
Appeal Decision

Inquiry opened on 11 February 2014

Site visits made on 11 February and 26 March 2014

by Richard Clegg BA(Hons) DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 29 July 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/A/13/2203327

Field east of Vantage Farm, Bletchley Road, Bletchley

- 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 Harrison Farms against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref 12/01367/EIA, dated 19 March 2012, was refused by notice dated 11 February 2013.
 - The development proposed was originally described as 'agricultural sheds, ancillary buildings, new access, road improvements and a landscape scheme'.
 - The inquiry sat for eight days, on 11-14 and 17-18 February, and 25-26 March 2014.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the erection of six poultry sheds, 16 feed bins, a biomass store, a boiler room and ancillary buildings, including 6 control rooms and an office, the construction of a weighbridge, the formation of a new access, road improvements, a landscaping scheme, and the installation of 212 mono crystalline solar panels on the roof of poultry shed No 6, at a field east of Vantage Farm, Bletchley Road, Bletchley, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 12/01367/EIA, dated 19 March 2012, subject to the conditions in schedule A.

Applications for costs

2. At the inquiry an application for costs was made by Harrison Farms against Shropshire Council and another by Shropshire Council against Harrison Farms. These applications are the subject of separate decisions.

Procedural matters

3. On the application form, the location of the site is given simply as field to east of Vantage Farm. The field is alongside Bletchley Road, Bletchley, and I have identified it accordingly in the appeal details above.
4. With the appeal, the Appellant submitted a revised scheme involving a somewhat reduced scale of development. An environmental statement had accompanied the planning application (Core Document 2 – CD2), and an addendum to the environmental statement and a revised non-technical summary were prepared and advertised before the inquiry opened. The revised scheme involves a similar form of development to that which was refused planning permission, and, following the preparation of the update to the environmental statement, the Council explained that it had no objection to

consideration of the revision. Given that the revised scheme involves a somewhat reduced scale of development, and that an update to the environmental statement has been advertised, I am satisfied that no prejudice would be caused to the interests of any parties by consideration of the revised scheme, and I have dealt with the appeal on this basis.

5. The main parties agreed that the revised scheme should be described as the erection of six poultry units, 16 feed bins, a biomass store, a boiler room and ancillary buildings, including 6 control rooms and an office; the construction of a weighbridge; the formation of a new access; road improvements; a landscaping scheme; and the installation of 212 mono crystalline solar panels on the roof of poultry shed No 6. Subject to consistent reference to the poultry buildings as sheds, I share that view, and I have considered the appeal accordingly.
6. A planning obligation in the form of a unilateral undertaking was submitted by the Appellant (Document A19). The obligation provides for an off-site landscaping scheme. I have taken the environmental statement for this proposal into account, and I am satisfied that the requirements of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 have been met.
7. The main parties prepared a set of core documents. Not all of the items on the accompanying list (Document G1) were submitted as core documents, and the list has been annotated accordingly.

Main Issues

8. I consider that the main issues in this appeal are:
 - (i) The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.
 - (ii) The effect of the proposed development on heritage assets.
 - (iii) The effect of the proposed development on the amenities of local residents and visitors to the area.
 - (iv) The effect of other considerations on the overall planning balance.

The proposal

9. The Appellant operates Vantage Farm and Church Farm (which is nearby at Moreton Say) as a single mixed agricultural business¹, which involves dairy and beef cattle and arable crops. Vantage Farm is currently used to house the followers for the dairy herd during winter, to store fodder and as the arable base. The poultry units would be erected on the south-west part (about 5.58ha) of a large field which lies on the opposite side of Bletchley Road from the farmhouse and adjacent buildings at Vantage Farm. The poultry enterprise would have a capacity of 300,000 broiler chickens per crop cycle: there would be a maximum of 7.6 crop cycles each year with clear-out periods of about six days between cycles.
10. Five of the units (sheds Nos 2-6) would be about 122m in length and about 24m wide, with a modest control room building attached at the south-east end.

¹ Details of the existing operation are given in section 3 of Ms Gourlay's proof of evidence.

The other shed (No 1), would be located at the south-west end of the field. It would be about 67m in length, with an attached office and a control room building, but the same width as the longer buildings. Each of the poultry buildings would have a ridge height of 4.74m and eaves heights of 2.59m. At the back of shed No 1 would be a biomass boiler house and fuel store (also referred to as the energy centre). This would be a taller building, with heights of 8.62m and 6m to the ridge and eaves respectively: the boiler house would be 36.58m in length and 19.59m wide. A total of 16 feed bins, 7.38m in height, would be positioned between the south-east ends of the poultry sheds. Earth mounding would be formed alongside Bletchley Road and the north-east boundary where a new hedge would be planted. Additional hedge and tree planting is also proposed elsewhere around the site.

11. The main appeal site extends across a farm track into a field to the south-west where access would be taken from the road to Moreton Say. The junction of this road with the A41 comprises a separate appeal site, where it is intended to widen the minor road to enable large vehicles to pass. In addition alterations to signage and white-lining are proposed on the A41 to each side of the junction. Off-site work also includes tree and hedge planting on land around the main site within the Appellant's control.

Planning policies

12. The Development Plan comprises the Shropshire Council Core Strategy (CD16), and the saved policies of the North Shropshire Local Plan and the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Joint Structure Plan which remain in force following the adoption of the Core Strategy. Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy is concerned with the countryside and Green Belt. The appeal sites are in the countryside but not in the Green Belt. This policy explains that new development in these areas will be strictly controlled. However, (subject to further controls which apply to the Green Belt) proposals on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits. Particular mention is made of several types of proposal in this regard, including agricultural development. Proposals for large-scale new agricultural development are expected to demonstrate that there would be no unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.
13. To comply with Policy CS6, proposals should be designed to a high quality using sustainable design principles. Amongst other requirements, all proposals should protect, restore, conserve and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. Development should also be appropriate in scale, density, pattern and design, taking into account the local context and character. The Council intends to develop and diversify the Shropshire economy (Policy CS13). Particular emphasis is placed on a range of measures, including, in rural areas, recognition of the continued importance of farming for food production, supporting rural enterprise and diversification of the economy. Policy CS17 requires that environmental assets are protected and enhanced. Development proposals should protect and enhance the diversity, high quality and local character of the natural, built and historic environment, and contribute to local distinctiveness. In the rural area, Policy CS4 seeks to focus investment into community hubs and clusters as part of a series of measures aimed at making communities more sustainable: development should not be allowed outside these settlements unless it complies with policy CS6.

14. It is common ground between the Appellant and the Council that none of the saved policies of the Local and Structure Plans are relevant to the appeal. However, at the inquiry, reference was made to the allocation of land for employment purposes on the edge of Market Drayton under Policy E3 of the Local Plan (Document G2). This site, which extends into the countryside to the north of the A53, lies about 2.5km east of Bletchley. Planning permission has been granted for the erection of new manufacture and distribution buildings for the Muller Dairy on this land (Documents A6 and A12).
15. The Council is preparing a Sites Allocations and Management of Development Plan (SAMDev), and the Pre-Submission Draft was published in March 2014. Policy MD1 identifies Bletchley, Longford, Longslow and Moreton Say as a community cluster in the Market Drayton Area. Suitable small-scale employment uses will be permitted, under Policy S11.3(i) to deliver around 6ha of employment land in Market Drayton, the surrounding community hubs, community clusters or appropriate rural locations. The emerging SAMDev is at a relatively early stage in its preparation, and consequently its content carries only limited weight.

Reasons

Character and appearance

16. The appeal sites lie within national landscape character area 61 – the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. The extent of the character area is identified in Countryside Character Volume 5 (CD29) which includes a description of the landscape character. Much of the plain is gently rolling, fields are bounded by full, well-maintained hedges and hedgerow trees are plentiful. Large farmsteads are frequent and the general appearance is referred to as one of a lush, productive and well-managed farmed landscape. Of greater relevance is The Shropshire Landscape Typology (CD30). The landscape type which includes the sites is the principal timbered farmlands. In the typology, these areas are described as predominantly rolling lowland landscapes, with occasional steeply undulating valley sides, characterised by a mosaic of agricultural land. Within the landscape types, more detailed information is available for individual landscape description units (LDUs).
17. LDU SP/78 is the area of principal timbered farmlands which includes the appeal sites and the small settlement of Bletchley². The assessment report refers to an area of intensive pastoral land-use interspersed with occasional arable production. Natural features tend to be concentrated around areas of parkland and there is a variable enclosure pattern and poor quality thorn hedgerows. The overall strength of character and the condition of the LDU are described as moderate, and its overall sensitivity as low. There are variations within the LDU itself. Whereas further to the north there is a pattern of smaller fields, larger fields are evident to the east and south-east of Bletchley³, including the site of the proposed poultry sheds. They would be erected on the south-western part of a larger field, and comparison with historical maps indicates that hedgerows have been removed within this field⁴. In the immediate locality, therefore, I consider that the condition of the landscape is

² The Shropshire Landscape Assessment LDU Report for SP/78 is at Appendix A11 to Mr Moss's proof and Appendix 1B to Mr Champion's proof.

³ The aerial photograph at Appendix A12 to Mr Moss's proof shows the field pattern in this part of LDU SP/78.

⁴ See, for example, the extracts from the maps circa 1879 and 1900 included in Appendix 19 to Mrs King's proof, and the field boundary overlay map at her Appendix 20.

low-moderate. A short distance to the south-west, the A41 runs through the LDU. This is a busy road, which runs on a stretch of dual carriageway from Bletchley to the north-west. The road is a discordant feature in the landscape, and reinforces my view that the sensitivity of the area around Bletchley is low. In reaching this view, I have taken into account that the landscape encompasses the setting of several heritage assets (below, paras 33, 36, 38, 40-42, 46).

18. A landscape and visual assessment (LVIA) was included as part of the Appellant's environmental statement. For the inquiry, a more detailed exercise was undertaken. On behalf of the Council, its landscape witness undertook his own assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the development, in which he suggested that there were shortcomings in the Appellant's first LVIA. However it was the second LVIA which was relied upon by the Appellant at the inquiry. A note of caution was sounded by the Council about the prospect of vertical distortion in photomontages, but there is no substantive evidence before me that the visual evidence submitted by the Appellant is unreliable in this respect. Criticisms were also directed at the Council's work; in particular it was suggested that it lacked clear criteria. This exercise did not purport to comprise an LVIA, but it nevertheless provided an assessment of the effect of the appeal proposal. I have found the exercises undertaken by both main parties for the purpose of the inquiry of assistance in considering the effect of the appeal proposal in respect of the first main issue.
19. The proposal, involving the construction of a row of poultry sheds, together with the biomass building, feed bins and hardstanding, would clearly represent a significant change to the main appeal site, resulting in the loss of the south-western part of a large field, and the encroachment of built development into the open countryside at the edge of Bletchley. The field rises to the north and the development would be cut into the site at the north-east end, with mounding formed inside a new hedgerow on this side and alongside Bletchley Road. A second hedgerow would be planted inside that on the boundary with the road to Moreton Say. There would be a loss of the south-western part of the existing field, but, taking account of the mitigation measures and the condition and sensitivity of the landscape around Bletchley, I consider that the development would have a moderate adverse effect on the site and the character of the settlement.
20. Insofar as the wider LDU is concerned, I share the view of the Appellant's landscape witness that there would be an adverse effect of minor-moderate significance in both the medium and long-term. It is clear from representations that the countryside around Bletchley is valued by local people, but it is not covered by any qualitative designation, and the information before me does not indicate that it has a value of more than local importance. This part of the principal timbered farmlands is of lower quality due to hedgerow loss and the creation of larger fields. Moreover large groups of farm buildings are not uncommon in the locality: to the north-east, and within LDU SP/78, the farmsteads of Moreton Hall, Audley Brow and Styche Farm are all located above the lower level of the riverside meadows (LDU SP/17)⁵. Further to the east and south-east, in the vicinity of the A53 are other large buildings, including a haulage depot and the existing Muller Dairy premises. I am mindful

⁵ The extent of LDU SP/78 is shown on an aerial photograph at Appendix A12 to Mr Moss's proof. This plan, which was not disputed by the Council, shows the three farmsteads to the north-east in LDU SP/78.

that planning permission has been granted for new buildings for the dairy business on the west side of the A53 (above para 14). These locations are at least 2km from the appeal site, they are not in the principal timbered farmlands and they relate to the town of Market Drayton and its environs rather than the area around Bletchley. The developments here do not provide support for the appeal proposal.

21. Localised widening would occur at the junction of the road to Moreton Say and the A41. This would involve an increase in the width of the carriageway of the minor road from 3.5m to 6m, with a new length of hedgerow planted to the north-west side of the road. Additionally a new hedgerow would be planted on the bank above the verge to the A41 on this side of the junction. The proposed works in this location are modest in nature and would not materially alter the form of the junction. Other than a minor adverse effect immediately following the construction period, I consider that this element of the appeal proposal would be of neutral significance to the landscape.
22. There would be some limited hedgerow removal to accommodate the formation of the new access, but this would be more than offset by additional hedgerow and tree planting. In response to my questions, the landscape witnesses of the Council and the Appellant respectively indicated that the planting proposed would achieve its principal mitigating effects after 15 years or 10-15 years. The additional planting around the perimeter of the main site and in the vicinity would be consistent with the character of the LDU, and would represent a benefit of limited localised significance. Electricity transmission lines which run above the site would be placed underground, and this work would similarly represent a limited localised benefit.
23. I turn now to consider the visual effects of the proposed development. Bletchley Road and the road to Moreton Say run along opposite sides of the main site. Tall hedges restrict views into the site, and both boundaries would be strengthened, with the formation of mounding to the north-west and a second hedgerow to the south-east. Whilst users of these roads would be aware of the presence of the poultry units, the biomass building and feed bins, particularly during the winter months, the extent of screening would limit the scale of the change in view. The roads are not busy, and I agree with the Appellant's landscape consultant that there would be an adverse effect of minor-moderate significance from both sides of the site.
24. The A41 is a busy main road, but it is separated from the main site by an intervening field and a group of buildings on Bletchley Road. There would be no significant view of the proposed poultry development for drivers and passengers travelling from the north-west, since a cluster of buildings extends in this direction from the sharp bend in Bletchley Road, and their presence would curtail views towards the main appeal site. The approach from the south-east is open, but traffic is generally moving freely and at speed, permitting only fleeting glimpses above the bank towards the appeal site. There would be a greater awareness of the development by people using the lay-by about 150m south-east of the junction with the road to Moreton Say. Given the nature of the A41, I anticipate that most users of the lay-by would simply be taking a break on a longer journey, rather than parking to appreciate the countryside, and overall I consider that the sensitivity of these receptors is low.

25. The road leading to the village of Longford from the A41 is a cycle route (Document A4). From here views are available towards the main appeal site through gateways and gaps in the roadside hedgerow. These viewpoints are about 1.4km from the field at Vantage Farm, which is behind the hedgerows alongside the road to Moreton Say. It is likely that the upper parts of buildings and feed bins would be discernible, but at this distance and with trees and hedgerows on intervening land, I do not consider that they would materially alter the view. The poultry development would have a negligible effect from this road.
26. There are several public footpaths in the vicinity of the appeal sites⁶. Footpath 0220/7 rises up to a low ridge line from the lay-by, and affords clear views over the A41 towards the intended position of the poultry sheds. A photomontage submitted by the Appellant's landscape consultant⁷ indicates that at year 10 the built development on the appeal site would be apparent from this elevated vantage-point. However the backdrop of trees, the strengthening of hedgerows on boundaries in front of the buildings, and the use of recessive colours would help to assimilate the development into the landscape, and I consider that the adverse effect on visual amenity would be of moderate significance.
27. Footpath 0220/3 runs from Bletchley Road across the northern part of the field which contains the main appeal site. A new hedgerow would be planted on the north-east boundary of the poultry development, with a mound rising behind this within the site. The extent of the built development would nevertheless be apparent from the footpath, with flues, feed bins and the biomass building projecting above the boundary treatment. Although some feed bins in the north-east corner may break the sky-line, the higher land to the south-west and south should remain visible beyond the development. With the establishment of the hedgerow, which would incorporate a number of trees, I do not consider that the structures on the appeal site would appear unduly prominent to users of this footpath, and it would have an adverse effect of moderate significance on visual amenity.
28. The effect from other nearby footpaths would be less marked. The footpath to the east (0220/16) descends from the road to Moreton Say, and the upper parts of the proposed development would only be likely to be seen over a short distance close to the road⁸. Footpath 0220/5 runs to the north-west of the main appeal site, beyond Bletchley Road. On a stretch of the footpath between Vantage Farm and Ivy Cottage, views are available towards the site. The upper part of the biomass building and other structures would be visible, but the footpath is set back from the road beyond an intervening field, and in addition to the roadside hedgerows there is a hedgerow with trees on the nearer field boundary. These features would all serve to significantly mitigate the view from this relatively short length of footpath. From both these footpaths, the effect on visual amenity would be of minor significance.
29. I have also considered the effect of the development on the views from nearby dwellings. The two nearest properties, Vantage Farm and Trevor House, are

⁶ The public footpaths are identified on the plan at Appendix A5 to Mr Moss's proof.

⁷ Photomontage for viewpoint 7 showing scheme B at year 10, in Appendix A13 to Mr Moss's proof.

⁸ The Appellant's landscape consultant disputed the location of a photograph in figure 6 to the proof of the Council's landscape consultant which is described as showing the view from footpath 0220/16 towards the road to Moreton Say (Mr Moss's rebuttal proof). At the site visit on 26 March, the main parties agreed that the photograph was not taken from the public footpath.

both in the ownership of the Appellant. The farmhouse is occupied by Mr M Harrison who is involved in running the Appellant's farming business, and by Ms Gourlay who expects to fulfil the role of systems manager for the poultry operation. Trevor House would be occupied by the manager of the poultry enterprise. Accordingly, whilst there would be views from first floor level towards the site from both houses, the sensitivity of their occupiers would be low. The Hollies is set back from Bletchley Road to the north of the site. There are tall hedgerows between the site and the house, and even from first floor windows I consider that the effect of the proposed development would be of only minor significance. Limited views of Bletchley Court and Bletchley Manor are available from the site, and it may be possible to see the poultry development from these properties. However they are on the far side of the A41, and the arrangement of windows indicates that the site would not be readily seen in direct views from Bletchley Manor. In direct views from Bletchley Court, the development would be seen set back beyond the group of buildings at the bend in Bletchley Road. The effect from these properties would be negligible.

30. The Appellant drew my attention to several other large poultry developments in Shropshire, but the full circumstances of these schemes are not before me, and each proposal must be assessed on its own merits. Although such developments are acceptable in principle in rural locations, the appropriateness of a particular scheme will depend to a great extent on individual matters concerning the particular scheme and site, and these other developments do not add any material weight to the Appellant's case.
31. The proposal would offer some limited benefits to the landscape through the undergrounding of electricity transmission lines and hedgerow and tree planting. Otherwise there would be a minor short-term adverse effect at the junction of the A41 with the road to Moreton Say, moderate harm arising from the loss of the main appeal site and the effect on the character of Bletchley, and a minor-moderate effect on the landscape of the locality. Insofar as visual amenity is concerned, the proposal would have a moderate adverse effect from the footpath south of the A41 and that to the north of the main site, and a minor-moderate impact from the adjacent roads. The effect from other footpaths, the A41 and the nearest dwelling not associated with the Appellant would be minor. I conclude that the proposed development would have certain minor-moderate adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area. In consequence there would be conflict with Policy C6 of the Core Strategy which requires that all development should at least protect the natural environment. However these effects would not be so severe as to amount to unacceptable adverse environmental impacts as referred to in Policy C5 of the Core Strategy. Nor would the limited adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area represent a material conflict with the core planning principle in paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Heritage assets

Bletchley Manor

32. Bletchley Manor is a grade II listed building, and it is located on the south-west side of the A41, which separates it from most of the buildings in Bletchley. The building was previously a farmhouse and it is still occupied as a dwelling. Built

as a double pile house of close studded timber frame construction in the late sixteenth century, it is an imposing property with a gabled front elevation. The Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) entry refers to several phases of construction⁹, and a third gabled bay was added on the south-west side of the building. Notwithstanding these works, many features of interest survive giving it evidential value. The house and the manor of Bletchley were purchased by the Corser family in 1712 which remained for about two hundred years. I heard that the Corsers were an important local family of putative gentleman farmers who were responsible for reorganising agricultural practices in the area, and this association contributes to the historical value of Bletchley Manor. The Council suggested that the building is of the highest significance, as set out in its schedule¹⁰, which category may include grade II listed buildings if their significance has not been recognised in their listing. I note that this category refers to assets of national or international importance, which are of more than special interest, and the information before me does not indicate that Bletchley Manor is of such importance. Grade II listed buildings would normally be identified as of high significance according to the Council's schedule, and I consider that this is the appropriate category for the building.

33. The NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which the asset is experienced, pointing out that the extent of the setting may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Bletchley Manor is a distinctive feature in the open landscape to the south-west of the A41, and as a former farmhouse, the contribution of the surrounding fields to its significance is important. The Appellant's heritage consultant argued that the setting of Bletchley Manor is restricted to the north by the A41, which was widened to a dual carriageway and realigned past Bletchley Manor during the last century. I disagree: whilst this busy main road cuts a sharp line through the landscape, it does not prevent experience of the Manor from nearby on the north-east side. However, I do not consider that the setting of Bletchley Manor extends as far as the main appeal site. From this field, it is possible to make out part of the first floor and roof of the listed building, but, as photographs 27, 28 and 30 in Mrs King's evidence and photograph 13 in Mr Moss's evidence show¹¹, this is a restricted view at some distance and I do not consider that Bletchley Manor is experienced as an entity from the appeal site or the adjacent roads. From the footpath and the field rising from the lay-by on the A41 to a low ridge the poultry units and associated structures would be apparent (above, para 26). From here a small part of Bletchley Manor may be glimpsed beyond Bletchley Court and tree cover, but it is indistinct and not in the same direction of sight as the main appeal site¹². I do not consider that the presence of the poultry development on the appeal site would have any adverse effect on the setting, or the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of Bletchley Manor.

Bletchley Court

34. Bletchley Court lies to the rear of Bletchley Manor. Originally it comprised a 'U'-shaped block of farm buildings, which have been converted into dwellings. These buildings have been treated by the Council as being part of the listed

⁹ The list description and the HER entry are in Appendix 15 to Mrs King's proof.

¹⁰ Table 1 in Mrs King's proof.

¹¹ Appendix 17 to Mrs King's proof and Appendix A7 to Mr Moss's proof.

¹² See photographs 24 & 25 in Appendix 17 to Mrs King's proof and the photographs from viewpoint 7 in Appendix A7 to Mr Moss's proof.

building at Bletchley Manor, and listed building consent was granted for their conversion to residential use. However the buildings are not mentioned in the list description, and the Appellant disputes whether they have listed building status. There is common ground between the main parties that Bletchley Manor and Bletchley Court were in the same ownership at the date of listing in 1987, and that they formed part of the same farmstead. There is a wall on the boundary with Bletchley Manor. Extracts from Ordnance Survey maps dated 1879, 1902 and 1954 indicate the presence of a physical feature in this position¹³, but photographs taken by the family of former owners of Bletchley Manor around the 1980s-1990s show a gap in the wall at the back of the farmhouse and a further break closer to the road (Document L3). There was a clear physical connection between the farmhouse and farmyard. A letter submitted at the inquiry from a former occupier of Bletchley Manor referred to cheese being made in the house and subsequently that space being used as a farm shop (Document O10). However the carrying out of certain activities related to the farm within Bletchley Manor does not indicate that the buildings in the farmyard served the purposes of the principal building at the date of listing, or at a recent time beforehand, in a necessary or reasonably useful way; in other words that they fulfilled an ancillary role to the farmhouse, which had a residential use. The information before me is insufficient to demonstrate that Bletchley Court should be considered as part of the listed building.

35. The buildings at Bletchley Court are described by the Council's heritage witness as good examples of the multi-functional buildings typical of northern Shropshire model farms, and the Appellant's heritage consultant acknowledged that they are of local historical importance. Accordingly, I have considered Bletchley Court as a non-designated heritage asset. The buildings were erected by the Corser family and date from the mid-nineteenth century. There was criticism from the Appellant's heritage consultant that conversion has not properly respected the character of the original buildings. However the overall form of the three ranges remains and the pattern of openings on the main elevations and the continuity of the central open space acknowledge the former agricultural use. The buildings thus have evidential value. Their form is a response to evolving agricultural practices, and historical value also derives from their association with Bletchley Manor and the Corser family. Whilst Bletchley Court has aesthetic value, particularly as part of a group with Bletchley Manor, public views of its more important front elevations are restricted as they face inwards behind Bletchley Manor.
36. I consider that the setting of Bletchley Court is similar in extent to that of Bletchley Manor (above, para 33). It is somewhat more visible from the main appeal site, but this is a restricted view at some distance. From the field and footpath to the south-west of the A41, Bletchley Court is forward of the Manor, but in a different direction of sight from the proposed poultry development. I do not consider that the main appeal site forms part of the setting of Bletchley Court, nor that the proposed development thereon would have an adverse effect on the setting, or the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of this heritage asset.

¹³ Figures 13, 16 & 17 in Appendix 1 to Mr Johnson's proof.

The Royal Oak

37. The Royal Oak is a grade II listed building: this house is part of the main group of buildings in the settlement, but it is positioned to the north-west of the sharp bend in Bletchley Road, and it is not on the same stretch of road as Vantage Farm and the main appeal site. The building dates from the end of the sixteenth century and was previously a farmhouse. It is a distinctive timber-framed structure with jettied gables, built on an 'H'-shaped plan. I agree with the Council that The Royal Oak is a key building in the settlement when viewed from the A41, and I note that the Appellant's heritage consultant refers to it as a landmark building. It is appropriately recorded as being of high significance by the Council.
38. Although a former farmhouse, The Royal Oak is separated from the agricultural landscape by the A41 and other buildings. Its setting includes the roads which run past the property and the openness of this aspect makes an important contribution to the significance of the listed building. To the north-west and rear of the house are Royal Oak Barns, now converted to dwellings and another dwelling, The Old Smithy, is close by to the south-east, and the setting is more constrained on this side of the local road. From an elevated position to the south-west of the A41, photographs 25 & 26 in Mrs King's evidence show that the upper part of the gables of The Royal Oak may be discerned, but there is no appreciation of the house itself from this vantage point, and the limited glimpse of the listed building is in the direction of Bletchley Court rather than the site of the proposed poultry sheds. I have reached the view that the new buildings would not fall within the immediate setting of The Royal Oak, and the setting, and the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of this important asset would not be adversely affected by the development.

Royal Oak Barns

39. The Royal Oak Barns were originally part of the farmstead with The Royal Oak. As with Bletchley Court, the buildings have been treated by the Council as being part of the adjacent listed building, and listed building consent was granted for their conversion to residential use. This position is disputed by the Appellant. The Council advised that the barns and the farmhouse were in the same ownership after the date of listing, and a photograph taken about 1914 appears to show a gate in the wall at the back of the farmhouse (Document A1). However, as with Bletchley Court, there is nothing before me to indicate that the use of the barns was ancillary to the farmhouse. The available information is insufficient to demonstrate that Royal Oak Barns should be considered as part of the listed building at The Royal Oak.
40. The barns were built in the nineteenth century, forming a yard with the rear of the farmhouse. They were built in brick with certain architectural details, and the main parties agreed that the conversion to residential use has been sympathetic to their original agricultural character. These buildings have local importance as a non-designated heritage asset. Their position in Bletchley and their setting is similar to that of The Royal Oak. The proposed development of the main appeal site would not lie within the setting of these buildings, and it would not detract from their setting, or the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of the converted barns.

The Old Smithy

41. The Old Smithy is situated at the sharp bend on Bletchley Road. The house faces towards that part of the road which is parallel with the A41, and there are outbuildings to the rear. These have been converted and alterations have been made to the main house. I note that the Appellant's heritage consultant comments that none of the alterations have been particularly destructive, and with The Royal Oak and Royal Oak Barns it forms an attractive and interesting group of buildings. On this basis The Old Smithy has moderate significance. Whilst the main aspect is towards the A41, the setting of this corner property extends up Bletchley Road, and includes the south-west corner of the main appeal site. The buildings proposed on the appeal site would be set back between at least 35m from the road behind mounding and there would be an area of woodland tree planting in the south-west corner. Having regard also to the tall roadside hedgerow, I do not consider that the proposed development would detract from the setting of The Old Smithy, or the contribution that setting makes to its significance as a heritage asset.

Vantage Farmhouse

42. The farmhouse is close to the south-west corner of the main site, which clearly falls within its setting. Vantage Farm has been included in the Historic Farmsteads Characterisation Project, and the information before me indicates that the farmhouse dates from at least the eighteenth century. However it has been extensively altered and buildings in the adjacent yard are contemporary portal frame structures rather than of traditional construction. I consider that the farmhouse has low significance as a non-designated heritage asset. There are fields to the north-east and rear of the farmhouse, and there would continue to be an open aspect immediately in front of the building. Agricultural buildings are often situated in close proximity to farmhouses, and the buildings on the appeal site would be set back from Bletchley Road. Nevertheless the extent of the proposed development, including a series of large modern poultry sheds, would be only a short distance from the front of the farmhouse, and it would impinge on the setting of this building. In assessing the effect of proposals on non-designated heritage assets, paragraph 135 of the NPPF requires that account should be taken of the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset in question. Having regard to the low significance of the asset, the extent of mitigation in the form of mounding and planting proposed around the poultry units (above, para 10), and the opportunity to secure a recessive finish to the proposed buildings and structures by means of a condition, I consider that the development would cause only limited harm to the setting, and the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of Vantage Farmhouse.

Trevor House and The Hollies

43. Both these houses are on Bletchley Road. Trevor House is situated to the south-west of the farm buildings adjacent to Vantage Farmhouse and it is, therefore, not far from the main appeal site. The Appellant's heritage statement¹⁴ identifies it as an early twentieth century addition to Bletchley, and this has not been disputed by the Council. The property is a detached house of pleasant appearance with a mock timber-framed gable, but the information submitted by the main parties together with my observation from Bletchley

¹⁴ Appendix 1 to Mr Johnson's proof.

Road, indicates that there is insufficient of interest about Trevor House to warrant consideration of the building as a heritage asset.

44. I have reached a similar view about The Hollies, which is situated to the north of the site, beyond the settlement. The HER entry indicates that this former farmhouse has no apparent alteration¹⁵. However the main parties both refer to alterations and, although the house is set back from Bletchley Road, a conservatory is visible on the south-west corner which detracts from its character.

The settlement of Bletchley

45. The Council argued that the settlement of Bletchley itself should be considered a non-designated heritage asset. It is suggested that there is evidential value from the fabric, layout and grouping of the buildings; historical value from its association with various landowners, particularly the Corsers; aesthetic value, with the settlement having the character of a working village; and communal value. The settlement is of variable quality: it includes two listed buildings and several properties which merit recognition as non-designated heritage assets, and to which I have referred earlier (above, paras 34-36, 39-42), but there are also buildings such as Westwood House, Fairfield and Corner Ways, which appear to have been substantially altered. In addition, the yard which lies between the minor road and the A41, and the utilitarian buildings of the stone masons and restoration premises on Bletchley Road detract from the character and appearance of the settlement. The realignment of the A41 has resulted in the physical separation of Bletchley Manor, Bletchley Court and the Castle Inn from the larger part of the settlement. The dual carriageway is an uncompromising feature, which brings the added intrusion of the traffic it carries. Whilst there is certain value in the association with the Corser family, they appear to have been a family of local importance and the limited information concerning their association with the settlement as a whole is insufficient to substantiate heritage credentials. I find that, on the information before me, the settlement of Bletchley does not merit consideration as a heritage asset.

Church of St Margaret, Moreton Say

46. The church is in the settlement of Moreton Say, about 0.7km to the north-east of the main appeal site. As a grade II* listed building, it is a structure of particular significance. The church has a twelfth century core, with the tower and the nave having been restored in the eighteenth century. There is no church in Bletchley, and I heard that St Margaret's serves that settlement. The building can be seen in its entirety within Moreton Say, where the farmstead of Church Farm is situated on the opposite side of the road, and it can also be appreciated from positions a short distance to the south-west, south and south-east of the settlement, as shown in photographs included in Mr Johnson's evidence¹⁶. However beyond the field which contains the main appeal site, the lie of the land falls to Moreton Say, and with the exception of the upper part of the tower, the listed church is concealed in views from the site. Walking towards Moreton Say along the footpath which runs to the north of the site, more of the tower becomes visible, although near the gate in the northern boundary of the field, the presence of large agricultural buildings at Moreton

¹⁵ Appendix 15 to Mrs King's proof.

¹⁶ Photographs 2, 3 and 5 in Appendix 2 to Mr Johnson's proof.

Hall Farm is apparent close to the church. From these positions, the poultry development would not only be behind the viewer, but beyond the new hedgerow and mounding. I have found that the proposed development would not be unduly prominent in views towards the appeal site from the footpath (above, para 27), and I do not consider that, out of view, it would diminish the value of views of the church tower from within what would still be an extensive open landscape. Whilst the upper part of the brick tower is discernible from the appeal site, and, at a greater distance, from the low ridge to the south-west of the A41, I do not consider that the setting of the church extends to include these areas, from where St Margaret's Church cannot be experienced in a meaningful way. Consequently the setting, and the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of the listed church would not be adversely affected by the appeal proposal.

Conclusions in respect of heritage assets

47. There are several heritage assets in Bletchley, and the grade II* listed building of the church of St Margaret is nearby in Moreton Say. The proposed poultry units would be within the setting of The Old Smithy and Vantage Farmhouse, both of which are non-designated assets. There would be no adverse effect on the setting of The Old Smithy, and only limited harm to the setting of Vantage Farmhouse. The development would be outside the setting of the other heritage assets, and it would not detract from their appreciation or significance. I conclude that the proposed development would cause limited harm to the setting, and the contribution that setting makes to the significance, of Vantage Farmhouse. Policies CS6 and CS17 of the Core Strategy require protection of the historic environment, and there would, therefore, be conflict with these provisions. The limited harm involved, however, would not amount to the unacceptable adverse environmental effects referred to in Policy CS5.

Effect on amenities

48. Considerable concern has been expressed by Bletchley Residents Group and local residents about the prospect of emissions from the proposed development, and reference is made to odour, gases, dust particles, endotoxins and micro-organisms. The Council's reason for refusal refers to the fear of failure of systems, although it acknowledged that the risk of such an eventuality would be no greater than at any other such site.
49. Air quality and amenity considerations are covered in the environmental statement. It is acknowledged that the process of rearing broiler chickens has the potential to affect air quality through the generation of dust (including fine particles known as PM10s), and the emissions of airborne pollutants (ammonia being the main substance of concern) and odour from poultry manure. The poultry units will incorporate ventilation systems, with dust baffles fitted to the exhausts, and controls on temperature and humidity. Odour mitigation measures include a sealed feed delivery system and the refrigerated storage of fallen stock, whilst the transportation of used litter in covered vehicles is expected to assist in minimising dust emissions.
50. The proposed operation is subject to control under The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. An environmental permit was granted in 2013 (CD23). Bletchley Residents Group and individual members of the public raised concerns about emissions, odours and manure spreading with the Environment Agency, in respect of the permit application,

and the matters raised are addressed in the Environment Agency's decision document (CD22). The decision document explains that an ammonia screen for human health has been undertaken, and that it is not considered that the environmental assessment level is likely to be exceeded. Measures to manage emissions are considered to represent best available techniques. The permit is subject to conditions: these include requirements that the activities shall be operated using the techniques described in the submitted documentation, and that emissions shall be free from odour at levels likely to cause pollution outside the site unless the operator has used measures to prevent or minimise the odour.

51. An odour impact assessment has been prepared for the Appellant¹⁷. Odour concentrations are expressed as European odour units per m³ of air (oue/m³). The report sets out descriptions of how odours may be perceived at different concentrations. From 3-5oue/m³ odours may be detectable, but they would generally be described as faint, and from 5-10oue/m³ odour levels may become annoying if persistent and/ or unpleasant. Modelling of emission dispersion from the proposed development identifies only two dwellings where the mean annual 98th percentile odour concentrations would exceed the 3oue/m³ threshold¹⁸: at Trevor House the predicted level is 3.03oue/m³ and at Vantage Farmhouse the predicted level is 4.47oue/m³. Both these dwellings would be occupied by persons involved in the poultry enterprise (above, para 29), and I anticipate that they would be more tolerant of odour emissions. The assessment was not disputed by the Council¹⁹. I note that the modelling exercise does not include cleaning out of the sheds. However the main doors of the sheds would be on the south-east elevations, away from the dwellings in Bletchley, and the Environment Agency has taken cleaning out into account in considering the application for the environmental permit. The Agency considers that the mitigation measures proposed represent best available techniques to manage bioaerosol emissions, but as a precautionary approach the permit includes a pre-operational condition requiring a bioaerosol management plan. Should power for the ventilation system fail a back-up generator would be available.
52. The Residents Group referred to two instances where the Environment Agency had prosecuted in respect of odour emissions from poultry operations in Lincolnshire²⁰. However both of these sites involved older and less efficient buildings. My attention was also drawn to complaints of odour at a relatively recent poultry unit at Great Ness in Shropshire²¹: I heard that here the management plan had been amended in response to complaints. These instances do not indicate that similar problems are likely to arise at Vantage Farm. Moreover the full details of these existing poultry operations and the nature of the odour problems are not before me, and each proposal must be judged on its own merits.
53. The environmental permit does not control the spreading of litter on land outside the site, but the decision document explains that this activity is subject to the Code of Good Agricultural Practice (CD53). Paragraph 391 of the code

¹⁷ Appendix 11 to Ms Gourlay's proof, as amended by Document A5.

¹⁸ The figures for the revised scheme, referred to as scenario B, are in table 2b of Document A5.

¹⁹ At the inquiry, a local resident queried the position for the highest concentrations of odour, shown at the north-eastern end of the main appeal site. This map is figure 5A in Document A5, which relates to the original proposal: figure 5B is relevant to the revised scheme, and it does not show this effect.

²⁰ Appendices 1 and 2 to the Residents Group's letter of 26 October 2013.

²¹ Documents O4 and O5.

specifies that solid manure, slurry or dirty water should not be spread in fields close to and upwind of houses.

54. Although not referred to by the Council, concerns have been raised by the Residents Group and local residents about noise from the poultry operation at Vantage Farm. Manoeuvring of vehicles, loading and unloading would take place on the far side of the site from the settlement, and as vehicular access would be taken from the road to Moreton Say, vehicles travelling to and from the site should not generally travel past dwellings in Bletchley.
55. A noise impact assessment undertaken for the Appellant considered the effect of noise from ventilation fans, breakout noise from the poultry sheds, on-site vehicle movement and vehicle noise on the road network on nearby dwellings²². The dwellings included in the assessment were Vantage Farmhouse, The Hollies, houses off Bletchley Road and houses in Moreton Say. Background noise is principally caused by traffic movement, particularly from the A41 in respect of those dwellings off Bletchley Road. In accordance with the approach set out in British Standard BS 4142, the rating levels of activity relating to the poultry operation were compared with background noise levels. The assessment took account of night-time noise. At each receptor the predicted rating levels were lower. Calculations of cumulative noise in the original scheme indicate no change other than of 0.1dB for the night-time average in Moreton Say. Further work taking account of changes in the number and type of fans in the revised scheme predicts specific noise levels lower than background noise. BS 4142 explains that a difference of around +5dB is of marginal significance.
56. I appreciate that the local community has genuine concerns about the effect of the development on living conditions and health. Suggestions were made that the development could have a detrimental effect on the viability of the Castle Inn and Moreton Say Primary School. However it is the evidence concerning the appeal proposal, rather than references to poultry operations elsewhere, which is most relevant, and this indicates that the proposed development should not cause an unacceptable worsening of conditions for both residents and visitors to the locality. The environmental permitting regime provides reassurance that the poultry development should not be incompatible with a good standard of living conditions in Bletchley and the surrounding area. I note that the Governors of the Primary School withdrew their earlier objection to the proposal stating that concerns had been satisfactorily addressed²³. I conclude that the proposed development would not unacceptably worsen the amenities of local residents or visitors to the area, and that it would not conflict with the objective of Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy to maintain countryside vitality, nor the core planning principle in paragraph 17 of the NPPF to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

²² Appendix 11.1 to the Environmental Statement as amended by Annex 3 of the Addendum.

²³ Letter of 3 November 2013 from the Headteacher of Moreton Say Primary School to The Planning Inspectorate.

Other considerations

Investment

57. The cost of developing the poultry enterprise at Vantage Farm is estimated as being at least £4,100,135²⁴. This sum includes the cost of the sheds, feed bins, solar panels, heating and lighting systems, groundworks and landscaping. Ms Gourlay explained that the schedule is not exhaustive; for example there is no figure given for the cost of diverting the electricity transmission lines which cross the main site. The project represents a substantial investment in the rural economy of this part of Shropshire. It is consistent with Policy CS13 of the Core Strategy, which, amongst other matters, places particular emphasis on recognising the continued importance of farming for food production and supporting rural enterprise in seeking to deliver sustainable economic growth and prosperous communities.
58. Proposals which relate to the provision of Policy CS13 concerning food production and rural enterprise must also comply with Policy CS5. I have found that there would be no conflict with the provisions in that policy concerning environmental impact and the character of the area (above, paras 31 & 47). The investment in the area would be a local economic benefit and I consider community benefits below (paras 66-70). Policy CS5 provides for the retention and appropriate expansion of established businesses, and, in similar vein, paragraph 28 of the NPPF promotes the development of agricultural businesses. Although the Council suggested that the development would involve the establishment of a new business, the evidence before me is that Harrison Farms is a mixed farming business (above, para 9), and the poultry enterprise would simply represent another element of the overall business. I give significant weight to the investment in the local economy arising from the appeal proposal.

Jobs

59. Evidence on behalf of the Appellant concerning employment was given by Ms Gourlay, the wife of Mr M Harrison of Harrison Farms, and by Mr Maxfield, the planning witness. Mr Maxfield deferred to Ms Gourlay in respect of evidence about the operational side of the proposal. In paragraphs 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 of her proof, Ms Gourlay gave details of the employment generated by the poultry development: a full-time manager, a full-time assistant manager, a part-time stockman, a part-time systems manager, a part-time administrator, and additional oversight duties for Mr M Harrison and additional duties associated with the boiler for existing labour. She agreed at the inquiry that 3.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs would be created.
60. Ms Gourlay addressed the reason for the establishment of a poultry enterprise, In her evidence prepared for the inquiry, she explained that the dairy system at Church Farm had reached its limits, and that it was not sustainable in the long-term. It was necessary to decide on the best way forward for the business: however, as the next generation of the family had no desire to enter dairying, there was little point in considering that as the best option. She continued by commenting that any alternative agricultural enterprise needed to have the potential to generate enough income to replace that currently generated by the dairy herd. Poultry farming was chosen, and at paragraph

²⁴ A breakdown of the cost is give at Appendix 15 to Ms Gourlay's proof.

4.11 of her proof, Ms Gourlay refers to the decision to opt for broiler production as an alternative to dairying.

61. A more nuanced position was taken at the inquiry, with the Appellant suggesting that there was no guarantee that the dairy enterprise would end, and that this was no more than a present intention. However the evidence before me indicates that it is the clear intention that the poultry enterprise would replace dairying. It is necessary, therefore to consider not only the effect of the establishment of the poultry enterprise, but also the loss of dairying on employment. Ms Gourlay explained that there are 3.5 FTE jobs associated with the dairy, equivalent to the number which would be created. The inquiry also heard that, due to the inter-relationship between the various parts of the business, existing jobs would remain if the dairy enterprise was terminated. I understand that staff may well work in different parts of the overall business, but it would be surprising if there were no reduction in employment at all from the loss of a 260 strong dairy herd.
62. The dairy enterprise would be phased out over a five year period, and during this period I accept that there would be an increase of 3.5 FTE jobs due to the appeal proposal. In the long-term, however, the net increase is likely to be somewhat lower.
63. I have reached a similar view in respect of indirect employment in other businesses. The Appellant has calculated that 126,865 man-hours per year would be generated in activities such as production of raw materials, processing of birds and site cleaning²⁵. Whilst the number of man-hours relating to the rest of the enterprise may remain broadly similar following the end of dairying, some intended contractors for the poultry operation are already providing services to Harrison Farms. There would, of course, be a greater positive effect during the period when the dairy is being phased out. In addition, during the construction of the poultry sheds, the Appellant has calculated that the project would provide 35,139 man-hours of work²⁶. I consider that the Appellant has over-stated the level of employment which would be generated by the development. Nevertheless I attach important weight to the creation of additional employment opportunities, which would be consistent with Policies CS5 and CS13 of the Core Strategy.

Business diversification

64. The current position in respect of the dairy enterprise is not sustainable (above, para 60). Diversification into poultry farming has the potential to enable the business to adapt to changing circumstance and continue to operate successfully in Bletchley. This matter carries significant weight.

Food supply and security

65. The British Poultry Council has reported that the annual consumption of poultry meat is 1.5 million tonnes and is expected to grow; currently it accounts for 49% of the primary meat market²⁷. In a speech in 2013, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs referred to the challenge of producing more food²⁸. The spatial vision for the Core Strategy intends that

²⁵ Appendix 16 to Ms Gourlay's proof (scheme B).

²⁶ Appendix 17 to Ms Gourlay's proof.

²⁷ Para 9.2 and Appendix 20 of Ms Gourlay's proof.

²⁸ Appendix 2.8 to Mr Maxfield's proof.

agriculture and farming will continue to be a prominent and successful economic sector. About 4,733 tonnes of chicken meat would be produced annually at Vantage Farm²⁹, and the role of the development in contributing to meeting food needs carries some weight in support of the proposal.

Work for young people

66. The reference to providing work for a young person appears to relate to Mr Harrison and Ms Gourlay's daughter³⁰. Once that position is filled in an enterprise with a relatively small number of jobs, the opportunity to repeat such an appointment may not reoccur for some considerable time, and I give only limited weight to this matter.

Education

67. It is intended to offer a placement to a student from Harper Adams University. In the absence of a mechanism to ensure delivery of this benefit, it merits no more than some additional weight. The viewing gallery for groups, including school children, would simply be a canteen at the end of one of the sheds, from where a window would enable a view into the poultry shed. Given the primary purpose of this facility, its use as a viewing gallery would be a benefit of only limited weight.

Support for local facilities

68. Trevor House is intended to be the residence of the farm manager. It was suggested that the household would make use of local facilities, such as the school, village hall and public house. However I do not consider that the farm manager and his/ her household would be more likely to use the facilities available locally than any other occupants of Trevor House.

Highway safety

69. Access to the poultry sheds would be taken from the road to Moreton Say, about 140m from its junction with the A41. Given the proximity of the access to the main road, I anticipate that heavy goods vehicles travelling to and from the site and most other vehicles would use the A41. At present the width of the minor road at the junction is insufficient to allow two such vehicles to pass. The Council's Highway Officer has also commented that there are practical constraints in respect of the simultaneous use of the junction by a car and a large vehicle³¹. The presence of a vehicle waiting in the carriageway of the A41, which is a well-used main road, would present a threat to highway safety. Widening of the junction would not only avoid this problem in connection with the poultry enterprise, but it would provide an improvement in highway safety to the wider community, representing a community benefit in accordance with Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy. The Highway Officer described the widening of the minor road as a significant highway safety gain, and I share this view.

70. A local resident expressed concern about slow vehicles negotiating the junction with the A41, where traffic is travelling at speed. He suggested that speed could be reduced by a condition requiring the use of white lines to reduce the dual carriageway to single lanes. Visibility requirements take account of speed, and

²⁹ Paragraph 1.2 of the revised non-technical summary to the Environmental Statement.

³⁰ Paragraph 9.3.3 of Ms Gourlay's proof.

³¹ Highway consultation response on the planning application (CD12k).

I note that there is no objection from the Council's Highway Officer to the visibility available at the junction: on the contrary it is considered that safety would be improved following widening of the minor road. In view of the likely pattern of vehicular movement arising from the proposal, with vehicles predominantly travelling between the site and the A41, I do not consider that there would be a threat to highway safety on the local network of rural roads.

Biodiversity

71. The management of several ponds (one of which would be reinstated) and the introduction of features such as bat boxes and artificial nests would be of benefit to biodiversity in accordance with Policy CS17 and they provide limited weight in support of the proposal. These measures could all be secured by condition.

Sustainable design

72. The appeal proposal would include solar panels, a biomass boiler and sustainable drainage system, all of which would be consistent with the intention of Policy CS6 of the Core Strategy to secure the use of sustainable design in principles. Whilst these features point to the environmental sustainability credentials of the poultry enterprise, the construction of new development in accordance with current planning policies does not represent a benefit as would be achieved by, for example, the installation of renewable energy technology as a replacement for conventional systems. There would be a limited benefit from the export of surplus electricity to the national grid.

Proposed poultry development at Acton Pigot

73. Bletchley Residents Group referred to a proposal for a poultry farm at Acton Pigot in Shropshire, which was dismissed on appeal in 2013 (CD46B). I note that the appeal decision refers to the site being about 500m from the hamlet and that the proposal would form an isolated development. In that case the Inspector found that there would be a negative impact on the landscape which would only partially be reduced by an artificial landform, and that the development would cause significant harm to the setting of heritage assets at Golding. Each proposal must be considered on its own merits, and this appeal decision does not indicate that the proposal before me would be an unsuitable form of development at Bletchley.

The planning obligation

74. The planning obligation would provide for the implementation of the off-site landscaping scheme, together with the replacement of any trees or shrubs which are lost. The locations covered by the scheme are all within the Appellant's ownership. As such the off-site landscaping could be secured by means of a condition as part of the overall landscaping scheme. Paragraph 21a-011 of the PPG makes it clear that where the same objective can be met by imposing a condition and entering into a planning obligation, the former approach is to be preferred. Accordingly, the planning obligation is unnecessary to make the proposal acceptable in planning terms. The planning obligation does not, therefore, meet the statutory tests, and it would be unlawful to take it into account in determining the appeal.

Conditions

75. I have already referred to conditions concerning landscaping and biodiversity features. To ensure that the development would be in keeping with its surroundings, details of materials and external lighting should be submitted for approval. In the interest of highway safety, the junction improvement, the access to the main site and the areas to be used by vehicles within it should be implemented before the poultry operation is brought into use. Details of foul and surface water drainage should be submitted for approval to ensure that the development would be satisfactorily drained. It is important that the development is carried out in accordance with the specified plans for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.
76. Whilst it is appropriate for certain biodiversity features to be included in the scheme, the extent of these works does not necessitate a habitat creation and management plan. Bat boxes and artificial nests can be covered by individual conditions, and the management of the ponds should be included in the landscape management strategy. Conditions restricting agricultural permitted development rights and requiring the implementation of the environmental management plan were also included in the suggested list (Document G4). The PPG (at paragraph 21a-017) makes it clear that conditions restricting permitted development rights should only be used in exceptional circumstances, and no such evidence is before me. The management plan³² relates to odour, dust, flies and vermin, and the Residents Group suggested conditions concerning odour and waste management. These matters are covered by the environmental permit, and the spreading of manure is subject to the Code of Good Agricultural Practice. Conditions would not, therefore, be necessary in respect of the above matters.

Conclusions

77. The NPPF sets out three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The scale of the investment in the poultry enterprise, the associated job creation (albeit not to the extent suggested by the Appellant), and the diversification of the business are all factors which would contribute to build a strong economy. Social gains would principally be achieved through the role of the development in helping to meet food needs and improving highway safety. There would be certain minor-moderate adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area, and limited harm to the setting of Vantage Farmhouse and the contribution which setting makes to the significance of that building. However the undergrounding of electricity transmission lines, tree and hedgerow planting and biodiversity measures would all constitute environmental benefits, and the incorporation of sustainable design features in the development itself would strengthen its environmental credentials. Overall I am satisfied that the proposal would represent a sustainable form of development.
78. Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy supports proposals which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character. In sustaining a working farm, the development would enhance the vitality of the countryside, and the environmental benefits identified above (para 77), although of minor localised significance, would nevertheless in themselves provide enhancement to its character. I note, moreover, that the specific provision in the policy for

³² Appendix 28 to Ms Gourlay's proof.

agricultural development merely requires that large-scale proposals should have no unacceptable adverse environmental effects. The minor-moderate harm in this case would not amount to such unacceptable effects. In similar vein to Policy CS5, Policy CS6 states that development proposals should protect, restore, conserve and enhance the natural, built and historic environment and Policy CS17 refers to proposals protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. Paragraph 4.81 of the explanation to Policy CS6 clarifies the requirement therein: new development should complement and relate to its surroundings to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment. Insofar as Policy CS17 is concerned, paragraph 7.7 explains that all new development should take account of the features which generate local distinctiveness. The development would bring certain environmental benefits and it would not give rise to unacceptable adverse environmental effects. Accordingly I consider that it would be consistent with the objectives of Policies CS5 CS6 and CS17.

