
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 January 2026

by N Armstrong BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/D2320/W/25/3376051

Land north east of Shelley Drive, Eccleston, Chorley, Grid Reference Easting: 352773, Northing: 416270

- 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 S Glenn of Northern Trust Land Ltd against the decision of Chorley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00863/PIP.
 - The development proposed is erection of up to 9 dwellings and associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and permission in principle is granted for a minimum of 1 dwelling and a maximum of 9 dwellings at land north east of Shelley Drive, Eccleston, Chorley, Grid Reference Easting: 352773, Northing: 416270, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/00863/PIP.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs has been made by Mr S Glenn of Northern Trust Land Ltd against Chorley Borough Council, and this is the subject of a separate decision.

Procedural Matters

3. In addition to this appeal, I am dealing with an appeal for housing development on land east of Bradley Lane, Eccleston¹. While there are similarities, I have dealt with the appeals separately and they are the subject of separate decisions.
4. 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 two stages: the first stage (or 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.
5. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted². All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent (TDC) application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

¹ Appeal ref: APP/D2320/W/25/3376087

² PPG Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

6. The appellant's appeal statement confirms that the proposed indicative site layout plan is for illustrative purposes only. I have therefore considered this as such.
7. An applicant can apply for permission in principle for a range of dwellings by expressing a minimum and maximum net number of dwellings as part of the application. In this instance, the application form specified a minimum of 1 dwelling and a maximum of 9 dwellings.

Main Issue

8. The main issue is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development, with particular reference to whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.

Reasons

9. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt. The suitability of the site for residential development is disputed as there is disagreement as to whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the Framework. The Council's decision does not make any reference to development plan policies and relies on the Framework.
10. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Development within the Green Belt is inappropriate, although with the exception of the types of development listed in paragraph 154 of the Framework, or if the circumstances in paragraph 155 apply. It is common ground that the proposal would not meet any of the exceptions within paragraph 154, and I have no reason to disagree.
11. Paragraph 155 of the Framework sets out that development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where it utilises grey belt land and subject to satisfying specific criteria. For the purposes of decision-making, the Framework defines 'grey belt' 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 of the Framework. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) of the Framework would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.
12. In this context, the Council does not suggest that the application of policies relating to areas or assets referenced in footnote 7 would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. However, interested parties have referred to flooding issues and effects on wildlife habitats. The evidence indicates that the site is located within Flood Zone 1 and I have nothing before me to suggest that the development would impact on any designated sites relevant to footnote 7. The TDC stage would require further assessment of matters related to drainage, flood risk and potential effects on wildlife and habitats. Consequently, from the information before me, the site does not comprise land where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance (other than Green Belt) provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting the development.

13. The appeal site is not previously developed land. To determine if the site is other land that would meet the definition of grey belt it is necessary to assess whether or not it strongly contributes to any of purposes a), b), or d) in Framework paragraph 143. Where there is clear dispute, with regard to the Council's decision notice, is in relation to purposes a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, and d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
14. With regard to purpose a), the PPG: Green Belt is clear that villages should not be considered large-built up areas. It also sets out illustrative features relevant to assessing whether or not a site makes a strong contribution to this purpose.
15. Eccleston is identified as a Rural Local Service Centre within Policy 1 of the Central Lancashire Adopted Core Strategy Local Development Framework (2012). Policy 1 aims to encourage limited growth and investment in such locations to help meet local housing and employment needs and support the provision of services to the wider area. The submissions, including representations from interested parties, indicate that Eccleston is a village and not a town. From the evidence before me and my observations on site, the overall scale and form of the settlement, as well as the services within it, reflect its role as a Rural Local Service Centre. On this basis, I do not consider that Eccleston is a large built up area.
16. In any event, the appeal site comprises a parcel of undulating grassland within a larger field, accessed from the road serving the adjacent dwellings on Shelley Drive and Keats Close. Whilst the appeal site, as well as the larger field, is free from existing development, it adjoins properties and a section of road at Shelley Drive and Keats Close. There are mature trees and hedgerow to the boundary of the larger field area and properties on Braeburn Crescent, and further tree and hedge planting to its north-eastern boundary. These physical features are in reasonable proximity to the appeal site and would restrict and provide some containment of the proposed development.
17. The appeal site is at a higher level than the main road through Eccleston, alongside existing housing on Shelley Drive, Keats Close and Braeburn Crescent. However, given its location to the rear of existing housing and being set well back from the main road, I do not find the site to comprise a highly sensitive or prominent gateway to the settlement. In addition, due to its proximity to housing, its modest size, and containment by physical features, the proposal would not result in an incongruous pattern of development or an extended 'finger' into the Green Belt in this location. The site is also a considerable distance from the nearest town of Chorley. Consequently, the appeal site does not make a strong contribution to the purpose of checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas.
18. Purpose b) aims to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another, and the PPG clearly states this purpose relates to the merging of towns, not villages. Whilst this is not specifically referenced in the Council's reason for refusal, their appeal statement suggests the proposal would threaten the site's current well performing status in this respect. Despite the close relationship between Eccleston and the smaller Heskin, given the overall scale and character of these settlements, the proposal would not undermine this Green Belt purpose. Furthermore, due to its location and size, the site does not form a substantial gap between towns, and its development would not be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns. Therefore, the appeal site does not make a strong contribution to purpose b).

19. In respect of purpose d), the PPG states this relates to historic towns, not villages. Notwithstanding the differences between the parties on the status of Ecclestone, despite some reference to listed buildings, I have limited evidence to demonstrate that the settlement is historic in nature with particular aspects of special character in this respect. Whilst not the only determinative factor, there does not appear to be a conservation area designation within Ecclestone, which could reasonably be an indicator of overall special character or historic aspects within the settlement.
20. The appeal site adjoins fairly modern housing development with little historic character, which is prevalent in the surrounding area, and it does not make a considerable contribution to any special character of the settlement. Due to its location, nature and relationship with surrounding development, it does not lie in, adjacent to, nor is it of significant visual importance to any historic aspects of the settlement. For these reasons, the appeal site does not make a strong contribution to the purpose of preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.
21. Having regard to the above, the proposed development would use grey belt land. To not be regarded as inappropriate development, paragraph 155 of the Framework also requires that development on grey belt land would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan; there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed; and the development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework.
22. The Council states that the proposal would meet the remaining purposes c) and e) of Framework paragraph 143. I have no reason to disagree with regard to purpose e). Given representations from interested parties on encroachment into the open countryside I have considered the proposal further in respect of purpose c).
23. The proposal would extend beyond the existing built form of the settlement, and given the size of the site, there would be a modest degree of encroachment into the countryside. However, as established above, the site is well related to existing housing development, and would be largely contained by existing physical features. Consequently, the proposal would not appear as a significant encroachment into the surrounding countryside beyond the existing built form. Whilst there would be some encroachment, for the above reasons, the proposal would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt.
24. The evidence shows that the Council does not currently have a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. The Council's appeal submission does not dispute this, although suggests that Central Lancashire is quickly progressing towards a five year housing supply. However, whilst noting the emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2041 that is currently at examination, I have no further information in this respect. Consequently, on the evidence before me, there is currently a demonstrable unmet need for housing, and the proposal would comply with criterion b) of paragraph 155 of the Framework.
25. Paragraph 110 of the Framework acknowledges that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, which should be taken into account. Paragraph 115 looks to ensure that sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the type of

development and its location. It also aims to ensure that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users.

26. The appeal site is located immediately adjacent to existing housing development towards the edge of the settlement. The nearest local centre to the site is within a reasonable walking distance, which has a limited range of services, with a primary school also close to this. There are a larger range of services, including a Post Office, Sainsburys Local, pharmacy and library, which are further away, albeit not a significant distance from the site. There are bus stops in relatively close proximity to the site and the junction of Shelley Drive with the main road running through the settlement, providing services to the wider area. The above facilities can be accessed from the appeal site by existing footpaths with street lighting.
27. Noting other decisions for new housing development that I have been directed to, as well as its role as a Rural Local Service Centre, I find that Ecclestone is a sustainable location that offers a range of services. Whilst there is no railway station, it also provides opportunities offering a genuine choice of transport modes in relation to the settlement's more rural location. The appeal site would be in a sustainable location in this context, given its proximity to existing housing development, services, facilities and public transport.
28. Interested parties raise concerns on the means of access to the site. These include the gradient of the road leading to the site and parked cars, increased traffic and congestion. The road and footpaths through Shelley Drive slope down towards the main road. Properties on Shelley Drive and Keats Close benefit from off-street parking. At the time of my visit, I observed some cars parked on the road leading to the site at Shelley Drive, including close to the site entrance. There was a modest amount of traffic using Shelley Drive and Keats Close, although traffic and on-street parking levels will likely fluctuate during the day.
29. The proposed development would increase the use of Shelley Drive for access with associated traffic, cycle and pedestrian movements. However, I have limited information before me to demonstrate that the existing arrangement is not a safe and suitable access for existing residents. Furthermore, there is no detailed information before me to indicate that the proposed development could not achieve a safe and suitable access, or that there would be significant impacts on the transport network or highway safety. The Council does not highlight any concerns in this respect and there is an absence of compelling evidence to demonstrate otherwise. Further details on these matters would also be considered at the TDC stage.
30. Consequently, the appeal site would be in a sustainable location, including in the context of paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework. The proposal would therefore comply with criterion d) of paragraph 155 of the Framework.
31. As the proposal is not major development, the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156–157 of the Framework are not applicable to the appeal scheme.
32. For the reasons set out above, the appeal site is grey belt land, and the proposed development would meet the requirements of paragraph 155 of the Framework. Accordingly, the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Therefore, I am not required to consider any effects on the openness of the Green Belt, or if very special circumstances exist to justify the development.

Other Matters

33. Interested parties have raised a number of issues in addition to those set out above, including concerns over use of the permission in principle route for such a proposal. However, this is an alternative route for obtaining planning permission for housing that applies to the proposed scale of development. Other matters would be considered in more detail at the TDC stage, and the site must receive a grant of TDC before development can proceed. These matters include layout, scale and design of the dwellings, site levels, effects on the living conditions of existing neighbouring residents, drainage and flood risk, trees, ecological effects, impacts during construction and other effects on the surrounding area such as noise and pollution. From the information before me at this stage, I do not find that these matters would justify refusing permission in principle with regard to the site's location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.
34. I have no compelling evidence that potential effects on existing services and infrastructure would result in unacceptable impacts in terms of the proposed location, land use and the amount of development, either on its own or in combination with other housing development. Effect on property values has also been raised. However, planning is concerned with land use in the public interest, therefore the protection of purely private interests, such as the impact of a development on the value of a neighbouring property, is not a material consideration.
35. Concerns are also raised that allowing the appeal could set an undesirable precedent. Whilst I recognise that consistency in the planning process is important and like cases should be decided in a like manner, it is also important to reiterate that each case is determined on its own merits and on the basis of the evidence. As such, I am satisfied that my decision on this proposal, on this particular site with its distinct characteristics in this context, would not harm the ability of the Council to exercise their judgement on other proposals, as I have done in this case, in future cases.
36. As set out above, interested parties raise concerns over the access to the site for all users, therefore I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This requires me to consider the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. Protected characteristics include age and disability.
37. As established above, I have not been provided with sufficient or detailed evidence to demonstrate that the existing access arrangements to Shelley Drive and Keats Close are unsuitable, or that there are overriding pedestrian or highway safety issues at this stage to weigh against the proposal. Detailed matters of access to the site will also need to be considered at the TDC stage. Consequently, it is proportionate for me to allow the appeal for permission in principle at this stage.

Conclusion

38. No conflict with the development plan has been identified. The most relevant planning policies in this case with regard to the matters of location, land use and the amount of development are those of the Framework relating to Green Belt. The appeal proposal would accord with those policies, by making use of grey belt land, and complying with the relevant requirements for development on such land, as

set out in paragraph 155 of the Framework. For the reasons set out above, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

39. The PPG is clear that it is not possible for conditions to be attached to a grant of permission in principle. In accordance with the relevant legislation, any application for TDC must be made within three years from the date of this decision.

N Armstrong

INSPECTOR