



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 June 2025

by J Hobbs MRTPI MCD BSc (hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/M0655/W/25/3360087

Warrington Golf Club, London Road, Warrington WA4 5HR

- 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 Mrs Lisa Yates of Warrington Golf Club against the decision of Warrington Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 2024/00997/FUL.
 - The development proposed is rear single storey extension, terrace extension, new bifold doors and alterations to balustrades.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and relevant development plan policies; and
 - 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

Green Belt

3. The appeal proposal comprises of a single-storey, ground floor extension and the extension of an existing first floor terrace to the rear of the clubhouse at Warrington Golf Club. The appeal site is entirely within the Green Belt.
4. Policy GB1 of the Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-2038/39, December 2023 (LP) states that in accordance with national planning policy, within the Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, except in 'very special circumstances'. The Policy goes on to explain that development defined in national planning policy as not inappropriate development, will be supported subject to it complying with other LP policies and any relevant supplementary planning documents.
5. Paragraph 154 of the Framework indicates that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the specified exceptions applies. The appellant contends that the proposed development would comply with the exceptions specified within paragraphs 154b) and 154c). Paragraph 154b) states "the

provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and 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.” Paragraph 154c) states “the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.”

6. Addressing the exception specified in Paragraph 154c) first. Neither the Framework nor the LP define ‘disproportionate additions.’ However, The Warrington Design Guide SPD, July 2024, advises that “extensions to any original building should not exceed a 33% increase to the volume of the original building to prevent disproportionate additions.” This advice applies to all extensions, including non-residential buildings. Nevertheless, it is advice and is not definitive, there may be circumstances where an extension increases the volume of the original building by more than 33% but it would not result in disproportionate additions. Accordingly, an assessment including factors such as floorspace, footprint and the external dimensions of the original building would be required to conclude on whether a proposal resulted in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
7. The Framework defines ‘original building’ as a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed afterwards, as it was originally built. There is no specific evidence before me comparing the volume, floorspace, footprint, or external dimensions of the original building, and the clubhouse following the proposed development. Nonetheless, it is clear from historical photographs that the building has already been extended from the original building. From reviewing the photographs, it is clear that the volume, footprint, and external dimensions of the original building have significantly increased, and it is likely that floorspace has as well. The parties do not dispute this. The proposed development would be in addition to previous extensions and alterations and would result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
8. The appellant explained that a greenkeeper’s cottage was demolished as part of previous proposals to extend the building. Based on the evidence before me, the cottage was ancillary to the wider use of the Golf Club, and it may have been in proximity to the clubhouse. However, I do not consider it to be an extension of the clubhouse as the use of the buildings would have been materially different to one another. As such, I do not consider that the greenkeeper’s cottage formed part of the original building.
9. I agree with the appellant that when considering the existing built form, the proposed extensions would not be excessive. Notwithstanding this, the test within paragraph 154c) relates to the original building and for the reasons given above, the proposal would not comply with this exception.
10. There are three aspects to the exception to inappropriate development specified within paragraph 154b) of the Framework. First is whether the proposal is for an appropriate facility for outdoor sport, second is whether it would preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and third is whether it would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

11. The proposed ground floor extension would accommodate an indoor golf simulator. The appellant contends that there is no space within the existing clubhouse to accommodate the simulator. Although the simulator could be used to complement existing training which takes place outdoors, it could be used entirely independently from the golf course. The appellant has also indicated that it would be used in periods of bad weather, as people may not want to access the golf course. This suggests that in some scenarios the simulator would be a replacement for outdoor sport, rather than a facility to support it. On balance, I do not consider that the proposed ground floor extension would comprise of the provision of an appropriate facility for outdoor sport.
12. In addition, the appellant has highlighted that the proposed extension to the first floor terrace would enhance their ability to host events and hospitality; as well as encourage members to stay at the clubhouse for longer. Whilst the facilities could be used by club members, the use of the proposed development would not facilitate outdoor sport. Accordingly, the first floor terrace would also not be an appropriate facility for outdoor sport.
13. There is both a spatial and a visual aspect to the openness of the Green Belt. The proposed ground floor extension would increase the amount of floorspace within the clubhouse and the volume of the building, but most of the extension would be under the existing terrace. The proposed extension to the terrace would not project beyond the existing side or rear elevations; as such, it would be within the existing building envelope and over an existing patio area. Furthermore, the proposed development would be largely screened from public views as it would be to the rear of the building and would be surrounded by the golf course. The proposed external finishes of the ground floor extension and terrace would assimilate with the existing building.
14. The proposed extensions would be modest when compared to the size of the existing building and following the development the clubhouse would appear similar to it does now from public areas. Nonetheless, the proposed development would materially enlarge the building. As such, it would harm the openness of the Green Belt albeit to a limited extent.
15. Paragraph 143 of the Framework outlines the five purposes the Green Belt serves. I conclude that the proposed development would not conflict with these purposes, and this is not disputed by the parties.
16. Overall, the proposed development does not comprise of the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, and it would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore, the proposed development would not comply with the exception for inappropriate development specified within paragraph 154b) of the Framework.
17. I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and relevant development plan policies. The proposal would be contrary to LP Policy GB1, for the reasons given above.

Other considerations

18. The evidence before me indicates that there is a competitive market in the north west of England for golf clubs, several of which are struggling, and some have gone out of business. The appellant has identified factors which are contributing to

this, including increased occurrences of inclement weather which has led to increased maintenance costs and discouraged players from using the golf course during the winter. The proposal would include facilities which would support the playing of golf all year round including during periods of inclement weather. Overall, the proposed development would improve the ongoing viability and vitality of the business, through diversifying the offer of the Golf Club.

19. There would be obvious economic benefits associated with improving the business offering, particularly one which currently employs 27 members of staff from the local area. There would also be health and social benefits through maintaining a sports club within the local community. I also acknowledge support for the proposal from the local MP and Golf England, and that the Golf Club is in an accessible location.
20. The Council's Sports Facilities Strategic Needs Assessment supports the retention of viable facilities and LP Policy DEV4 supports the continued viability and growth of the local economy by ensuring proposals do not lead to the loss of viable, accessible sites and buildings used for employment generating uses. The proposal would comply with these aims. The proposal would also be in accordance with paragraph 85 of the Framework where it indicates that the approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths and counter any weaknesses.
21. Notwithstanding this, the proposal does not include substantive evidence that the ongoing viability and vitality of Warrington Golf Club would be at risk if the proposal were not allowed. Whilst I acknowledge the proposal would bring benefits, most of those listed above are associated with the ongoing operation of the Golf Club, rather than from the proposed development itself. Accordingly, I only ascribe moderate weight to the benefits of the proposal.
22. I acknowledge that no interested party objected to the planning application. However, this is a neutral factor which neither weighs in favour nor against the proposal.
23. Paragraph 153 of the Framework indicates that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness, and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. I have concluded that the appeal proposal would be inappropriate development and is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. I have also found limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
24. As per established caselaw¹, there is no reason why ordinary considerations cannot cumulatively amount to very special circumstances. However, in this instance, I ascribe moderate weight to the other considerations in favour of the proposal. As such, the other considerations do not clearly outweigh the substantial harm. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.

¹ R. (on the application of Basildon DC) v First Secretary of State [2004] EWHC 2759 (Admin)

Conclusion

25. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, when considered as a whole, and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Hobbs

INSPECTOR