79. I have found that, although the development would not unacceptably worsen the amenities of local residents or visitors to the area, there would be certain minor-moderate adverse effects to the character and appearance of the area, and limited harm to the setting of Vantage Farmhouse and the contribution which setting makes to its significance. There are, however several benefits associated with the scheme. The scale of the investment in the local economy, the opportunity for the farming business to adapt to changing circumstances through diversification, and the improvement in highway safety all carry significant weight. The creation of employment opportunities is an important consideration, and the contribution to food supply provides some support for the proposal. Additionally, education opportunities, work for young people, landscaping, the undergrounding of electricity transmission lines, biodiversity features, and the export of surplus electricity would be benefits of limited weight. I conclude that the totality of benefits outweighs the harm arising from the proposed development
80. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Richard Clegg

INSPECTOR

Schedule A: Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans listed in schedule B.
- 3) No development shall take place until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the buildings and structures hereby permitted, including colour finishes, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 4) None of the buildings hereby permitted shall be brought into use until a landscape management and protection strategy has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The strategy shall cover the landscaping scheme on plan ref 1409.01 and management of the existing landscape, and shall include a programme for implementation and maintenance. The approved strategy shall be carried out in accordance with the programme for implementation and maintenance.
- 5) No development shall take place until an external lighting scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall be designed to take account of the advice on lighting included in The Bat Conservation Trust booklet *Bats and Lighting in the UK*. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme, which shall be retained thereafter.
- 6) No other development shall take place until the junction of the unclassified road to Moreton Say with the A41 has been altered in accordance with the scheme shown on plans refs BL-LP-400 Rev B and BL-TS-401 Rev C, and with a drainage scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
- 7) No other development (with the exception of the junction alteration referred to in condition No 6) shall take place until the vehicular access to the site of the poultry units from the unclassified road to Moreton Say has been constructed in accordance with the scheme shown on plan ref BL-LP-400 Rev B, and with a drainage scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
- 8) None of the buildings hereby permitted shall be brought into use until hardstandings and a turning area have been constructed in accordance with the site plan ref HARO10-SK007 Rev H, and with a drainage scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The drainage scheme shall include a plan which identifies the full extent of the hardstandings.
- 9) None of the buildings hereby permitted shall be brought into use until bat boxes suitable for nursery or summer roosting for small crevice dwelling bat species have been installed on the site in accordance with a scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall identify locations for the boxes which are at least 4m above ground level in non-illuminated areas. The

development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme, which shall be retained thereafter.

- 10) None of the buildings hereby permitted shall be brought into use until artificial nests suitable for small birds such as robins, blackbirds and sparrows, have been installed on the site in accordance with a scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme, which shall be retained thereafter.
- 11) No development shall take place until a scheme for separate foul and surface water drainage works has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall include full engineering details of the swale and flow control structure. None of the buildings shall be brought into use until the drainage works have been provided in accordance with the approved scheme.

Schedule B: Approved plans³³

HAR010-02 – Location plan

HAR10-SK007 Rev H – Site plan

PA232/01 Rev C – Floor plans and elevations of poultry sheds, elevation of feed bin

HAR10-SK009 Rev B – Floor plan and elevations of biomass building

HAR10-SK008 Rev E – Site sections

1409.01 - Landscape plan (CD4.F4)³⁴

BL-LP-400 Rev B – Highway alterations and access arrangements

BL-TS-401 Rev C – Traffic signs and road markings

³³ The list of amended plans in the statement of common ground includes plan ref HAR10-SK10 Rev B showing a drainage layout. As this is entitled *Illustrative drainage layout* it is not included in the schedule of approved plans.

³⁴ The list of amended plans in the statement of common ground includes three core documents which show versions of the landscape plan ref 1409.01. The two based on aerial photographs are not included in the schedule.

APPEARANCES

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mr J Easton of Counsel	Instructed by Legal Services, Shropshire Council.
He called	
Mr J W Campion	Director, John Campion Associates Ltd.
BA(Hons) BLD MSc CMLI	
MCIEEM	
Mrs M E King BA(Arch)	Senior Conservation and Design Officer,
RIBA IHBC	Shropshire Council.
Mr A Gittins BA(Hons)	Principal Planning Officer, Shropshire Council.
MA	

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mrs D Sharples LLB(Hons)	Partner, Hewitsons Solicitors.
She called	
Mr A Moss BA(Hons) BPI	Director, Allan Moss Associates.
MRTPI DipLA CMLI	
Mr S Johnson BA PGDip	Mayfield CA Ltd.
FRSA FSAScot IHBC	
MIFA	
Ms M Gourlay	Wife of Mr M Harrison of Harrison Farms.
Mr G Maxfield	Senior Associate, Roger Parry & Partners LLP.
BSc(Hons) MRICS	
Mr M Harrison ³⁵	Partner, Harrison Farms.

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Mr A Webb	Bletchley Residents Group.
Professor R Beal	Local resident.
Mr D Ellis	Licensee of the Castle Inn.
Mrs N Goulter	Local resident.
Mrs M Joyce	On behalf of Mrs Cummings, the parent of a child at the local school.
Mrs C Wellon	Local resident.

THE LPA'S DOCUMENTS

- L1 Bundle of documents concerning Bletchley Court and the barns at Royal Oak.
- L2 Costs decision relating to appeal ref APP/L3245/A/12/2187514 for four poultry units and associated development at Acton Pigot.
- L3 Email dated 18 February 2014 from the Castle Inn and bundle of photographs concerning Bletchley Manor and buildings now forming Bletchley Court.
- L4 Elevations and photographs of buildings now forming Bletchley Court.
- L5 Judgement in The Queen (on the application of R Hayden) v Erewash BC and S T Kelly.
- L6 Letter dated 18 June 2014 concerning Document A19.

³⁵ Mr Harrison did not give formal evidence in support of the Appellant's case, but he contributed to the session on conditions.

THE APPELLANT'S DOCUMENTS

- A1 Photograph of the Royal Oak.
- A2 Shropshire Landscape Character Assessment – Coding and Matrices and landscape description reports for SP/17 and SP/18.
- A3 Heritage consultation responses on planning application ref 13/03847/EIA for four poultry sheds and associated development at Aston Rogers.
- A4 Map of cycle routes in the vicinity of Market Drayton.
- A5 Revision to Ms Gourlay's Appendix 11 - Odour modelling.
- A6 Outline planning permission, approval of reserved matters and elevations for the erection of a manufacturing facility at Muller Dairy North Site, Shrewsbury Road, Market Drayton.
- A7 Points of clarification note.
- A8 Mr Moss's rebuttal evidence.
- A9 Amendments to Ms Gourlay's appendices 2 and 31.
- A10 Photograph of Guilden Down Poultry Farm under construction.
- A11 Photograph of Shadwell Hall Poultry Farm.
- A12 Plans relating to manufacturing facility at Muller Dairy North Site.
- A13 Extract from Visual Representation of Windfarms – Good Practice Guidance 2006.
- A14 List of poultry farms in the principal timbered farmlands.
- A15 Appendices to the Appellant's costs application.
- A16 Letters dated 21 March 2014 from mfg Solicitors LLP and Mrs J E B Walker and Mrs B E Home concerning the execution of the planning obligation.
- A17 Schedule of dimensions of buildings at other farms.
- A18 Appendices to the Appellant's response to the Council's costs application.
- A19 Planning obligation, certified by the Council.
- A20 Judgement in The World Society for the Protection of Animals v The Welsh Ministers and Others.
- A21 Comments concerning Document A19.

OTHER PARTIES' DOCUMENTS

- O1 Mrs Cummings's statement.
- O2 Bletchley Residents Group's statement.
- O3 Letter dated 16 December 2013 from the NFU concerning residential development near poultry units. Submitted by Mr Webb.
- O4 Email dated 15 May 2013 from the Environment Agency concerning odour at a poultry site at Great Ness. Submitted by Mr Webb.
- O5 Letter dated 10 December 2013 from the Environment Agency concerning proposed poultry buildings at Great Ness. Submitted by Mr Webb.
- O6 Mr Ellis's statement.
- O7 Mrs Goulter's statement.
- O8 Mrs Wellon's statement.
- O9 Aerial view of Bletchley Manor.
- O10 Undated letter from J R Ellis concerning Bletchley Manor and buildings now forming Bletchley Court.

GENERAL DOCUMENTS

- G1 List of core documents.
- G2 Extracts from the North Shropshire Local Plan.

- G3 Coloured plan of landscape types from The Shropshire Landscape Typology (Core Document 30).
- G4 List of suggested conditions.
- G5 Suggested itinerary for accompanied site visit.
- G6 Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan – Pre-Submission Draft – March 2014.
- G7 Extracts from Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan – Revised Preferred Options – July 2013.