



Appeal Decision

Inquiry Held on 21 to 30 November 2023

Site visit made on 22 November 2023

by Peter Mark Sturgess BSc(Hons), MBA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th January 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/W2845/W/23/3325211

Land North of Bedford Road, Great Houghton, Northampton (Easting 478525, Northing 259345)

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Duncan Investments Ltd against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref WNN/2021/0466, dated 26 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 6 January 2023.
 - The development proposed is outline planning application (all matters reserved except for access) for the development of up to 24,000 sqm (GEA) of employment land (use classes E(g), B2 and B8) with new vehicular access, associated parking, highways infrastructure and other ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The notice of decision refusing planning permission for the appeal proposal makes reference to the saved policies of the Northampton Local Plan 1997 and to the emerging Northampton Local Plan Part 2. Since the decision notice was issued the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2) has been formally adopted and is now part of the development plan. However, the Northampton Local Plan 1997 is not now part of the development plan. I shall therefore have regard to the policies of the LPP2 in this decision.
3. Since the Inquiry, a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published in December 2023. Having examined the revised Framework in relation to the matters at issue in this appeal I consider that the main areas of the Framework relevant to this decision have not changed. However, I will refer to the paragraph numbers in the revised Framework, as appropriate, in this decision. In this respect I will have regard to the revised version of the Framework in this decision.
4. The application was made in outline with all matters reserved except for access. I therefore have treated all plans considered by the Council when they made their decision on the application as for illustrative purposes only, apart from those that relate to the location of the site, the parameters plan and those related to access.

Main Issues

5. The main issues in this case are:

- whether the site is in an appropriate location for the proposed development, having regard to the policies of the development plan;
- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
- the effect of the proposal on the heritage assets of the Conservation Areas of Great Houghton and Little Houghton and the Grade II* listed Churches of St Mary The Virgin, Little Houghton and St Mary The Virgin, Great Houghton

Reasons

Character and appearance of the area

6. The site lies on the edge of the built-up area of Northampton. It is comprised of two fields, separated by a hedgerow, and is currently agricultural in character and appears to have been used for rough grazing. Reference was made at the inquiry and in evidence that the site has been quarried in the past. However, there is no visible/physical evidence on the site of this previous use. Therefore, the appeal site, in its current form relates well to the flat/valley bottom agricultural land to the east.
7. Topographically the site appears flat and is set down below the level of the Bedford Road. However, surveys submitted with the application show that the site does slope. Having said that the site is clearly part of the floodplain/valley bottom of the River Nene with land visibly rising to the site's south and west.
8. The urban edge of Northampton, where it is adjacent to the appeal site, is characterised by a business park made up of low rise pitched roof buildings including a hotel and a public house, an area known as the Lakes Business Park (LBP). In this location the edge of the urban area, is softened by boundary planting. However, in this location, there is a clear delineated boundary between the built area (LBP) and the countryside surrounding the town.
9. Likewise, on the southside of the Bedford Road, the development of the Brackmills Industrial Estate (BIE) ends abruptly at the landscaping provided as part of its development and the rough vegetation currently situated along the south side of the A428. Moving east, beyond the appeal site are fields in agricultural use. These appear flat and have the same valley bottom character as the appeal site and relate well to the appeal site.
10. The appeal proposal would extend the built-up area, which to the north of the Bedford Road consists of the LBP, beyond the existing landscaping and out into the countryside surrounding the town. The appeal proposal would be visible from close vantage points along the Bedford Road, LBP and Hardingstone Dyke and more distant vantage points of the higher land between Great Houghton and Little Houghton and footpaths to the west of Little Houghton.
11. Consequently, **as a result of the appeal site's** open agricultural character, the clearly delineated boundary between it and the LBP (which would be breached by the appeal proposal), the separation between it and the BIE and the agricultural character it shares with the land to the east, the appeal proposal

