



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 July 2025

by **Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4th August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/D/25/3363844

Rowemount Cottage, Abinger Road, Coldharbour, Surrey RH5 6HG

- 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 Miss Lucy Botting against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
 - The application Ref is MO/2025/0219/PLAH.
 - The development proposed is the erection of replacement stable block.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of development on the application form is extensive in detail. I have had regard to this detail but for the purposes of the banner heading above, I have used the description in the Council's decision notice as it is more succinct.
3. At the time of my site visit the previous stable building had been removed to make way for the stables permitted under the 2024 permission.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - a) whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant development plan policies; and
 - b) 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 required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that in the Green Belt, development should be regarded as inappropriate. Paragraphs 154 and 155 of the Framework do however set out exceptions where development in the Green Belt might not be considered as inappropriate.
6. Policy EN1 of the Mole Valley Local Plan 2024 (MVLP) similarly allows for the provision of certain development within the Green Belt. The range of development set out in the policy is broadly similar to that of the Framework.

7. The Council considered the scheme under Paragraph 154(c) which allows for the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The appellant's statement makes reference to the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, which I have taken to be a reference to Paragraph 154 (b). There were no other exceptions to inappropriate development as set out in the Framework which were identified as relevant to the proposal.

Paragraph 154(c)

8. The Framework makes clear that an original building is a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally.
9. The appellant has produced a photograph of the site said to date from 1927. This shows previous buildings on the site which may have occupied the same area as the current appeal. However, there is no substantive evidence that these existed on site on 1 July 1948 and so constitute the original building. Consequently, in this appeal, the stable building which has been removed to make way for the 2024 replacement, and which the Council considered when making its decision, is the original building.
10. The Council indicate that the proposed stables would represent a 220% increase in footprint. It would also have a maximum height of 3.69m compared to 2.94m, which is an additional 0.75m. The appellant does not dispute the Council's figures.
11. In addition to its dimensions and volume increasing, the building would noticeably change shape, from an L-shape to a square. Therefore, in comparison to the original building there would be a noticeable and substantial increase in size.
12. As a matter of judgement, I conclude that the overall size of the building as now proposed cannot reasonably be considered to result in anything but disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

Paragraph 154(b)

13. Paragraph 154(b) 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;
14. The proposed building would be used for stables within the large rear garden serving the host dwelling. They could be considered to be an appropriate facility for outdoor sport or recreation. They would be used by the applicant in connection with the use of the dwelling. Accordingly, I must consider whether the openness of the Green Belt would be preserved or whether there would be conflict with the purposes of including the land within the Green Belt.

Openness

15. The Framework identifies that a fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to keep land permanently open, and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. In determining the nature and extent of any impact on Green Belt openness both spatial and visual impacts are assessed.

16. The proposed building would be physically larger than the building it would replace. This increase would be noticeable when compared to the original building. Thus, not only would there be a visual loss, but the openness of the Green Belt would also be reduced in spatial terms. Whilst this loss would be small and thus the overall effect on openness would be limited and localised, harm to the openness of the Green Belt would nevertheless occur.

Purposes

17. Paragraph 143 of the Framework identifies that Green Belts serve five purposes: a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
18. The site is away from any large built-up areas or historic towns, so would not contribute to the sprawl or merger of urban areas or affect their setting or character. The proposal involves works within an existing residential plot, so there would be no encroachment into the countryside. The works are unlikely to discourage the recycling of derelict or other urban land. The proposal would not therefore conflict with the purposes of including the land in the Green Belt.

Findings

19. I have found the proposal to be materially larger than the original building it would replace and thus inappropriate development under Paragraph 154(c). Given that the appeal scheme results in harm to the openness of the Green Belt, it follows that it does not meet the exceptions outlined in paragraph 154(b) either.
20. The appeal scheme therefore constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Therefore, the development as a whole would conflict with Policy EN1 of the MVLP and the Framework insofar as they seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
21. Framework Paragraph 153 confirms that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It also confirms that any harm to the Green Belt attracts substantial weight.

Other Considerations

22. In the past the buildings on the land were said to have formed part of a larger farming operation and so the site is a cultural and heritage asset. However, while the host dwelling is a traditional vernacular rural building, which would be retained, it is not locally or statutorily listed. The site as a whole is now in residential use with the outbuildings and paraphernalia one might associate with such a use. As such, the culture and heritage relating to the site attracts limited positive weight.
23. There would be benefits to the welfare of the horses if the proposed stable building were constructed. However, there is no suggestion that the 2024 permission would not meet welfare standards. As such, this attracts limited positive weight.
24. The proposal would, it is said, assist what is currently poor drainage around the site. However, drainage improvement could form part of the current works to

implement the 2024 planning permission. I therefore only give this matter a small amount of positive weight.

25. The Council suggested that the proposed building might be capable of residential conversion in the future. However, this is a matter which would require a separate grant of planning permission and so is beyond the scope of my decision.

Other Matters

26. The site is within the Coldharbour Conservation Area (CCA), which has a linear layout. It encompasses a scattered ribbon of buildings, some of which are of architectural significance, and the countryside around them. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, the CCA derives some of its significance from the quality of the period architecture, the relationship between the buildings and the spaces around them.
27. The proposal would be visible from Abinger Road but would be at a lower level and seen at some distance within a wider context of outbuildings and parked cars. Overall, the character and appearance of the CCA would be preserved.
28. Opposite the site are the Grade II listed Mosses Wood Cottages. They are vernacular rural cottages which appear to date from the 17/18th centuries albeit with some more modern additions. Set back slightly from the road and behind high hedges, with rising land to the rear, it is the curtilages which provide the immediate setting for these heritage assets. This immediate setting contributes to the assets' special interest and significance.
29. Abinger Road allows for an appreciation of the buildings and their standalone nature. To that extent it also contributes positively to the special interest and significance of the listed building. The proposal would be set away from Abinger Road and at a much lower ground level. Other buildings and parked vehicles would occupy some of the intervening area.
30. Therefore, having regard to the appeal site and the proposal, in this instance, I am satisfied that the proposed development would preserve the setting and special interest, and would not harm the significance, of the Grade II listed buildings.

Conclusion

31. The proposal as a whole would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. As such, the Framework requires that the harm by reason of inappropriateness be given substantial weight, and that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
32. The weight I give to the considerations cited in support of the proposal do not clearly outweigh the harm the development would cause. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not therefore exist.
33. The proposal is contrary to the Framework and MVLP which seek to protect the Green Belt. I have considered all other matters raised but none outweigh the conclusions I have reached. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR