



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 March 2023

by Paul Martinson BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/R4408/W/22/3311283

Hazelhead Hall Farm, Lee Lane, Millhouse Green, Sheffield S36 9NN

- 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 William Booth against the decision of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2022/0532, dated 10 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 4 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as: 'change of use agricultural storage to caravan storage'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the site address from the appeal form in the interests of clarity.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether 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, including the effect upon the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - whether the 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

4. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are openness and permanence. It goes on to state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
5. The Framework further establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions. Paragraph 150 lists other forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not

- conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These include at 150. d) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds).
6. Consistent with the Framework, Policy GB1 of the Barnsley Local Plan (2019) (the LP) states that the Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development in accordance with national policy.
 7. The appeal site is a portion of a field that is partly enclosed by a tall, vegetated bund. It lies adjacent to the straight access road to Hazelhead Hall Farm from Whams Road which is bounded by a stone wall. The site is set away from the farm buildings beyond intervening woodland. The adjacent field slopes down to the appeal site from Whams Road and forms part of a highly open and undulating agricultural landscape.
 8. Due to the site not being entirely enclosed by a bund, and it being sited at a lower level in the landscape, partial views into the appeal site are possible from points along Whams Road as well as from Lee Lane, albeit at a greater distance. The site appears open in these views. Views of the appeal site are also possible looking down from the Trans Pennine Trail which is elevated above the appeal site to the south. These views are through trees growing on a wooded bank, which were not fully in leaf at the time of my site visit.
 9. A change of use is sought to use the appeal site for storing around 70 - 80 caravans. I am not provided with a layout plan, but in my view, given the area of the appeal site this would require the caravans to be tightly packed together occupying most, if not all, of the site. A large concentration of caravans such as this would inevitably result in a significant loss of spatial openness at the site itself.
 10. I accept that the site is relatively well contained, being partly enclosed by the bund. However, having regard to the above, the caravans would be at least partly visible from Whams Road. In these views the caravans would intrude into an area that was previously open. From Lee Lane there would be a similar effect, although at a greater distance. Much of the site would also be seen through the trees from the Trans Pennine Trail. In all these views, the resulting loss of visual openness would be exacerbated by the prominence of the pale coloured, closely packed caravans within the open green landscape.
 11. The proposed development would lead to a significant reduction of spatial and visual openness compared to the existing open situation and would conflict with the fundamental aim of keeping land permanently open. Reference is made in the evidence to providing landscaping, but I have not been provided with any specific details of this and therefore this carries limited weight in my reasoning.
 12. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would fail to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. The proposal therefore does not fall within the forms of development included at 150 of the Framework and as such is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
 13. For these reasons it would therefore conflict with Policy GB1 of the LP, described above.

Other Matters

14. The appellant has referred to a previous approval at a neighbouring farm, Ranah Stones Farm¹. Here, caravan storage was granted planning permission by the Council due to its importance as a habitat and 'core' site for ground nesting birds. The application was supported by financial information, which demonstrated that the supplementary income arising from the caravan storage allowed for less intensive farming activity to take place at the site. This in turn was determined to be beneficial to the habitat and the ground nesting bird population. The Council determined that this benefit amounted to very special circumstances which clearly outweighed the harm to the Green Belt.
15. The appellant sets out that the same birds breed at Hazelhead Hall Farm and the proposal would similarly allow for less intensive farming and resulting benefits to biodiversity by providing an income. Whilst I do not doubt that the proposal would supplement the appellant's income gained from the agricultural business, I have not been provided with evidence (including financial information) that the proposal would support a particular farming approach. I have also not been provided with any specific detail of any habitat creation, restoration, or protection that would occur and where or when this would take place, or the low intensity farming methods that would be adopted and for how long.
16. As such, I cannot be certain that allowing the appeal would realistically lead to the benefits that are described by the appellant. I can therefore only give the benefit to biodiversity limited weight.
17. Nevertheless, whilst the Council has evidenced existing diversification at Hazelhead Hall Farm, the proposal would provide an additional income stream which would support the continuation of the farm business. This represents a moderate benefit of the proposal.
18. I accept that there is a demand for caravan storage as evidenced by the appellant, however it has not been put to me why this demand needs to be met within the Green Belt. Furthermore, given the appellant's evidence relating to the need for secure sites, it is unclear why this site, in a rural location and remote from the main farm complex would be particularly secure, even if CCTV were installed. I have therefore given this benefit limited weight.
19. I was able to view the Ranah Stones Farm site from Whams Road. I saw that caravans were visible here, although there were less than are anticipated at the appeal site. The caravans were also seen against the backdrop of buildings in contrast with the farmland and woodland forming the backdrop to the appeal site. Taking this into account, alongside the lack of supporting information, including financial information, I am not convinced that the appeal proposal represents a direct parallel with the Ranah Stones Farm site. Furthermore, I would note that each application should be assessed on its own merits and that evidence of existing Green Belt harm is not justification for further harm.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm openness. The Framework establishes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very

¹ Ref 2015/1020.

special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.

21. Given the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm, relative to the moderate benefits of the proposed scheme outlined above, the harm that would arise would not be clearly outweighed by the other considerations. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.
22. I have considered all other matters raised but none outweigh the conclusions I have reached. For the reasons set out above, I dismiss the appeal.

Paul Martinson

INSPECTOR