



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 January 2026

by J Glasin RIBA SCA MBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/T0355/W/25/3373920

Land at Dean Stable, Cookham Dean, Maidenhead, SL6 9NT

- 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 John Rowley against the decision of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
 - The application Ref is 25/01648/PIP.
 - The development proposed is a phased development of up to 2 self-build 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 two stages: the first stage (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.
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 are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent (TDC) application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

4. 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.

Reasons

Location

5. The site is located in the Green Belt, where the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (NPPF) places great importance on preventing urban sprawl by keeping the land permanently open. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate and should not be approved except in very special circumstances, other than for specific

¹ PPG Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615; Revision date: 15 06 2018

exceptions that are not relevant to this appeal. The proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The Borough Local Plan (2013-2033) (2022) (Local Plan) supports the national policy through Policy QP5, which states that development in the Green Belt will be restricted in line with the NPPF.

6. Despite the presence of the small stable building at the entrance from Hills Lane, the site retains a distinctly rural character. The land remains a predominantly undeveloped open field with long reaching views across the surrounding fields and countryside. Owing to its elevated position on high ground, the site is highly visible and prominent from the nearby Public Right of Way (PROW) footpath and wider viewpoints in the surrounding countryside. As such the site reads visually as part of the wider open countryside, rather than the village of Cookham Dean, and it makes a strong contribution to the Green Belt. Therefore, a development in this specific location would fail to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and consequently it would result in an adverse effect on one of the purposes of the Green Belt as well as the openness of the Green Belt.
7. The appellant argues that the site should be considered as Grey Belt. Paragraph 155 of the NPPF establishes that the development of homes on grey belt land should not be regarded as inappropriate if relevant criteria are met. When assessed against the criteria, the proposal meets Paragraph 155(a), because it would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan, and Paragraph 155(b), because there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed. However, the proposal fails to meet Paragraph 155(c), because the development would not be in a sustainable location due to unsafe pedestrian access, the absence of key local services, the lack of public transport, and reliance on private car. Paragraph 155(d) is not applicable to this development. As the proposal does not satisfy all of the criteria in Paragraph 155, it cannot be considered as Grey Belt.
8. The site is located in the open countryside between the settlements of Cookham Dean and Cookham Rise. The Cookham Parish Neighbourhood Plan (CPNP) Policy C-DP2 recognises the different characters and distinct identities of the Parish villages of Cookham Dean, Cookham Rise and Cookham Village, and seeks to ensure that this settlement pattern is maintained. Policy C-C11 of the CPNP states that proposals for developments outside the built-up areas of existing settlements should avoid contributing to the visual coalescence of the settlements. The appeal site forms a part of an important historic separation, acting as a green buffer and visual break between the villages of Cookham Dean and Cookham Rise. Development on this particular site would erode this separation, and increase the risk of coalescence between villages of different character, and contributing to the urban sprawl. Such outcome would conflict with the established settlement pattern that the CPNP seeks to protect.
9. The appellant contends that the site should be considered as an infill site. Paragraph 154 in the NPPF, and Policy QP5 of the Local Plan, states that limited infilling may be acceptable within identified village settlement boundaries within the Green Belt, or, in certain circumstances, outside identified village settlement boundaries where it can be demonstrated that the site can be considered as falling within the village envelope as assessed on the ground. As the site lies outside the defined village settlement boundary within the Green Belt, it cannot meet the first criteria. When assessed on the ground, the site does not read as part of the built up area of the village. The site is defined by mature hedges to two boundaries, and the

remaining two boundaries with adjoining open fields, have a cattle fence with a low hedge to one, and no demarcation to the other. As a result, the site is perceived visually as part of the open countryside rather than the village. On this basis, the site cannot be regarded as an infill development.

10. The development is situated in a sensitive location immediately adjacent to the Cookham Dean Conservation Area (CA), significant for its historical, architectural, environmental and landscape value. The CA features traditional cottages and farmhouses, undulating topography, open fields, mature woodland and network of country lanes, tracks and footpaths, all which contribute to its significance as a historic landscape. The CPNP emphasises that the proposals must consider the impact of the proposed development on a heritage asset and its setting, defining the setting of a heritage asset as the “surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced”. While no heritage statement was submitted with the appeal, the site’s open undeveloped landscape, located directly adjacent to the CA, clearly forms part of the wider setting through which the CA is viewed and understood, and thus it contributes to the significance of the setting of the CA. Given the site’s elevated position, its rural character, the surrounding open countryside, and its immediate adjacency to the CA, the development in this location would be visually prominent and would intrude upon the historic landscape setting of the CA. This would adversely affect the historic setting and significance of the CA, which would be contrary to both national and local heritage policies.

Proposed use and amount of development

11. The development comprises of two residential dwellings. Access to Cookham Dean from the site is via a narrow and unlit footpath along Hills Lane, with a steep incline. The village provides some limited range of services including pubs and restaurants, but it lacks essential facilities such as shops, a pharmacy, a post office, or public transport. When considering the unsafe pedestrian access, the absence of key local services, the lack of public transport, and reliance on private car, the site cannot be considered a sustainable location for residential development. The proposal would therefore conflict with the principles of promoting sustainable patterns of growth and reducing dependency on private vehicles.
12. The appellant has put forward an argument that the site is a sustainable location for residential development, referring to distances to services, including services in neighbouring villages, and drawing comparison with other appeal decisions. However, I have determined this case on its own merits, having regard to the specific circumstances of this site, its location, and its context of Cookham Dean. I have no evidence before me of the presence of adequate pedestrian infrastructure that would support safe and reasonable travelling on foot from the site to nearby villages for accessing basic services. While the NPPF promotes sustainable transport such as walking and cycling, it also requires that development have safe access to services and facilities, and a genuine choice of travel modes. When considering the absence of essential services within reasonable walking distance, the unsafe, narrow, steep and unlit footpath along the Hills Lane, and the lack of public transport connections, the site cannot be considered a sustainable location for residential development.
13. The development would provide a modest positive contribution to enhance and maintain the vitality of a rural community. However, while this benefit is

acknowledged, it is limited in scale given the small number of dwellings proposed and the restricted range of local services available in Cookham Dean.

14. Although no site plan was submitted with the appeal, the site would appear to be large enough to accommodate two dwellings, together with appropriate private amenity space and necessary parking provision. However, detail design matters are reserved for consideration at the TDC stage of the application.

Planning Balance

15. The site is located within the Green Belt, which is a strategic designation. The NPPF states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In this case, the proposal would result in an adverse impact on Green Belt and the openness of the Green Belt. As such the development is considered inappropriate. No special circumstances have been identified that outweigh the harm. Accordingly, this matter carries substantial weight in the planning balance.
16. The Council has confirmed that it cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development under paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF would apply unless either of the criteria set out in sub paragraphs 11(d)(i) or (ii) apply. The conflict with Green Belt policy, and the harm to a designated heritage asset, provide strong reasons for refusing the development, and therefore the presumption does not operate in this case.
17. While the development would make a modest contribution towards the local housing land supply, the benefit is limited in scale. Crucially, the appeal site does not represent a sustainable location, given the lack of safe access to basic services, and lack of public transport. Therefore, this matter carries limited weight in the planning balance.
18. Self-build development is supported in principle by policies in both the NPPF and the Local Plan, and the Council has confirmed that self-build plots are under active consideration on nearby land to the south of Cookham. While acknowledging that the development would make a positive contribution to the provision of self-build opportunities in Cookham Dean, the addition of two dwellings represent only a modest increase. As such, this matter will afford limited weight in the planning balance.
19. The sensitive location of the site adjacent to the CA, together with the adverse effect the development would have on the setting and significance of the CA, carries great weight in the planning balance.
20. Taking all matters into account, I conclude that the adverse effect on Green Belt, including harm to its openness, together with the harm to the setting and significance of the CA, result in clear conflict with the relevant policies of the NPPF and Local Plan. Even if that were not the case, I consider that the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal, which would conflict with policies of the NPPF, Policies C-DP2 and C-CI1 of the CPNP, and Policy QP5 of the Local Plan, all of which seeks to ensure sustainable development and protect the countryside.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the site is not suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development. I find that it would conflict with the development plan, and there are no material considerations that indicate a decision other than in accordance with the plan. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Glasin

INSPECTOR