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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 April 2024

**by C Harding BA (Hons) PGCert PGDip MRTPI**

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

**Decision date: 12 June 2024**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/D2320/W/23/3335669**

**Land to south of Stanworth Farm, Abbey Village, Lancashire PR6 8BP**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Benjamin Smith against the decision of Chorley Borough Council.
  - The application Ref 23/00436/OUT, dated 19 May 2023, was refused by notice dated 20 July 2023.
  - The development proposed is new build detached farmhouse.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Preliminary Matters

2. The site address given on the planning application form simply referred to "Land to south of Stanworth Farm". Therefore, in the interests of clarity I have used the full address provided on the appeal form, and used by the Council.
3. The proposal is made in outline form, with all matters reserved for future consideration. I have therefore taken the provided plan as being indicative only.

## Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
  - whether the proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework');
  - the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt, and;
  - if the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, 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 the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt*

5. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. It sets out that the construction of a new building in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, unless it would constitute one of the exceptions set

out in Paragraph 154. The Framework 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.

6. The proposal is advanced as a farmhouse which would be occupied by the appellant and his family. I understand that the appellant currently works as a farrier and also has a growing sheep farming business, whilst his wife also works within the rural economy. Be this at it may be, dwellings for rural workers, such as farmhouses are primarily intended for residential use.
7. Therefore, they are not buildings for agriculture for the purposes of the exceptions to inappropriate development set out at Paragraph 154 of the Framework, and it has not been put to me that the proposal would meet any of the other exceptions which are set out. On this basis, I conclude that the proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

*The effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt*

8. The appeal site comprises an open field located within the countryside. It is located close to a small collection of dwellings clustered around the Grade II listed Stanworth Farmhouse ('the LB'). Some of these dwellings appear to be buildings converted from former use.
9. The field within which the appeal site is located is accessed from its northwestern corner, and falls from there towards a pond and watercourse located to the east. To the south is, I understand, a former landfill site which forms rising ground. There are views from the field to the northeast, across the M65 motorway cutting and towards Blackburn, as well as other views to the south-east towards higher ground.
10. The appeal site itself forms a small part of this wider field and is located towards the northern boundary. Here it is closely related to an existing wall and mature trees that would provide a visual buffer between the proposal and the LB. Overall, although the site is sheltered to some extent by topography, it is open in character.
11. The proposal before me is in outline form, with all matters relating to layout, scale, appearance, access and landscaping reserved for future consideration, and the provided planning application form indicates that the potential number of bedrooms that the farmhouse would contain is not yet known. Nevertheless, the introduction of even a new dwelling of modest proportions onto the appeal site would lead to a loss of openness in comparison to the open field that currently exists.
12. It is also likely that there would be some domestic paraphernalia associated with the dwelling at times. This could include washing lines, chairs and tables. Although not necessarily development in themselves, these elements would also contribute to the effects of the development upon the openness of the Green Belt.
13. I accept that the dwelling would be located such that it would be closely related to the existing collection of buildings, and that topography would, to a limited extent, provide screening in wider views. However, this would not entirely screen the development, and whilst I have not been directed to any Public Rights of Way or particular vantage points from where it may be visible, the open character of the site means that it is likely that the proposal would be

visible from a number of locations. Furthermore, openness has both spatial as well as visual components, and even if the degree of topographical screening were to provide an element of mitigation to some of the visual loss of openness, a spatial loss of openness would nevertheless remain. I therefore conclude that the proposal would lead to a harmful loss of openness to the Green Belt.

#### *Other considerations*

14. It is stated that the appellant currently operates a farming business, producing sheep for breeding purposes and food. I understand that this business is co-located with the appellant's personal stables, and that the business has access to a wider area of land around the appeal site. It is also stated that during lambing season, that the appellant is required to travel to and from the farming business throughout both the day and night, and that throughout the rest of the year, twice daily visits are required in order to tend livestock.
15. However, the evidence before me includes only limited details in relation to the farming business; the scale and nature of its operation, length of its establishment, and past or future profitability are unclear. Accordingly, whilst it may be making a positive contribution to the local rural economy and food security, it is difficult to fully quantify the extent of such contributions, or the likelihood that they would continue or increase in the future. In addition, it is unclear whether any other alternative forms of accommodation closer to the farming business than the appellant's current residence, such as existing housing stock have been considered or explored in order to meet the need to be located closer to the business.
16. Nevertheless, even if I were to agree that a dwelling would be reasonably required in order to manage animal welfare and to facilitate the ongoing future expansion of the farming business, there is no mechanism before me which would formally tie the proposed dwelling to the business and prevent its future sale on the open market. Therefore, the weight that I can afford to the benefit of the proposal in terms of securing the future of the farming business is limited.
17. I accept that the grazing of sheep on surrounding land would help maintain the rural character of the area and that this would include the reclaiming of parts of the landfill site for agricultural purposes which would amount to an environmental benefit. However, it has not been shown that these benefits could not be achieved by other means and would be solely reliant upon the proposed farmhouse. This reduces the weight that I can afford these factors as benefits of the proposal.
18. It is indicated on the planning application form that the proposal would comprise a self-build or custom home. Even if this was the case, no mechanism has been put before me that would secure it as such. Therefore, I cannot attribute weight to the benefits of the proposal as a self-build home. I nevertheless accept the proposal would make a modest contribution to the government's objective of boosting the supply of homes, as set out at Paragraph 60 of the Framework, and could be of an energy efficient construction. I afford these factors minor weight in favour of the proposal.
19. It is stated that the proposal would not lead to the loss of best or most versatile agricultural land, and that it would not adversely affect the living

conditions of occupiers of nearby residential properties. However, even if I were to agree, the absence of harm in these respects would be neutral factors that do not weigh in favour of the proposal.

20. My attention has been drawn to a number of developments in the area, including the M65 motorway cutting and viaduct and associated groundworks, the former landfill site, a gas pipeline, a development of 400 houses and a 40-hectare logistics park. I have also been made aware of previous planning permissions granted to the appellant by the Council in respect of the erection of a barn and its later extension.
21. However, I have been provided with few details in relation to these projects or the circumstances of their approval. Nevertheless, based on the evidence which is before me, they appear to be of a notably different nature and scale to the proposal. Accordingly, they are not determinative factors in my decision, and I have considered the proposal on its merits.
22. The effect of the proposal upon the character of the area or wider landscape do not appear to be matters of dispute. Even if I were to agree that the proposal would be acceptable in such regards, the harm that I have identified to the openness of the Green Belt would nevertheless remain.
23. Consequently, having regard to all of the above, the proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is, by definition, harmful to it. Further harm to the Green Belt would be caused by its effect upon openness. I afford this harm substantial weight.
24. As a whole, the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development stated at Paragraph 153 of the Framework, do not exist. Having regard to Paragraph 11(d)(i) of the Framework, this provides a clear reason to refuse the development.

### **Other matters**

25. I note the appellant's concerns and frustration with the service which they have received from the Council, however, this is unrelated to the merits of the case.
26. There is no dispute between the main parties that the proposal would preserve the significance of the LB and its setting. Due to the distance between the appeal site and the LB, and intervening mature trees, in principle, I have no reason to find that the appeal proposal would harm the special interest of this heritage asset. As I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, no harm in this regard could arise from my decision.

### **Conclusion**

27. For the reasons given above, having considered the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*C Harding*

INSPECTOR