
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 July 2025

by **N Robinson BA (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/25/3365426

Land at Park Lane, Cheadle

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Mark Bullock against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref is SMD/2024/0459.
 - The development proposed is outline application for erection of a single dwelling including details of means of access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application was submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration, except for access. I have considered the appeal on this basis. The proposal includes an indicative layout plan. I have had regard to this insofar as it depicts how the development could be carried out.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
 - The effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties on Nursery Close with particular regard to loss of outlook;
 - The effect of the proposal on biodiversity; and
 - If the proposal is 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 the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

4. The site is located in the North Staffordshire Green Belt and comprises part of a field. The site does not contain any built form and is surrounded by grazed pasture

land. Outline planning permission is sought for the erection of a dwelling. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It goes on to state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Policy SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan (2020) (LP) confirms that strict control will be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt, allowing for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

5. The Framework includes reference to “grey belt” land, which is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land (PDL) and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes a, b, or d set out in Framework paragraph 143. The aim of the definition of grey belt is to protect high performing Green Belt land and to recognise the development potential of land which, though formally designated as Green Belt, no longer adequately serves the Green Belt purposes.
6. The main parties agree that the site does not comprise PDL. Nonetheless, on the basis that grey belt is not restricted to PDL, to conclude whether the site comprises grey belt land I now turn to the aforementioned tests in relation to Green Belt purposes, drawing upon the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) which provides advice on how to determine whether land constitutes grey belt in decision making.
7. The Council’s Green Belt Review Study (2015) (GBRS) considers parcels of land against the Green Belt purposes in the Framework. The site forms part of a larger land parcel (S13- Land to the north west of Cheadle, south west of the A522) which the GBRS states makes ‘a limited contribution’ to Green Belt purposes a, b and e and ‘a contribution’ to purposes c and d, commenting that overall the land parcel contributes to maintaining the openness of the land in a relatively accessible location, as well as being part of the setting of Cheadle.
8. The GBRS also considers the contribution of smaller, individual parcels of land at the local level against the Green Belt purposes. Parcel CH165, which comprises the site and small parcels of land to the east and north, was found to make ‘a contribution’ towards Green Belt purpose a, ‘a significant contribution’ towards purposes c and d and a ‘limited contribution’ to purpose b.
9. The site has the appearance of a field used for grazing and has an undoubtably rural character. The site is located on elevated land adjacent to the settlement boundary and the mature hedgerow to the eastern boundary forms a strong defining edge to Cheadle. The development of the site would appear as an obvious encroachment into the open countryside as opposed to infill development between built form, and, as part of a wider field, would not appear well-contained within the landscape. Given this, the site plays an important role in preventing the extension of development along Park Lane, checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area of Cheadle, and thus strongly contributes to Green Belt purpose a.
10. Whilst not forming part of a conservation area or a special landscape character area, the site and its gently-sloping, undeveloped nature, together with adjoining agricultural land, contributes positively towards the countryside setting of the medieval town of Cheadle and the sense of place of this historic settlement afforded by its links with the surrounding landscape. Whilst the main features of the

historic town are not visible from the site, nor is there public access to the site, the site nonetheless makes an important contribution to the special character of the town, and thus strongly contributes to Green Belt purpose d. Whilst of a limited scale, the intrusion of built form into the site which contributes positively to the setting of the town, would nonetheless result in harm to its special character.

11. In support of the proposal the appellant references appeal decisions¹ in which the Inspectors concluded that the site comprised grey belt land. However, there is no suggestion that the sites made a strong contribution to Green Belt objectives a or d. These decisions do not therefore appear to be comparable to the appeal proposal. I therefore afford them limited weight in this decision.
12. In conclusion, the site does not fall within the definition of grey belt and so fails to meet Framework Paragraph 155a. The proposal therefore fails to meet Framework Paragraph 155 overall. In light of this, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and which would be contrary to the Framework in this regard. Conflict also arises with those aims of LP Policies SS10 and H1 which seek strict control over inappropriate development allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

Character and appearance

13. The site is located towards the northern part of Park Lane which has an attractive rural character, to which the site's open, undulating, undeveloped nature and connectivity to the surrounding fields and rural landscape makes a positive contribution. The site borders 2 dwellings to the east and is lined by a dense boundary hedge which clearly delineates the settlement of Cheadle from development to the northwest on Park Lane, which has a dispersed, rural character. Given its open nature, verdant qualities and visual connection to the agricultural land beyond, the site is experienced as part of the open countryside.
14. The design, layout and scale of the proposal are not yet known though the submission states that the dwelling would be single storey in height. The introduction of built form would represent an urban incursion into this undeveloped site which would noticeably reduce the site's open, verdant, rural qualities. The introduction of built form to the site would feature prominently in views from Park Lane and from neighbouring properties and fields. In these views the introduction of a dwelling, along with associated hardstanding, would represent an urban incursion which would alter the site's verdant rural character, resulting in harm to the established character and appearance of the area.
15. In support of the proposal the appellant references other development along Park Lane which, it is stated, has negative landscape impacts. However, there is no suggestion that this development, or the referenced application at Manor Park Farmhouse², has altered the character of the appeal site and its surroundings. In any case, even if development exists elsewhere which has resulted in harm to the character and appearance of the area, this does not in itself justify further harm.
16. The proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Conflict therefore arises with those aims of LP policies SS1, SS10, H1, DC1 and

¹ APP/M3645/W/24/3339699 and APP/R3650/W/24/3352222

² application reference SMD/2023/0341

DC3 which seek to restrict housing development in the countryside, enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside and maintain the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and their settings.

Living conditions

17. The site is located on higher land than the bungalows on Nursery Close. A thick screen of vegetation runs along the site's eastern boundary, separating the site from the windowed front elevations of these dwellings.
18. There are no details before me regarding the scale and massing of the dwelling and plans showing the dwelling's location are indicative only. Nonetheless, I note that it is the appellant's intention to erect a single storey dwelling. The indicative layout plan indicates that the site has the capacity to be developed in a manner which achieves adequate separation from the properties on Nursery Close, and, noting the mature screen of vegetation along the boundary, I consider that the site has the capacity to be developed in a manner which would not result in harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of these dwellings through loss of outlook, details of which could be adequately managed at the reserved matters stage.
19. In light of the above I find that the proposal would not result in harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties. Therefore, in relation to this main issue, I find no conflict with LP policies SS1, SS2, SS10, H1 or DC1 which seek to ensure that development protects the amenity of the area.

Biodiversity

20. The proposal is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The PEA notes that the survey was undertaken at a time of year considered suboptimal for identifying some botanical species. However, there is no indication that it was suboptimal for identifying protected species, and no further protected species surveys are recommended. In light of this, there is no indication that the proposal would result in harm to protected species.
21. LP policy NE1 expects all development where possible to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. The Council states that, in light of the suboptimal timing of the PEA, the biodiversity value of the site has been underreported. There is limited detail before me regarding how a net gain in biodiversity would be achieved. However, even noting the requirement for further in-season surveys to be carried out and the potential underreporting of the site's biodiversity value, there is no indication that the site does not have the capacity to achieve the required net gain in biodiversity and I am satisfied that this matter could be controlled by a condition.
22. There is no compelling evidence before me that the proposal would result in a diminution of the ecological value of the site or that the site does not have the capacity to provide a net gain in biodiversity. I therefore find no conflict with LP policies SS1, SS10, DC1, NE1 and NE2 which seek to protect the natural environment, ensure that development promotes the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and recreation of biodiversity and deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

Other considerations

23. The Framework highlights that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special

circumstances, with substantial weight given to any harm to the Green Belt. 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.

24. It is stated that the proposal has been designed to provide an accessible, lifetime home for the appellant who requires single storey accommodation due to health reasons. Accordingly, the development would bring demonstrable social benefits for the appellant. These are personal circumstances to which I attribute weight in favour of the appeal, and I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, which specifies the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
25. In support of the proposal the appellant references a shortage of single storey lifetime homes in the area and has provided a letter from a local estate agent confirming that they have no properties on the market that would meet the appellant's requirements and cannot recall having a similar property in the recent past. However, I have not been provided with any details regarding the appellant's geographical and financial search criteria, nor confirmation of the availability of single storey properties with other estate agents. Similarly, there is limited information regarding the availability of alternative sites with a view to erecting a lifetime home. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I cannot be assured that there are no available properties or land which could meet the appellant's needs. I therefore give limited weight to this benefit.
26. The proposal would contribute to boosting the supply of new housing on a site with good access to services, facilities and public transport. There would be social and economic benefits to local services during the construction and occupancy phases. In light of the acknowledged shortfall in housing delivery, I attach significant weight to the benefit of housing delivery.
27. The indicative block plan shows a 'Wildflower and Orchard Planting and Biodiversity Enhancement Area' on land to the south of the site. As this would take place on land outside of the appeal site, there is no mechanism before me to ensure that this orchard and wildlife area would be delivered and maintained in perpetuity. This matter therefore attracts limited weight in favour of the proposal.
28. The proposal is described as self build. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 sets out that the primary purpose of the build must be for personal occupancy and that ownership must initially be retained by the self-builder. To be considered a self-build dwelling there must be an effective mechanism through which the dwelling could be secured as a self-build property. No planning obligation is before me, and it has not been shown that a planning condition would provide an effective or enforceable mechanism for controlling future occupancy in this regard. Given this I afford limited weight to the benefits of the provision of self-build housing.
29. The Green Belt is a strategic designation, the purposes of which are set out in the Framework which is clear that substantial weight should be given to any harm. The demonstration of very special circumstances is a high policy bar to exceed. Overall, I conclude that these other considerations do not 'clearly outweigh' the harm

identified by reason of inappropriateness. Therefore, the very special circumstances required to justify this proposal do not exist in this instance.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

30. The Council accepts that it is unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. In these circumstances, paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is engaged. This indicates that the policies which are most important for determining the application should be deemed out-of-date and permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development. Footnote 7 of the Framework lists the Green Belt as one such asset of importance.
31. In view of my conclusion that the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Thus, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development outlined at Paragraph 11, and, as a material consideration, the Framework would not indicate that permission should be granted.
32. The proposal would conflict with the development plan and material considerations do not indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

N Robinson

INSPECTOR