



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 June 2025

by **R Major BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/V4250/W/25/3358456

Stables adjacent to Common Fold Farm, Cumbermere Lane, Common Lane, Tyldesley M29 8ND

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs A Hobson against the decision of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is A/23/96352/FULL.
 - The development proposed is replacement stable building, storage building ancillary to the stables and an exercise arena.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Subsequent to the Council issuing its decision the revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 12 December 2024. Both parties, within their respective submissions had an opportunity to comment on the revised Framework. Where reference is made to the Framework in this decision, the paragraph numbers are those that appear in the latest version.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - if the development is inappropriate, 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 necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development including effect on openness

4. The appeal relates to a parcel of land located on the northwestern side of Cumbermere Lane, within the Green Belt. I observed that the site consists of a timber stable building, a horse lunge area and a metal shipping container. The site lies within a verdant rural setting, largely characterised by grassland with mature

field trees and hedges, with a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the vicinity.

5. To the north, on the opposite side of an unnamed track, is a group of buildings which vary in design, size and use, within the neighbouring Common Fold Farm complex. To the east, on the opposite side of Cumbermere Lane, is an equestrian site, consisting of brick stable buildings and an exercise area. To the west, in a neighbouring field, is a large brick-built agricultural building.
6. Policy JP-G9 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (2024) (PfE), seeks to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt without harm to its openness, permanence or ability to serve its five purposes. This policy conforms with the provisions of the Framework.
7. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, with the essential characteristics of the Green Belt being their openness and permanence. 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.
8. The Framework establishes that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions set out in paragraphs 154 and 155.
9. One such exception, criterion 154 (b), is for the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries, 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.
10. The stabling and exercising of horses is an outdoor recreational use. As such, the proposed replacement stable block and provision of an exercise arena would represent appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation as per the first part of the exception detailed within criterion 154 (b).
11. With regard to the proposed storage building, the description of development states the storage building would be ancillary to the stables and the supporting information details that it will be used to store hay or haylage for the horses, bedding material, hard feed and other equipment including fencing, posts and rails. The appellants' submission also states that they own 9 acres of land and the storage building would be used to house machinery comprising of a tractor, pasture topper and trailer which are currently stored off site due to the lack of an undercover storage area at the site.
12. I note the Council's concerns regarding the use of the storage building to house machinery that would likely be used on land forming part of the wider holding. Nonetheless, I find that from the appellants' submissions the items to be stored in this building would be associated with the outdoor recreational use of the site. As such, a storage building that is used as ancillary to the stables, as described within the description of development within the submitted application form and on the Council's decision notice, would also be an appropriate facility for outdoor recreation.
13. Nevertheless, to comply with paragraph 154 (b) an assessment must also be made as to whether the proposal preserves the openness of the Green Belt, which can be perceived both spatially and visually, and whether it conflicts with the purposes of including land within it.

14. The proposed exercise arena would replace an existing lunge area, albeit located within a different part of the site. The arena would be surfaced using sand and cliff fibre and would represent a typical feature found at an equestrian site. Apart from its post and rail fencing it would be devoid of built form or volume.
15. The proposed man-made fencing would however inevitably result in some harm to both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt as it would result in features above ground level in a part of the site that is currently absent of any built form, albeit the fencing would be relatively modest in terms of its height. Furthermore, the largely open design of the fencing would continue to allow views through, and therefore the harmful impact upon both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt from the proposed exercise arena would be limited.
16. The proposed storage building would occupy a similar location to that of the existing stable building that is to be removed. Whilst a different shape, the siting of the storage building in this location would have a similar impact on the spatial openness of the Green Belt as the existing stable building. The storage building would however be significantly taller than the existing stable building and would therefore result in a greater visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
17. A new stable block would replace the existing stable block that is to be removed from the site. However, the proposed would be sited to the southwest of the existing building, on land that is currently part of the existing lunge area and part of an open, undeveloped section of the site. The re-siting of the stable to this location would extend the built development on this site beyond its existing extremities. The proposed siting of the stables on land where there is currently no building would therefore extend the boundaries of the built development on the site and consequently alter the spatial openness of the Green Belt in this location.
18. Visually, whilst the existing roadside hedgerow would provide some screening of the stable building from Cumbermere Lane, it is reasonable to assume that in the winter months the existing hedge would become more permeable to views than it was during my site visit. This would allow for greater views of the proposed stable building. Moreover, I observed that from the PRow which runs to the south of the appeal site, there would be clear and uninterrupted views of the proposed stable building, and the taller storage building.
19. The re-location of the proposed stable building to a part of the site which is currently devoid of any buildings would therefore have an impact on both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt. This impact is only exacerbated by the distance that would be provided between the proposed stable building and the proposed storage building, which would result in the stables appearing as a somewhat isolated building that is visually detached from the proposed storage building and the existing cluster of buildings on the neighbouring complex to the north. The siting of the stable building in this location would also result in an encroachment of built development into the countryside.
20. I note the Council has raised concerns that the use of brick for the proposed stable building would amplify the harm to the openness of the Green Belt and represent a more permanent construction in comparison to a timber stable building. However, my attention has been drawn to brick stables and agricultural buildings in the immediate vicinity of the appeal site, which I observed during my visit. The Council has commented that the decisions to allow these other nearby brick buildings were taken

several years ago (4-5 years ago) and in the intervening period the Council's approach has been to advocate timber construction for stable buildings. The Council has also provided some further analysis as to the reasons why they consider these nearby cases are not directly comparable to the appeal scheme.

