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21/04/25

Maidwell with Draughton Parish Council

Supplementary Response dated 21 April 2025

**Re: Planning application WND/2023/0046 Land at Dale Farm,
Harborough Road, Maidwell (Lampport Parish) Northamptonshire, NN6
9JE (21st Feb 2023)**

An application for a substantial dwelling and associated structures under the exception policy of paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") 2024 (formerly paragraph 80 of the 2021 iteration).

Summary

This response supplements the PC's initial response in April 2023, of which a copy is for convenience annexed below. Subject to the comments below, the PC wishes to maintain its overall view set out in the initial response, namely that the application does not meet the standards of paragraph 84 of the NPPF. The new documents from the applicant do not change that overall view and we invite the Planning Committee to take careful account of our earlier response when considering this supplementary response.

The dwelling is not isolated

The further documentation does not address the earlier concern raised by the PC. That the proposed dwelling is not isolated means that it does not qualify for the exception and the application should therefore fail. Please see our earlier comments.

Not clearly a design of exceptional quality

The additional architectural design information does not appear to be adequate to determine whether this will be a design of exceptional quality. The combination of watercolour sketches, bland CAD output, and one drawing indicating type of materials to be used in various locations, is not sufficient to determine design quality. There is no description of the source of the materials

despite the repeated reference to local materials. The additional reporting by the design peer review panel is presumably based on these submitted documents.

It does not appear as though the peer review panel is independent, in that the applicant's architect is the convenor of the panel formed by members of the Traditional Architecture Group. There is no evidence on the website of the assessment by WNC of the design quality, or of an officer's report considering the application under paragraph 84 of the NPPF. It is therefore assumed that an independent review panel will be constituted shortly (see below).

There is a large subjective element to the question of whether the design quality of this development is or is not exceptional. Aspects for consideration by the Committee might for instance include:

- Whether the multi-curved line of the driveway lacks the formality to be expected for a dwelling of this kind. The drive does not, as stated, follow the natural contours as the layout shows that it crosses them. The approach is not axial.
- Whether the entrance courtyard has sufficient presence and welcome for the visitor. The building at the entrance to the courtyard is not on the axis of the house; what is its purpose in the design? The formality in the path to the entertainment area is not matched by formality in the courtyard design. The kitchen garden does not align with the cross axis of the carport/plant room/log store.
- At the back, whether the absence of a vista or focal point for the eye is significant. Ought this house to have a grand staircase to the lower garden rather than one recessed into the upper terrace?
- Is there suitable coherence in the garden design? The formality of the "Formal Lawn" is not apparent; how important is that to the overall assessment?
- Is the line of the house, not following the line of the field boundaries, significant?
- Does the interior meet the NPPF standards? There are no interior perspective drawings showing the experience of the visitor.
- The design of the building elevations and internal layout does not seem to have been improved by the pertinent points raised by the architect's peer review group first meeting.
- The current elevational design seems an odd mix of styles.

Fails to help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas

There is no description of the source of the materials despite the repeated reference to local materials. The proposal could help to "raise standards of design more generally in rural areas" if it enabled a local quarry to be reopened for stone that could also be a source for the repair of many heritage buildings and the sympathetic construction of new buildings.

Other matters

A paragraph 84 application is not common and this is a substantial dwelling in an area designated as a Special Landscape Area. The upcoming elections and organisational changes within West Northants Council means that there could be a number of new councillors on the Planning Committee with little experience of planning matters. The views of a truly independent body (as

opposed to the peer reviews already conducted) would surely be of significant value and benefit before any final decision is made.

The PC would very much wish to attend the Committee meeting when the application comes up for consideration and therefore looks forward to notice thereof in due course.

Signed: 

Clerk to Maidwell with Draughton Parish Council

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ANNEX

Maidwell with Draughton Parish Council initial response in April 2023

Planning application:

**WND/2023/0046 Land at Dale Farm, Harborough Road, Maidwell
(Lamport Parish) Northamptonshire, NN6 9JE (21st Feb
2023)**

An application for a substantial dwelling and associated structures under the exception policy of paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

Summary

Whilst the proposal has merit in terms of the use of the immediate site, its approach, proposed landscaping, and massing of buildings, we do not consider that it should be given full planning consent for the following reasons:

- As proposed the dwelling is not isolated,
- It is not clear from the submission documents that the proposed house is a design of exceptional quality,
- No attempt has been made to show how the proposal will help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas,
- And in its broader setting it could be considered as detrimental to the Special Landscape Area.

In our response we give our detailed reasons for not supporting the application; pose questions for the Local Planning Authority to consider; and make suggestions of ways in which the proposal could potentially be acceptable.

