



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 August 2025

by **J Hobbs MRTPI MCD BSc (hons)**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/W/25/3363192

Land North of the Cherry Hinton Caravan & Motorhome Club, Cambridge

- 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 Dudley of Neston Court Limited against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00461/PIP.
 - The development proposed is up to nine self-build/custom-build plots.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner above is duplicated from the Application Form. However, I have removed reference to “Permission in Principle (PIP) application for ...” as this does not refer to an act of development.
3. The proposal is for permission in principle. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)¹ advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (permission in principle) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second stage (technical details consent) is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
4. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted². All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the appeal site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use, and the amount of development.

Reasons

6. Policy 4 of the Cambridge Local Plan, October 2018 (LP) states that new development in the Green Belt will only be approved in line with Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Paragraph 154 of the

¹ Planning Practice Guidance, Permission in Principle, Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 58-001-20180615

² Planning Practice Guidance, Permission in Principle, Paragraph 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

Framework indicates that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the specified exceptions applies. Neither party seeks to argue that the proposed development would comprise of one of the specified exceptions. Nonetheless, paragraph 155 of the Framework specifies that the development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate subject to the development complying with the specified criteria.

7. The first criterion of paragraph 155 requires the development to utilise Grey Belt land. Grey Belt is defined in Annex 2 of the Framework as land which does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) of the Green Belt, specified within paragraph 143 of the Framework. However, the definition goes on to exclude land where the application of policies relating to areas or assets in footnote 7, would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting the development. Footnote 7 includes habitat designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
8. The appellant has indicated that the appeal site does not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b), or (d) of the Green Belt. This is not disputed by the Council and my observations on site do not lead me to an alternative conclusion. The site is in proximity to Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI. Consequently, for the appeal site to be defined as Grey Belt, it would need to be demonstrated that policies relating to SSSIs within the Framework do not provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.
9. Paragraph 193 of the Framework indicates development outside of a SSSI which is likely to have an adverse effect on it should not normally be permitted. There is a lack of information before me on the qualifying features of Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI. However, it is not disputed that increased recreational pressure may be harmful to them. The appeal proposal would lead to increased recreational pressure on the SSSI due to an increased population living in proximity to it.
10. Planning permissions³ have been granted for residential development close to SSSIs within Cambridge. However, they were based on an assessment of that development, the qualifying features of the specific SSSI, and the proposed mitigation. The presence of residential development close to SSSIs alone does not indicate that the appeal proposal would not have a harmful effect on the qualifying features of Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI.
11. As above, the application subject to this appeal is for permission in principle; therefore, it is necessary to assess the proposal on the basis of its location, land use and amount of development only. It would not be appropriate to refuse permission in principle on the basis that it may have a harmful effect on a SSSI, when appropriate mitigation could be secured as part of any Technical Details Consent. Furthermore, the Council's local plan evidence base does not indicate that all development in proximity to Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI should be restricted.
12. Notwithstanding this, in this instance it is necessary to conclude that the proposal would not have a harmful effect on the SSSI to ensure that the appeal site could be defined as Grey Belt and for the proposed location to be considered acceptable for residential development in principle. As it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would not affect Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI, I cannot conclude that

³ Planning permission Refs. 16/1919/FUL and 11/1114/OUT

the appeal site is Grey Belt. Accordingly, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would not be acceptable with regard to its location and proposed land use.

13. Paragraph 142 of the Framework explains that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The openness of the Green Belt has both a spatial and a visual aspect. As the appeal proposal is for permission in principle, specific details of the development are not before me. However, the proposal would introduce a significant amount of development and residential activity to the site. It would also lead to domestic paraphernalia being located in external areas. Nevertheless, the site is well screened from the road by mature vegetation. Also, when viewed from public areas, it would be seen alongside existing development. The appeal site is surrounded by development on three sides and beyond the open field to the south, is a caravan site. On balance, the proposal would have a harmful effect on the openness of the Green Belt, but to a limited extent.
14. The appeal site is in proximity to existing services and facilities, necessary to support the everyday needs of future occupiers. Nonetheless, to walk to these services and facilities future occupiers would need to walk along Limekiln Road. This section of the road is steep and unlit, moreover it is subject to the national speed limit. There is a footpath on the opposite side of the road from the appeal site, but sections of the footpath are narrow, and it would be very difficult for people using mobility aids or a pram to use it.
15. Despite a lack of historic incidents involving pedestrians, given the characteristics of the road, it would be at best unpleasant to walk along, and in the dark or during inclement weather it would be unsafe. Although I accept the appeal site is only a moderate distance from Queen Edith's Way, where there is an appropriate footpath, the location of the appeal site would discourage walking and would result in an over reliance on the use of private motor vehicles.
16. I note that the Local Highways Authority did not object to the proposal and indicated that an appropriate access could be secured as part of any Technical Details Consent. However, an appropriate access would not alter my assessment on the accessibility of the appeal site.
17. LP Policy 3 states that the overall development strategy is to focus the majority of new development in and around the urban area of Cambridge. Although the appeal site may be considered outside of the settlement area, it adjoins development within Cambridge. It is therefore reasonable to conclude it is around the urban area. There is no wording within the policy which prohibits residential development outside of the settlement. As such, the proposal would not be contrary to the spatial strategy outlined within LP Policy 3.
18. Given the size of the appeal site and the proposed amount of development, the development would be of a moderate density. The proposed density would assimilate with the suburban character of the surrounding residential development. Furthermore, by only developing part of the land owned by the appellant, a verdant edge to the south would be created which would be in keeping with the site's edge of settlement location. The appeal site would make an efficient use of land in accordance with paragraph 129 of the Framework.

19. Overall, I conclude that the appeal site is not suitable for residential development, having regard to its location and the proposed land use. It would be contrary to LP policies 1, 4, 55, 56, 80 and 81 which indicate that development in the Green Belt will be approved in accordance with Green Belt policy in the Framework, and development will be supported where it demonstrates that prioritisation of access is by walking, cycling and public transport and is accessible for all, amongst other matters.

Planning Balance

20. Paragraph 153 of the Framework indicates that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness, and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
21. The appeal proposal would be inappropriate development and is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The proposal would also cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt and would result in future occupiers being overly reliant on the use of private motor vehicles. I ascribe great weight to the harm caused by the proposal.
22. There would be economic benefits associated with the construction of the dwellings and an increased population using services and facilities in the area. The proposal may provide social benefits through the provision of affordable housing and environmental benefits through enhancements secured as part of any Technical Details Consent.
23. The parties agree that the Council is not meeting its statutory requirement to grant sufficient permissions to meet demand for self-build and custom housebuilding. The parties agree that the shortfall is over 400 serviced plots, which is a substantial shortfall. As such, the granting of permission in principle for up to 9 self-build/custom-build plots would go toward meeting demand. Accordingly, I ascribe significant weight to the provision of up to 9 serviced plots as a benefit.
24. The parties dispute whether the Council can demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. Even if, I accept the appellant's position that the Council can only demonstrate 3 years' supply of deliverable housing land, I would only ascribe significant weight to the benefit of supplying 9 dwellings, in combination with other benefits, due to the scale of the proposal. Consequently, the other considerations in favour of the proposal do not clearly outweigh the harm. Therefore, very special circumstances do not exist.
25. Similarly, even if the supply of deliverable housing land is less than five years, the balance specified in 11(d)(ii) would not apply as the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusing development. As it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would not have a harmful effect on Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits SSSI.

Conclusion

26. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, when considered as a whole, and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Hobbs

INSPECTOR