
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 January 2020

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/D2320/W/19/3240410

Land south of The Straits, Houghton, Chorley PR5 0DA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Brook View Developments Ltd against the decision of Chorley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/00821/OUT, dated 29 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 22 May 2019.
 - The development proposed is outline application for the erection of 9no. dwellings (with all matters reserved save for access).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The description of the development in the application form is "proposed residential development of 9no. dwellings". However, the appeal form indicates that the description of the development has changed. Therefore, in the interests of clarity, I have adopted the description of the development in the banner heading above from the decision notice and the appeal form.
3. The appeal scheme relates to an outline proposal, with access to be considered at this stage and with all other matters reserved for future consideration. An Indicative Site Plan has been submitted which illustrates the access arrangements and how 9 dwellings could be accommodated at the site. Notwithstanding the illustrative nature of the plan, I have had regard to it in so far as it illustrates the access road.

Main Issues

4. 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 any relevant development plan policies; and
 - ii) If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness 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

5. The appeal site is comprised of agricultural land on the outskirts of Hoghton. The proposed dwellings would be located on a small field enclosed by the rears of properties on Station Road, the railway line, and a wooded brook corridor. Access would be taken from The Straits, along the edge of the field adjacent to the side boundary of Torwood, which is a residential property. The land where the dwellings are proposed is in the settlement of Hoghton. However, the access road would be in the Green Belt.
6. Paragraph 146 of the Framework states that certain forms of development, including 146 b) engineering operations, are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The Framework advises that openness and permanence are the essential characteristics of the Green Belt. Openness is the absence of development and it has both a spatial and a visual aspect.
7. The plans illustrate that the road would be long and sinuous. It would be approximately 5.5m wide with a 2m wide footway to one side and low level bollard lighting. By virtue of its length, width and permanent footprint of development in a green field location, there would be a spatial impact on openness.
8. Although located towards the boundary of Torwood, the road would encroach into the open countryside. It would be separated from the adjacent field and The Straits by post and rail fences, railings and hedgerows. Nevertheless, by virtue of its design and construction, including the footway and the bollard lighting, the road would have the appearance of an urban residential road rather than a rural agricultural track.
9. The road would be screened in part by the proposed hedgerow planting. However, it would be visible from locations in the area including the public highway. Its visual impact would be exacerbated by its use by domestic and commercial vehicles and pedestrians. It would be noticeable overnight as a result of the illumination from the bollard lighting and from car headlights as they crossed the field. Furthermore, the road would be even more conspicuous during the winter months, when the screening function of the hedgerow would be diminished by the absence of leaves.
10. Therefore, the road would be an incongruous and uncharacteristic form of development that would have an urbanising effect on the countryside. Consequently, there would be a significant visual impact on openness in this locality. The combined spatial and visual loss of openness would be small in the context of the Green Belt. Nevertheless, the road would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and it would conflict with the Green Belt purpose of assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
11. For these reasons, the access road would be inappropriate development which would conflict with the policies in the Framework that protect the Green Belt.

Other Considerations

12. Policy V2 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document Adopted July

2015 states that within settlement areas excluded from the Green Belt, and identified on the Policies Map, there is a presumption in favour of appropriate sustainable development, subject to material planning considerations and the other Policies and Proposals within the Plan.

13. In this respect, Hoghton is a smaller village with limited services and facilities. Consequently, although not identified for housing growth, it is a suitable location for small scale residential development. The proposed dwellings, which would be within the settlement boundary, are therefore acceptable in principle. However, irrespective that there has been little recent residential development in the area, compliance with the Council's locational strategy is a requirement of the development plan and it does not weigh in favour of the scheme.
14. Nine detached dwellings would make a modest contribution to the supply of housing in the area. However, on the basis that the Council is able to demonstrate in excess of a 5 year housing supply, this is a matter that carries limited weight in the assessment. The short-term economic benefits during the construction phase and the long-term economic and social benefits from the occupation of 9 dwellings in this location carry modest weight in favour of the scheme.
15. The provision of 3 single storey dwellings would contribute to a mixed housing stock. However, even accepting that there is a need for smaller housing suitable for older people, it has not been demonstrated that there is a need for such in this location. Moreover, there is little before me to indicate that occupancy would be restricted to any particular age group or that similar benefits could not be delivered in other, and possibly more, accessible locations. Therefore, this carries limited weight in favour of the scheme.
16. It is suggested that the scheme would be an appropriate use of a vacant plot and an efficient use of land within the settlement boundary. However, the appeal site is not previously developed land and there is little before me to indicate that the fields are no longer suitable to be used for the purposes of agriculture. Therefore, irrespective of its relationship to Hoghton, the use of agricultural land for housing and roads is not a benefit of the scheme.
17. The dwellings would not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area or to the living conditions of neighbouring residential occupiers. While I note the third party representations relating to the impact on wildlife, the proposal would not result in significant adverse impacts on protected or priority species or habitats. Highway matters could be addressed by planning condition. However, these are requirements of the development plan and they therefore carry neutral weight in my assessment.

Green Belt balance

18. I have concluded that the proposed access track would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would be an engineering operation that would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and it would conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This harm attracts substantial weight. On the other hand, there would be limited and modest economic and social benefits arising from the provision of 9 new dwellings.
19. The Framework is clear that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special

circumstances. In this case, there are no other considerations that would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and loss of openness. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other relevant matters, the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR