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## 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: 27 May 2025

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**Appeal Ref: APP/F2360/W/24/3354606**

**Land adjacent to Fairfield, Long Moss Lane, New Longton, Lancashire PR4 4XN**

- 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 Richard Owen against the decision of South Ribble Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is 07/2024/00455/PIP.
  - The development proposed is erection of one dwelling and associated development.
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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.

### Main Issues

4. 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*

5. The appeal relates to a parcel of agricultural land south of Long Moss Lane. The immediately surrounding area is characterised by undeveloped agricultural land

with scattered properties. The appeal site is in the Green Belt on the outskirts of New Longton.

6. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Policy G1 of 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.
7. Neither the Framework nor the LP define the term 'limited infilling in villages'. In terms of what constitutes a village, case law has established that a village boundary defined in a local plan is relevant but not necessarily determinative in this regard. Other relevant factors include the spacing and grouping of nearby buildings and the relationship of the site with surrounding buildings and open land. Infilling generally implies containment by built development such as a gap in an otherwise built up frontage or in a building group.
8. In this case, the defined boundary of New Longton lies to the north of Long Moss Lane. The appeal site is both outside the boundary and about 60m from the built-up part of the settlement. At this point, Long Moss Lane is a rural road with grass verges and sporadic development with irregularly sited and spaced dwellings of varied sizes, styles and ages generally set in large mature plots. As found by the Inspector in an earlier appeal<sup>1</sup>, Fairfield is in the countryside. It is in a relatively flat and open landscape where fields, agricultural buildings and occasional residential dwellings contribute to the rural character on the south side of Long Moss Lane. In this regard, the rural and spacious surrounding context for the appeal site are in sharp contrast to the densely developed, urban character of the settlement.
9. The appeal site itself is part of an undeveloped field to the west of Fairfield and it is separated from Feniscliffe to the west by a further agricultural field. As such, it forms part of a wide rural gap between buildings. The appeal site has a mature roadside boundary hedge, but elsewhere the low post and wire fenced boundaries mean that it blends seamlessly into the expansive rural landscape to the south of Long Moss Lane. Notwithstanding there is a footpath from Sheephill Lane to the service centre, I find that the appeal site is visually, physically and functionally related to, and indeed part of, the countryside beyond the settlement.
10. The appeal site is separated from Fairfield by a strip of land that provides access from the highway to the land to the rear via an agricultural gateway. Fairfield is widely separated from the next nearest property to the east by open land. Although part of a short ribbon of detached dwellings in large plots with mature boundary hedges, Feniscliffe is widely separated from its neighbour Belthorn.
11. By virtue of the isolated siting of Fairfield, the wide open gaps along the road frontage that contribute to the rural character and appearance of the area, and the grassed road verges and mature boundary hedgerows, the appeal site is not a gap in a built-up frontage. Moreover, taking into account its separation from Feniscliffe, the absence of buildings to the rear, and that Fairfield stands alone, the appeal site is not a gap in, nor would the proposal be read as part of, a building group.

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<sup>1</sup> APP/F2360/W/23/3329872

12. One dwelling would be a limited amount of development. However, the appeal site is part of the countryside to the south of Long Moss Lane and it is poorly related to the built envelope of New Longton. Moreover, it is not a gap in a built up frontage nor is it part of a building group or otherwise contained by development. Therefore, the proposal would not be limited infilling in villages for the purposes of paragraph 154 e) of the Framework.
13. My attention has been drawn to paragraph 155 of the Framework, which relates to the development of grey belt land in the Green Belt. The Framework defines grey belt as previously developed or other land that does not strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143. The Council considers that the appeal site contributes to purpose (a) checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. In this regard, the appeal site is part of the countryside and it is not part of the built envelope of the village. It makes a strong contribution to the rural setting of the village. While the proposal would be only one dwelling, it would urbanise the rural setting of the settlement. The appellant acknowledges, as has happened elsewhere, that if the appeal was allowed further gap-filling proposals could come forward. Therefore, I find that the appeal site does make a strong contribution in terms of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area. As the appeal site is not demonstrably grey belt in the green belt, the proposal would not meet the exception to inappropriate development in paragraph 155.
14. Therefore, for the above reasons, the proposal would not meet the Framework exceptions in paragraphs 154 e) or 155. It would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would conflict with LP policy G1 and the policies in the Framework that protect the Green Belt.

#### *Openness of the Green Belt*

15. 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.
16. Matters relating to layout, appearance, scale and design would be reserved for a subsequent Technical Details Consent application. There are no plans illustrating the proposal. However, the appellant anticipates that the dwelling would be set on a similar building line and its height and scale would reflect existing properties on Long Moss Lane, and its highway access would reflect the existing streetscene. On this basis, it seems likely that the proposal would be a relatively large 2-storey dwelling with new highway access, frontage hardstanding and parking and private outdoor space.
17. By virtue of its built footprint and quantum of development, the proposal would result in a significant spatial loss of openness. Taking into account its likely height, scale and proximity to Long Moss Lane, the proposal would be visually prominent and it would have an urbanising effect on the street scene. Undeveloped land would remain between it and Feniscliffe, but the new dwelling, with boundaries, lighting, residential activity and paraphernalia would interrupt the long views and visual connection to the open landscape to the south. This would result in a significant visual loss of openness of the Green Belt.

18. Therefore, the proposal would result in a permanent spatial and visual impact on openness. Based on the evidence before me, I find this impact would equate to a moderate and harmful spatial and visual loss of openness of the Green Belt.

### **Other Considerations**

19. I have taken into account the third party representations, including the suggestion that the proposal would better enable the appellants' business to support local rural businesses. However, the proposal would be a dwelling and it is not demonstrably essential for the purposes of a rural business in this location.
20. I understand that Mr Owen provides care and support, including transport and home and garden maintenance, for his mother who currently lives in Fairfield. It would thus be convenient if he lived close to his mother. However, the proposal would be an independent dwelling and it would not be ancillary accommodation for a carer or elderly relative. Moreover, while the appellants intends to occupy it, the proposal could equally be occupied by persons unrelated to their mother and who were not involved in her care. On this basis, the personal circumstances of the family carry little weight in favour of the scheme.
21. I have been provided with appeal decisions where limited infilling in villages was allowed. The Park Avenue appeal (ref: APP/F2360/W/21/3284681) related to a gap in a built up frontage, where there was continuous development to both sides of the road extending from the settlement boundary. The appeal site at Chain House Lane (ref: APP/F2360/W/20/3244797) is in the village, enclosed by built development and with a sense of enclosure. The Royalty Avenue appeal site (ref APP/F2360/W/22/3306867) is just beyond the settlement boundary but it is contained by development to 3 sides, apparently with further buildings to the rear. It appears to be an infill plot in a building group and it is closely related to the urban built up area of the settlement. None of these is directly comparable to this appeal and they do not weigh in its favour.
22. My attention has also been drawn to a large number of sites elsewhere where the Council has granted permission for limited infilling in villages. Most of these are clearly distinguishable from the appeal, including the development of a car park between dwellings at the edge of a settlement, the infilling of gaps in continuously built up frontages in villages and situations where the proposal was contained by development to 3 or more sides.
23. I note however the appellant's concerns in relation to the consistency of the Council's decision making, with particular regard to planning permissions on Lodge Lane<sup>2</sup>. I accept that there are some apparent similarities in terms of the immediate pattern of development and the surrounding farmed land. Nevertheless, the wider context at Lodge Lane appears to differ including that those sites were considered to be in a settlement in part by virtue of their close relationship to the edges of both Farington and Lostock Hall, which merge in that location. The sites in those cases also appear better contained by built development than the appeal site. Based on the evidence, I am satisfied the particular characteristics and surrounding context are sufficiently different such that they do not provide a precedent for the appeal.
24. Conversely, I have also been provided with a number of dismissed appeals for limited infilling, including Newgate Lane, Chain House Nursery and Royalty

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<sup>2</sup> Refs 07/2024/00053/OUT; 07/2021/01090/OUT; 07/2022/00808/OUT

Avenue<sup>3</sup>. In the first, the appeal site was in a village but it was not a narrow gap and the informally positioned housing with wide spaces in between was not an otherwise built up frontage. The second was in a village but it was not limited infilling as it was part of a large agricultural unit and it provided a visual break in residential development. The last related to part of a lengthy field that adjoined and was part of the countryside, where the surrounding pattern of rural development was distinct to the more suburban character of the settlement and, despite being within walking distance of village services, the Inspector concluded that it was not within the village. As can be seen, each of these share similarities to the appeal site. Even so, they do not provide a justification to allow the appeal, rather they serve to demonstrate that each case must be considered on its individual merits, taking into account the characteristics of the site and surrounding context, which is the approach I have taken in this appeal.

### *Green Belt balance*

25. 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.
26. 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**

27. 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. It would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations that would outweigh that conflict.
28. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*Sarah Manchester*

INSPECTOR

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<sup>3</sup> Respective refs APP/F2360/W/23/3329504, APP/F2360/W/23/3332988 and APP/F2360/21/3278967