



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 June 2025

by Graham Wraight BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/25/3361808

Whitehouse Farm, Whitehouse Farm Centre, Stannington, Northumberland NE61 6AW

- 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 Dean Hogarty against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/04306/FUL.
 - The development proposed is an Outdoor Children's Play Area Steel Framed Cover Building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The building has been erected and therefore I have determined this appeal on the basis that it is a retrospective proposal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - i) Whether the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and relevant development plan policies; and
 - ii) 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 required to justify the development.

Reasons

4. Policy STP 8 of the Northumberland Local Plan 2022 (LP) refers back to the Framework in establishing whether new development in the Green Belt is inappropriate. Paragraph 154b) of the Framework allows for 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.
5. The building covers land on which it is understood an outdoor play area was previously present. It appears to be the intention that this will be replaced with a new play area, underneath the building. The building is almost fully enclosed on three sides and mainly enclosed on the fourth side. Any new play area would, as a result, not be outdoor recreation but more akin to an indoor facility. Therefore, the

development does not represent the provision of an appropriate facility for outdoor recreation.

6. Furthermore, the development is a substantially sized building of considerable bulk and massing. Whilst it is close to the existing buildings at the Whitehouse Farm Centre, some of which are not of dissimilar height, it sits on the edge of the main built development that previously existed. It has, as a result of these factors, not preserved the openness of the Green Belt in a visual sense. This has resulted in moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Although the development is not contrary to any of the purposes of the Green Belt, the requirements of paragraph 154b) as a whole are not met.
7. Paragraph 154g) is referred to in the Council's submissions, but I have no details before me to establish whether the land falls within the definition of previously developed land, including in terms of whether the land was lawfully developed. Therefore, whilst the emphasis in paragraph 154g) to harm to openness has changed in the most recent revision of the Framework, I cannot be sure that the development is sited on previously developed land. It is not infill development, as it sits on the very edge of the built development at the farm centre and not between existing buildings. It has not therefore been demonstrated that the development benefits from paragraph 154g).
8. The appellant makes a brief reference to paragraph 155 of the Framework and to development on grey belt land in their final comments. The concept of grey belt was introduced into national planning policy after the planning application was determined but before the appeal was made. However, they provide no explanation as to how the development meets with the criteria of that paragraph. And, with specific regard to 155b) and without any representations having been put forward to the contrary, it is difficult to envisage how there could be a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed.
9. The development does not therefore fall into any of the exceptions listed in paragraph 154 and paragraph 155 of the Framework, and it is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Consequently, it also fails to accord with Policy STP 8 of the LP.

Other Considerations

10. The appellant sets out that the development is needed to allow for the outdoor play-area to be used all-year round, with the associated benefits of making the play equipment safer to use by virtue of being protected from rain and frost and providing added protection for the equipment from the elements. This it is stated will attract more visitors and have a positive impact on the health of children. There is provision in Policy STP 1 of the LP for development which supports the sustainable growth and expansion of existing business in the open countryside.
11. However, there is nothing substantive to show that extreme weather events or rainy periods have increased to the extent that the equipment has been unusable more often or that the outdoor nature of this element of the attraction has a material effect on visitor numbers either existing, or the numbers that might be achieved in the future. Indeed, it is stated that the centre received over 100,000 visitors during 2022 with no evidence provided that this is reducing. The benefits in terms of safety and longevity of the equipment would be limited, as such

equipment would be expected to be designed to be sited outside. These considerations collectively carry moderate weight in favour of the development

12. The appellant refers to Policies ECN 6 and ECN 7 of the LP. However, whilst those policies establish specific sites on which employment uses that fall under the criteria will be considered acceptable, they do not absolve a development from needing to address other local and national planning policies, including in relation to the Green Belt. Nonetheless, that there is support for employment uses on the wider site mean that this consideration also carries moderate weight.

Planning Balance & Conclusion

13. The Framework at paragraph 153 establishes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness, and that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
14. The building is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and has resulted in moderate harm to its openness. The other considerations put forward in this case, to which I have afforded moderate weight, do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
15. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the development conflicts with Policy STP 8 of the LP and with the objectives of the Framework where they seek to protect the Green Belt. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

Graham Wraight

INSPECTOR