
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 December 2025

by **R Gravett BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12th January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/W4325/W/25/3373334

The Heyes, Heron Road, Meols, Wirral CH48 1PU

- 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 Paul Johnson of PE & SA Johnson against the decision of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is APP/22/02078.
 - The development proposed is “new barn on working farm, in field adjacent Heron Road.”
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, and the Green Belt.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The Heyes is an existing farmstead of around 14ha located to the east of Heron Road. It comprises a pattern of open fields and a cluster of farm buildings which are typical of, and contribute positively to, the surrounding semi-rural lowland agricultural landscape.
4. An agricultural barn is proposed to provide shelter and storage of hay and feed for a ‘start-up’ herd of around 35 cattle which would be grazed on the site and on adjoining, rented land. The steel framed barn would be sited on an area of existing hardstanding and would be typically agrarian in appearance, finished with vertical hardwood cladding with a grey zinc sheeting roof finish. However, it would be located broadly centrally within an open field toward the north-west corner of the landholding and would be significantly distant from any other buildings. The proposal would therefore result in the introduction of built development in a semi-rural landscape where there is currently none.
5. While there is a mature hedgerow interspersed with trees along large sections of the road, most of the long elevation of the barn would be clearly visible in gaps in the hedgerow particularly when travelling on Heron Road from the north-west. From here, although views would be transient, the barn would appear unduly prominent, set at a higher level than the road. It would be an isolated structure, incongruous in its siting with no visual relationship with the existing farmstead buildings which are concentrated on the south-east boundary of the landholding.

The siting of the barn would be to the detriment of the prevailing pattern of development, and to the character and appearance of the agricultural landscape, where buildings are typically clustered together, rather than isolated or dispersed.

6. The proposed barn would be accessed from an existing track to the south which also serves fields which are used in rotation for grazing associated with a second herd of pedigree Herefordshire cows. It is understood that it would be good biosecurity practice to keep the existing and proposed herds separate as far as practicable. I also note the advice from the Leahurst Farm Animal Practice that the two herds of cattle should not share air space. While the cattle may congregate around the barn, given the location of the grazing fields, there is nevertheless already close proximity between these herds. Further, it is not clear from the evidence before me what the minimum acceptable separation distance should be, or indeed where the pedigree cattle are housed. Although I note that an alternative location was discussed with the Council, and was discounted because of the proximity to the road, I have insufficient evidence before me to justify the siting of the proposed barn in such an isolated position within the landholding, divorced from all other buildings.
7. I note the comments that the proposed barn would accord with the Red Tractor farm assurance scheme's guidance for stocking densities and would be a suitable size for 35-40 head of cattle. I have no reason to dispute this. The barn would be around 3m to its eaves which would allow for machinery to be used to move stored feed, hay and other consumables. Based on the evidence before me, it would therefore be of a scale appropriate for its intended use.
8. Nevertheless, I have concluded that the isolated, prominent siting of the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would conflict with policies WS6 and WS7 of the Wirral Local Plan 2022-2040 (2025) (WLP) which together require *all* development to respond well to local context and positively enhance the character, appearance and setting of the surrounding area.
9. The proposal would not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land so there would be no conflict with LP Policy WP8. LP Policy WS1 relates to the Green Belt so is not determinative to this main issue.

Green Belt

10. The appeal site is in the Green Belt. The building applied for is clearly for an agricultural purpose and is designed accordingly. Therefore, it meets exception a) of paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), namely 'buildings for agriculture and forestry,' and it is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The exception at paragraph 154 a) of the Framework is without qualification. Although the Council refers to a substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where development is not inappropriate, the effect on the openness of the Green Belt, or on the purposes of including land within it, are not matters for further assessment.
11. Accordingly, there would be no conflict with WLP Policy WS1 which is consistent with the Framework as it states that national policy for the Green Belt will apply in the determination of relevant proposals. The proposal would not therefore harm the Green Belt.

Other Matters

12. The appellant asserts that permitted development rights afforded by Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (the Order) allow larger structures than the one proposed, if appropriate to the needs of the agricultural enterprise. While there may be a real prospect of such a structure being constructed should this appeal fail, based on the information before me, I am unable to be certain that it would be equally or more harmful than the appeal proposal. I am also mindful that the local planning authority would still need to determine whether prior approval would be required for the siting, design and external appearance of the building. Consequently, a fallback position afforded by the Order can be given very little weight in the determination of this appeal.
13. Given the location of the appeal site, the development has potential to have effects on several European protected sites. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) require that, where a project is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, the competent authority must, before any grant of permission in principle, make an appropriate assessment of the project's implications in view of the relevant conservation objectives. As I have found the appeal proposal to be unacceptable for other reasons, it is not necessary for me to undertake an appropriate assessment, or to consider this matter further.
14. I note the appellant's frustration that there was no opportunity to meet with the Council on site to discuss the planning application. However, this has not had a bearing on my determination of this appeal, which I have considered solely on its planning merits.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

15. I acknowledge that the barn would comprise only a small part of a large landholding and would meet an agricultural need, supporting a 'start up' farm. The proposal is also clearly based on the experience and expertise of the appellant, a long-standing farmer. Whilst these are benefits of the proposal to which I attribute moderate weight, they are not sufficient to outweigh the significant harm it would cause to the character and appearance of the area.
16. There is no clear evidence that the proposal would provide a suitable habitat for wildlife and the absence of an impact on existing trees would be a neutral matter rather than one that carries weight in favour of the proposed development.
17. Although there would be no conflict with Green Belt policy, the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

R Gravett

INSPECTOR