



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 June 2025

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0415/W/24/3350143

Chenies Stables, Claypit Lane, Chenies, Rickmansworth, WD3 6EJ

- 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 Hugo Madge against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/24/1226/FA.
 - The development proposed is demolition and replacement of existing stable building, associated hard surface and access track.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework was revised in December 2024. The main parties were invited to comment on the revisions, and I have considered their comments in my determination of this appeal.
3. In November 2023 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were renamed National Landscapes so I have used that term in this decision.
4. The appellant referred to a revised site plan in their submissions. As only a single proposed site plan has been provided I have determined the appeal on the basis of that plan.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the area, including the Chilterns National Landscape,
 - Whether the development proposed would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including any effect on openness, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant development plan policies; and,
 - The effect on bats.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to

these issues. Similar language is contained in policies GC1 and LSQ1 of the Chiltern Local Plan, and policies CS20 and CS22 of the council's Core Strategy.

7. The proposed building would include 6 rooflights. The council's Buildings Design Guide emphasises the importance of roofs in the design of new buildings. It recommends that the use of rooflights be restricted. Rooflights are not, in my experience, typical features of such buildings as stables. The building would be set back from the road and generally well screened by the established planting around the field boundary. However, it would be visible from some neighbouring houses and from the access.
8. The site is on the edge of a settlement with several houses on Bedford Close nearby, so is not in a location that is isolated and intrinsically dark. The nature of a stables use is such that it is unlikely to typically be in extended active use outside of daylight hours. Light spillage from the proposed building would principally be from any external lighting or from the stable doors. Light from the rooflights would therefore be unlikely to have any significant effect on the surrounding area.
9. The rooflights to the proposed building would nevertheless be uncharacteristic features of a rural building of this nature. Viewpoints from which the building would be visible are limited, and greater natural light would be a benefit to the horses. However, in the context of the great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty these considerations would not outweigh the harm to character and appearance. The proposed development therefore conflicts with the identified aims of the Framework, as well as policies GC1 and LSQ1 of the Chiltern Local Plan, and policies CS20 and CS22 of the council's Core Strategy.

Whether inappropriate development

10. The appeal site is in the Green Belt. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It further states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and, by definition, harmful other than in certain exceptions. Policy GB2 of the Chiltern Local Plan contains broadly similar language. However, it significantly predates the Framework and so where conflict exists the Framework carries greater weight in my determination of this appeal.
11. The Framework recognises that the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt will not be inappropriate development.
12. The proposed stables building would occupy a slightly larger footprint than the existing building. It would be 2 metres taller to the ridgeline, providing more space for the horses within the individual stables.
13. The Framework does not define what substantial harm to openness involves. It is therefore a matter of planning judgement. The replacement stables building would occupy a similar position to the existing in a large field, much of which is used for the horses' exercise area. The larger building would have a greater impact on openness in both spatial and visual terms. However, even allowing for the significantly greater height this would not amount to substantial harm to openness given the similar footprint and siting, and the size of the field.

14. The development would also include the formation of a concrete apron around the new building, providing access to the individual stables. There is a hardstanding to the front and side of the existing stables, and the proposed apron would not cause substantial harm to openness as part of the redevelopment.
15. The proposed development would include the laying of a new track to the field access with a parking area. The Framework and policy GB2 collectively state that engineering operations are not inappropriate development where they preserve Green Belt openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
16. The laying of a track and parking area would have a negligible effect on the visual openness of the Green Belt in this location. Had I otherwise been minded to allow the appeal, I could have imposed a suitably worded condition to secure details of their layout and landscaping to ensure that it would not significantly affect the spatial openness either. This aspect of the development would therefore preserve Green Belt openness and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
17. Policy GB2 of the Chiltern Local Plan does not include any exception for the replacement of existing buildings other than dwellings. However, the greater weight I attach to the Framework leads me to conclude that the appeal proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
18. The council have referred to Local Plan policy GB7 in their reason for refusal. However, this policy relates to the rebuilding or replacement of an existing habitable dwelling in the Green Belt. It is not therefore determinative in my consideration of this appeal.

Bats

19. Government Circular 06/2005¹ states that it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed. All species of bats present in England are protected.
20. The appeal is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal which found no evidence of bats at the site and a moderate likelihood of their presence. Typically, the presence or otherwise of bats is determined by a qualified ecologist. However, national advice on making planning decisions that may affect bats² refers to guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. This guidance³ refers to the knowledge and skills required by surveyors but does not state that any specific qualification is required. While a relevant qualification ensures that the surveyor does have that knowledge, in this instance the surveyor possesses considerable experience without a specific ecological qualification.
21. The stables building is in active use with the lean-to sections open at all times. It has a low, corrugated metal roof and the bays within it are open above the partition walls. While the building is close to trees and hedgerows, no evidence of bat

¹ Government Circular: Biodiversity and geological conservation – statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system

² Bats: advice for making planning decisions - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bats-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>

³ Technical Guidance Series Competencies for Species Survey: Bats

presence was found within the building during the survey. Given the findings of the survey, the limited scope of investigation required, and as no works are proposed outside of the building footprint, it does not appear that there is a reasonable likelihood of bats being present on site. In this instance there is therefore enough information to be certain that a suitably worded condition requiring appropriate measures in the event of bats being discovered during works would have been appropriate, had I otherwise been minded to allow the appeal.

22. On balance, therefore, the proposed development would not be harmful to bats. It would consequently accord with policy CS24 of the Core Strategy which, amongst other things, seeks that development proposals protect biodiversity and protect and enhance legally protected species.

Other Matters

23. The council has not raised any concerns regarding the effect of the proposed development on the significance of the neighbouring Chenies and Latimer Conservation Area. Given the relatively small scale of development and the substantial screening provided by the intervening trees and hedgerow I see no reason to disagree with this.

Conclusion

24. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed.

M Chalk

INSPECTOR