



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 July 2025

by **C Billings BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/25/3361144

Berrisford Barns, Sytch Road, Brown Edge, Staffordshire ST6 8QX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr A Beardmore against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- The application Ref is SMD/2024/0172.
- The development proposed is demolition of existing buildings, construction of two dwellings and associated works to include a comprehensive landscape scheme.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the planning application was determined a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in December 2024. The parties have had opportunity to comment on this as part of their appeal submissions and so, any references in this decision are to the revised Framework.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and relevant development plan policies, including the effects on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and,
 - if inappropriate development, whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development in the Green Belt

4. The appeal site is within the Green Belt, outside any development boundary. It lies to the rear of dwellings which front onto Sytch Road, with an existing vehicular access therefrom. There are a number of existing buildings and structures and some areas of hardstanding within the appeal site. This includes single storey brick buildings, a polytunnel and a mobile home. At the time of my site visit, I observed that the polytunnel (building F) was principally being used for storage purposes and that two of the brick buildings (buildings H and D) were in use for the stabling of horses, while buildings A and B and the mobile home appeared to be vacant. It is

undisputed by the main parties that the appeal site is partly a previous horticultural nursery and partly used as livery stables (sui generis use).

5. Paragraph 154 of the Framework sets out that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the stated exceptions applies. The appellant asserts that the proposed development falls within exception g) in that it would be limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
6. However, the definition of previously developed land in the glossary of the Framework excludes land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings. Therefore, the horticultural elements of the appeal site do not fall within such definition.
7. From the evidence provided and my site observations, the livery part of the appeal site is not a significant proportion of the overall site. It includes two small single storey brick buildings toward one end of the appeal site and some areas of land adjacent to them. While the volumetric calculations provided of the existing buildings compared to the proposed dwellings show there would be an overall reduction in built volume as a result of the proposal, this also includes buildings last used in agriculture, which do not comprise previously developed land. Additionally, even though part of the proposed development would be on land that is considered to be previously developed, much of the proposed development would be beyond such areas and buildings.
8. Consequently, the proposal would not just involve the partial or complete redevelopment of previously development land and so, would not satisfy exception g) of paragraph 154 of the Framework. Furthermore, even if the proposal would meet some of the criteria under paragraph 155 of the Framework, as acknowledged by the appellant, the proposal would not meet all of the required criteria a. to d. of paragraph 155 to be regarded as not inappropriate. Although, I will go on to consider local housing need below. As the exceptions under paragraphs 154 and all the criteria of 155 of the Framework would not be met in this instance, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
9. Turning to the effect on openness, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Furthermore, the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The proposed dwellings would be much bulkier and taller than the low level, small, individual single storey existing buildings within the appeal site, even though in volumetric terms the overall scale of the new dwellings would be less than that of all of the existing buildings combined. Also, some of the existing structures, including the polytunnel and mobile home are less permanent in nature and form than the proposed dwellings. Therefore, by reason of the scale, form and nature of the proposed development, it would have a harmful effect on the openness of the Green Belt, both in spatial and visual terms.
10. Although part of the appeal site is previously developed land and the proposal would reduce the amount of hardstanding within the appeal site, could be considered to comprise the effective use of land and, that the proposal includes the

creation of a significant area of landscaping on the edges of the development, such matters would not reduce the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness. Also, even though there would be some benefits derived from such, including some visual enhancement, this would not remove the harm caused to the openness by reasons of the scale and form of the proposed residential development or in spatial terms.

11. A considerable proportion of the Council's district is Green Belt land, which consequently is likely to restrict the delivery of housing to meet local needs in such areas. However, where the appeal site is located to the west of Brown Edge, it forms part of a wider area of Green Belt between this settlement and the major conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent. As a result, based on the evidence provided and from my site observations, this area of land in this location appropriately serves the important purposes of the Green Belt including, to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another and, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
12. In view of the above, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would cause harm to the openness and purposes of the Green Belt, in conflict with the Framework and Policies SS2, SS10 and H1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020) (LP). Such LP policies, amongst other matters, do not support inappropriate development within the Green Belt, including housing, only allowing exceptions as defined by Government policy.

Character and appearance

13. The Landscape and Visual Guidance document (LVG), prepared by Trevor Bridge Associates Ltd, sets out that the defining characteristics of the landscape character area for the Potteries and Churnet Valley Landscape Character Area would not be compromised by the proposed development, due to the largely developed, brownfield nature of the site and lack of notable landscape qualities therein. The LVG also sets out that the proposed landscape scheme will provide positive benefits to the landscape character.
14. However, despite that there are existing buildings and areas of hardstanding within the appeal site and is located just beyond the settlement of Brown Edge, the site is in the open countryside and has a general rural setting. Also, while some of the existing buildings within the appeal site may be old and in a state of disrepair, they are generally small, low level, single storey buildings, and most have a rural character, which is not obtrusive in their countryside setting.
15. Even though the proposed dwellings would be of limited 1.5 stories height, they would be taller and bulkier in scale compared to the existing buildings. Additionally, the proposed dwellings would introduce a more suburban, form and layout of development, along with the domestic use of the land around them, which would not be akin to the rural character of the site and open countryside setting.
16. The proposed landscaping areas would diminish some wider views of the proposed dwellings from certain public vantage points. However, the proposed development would have greater visibility compared to existing buildings, due to the scale, form and nature of the dwellings and subsequent domestic use of the land. This would be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural setting of the area, particularly when viewed from the public right of way (PRoW) along the access driveway in front of the new dwellings, from where the dwellings would be prominently visible. Consequently, the LVG finds that the impact of the development

will be medium – high sensitivity to those using the PRow closer to the site, even though such impact would diminish further away along this footway.

17. Even though the new dwellings would be close to and seen against the backdrop of the rear of existing dwellings fronting onto Sytch Road, with residential gardens to two sides, they would not follow the prevailing character of road frontage dwellings on this side of Sytch Road. Rather they would be built away from Sytch Road, encroaching further into the open countryside, fronting toward open fields. Also, even though an adjacent neighbouring dwelling has an outbuilding to one side of the site, which the appeal dwellings would not project further out than, this is a single storey building, not of the same scale, height and character as the proposed dwellings.
18. The proposed landscaping scheme would, once established, provide screening of the new development from certain directions at certain times of the year. Although, despite proposed native species planting, the landscaping area would be of a layout and form not particularly characteristic of natural landscape features, typically found in this part of the open countryside. Furthermore, it would add extensive landscape planting to the edges of the appeal site, which currently is sparser of vegetation. Therefore, while the proposed landscaping would provide some visual and biodiversity enhancements to the existing site per se, and partly enclose the site, it would appear harmfully contrived and unsympathetic to the character and appearance of the appeal site and rural setting of the surrounding area.
19. In view of the above, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, in conflict with Policies SS10, DC1 and DC3 of the LP which, amongst other matters, require development to have regard to the character of an area, including the landscape character and setting.

Other Considerations

20. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reasons of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the development, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
21. The proposal would provide new dwellings, which would contribute to boosting the supply of homes in an area where the Council can only demonstrate 3.58 years supply, as of April 2023. Yet, two additional dwellings would not make a significant contribution and so, this carries only moderate positive weight.
22. The proposed development would be adjacent to the existing settlement of Brown Edge, in a sustainable location, with services and facilities accessible nearby and via a local bus service. Additionally, the proposal would provide social and economic benefits through its construction and occupation, including supporting local services and facilities. Although, due to the small scale of the scheme these benefits carry limited positive weight.
23. Brown Edge is identified as a large village in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Topic Paper Site Allocations- Rural Areas (2015) and while the Council's Green Belt Review indicates potential development sites for housing on the edges of the settlement, it does not include the appeal site. Therefore, even if other potential

allocated development sites may encroach further and may have a more harmful effect on the Green Belt compared to the appeal proposal, this does not weigh particularly in favour of the proposed development, which is in a different location, with a different site context. Therefore, I give limited weight to this consideration.

24. The appeal site benefits from an established vehicular access and so, no new access is required to serve the proposed dwellings. The site is not identified as being best and most versatile agricultural land. Also, the main parties do not dispute the design of the proposed dwellings, the bat survey confirms there would be no harm to protected species and, the proposed biodiversity net gain would be significant, although no mechanism is in place to secure its delivery and long term maintenance. Consequently, even though these matters do not weigh against the proposal, I give limited weight to such considerations.

Green Belt and Planning Balance

25. The proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the development would harm the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. The harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness and the loss of openness, attracts substantial weight. In addition, I have found the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, which also carries considerable weight.
26. The benefits of the appeal proposal, neither individually nor cumulatively, clearly outweigh the totality of the harm arising from inappropriateness and any other harm in this instance. Therefore, the very special circumstances required to justify the development have not been demonstrated.
27. Even though there is unmet housing need, paragraph 11d)i sets out that the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Footnote 7 includes policies relating to land designated as Green Belt. Therefore, my findings in respect of Green Belt harm provides a strong reason for refusing the development for the purposes of paragraph 11d)i of the Framework and so, paragraph 11d)ii is not engaged in this instance.

Conclusion

28. For the above reasons, the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and material considerations do not indicate a decision should be made other than in accordance with it.
29. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

C Billings

INSPECTOR