21. Nonetheless, whilst I acknowledge that each application must be judged on its own merits, consistency of decision making is also important to ensure public confidence. In this regard, the Council has not drawn my attention to any policies or guidance which specify the materials to be used in the construction of stable buildings. Furthermore, given that there are examples of brick agricultural and equestrian buildings in the vicinity of the appeal site, I find that the use of brick forms part of the character of this area. Consequently, in this particular case and location, I do not find that the use of brick for the proposed stable building would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the use of timber.
22. In summary of the above, I find that the proposed exercise arena would have a limited impact upon openness. However, the erection of a replacement stable building on a section of the site that is currently devoid of any buildings would have an impact on the visual and spatial openness of the Green Belt. It would also breach the key purpose of Green Belt policy by encroaching into the countryside. Furthermore, as a result of its height the proposed storage building would have a greater visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing building on the site.
23. The appeal proposal would therefore not preserve openness and would result in encroachment into the countryside. In this respect the degree of harm to the openness of the Green Belt arising from the proposal would be moderate. Therefore, the appeal proposal would not fulfil the requirements of paragraph 154 (b) of the Framework.
24. I conclude that the appeal proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt as defined by the Framework and causes moderate harm to openness. The proposal therefore conflicts with PfE Policy JP-G9 which seeks to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt without harm to its openness, permanence or ability to serve its five purposes.

Character and appearance

25. At present the existing stable building and lunge area within the appeal site are largely screened from the highway of Cumbermere Lane, and the unnamed track which runs to the north, by the existing mature roadside hedge. The appeal site is however visible from the PRoW which runs through the field to the south.
26. The proposed storage building would be taller than the existing stable building it would replace and the upper sections of this building would be visible from parts of the highway, above the existing hedge. It would therefore have a greater visual impact on the rural character of the area than the existing building on the site.
27. Furthermore, the replacement stable building would be sited within a part of the site that is currently devoid of any buildings and would extend the built development on the appeal site significantly to the south. As mentioned above, the harmful visual impact of this is only heightened by the significant gap that would be created between the storage and stable buildings. This results in the stable building

appearing as somewhat isolated and detached from the proposed storage building, and the buildings to the north within the neighbouring complex.

28. Additionally, when viewed from the PRow to the south, the proposed stable and storage buildings, and to a lesser extent the proposed larger exercise arena, would also be more visually prominent than the existing development on the appeal site. From this vantage point the appeal proposal would have a more intensive appearance, in comparison to the existing development on the site.
29. In view of the above, the appeal proposal would result in a moderate degree of harm to the character and appearance of this verdant, rural area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CP10 of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013) where it seeks to ensure, among other things, that new development respects and acknowledges the character and identity of the borough and its locality, in terms of siting, size, and scale.

Other considerations

30. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 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.
31. I observed that the existing stable building and lunge area were in a relatively poor condition and in need of repair or replacement. I also acknowledge that certain goods and items need to be stored undercover. However, I have limited evidence before me that the appeal proposal is the only way these outcomes could be achieved, and I have been provided with very limited information in terms of the size and dimensions of any goods and items to be housed within the storage building. As such, it has not been demonstrated that an alternative scheme could not be put forward which complies with the relevant policies and achieves these outcomes. This therefore limits the weight I attribute to these matters in favour of the proposal.
32. It is stated that the site has suffered damage from vandals. However, there is no substantive evidence before me that the appeal site is at risk from criminal activity. Furthermore, I have been provided with limited evidence as to how the appeal proposal would improve security, or that the scheme before me is the only way of improving security at this site. Consequently, and based on the lack of evidence provided in respect of this matter, I attach limited weight to the purported security benefits arising from the proposal.
33. Economic benefits would arise from the proposal, including contributions to the local economy during the demolition and construction phases of the development. These however would be short term benefits and given the scale of development the economic support arising from the appeal proposal would be relatively small. I therefore attach limited weight in respect of the economic benefits.
34. The proposed stables, storage building, and exercise area would be for personal use. This however is a neutral matter which weighs neither for, nor against, the appeal proposal.

Green Belt Balance

35. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would result in moderate harm to openness. By virtue of paragraph 153 of the Framework this harm attracts substantial weight. The proposal would also result in moderate harm to the character and appearance of the area.
36. The Framework makes it clear that the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the development, must be clearly outweighed by other considerations for planning permission to be granted. In this case, I find that although there are matters which provide limited weight in favour of the appeal, the weight of these other considerations does not clearly outweigh the totality of the harm arising to the Green Belt and the character and appearance of the area.
37. Consequently, the very special circumstances that are necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist in this case.

Conclusion

38. The proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no material considerations, including the Framework, to suggest the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

R Major

INSPECTOR