



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 September 2025

by Ryan Cowley MPlan (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/25/3365078

Higher Wrennalls Farm, Coopers Lane, Hildale, Heskin, Lancashire PR7 5PU

- 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 Scholes against the decision of West Lancashire Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 2024/0942/FUL.
 - The development proposed is change of use of an existing stables to a residential dwellinghouse and associated works
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. Nevertheless, the Council concluded that the proposal would benefit from Paragraph 154(g) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which provides an exception for development in the Green Belt comprising partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. The evidence before me and my own observations do not lead me to a different conclusion on this matter. Accordingly, the proposal would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether or not the proposed development would provide a suitable location for housing with regard to the Council's spatial strategy and its access to services and facilities.

Reasons

4. The appeal scheme relates to an existing single storey building, formerly used as stables, located to the south of an existing dwellinghouse. The site is not within any of the settlements identified in the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy SP1 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document October 2013 (the Local Plan) and is therefore located in the countryside.
5. Policy GN1 of the Local Plan states that, development outside settlement boundaries and within the Green Belt will be assessed against national policy and any relevant Local Plan policies. Policy RS1 seeks to limit the scale and type of housing development outside settlement boundaries. Policy SP1 seeks to ensure new development is sustainable in its location and accessibility, among other provisions.

6. Paragraph 84 of the Framework seeks to avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside. The Council accepts that the site is not physically isolated, as did the Inspector in the previous appeal decision¹. Even if I agree with this assessment however, this is distinct from paragraph 83 of the Framework, which seeks to promote sustainable development in rural areas by ensuring housing is located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
7. I saw on my visit that the appeal site sits along a narrow country lane, some distance from the nearest settlement. A comprehensive assessment of local services and amenities has been submitted in support of the appeal. This demonstrates that, while there are various amenities within 5.6-miles of the site, there are none closer than 1 mile, as per the previous Inspector's² assessment.
8. Based on the evidence, the closest shop is a farm shop located 1.2 miles away. While this would provide a selection of goods and locally sourced produce, it is unlikely to offer the full range of products available at a larger convenience store or supermarket. Beyond this, the nearest convenience stores are over 2 miles away.
9. Though a relatively short drive, walking and cycling to the nearest shops is unlikely to be done frequently, due to the distances involved, the narrow and unlit nature of the routes and lack of footways. While there may be a public right of way (PROW) providing pedestrian access to the farm shop across intervening fields, this is unlikely to be suitable for carrying goods over a long distance due to its informal nature, and even less so in poor weather conditions or later in the evening.
10. The schools, restaurants, public houses, cafes, post offices, medical services, churches and community facilities referred to in the supporting evidence are in most cases further still from the appeal site. The closest train stations are over a 10-minute drive away. Walking and cycling routes to these services and facilities are equally as unsuitable, and there is little substantiated evidence before me regarding public transport access. Irrespective of the time of day or weather conditions, most of these services and facilities would be difficult to access for future occupiers by any means other than the private car.
11. Paragraph 110 of the Framework highlights that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. The location of the appeal site however severely limits any alternative means of travel. While the site has access to the local PROW network, it is unlikely this would be used for anything other than recreation, for the reasons set out above.
12. The poor accessibility of the appeal site in this instance would thus result in an unduly heavy reliance on the private car for most, if not all, journeys. An appreciable proportion of these would likely involve long round trips. The poor accessibility of local villages, services and facilities would also limit the contribution of the development to the vitality of the rural communities.
13. I recognise that former agricultural buildings close to the appeal site may have been converted to dwellings at some point in history. On the evidence, the most recent planning permissions³ granted by the Council for such development were over 20 years ago. Details of these applications or the circumstances that led to

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/22/3296024

² Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/22/3296024

³ Council Refs: 2002/0312 and Council Ref 1990/1009

those decisions are not before me, and they were determined in a different local and national planning policy context.

14. My attention has also been drawn to 2 appeal decisions⁴ for similar development that was allowed elsewhere in West Lancashire. In the case at Elm Farm, local services and facilities including a farm shop, restaurant, children's nursery, bus stops, and a train station are described as being accessible on foot and by bicycle. This is not directly comparable to the appeal scheme. The case at Six Foxes Farm is geographically closer to the appeal site and bears more similarities, though is not as distant from many of the services referred to by the appellant in this appeal, including those in Mawdesley, Bispham, Parbold and Rufford. Ultimately, each case must be determined on its own merits, and none of the cases cited demonstrate that the proposal would provide a suitable location for housing.
15. A Court of Appeal decision⁵ has been referred to in the evidence as an example of a case in which poor accessibility to services, facilities and employment from a site other than by car did not result in the development location being unsustainable. Notably the site in that case was described as being in a "recognisable village", with some limited services and facilities. The same cannot be said of the appeal site in this case. The judgement clarifies that whether a site is sustainably located is ultimately a matter of planning judgment. This does not therefore lead me to a different conclusion on this main issue.
16. The proposed development would not provide a suitable location for housing with regard to the Council's spatial strategy and its access to services and facilities. It would conflict with Policies RS1 and GN1 of the Local Plan. Though not explicitly referenced in the reason for refusal, I have found that the proposal would also conflict with Policy SP1 of the Local Plan. These policies, among other provisions, seek to facilitate a sustainable pattern of residential development while meeting local housing needs, including by designating settlement boundaries, placing limits on development outside of these, and promoting new development in accordance with the settlement hierarchy.

Other Matters

17. Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework indicates that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged where the policies which are most important for determining the application are deemed out-of-date. This includes, for proposals involving the provision of housing, situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites.
18. In such cases, Paragraph 11(d) states that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.
19. The Framework seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing. The evidence indicates that the area has a housing land supply of just 2.49 years, a significant undersupply. The delivery of new housing must therefore be afforded considerable

⁴ Appeal Refs: APP/P2365/W/19/3228538 and Appeal Ref: APP/P2365/W/21/3277552

⁵ Braintree DC v SSCLG, Greyread Ltd & Granville Developments Ltd [2017] EWHC 2743 (Admin), [2018] EWCA Civ 610

weight. The development would also add to the supply of bungalows, of which the appellant maintains there is a shortfall, though little substantiated evidence of this has been presented in the appeal.

20. In addition, the proposal would reuse previously developed land and provide a temporary economic boost during the conversion works. Additional residents may also contribute to the local economy and community, albeit the limited accessibility of local villages from the site would somewhat curtail this. Overall, these social, environmental and economic benefits of the proposal would be relatively modest given its small scale and context.
21. The Framework also seeks to ensure housing in rural areas is located to enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. It promotes sustainable transport and the active management of growth. It also seeks to ensure development gives priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and access to public transport, and can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including through its location.
22. While Policy RS1 of the Local Plan is more restrictive than the exceptions set out in the Framework for Green Belt development, Policies GN1 and SP1 remain broadly consistent with the Framework's approach of directing development to sustainable locations. I thus apportion significant weight to the harm and development plan conflict arising from the inappropriateness of the location for an additional dwelling. The identified harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Accordingly, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.
23. I recognise the appellant's concern regarding the Council's approach to extensions to the determination period of applications. The Planning Practice Guidance⁶ states that the local planning authority should ask the applicant to consider an agreed extension of time, and that any such agreement must be in writing and set out the timescale within which a decision is expected. Nevertheless, this matter cannot lead me to a different conclusion on the main issue.
24. While no objections to the application were received from members of the public or technical consultees, this does not in itself demonstrate that the proposal is acceptable with regard to the main issue in this case.
25. Other than where set out above, I have not identified conflict with any other relevant parts of the development plan or national policy and guidance. However, the absence of harm or development plan conflict with respect to other relevant matters weighs neither for nor against the proposal.

Conclusion

26. The development conflicts with the development plan, taken as a whole. I have found no material considerations that indicate the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. Consequently, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Ryan Cowley

INSPECTOR

⁶ Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 21b-003-20140306