
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 August 2025

by **R Gravett BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/25/3367826

High Moor Manor, High Moor Lane, Wrightington, Lancashire WN6 9PS

- 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 Paul Jones against the decision of West Lancashire Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 2024/0568/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as “construction of a new access track from High Moor Lane through the estate's retained land.”
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant has submitted two revised plans which correct an error in the boundary of the land owned or controlled by the appellant and amend the boundary of the appeal site such that it excludes the existing access track. The Council has had an opportunity to comment on the amended plans.
3. The planning appeals procedural guidance¹ advises that the appeal process should not be used to evolve a scheme. It is important that what is considered by the Inspector at appeal is essentially the same scheme that was considered by the local planning authority and by interested parties at the application stage. Having considered the amendments against the substantive and procedural tests set out in the relevant judgment, I do not consider that there is justification for exceptionally accepting the revised plans. Whilst I note that the correct Notice has been served on the landowner, such a reduction in the appeal site would amount to a substantial difference to the proposal. Accordingly, I have determined the appeal based on the scheme and plans which were refused by the Council.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the rural character and appearance of the site and surrounding area; and

¹ Procedural Guide: Planning Appeals – England (June 2025)

- 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. There is no dispute between the parties that the appeal site lies within the Green Belt. It comprises part of a grassed field to the west of a detached dwelling at High Moor Manor. There is an existing track off High Moor Lane, which runs alongside the boundary of High Moor Manor and continues broadly south providing access to farmland. It is proposed to construct a new access from High Moor Lane which would connect with this existing track roughly at the point it doglegs to the south-east.
6. Policy GN1 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document (2013) (LP) requires development proposals within the Green Belt to be assessed against national policy.
7. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) defines “engineering operations” as including the formation or laying out of means of access to highways. It is common ground between the parties that the proposal is an engineering operation and that paragraph 154(h) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is relevant. This states that ‘other forms of development,’ which includes engineering operations, are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
8. 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. Whether or not any change will have an adverse impact, and so cause harm to openness, might depend on factors such as the scale of the development, its locational context, and its spatial and/or visual implications.²
9. The new access would be at right angles to the road, offset over 60m from the western boundary of High Moor Manor, and would have a broadly straight alignment before meeting the existing access track. It would introduce built form onto a part of the field, and within the open countryside, which did not historically exist and would materially widen the existing track as it continues south. It would therefore have a detrimental impact on the spatial aspect of the openness of the Green Belt. Moreover, I have no evidence before me that the first part of the existing track would be removed, and the proposal would therefore result in two access tracks close-by, exacerbating this spatial impact.
10. There are existing hedgerows on the wider field boundaries which would partly screen the access from the west and south, where there are no public rights of way. However, in contrast to the view of the Council, I observed that the field boundary to High Moor Lane is relatively open and whilst there are trees along the grass verge these would afford the new access little screening, especially at times of the year when they are not in leaf. Consequently, as it crosses the open field, the

² *Euro Garages Ltd v SSCLG & Anor* [2018] EWHC 1753 (Admin)

full length of the new access would be highly visible when travelling in either direction on High Moor Lane. Although the proposed finish could be controlled by condition, the introduction of any hard surface into the grassed field would further contribute to this visual impact by drawing the eye to the access track and giving it undue prominence.

11. The purposes of the Green Belt include assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The siting of the proposed new access a distance from the boundary of High Moor Manor would lead to encroachment into the countryside. However, this encroachment would be modest given the scale of the proposal.
12. An agricultural barn sited part way along the existing track and close to the boundary with High Moor Manor has recently been demolished. The appellant asserts that the removal of this barn has improved the openness of the Green Belt. Whilst this may be the case, it does not form part of the proposal before me, nor do I have any substantive evidence that the demolition of the barn was predicated on construction of the proposed new access. The benefits to openness resulting from the removal of the barn therefore offer very little justification for the appeal proposal now before me.
13. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal proposal would result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt and would conflict with one of the purposes of including land within it. Accordingly, the proposed development would not meet the exception outlined in paragraph 154(h) of the Framework. It therefore constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site forms part of an open, grassed field which makes a positive contribution to the rural and verdant character and appearance of the surrounding area, which comprises a loose pattern of built development set amongst open countryside and farmland. This part of High Moor Lane comprises a typically narrow country lane with no pavements, and it is edged by grass verges, trees and in places lengths of hedgerow.
15. I observed that driveways or tracks off High Moor Lane to adjoining fields or dwellings are commonplace, but these are sporadically located and typically well-spaced out. In contrast, the appeal proposal would result in a proliferation of accesses on a relatively short section of High Moor Lane which would be at odds with the prevailing pattern of development. Moreover, it would introduce a reasonably wide and straight length of hardstanding through an existing field which would be highly visible and unduly prominent from High Moor Lane. This would harmfully detract from the rurality and verdancy that I have identified as being characteristic of the area.
16. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would result in modest harm to the rural character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with LP Policy GN3 in so far as it requires proposals for new development to have regards to visual amenity through sensitive design, including appropriate siting and materials and integrate well with their surroundings.

Other considerations

17. The primary reason cited for the proposed access is to provide farm access to fields to the south of the appeal site, avoiding the need to pass through land close to High Moor Manor which would be owned by the appellant.
18. It is also asserted that the new access track would be much more suited to modern agricultural machinery than the existing one. However, I have very little information before me regarding the type of agricultural operations which are taking place, or the size or type of machinery used. Further, I observed that the existing access track is reasonably wide and hard surfaced (at least in part) and it is not clear from the submissions why it is no longer suitable for agricultural use. I therefore attach limited weight to these matters. Nevertheless, I afford moderate weight to the provision of access for a local farmer which would contribute to supporting the rural economy.
19. As I have explained above, because the agricultural barn has already been demolished and does not form part of the proposal before me, I attach very limited weight to the benefits resulting from this in respect of Green Belt openness.

Green Belt Balance and Conclusion

20. The appeal proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In addition, there would be modest harm to the rural character and appearance of the area.
21. Paragraph 153 of the Framework requires that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 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.
22. In this case, the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm, and any other harm, would not be clearly outweighed by the other considerations above. Therefore, the very special circumstances required to justify a grant of planning permission have not been demonstrated.
23. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

R Gravett

INSPECTOR