
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 June 2025

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 18 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/25/3362504

Land between 4 and 14 Middlemoor Road, Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire CB22 4PB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Joe Jackson against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 24/02706/FUL, dated 16 July 2024, was refused by notice dated 18 September 2024.
 - The development proposed is a 1.5 storey single dwelling with associated garden space, access, parking and associated infrastructure works.
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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 (NPPF)¹ and development plan policy;
 - 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;
 - The effect of the proposal on great crested newts; and
 - If the proposal would be inappropriate development, whether the 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 it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

3. The site lies within the Cambridge Green Belt as defined by Policy S/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 (the SCLP) so the first issue is whether the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In relation to NPPF paragraph 154(e), the appellant argues that the proposal comprises infilling in a village. However, the SCLP defines the development

¹ December 2024 version, published after determination of the application but applicable to this appeal.

framework of Whittlesford (and the other villages within the Green Belt) where infilling is permitted in principle, and the appeal site lies well outside it. The development plan defines the extent of the village for the purposes of paragraph 154(e).

4. There is no dispute that the site does not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b) or (d) in NPPF paragraph 143 and that no policies in footnote 7 provide a strong reason for refusing the development. The site is consequently grey belt land. As a single dwelling, the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt in South Cambridgeshire, thus criterion (a) of NPPF paragraph 155 is satisfied.
5. Criterion (b), whether there is a demonstrable unmet need for further housing, turns on whether the Council can demonstrate five years supply of deliverable housing sites. In accordance with SCLP Policy S/12, the land supply position is assessed in combination with Cambridge City. Unfortunately, the evidence submitted for the appeal on this point is limited².
6. In the appellant's statement of case dated March 2025 it was said that the land supply position was at best 4.6 years, however the Council's statement in April 2025 said the position was 5.1 years. The appellant's final comments in May 2025 accepted this whilst noting that the figure was extremely marginal. On seeking further clarification, the Council submitted the 'Greater Cambridge Housing Trajectory and Housing Land Supply Report' dated April 2025 which claims the five-year supply amounts to 13,383 dwellings against a requirement of 12,122 dwellings, some 5.5 years supply. Disputing this, the appellant argues that the supply has been overstated by about 5,000 dwellings due to the lack of clear evidence that completions would begin on sites that fall within category (b) of the NPPF definition. This would mean a supply of about 8,383 dwellings, or some 3.5 years.
7. However, this is put forward as a simple assertion with no individual sites disputed. In fact, the Council's lengthy 480-page report includes an exhaustive assessment of likely completions on allocated sites and those with planning permission, supported by the responses to an email questionnaire sent to developers and landowners. Whilst a full exercise to establish the accurate position seems disproportionate to support the case for a single dwelling in the Green Belt, this would be necessary to undermine the Council's evidence which otherwise must stand. Neither party submit an up-to-date appeal decision addressing housing land supply which might help.
8. In relation to criterion (c), the appeal site lies about 800 m from the main part of Whittlesford to the south-east, a short walk via a continuous footway. The village offers a range of services and facilities including a primary school, shop, recreation ground, public house and regular bus services with the SCLP defining it as a 'Group Village' suitable for limited development. The dwelling would thus be in a sustainable location. Whilst criteria (a) and (c) of NPPF paragraph 155 are met, criterion (b) is not³.
9. For these reasons the proposal does not fall within the provisions of NPPF paragraphs 154 or 155 and would consequently comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt. This would, by definition, be harmful.

² The housing delivery test is also relevant but is over 75% for both South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City.

³ As the proposal is a single dwelling criterion (d) is not applicable.

Openness

10. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt and can essentially be regarded as the presence or otherwise of built form. According to the Council, the existing single storey garage on the site has a footprint of about 19.5 sq m whilst that of the proposed dwelling would be about 129 sq m, over six times greater. As a three-bedroom chalet bungalow the increase in built volume on the site would be even more. This would amount to a significant reduction in the openness of the site and constitutes a further element of harm to the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

11. The site lies amongst an outlier of scattered built development 800 m or so away from the main built-up part of the village. To the west, beyond the wide side garden of No 14 Middlemoor Road, lie a group of terraced and semi-detached properties and to the east, beyond an undeveloped gap, a pair of semi-detached and a further detached house. Opposite however lie an open grass field and woodland, so the area could be described as semi-rural.
12. At present the site is occupied by an old prefabricated single garage with a hardstanding in front, a somewhat isolated and disjointed feature in the street scene. However, the proposed 1.5 storey dwelling presenting a front facing gable with first floor window to the road and with long side elevations would significantly urbanise the site and have a greater visual impact than a smaller bungalow previously proposed⁴. As the street elevation demonstrates⁵, the single, relatively narrow but long dwelling between two wide undeveloped gaps and with nearby housing having a more traditional two-storey form, the scheme would appear unduly incongruous in its setting.
13. For these reasons the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area in conflict with SCLP Policies S/7 and HQ/1 which restrict new housing outside development frameworks to protect against gradual encroachment on the edges of villages and require high quality design which makes a positive contribution to its local context.
14. The grass field and woodland opposite the site form a small peripheral part of the designated Whittlesford Conservation Area (CA) and Rayners Farmhouse, a Grade II* listed building, lies on the North Road frontage about 100 m away. However, the proposal would have a negligible impact on the setting of the CA when considered as a whole and on that of the farmhouse as it lies out of sight with the road and its boundary hedgerow curving around a slight bend.

Ecology

15. The site lies in the amber risk zone for great crested newts which are known to be present in the immediate area. To ensure satisfactory mitigation, the appellant plans to join the district level licensing scheme but the necessary payment certificate has not been submitted to date. Accordingly, at least at present, the proposal conflicts with SCLP Policy NH/4 which seeks to conserve or enhance biodiversity.

⁴ Reference S/4359/18/FL

⁵ Drawing no. 220 Job Ref 344

Other considerations

16. The proposal would provide an additional dwelling which would make a useful contribution towards local housing needs and offer social and economic benefits for the village. It would also make use of a currently underused site and involve the replacement of the existing slightly run down garage. However, even together, these other considerations can only be given limited weight.

Conclusion

17. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is by definition harmful; it would also adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt. The NPPF prescribes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and in addition the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and without mitigation could harm great crested newts. In support of the scheme the other considerations can only be given limited weight. Consequently, in this case other considerations do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other harm that has been identified, which is the relevant test in paragraph 153 of the NPPF. Therefore, very special circumstances do not exist to justify the proposal and the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR