



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 September 2025

by **S Rawle BA (Hons) Dip TP Solicitor**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7th October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/25/3363996

Runtley Wood Farm, Runtley Wood Lane, Sutton Green, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7QQ

- 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 Kurt Morris against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PLAN/2024/0842.
 - The development proposed is the relocation of track to centre of the site together with the installation of a substation to serve residential development permitted under ref Plan/2024/0190.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have made a minor amendment to the description of development to remove matters that are not acts of development. I note that some works have already been undertaken, and it is unclear whether they exactly match the details provided on the submitted plans. For the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal on the basis of the details provided on the submitted plans.
3. There is disagreement between the main parties about whether or not some existing structures on the appeal site still benefit from prior approval under Class Q, Part 3, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended)¹. Given that this matter appears to remain unresolved I have determined this appeal on the basis that the prior approval remains extant.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are;
 - Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any other relevant development plan policies;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
 - Whether or not the proposal would result in an unacceptable risk of flooding; and

¹ PLAN/2024/0190

- whether the 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 development

Reasons

Whether or not inappropriate development

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It goes on to state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
6. The Framework further establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions as set out in paragraph 154. Policy CS6 of the Woking Core Strategy October 2012 (WCS) and Policy DM13 of the Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DMPDPD) are consistent with the Framework as among other things they set out that strict control will apply over inappropriate development as defined by Government policy outlined in the Framework and unless very special circumstances can be clearly demonstrated the construction of new buildings and forms of development will be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt.
7. The proposal would involve the construction of a sub-station building. I am not satisfied that this element falls within any of the exceptions set out in paragraph 154. Consequently, the sub-station is an inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
8. The proposed access road would be an engineering operation and under paragraph 154 h) ii, such development may not be inappropriate if it preserves openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
9. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects. The appellant considers that the proposed access would be a like for like replacement of the existing track and the amount of hardstanding would be the same. However, I do not agree. Having visited the site and looking at the appeal plans, there would be an overall increase in the total land covered by the proposed access track in comparison to the existing access track which is currently partly unmade as the proposal would also include a track running up to the sub-station and beyond to provide access to existing agricultural land. By occupying space that was previously undeveloped, the proposed development would harmfully fail to preserve openness.
10. Visually, public views of the proposed access would be limited. Nevertheless, the access track would be apparent to anyone visiting the new dwellings and the proposed sub-station. As a result, there would be moderate harm to openness to which I give substantial weight.
11. Given my findings it is not strictly necessary to consider the purposes of the Green Belt, however, bearing in mind the countryside setting of the appeal site the proposed access track would fail to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

12. Further, the proposed sub-station would result in a building with a certain bulk and footprint that would increase the total land covered by buildings on the appeal site. Like the access track, although public views would be limited, the sub-station would be apparent to anyone using that part of the new access track. As a result, there would be moderate harm to openness to which I give substantial weight. Consequently, even if I had considered the sub-station as another form of development such as an engineering operation, it still would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it fails to preserve openness.
13. I therefore conclude that overall, the appeal proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It would therefore conflict with Policy CS6 of the WCS and Policy DM13 of the DMPDPD and the relevant policies of the Framework as set out above.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site is located within the countryside and is surrounded by fields and some wooded areas and is located within a tranquil rural area. The appeal site comprises some existing structures and ultimately two of these will be converted into two dwellings following a prior approval mentioned above (the approved dwellings). The appellant has introduced some other items onto the appeal site including a caravan, a site office, a container-like structure accommodating some toilets and other paraphernalia. However, I am satisfied that these are transient items associated with the development of the two dwellings as they do not appear on any of the submitted plans and I have determined the appeal on that basis. As a result, notwithstanding the approved dwellings and associated development overall the appeal site appears as open and verdant which creates a sense of spaciousness which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.
15. As outlined above, the proposal would involve the introduction of a repositioned access track and a sub-station. The proposed sub-station would be positioned away from any other existing or proposed structures and would appear as an isolated and incongruous utilitarian feature in the landscape which would be at odds with this countryside setting.
16. I am satisfied that an appropriate track could be provided on the appeal site to ensure that appropriate access could be provided to the approved dwellings. I also see merit in relocating the existing track away from Runtley Barn to minimise any impact on the living conditions of the occupants of this dwelling caused by vehicles using the existing track to access the approved dwellings. However, due to the position of the sub-station located a significant distance away from existing and proposed buildings, overall the proposed access track would unacceptably increase built development into this sensitive setting.
17. I note that the appellant indicates that the proposed access track would link to the existing access that serves the wider agricultural holding. However, I observed that the existing track beyond the proposed location of the electricity sub-station is an unmade low-key track that unlike the proposed track is entirely compatible with this countryside setting.
18. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area and afford this issue moderate weight.

Consequently, the proposed development would be at odds with Policies CS21 and CS24 of the WCS which among other things seeks to ensure development respects and makes a positive contribution to the landscape character of the area.

Flooding

19. At the planning application stage, the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) providing an advisory response which set out that in their view the appellant had not provided adequate details in relation to submerged discharge to explain how surface water would be discharged during periods of fluvial flooding, and suggested a condition if I did not agree that planning permission should be withheld on the basis of flood risk.
20. Notwithstanding my findings in relation to Green Belt and character and appearance matters, the proposed development is relatively modest. Moreover, I am determining the appeal based on the submitted details and plans rather than any work that has already been undertaken at the appeal site. The appellant has submitted a detailed flood risk assessment (FRA) which was updated during the planning process.
21. As part of the FRA, the appellant has undertaken a detailed assessment using topographic data of the appeal site which highlights that the proposed track would be constructed of a reinforced permeable material and would be located in an existing permeable area of the appeal site.
22. Consequently, I accept the findings of the FRA which concluded that there would be no additional risk to surface water flooding. That said, if in all other respects the proposal was satisfactory, in accordance with the suggestion of the LLFA it would have been necessary to impose a suitably worded condition to ensure that any flood risk at the appeal site was appropriately mitigated incorporating a sustainable drainage system in accordance with Framework guidance.
23. On that basis I conclude that the proposal would not result in an unacceptable risk of flooding. Consequently, the proposal would accord with Policy CS9 of the WCS which among other things seeks to ensure that planning applications will be determined in accordance with the guidance contained in the Framework, that a flood risk assessment will be required for development proposals within or adjacent to areas at risk of surface water flooding and that all significant forms of development should incorporate sustainable drainage systems.

Other Considerations

24. I note that the appellant sets out that UK Power Networks has carried out an on-site survey and concluded that the sub-station to serve the approved dwellings must be located to the southwest of the approved dwellings. The appellant also highlights that any other location would either site the substation within close proximity to neighbouring residential properties or would locate it further from the properties to which it would serve. While I accept that there needs to be a certain level of separation between the sub-station and residential properties, given that the proposed sub-station is to serve only two dwellings I am not persuaded that the distance proposed is justified nor is there any sufficiently compelling information why the sub-station unequivocally needs to be sited to the southwest of the approved dwellings at the proposed location rather than in a less conspicuous position.

25. As outlined above, the proposed sub-station would be sited some significant distance from any existing or proposed dwellings, and it is that location which results in the harm to both the Green Belt and the character and appearance of the area that I have identified above. I am not satisfied that there are no other alternative locations on the appeal site, or on land controlled by the appellant that would result in less harm to the Green Belt and the character and appearance of the area that would also ensure that adequate electricity was supplied to the approved dwellings.
26. Similarly, it is necessary for the proposed access track to be extended to provide access to the proposed sub-station. Again, this results in the harm identified above. As I am not persuaded that the proposed location is the only possible location for the sub-station it follows that I am also not persuaded that there is adequate justification for the introduction of this part of the proposed access track. Given my findings it also follows that I am not satisfied that the sub-station and the track in the proposed location are essential to facilitate the approved development.
27. As outlined above, I accept there is some merit in relocating the existing track away from Runtley Barn to minimise any impact on the living conditions of the occupants of this dwelling caused by vehicles using the existing track to access the approved dwellings. However, as I previously explained, the proposed track is not a like for like replacement and consequently, this tempers the weight of this matter. As a result, I afford the totality of the benefits associated with the other considerations that weigh in favour of the proposal moderate weight.

Green Belt Balance

28. The proposal would have some benefits which I afford moderate weight. On the other hand, I have found that the proposal would result in harm to the Green Belt by virtue of its inappropriateness, its impact on openness and it would conflict with one of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. As required by the Framework I have afforded these harms substantial weight.
29. Furthermore, I have found that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area which I afford moderate weight. Moreover, although I have found that the proposal would not result in an unacceptable risk of flooding, this is a neutral factor in the determination of the appeal.
30. I have found that the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having undertaken a balanced judgement, the resulting harm and any other harm, would clearly not be outweighed by the other considerations. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposed development do not exist.

Conclusion

31. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.²
32. In this case, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when considered as a whole and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be

² Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

decided other than in accordance with it. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

S Rawle

INSPECTOR