- can be described as an intrusion of built development into the countryside surrounding Northampton.
12. Furthermore, this sense of intrusion of built development into the countryside by the appeal proposal is exacerbated by views of the appeal site from the higher ground surrounding the floodplain/valley bottom in close proximity to the appeal site. This land includes the countryside around Great Houghton, the fields between Great Houghton and Little Houghton to the south of the Bedford Road and the land to the west of Little Houghton. From all these areas the appeal proposal would be viewed as an incongruous intrusion of built development into the countryside surrounding Northampton as it would extend beyond the current well-defined boundary of the Lakes Business Park.
 13. To the north of the appeal site lie lakes which have been formed from the remains of former sand and gravel workings. This area has public access and is crossed by a number of public footpaths and/or permissive paths. The path along Hardingstone Dyke, would afford closer views of the appeal site than the higher ground referred to above. From this vantage point there would be a clear change in character of the land from agricultural to industrial/commercial. Moreover, the countryside of the floodplain/valley bottom around the Upper Nene Gravel Pits Special Protection Area is flat with no buildings. Therefore, the proposed development would be seen as an incongruous feature in an otherwise flat and undeveloped landscape.
 14. The landscape character assessments that have been submitted tend to be at a broad scale. However, elements described in these studies help to show that the appeal site and its surroundings share characteristics of these landscapes, such as the presence of large urban areas, limited woodlands, the undulations in the landscape, including the presence of scarp slopes and the presence of pasture and arable agricultural land. In particular the area is part of the broad river valley which includes artificial lakes and canalised rivers. None of these studies either supports the appeal proposal or specifically rejects this type of development. However as set out above the proposal does impinge on some of the characteristics set out in these assessments, in particular those of the broad river valleys.
 15. The development plan for the area is comprised of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (2014)(JCS), the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 (2023) (LPP2) and the Great Houghton Neighbourhood Development Plan (May 2022)(NDP).
 16. In terms of planning policy, the JCS at Policy BN5 is, amongst other things, aimed at protecting the landscapes. In particular the policy seeks to protect areas of '*landscape sensitivity*' and ensure that development is '*sympathetic to locally distinctive landscape features*'. The area within which the appeal site lies has not been identified as an area of '*landscape sensitivity*'. However, it does display characteristics that are distinctive in the locality, such as its relatively flat topography, the presence of gappy hedgerows and a common, open character with other areas of the valley bottom surrounding it. Moreover, it contributes to the gap between the built-up area of Northampton and Great Houghton village which is seen as being a distinctive feature in the locality.
 17. The appeal proposal would change that character and appearance by introducing large bulky buildings and landscaping which would be in conflict with the current open agricultural character of the area. Therefore, whilst there

- are no heritage assets or landscape designations present on the site, I find that due to the significant change in the character and appearance of the site brought about by the appeal proposal, including the loss of openness, the hedgerows and the contribution it makes to the gap between Northampton and Great Houghton, it is in conflict with Policy BN5 of the JCS.
18. Policy Q1 of the LPP2, amongst other things, focuses on creating and protecting strong locally distinctive places. This includes retaining and enhancing important views and vistas and integrating new developments within the existing local context. I have set out above that the appeal proposal would breach a well delineated boundary between the LBP and the open countryside surrounding the town. This would be clearly visible from the embankment to the north of the site. Furthermore, and from this direction the closing of the gap between Northampton and the village of Great Houghton would be evident, thereby eroding its landscape setting and its distinctiveness. I therefore find that the appeal proposal is in conflict with Policy Q1 of the LPP2.
 19. The appeal site lies in the Great Houghton NDP designated area. The NDP through its objectives and policies recognises that the landscape surrounding the village is important in maintaining its character, appearance and sense of place through both its intrinsic beauty and the function it performs in maintaining the gap between the village and Northampton.
 20. Policy 1 does this by expecting development to maintain this clear separation between the town and the village. Although it is aimed at a specific development, its intention is clear that in order to **protect the villages'** character and appearance development must not intrude on the gap between the village and Northampton. The Policy also expects developments to be sympathetic to the surrounding rural landscape and sensitive to its existing small scale residential character.
 21. The appeal proposal would close the gap between Northampton and Great Houghton on its northern side, it would result in large buildings being developed close to the houses at the northern end of the High Street. In these respects, therefore, and for the reasons set out above I find that the appeal proposal is in conflict with this policy of the NDP.
 22. Policy 3 of the NDP appears to be a design policy, as the appeal proposal is in outline much of the policy is not relevant at this stage. However, this policy does recognise the importance of landscape to the setting of the village.
 23. Finally with regard to the NDP Policy 6 deals specifically with conserving and enhancing the landscape. As with the other policies this emphasises the importance of the landscape setting of the village and the visual and physical separation of the village from Northampton, especially where development takes place on exposed landscapes and leads to an incursion of inappropriate development into the surrounding countryside.
 24. The appeal proposal would break through the soft landscaping around the LBP into the open valley bottom. This part of the landscape is exposed and is visible from the close and distant views described above. Therefore, the proposal would be visible from a range of vantage points along the A428, the Hardingstone Dyke and the higher land to the east of Great Houghton and from the western side of Little Houghton. In these respects, the proposal would be in conflict with this Policy of the NDP.

25. Overall, I find that the proposal would be in conflict with those policies of the development plan that relate to the protection and conservation of the landscape as it would harm the character and appearance of the countryside surrounding Great Houghton and contribute towards closing the gap between the village and Northampton, for the reasons set out above.

Effect on Heritage Assets

26. Within the area where the appeal site is located lie a number of heritage assets, these are the Little Houghton Conservation Area (CA), the church of St Mary the Virgin, Little Houghton, Grade II* listed, Great Houghton CA and the church of St Mary the Virgin Great Houghton, Grade II*. I shall assess the impact the proposal would have on each of these heritage assets in turn in order to come to a conclusion on whether it would harm the significance of the heritage asset, whether any harm identified would amount to substantial or less than substantial harm. Additionally, if I find that the proposal causes less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, and whilst I am not required to do so, I will seek to place that harm on a scale.
27. Furthermore, if I find that the proposal causes less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, I will carry out the balance required by paragraph 208 of the Framework at the end of this section.

Little Houghton CA

28. The significance of Little Houghton CA is set out in a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan which appears to date from 2014. It sets out that the character and therefore the significance of the area is derived primarily from its nucleated form centred around a across roads in the middle of the village. This significance is added to by relatively little modern development and a continuity and uniformity brought about by the use of local ironstone and limestone in the construction of the older buildings. The nucleated form gives rise to the village being inward looking, contained within high walls and hedgerows. These features limit the views out of the village.
29. However, the CA appraisal does refer to views out over the open fields being a defining characteristic with these wider panoramic views contrasting with the more channelled views within the village itself.
30. It is generally agreed that the appeal proposal would lie over 1km from the CA to the west. From the Little Houghton CA it would be read against a backdrop of existing large scale industrial buildings and the town of Northampton in general, including the lift testing tower and the large buildings of BIE. It would not break the skyline when viewed from the CA. Between the appeal site and the CA significant areas of open agricultural land would remain and there would still be intervisibility between Little Houghton and Great Houghton. Moreover, the views to the north from the edge of the CA would be unaffected by the appeal proposal and views across the River Nene would remain as they are at present. Therefore, the panoramic views referred to in the CA appraisal would remain a defining characteristic of the village.
31. When viewed from the vicinity of the appeal site the CA would still remain surrounded by open fields at some distance. Therefore, the appeal proposal would not affect the experience of the CA from this location.

32. In view of the above analysis, I consider that the appeal proposal would have at worst a negligible effect on the setting of the Little Houghton CA and at best a neutral effect. This is due to the loss of some of the open fields which can be viewed from the CA. However, even a negligible effect would amount to less than substantial harm, albeit at the low end of any scale. This requires me to carry out the heritage balance referred to at paragraph 208 of the Framework, which I shall do later in this decision.

St Mary's Church Little Houghton

33. **The significance of St Mary's Church Little Houghton** is derived from its position at the centre of the village, adjacent to its central cross roads, the materials from which it is constructed, which reflect those used on other buildings in the CA and its prominence in the local landscape.

34. In terms of the appeal proposal, it would not affect the significance of the church in terms of compromising its position at the centre of the village or in terms of the materials from which it is constructed, given the distance between it and the Church. However, given the **tower's prominence in the local** landscape there is a risk that new development in the valley bottom could affect its setting.

35. I do not consider that this is a risk with the appeal proposals. The tower is at least 1km from the appeal site and is considerably higher than the appeal site or the appeal buildings. It would still be visible in the local landscape from the same range of vantage points with the appeal proposal in place and would still be viewed across a significant amount of open agricultural landscape. I therefore consider that the appeal proposal would have a neutral effect on the setting of the church of St Mary The Virgin, Little Houghton.

Great Houghton CA

36. The significance of the Great Houghton CA is set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAA) dated March 2018. Whilst there is much in the CAA which is internal to the village, it is clear to me that a substantial part of its significance is derived from its position on rising ground to the south of the Nene Valley, giving it a prominence in the local landscape, and its separation from Northampton itself **which is part of the village's local** distinctiveness. The CAA identifies these aspects of the areas significance in the summary on page 3 and in the key views and vistas section on page 14 where it is stated that the **'visual separation between Great Houghton and the built-up area [of Northampton] makes a major contribution to the setting and to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area'**.

37. This prominence and separation from Northampton is best appreciated from the north of the village. These include views from the A428, the edge of the LBP and from the Hardingstone Dyke, where there is significant public access. From these locations the village appears separate from the urban area of Northampton and is clearly visible on the rising ground. The steeple of the Grade II* listed church of St Mary the Virgin, within the CA can be clearly seen across an open agricultural landscape. Moreover, houses in the village closer to the valley floor can also be seen, although some of these are outside the CA.

38. The appeal proposal would extend along the southern side of the Bedford Road (A428) from just beyond the edge of the LBP to the junction of the A428 with

- the High Street, Great Houghton. From the eastern edge of the LBP and the paths along Hardingstone Dyke to the north, the appeal proposal would be seen as a continuous strip of built development extending from the LBP to Great Houghton village, effectively joining the urban area of Northampton with the village when seen from this direction.
39. Moreover, whilst it is proposed to mitigate the impact of the buildings in this location through extensive landscaping, this landscaping itself would appear as an alien feature in a valley bottom landscape, otherwise devoid of dense woodland and vegetation. Furthermore, the restriction in the height of the vegetation on the north side of the buildings would mean that it would have limited effect against buildings that would be significantly taller.
40. I agree with the appellant that the duty set out in s72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area does not apply to land outside conservation areas. However, the Framework at paragraph 205 sets out that when considering the impact of proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the **asset's** conservation. This approach is reinforced in paragraph 206 where it is stated that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.
41. I have set out above that the appeal proposal would harm the significance of Great Houghton CA as it would impinge on the setting of the CA by compromising its separation from the urban area of Northampton and reducing the impact of its position as a settlement on rising ground. I have set out the reasons for this above, together with the effect of mitigation. I also conclude that this harm would amount to less than substantial harm. Whilst in reaching this conclusion there is no need to place that harm on a scale, I also find that the harm would lie towards the middle of a scale of harm. I will deal with whether there is a clear and convincing justification for this harm later in this decision.
42. In terms of the Framework where I have found that the proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (the Great Houghton CA), this harm should be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal, which again I will do later in this decision.

St Mary's Church Great Houghton

43. The significance of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Great Houghton is derived from its position in the village on rising land from the valley of the River Nene, the quality of its steeple and its status as a local landmark. At present it is seen rising above the village, and the trees which are also a characteristic of Great Houghton, from the north, north east and north west from across open agricultural landscapes. Whilst there are certain features such as the Brackmills Industrial Estate, power lines and roads that can from certain points detract from those views in essence this is the view that is experienced. This allows the height and quality of its tower to be appreciated in a rural setting.
44. The appeal proposal would interrupt the views of the steeple from the north and north west with it only being visible from these directions protruding above

industrial buildings, instead of in its current rural setting, viewed across an open agricultural landscape. This would seriously affect its significance in the local landscape. I therefore find that the appeal proposal would harm the significance of the church of St Mary The Virgin, Great Houghton by reason of impinging up on its rural setting for the reasons set out above. I also find this harm to be less than substantial, but at the middle of any scale.

Heritage Balance

45. In terms of the heritage balance, I have found that the appeal proposals would cause negligible harm to the significance of Little Houghton CA. this would be less than substantial harm, but at the low end of any scale. I have found that the proposal would harm the significance the Great Houghton CA and the church of St Mary The Virgin, Great Houghton as it would damage their settings. I have assessed above that this would also amount to less than substantial harm but at the middle of any scale.
46. In terms of the church of St Mary The Virgin, Great Houghton which is Grade II* listed I am required to give considerable importance and weight to any harm that might be caused to the significance of a listed building.
47. Additionally, whilst the site lies outside the Great Houghton CA I have found that the appeal proposal will affect its significance by reducing its impact as a settlement on rising ground and, when viewed from certain directions, will appear to be joined up to the urban area of Northampton. A key characteristic of the village and the CA is its separation from the built-up area of Northampton. Moreover, I have also found that the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the Little Houghton CA, albeit at the lower end of any scale, by reason of a reduction in the agricultural land surrounding the village.
48. As a result, and in accordance with paragraph 205 of the Framework I give great weight to the assets conservation. Moreover, the effect on the significance of 3 heritage assets adds to the weight of these harms.
49. The main public benefits associated with the appeal proposal are the jobs that it would create, the additional employment floorspace provided in sectors that are in demand in Northampton, the contribution it would make to local Gross Value Added (GVA) and the capital spend would bring economic benefits to the local area. Additionally, the proposal would provide for highway improvements, training opportunities and biodiversity net gains (BNG).
50. The economic gains, including the provision of additional jobs and the provision of premises for which there is continuing demand, would be a substantial benefit of the proposal. Moreover, the capital spend and local spending once the proposal was complete would add to the income in the local area and beyond. However, the development plan provides a permissive policy framework within which additional employment floorspace can be provided and the parties are in agreement that the Council is on track to meet its job requirements by 2029. Notwithstanding the position with regard to the provision of jobs through the implementation of the development plan policies, I give substantial weight to the economic benefits of the proposal.
51. Other benefits relate to the requirements of the Council with regard to this type of development and include, highway improvements, training opportunities and

biodiversity enhancements. I acknowledge that all these benefits would have an impact beyond the development itself, in other words a wider public benefit. However, they would only be realised because they are a requirement of the Council in relation to this type of development. However due to the small scale of these benefits I give them only limited to moderate weight in this decision.

52. I have already confirmed that in accordance with legislation and national policy I am required to give considerable importance and weight to any harm (including harm to its setting) to a listed building. In terms of the Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs the Framework advises that I give great weight to the assets' conservation. I acknowledge that the appeal proposal would bring substantial benefits in terms of jobs, employment land and the economy. However, the Council appears to be on track to deliver the jobs target it has set itself in the development plan and the undoubted need for employment land, whilst significant, appears to be capable of being met through the flexibility of existing policies and the emerging local plan which looks to allocate sites up to at least 2040.
53. I therefore find, for the reasons given above, in terms of the heritage balance that when the harms are weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, as required by paragraph 208 of the Framework, that the benefits of the appeal proposal do not outweigh the harms.

Heritage Planning Policy

54. The JCS, through Policy BN5, seeks to conserve and enhance the settings of designated heritage assets. To do this development will be required to sustain and enhance the heritage and landscape features of conservation areas and locally and nationally important buildings, structures and monuments. I have demonstrated through the reasons set out above that the proposal will harm the settings of Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs, and that of the Grade II* listed church St Mary the Virgin, Great Houghton. I therefore find that the appeal proposal is in conflict with this policy of the development plan
55. The LPP2 at Policy ENV6 seeks to conserve the historic environment by requiring a clear and convincing justification for any harm or loss of an asset, supported by demonstrating how harm is outweighed by the public benefit. I have set out how the development harms the historic environment of the Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs and the Grade II* listed church of St Mary the Virgin, Great Houghton. The balance set out in this policy is similar to that set out at paragraph 208 of the Framework. I have above balanced the harm caused by the appeal proposal and its benefits and concluded that the harm caused does not outweigh its benefits. Consequently, the proposal is in conflict with this policy of the development plan.
56. The NDP deals specifically with Great Houghton itself, but its area also includes the appeal site. Policy GHNDP 1 **seeks to protect the village's character** by requiring development to take into account and be sensitive to the significance and setting of the CA. I have set out above how the appeal proposal would harm the significance and setting of the CA by diminishing the gap between the village and Northampton. The appeal proposal is therefore in conflict with this policy of the development plan.
57. There was some debate at the inquiry as to whether some of the policies of the development plan were not consistent with the Framework as they did not

include a requirement to balance harms against benefits of a proposal where it would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset. I agree that there is no specific mention of how a finding of '*less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage*' **should be assessed** against the benefits of a proposal.

58. However, I have pointed out above that the concept of balancing harms versus benefits is present in Policy ENV6 of the JCS. Moreover, it would be clear to anyone working in this field that where an assessment of less than substantial harm to an **asset's** conservation is alleged that due to paragraph 208 of the Framework an assessment of harms versus benefits is required. I therefore do not consider that omission of a specific reference to balancing harms and benefits in some of the development plan policies renders them inconsistent with the Framework.

Heritage conclusions

59. I have found that the appeal proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs and to the setting of the Grade II* listed church of St Mary the Virgin Great Houghton. As required by the Framework I have weighed this harm against the benefits of the proposal and found that, for the reasons given above, the heritage harms do not outweigh the public benefits of the proposal, especially as I am required in terms of the CA to give great weight to the **asset's** conservation and considerable importance and weight to any harm to the listed building.
60. I have also found that the proposal is in conflict with Policies BN5, ENV6 and GHNDP 1 of the development plan, also for the reasons given above.

Location of the development

61. I have established in the section above dealing with character and appearance of the area, that the site lies in open countryside but is adjacent to the built-up area of Northampton. In terms of locational policies, the development plan has a flexible approach which seeks to accommodate the growth and demand for new premises present in the local economy.
62. **The JCS at Policy S4 anticipates meeting Northampton's need** for development through a combination of development within the existing urban area and through the proposed sustainable urban extensions. Flexibility is introduced by allowing development in other areas of the Northampton Related Development Area (NRDA) provided it complies with the vision, objectives and other policies of the plan. Therefore, the policy allows for the growth and development of Northampton outside those areas specifically allocated for development and those areas where development would be permitted by the policies of the development plan.
63. The approach is reinforced in Policy S8 which states that the majority of new jobs growth will be concentrated within the principal urban area of Northampton through a variety of methods, none of which refer to land outside the urban area. Consequently, and in view of policies S4 and S8, it is clear that new employment land should, in the first instance be located within the principal urban area of Northampton or within a proposed urban extension and only if a proposal is consistent with the vision and objectives of the plan and

- complies with the other policies should sites outside these locations be considered.
64. The LLP2 follows a similar path. However, **being a 'Part 2' plan it makes** allocations of employment land at Policy EC2. These do not include the appeal site. However, at Policy EC3 it supports the development of sites other than those allocated at EC2, provided that they have been '**comprehensively assessed**'. Moreover, for a site to be acceptable as a '**windfall**' they need to be consistent with other policies of the plan and the required assessment should cover, amongst other things, the proposals impact on the natural environment, heritage and non-heritage assets.
65. I have found above in relation to the character and appearance of the area the appeal proposal causes harm by extending built development into the open countryside surrounding the town and harming the local distinctiveness and character of Great Houghton by closing the gap between the village and Northampton. This would be contrary to the vision of the JCS which expects villages to retain their local distinctiveness, the objectives of the JCS at 16 which also expects a sense of place and local distinctiveness to be maintained and Policy BN5 which expects proposals to be sympathetic to local landscape features.
66. I therefore find that the proposal is in conflict with the vision, objective and Policy BN5 of the JCS. This also brings it into conflict with Policies S4 as this policy only supports development in other areas only if it meets the vision, objective and requirements of other policies which it clearly does not for the reasons I have set out above.
67. I have also found above that the appeal proposal would cause harm to the significance of some of the heritage assets present in the area, namely the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary the Virgin Great Houghton and the setting of Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs. Therefore, and in terms of Policy S4 of the JCS, whilst the appeal proposal would be on the edge of the Northampton's urban area, it would not be consistent with other policies of the development plan in that it would not comply with policies of the plan that seek to protect the character and appearance of the area and conserve heritage assets.
68. Policy EC3 of the LPP2 follows a similar approach to S4 of the JCS in that whilst it expects proposals to be comprehensively assessed it also requires them to be consistent with other policies of the plan. I have set out above that I find the appeal proposal to be in conflict with Policy Q1 of LPP2 as it would not conserve locally distinctive places by eroding the local distinctiveness and the landscape setting of Great Houghton. Furthermore, the effect of the proposal on the setting of the heritage assets of the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary the Virgin, Great Houghton and the Great Houghton CA would be in conflict with the policies of the LPP2 that protect heritage assets, as set out above. Therefore, the appeal proposal would be in conflict with Policy EC3 of the LPP2.
69. Therefore, and with regard to whether the site is appropriate for the proposed development I have found for the reasons given above that the appeal proposal is in conflict with the locational policies of the development plan and consequently it is not in an appropriate location for development.

