



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 June 2025

by A Price BSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 JULY 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/W/25/3360100

Plots 1 and 3 in Land to West of Ifield Road, Charlwood, Surrey RH6 0DR

- 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 Ali Athar against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
 - The application Ref is MO/2024/1093/PIP.
 - The development proposed is Permission in Principle for 3 residential dwellings with new access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. This consent route has two stages. The first stage establishes whether a site is suitable in principle. The second stage forms the technical details consent, where the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for the first stage is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent technical details stage, if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, land use and amount of development, and with particular regard to:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including its effects on the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

5. The appeal site comprises an undeveloped parcel of land that lies adjacent to Ifield Road. It is separated from the road by mature, verdant landscaping. The site is within the Green Belt.

6. National Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate development. The Framework, however, sets out certain exceptions. One of those, at paragraph 155 and raised by the appellant, relates to grey belt land.
7. Paragraph 155 sets out that the development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where all of the following apply: a) it would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt; b) there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed; c) the development would be in a sustainable location; and d) where applicable, the development meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in Framework paragraphs 156-157. I consider these in turn, below.

Utilising grey belt land (a)

8. The Framework defines 'grey belt' as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. Based on the evidence before me and my observations on site, I am of the view that the appeal site could reasonably be described as grey belt land. There is no dispute between the main parties in this regard.
9. The appeal site is positioned in the open countryside, outside of any settlement boundaries. It has a rural character, enclosed by mature landscaping. The site's location could not reasonably be described as forming the setting of an historic town or a large built-up area. Similarly, the proposed development could not result in the merging of neighbouring towns. From that perspective, the proposed development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt.
10. There is no evidence before me that would lead me to conclude that the site should be excluded from the definition of grey belt because of the application of footnote 7. The site does not strongly contribute to the purposes of (a), (b) or (d) of paragraph 143 and the proposed development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the Green Belt across the area of the plan. It would meet the requirements of paragraph 155(a).

Demonstrable unmet need (b)

11. The Council sets out that its latest Housing Delivery Test results are above the 75% threshold. In addition, the Council confirms that it can demonstrate a housing land supply of at least 5 years.
12. Although the appellant has raised doubts in this respect, referring to 2019-2022 housing delivery test figures, I have no substantive evidence to adequately demonstrate this. Moreover, the appellant acknowledges that the Council can demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply. Based on the evidence before me, the proposed development would conflict with the requirements of paragraph 155(b). Nevertheless, even were I to find a demonstrable unmet need in respect of housing supply, all criteria under paragraph 155 must be considered. I continue my assessment below.

Sustainable location (c)

13. The appeal site forms a parcel of undeveloped land. Despite some scattered residential development that exists near to the site, it falls outside of any settlement boundary and therefore lies within the open countryside.
14. The nearest settlement to the site is Charlwood, which lies to the north. This is stated by the appellant as being approximately 800m away. However, some of the services within Charlwood are likely located further afield than this.
15. Although positioned relatively close to the site, to reach the centre of Charlwood by foot or cycle, future occupiers would need to proceed along rural, narrow roads which do not have dedicated footways, cycle paths or wide verges. They are also largely unlit. These routes are unsatisfactory and would be particularly undesirable in winter months, outside daylight hours or during inclement weather conditions. There is no evidence before me of any nearby bus stops.
16. The Framework, at paragraph 110, acknowledges that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. I also accept that the distance between the proposed dwellings and Charlwood would be similar to that of dwellings within the surrounding area. However, in this location, the occupants of the proposed dwellings would be reliant on the use of private vehicles to access services and facilities due to a lack of satisfactory cycling and walking routes and a lack of public transport facilities within a reasonable distance of the site.
17. Overall, the introduction of dwellings in this location would undoubtedly result in the use of private cars to access local services and facilities. It would form an inappropriate location for the proposed development in respect of sustainability, conflicting with the requirements of paragraph 155(c).

Golden Rules (d)

18. As the proposed development does not meet the definition of major development, (d) is not applicable in this instance.

Conclusion

19. Overall, I conclude that the proposed development would conflict with paragraphs 154 and 155 of the Framework and would fail to satisfy an exception. The proposed development would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would also be contrary to the relevant provisions of policy EN1 of the Mole Valley Local Plan, which in summary seeks to protect Green Belt from inappropriate development, in line with national policy.

Other considerations

20. The proximity of nearby established residential development and Gatwick Airport are noted. However, this is not reason to automatically accept development at the site, particularly where no exceptions have been met. I afford this consideration only limited weight.
21. I accept that there would be a contribution to housing supply in the district, an objective of the Government. I also acknowledge the economic benefits of the development in respect of employment during construction and increased local

spend upon occupation. Nevertheless, these benefits would inevitably be limited due to the scale and nature of the proposed scheme. I afford these considerations no more than moderate weight.

Green Belt Balance and Conclusion

22. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
23. Cumulatively, I attach no more than moderate weight to the benefits of the proposed development which make up the other considerations. As such, the other considerations do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposed development do not exist. The proposed development would not therefore accord with the Green Belt protection aims of the Framework and the site would be unsuitable for residential development.

Conclusion

24. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Price

INSPECTOR