



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 June 2019

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5th August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/F2360/W/19/3225393

Land at Balshaw Farm, Drumacre Lane West, Longton PR4 4SB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr D Jackson against the decision of South Ribble Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 07/2018/4093/FUL, dated 15 June 2018, was refused by notice dated 22 October 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a stable building, construction of a manege and use of land for the grazing and exercise of horses stabled on the land.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. While the planning application form lists four applicants, only one of these individuals is named on the appeal form and I have therefore used the name of the appellant from the appeal form in the banner heading above.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - i) Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the development plan;
 - ii) The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the countryside; and
 - iii) If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness or any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt

4. The appeal site comprises several fields close to Balshaw Farm on the western side of the A59 Longton By-pass. Field boundaries are formed from hedgerows with scattered trees. The site is in the Green Belt.
5. Paragraph 143 of the Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very

- special circumstances. Policy 145 of the Framework sets out that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt, subject to a number of exceptions which include 145 b) the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
6. The proposed stable building would accommodate up to 10 horses. It would therefore have more in common with a large-scale commercial equestrian development than a small private development for a limited number of horses. I accept that it would be for the personal use of the appellant's family and that the number of individual stalls has been justified on the basis of the number of horses that the appellant wishes to keep in the future. Nevertheless, the stable building would be significantly large. In this respect, the Central Lancashire Rural Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Adopted October 2012 sets out that large-scale equestrian developments can rarely be located satisfactorily in open countryside. Consequently, it would not be an appropriate facility for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation in the Green Belt.
 7. Paragraph 145 b) also requires that the proposal preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 133 of the Framework states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Openness is an absence of development and it has both spatial and visual aspects.
 8. The proposed stable building would be approximately 23 metres long, 11.7 metres wide and 4.5 metres high. The manege would be approximately 40 metres by 25 metres, surrounded by a post and rail fence just under 1.4 metres high. There would be a new access track leading from the existing private road that serves the buildings at Balshaw Farm, together with hardstanding on 3 sides of the stable building, parking and turning areas.
 9. The proposal would therefore result in a significant footprint of permanent built development in an area of countryside that is currently open. Consequently, there would be a significant spatial loss of openness.
 10. Notwithstanding that the building would be single storey, there would be a significant visual impact as a result of its bulk and the sprawling footprint of the development. Consequently, there would be a harmful loss of openness of the Green Belt. While the loss would be small in the context of the Green Belt as a whole, the proposal would result in a moderate loss of openness in this locality. The Framework is clear that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.
 11. I find that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would conflict with Policy G1 of the South Ribble Borough Council Local Plan Adopted July 2015 (the Local Plan) which seeks to protect the Green Belt from development, to maintain the openness and character of the area and restrict urban sprawl. It would also conflict with policies in the Framework that protect the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

12. The proposal would be set back from the A59 and Drumacre Lane West behind hedgerows and trees. However, the existing hedgerows would not screen the

proposed development from view, particularly during winter when trees and shrubs are not in leaf. The building and associated equestrian paraphernalia would be visible to users of the adjacent roads, including pedestrians. The proposals would also be visible from the nearby dwellings at Balshaw Farm and more distant views would be afforded from locations, including buildings, elsewhere in the area.

13. Given the large size of the proposed development and its separation from the existing built complex at Balshaw Farm, it would not be seen as part of the existing building group. It would extend the built environment and it would erode and encroach into the open countryside.
14. By virtue of its size, scale and siting, the proposed development would be harmful to the rural character and appearance of the countryside. It would conflict with Policy 17 of the Central Lancashire Adopted Core Strategy Local Development Framework Adopted July 2012 and Policy G17 of the Local Plan. These require development, among other things, to respect the character of the area.

Other Considerations

15. The proposed development would be some distance from Balshaw Farmhouse, which is a Grade II Listed building. Section 66(1) of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting. In this case, the listing building is set within its own grounds which would not be affected by the proposal and there would be a group of mature trees between the building and the appeal scheme. The Council considers that the proposal would have a neutral impact on the listed building and its setting, and I see no reason to disagree.
16. The proposal would not result in harm to the highway network. The individual elements of the scheme would meet the relevant minimum standards for the number of horses proposed. However, these are neutral factors and do not weigh in favour of the scheme.
17. In its decision notice, the Council refers to the failure of the proposal to explore alternative stabling options and to demonstrate that the stables are necessary as required by Paragraph 38 of the SPD. Paragraph 38 relates to commercial equestrian developments and does not therefore appear directly relevant to the appeal scheme. Paragraph 39 of the SPD requires proposals for large private developments to be supported by a statement which justifies the size of the development. In this respect, the evidence before me indicates that the appeal scheme is necessary to provide alternate accommodation for the family's existing 5 horses, due to the forthcoming closure of the Longton Riding School¹ where the horses are currently stabled. Notwithstanding this, there is little substantive evidence before me to demonstrate that other alternatives in the area have been explored or would be unavailable. This is therefore a matter that carries limited weight.
18. I appreciate that the appellant's family are attached to their horses, and that the proposed location in proximity to the appellant's dwelling would be convenient. However, the evidence before me suggests that the proposals have

¹¹ Planning permission for 9 houses granted by 07/2017/3794/OUT

come about as a direct result of the closure of the commercial livery facilities where the horses have been stabled. There is little evidence before me in respect of any significant logistical difficulties or particular safety issues associated with the previous arrangement. These are therefore issues that carry limited weight.

19. The proposal is of a size that would allow for the acquisition of additional horses for the appellant's large family, including a nephew and niece, and in this respect my attention has been drawn to the particular personal circumstances of family members. However, notwithstanding the appellant's preference is for one large stable building rather than two or more smaller stable buildings, I am not persuaded that there are no alternative possible solutions that would deliver substantially the same benefits but without the harmful conflict with national and local planning policy. Therefore, these personal circumstances and the desire to accommodate a large number of horses at this site are matters that carry only limited weight.

The Green Belt Balance

20. I have concluded that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would result in a moderate loss of openness of the Green Belt. These matters attract substantial weight. The proposal would also result in harm to the character and appearance of the countryside.
21. Other considerations before me would not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and loss of openness. Therefore, the very special circumstances as required by the Framework and necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.

Conclusion

22. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR