



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 March 2025

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F2360/W/25/3359228

**Land adjacent to Banks Farm, Dob Lane, Walmer Bridge, Preston,
Lancashire PR4 4SU**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs D and J Carter against the decision of South Ribble Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 07/2024/00345/PIP.
 - The development proposed is permission in principle application for up to 3 dwellings with ancillary landscaping works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle, which the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first (or permission in principle) stage establishes whether a site is suitable in principle and the second ('technical details consent') stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. The appeal relates to the first stage.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development. All other matters are considered as part of the subsequent Technical Details application, if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal on this basis.
4. The planning application form describes the scheme as "Permission in principle application for the creation of a wildlife corridor, including pond, plantings and wetland area in addition to up to three dwellings". However, as the consent route relates to housing-led development, I have adopted the description from the decision notice and the appeal form in the banner heading above.

Main Issue

5. The main issues are:
 - i) 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;
 - ii) The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;

- iii) Whether any 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 or not inappropriate development

- 6. The appeal relates to an undeveloped field in agricultural use to the west of Dob Lane. The appeal site is bordered to the north by the grounds of Banks Farmhouse and to the south by Lilac Cottage. The land to the east and west is undeveloped and the appeal site forms part of a wide swathe of undeveloped countryside that extends from the A59 Longton Bypass and that continues on the opposite side of Dob Lane. It is in the Green Belt.
- 7. The Framework sets out that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In this regard, Policy G1 of the South Ribble Borough Council Local Plan (2012-2026) Adopted July 2015 (the LP) sets out exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including limited infilling in villages. This is consistent with the exception in Framework paragraph 154e) limited infilling in villages. My attention has also been drawn to paragraph 155 of the Framework, which relates to the development of grey belt land in the Green Belt.

A) Limited infilling in villages

- 8. Case law has established that the boundary of a village defined in a local plan is not necessarily determinative for the purpose of the 'limited infilling in villages' exception to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Other factors should also be considered such as the spacing and grouping of nearby buildings and the relationship of the site with surrounding buildings or open land.
- 9. In this case, the defined settlement boundary of Walmer Bridge is over 400m from the appeal site and on the opposite side of the A59. While Dob Lane does continue on both sides of the A59, there is a nevertheless a distinct change in character at the edge of the settlement where the densely developed urban environment gives way to a more sparsely developed, rural pattern of development. The severance of Dob Lane by the dual carriageway reinforces the visual and physical separation of the settlement from the part of Dob Lane that includes the appeal site.
- 10. The appeal site forms a wide gap between the cluster of buildings of which Banks Farmhouse forms part and the cluster of development that extends southwards from Lilac Cottage. This pattern of clusters of development, and widely spaced buildings, interspersed with undeveloped land continues along Dob Lane and Knoll Lane to their junctions with the A59. Both Lanes are narrow rural roads with somewhat sporadic and irregularly sited and spaced development, including farmsteads and dwellings. The mixed styles, sizes and ages of dwellings, converted and working farmsteads and surrounding and intervening undeveloped land result in a typically rural character and appearance that is distinct from the more regular and densely developed settlement of Walmer Bridge.
- 11. To one side of the appeal site, Lilac Cottage appears to be a relatively modest, modern property with a relatively short road frontage. The next neighbour property is widely spaced from it and set in a very large plot with a long frontage. These

dwelling is set back from the road with mature vegetated boundaries comprising hedgerows and trees. To the other side, Banks Farmhouse is around the corner of Dob Lane from the appeal site and widely separated from it by its extensive side garden which is enclosed by mature hedgerows and fences. Banks Farmhouse is a traditional rural dwelling which, together with its converted farm buildings, remains legible as a historic farmstead.

12. The appeal site is typical of the functionally linked, traditional agricultural land that would have surrounded the former farmstead. Notwithstanding more recent development in the wider area, the appeal site remains visually and physically related to the farmed land to the east and west and which contributes strongly to the rural character and appearance of the area. The scattered rural development that extends along Dob Lane from the dual carriageway is not contiguous with the settlement of Walmer Bridge and the appeal site is in any case distinct from not part of a built envelope for the purposes of infilling within villages.
13. Taking into account the distance from the settlement, the distinct change in character between the settlement and the more sporadic rural development on the appeal site side of the dual carriageway, and the relationship of the appeal site to the surrounding undeveloped countryside, I find that the appeal site is not in a village. The proposal would not be limited infilling in villages. It would not meet the exception in paragraph 154e) of the Framework and it would conflict with LP Policy G1 and the policies in the Framework that protect the Green Belt.

B) The development of grey belt land

14. The glossary to the Framework defines grey belt land as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land (PDL) and/or any other land that does not contribute strongly to any of purposes (a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, (b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging or (d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, in paragraph 143.
15. In this case, the appeal site is agricultural land and it is not PDL. Given its rural location and significant degree of separation from large built up areas, it does not appear to contribute strongly to any of Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d). As such, the appeal site may be considered grey belt for the purposes of the appeal.
16. Paragraph 155 of the Framework states that the development of homes on grey belt land in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where it would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt, there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of housing, the location is sustainable with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework and where applicable the proposal meets the 'golden rules'. The latter does not apply as the proposal would not be major development.
17. The evidence indicates that the Council is currently unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites (5YHLS). As such, in accordance with footnote 56 of the Framework, there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of housing.
18. The PPG states that, when making decisions regarding planning applications on grey belt land, authorities should ensure that the development would be in a sustainable location. Whether locations are sustainable should be determined in light of local context and site specific considerations. In reaching these judgements,

national policy is clear that authorities should consider opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions.

19. The limited services and facilities on the same side of the A59, and in proximity to the appeal site, would not meet the reasonable daily needs of future occupiers and they would need to travel at least as far as Walmer Bridge. While the settlement does appear relatively well served by shops, services and community facilities, these are on the opposite side of the A59 to the appeal site. Notwithstanding that there is a pedestrian crossing point, the busy dual carriageway is a significant barrier and a deterrent to movement on foot or by bicycle, particularly for more vulnerable pedestrians including the elderly and children.
20. Moreover, while Dob Lane is used recreationally by walkers and cyclists, it is a narrow rural road without footways or streetlighting. The evidence indicates that it is fairly heavily used by vehicles, both light and heavy. Taking into account the length and nature of the intervening rural roads and the A59, future occupiers would be reasonably unlikely to access the wider range of services and facilities in Walmer Bridge by sustainable transport modes.
21. The appellants' CCTV recorded buses along Dob Lane, but I understand that these are school services and the closest public transport bus stops appear to be at least 1km away. While services may run to larger settlements, future occupiers would not travel regularly by bus given the distances involved. Even accepting that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, the location does not offer a realistic choice of transport modes. The proposal would not minimise the need to travel. Future occupiers would be heavily reliant on private car journeys. On this basis, and irrespective that there are already dwellinghouses in the area, the location would not be sustainable having regard to the accessibility of shops, services and sustainable transport.
22. As I have found that the location is not sustainable, the proposal would not meet the exception in paragraph 155 of the Framework and it would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal would be the encroachment of development into the countryside (in conflict with Green Belt purpose (c)), and it would sever the undeveloped green belt land to the west from the wider countryside to the east. However, it is not necessary for me to consider whether or not the proposal would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.

Openness of the Green Belt

23. The Framework advises that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Thus, the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness, which has both spatial and visual aspects, and their permanence.
24. As the appeal relates to the permission in principle stage, there are no detailed plans of the development. However, a sketch plan has been provided to show how 3 dwellings and access could be accommodated. This illustrates 3 substantial detached dwellings, extensive hardstanding for driveways, parking and vehicle manoeuvring, new boundary treatments and 3 new highway access points. Although not illustrated, there would likely be hardstanding to the rear of the dwellings for the purposes of sitting out and recreation, outbuildings for the storage of gardening equipment and other outdoor paraphernalia.

25. The appeal site is a fairly large field with a continuous vegetated road frontage except for a field gateway close to Lilac Cottage. The field appears to be largely enclosed by typically rural boundary hedgerows with hedgerow trees. From the roadside, views are afforded across the field towards the undeveloped farmed landscape to the rear with its fields, hedgerows and mature trees.
26. In contrast to the existing rural situation, the new gateways with visibility splays would create a residential, more urban frontage. The access points would open up views into the appeal site. The dwellings, frontage hardstanding and parking, new boundaries, domestic paraphernalia and residential activity would be visually prominent and conspicuous. The substantial quantum of development across the site would sever the visual connectivity between the undeveloped countryside to the east and west of Dob Lane. The proposed landscaped area to the rear boundaries would not mitigate the visual impact of the proposal.
27. By virtue of the footprint and bulk of development, there would be a significant spatial loss of openness of the Green Belt. Taking into account the prominent roadside location, quantum of development and loss of landscape connectivity, the proposal would have a detrimental urbanising effect and there would be a significant visual loss of openness.
28. Therefore, the proposal would result in a permanent spatial and visual impact on openness. Taking into account the scale and nature of the proposal, this would equate to a moderate and harmful loss of openness of the Green Belt.

Other Considerations

29. I have taken into account third party representations both in support and objecting to the planning application and the appeal. Although the Council has not raised concerns in relation to highway safety, the third parties refer to increasingly heavy traffic usage, including tractors, gas tankers and vehicle carriers, and traffic frequently fails to stop when joining Dob Lane from Moss Lane. However, there is little evidence of a need for, or that the proposal would include, a passing place or that new residential dwellings in this location would alter driver behaviour at the Moss Lane junction. This is a neutral matter.
30. Banks Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building (ref: 1361868) (the LB). On the basis that the proposal would affect the setting of the LB, the duty in Section 66(1) of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 (as amended) applies. The LB is a 2 storey building finished in brick, with a slate roof and chimney stack set below the ridge line. Its former farm buildings appear to have been converted to residential use, but it remains legible as a historic farmstead. Its rural agricultural surroundings, which comprise its setting for the purposes of the appeal, contribute to its special interest as a rural vernacular farmhouse.
31. The Council considers that the angled orientation of the LB relative to the proposal, and its deep side garden, would in part screen any new properties and that suitable traditional in-keeping design and screening would limit the harm to the heritage asset. While the sketch layout illustrates 3 regularly arranged and similar dwellings, the design and its acceptability would be a matter for the Technical Details Consent stage and they are not a matter for this appeal. Subject to a future development of up to 3 dwellings being appropriate in scale, design, materials and layout such that it respects the primacy of the LB and does not detract from its rural agricultural

setting, I agree that harm to the setting and hence special interest of the heritage asset could be avoided. This is a neutral matter.

32. The Council's pre-application advice suggested that the site could be considered edge of settlement in terms of its proximity to the village. It advised that while pedestrian access to the settlement was difficult, it was not impossible and there are schools, buses and local shops within walking distance. As such, and having regard to the nature of residential development along Dob Lane, the pre-application advice was that in principle a development of 3 dwellings was worthy of a planning application. The PPG sets out that pre-application engagement has potential to improve the quality of planning applications and their likelihood of success. However, while the advice could itself be a material consideration in the planning application process, it is not binding and it cannot pre-empt the Council's decision making process. Taking into account the harm that I have found, the pre-application advice carries little weight in favour of the scheme.
33. Planning permission (ref 07/2023/00757/PIP) was previously refused in October 2023 for construction of up to 2 dwellings. The reasons for refusal related to the unsuitable location, due to distance from shops and services, absence of nearby public transport and lack of connection to nearby settlements, and inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The amendments to the scheme, including an increase in the number of dwellings, do not weigh in its favour.
34. My attention has been drawn to other developments along Dob Lane. Residential extensions and outbuildings and replacement buildings are not directly comparable and they do not provide a justification for new dwellings on agricultural land. I have also been provided with a list of planning permissions elsewhere, some of which relate to limited infilling in villages in the Green Belt, and their respective distances to shops, services and public transport modes. I accept that the Council has approved new dwellings elsewhere, including in the Green Belt, and at apparently greater distances from conveniences. Full details of those schemes have not been provided, but the summary data serves to illustrate that no two sites or schemes are directly comparable. Each scheme must be considered on its individual merits and, in reaching my decision, I have taken into account the particular characteristics of this location. Other schemes, in different surrounding contexts and circumstances, do not weigh in favour of the appeal.
35. The description of the development includes the creation of a wildlife corridor, including pond, plantings and wetland area. This is illustrated as a linear band between the rear gardens and the adjoining agricultural land. No ecological survey has been provided to establish the biodiversity value of the appeal site or to demonstrate that the proposal would result in a net gain in biodiversity value. In this regard, the majority of the site would be lost to residential use and the remaining boundaries and wildlife corridor would be subject to a significant increase in recreational disturbance by people and pets, noise and light pollution. Moreover, there is little detail in relation to habitat creation or long-term management, including who would be responsible, both operationally and financially, and how it would be secured. Therefore, this is a neutral matter and it does not weigh in favour of new residential development.
36. As the Council is unable to demonstrate a 5YHLS, paragraph 11d) of the Framework is engaged and planning permission should be granted unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular

importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Footnote 7 of the Framework sets out that the particular policies include those relating to land designated as Green Belt. Consequently, on the basis that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply in this case.

Green Belt balance

37. I have concluded that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, in conflict with the local and national policies that protect the Green Belt. It would also result in a harmful loss of openness of the Green Belt. These matters attract substantial weight in accordance with the Framework.
38. There are no other considerations that would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and loss of openness. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.

Conclusion

39. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the site is not suitable for residential development having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and there are no material considerations that indicate the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it.
40. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR