



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 April 2026

by **C McDonagh BA (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 April 2026

Appeal Ref: 6005296

Land off Alwoodley, Edge Lane, Endon ST9 9DG

- 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 G Blood against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref is SMD/2025/0297.
 - The development proposed is a riding arena.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are as follows:
 - Whether the proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the green belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.
 - The effect of the proposal on the living conditions of occupiers of adjacent dwellings.
 - Whether any harm to the green belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposed development.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate in the Green Belt

3. The proposal entails the installation of a horse riding arena, which would be formed of an excavated area filled and surfaced with silica sand. The arena would be 40 metres (m) x 20m in area and enclosed by a post and rail timber fence of some 1.5m height. Access to the arena would evidently be taken from an existing field gate off Edge Lane to the west and would not require resurfacing.
4. Paragraphs 154 and 155 of the Framework list exceptions to the presumption against development in the green belt. Of relevance to the proposal are the exceptions given in paragraphs 154(b) and (h). The former relates to the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport and recreation among others as long as

the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 154(h) lists other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. For the purposes of this appeal this includes 154(h)(ii) for engineering operations and 154(h)(v) for material changes in the use of land such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation.

5. Policy SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (LP) (adopted September 2020) states that strict control will be exercised over inappropriate development in the green belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by government policy.
6. Paragraphs 154(b) and (h)(v) are linked insofar as they offer exceptions to both the facilities required for outdoor recreation and the material change of use of the land for the same purpose. Either way, alongside the exception at 154(h)(ii), all require that the openness of the green belt is preserved and to ensure there is no conflict with the purposes of including land within the green belt.
7. From my observations on the site visit, the proposed location of development was clearly visible from Edge Lane at various points, and while the land undulates, the fencing in particular would be readily apparent from such public vantage points. This is also demonstrated in the submitted section drawings. Although it may be of standard size for its purpose, the land area required for the arena would be significant which would be highlighted by the fence. Moreover, in enclosing an area of this size, particularly in the middle of an open field, it would by definition reduce openness. As such, in both spatial and visual terms, the proposal would harm openness of the green belt.
8. Furthermore, one of the purposes of the green belt as set out in paragraph 143 of the Framework is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. I note that there is an existing stable building which has been granted planning permission retrospectively¹ since the appeal was lodged. Be that as it may, the stable is located close to the existing field boundary and is of significantly smaller size. I also understand that it had a historic permission. The arena would be of significantly larger area and introduce built form into what would otherwise be an open area of agricultural land other than the stable building. This would therefore constitute encroachment into the countryside.
9. To conclude on this matter, the proposal would not preserve openness and would conflict with the purposes of including land within the green belt. It would therefore be inappropriate development, contrary to paragraph 154 of the Framework and policy SS10 of the LP.

Character and Appearance

10. The appeal site is part of a larger grassed field which at the time of my site visit included the aforementioned stable building and fences erected for a riding area. This was evidently carried out without the need for planning permission and did not include excavations or resurfacing. The field is bound by dry stone walls with a smaller section of more modern boundary fencing to the southeast. The site lies between the settlements of Endon and Brown Edge and has a rural character formed by historic field patterns and narrow roads. The landscape undulates

¹ SMD/2025/0517

significantly with the appeal site located between higher and lower ground which offers long range views to the east.

11. The proposal would include excavations and fences required to level and enclose the land to enable its use as a riding arena. Although I understand that excavations would be kept to a minimum, and landscaping may temper views to the north, the proposal would harmfully manipulate and alter the local landform while the modern appearance of the fences would jar with the open and agricultural character of the local area as well as the dry stone wall boundaries.
12. Overall, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, contrary to policies DC1 and DC3 of the LP. These seek to ensure respect and enhance local landscape character. This would also conflict with paragraph 135 of the Framework which advises that development should be sympathetic to local character.

Living Conditions

13. The proposal would evidently be located within 40m of the nearest residential properties to the east. I observed on my site visit that the landform of the field within which the appeal proposal would be located slopes towards these properties while mature trees are located between the dwellings and appeal site.
14. Notwithstanding my assessment of the proposal regarding the other reasons for refusal, I cannot agree that the fences of the arena would be imposing to occupiers of these properties at a distance of some 40m. There appeared to be few windows facing this direction and views from the garden areas of either property appeared unlikely. Even so, the arena would be observed through trees lining the field boundary and the idea that this would be so imposing so as to harm the living conditions of the occupiers of these properties is absurd.
15. Moreover, any noise at this distance from horses exercising or the people riding them in enjoyment would be minimal and normal background noise one would associate with many rural areas. This would also diffuse through the open nature of the area and partially blocked by trees. Horses riding along country roads such as Edge Lane would not be unusual and there is nothing before me to indicate that this would be harmful.
16. To conclude, there would be no harm to the living conditions of occupiers of these properties with regards to outlook or noise. This would accord with policy DC1 of the LP which seeks development proposals to protect the amenity of the area, including through outlook and noise. This would also accord with paragraph 135 of the Framework which advises proposals should ensure a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Other Considerations

17. I have found that the proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the green belt as it would not preserve its openness and would conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and the Framework is clear in paragraph 153 that substantial weight is given to any harm to the green belt. Development proposals should not be approved in these scenarios except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the green

belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

18. In this case, I have also found other harm resulting to the character and appearance of the area. Alongside the substantial weight attributed to harm to the green belt, harm to the character and appearance of the area is attributed further significant harm. Taken together, these factors weigh against the scheme considerably.
19. Set against this harm, the proposal would provide outdoor recreational opportunities to the appellant and their family. While they would no doubt derive great enjoyment from this activity, the benefits would be private in nature and worthy of little weight in the planning balance.

Other Matters

20. I understand that another application² was submitted for a riding arena with different dimensions within the same field and after consideration, this was refused. While the proposal before me may well be the least harmful option, I must consider it as presented to me, which I have assessed in this decision.

Conclusion

21. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the green belt which is harmful by definition. There is also further harm to the character and appearance of the area. I was not presented with other considerations which could constitute very special circumstances sufficient to overcome the weight I must give these collective harms.
22. As such the proposal would conflict with the provisions of the development plan and advice in the Framework. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

C McDonagh

INSPECTOR

² SMD/2025/0482