



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 August 2025

by **H Miles BA (hons), MA, MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/W/25/3362294

Gate House Cottage Hogden Lane, Ranmore Common, Surrey RH5 6SY

- 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 & Mrs Anderson against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
 - The application Ref is MO/2024/0858/PLA.
 - The development proposed is new stable outbuilding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt.
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the Surrey Hills National Landscape.
 - The effect of the proposed development on biodiversity with particular regard to Biodiversity Net Gain.
 - 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

3. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and thus should be approved only if very special circumstances exist, unless it comes within one of the exceptions in the Framework. This is broadly echoed by Policy EN1 of the Mole Valley Local Plan (2024) (LP).
4. Paragraph 154 h) v) of the Framework has been brought to my attention, which relates to material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds). However, as a new

building is a fundamental part of the appeal scheme, the proposed development would not be covered by this exception.

5. Also of relevance to this appeal, paragraph 154 b) provides an exemption 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. Policy EN1 of the LP states that this should be by reason of their scale, design or siting.
6. The proposed development is described as a stable outbuilding. The appellant's case is clearly that they intend to use the building for keeping horses. The Council observed that there are no horses on the site at present. Nevertheless, given the development has not occurred, this would not be decisive. Therefore, the appeal is considered on the basis that the proposed building would be for stables for equestrian use.
7. As such, I am satisfied that, based on the evidence in this case, this would be a building in connection with the use of the land for outdoor sport and recreation. Consequently, I will go on to consider the effect on openness.

Openness

8. Openness has both spatial and visual dimensions. The appeal site is currently an open, undeveloped field. The proposed development would introduce a single storey building, which includes two loose boxes as well as both covered and open storage and a pitched roof above. The combined mass of the stables and storage areas at the scale proposed would appear as a bulky building in this context. Whilst no harm is identified with regard to the appearance and detailing of the building, this does not alter the scale or bulk of the proposed development.
9. There is a public right of way close to the southern elevation of the proposed stables. Although there is screening from trees and hedges, the field is seen from this route. Also, the stables would be located at the end of the existing driveway to the house and would be seen in glimpsed views from the road. Further landscaping is proposed although this would be unlikely to fully screen the building, particularly when trees are not in leaf. As such, the building would be seen in these public views.
10. The development would therefore result in a bulky building in an area which is currently open, and this would be visible in public views. The proposed development, including with regard to its scale and siting, would therefore be harmful to both spatial and visual openness.
11. Consequently, it would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. As such it would not meet the exception at paragraph 154b) and would be contrary to Policy EN1 of the LP, the aims of which are set out above. Therefore, even if I were to find that the development would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, the appeal scheme would nevertheless be inappropriate development in this respect as it would not satisfy paragraph 154b).

National Landscape

12. The appeal site is within the Surrey Hills National Landscape, and I give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in this area, which has the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. I have a duty to seek to further the statutory purposes of the National Landscape which are conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. The special qualities of the National Landscape include its traditional mixed farmland, and this use and character makes an important contribution to the scenic beauty of this area.
13. As set out above, the proposed development is for a stable building and no hardstanding is proposed. The appearance and construction materials of the building would be appropriate for this rural location. The building and its access would cover a small portion of the field in which it would be located. Even though it would be visible in public views, in this setting it would have a very minor effect on the landscape character of this area. The majority of the field in which the stables would be located is outside the red line of the appeal site. It does not form part of the appeal scheme and it is not within my remit to formally determine whether the use of this land, including any paraphernalia, in connection with the proposed stables would require planning permission. As such, in the circumstances of this case, the landscape character would not unacceptably change.
14. As such, the proposed development would not be harmful to the existing character and appearance of the land and consequently would conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.
15. Therefore, the proposed development would have an acceptable effect on the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the Surrey Hills National Landscape. As such, it would be in accordance with Policy EN8 of the LP which seeks that proposals should conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty within the National Landscape, amongst other things.

Biodiversity Net Gain

16. Policy EN9 of the LP supports development which conserves and enhances biodiversity and requires that a biodiversity gain plan demonstrating biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 20% must be approved before development commences. There is also a national requirement to provide BNG.
17. The appellant has provided a technical note which sets out that 20% biodiversity net gain could be achieved, mainly through tree and hedge planting elsewhere in the field. Given this land is within the ownership of the appellant, and there appears to be scope for planting, based on the evidence before me I am satisfied that this could be achieved.
18. As such, the proposed development would have an acceptable effect on biodiversity. Consequently, the proposed development would be in accordance with Policy EN9, the aims of which are set out above.

Other Considerations

19. Paragraph 151 of the Framework seeks for local planning authorities to plan positively to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, and the appellant states that the Courts have held in *Timmins and Lymn Family Funeral Service v Gedling Borough Council and Westerleigh Group Limited* [2015] EWCA

Civ 10 that compliance with this paragraph is a material consideration. Paragraph 103 also recognises the health and wellbeing benefits of the provision of opportunities for sport and requires that plans should accommodate these needs. The proposed development would provide opportunities for sport and recreation for the existing occupiers who would be able to access the existing public rights of way nearby. However, there is no mechanism before me that would secure public access to the appeal site and therefore these would mainly be private benefits.

20. Policy EC7 of the LP relates to equestrian and horse racing facilities and provides criteria against which to assess such development. These include that the design, scale and siting of the proposed development is consistent with policies for development associated with outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt. It does not state that small scale equestrian facilities amount to very special circumstances. For the reasons above the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would be harmful to openness. Therefore, based on the evidence in this case, the development would be contrary to policy EC7 and it does not weigh in support of the proposed development.
21. There would also be associated economic benefits from the services, food and other equipment required for the keeping of horses, and there would be temporary economic benefits during construction. However, as this relates to two stables, the benefits in this regard would be limited.
22. I have not found harm with regard to character and appearance and the National Landscape nor biodiversity, nevertheless the lack of harm in these regards is a neutral matter.
23. Taking all the above into account, overall, there would be modest benefits as a result of the proposed development.

Green Belt Balance

24. I have concluded that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful. There is also harm to the Green Belt due to the effect on openness. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
25. On the other hand, the proposed development would provide the modest benefits identified above. Consequently, the considerations advanced by the appellant, even when considered together, do not clearly outweigh the totality of the Green Belt harm. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development therefore do not exist.

Conclusion

26. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

H Miles

INSPECTOR