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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 May 2023

**by N Teasdale BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 6 July 2023**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/23/3318151**

**Oakfield Lodge, C343 Stamfordham Junction To Stamfordham Road,  
Eachwick, Northumberland NE18 0BG**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant full planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Mr Gary Thornton against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
  - The application Ref 22/04124/FUL, dated 4 November 2022, was refused by notice dated 1 February 2023.
  - The development proposed is erection of stables & tackroom and associated horse paddock.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
  - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including any effect on openness, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
  - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area; and
  - Whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be 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 appeal site relates to land located within the Green Belt and open countryside to the south of Eachwick.
4. Policy STP 8 of the Northumberland Local Plan (2016-2036), 2022 (LP) amongst other matters, explains that development that is inappropriate in the Green Belt will not be supported except in very special circumstances where other considerations clearly outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm resulting from the proposal. It then goes on to state that development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt, as defined in national planning policy, will be supported.

5. Paragraph 149 of the Framework explains that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions include the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and 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. Policy STP 8 of the LP is consistent with national Green Belt policy and as a result, I afford it full weight.
6. The proposed development seeks permission for the construction of a stables, tackroom and associated horse paddock. The appellant states that the building would also be used for other agricultural storage associated with the land maintenance and welfare of sheep. From the evidence before me, this would be ancillary to the use of the building as a stables and tackroom. The Council considers that the building is larger than can be justified for personal use. However, paragraph 149b) of the Framework does not set any specific limiting criteria relating to size.
7. Paragraph 137 of the Framework explains 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 their openness and their permanence. Openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect. Both aspects therefore need to be considered.
8. The proposed development would introduce a sizable building in an existing open parcel of land currently devoid of any built development. In spatial terms, the footprint and bulk would inevitably have an impact on the openness of the Green Belt even taking into account the height of the building which would not be higher than neighbouring buildings. The proposed building would be located some distance away from other existing buildings. Although a good level of screening is provided to the north and east including the tree line which would help to screen views, it would stand alone where its mass, height and volume would be clearly visible from public vantage points including the nearby public footpath running through the site. I have had regard to the appellant's submitted photographs. However, based on my own observations onsite, views would also be had from neighbouring properties and glimpsed views from the adopted highway to the south. Despite the lack of an access track, the increase in built form along with its positioning would also result in a loss of openness in visual terms leading to a fundamental and permanent change to the Green Belt.
9. For the above reasons, the proposed development would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and conflicts with the purposes of including land within it. I therefore conclude on this issue that, for the purposes of the Framework, the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which would by definition be harmful to the Green Belt. Consequently, the proposed development would be contrary to paragraph 149 of the Framework and Policies STP 1, STP 7 and STP 8 of the LP.

#### *Character and appearance*

10. As mentioned above, the proposed development would be located away from other existing buildings within an open field. The field retains a natural and rural appearance with features such as the tree line contributing positively to the character and appearance of the site and wider countryside. Given the impacts of the proposal on openness, I find that it would lead to encroachment

of development into the countryside. The stables building would also significantly alter the appearance of the site which when viewed in its landscape context would appear obtrusive.

11. I appreciate that such buildings are broadly acceptable in rural locations, however, in this case, the proposed footprint and overall height would interrupt views of the open countryside resulting in a detrimental adverse urbanising effect on the site that would harm the site's rural appearance.
12. I conclude that the proposed development would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. Accordingly, the proposed development would be contrary to Policies STP 1, QOP 1, QOP 2, ENV 1, ENV 3 of the LP which together, amongst other matters, requires development to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness and contribute to a positive relationship between built and natural features, including landform and topography. The proposed development would also be contrary with the aspirations of the Framework relating to achieving well-designed places. The Council's decision notice includes Policy HOU 9 of the LP. However, this policy relates to residential development and householder development so is not determinative in this case.

#### *Other considerations*

13. I acknowledge that the Council allowed a large agricultural building in 2003 which is now being converted and the overall increase in volume was permitted. However, notwithstanding the date of the agricultural building, which was some time ago, this use and the subsequent conversion is different to the appeal before me. As a result, it would have been decided under a different planning policy environment. My attention has also been drawn to previous applications elsewhere for agricultural/equestrian development. However, one of these decisions relates to an agricultural building which was assessed under paragraph 149 a) of the Framework where there was no consideration of openness. Although the application relating to an equestrian use has also been assessed under similar Green Belt policy, I have limited information regarding its specific location, context, and siting to be able to provide further comment. In any event, I am considering the scheme that is before me, and I have identified the harm that would arise. I note the appellants comments regarding the lack of changes in policy from previous approvals. However, I must determine the current appeal based on its own merits and evidence in front of me.
14. The proposed development would include storage space, the use of which would support ongoing agricultural use of the wider site. The proposed development would also be for personal use only opposed to commercial and the scheme has been revised following discussions with the Council. However, these matters would also carry limited weight and would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified.
15. The Council did not oppose the development with respect to residential amenity and highway safety. The absence of harm in these respects is, however, a neutral factor weighing neither for nor against the development.
16. Although such buildings are not uncommon in the countryside and permitted development rights exist for certain forms of development, such matters would

not affect my findings on the main issue in relation to openness nor would the agricultural style and use of specific materials/colour as its overall positioning and size would still lead to a loss of openness of the Green Belt.

### **Planning Balance and conclusion**

17. Paragraph 147 of the Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Additionally, the proposed development would have an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area.
18. Paragraph 148 of the Framework explains 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. Whilst I acknowledge the other considerations put forward by the appellant as set out above, the Framework makes it clear that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt which I have applied.
19. Therefore, those other considerations referred to above would not hold sufficient weight to outweigh the harm that I have found would be caused to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and character and appearance. Furthermore, I have not received substantive evidence of any other considerations which would do so. The very special circumstances needed to justify the development do not therefore arise.
20. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

*N Teasdale*

INSPECTOR