



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 July 2023

by A Berry MTCP (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/V4250/W/23/3315096

Land to the west of Kenyon Hall Farm, Winwick Lane, Lowton

- 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 Lancs Aero Club against the decision of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
- The application Ref A/21/92884/FULL, dated 10 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 29 July 2022.
- The development proposed is the erection of 4 aircraft hangars and the relocation of the existing portacabins.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. In 2016, planning permission¹ was granted for the laying out of an airstrip with associated car parking and improvements to an existing farm track for use by Lancashire Aero Club. The submitted approved drawing shows that no buildings formed part of this permission and the appeal site's planning history indicates that planning permission has not been granted for any further development. While the description of development refers to the relocation of the existing portacabins, the information before me suggests that planning permission has not been granted for their siting, nor has a Lawful Development Certificate been granted. I have therefore determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - a) whether the proposed development 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 the purposes of including land within it;
 - b) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - c) if the development is inappropriate, 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 development.

¹ Planning Ref: A/16/81895/MAJOR

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

4. The Framework identifies the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. 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. Paragraph 149 of the Framework explains that other than in connection with a closed list of exceptions, the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt.
5. One such exception is (b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; 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. Policy CP8 of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy, adopted 2013 ('the CS') states that development in the Green Belt will only be allowed in accordance with national planning policy.
7. It is proposed to extend the land associated with Lancashire Aero Club into part of the existing field to the east; to site three portacabins for use as an equipment store, a control office and an archive store; and construct four aircraft hangars to store some of the members' aircraft. The drawings also indicate that an existing parking area (currently laid to grass) would be relocated. Therefore, the proposed buildings would be used in connection with the existing use of the land for outdoor recreation and would amount to appropriate facilities. However, exception (b) of paragraph 149 of the Framework is subject to the development preserving the openness of the Green Belt and not conflicting with the purposes of including land within it.
8. Paragraph 138 of the Framework sets out the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The siting of the proposed development would not lead to encroachment into the countryside, nor would it represent sprawl, the merging of neighbouring towns, or affect a historic town. Therefore, I find no conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
9. When considering the effect on openness, there is both a spatial and visual strand. The proposed development would be located within part of a field that is devoid of development. The proposed aircraft hangars would comprise four sizeable buildings, while the portacabins would comprise two larger containers and one smaller container. Each building would be detached and would be positioned in a linear formation to the south of the existing access track. The proposed development would spread a significant distance across the field. There would be a gap of 2.5m between each aircraft hangar, while the portacabins would be positioned around the relocated car park and would be separated from one another, further exacerbating the spread of the proposed development. Therefore, in spatial terms, the proposed development would reduce the Green Belt's openness.
10. The land immediately surrounding the appeal site is relatively flat, however, the wider landscape is gently undulating. Winwick Lane (the A579) is located to the east of the appeal site. However, the proposed buildings would be sited a

significant distance from the road, and field hedges and a tree belt positioned between the buildings and the road would ensure that any views of the proposed buildings would likely be extremely limited. Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) traverse land to the south and west of the appeal site. With the exception of PRoW FP93, the PRoWs would be located a significant distance from the proposed buildings, and any views of the proposed buildings from the PRoWs (including PRoW FP93) would likely be restricted due to the height and density of intervening trees, vegetation and field hedges. Consequently, in visual terms, the proposed development would not reduce the Green Belt's openness.

11. Overall, whilst I find there would be no harm to the visual dimension of the openness of the Green Belt, there would be harm to the spatial dimension. Therefore, the proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, the proposal would comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would not comply with the exception detailed at paragraph 149(b) of the NPPF, or Policy CP8 of the CS.

Character and Appearance

12. The surrounding landscape predominantly comprises open fields interspersed with isolated farms/former farms and small groups of dwellings. Visible in the distance from the appeal site to the northeast and southwest are what appear to be modern agricultural buildings. The proposed aircraft hangars would have a pitched roof and would be constructed of metal cladding, while the portacabins would have the appearance of metal shipping containers. The design and materials of the proposed buildings would be similar to existing modern agricultural buildings in the surrounding area.
13. However, the siting of the proposed buildings in an elongated linear formation with each building detached and separated from one another by large gaps would be in stark contrast to existing developments in the surrounding area, where buildings tend to be grouped together in a cluster. While I recognise that space is necessary for aircraft to be able to manoeuvre into, out and around the proposed aircraft hangars, I am not convinced from the information before me, that the buildings need to be detached or arranged in such a manner. Furthermore, it is unclear why the portacabins cannot be clustered together or sited abutting the proposed aircraft hangars. Consequently, the siting and spread of the proposed development would be incongruous within the surrounding landscape.
14. The proposed buildings would be sited close to, but not immediately adjacent to, an existing field boundary hedge. However, the height of the hedge would not be effective in screening the proposed development. The appellant has suggested that the hedge could be enhanced to soften the appearance of the proposed development, however, no details have been provided regarding what this would entail. Furthermore, landscaping should not be used to conceal an otherwise unacceptable form of development.
15. I have been directed to the Parkside Development² to the west/southwest of the appeal site, which will comprise a major strategic rail freight interchange and employment uses. From my site visit I noted that work had commenced on the construction of some of the development's roads, however, limited

² St Helen's Borough Local Plan, adopted 2022 - Allocation 7EA (Parkside East)

information has been provided regarding this development. Therefore, while the Parkside Development will likely significantly alter the character and appearance of the wider landscape, I am unable to determine its precise impact or how this may alter the proposed development's effect on the possible future character and appearance of the surrounding area.

16. The proposed development would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would be contrary to Policy CP10 of the CS which, amongst other things, seeks to ensure that new development respects and acknowledges the character and identity of the borough and its locality in terms of the materials, siting, size, scale and details used; and is integrated effectively with its surroundings and helps to create attractive places. It would also be contrary to chapter 12 of the Framework that seeks to achieve well designed places.

Other Considerations

17. The club has been operating from the site since 2009 with no hangars. It is said that the club has become well established since moving to the site, with a membership of approximately 150 people. While I accept that an airfield may have a requirement for storage facilities, the evidence before me is limited in justifying the proposed buildings, their scale and their siting. Furthermore, I am not persuaded that the aircraft cannot continue to be stored elsewhere and brought to the site when needed, or that the provision of on-site aircraft hangars is necessary to ensure the continued operation of the club.
18. Other airfields around the country may exist in the countryside and may have storage facilities including aircraft hangars. However, limited information has been provided to determine whether such sites are comparable to the appeal proposal, and in any event, each case must be determined on its own merits.
19. I accept that the club provides a recreational activity that contributes to the health and wellbeing of its members and that it is likely to be a valued facility within the borough. However, the site already operates as an airfield with these associated benefits and therefore it is unclear how the provision of the proposed buildings would enhance them. The club wishes to rekindle some of the activities that took place in earlier years, for example involving youth groups or having open days. However, it is unclear why the club cannot do this at present, or why the proposed buildings are a pre-requisite before these events can take place.
20. Matters such as the proposal not leading to an intensification in the use of the airfield; that the appeal site has operated without complaint for a long time; that the existing access onto Winwick Lane has good visibility; or that the proposal would not lead to a notable increase in traffic, are all neutral matters.

Conclusion

21. The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm openness. As such, the Framework establishes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. It would also be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.

22. Given the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm combined with the other identified harm, relative to the modest benefits of the proposed development, the harm is not clearly outweighed by other considerations. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.
23. For the reasons set out above, having regard to the development plan as a whole and all other material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Berry

INSPECTOR