



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 August 2025

by **U P Han BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J3720/W/25/3366369

Dan Skelton Racing, Lodge Hill Shelfield Green, Warwickshire B49 6JR

- 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 Dan Skelton Racing Ltd against the decision of Stratford-on-Avon District Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00285/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of timber and steel observation cabin.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Reference to 'retrospective' in the description of the application is not a form of development, so I have removed it from the banner heading.
3. The Application Form confirms that the work has already started but has not been completed, and I was able to see this during my site visit. For the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal on the basis of the submitted plans.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including its effect on openness and the purposes of including land within it, having regard to the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Arden Special Landscape Area; and
 - if the proposed development is inappropriate, 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 appeal site relates to a single storey timber clad observation cabin with a dual pitched corrugated metal roof. The cabin is situated within Dan Skelton Racing, an established horse training facility in Lodge Hill. The cabin has been erected on a

hill, next to an exercise ring, and looking down at a gallop which extends in a southeasterly direction from the cabin.

6. Policy CS.10 of the Stratford-on-Avon District Council Core Strategy 2011-2031 (adopted July 2016) (the CS) seeks to resist inappropriate development in the Green Belt except where very special circumstances are justified in accordance with the Framework. Policy CS.10 sets out a list of the types of development which are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including the construction of new buildings and the carrying out of activities as defined in the Framework.
7. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It goes on to establish that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the specified exceptions applies. This includes, under part (b) of paragraph 154, the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport and recreation, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
8. On the evidence before me, the existing use of the land is for horse riding and the training of horses, which are forms of outdoor sport and recreation. It is also evident from the siting and design of the cabin, that its purpose is to allow customers and visitors to watch the exercise and training of horses on the gallop. While spectating is not a sport in its own right, the observation cabin would be directly and functionally connected to the conduct of equestrian sport. In this context, I am satisfied that the development falls within the scope of facilities, including buildings, for outdoor sport and recreation, envisaged by the Framework.
9. Notwithstanding my assessment that a facility for outdoor sport and recreation is before me, paragraph 154 (b) requires that such facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, to be regarded as not inappropriate. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has both spatial and visual aspects.
10. The cabin is positioned on elevated ground and stands apart from other buildings within the wider site. These factors, combined with its appreciable scale, result in a discernible reduction in the visual and spatial openness of the Green Belt.
11. Although the cabin benefits from partial screening by mature trees growing in close proximity to it, this mitigation is seasonal and therefore unreliable. During autumn and winter months, when foliage is sparse, views of the cabin from the footpath to the east become less obscured. Moreover, from certain vantage points along the footpath, the cabin breaches the skyline, accentuating its prominence with the elevated terrain.
12. While long-range views of the cabin from surrounding roads are generally limited by the presence of mature boundary hedgerows, these natural screening features are not continuous. Gaps in the vegetation allow clear and direct views of the cabin, further contributing to its visual impact. Even where woodland forms part of the backdrop in views from the south, the cabin remains visually discernible due to its elevated siting, scale and large glazed doors on the southeast elevation. These factors cumulatively heighten its visual impact and reinforce its presence within the wider landscape.

13. For the avoidance of doubt, even though the cabin is located within the established equestrian facility, this does not mitigate its impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Most notably, its isolated and elevated siting within the landscape, results in a conspicuous and detached built form that fails to safeguard the countryside from encroachment.
14. For the reasons given, the development would cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt and conflict with one of the five purposes of including land within it. Thus, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, conflicting with Policy CS.10 of the CS and the Framework.

Character and appearance

15. The appeal site is located in the Arden Special Landscape Area (SLA) where Policy CS.12 of the CS seeks to resist development that would have a harmful effect on the distinctive character and appearance of the SLA. Paragraph 4.3.5 of the supporting text to Policy CS.12 indicates that the Special Landscape Areas identified represent particularly high quality countryside in the context of the District, based on their landscape and scenic quality, as well as their natural and historic features. The presence of wooded hillocks, such as the one upon which the cabin is situated, is a key characteristic of the SLA, contributing to its special character.
16. Although the appellant's submissions address the visual impact of the development, they do not provide a sufficiently detailed or robust assessment of its specific landscape effects within the SLA. In particular, the cumulative impact of the development on the quality and character of the landscape has not been adequately addressed, as required by Policy CS.12.
17. In terms of its visual impact, the cabin, by virtue of its siting, scale and design, introduces a visually prominent and alien feature into a sensitive and elevated part of the landscape, thus harming the visual qualities of the SLA.
18. From certain viewpoints, the structure is less visually conspicuous due to the effect of woodland backdrop. However, from other vantage points, particularly where vegetation is sparse, the cabin breaks the skyline and appears visually prominent, thereby increasing its perceptibility within the wider landscape.
19. Although the appeal site forms part of a wider equestrian establishment, the cabin is physically separated from other buildings and occupies a prominent and elevated position within the open countryside. This siting results in a degree of visual isolation, which contributes to its perceived encroachment into the countryside.
20. The sense of incongruity is further heightened by the inclusion two large, glazed folding doors on the southeast elevation of the cabin. These design features are more typical of domestic buildings, and as a result appears incongruous within its setting. So, although the cabin incorporates elements of an agricultural building such as timber cladding and a simple built form, the extensive glazing on the southeast elevation reduces its ability to integrate discreetly within the surrounding rural landscape and contributes to a more conspicuous domestic presence. The southeast elevation of the cabin, with its large, glazed doors are clearly visible in long-range views from the public road to the south, significantly increasing its visual prominence.

21. I am not convinced that the large glazed doors are the only viable option for observing horses on the gallop given the elevated position of the cabin and its physical relationship to the gallop track.
22. The appellant has suggested a condition, that has been used for schemes in other areas, could be imposed requiring the installation of electronically timed blackout blinds to prevent light spill into the surrounding landscape. However, such a condition would not control when and if the blinds would be used, so lacks clarity and enforceability. Accordingly, the condition would not meet the tests for conditions set out in the Framework and Planning Practice Guidance.
23. For the reasons given, the development would have an unacceptably harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Arden Special Landscape Area. As such, it conflicts with Policies CS.5, CS9, CS.12 of the CS insofar as they seek to maintain the landscape character and quality of the District, require development to reflect the character and distinctiveness of the locality and resist development that would harm the character, quality and appearance of Special Landscape Areas.

Other Considerations

24. The cabin would support the observation of horses during training, thus enhancing a well-established elite horse training facility, stated to contribute to the local economy. However, as there would be no increase in the number of employees as a result of the cabin, as indicated on the Application Form, I attribute moderate weight to these benefits.
25. While it may be true that certain equestrian activities benefit from open countryside settings and sloped terrain, this does not automatically justify the construction of observation cabin within the Green Belt. The Framework is clear that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless very special circumstances exist — and those circumstances must be exceptional.
26. The assertion that the appeal site was chosen for its slope does not demonstrate that the cabin itself is essential to the functioning of the training facility.
27. While paragraph 88 of the Framework supports the expansion of all types of business in rural areas through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings, paragraph 89 of the Framework requires development in rural areas to ensure that it is sensitive to its surroundings.
28. As outlined above, the cabin's siting, scale and extensive use of glazing result in a built form that fails to integrate with the surrounding landscape.
29. That there are no residential dwellings proximate to the site weighs neither for nor against the proposal and is considered neutral in the planning balance.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

30. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the Framework advises that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. It also indicates that inappropriate development is by definition harmful and should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances' which will not exist unless potential harm to

the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

31. Having regard to the 'Other Considerations' set out above and the overall moderate weight I attach to them in favour of the proposal, they do not clearly outweigh the substantial weight which must be given to the Green Belt harm. In addition, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the SLA. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.
32. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above, the appeal should be dismissed.

U P Han

INSPECTOR