

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 May 2025 by M Long BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Decision by M Russell BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/R0335/W/25/3361478

Rural Rides, Pump Lane, Ascot SL5 7RW

- 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 Cliff Price against the decision of Bracknell Forest Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/00590/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of replacement dwelling at Rural Rides'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by a representative of the Inspector whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; 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 necessary to justify the proposal.

Reasons for the Recommendation

Whether or not inappropriate development in the Green Belt

4. Policy LP 34 of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan 2020-2037 (2024) (BFLP) confirms that proposals for development in the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with relevant national Green Belt policy. Paragraph 154 of the Framework outlines that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, save for a number of exceptions. One of these is 'd) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces'.

5. The supporting text to Policy LP 34 confirms that when assessing whether a replacement building is materially larger than the one it replaces, account will be taken of siting, floorspace, bulk and height. It also sets out that as a general guide, a replacement building that would result in an increase in volume of the existing building by more than 20% is very likely to be regarded as materially larger. These factors are pertinent to my assessment.
6. The Council's officer report sets out that the existing dwelling has a footprint of approximately 78 square metres and a volume of around 305 cubic metres. The proposed dwelling would have an approximate footprint of 141 square metres and a volume of around 566 cubic metres, which equates to increases of around 81% in footprint and 86% in volume. Even though the maximum height of the proposed dwelling would be slightly lower than the maximum height of the existing dwelling, the increases in footprint and volume represent a substantial enlargement. While the replacement building would have the same use as the one it replaces, it would be materially larger and so would not meet the requirements of the exception at Paragraph 154 d).
7. Paragraph 154 e) provides an exception for limited infilling in villages. Policy LP 34 of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan 2020-2037 (2024) (BFLP) identifies Green Belt village areas where limited infilling will be permitted, one of which is Cheapside. The appeal dwelling sits close to other residential properties and within the main built-up footprint around the areas of Watersplash Lane, Cheapside Road and the B383. It is in close proximity to services and amenities that are typically associated with a village settlement such as a primary school, village hall and public house. Therefore, I am satisfied that the appeal site forms part of a village for the purposes of applying Green Belt policy.
8. The Framework does not define what is meant by limited infilling. However, supporting Paragraph 9.97 to Policy LP 34 sets out that 'limited infilling is considered to be the development of a small gap in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage, or the small-scale redevelopment of existing properties within such a frontage'. This is a common interpretation of the term that has been referred to by both of the main parties, and I have had regard to it as part of my assessment.
9. The appeal dwelling sits within a row of similarly aligned houses along one side of Pump Lane and so, even if located at one end, it forms part of a continuous frontage. The main parties dispute whether the definition of 'limited infilling' includes the small-scale redevelopment of a single property within that frontage. Nevertheless, even if I accept that it does, the proposal would span most of the corner plot with the larger 'eastern wing' forming a large and prominent feature against the side boundary with the road. Consequently, it would not read as small-scale redevelopment or limited infilling and would not meet the exception at Paragraph 154 e).
10. The appellant's planning statement also refers to Paragraph 154 g) of the Framework. However, that exception relates to previously developed land. The definition of 'previously developed land' set out in the Glossary to the Framework excludes land in built-up areas such as residential gardens. I have found that the residential site is within the built-up area of Cheapside and so this exception does not apply to the appeal proposal.

11. I conclude that the proposed development would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would therefore be contrary to Policy LP 34 of the BFLP and Policy W1 of the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2037 (2022) which seek development that accords with the relevant national Green Belt policy. For the reasons above, there would also be conflict with the Framework.

Openness

12. Paragraph 142 of the Framework sets out that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
13. The existing bungalow on the site is modest in form and is positioned away from the site boundaries. The proposal would significantly increase the footprint and mass of built form when compared with the dwelling it would replace and so, in spatial terms, this would evidently reduce openness. The glazed openings to the lobby that would connect the two main wings would likely allow for some limited views through the building. Even so, the 'eastern wing' would have an elongated form and whilst there would be a slight reduction in terms of the comparable maximum heights, the scale of the proposal would be accentuated by the position of the taller 'eastern wing' alongside the external side boundary which would visually enclose the site and markedly reduce openness at the corner. This would be clearly visible from public views taken from Pump Lane and Sunninghill Road.
14. Taken together, the spatial and visual effects would have a moderate effect on the openness of the Green Belt. It would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, thereby conflicting with the aims of including land within the Green Belt when assessed against the Framework.

Character and appearance

15. The site is located at the corner of Pump Lane and Sunninghill Road and there are open views to a verdant field opposite the site. Pump Lane is characterised by a variety of houses, including attractive semi-detached pairs of Victorian cottages close to the appeal site. The appeal bungalow is modest, detached and has a hipped roof with a small front gable projection; it sits inconspicuously next to the larger Victorian pairs. The bungalow's position set in from the plot boundaries affords a spacious quality to the corner and this positively contributes to the character and appearance of this semi-rural location.
16. The site falls within 'Area D: Pump Lane, Cheapside' of the Bracknell Forest Character Area Assessments: Supplementary Planning Document 2010 (SPD) which is described as a remnant of a Victorian Lane. The SPD partly characterises the area by its strong rural character and small-scale open frontages. It identifies the Victorian cottages as the most distinctive elements, which should be retained and protected.
17. The substantial scale and elongated form of the larger 'eastern wing' would be a dominant feature at this corner plot. Its position next to the side boundary would reduce the spacious quality of the site. In particular, the flank elevation facing Sunninghill Road would have a considerable extent. The timber-cladding at first floor level would have limited features to break up this expanse of built form meaning the massing of the building to this boundary would have a particularly

stark appearance. Consequently, this wing would be imposing and highly visible in public views from the street.

18. While the proposal may follow an historic building line along the front of Pump Lane, this does not overcome my concerns relating to the visual effects of the 'eastern wing' against the side boundary. Some buildings, such as Cheapside Court, are sited close to their front boundaries with Sunninghill Road. However, this does not form an overriding pattern of development in this locality. Indeed, the house to the rear of the appeal site is significantly set back from the highway. Therefore, the imposing form of the 'eastern wing' would not be assimilated within views along Sunninghill Road.
19. I accept that there may be contemporary dwellings within more rural Green Belt environments than the appeal site. Some of the materials would also respond to nearby cottages and allude to a rural aesthetic. Even so, whilst the existing bungalow has a somewhat plain suburban design, it features unobtrusively in the street. In contrast, the extensive timber cladding, large areas of glazing and unconventional layout and form, would appear incongruous on this prominent corner site next to the traditional Victorian architecture of the nearest neighbouring dwellings.
20. I conclude that the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. As such, it would be contrary to Policies LP 28 and LP 50 of the BFLP which seek proposals that create attractive places by responding to and enhancing the distinctive character of the local area and which relate well to their location and surroundings through their siting, scale (including height and massing), form, roofscape, design and materials. There would also be conflict with the Framework which seeks development which is sympathetic to local character.

Other considerations

21. I have been provided with details of a lawful development certificate relating to a single-storey side extension, hip-to-gable roof extension with a proposed rear dormer (LPA Ref 22/00606/CLPUD). I am also aware of prior approval having been granted for a single storey rear extension (LPA Ref 22/00610/PAH). These schemes, have a real prospect of being implemented together and represent a fallback scenario.
22. The evidence suggests that the proposal would result in a 17.5% reduction in footprint and a 5% reduction in volume when compared with the totality of the fallback scenario. Therefore, the proposal would have a lesser effect on openness purely in spatial terms. However, this comparison of spatial effects is somewhat undermined when considering the proposed development's visual effects on openness, as well as the identified harm to character and appearance, which have been set out above. More particularly, in comparison to the proposal, the fallback option would have a more compact form when viewed from Pump Lane that would be further set back from the front and side with Sunninghill Road. This would allow it to sit more comfortably within its corner plot and retain greater visual openness around the building.
23. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the fallback option's large footprint would be a single-storey extension positioned discreetly to the rear and largely obscured from public views behind boundary treatments. The fallback option would also still retain much of the original dwelling's traditional design, proportions and fenestration

pattern and this would allow it to be better assimilated into the street scene. Taking these circumstances into account, the proposal would result in greater visual harm to openness and to the character and appearance of the area when compared with the fallback option. Therefore, the fallback option carries no more than moderate weight given the comparable harm of the appeal proposal.

24. The appellant contends that the proposal would offer some reductions in noise levels from passing traffic for occupiers of the appeal site and neighbouring properties. However, there is no substantive evidence before me to show that current noise levels, noting that there is an existing acoustic fence, are so significant that living conditions at the appeal site are materially affected. It has also not been demonstrated that any desired reductions in noise levels experienced within the appeal site could not be delivered through interventions that are less harmful than the proposed development.
25. The design and layout of the proposal has the potential to improve access between the dwelling and garden space and a lighter interior. It would also offer views to the field on the opposite side of Pump Lane. However, there is nothing to suggest that there is currently a deficiency of usable garden space or light and that similar improvements could not be achieved through a design which better responds to the Green Belt location and the character and appearance of the area. In any case, these would be private benefits for a single household and so carry limited weight.
26. The application form indicates that the proposal would be a self-build dwelling. However, there is nothing to suggest that it would meet an unmet need on the Council's custom and self-build housing register and so this matter also carries limited weight.

Green Belt Balance and Recommendation

27. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should only be approved in very special circumstances. I have also found that the proposal would result in some moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
28. Paragraph 153 of the Framework specifies 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 potential harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
29. I have also found that the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. This further weighs against the proposal.
30. Even taken in their totality, the other considerations presented in this appeal carry no more than moderate weight. Therefore, the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm, in addition to the other harm identified, is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations. As such, the very special circumstances that would be needed to justify the proposal do not exist.
31. The proposal would be contrary to the development plan and the Framework. For the reasons given above and having had regard to all other matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

M Long APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

32. I have considered all the submitted evidence and my representative's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

M Russell

INSPECTOR