This is a complex and special application. We ask that West Northamptonshire Council consider this at full committee.

Paragraph 80 is reproduced in Appendix A with relevant text highlighted.

An assessment against the Maidwell with Draughton Neighbourhood Plan is attached as Appendix B.

The dwelling is not isolated

The application is actually for two self-contained dwellings, as shown on the plan, and with possibly a third self-contained apartment, and the potential over time for 5 or more dwellings or holiday lets or business units to be created in the proposed out-buildings. The immediate neighbourhood (100m) has two existing dwellings: Blueberry Lodge, and Blueberry House, as well as consent for a dwelling at Blueberry Barn (WNP/2021/0025). The proposal creates a settlement which goes beyond the purpose of paragraph 80. The number of dwellings proposed should require a revised application.

The Local Planning Authority (LPA) is asked to consider the following measures to avoid the creation of a settlement:

- The cancelling of the consent for a dwelling at Blueberry Barn, and
- The requirement to demolish and not replace Blueberry House, and
- A method to ensure in perpetuity (either through conditions, obligations, or legal charge) that the proposed substantial dwelling and associated accommodation and out-buildings remain as the home of a single principal household.

Not clearly a design of exceptional quality

It has to be said that skill and careful consideration have been applied to the design of the internal layouts, the approach route, landscaping and the general massing of structures, but key details are missing to be able to determine that the elevations of the main house are truly outstanding and reflect the highest standard of architecture.

The work of the Traditional Architecture Group's design review panel appears to have contributed to the positive aspects of the design. This panel, however, cannot be considered independent as it is facilitated by a leading member of the design team for this proposal.

Furthermore, from the observations made by this panel, it appears that they were privy to more information and drawings than have been presented for full planning consent.

The submitted plans and elevations are weak in not showing how the building will look (both close up and from a distance) and what materials will be used. Drawings should be provided to show how the main house will look from surrounding viewpoints including the A508.

The design quality of the proposal is crucial to being able to receive consent under paragraph 80. And to some extent the best of designs could overcome some other concerns expressed in this response.

Truly outstanding country houses can and do contribute to the wider landscape (Lamport Hall, Cottesbrooke House, Kelmarsh Hall – all within 3 miles of the site) and they do not need to be old or large, as the recent work of Ben Pentreath Architecture or ADAM Architecture can show.

As submitted it could be argued that the main house elevations lack proportion and harmony (compare for example the entrance elevation of Maidwell Hall) but it is hard to tell.

The description of materials as being dressed stone and rubble stone is inadequate. What stone is proposed? The nearest natural stone operating quarry is 50 miles away at Great Tew in Oxfordshire – its colour and composition are quite inappropriate for the local setting (see Diane Sutherland, *Northamptonshire Stone*, or Alex Clifton Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building*). The choice of materials is fundamental to the assessment of design quality and should not be left until later as a condition of consent.

The CGI elevations on this architect's webpage of this project appear non-descript and add little or even detract from what is submitted, though this observation may not be relevant to the planning process.

What is relevant is that the proposal is given the most thorough scrutiny to determine whether the design quality is exceptional, and we ask the LPA to:

- Seek further detail of the design and materials, especially of the main house,
- Let the Parish Council know what resources and processes the LPA will apply to the design assessment, for example by using an independent design review panel, and
- Seek sufficient information prior to full planning consent to ensure that what is built conforms to what may be approved, and takes care that the inevitable design iterations or minor amendments during the build phase are considered within the integrity of a whole design proposal.

Fails to help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas

No consideration appears to be given in the application to this important factor.

The best of designs can provide an exemplar, but that is of little use if people cannot get a look from a reasonable distance. A suggestion could be that there is a break in the proposed and current planting of trees so that the house could be seen from public bridleway.

A further suggestion that would benefit settlements between Northampton and Market Harborough would be to require the applicant to facilitate the reopening of a local quarry – particularly for ferruginous sandstone, or oolite or calcareous ironstone. Not only would that provide a resource for a proposed prominent new building in the local landscape but also to those who wish to repair historic buildings, extend, or even build new, structures in nearby settlements.

If traditional materials are proposed for this application then perhaps an obligation to take on or provide for craft apprentices from the locality could be of wider benefit, especially to maintain local heritage. There is a shortage of skilled trades in masonry and others.

Potentially insensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area

The site and proposed buildings are not in a discreet location (as are most of the country houses that get consent under paragraph 80 exceptions and its predecessors). It will be prominent from much of the local Northamptonshire Uplands and the Special Landscape Area, especially from the higher elevations in an approximate 2-mile radius e.g., Brixworth, Hanging Houghton, Lamport, Approaches to Maidwell from the south, Haselbech Hill, and the Cottesbrooke estate viewpoints. This may be a fundamental block to the proposal and needs careful consideration by the LPA.

The view from the A508 is essentially of open countryside; the viewer's eye will immediately go to these buildings, if built, which project out significantly in a westerly direction from the existing (smaller) two houses and the agricultural buildings on the north-eastern side. This is in contrast to established country houses e.g. Kelmarsh, Cottesbrooke, Haselbech Hill and other Para 80 properties.

This point is closely related to design quality. A garish stone, poorly detailed outbuildings, materials that age badly, or an overdose of screens, walls, and visual obstacles, for example would all detract from a sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area.

We accept that if the design and execution become truly outstanding then not only could this be sensitive to, but also contribute to, these local area characteristics. And we accept that a house with exceptional quality of design is a better addition to the landscape than the surprisingly large number of modern barns and sheds that seem to be erected, also in prominent positions, without requiring consent.

Other factors

What is the need for the accommodation?

No need for additional housing has been evidenced. Nor has any consideration be given to the longer-term sustainability of use of a substantial country house. There are not many who can afford the upkeep, and as initial owners/builders move on we see many larger country houses become hard to maintain (see Haselbech Hall, less than 1 mile away, empty and not found a user to date), fall into disrepair or put to uses which can detract from the setting, such as holiday lets or a multitude of small business units.

Perhaps the LPA should require that an area of estate land sufficient to provide an income to maintain the house should be permanently attached to the property or a cash endowment in perpetuity to provide income for maintenance of the buildings.

Community Infrastructure Levy

We understand that a new house, particularly with its total floor area proposed, will be required to contribute under CIL even though it might be a replacement for Blueberry House and the lost consent for Blueberry Barn.

We ask the LPA to consider suggestions from this Parish Council and from Lamport and Hanging Houghton PC, if the application is consented, as to how those funds would be applied.

Planning Obligations

The proposal has a much higher net floor area gain than the local affordable housing obligation threshold of 5 new dwellings (say 450m²). The obligation to assist in the provision of affordable housing should be considered by the LPA. There may also be other infrastructure obligations (e.g., parking for the Maidwell primary school, A508 further road calming in built up areas, etc) that could help mitigate the impact of such a development proposal.

We ask the LPA to consider the possible need for local infrastructure provision to be an obligation under any consent.

Appendix A

80. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;
- b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;
- c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;
- d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or
- e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
 - would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

Appendix B

Maidwell with Draughton Neighbourhood Plan (2019)

Assessment of planning application against the Neighbourhood Plan adopted policies

WND 2023/0046 Land at Dale Farm, Harborough Road, Maidwell (Lamport Parish) Northamptonshire, NN6 9JE (21st Feb 2023)

MD1 – Village confines and development principles

The proposal is far outwith the village confines.

MD2 - Protecting Local Green Space

The application neither enhances nor damages the provision of Local Green Space.

MD3 – Protecting Other Important Open Spaces

The application is partly within the M&D Parish rural area and well within the Hemplow Hills, Cottesbrooke and Brington Special Landscape Area.

MD4 – Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character

The West Northamptonshire Joint Core strategies and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) take precedence over the Neighbourhood Plan. See accompanying response.

MD5 – Local Wildlife Sites

The application does not impact on the listed sites and potentially could add to locations for wildlife diversity.

MD6 – Protection of Non-Designated Heritage Assets

This application does not impact on the Neighbourhood Plan Non-Designated Heritage Assets.

MD7 – Housing Provision

Local plan provision for rural exception sites to provide affordable housing has not been addressed. The need for the proposed additional housing has not been articulated, nor has local consultation (yet) taken place.

MD8 – Design and Energy Efficiency

See accompanying response on design quality. Energy efficiency measures appear to be adequately addressed.

MD9 – Local Economy and Employment

It is not clear that the proposal adds to the local economy nor employment, given the existing and unchanging uses and employment resources of the associated land.

MD10 – Protecting Community Facilities

Not relevant.

MD11 – Traffic Management, Transport and Local Connectivity

The proposal is isolated from the main highway and public transport by 2.5km (1.5 miles) and occupiers will be dependent on motor vehicles. The impact of additional traffic on Blueberry Lane and the A508 is likely to be minimal.

Summary

This application is somewhat out of the remit of the Neighbourhood Plan and should be considered against local and national policies, strategies and framework and in particular NPPF (2021) Para 80.