the NPPF 2026. Whilst Policies S3 and S5 alter the national policy context for housing development outside settlements, the Council does not consider that this renders the relevant development plan policies inconsistent with the Framework or attracts very limited weight.