



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2025

by J Heppell BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 DECEMBER 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/25/3364882

Grayshurst, Highercombe Road, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Mr A Leighton against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PIP/2024/02401.
 - The development proposed is two detached 2 storey dwellings.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and permission in principle is granted for two detached 2 storey dwellings at Grayshurst, Highercombe Road, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LH in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref PIP/2024/02401, dated 31 October 2024.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle route has two stages: the first 'permission in principle' stage establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second 'technical details consent' stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. In this instance, because the site is in the Green Belt, these matters must be assessed in relation to national and local Green Belt policies. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent technical details consent application if permission in principle is granted.
4. An applicant can apply for a range of dwellings by expressing a minimum and maximum net number of dwellings as part of the application. In this instance, permission in principle has been sought for two dwellings. Drawings were submitted with the application showing the location of two detached dwellings, which I have treated as indicative only.

Main Issues

5. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - whether the appeal site is grey belt land and whether the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National

Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies; and

- whether the site is suitable for residential development having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

6. The appeal site comprises part of the garden of Grayshurst. The proposal is to erect two dwellings on the site, with access taken via a driveway to Grayshurst which is currently not in use.
7. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, whose essential characteristics are their openness and their permanence. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.
8. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework further establishes that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions set out in paragraphs 154 and 155, which I address below.

Grey belt

9. I have assessed whether the site is grey belt in accordance with paragraph 155 of the Framework. Grey belt is land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land (PDL) and/or any other land that, in either case, does not contribute strongly to any of the purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143 of the Framework. There is no suggestion from the main parties that the site would not constitute other land, but they disagree on whether the site is PDL. However, the fact that the site forms part of a residential garden outside a built-up area means that it is capable of meeting the Framework's definition of PDL.
10. The main parties agree, and I have no reason to take a contrary view, that the land does not contribute strongly to preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another (purpose b) or preserving the setting of historic towns (purpose d). The parties disagree, however, about whether the land contributes strongly to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (purpose a).
11. Haslemere is a town and therefore a large built-up area. The appeal site is located close to the defined settlement boundary of Haslemere. PPG advises that land situated adjacent to such areas is likely to contribute strongly to their unrestricted sprawl where that land is free of existing development and lacks physical features in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development.
12. Although the pattern of development in the immediate area is loose knit, the appeal site is bounded by Highercombe Road on one side and by dwellings on its other three sides. As such, there are physical features in close proximity to the site which act to restrict and contain development. This, together with the fact that the appeal site is capable of being previously developed land, means that the site does not contribute strongly to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.

13. As a result, and since the site does not include any of the areas or assets listed in footnote 7 of the Framework, the proposal is grey belt as defined by the Framework.

Purposes of the remaining Green Belt

14. Having found the site to be grey belt, I have to consider the proposal against the three criteria in paragraph 155 of the Framework. The Council considers that the proposal would fail to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, resulting in a loss of visual openness (owing to the semi-rural character of the area being eroded and open sightlines across the site lost) and spatial openness (substantial built form disrupting the open grain of the area).
15. The immediate area has a more spacious and less urbanised character than the houses within the defined settlement boundary. However, the level of containment provided by nearby dwellings, along with the potential for the appeal site to be previously developed land, mean that the proposal would not appear as an encroachment into the countryside. The proposal would not therefore materially affect the ability of all the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way. Consequently, the proposal would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan, thus satisfying criterion (a) in paragraph 155 of the Framework.

Whether there is a demonstrable unmet need

16. The Council has confirmed that as of 1 April 2024 it had a 1.28 year housing land supply. The Framework confirms that the lack of a five year supply of deliverable housing sites amounts to a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed. The proposal therefore satisfies criterion (b) in paragraph 155 of the Framework.

Whether the location is sustainable

17. The appellant has advised that facilities in Haslemere are a 15 minute walk from the appeal site, which the Council has not disputed. Notwithstanding the Council's misgivings about pedestrian infrastructure, the majority of the route has street lighting and a pavement. Highercombe Road, which forms a short sloping section of the route, serves only a small number of dwellings and, whilst only a snapshot, I did not observe other cars using it. Therefore, notwithstanding that Highercombe Road has a shared surface and is unlit, the site offers opportunities for travel other than by private car.
18. I have had regard to Framework paragraphs 110 and 115 and recognise that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural locations. In this context, the site would offer a genuine choice of transport modes, and safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. I therefore conclude that it is a sustainable location and so accords with criterion (c) in paragraph 155 of the Framework.

Findings

19. The site is grey belt and accords with criteria (a)-(c) of paragraph 155 of the Framework. The proposal is not major development and so it is not necessary for me to consider the 'Golden Rules' referred to in criterion (d) of paragraph 155. The

proposal would therefore not be inappropriate development, and there is no need for me to consider the proposal under criteria (e) and (g) of Framework paragraph 154.

20. The proposal would accord with Policy RE2 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Policies and Sites February 2018 (LPP1) and Policy DM14 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies March 2023 (LPP2), which together seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Location, proposed land use and amount of development

21. The proposal is for two dwellings in a sustainable location just beyond the defined settlement boundary of Haslemere. The supporting text to Policy DM13 of the LPP2 guides that outside settlement boundaries, the principle of development will be determined on a case-by-case basis through consideration of factors including a site's relationship with the defined settlement and the sustainability of the location. The proposal accords with this broad policy context.
22. Furthermore, the proposal would satisfy Policy SP2 of the LPP1, whose spatial strategy focusses development on four main settlements, one of which is Haslemere. As a consequence, the proposal would also accord with Policy H1.3 of the Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan 2013-2032 (HNP), which states that development outside settlement boundaries will be strictly controlled and will only be supported where it conforms with national and local planning policies.
23. Given the size of the appeal site, the density of development would be comparable with other dwellings in the immediate vicinity (except Grayshurst, which occupies a very large plot) and thus reflective of the character of the area.
24. I conclude that the site is suitable for residential development having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Other Matters

25. The appeal site is situated in the 400m-5km Zone of Influence of the Wealden Heaths Phase II Special Protection Area (SPA), part of a complex of heathlands which together support a significant proportion of the global breeding populations of three vulnerable and uncommon birds, the Dartford warbler, the nightjar and the woodlark. It is a European Designated Site afforded protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended (the Habitats Regulations), and as such it is incumbent upon me as competent authority to consider whether the development is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the sites
26. Policy NE1 of the LPP1 indicates that where new development is proposed that would result in a net increase in residential accommodation within 400m of the boundary of the SPA, the Council would need to be satisfied that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA through a project level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). As the appeal site is further than 400m from the SPA, the policy is not engaged.
27. The Waverley Planning FAQ November 2020 contains advice from Natural England and is a material consideration. It guides that within 400m-5km of the SPA, schemes of less than 20 dwellings would be unlikely to need mitigation, an

Appropriate Assessment, or Natural England consultation, and can therefore be permitted without likely significant effects on the SPA. I am satisfied therefore that there will be no likely significant effect on the SPA.

28. The lack of a 5 year housing land supply has already been shown to weigh in favour of the proposal in relation to grey belt, and the current level of supply adds further positive weight in favour of the scheme.
29. The Council has drawn my attention to three previous planning applications on the site which they advise were dismissed. As the Council describes them as historic cases, and I have not been supplied with details of the proposals or the reasons for their rejection, I have afforded them limited weight.
30. The effect of the proposal on neighbouring properties in terms of living conditions would be a matter to be considered at the technical details consent stage.
31. Thames Water has drawn attention to water mains which cross or are close to the appeal site, and advised that building over or construction within 3m is not permitted. This matter is capable of being resolved at the technical details consent stage.

Conclusion

32. The PPG makes it clear that it is not possible for conditions to be attached to a grant of permission in principle, whose terms may only include the site location, type, and amount of development. Therefore, I have not imposed any conditions. Where permission in principle is granted by application, such as this, the default duration of that permission is three years, and there is no justification to vary this period in this case.
33. For the above reasons, the proposal accords with the development plan, when read as a whole. Material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be taken other than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

J Heppell

INSPECTOR