



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 June 2022

by A Caines BSc(Hons) MSc TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14th July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/W/22/3297631

**Small Holding 1 Opposite Northwood Hills United Reform Church,
Joel Street, Northwood HA6 1NL**

- 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 Barry against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
 - The application Ref 75214/APP/2021/2097, dated 21 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 28 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is construction of a single storey building to house a dog grooming centre.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. As the site is within the Green Belt, the main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, with particular regard to the effect on the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

3. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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. Openness is generally held to be the absence of buildings.
4. Paragraph 147 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 149 of the Framework regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt, other than for a limited number of exceptions. Policy G2 of the London Plan 2021 (the LP) and Policy DMEI4 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2 Development Management Policies (2020) (the DMP)

similarly seek to protect Green Belt land from inappropriate development in line with national guidance.

5. The appellant refers to the exception in paragraph 149 g) of the Framework, which provides for the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use. However, in order to not constitute inappropriate development the proposal must satisfy the sub-criteria within paragraph 149 g), of which only the first is relevant to this case. This stipulates that the development would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.
6. The appeal site lies within a wider Green Belt parcel on the western side of Joel Street which contains a mix of allotments, a builder's merchants, some agricultural/equestrian buildings, and open fields. Information submitted with the appeal describes the appeal site as a small holding that is currently used to keep horses. Whilst there may previously have been a number of redundant agricultural buildings at the site, the only building there at present is a modest stable block which is tucked tightly into the corner of an area of hardstanding at the western end of the site, backing onto the neighbouring yard and structures. As a result, the site has a largely open character.
7. The proposed building would be single-storey in height, timber-clad, and would occupy a relatively small part of the hardstanding area. Even so, it would result in a building where presently there is none and an overall greater volume and spread of built development on the site compared to the existing situation. This would cause a loss of openness in terms of the spatial dimension. In visual terms, although the site is well screened from Joel Street, the proposed building would still be visible from the public footpath which runs along the southern boundary of the site, from the neighbouring allotments to the north, and from the upper floor windows of the properties on the opposite side of Joel Street facing the site. As a consequence, the proposal would result in this part of the Green Belt being less open than it is at present, both spatially and visually. Furthermore, given the proposal would introduce a new standalone use to the site, there would also likely be a noticeable increase in activity in terms of vehicles and people, thereby adding further to the perceived loss of openness.
8. I note the appellant's suggestion that the proposal does not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt. However, an assessment of the proposal against the five purposes of the Green Belt is not a matter that affects the consideration as to whether it is inappropriate or not.
9. When all the above factors are taken into account, I find that the proposal would undoubtedly have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development. Accordingly, the proposal falls outside the exception at paragraph 149 g) of the Framework and would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Other considerations

10. It has been suggested that the proposal would meet a local demand for dog grooming services. However, even if that were the case, there is no clear evidence that a Green Belt location is a necessity in this instance. As such, I afford this consideration only limited weight within the decision.

11. I do however note that the site is owned and run by a local charity, which the development would help to support through additional income generation. In addition, the application form indicates that 2 full-time jobs would be created. These are benefits which weigh moderately in favour of the proposal.
12. Separate to its effect on the Green Belt, the scheme would not cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, or to the amenities of neighbouring occupiers. The site is also in a reasonably accessible location. However, the avoidance of harm and compliance with local and national planning policies in these regards are not considerations which amount to a benefit in support of the proposal.
13. The concerns that have been raised over the Council's handling of the planning application are not matters that I can address as part of the appeal and do not affect my consideration of the planning merits of the proposal.

Whether special circumstances exist

14. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. It would also cause moderate harm to Green Belt openness. The Framework is clear that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and that '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.
15. On analysis of all the above, the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the Green Belt harm I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist. The proposal therefore also conflicts with Policy G2 of the LP and Policy DMEI4 of the DMP, which seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Conclusion

16. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the Framework, to indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Caines

INSPECTOR