



Appeal Decision

by Zoe Baxter BSc, MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Welsh Ministers

Decision date: 12/02/2025

Appeal reference: CAS-03818-H6K2Y1

Site address: Dream Fields, Llandarcy, Neath, SA10 6JU

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Hale against the decision of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
 - The application Ref P2023/0182, dated 27 April 2023, was refused by notice dated 12 August 2024.
 - The development proposed is the erection of an outbuilding to store farm equipment, hay, house a biomass boiler, and associated ancillary works
 - A site visit was made on 21 January 2025.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The site address is taken from the Appeal Form. The property name has been changed since the planning application submission.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the green wedge, and if so;
 - whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm to the green wedge would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the development; and
 - whether the development is justified having regard to policies designed to control development in the countryside and its effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site forms part of the agricultural holding of Dream Fields, formerly Gelli Bwch Farm. The new outbuilding is proposed to be sited to the northwest of the existing farmhouse and barn complex. The land rises from the B4290 highway to the east of the site with the proposed building identified to be located on a plateau before the land continues to rise toward the west. Access is from the B4290 via a single-track lane.

Inappropriate development

5. The site is situated outside of the defined settlement limits in the Adopted Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) and within the green wedge under reference EN3/4 Crymlyn Bog / Crymlyn Burrows / Llandarcy of Policy EN 3. Although less permanent than Green Belt designations, a green wedge has the same purpose, including managing urban form through controlled expansion, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and protecting the setting of an urban area.
6. Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12) (PPW) (paragraph 3.75) states that the construction of new buildings within the green wedge is inappropriate development unless it meets one of several specified purposes, the first of which relates to justified rural enterprise needs. Similarly, LDP Policy SP 14 refers to the protection of green wedges.
7. The agricultural planning evaluation questionnaire provided in support of the scheme identifies the appellant's intention to increase hay production and the number of livestock at the holding, including chickens, goats and sheep. Reference is made to the requirement for a new building to store machinery associated with hay production, animal feed and a chicken coop. The Council contend that a new outbuilding at the site is not justified in the green wedge given the potential for reuse of the existing barns at the holding. However, I observed during my site visit that the barns are largely in a poor condition and given their size and scale would not be suitable for access by large scale machinery or installation of numerous pop doors for a chicken coop without substantial alterations which would alter the character and appearance of the barns and farmyard. Based on the evidence provided and observed on site, I do not dispute that there is justification for a suitably sized outbuilding to house large-scale agricultural machinery, animal feed and for a chicken coop.
8. However, although referred to as a secondary use, the proposed outbuilding has been designed to include a separate dedicated area for two biomass boilers and associated fuel storage to serve the dwellings situated on the holding. PPW at paragraph 3.77 states that certain other forms of development, including renewable and low carbon energy generation, may be appropriate in the green wedge provided they preserve its openness. As such, given the purpose of the proposed building also includes renewable energy generation, it is necessary to consider whether the increase in size of the building to accommodate the proposed boilers would impact on the openness of the green wedge.
9. Openness is generally held to refer to the absence of development. By introducing additional built form in an area absent of any buildings or permanent structures and characterised by scrub vegetation and scattered tree cover, increasing the size of the proposed outbuilding would unavoidably reduce the site's openness. In order to accommodate the biomass boiler, the submitted plans indicate that the proposed building would be notably larger than that identified for agricultural purposes. Although reference is made by the appellant to it being preferable to include the boilers within the outbuilding than creating a new outbuilding in the green wedge, I am not satisfied that a new building would be needed. Whilst the boilers may be too large for inclusion within the domestic properties, no cogent evidence has been presented to demonstrate that the boilers could not be sited within the existing farmyard and cluster of buildings and barns. As such, due to the large-scale footprint required to accommodate the boilers and storage along with its position, the proposed building would be a noticeable feature which would detract from and cause harm to the openness of the green wedge.
10. Based on the foregoing, whilst I have found that there is a justified rural enterprise need for an agricultural outbuilding, the size and position of the proposed outbuilding required

to include the biomass boilers would harm the openness of the green wedge. I therefore conclude the proposed development would be harmful to the openness and would comprise inappropriate development in the green wedge. It would be contrary to PPW and LDP Policies SP 14 and EN 3.

Very Exceptional Circumstances

11. In considering whether very exceptional circumstances exist which would justify the harm to the green wedge, I have found that there is a justified rural enterprise need for an agricultural building which I afford neutral weight. I have had regard to the importance placed on agriculture in food production as set out in the support letter from NFU Cymru, the incorporation of renewable energy generation and the reduction in pollution through the biomass boilers. As such, the scheme would comply with a number of the sustainable placemaking outcomes set out in PPW. I also note the appellant's reasoning for the proposed siting of the outbuilding, including the assessment of alternatives. However, I conclude that these considerations, when taken together, do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified to the green wedge. Therefore, the very exceptional circumstances necessary to justify development in the green wedge do not exist.

Character and appearance

12. Policies SP 3 and SP 14 of the LDP refer to resisting inappropriate development outside of settlement limits and the protection of the open countryside and Policy BE 1 relates to the design of development. Policy SC 1 refers to exceptions to development outside of settlement limits, which includes proposals associated with agriculture and energy production, providing any new buildings are located adjacent to existing buildings or settlements wherever possible and are of an appropriate scale and form.
13. Whilst the proposed outbuilding would be of a modest height, its length and width would be out of keeping with the smaller footprints of the existing built form at the holding, which predominantly includes narrow barns and farmhouses. It would be sizeable resulting in a large-scale detached building positioned away from the main farmstead. As such, its visual relationship would be more strongly associated with the surrounding countryside and in this context, it would be an isolated and prominent feature.
14. The site is elevated above surrounding land to the east, yet the landform, existing trees and vegetation would provide screening from the initial part of the access track from the B4290. However, as the track approaches the farmyard and rises with the topography of the land, the proposed building would be prominent and obtrusive in the rural landscape. Furthermore, the windows and single doors on the rear elevation would introduce a domestic element to its appearance from this vantage point. Similarly, the context elevations show that whilst the building would be set within the landform when viewed from the north and south, its width along with the boiler flue would result in it being conspicuous in such views. It would consequently erode the rural character of the site and would be at odds with the sparsely developed nature of the surrounding countryside.
15. Due to the topography of the area, the levels of surrounding land within the appellant's ownership varies which limits the options for an outbuilding of the size proposed. However, whilst its siting might support its adaptation to other agricultural uses in the future, no cogent evidence has been presented demonstrating the need for the biomass boilers to be housed within the proposed outbuilding some 50 metres from the domestic dwellings they would serve. I am not persuaded that the delivery and unloading of pellets in bulk could not be carried out at the existing farmyard without harmfully disturbing the living conditions of the farmhouse occupiers. As such, I am not satisfied that the size, scale and form of the outbuilding as proposed is necessary or appropriate in this location.

16. In conclusion, whilst the proposed building would be for agriculture and energy generation, one exception under LDP Policy SC 1, it would not comply with the siting and scale requirements of the policy. It would also fail to conserve the countryside or complement and enhance the character and appearance of the site contrary to the requirements of LDP Policies SP 3, SP 14 and BE 1.

Other Matters

17. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) raise concern over the potential impact on the nearby Crymlyn Bog Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Pant-y-Sais Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, as I am dismissing the appeal, I have not considered this matter further. Matters raised in relation to previous planning applications and candidate site submissions have little bearing on this appeal and I therefore afford them limited weight.

Conclusion

18. I conclude that the proposal before me would be inappropriate development in the green wedge that harms its openness and that there are no very exceptional circumstances to clearly outweigh this harm. The proposed development would also have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area within the countryside. This harm would not be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme, as considered above, and in relation to biodiversity enhancements secured by condition. For the above reasons, and taking into account all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

19. In reaching my decision, I have taken into account the requirements of sections 3 and 5 of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. I consider that this decision is in accordance with the Act's sustainable development principle through its contribution towards one or more of the Welsh Ministers' well-being objectives.

Zoe Baxter

INSPECTOR