



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 January 2026

by **CM Blair BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/A0665/W/25/3374770

Land At Oak Bank Lane, Hoole Village, Chester, CH2 4ER

- 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 Alan Pleavin against the decision of Cheshire West and Chester Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/03504/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of an agricultural building to a residential dwelling, and closing up of existing accesses to create a singular accessway together with alterations to the internal track area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - 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;
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - Whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

a) Whether inappropriate development

3. The relatively flat appeal site comprises a single-storey agricultural building, hardstanding and two field-gate accesses. The building and an associated agricultural access point are located in the corner of a large grazing field in the countryside at the junction of Oak Bank Lane with Mannings Lane, Hoole Village, Chester. Despite the appellant's argument that the appeal site should be considered as falling inside a defined settlement, the evidence before me is clear in that the appeal site is located in the countryside inside the Green Belt.

4. The second field gate entrance with associated hardstanding is located at the opposite end of the appeal site on Oak Bank Lane. A mix of dwellings and agricultural buildings surrounds the appeal site.
5. Policy DM 22 of the Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan (LP) states that for a change of use of a building to a dwellinghouse, and in line with Policy Strat 9, it must among other things, accord with the Green Belt policy as set out in the Framework.
6. Policy Strat 9 of the LP supports the reuse of existing rural buildings, particularly for economic purposes, where buildings are of permanent construction and can be reused with major reconstruction. It further states that where countryside falls within the Green Belt, additional restrictions will apply to development in line with the Framework.
7. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
8. Paragraph 154 of the Framework sets out that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless an exception applies. One such exception at paragraph 154 h) iv is other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, such as, is the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.
9. The brick and blockwork building, formerly used for livestock isolation within a larger agricultural field, is of permanent and substantial construction (including complete walls, roof and door openings). I must also consider whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, in accordance with the relevant exception.

b) Openness and Purposes

10. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt and its preservation a key element of paragraph 154 h). The proposed development would not include any addition to the volume of the existing building and would not result in any further loss of openness as a result of the alterations.
11. I found the appeal site to be conspicuous from the surrounding public roads. There are no footpaths on either side adjacent to the site with it necessary to stand on the roadside verge to allow vehicles to pass on the narrow roads.
12. Notwithstanding there would be a modest reduction in hardstanding due to the removal of associated agricultural field entrances and from around the building in part (the proposed patio area would retain a hard element at the building), the proposed creation of an extended driveway to a new access location on Oak Bank Lane, would introduce a significant engineering operation and surface that would be visually dominant from the road network.
13. Even though new hedging and tree planting (which would take time to become established) is proposed along Mannings Lane, within the site and to replace existing hedging on Oak Bank Lane to allow for visibility splays and new access, it

is also inevitable that there would be some associated residential paraphernalia such as garden furniture, washing lines, or play equipment, within the proposed extensive garden area, not least because of the limited size of the dwelling. The plans also show a considerable parking and turning area in addition to the new driveway. As a result, there would be a noticeable change in the rural character and appearance of the site and a degree of suburbanisation.

14. Taking everything together, the proposed development would give rise to a site with a considerably different and greater hard element coverage and overall footprint compared to the existing situation.
15. For these reasons, the proposal would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt.
16. The effect of development as encroachment on the countryside may also be in the form of loss of openness or intrusion and through that loss of openness, there can also be an intrusion or encroachment into the countryside. The site clearly forms part of the countryside, and the driveway extending from the edge of the existing hardstanding surrounding the building to the proposed new centralised access point between the two field gates to be closed up, would result in the physical encroachment of development into and onto parts of the site that are currently free from development. Overall, the proposed development would not safeguard the countryside from encroachment, contrary to one of the five purposes. It would not therefore constitute an exception as specified within Paragraph 154 h) of the Framework and would be inappropriate development.

c) Character and Appearance

17. Surrounding dwellings predominantly have a brickwork or painted blockwork finish. Despite the existing building's limited size and height, the proposed cladding would be out of place and result in the building having a greater visual impact on the appearance of the countryside in the locale.
18. Additionally, there would be clear views into the open site of the proposed elongated, sweeping driveway and other domestic features from both Mannings Lane and Oak Bank Lane, which would not respect the surrounding character or appearance. Accesses to existing properties with clearly defined boundaries are to the front or via established, screened lanes. The provision of proposed landscaping including hedging and trees to compensate removal of existing hedgerow would not alleviate the substantial harm caused. The proposed development would be incongruous within the established character and would erode the appearance of the site and surrounding area.
19. I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the site and countryside. As such, this would be contrary to Policies DM 3 and ENV 6 of the LP, which amongst other things, requires development to respect the key features of the landscape, contribute positively to the character of the area and is sympathetic to the characteristics of the development site, its relationship with its surroundings and where appropriate views into, over and out of the site.

d) Other considerations

20. The other considerations, including limited weight to economic and social benefits attributed to this small scale development, do not clearly outweigh the totality of harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness, through its failure to preserve openness, encroachment into the countryside and the harm to the character and appearance of the appeal site and area that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
21. The appellant's reliance on Paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is misplaced. Paragraph 11 d) indicates that permission should be granted, unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. The application of Green Belt policy provides that to be the case here. As such, the proposal would not be the sustainable development for which Paragraph 11 of the Framework indicates a presumption in favour.

Other Matters

22. Appeal APP/A0665/W/25/3366204 relates to a different site and to the replacement of barns with a new two-storey dwelling. There is also no fallback scheme at this site. In addition, my attention has been drawn to the use of timber panels on agricultural buildings throughout Cheshire. However, as I have found above the proposed finishes to the appeal building would not be compatible with the character and appearance of the surrounding locale.
23. Thus, none of these other considerations or matters, on their own or in combination, alter my views.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan, when read as a whole and the Framework. Material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be taken other than in accordance with the development plan. Having considered all other matters raised, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

CM Blair

INSPECTOR