



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 06 November 2025

by Chris Preston BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/C/25/3362958

Dernford Farm, Dernford Farm Road, Stapleford, Cambridge, CB22 5DY

- The appeal is made under section 174 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).
- The appeal is made by Mr Andrew Watson (Hale Investments Holdings Limited) against an enforcement notice issued by South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- The notice was issued on 25 February 2025.
- The breach of planning control as alleged in the notice is: Without planning permission:
 - a) The change of use of the land from a mixed Agricultural Use and Hostel Accommodation for Agricultural Workers, Ancillary Office Accommodation and Use of Existing Bungalow as Warden Accommodation to a mixed use, Agricultural Use, Caravan Site, Commercial Business Use, Hostel Accommodation and Use of Existing Bungalow as Warden Accommodation.
- The requirements of the notice are to:
 - (i) Cease the use of the land as a caravan site.
 - (ii) Remove all caravans from the land.
 - (iii) Cease to use the land for Commercial Business Use.
 - (iv) Ensure that occupants of the hostel are Agricultural Workers.
- The period for compliance with the requirements is 6 months from the date the notice takes effect.
- The appeal is proceeding on the grounds set out in section 174(2) (a) & (g) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Since an appeal has been brought on ground (a), an application for planning permission is deemed to have been made under section 177(5) of the Act.

Decision

1. It is directed that the enforcement notice is corrected and varied by:
 - (i) The insertion of the word “material” in between the words “the” and “change” in the description of the breach at section 3 a);
 - (ii) The deletion of the words "Commercial Business Use" from the description of the breach of planning control at Section 3;
 - (iii) The deletion of requirement (iii) from the requirements at section 5; and
 - (iv) The deletion of the words “6 months following the date this notice takes effect” in respect of the time period for compliance in section 6 and the substitution with the following words: (1) In respect of requirement 5(i) 11 months from the date the notice takes effect; (2) In respect of requirement 5(ii) 17 months from the date the notice takes effect; and (3) In respect of requirement 5(iv), 6 months from the date the notice takes effect.
2. Subject to those corrections and variations, the appeal is dismissed, the enforcement notice is upheld and planning permission is refused on the application deemed to have been made under section 177(5) of the 1990 Act as amended.

Procedural Matters

3. The breach of planning control, as described within the Enforcement Notice (EN) is set out in the banner heading above. Part of that description refers to a “Commercial Business Use”. There is no doubt that the site is in use for a mix of agricultural land, hostel accommodation for agricultural workers, ancillary office use, a bungalow for the site warden or that part of the land has recently been used for the stationing of caravans for residential occupation. However, having read the respective statements it was not clear what the phrase “Commercial Business Use” referred to.
4. At my accompanied site visit, the Council representative confirmed that it was not intended to reflect an additional component but was, in effect, intended to refer to the commercial use of the site as a whole. In that respect, the phrase is unnecessary because the primary elements of the use are set out elsewhere within the EN. It also adds confusion because it hints of some form of additional commercial use when, in fact, there is none. In view of that I shall correct the notice to delete reference to “commercial business use” and to vary the associated requirements. I am satisfied that no injustice will arise as a result.
5. Part of the breach of planning control, as described by the enforcement notice, is an alleged “change of use of the land”. Whilst it is not a matter raised by either party, planning permission is only required for a “material” change of use, as set out at section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act. In order to ensure that the deemed planning application under Ground (a) is considered on the correct basis, I have corrected the notice to make clear that the development in question involves a “material” change of use.
6. No appeal has been made on Ground (b) but, in his final comments, the appellant makes the suggestion that the site is not being used as a residential caravan site. There is no dispute that caravans have been sited on the land and occupied for residential purposes. In planning terms, the occupation of caravans for the purposes of human habitation represents use as a caravan site, regardless of whether that is for holiday accommodation or seasonal accommodation for workers. Thus, I am satisfied that the breach is correctly described in that regard.

The Appeal on Ground (a)

7. Having regard to the information before me the main issues in respect of the appeal on ground (a) are:
 - i) Whether the development constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt;
 - ii) The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area;
 - iii) Whether the location of the site is such that the development has led to unsustainable patterns of travel;
 - iv) The effect on the living conditions of neighbouring residents at Dernford House; and
 - v) If the development does represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt, whether there any other considerations exist to amount to the

very special circumstances necessary to justify a grant of permission, including the need for accommodation for the local agricultural economy.

Whether Inappropriate Development

8. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. Development is considered to be “inappropriate” within the Green Belt unless it falls within a defined list of exceptions, as set out at paragraphs 154 and 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Policy S/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) (the Local Plan) essentially defers to the Framework in terms of the approach to development within the Green Belt,
9. Under paragraph 154(h)(v), the material change of use of land is not inappropriate where it would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In this case, the introduction of static and touring caravans has resulted in the material change of use to the mixed use alleged in the notice. Openness has both a spatial and visual quality. The introduction of numerous caravans on space that was previously free from development – the paddock to the north-east of the farm buildings and the field to the east – has undoubtedly reduced openness in a spatial sense.
10. The paddock just to the north-east of the main farm buildings is enclosed by established planting such that the caravans are largely shielded from public vantage points. Nonetheless, the development can clearly be seen as one passes the site and the tops of the caravans made out in the distance from the public highway to the north. The caravans in the field to the east of the main buildings had been removed by the time of my visit but were in situ at the time the notice was served and form part of the breach. That part of the site is less well screened and it is likely that those caravans would have been visible from public vantage points given the generally open and flat nature of intervening arable land.
11. Overall, the development has had a detrimental effect on openness in a spatial and visual sense. It has also resulted in encroachment into the countryside on account of the visual and spatial expansion away from the pre-existing farm buildings and purpose built hostel, contrary to one of the primary purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as set out at paragraph 143 of the Framework.
12. The appellant has referred to the exception at paragraph 154(g) of the Framework but that relates to the limited infilling or redevelopment of previously developed land. Whilst the buildings and yard areas were previously developed and used for hostel accommodation and associated staff accommodation and office space, the introduction of caravans onto surrounding agricultural land did not involve the use of previously developed land. It is the introduction of accommodation in caravans that has led to the current mix of uses alleged in the enforcement notice. That part of the use has not involved previously developed land but represents an expansion onto agricultural land and does not benefit from the exception at paragraph 154(g).
13. The appellant has also referred to the definition of Grey Belt land within paragraph 155 of the Framework. Grey Belt is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.

14. In respect of paragraph 143(a), the appeal site is somewhat distant from the edge of Cambridge and in a rural setting. Accordingly, I am satisfied it does not contribute strongly to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. Moreover, it does not play a strong role in preserving the setting and special character of historic towns, in respect of paragraph 143(d). Nonetheless it forms part of a narrow tract of land between two distinct settlements; Sawston and Great Shelford/ Stapleford.
15. No analysis has been presented by either party as to whether those areas represent “towns” in the sense of paragraph 143(b). However, both are sizeable in terms of the number of houses and have a range of services, shops, schools, sports facilities, churches, pubs, employment uses and the like. Sawston has a cinema and leisure centre, Great Shelford has its own train station. Both settlements feel like small towns, having regard to size and the range of uses within them. Neither instinctively feels like a village.
16. The land at the appeal site does contribute strongly to preventing those settlements from merging into one another, given the limited gap between the two and the flat, generally open, character landscape, which allows for sweeping views. Accordingly, in the absence of any substantive analysis from either party as to why the site should or should not constitute Grey Belt land, I am of the view that it does not, having regard to paragraph 143(b) of the Framework.
17. Consequently, in view of the above, the development does not meet any of the exceptions at paragraphs 154 or 155 of the Framework and constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt, having regard to the policies of the Framework and the Local Plan.

Effect on the Character and Appearance of the Area

18. The appeal site comprises a former farmstead, with a number of traditional buildings set around the farmyard and the more recent accommodation block constructed as a hostel to house agricultural workers. Whilst the buildings are no longer used for agricultural purposes, the group of buildings still sits easily in the rural landscape where scattered farmsteads set amongst arable fields are not uncommon.
19. The introduction of caravans beyond the confines of the farmyard and onto surrounding fields has resulted in the visual incursion of a somewhat alien form of development into the rural landscape. The white exterior and utilitarian appearance of the caravans contrasts awkwardly with the traditional materials of surrounding buildings and the verdant character of the surrounding landscape.
20. The field to the east is prominent from public vantage points towards the A1303 due to the generally open nature of the landscape. Whilst planting could mitigate the visual impact to a degree, such planting would need to consist of native, deciduous, hedgerow species if it was to blend into the landscape of itself. Not only would it take time to establish, it would not provide full cover in the winter months. However, the appellant suggests that the eastern paddock is only used during the season from May to September. It would be possible to attach a condition to that effect which would, in combination with a landscaping condition, help to mitigate the visual impact.

21. In terms of the enclosed paddock to the north, the surrounding planting effectively screens views from exterior vantage points to a significant degree and the caravans are only visible at close quarters from the entrance to the site and within the enclosed space itself. Thus, the impact on the surrounding landscape is negligible. Nonetheless, the appearance of the site is cluttered and the numerous caravans were all of some vintage, giving off a somewhat dilapidated and rather bleak appearance. For those residing in the caravans or those passing close by the visual effect is unsympathetic to the area in my view.
22. Having said that, the extent of harm is very localised and that tempers the weight against the matter. Nonetheless, the development does not respect, retain or enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the landscape and there remains a degree of conflict with the aims of Policy NH/2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 135(c) of the Framework in that regard.

Effect on Travel Patterns/ Transport

23. Policy TI/2 of the Local Plan requires that development must be located and designed to reduce the need to travel, particularly by car, and promote sustainable travel appropriate to its location. The appellant contends that the site is a 10 minute walk from Stapleford and its associate facilities which can be accessed from the footpath from the A1303.
24. However, having gauged the distance it seems to me that 10 minutes is an optimistic estimate, even to reach the edge of the settlement. The main shops and services are further away still. If the proposal were serving a general housing need, its location at the end of an unlit, heavily rutted, track some distance from available services would undoubtedly encourage additional travel, by car, due to the distance and nature of the route, particularly during times of darkness and poor weather when walking and cycling would be an unattractive proposition. The site is poorly located in that respect, compared to land within or closely adjacent to the settlement.
25. The appellant contends that approximately 100 residents live on site, presumably during the agricultural season, and that they are encouraged to share a mini-bus which is in operation to transport them to their place of work and also that some cycle to work. The number of residents is such that the use clearly has the potential to generate significant amounts of traffic. It is said that they are predominantly agricultural workers but the statement is broad in nature and lacking is specific detail.
26. How many mini-buses are provided? How often do they run? Who provides that service? Is there a fee? Which farms in particular tend to employ workers who live at the site? How far away are those farms? Without more information on questions such as those it is very difficult to conclude that the location of the site is designed to reduce the need for travel.
27. There is very little information at all as to who has lived at the site, other than the general assertion that they are agricultural workers. The Council has provided an extract of an application for Housing Benefit from a resident of the site. Within that application it does not appear that the occupant is working and it is noted that the individual had recently been released from prison. That does cast some doubt on the claim that all occupants are working locally in agriculture.

28. The appellant contends that the individual has now left the site and that the person was an agricultural worker and the benefit claim was to support them outside the rural agricultural season. The fact that they may now have left does mean that the information is irrelevant because it is evidence of the nature of occupation at the time the notice was served. Moreover, the explanation given does suggest that residential occupation was continuing outside the agricultural season, contrary to the suggested purpose of the caravan accommodation.
29. That evidence related to a single occupant. It may or may not be indicative of the nature of occupation on a more general level. Without further information in respect of who has occupied the site it is not possible to tell with any degree of confidence. In the absence of clear evidence as to who has occupied the site and the nature of their occupation, I cannot conclude that the site is well located to encourage travel by a range of modes. It is poorly located in relation to local shops and services and has the potential to generate significant travel due to the number of people in occupation.
30. Consequently, the appellant has failed to demonstrate that the development complies with the aims of Policy TI/2 of the Local Plan and that is a matter that weighs against the grant of permission.
31. The Council contends that the poor quality of the surface of Dernford Farm Lane is due to the high levels of traffic associated with the development. The appellant suggests that it is an adopted track and the responsibility of the highway's department to maintain, with no evidence that the condition is down to the use of the appeal site. Little evidence is before me to reach any definitive conclusion on whether the condition is related to the use of the site. In any event, the condition is such that it does not encourage cycling, for reasons set out above.
32. In terms of highway safety vehicles can access the A1303 with good visibility and the fact that it is in poor condition is not a significant factor in that respect, albeit that it does mean that anyone driving to the site needs to take care so as not to damage their vehicle, it is not necessarily a road safety issue given the good levels of forward visibility.

Living Conditions at Dernford House

33. The Council alleges that the use has caused harm to the occupants of Dernford House on account of noise and disturbance. Whilst I am in receipt of two letters from local residents, neither appears to be from the occupants of Dernford House and neither explicitly refers to noise and disturbance. Moreover, the Council hasn't pointed to any specific examples to demonstrate how the alleged disturbance has occurred and the evidence is of a general nature.
34. Whilst the development has led to an increase in the number of people living at the site, it remains a residential use. In the absence of any specific information, there is no reason why one residential use should be incompatible with another and nothing to indicate that the use of the site would cause harm to the living conditions of the occupants of Dernford House. No doubt traffic has increased but residents of properties often live adjacent to busy roads and that of itself is not sufficient to indicate a harmful impact.

35. Consequently, there is nothing to indicate harm in that regard and I am satisfied that the development complies with the aims of Policy SC/10 of the Local Plan with regards to noise emissions.

Other Material Considerations

36. The appellant's primary contention is that the need for accommodation to house agricultural workers is significant and should outweigh any harm to the Green Belt and other harm. It is the case that the site has been providing accommodation through the approved hostel building for in excess of 20 years.
37. However, as outlined above, the statements submitted in support of the appeal are of a very general nature and lack detail in terms of the individuals who reside at the site and where they are employed. Whilst only relating to one individual, the Housing Benefit application form casts some doubt on the question of whether those residing are all employed in agriculture.
38. No doubt some will be but even then, without knowing where the occupants are employed or in the absence of any statistics, or evidence from local employers to demonstrate that there is a need in the local area it is difficult to attach significant weight to the argument that the site is meeting an urgent need for accommodation in the agricultural economy. The appellant has simply not made out his case with sufficient information.
39. Whilst not a matter raised directly by the appellant the implications of the enforcement notice has potential consequences for the home and family life of the occupants of the accommodation and it is a circumstance where Article 8 Convention Rights¹ are engaged. That said, on the basis of the information provided, the accommodation is intended as a temporary base on a seasonal basis and would not amount to the primary home of those residing at the site. In that sense, there is nothing to indicate the effects of the notice would render the occupants homeless but it would potentially make it more difficult for them to live close to their employment over the agricultural season. That is a matter that weighs in the planning balance.
40. Tempered against that is the absence of any clear information regarding the defined need for the accommodation or any analysis of the availability of accommodation elsewhere. Plus the temporary nature of the accommodation. Whether the interference with Article 8 Rights is proportionate is a matter I shall address in the balance below.

The Planning Balance

41. The development is inappropriate within the Green Belt and has also led to a reduction in the openness of the Green Belt and conflicts with two of the key purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and I must attach substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt, in line with paragraph 153 of the Framework.
42. Planning permission should not be approved for inappropriate development unless "very special circumstances" exist. Such circumstances will not arise unless the harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness, and any other harm, are clearly outweighed by other considerations. In addition to the harm to the Green

¹ Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, enshrined into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998

Belt, the development has led to localised harm to the character and appearance of the area and is poorly located to encourage sustainable modes of travel.

43. The combined harm of all of those matters is very substantial. In contrast, I can only attach limited weight to the suggested benefits in terms of providing accommodation for rural workers in the absence of any clear evidence to support the need in this location. There is also uncertainty as to whether all those who have lived at the site were, in fact, employed in agriculture.
44. Consequently, it is clear that the benefits of the development do not clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt and other harm arising, such that the very special circumstances needed to justify a grant of planning permission do not exist.
45. I should stress that would remain the case, regardless of my conclusion on whether the appeal site amounts to Grey Belt land. Even if it was, the site is not in a sustainable location and the information presented does not satisfactorily identify a demonstrable need for the accommodation. As such, it would remain inappropriate development, having regard to the terms of paragraph 155 of the Framework.
46. As noted above refusal to grant planning permission would engage Article 8 rights. The proportionality assessment required by Article 8 necessitates a balancing exercise to ascertain whether the rights of the occupiers would be disproportionately interfered with should planning permission be refused. Weighed against that is the public and community interest. Regulation of land through the planning system can be said to be in the public interest with the legitimate aims of protecting the economic well-being of the country and public safety.
47. Given the extent of planning harm arising, balanced against the temporary nature of the accommodation and the lack of evidence in respect of need and availability of alternative sites, I find that any interference with the Article 8 Rights of occupants is proportionate in this instance. I shall consider the matter further in relation to whether the time period for compliance is proportionate in respect of the appeal on Ground (g). However, in respect of the appeal on Ground (a), the interference would be proportionate.
48. For all of those reasons, the development is contrary to the relevant policies of the development plan and no material considerations exist to justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. It follows that the appeal on Ground (a) should be dismissed and I shall refuse to grant planning permission on the deemed application.

The Appeal on Ground (g)

49. The EN provides a period of 6 months from the date the notice takes effect for all requirements to be carried out. Consideration of what is a reasonable period of time under Ground (g) essentially requires a balance between the need to ensure expedient enforcement and the removal of unauthorised and harmful development and the practicality of carrying out the required steps and any private interests bound up in the development.
50. Whilst the accommodation in question is used for transient purposes and does not represent the permanent home of occupants in question, it does have implications

for the home life of those residing at the site. Following my accompanied site visit, the agent for the appellant and the Council have discussed the implications of the time period for compliance and agree that the six months period is unreasonably short.

51. According to the appellant contracts for accommodation covering the next agricultural season are in place and significant disruption would be involved if those arrangements had to be cancelled at short notice. Thus, he requests that the period for compliance is extended to allow accommodation in caravans to be occupied up to November 2026, after which would be a 6 month period to allow the site to be cleared of all caravans.
52. Having considered the matter, the Council is agreeable to that suggestion. In most cases it is unusual for the period to be extended beyond a 12 month period. However, given the general agreement of the parties, the practicalities involved and the impact on the living arrangements and home life of those involved, having regard to Article 8 Rights, I find that the proposed extension is reasonable and proportionate in this instance.
53. Accordingly, the appeal on Ground (g) succeeds and I shall vary the terms of the enforcement notice in line with the agreed position of the parties. I have amended the timescales to reflect the point at which my decision will be issued.

Conclusion

54. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed. I shall uphold the enforcement notice with corrections and variations and refuse to grant planning permission on the application deemed to have been made under section 177(5) of the 1990 Act (as amended).

Chris Preston

INSPECTOR