Other Matters

70. It is agreed by the parties that the site is currently classified as Grade 2 agricultural land bringing it into the definition of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land as set out in the Glossary to the Framework. The Framework at paragraph 180 states that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, recognising the intrinsic beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.
71. Policy R2 seeks to sustain and enhance the rural economy, therefore it is of limited relevance as the appeal proposal, amongst other things, is about the economy of Northampton town itself. However, it is agreed that the site does lie in the countryside surrounding the town albeit in the NRDA. In this respect the policy's aim of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land is relevant to the appeal proposal.
72. The appeal proposal would lead to the loss of some BMV agricultural land. Whilst I appreciate that due to the need to retain a buffer between the built development and the SPA not all the BMV agricultural land would be lost, it has not been explained how it could be put into productive agricultural use. I therefore consider that the agricultural potential of all the BMV on the site would be lost to the development. It is therefore in conflict with Policy R2 of the development plan.
73. It has been suggested by interested parties that the appeal proposals, if allowed, would increase the danger from traffic at the junction of the A428 and the High Street Great Houghton. Furthermore, due to the High Street Great Houghton being used as a short cut from the Newport Pagnell Road to the Bedford Road congestion would increase at this junction.
74. The evidence that has been presented by the main parties demonstrates that there would be no increased traffic danger or congestion brought about by the appeal proposal if measures to introduce a right-hand turning lane at the site entrance and extend the current speed limit in place along the Bedford Road were introduced. These measures are capable of being covered by conditions should the appeal be allowed. I therefore find that the appeal scheme is capable of implementation without any further traffic congestion in the area and without increasing danger to highway users.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

75. I have found that the appeal proposal would harm the setting of the Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs. I have also found both of the harms caused to be less than substantial with harm to the Little Houghton CA being at the lower end of any scale. However, I have found that whilst the harm caused to the Great Houghton CA would also be less than substantial this would be at the middle of any scale. This would be due to the reduction in the gap between the built-up area of Northampton and the Great Houghton brought about by the appeal proposal and the effect of the proposal on its rural setting.
76. This gap has been identified as being important to the significance of the CA. Moreover, the extension of built development along the northern side of the Bedford close to its junction with the High Street, Great Houghton would result

- in the steeple if the Grade II* listed church of St Mary the Virgin, Great Houghton being viewed from the north over the top of buildings rather than across open farmland as it is at present. In these respects, the significance of these heritage assets would be harmed.
77. In terms of the Framework and the legislation protecting heritage assets I am required to give great weight to the **asset's** conservation and considerable importance and weight to the conservation of listed buildings. It appears to me that key to the significance of **the setting of Great Houghton's CA is its** separation from the built area of Northampton and how it is viewed on rising ground. Moreover, and in terms of the setting of the Grade II* listed church of St Mary the Virgin, part of its significance is derived from how its spire is viewed across open agricultural land from the north, especially from Hardingstone Dyke. I therefore give substantial weight to the harm caused to the significance of these heritage assets by the appeal proposal.
78. I have also found that the appeal proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area by extending the built-up area of Northampton into an exposed countryside location beyond a clearly delineated edge. This would have the effect of moving the physical boundary of the town from the edge of the LBP to the junction of the A428 and the High Street, Great Houghton. This change would be clear when viewed from the higher land surrounding the appeal site and from the north. Furthermore, as well as this encroachment into countryside it would, when viewed from the north, have the effect of joining Great Houghton with the built-up area of Northampton.
79. The policies of the development plan, as well as being flexible in allowing development outside the allocations and the built-up area of Northampton also seek to ensure that local distinctiveness and landscape setting is maintained, including that of villages, important views and vistas are enhanced and new development is integrated with the local context. I have found that the appeal proposal is in conflict with the policies of the development plan which seek to achieve these aims. In particular I find, for the reasons given above, that the proposal is in conflict with policy BN5 of the JCS, Policy Q1 of the LPP2 and policies of the NDP. I give substantial weight to this harm.
80. Policies in the JCS dealing with the location of new development are flexible and allow for the development of new sites around the urban area of Northampton. However, they also seek to protect areas of heritage significance, the landscape and the local distinctiveness of villages, both in themselves and by reference to other policies. I have found that the appeal proposal is in conflict with these locational policies as it would harm the character and appearance of the area and damage the settings of both the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary the Virgin at Great Houghton and the Great Houghton and Little Houghton CAs. For the reasons given above. I give the harm the appeal proposal does to the purposes these policies are meant to serve substantial weight.
81. Northampton has a growing economy and there is a continuing need for more job opportunities and employment sites. The evidence presented by both parties has demonstrated this. The appeal proposal would provide additional floorspace and additional jobs in an area that has proved popular for businesses as the expressions of interest and the presence of both the LBP and BIE demonstrates.

82. However, the flexible way the development plan policy is worded, means that new jobs and additional employment floorspace are not restricted to the Northampton built up area. This gives the opportunity for more '*windfall sites*' to come forward in locations that do not have similar landscape and heritage constraints as the appeal site. Moreover, whilst the number of jobs created in the period of the JCS has fluctuated, it appears on course to deliver the anticipated number of jobs in the plan period. Furthermore, projections and assessments of need for new employment floorspace which have been advanced at the inquiry are for a number of years in the future, by which time a new local plan should have identified more sites in the area.
83. Therefore, whilst I give substantial weight to the jobs and floorspace that would be created by the appeal proposals and the immediate need for new floorspace, this weight is to a certain extent, mitigated by the flexibility of the current policies and the progress the Council is making in achieving its jobs target set out in the JCS.
84. The appeal proposal through capital spend and the ongoing spending once the development is complete would make a contribution to GVA in the area and spend in the local economy. This would act as a boost to local businesses. However, and in terms of the whole of the West Northamptonshire economy the appeal proposal would represent a relatively small contribution to GVA. I therefore give the provision of capital spend and the contribution the appeal proposal would make to local GVA moderate weight.
85. The appeal proposal would deliver other benefits in terms of offering training opportunities in the local area, BNG and traffic and transport improvements.
86. In terms of training opportunities these would be secured through the provisions of a planning obligation made under s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Given the scale of the proposed development these benefits are likely to be limited in scope and duration. I therefore give this benefit limited weight in this decision.
87. In terms of BNG the precise extent of the BNG will only be known at the outline stage. However, given the extent of land that will be left undeveloped on the site it could be that BNG could be considerable. I therefore give moderate weight to this benefit.
88. With regard to the traffic improvements proposed, whilst most of these are required in order to deal with the traffic generated by the appeal proposal, there will be a short length of additional cycle path that will be added to the existing network. This is a public benefit albeit relatively small, I therefore give this limited weight in this decision.
89. I have found that the appeal proposal is in conflict with the policies of the development plan for the reasons set out above. Furthermore, I have found that the material considerations advance in support of the appeal proposal do not outweigh the harm the proposal would cause. This is in part due to the harm the proposal would do to the significance of the heritage assets present around the appeal site where, in the case of harm to the setting of a listed building I am required to give considerable importance and weight to that harm. In the case of harm to the Great Houghton CA the Framework at paragraph 205 requires me to give great weight to the **asset's** conservation. In

doing this I have found that the benefits of the appeal proposal do not outweigh its harm.

90. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I have found that the material considerations in this case do not indicate that planning permission should be granted. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Peter Mark Sturgess

INSPECTOR

ANNEX A: APPEARANCES

FOR THE COUNCIL

Caroline Daly of Counsel

Instructed by the solicitor to West Northamptonshire Council

She called:

Stephen Wadsworth BA(Hons), DipLA, PostDipUD, CMLI

Briarwood Landscape
Architecture.

Adam Partington BA(Hons), MSc(Dist)

Partner, Marrons Heritage
Team

Sandra Ford DipTP, CertUD, MRTPI

Planning Director, Marrons

FOR THE APPELLANT

Peter Goatley KC assisted by Jessica Allen

Instructed by Lichfields

He called:

Timothy Jackson BA(Hons), DipLA, CMLI

Senior Director FPCR
Environmental Design Ltd

Rob Bourn BA(Hons), MA, CIFA

Managing Director, Orion
Heritage Ltd

Christopher Drummond

Commercial Property
Consultant, TDB Real
Estate.

Colin Robinson BA(Hons), MTP(Dist), MRTPI, MIED

Planning Director, Lichfields

Jonathan Kirby MSc(Hons), DMS, MRTPI

Senior Director , Lichfields.

INTERESTED PARTIES

Matthew Jaggard

Local Resident (Great
Houghton)

Sarah Williams

Chair, Great Houghton
Parish Council

ANNEX 2 INQUIRY DOCUMENTS

- ID1 Aerial photograph of the appeal site and surroundings during the operation of the quarry.
- ID2. Opening statement on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council
- ID3. Opening submission on behalf of the Appellant
- ID4. Sarah Williams – Chair of Great Houghton Parish Council – Speech for Planning Inquiry
- ID5. Closing submission on behalf of the Council.
- ID6 Closing submission on behalf of the Appellant.