
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 November 2025

by **S Lo LLB M.SRA**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14th January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/M3645/W/25/3372745

Land at Little Common Lane, Bletchingley, Surrey RH1 4LL

- 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 Chapel Hill Homes against the decision of Tandridge District Council.
 - The application Ref is TA/2025/21.
 - The development proposed is the erection of dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

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 consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (permission in principle) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second stage (technical details consent) is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted¹. All other matters would be considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.
4. The PPG explains that, in summary, that a decision on whether to grant permission in principle to a site following a valid application must be made in accordance with relevant policies in the development plan unless there are material considerations, such as those in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and national guidance, which indicate otherwise.
5. The site sits on the boundary of the Bletchingley Conservation Area. The Council raised no objections in relation to the effect of the development on the setting of this area. I have found no reason to come to a different conclusion.

Main Issues

6. The application form states that the minimum number of dwellings proposed is 4 and the maximum is 5. The appeal site is a rectangular plot of land located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Although this matter is not disputed between the main

¹ PPG Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

parties, it has been raised as a significant concern by interested parties. Accordingly, it is considered necessary to address this issue.

7. Taking the above background into account, evidence from the interested parties, and my observations onsite, it is considered that the remaining outstanding main issues are:
 - the effect of proposed development's location, land use and amount of development on the habitat and character and appearance of the area; and
 - whether or not the appeal site is grey belt land and whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and relevant development plan policies.

Reasons

Location, land use and amount of development

8. The appeal site is accessed from Little Common Lane and is situated adjacent to a public recreation area, while being enclosed on three sides by residential development. The appeal site contains dilapidated metal railings but otherwise retains the appearance of undisturbed woodland.
9. Policy CSP 18 of the Tandridge District Core Strategy 2008 (CS) requires that new development within villages and the countryside must achieve a high standard of design that reflects and respects the character, setting, and local context, including features that contribute to local distinctiveness. It must also have regard to the topography of the site, important trees or groups of trees, and other important features. The policy explains that wooded hillsides in built-up areas will be protected by ensuring that new development does not adversely affect the character of these areas and that there is no overall loss of tree cover.
10. Given the nature of the application, it is currently uncertain whether the proposed development would achieve a high standard of design. However, as the local character, setting, and context includes a substantial amount of existing residential development, I am satisfied that an appropriate design standard could be secured at the technical details consent stage. Nonetheless, given the number of properties proposed within the limited land available within the appeal site, it is considered likely that the development would result in the loss of a substantial portion of the existing woodland, resulting in a significant alteration of the character of the area and an overall reduction in tree cover.
11. Policy DP7 of the Tandridge Local Plan: Part 2 Detailed Policies 2014 (LP) states that where trees are present on a proposed development site, a landscaping scheme should be submitted alongside the planning application which makes provision for the retention of existing trees that are important by virtue of their significance within the local landscape. It is therefore unclear the extent to which trees could be retained, given the quantity of development that is proposed. Nonetheless, due to the nature of this application, these details should be considered at the Technical Details Consent stage.
12. Policy DP19 of the LP requires that proposals which would result in significant harm to local, national or statutory sites of biological or geological importance or the broader Green Infrastructure (GI) network will be refused planning permission unless: 1. All reasonable alternative locations with less harmful impacts are

demonstrated to be unsuitable; and 2. The proposal incorporates measures to avoid the harmful impacts arising, sufficiently mitigate their effects, or, as a last resort, compensate for them. The guidance for the policy refers to GI as the living network of green spaces in both rural and urban areas, which includes woodlands. Their function is to maintain the critical ecological links between town and country.

13. The woodland lies just beyond the settlement edge and represents an important green space that provides a valuable habitat for local wildlife. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the appeal site could reasonably be considered part of the GI network and subject to the protections set out in this policy. There is no evidence before me to demonstrate that all reasonable alternative locations with less harmful impacts have been shown to be unsuitable for the proposed development. While I accept that the technical details consent stage would be the appropriate point to consider detailed and specific mitigation proposals, the principle of development of the site would not be met by the scheme at this stage.
14. The development of at least four dwellings on the appeal site would inevitably introduce fairly significant levels of built form, and related domestic activity and paraphernalia. This development, even if very well designed, laid out and landscaped would, in my judgement, change the character and appearance of this area as it would replace a section of this woodland with built development. This change would be harmful, causing a noticeable reduction in woodland and likely result in a significant loss of its ecological value. Although some of the trees would likely be retained, the scale and encroachment of four dwellings would unduly compromise the site's contribution to local green spaces. Furthermore, it has not been clearly demonstrated that the woodland does not form part of an area that helps to maintain critical ecological links. As such, it is considered that the level of harm would be such that the proposed changes in land use and amount of development would detract from the intrinsic character and beauty of the existing woodland.
15. In reaching this view, I have taken account of the appellant's comments that, although the appeal site is identified on Magic Maps as Priority Habitat Deciduous Woodland, it measures approximately 0.47 hectares and therefore falls below the Forestry Commission's 0.5-hectare threshold for classification as woodland. Interested parties have noted, however, that the site originally formed part of a larger parcel, which included adjacent land bequeathed to the village as a recreation area. Consequently, while the appeal site alone is under the threshold, they consider that the Priority Habitat designation remains appropriate as it reflects the site's role within a wider, contiguous ecological corridor. In any event, irrespective of whether the site meets the threshold for priority habitat classification, it clearly provides ecological benefits, and there is no evidence before me to suggest otherwise. Accordingly, whether or not the site should be regarded as a priority habitat is not a determinative factor under the above policies.
16. Additionally, while tree and habitat loss could be potentially minimised or mitigated at the Technical Details Consent stage through a tree replacement strategy or the biodiversity net gain mechanism, the proposal would still result in harm under the above policies, including the loss of local tree cover and adverse impact on the GI network. I am not satisfied that any planning conditions, layout, extensive landscaping or other details at the technical details consent stage could overcome this harm.

17. I recognise that the appeal site falls within an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). However, the Council has raised no objections in relation to the effect of the proposal on Policies CSP20 or CSP21 of the CS. As this appeal fails on other grounds, it is not necessary for me to address this matter further.
18. Given the above findings, I am satisfied that the proposed development would result in harm to the natural and local environment by failing to recognise the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, contrary to paragraph 187 of the Framework.
19. Accordingly, I conclude that the scheme, by reason of the location, land use and amount of development, would unduly and adversely harm the habitat and character and appearance of the area. The scheme would, thereby, conflict with Policy CSP 18 of the CS, which seeks to ensure that the character of the area is not adversely affected and that there is no overall loss of tree cover. It would conflict with Policy DP19 of the LP as it would result in significant harm to the GI network and it is unclear whether all reasonable alternative locations have been adequately explored. No harm is found in relation to Policy DP7 of the LP, as this should be considered at the technical details consent stage.

Whether or not inappropriate development in the Green Belt

20. The Framework clarifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The proposal should be assessed against the presumption that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
21. The construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt, subject to a number of exceptions set out in paragraph 154 of the Framework. The parties do not consider that the proposed development would meet any of these exceptions, and I have found no reason to come to a different conclusion.
22. The Framework also states that the development of homes within the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where the proposal meets all the criteria set out in paragraph 155 of the Framework. The first criterion requires that the development utilises Green Belt land and does not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. For the purposes of decision-making, Green Belt land is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land (PDL) and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.
23. The Framework defines PDL as land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It is agreed between the parties that there is no relevant planning history for the site. While I did observe some dilapidated metal railings within the appeal site, I cannot be satisfied that the whole appeal site meets the definition of PDL.
24. Paragraph 143 of the Framework states that the green belt serves the following purposes; a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent

neighbouring towns merging into one another; d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. The appeal site is enclosed on most sides by existing residential development, so it would not prevent any further residential sprawl. There is no indication that the setting of any historic towns would be affected. As such, the appeal site is considered grey belt land.

25. Regarding the other criteria set out under paragraph 155 of the Framework: (a) there is no evidence that the proposal would undermine the purposes of the wider Green Belt; (b) the parties agree there is a demonstrable need for the proposed housing; (c) the site appears to be in a sustainable location, as access would be available to existing roads, with safe and suitable access likely achievable for all users. No concerns have been raised regarding the potential for prioritising sustainable transport to the appeal site, and detailed design matters such as streets and parking could be addressed at the technical details consent stage. Given the scale of development, significant transport impacts are unlikely; (d) the proposal does not constitute major development, as it provides fewer than 10 homes and covers less than 0.5ha.
26. The proposed development satisfies all the criteria in paragraph 155 and should therefore not be regarded as inappropriate development. Accordingly, there is no need to consider any other issues regarding development in green belt land.

Other Matters

27. Interested parties have raised a series of concerns including flooding, bank stability, subsidence, construction danger, blind spots, traffic volume, sight lines, healthcare, schools and shops, transport infrastructure, recreation, pollution, conservation, privacy, transparency of site ownership and the availability of affordable housing. However, these are all matters that could be addressed at the Technical Details Consent Stage, if the principle of developing this section of woodland was to be agreed. I have not therefore needed to consider these matters further at this stage.

Planning Balance

28. While the scheme would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt, it would cause undue and unacceptable harm to this woodland area. The harm and related policy conflict is of such an extent that I consider that the scheme would conflict with the development plan as a whole
29. The appellant has referred to the most recent housing land supply publication by the Council, the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan published in May 2024. This identified that the Council is only able to demonstrate a housing land supply of 1.92 years. The Council has confirmed that its delivery of housing has been below 75% of the housing requirement for past three years. As such, this constitutes a very significant level of undersupply and delivery. Consequently, the requirements of paragraph 11 d) of the Framework are engaged². In such circumstances, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts 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.

² Although the appeal site is within an AGLV, this is a local landscape designation and is not listed in Footnote 7 of the Framework. As a result, it cannot provide a strong reason for refusal.

30. The proposed development would provide four to five dwellings. Given the significant level of undersupply, this would be a worthwhile benefit. The construction phase would generate employment, and the creation of new dwellings would deliver some economic and social benefits. Given its location within an established residential area, the site would be sustainably situated in terms of access and transport. The scheme would also provide environmental benefits through Biodiversity Net Gain. These benefits would all be supported by the Framework. However, given the modest number of dwellings that the scheme could deliver, I consider that the cumulatively benefits should be attributed limited weight.
31. Paragraph 232 of the Framework confirms that existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to its publication, and that due weight should be given to them according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. Accordingly, the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given to them. The CS (2008) and LP (2014) policies, which aim to protect local character, prevent tree loss, and safeguard GI, remain broadly consistent with the Framework. I therefore consider that the scheme's harm and related conflict with the development plan policies that I have identified should be attributed substantial weight against the scheme.
32. I therefore find that the adverse impacts of the development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. The scheme would therefore not be sustainable development within the meaning of the Framework. This weighs heavily against the scheme.
33. Even taking into account details that could be provided at the Technical Details Consent stage, the proposed development would not accord with the development plan when considered as a whole, and there are no material considerations that indicate a decision should be made otherwise.

Conclusion

34. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S Lo

INSPECTOR