



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 March 2026

by H Jones BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/23/3320591

Mickley Bank Farm, track to Mickley Bank Farm, Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7LQ

- 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 John McCready against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
- The application Ref is 22/03027/FUL.
- The development is erection of storage sheds.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for erection of storage sheds at Mickley Bank Farm, track to Mickley Bank Farm, Stocksfield, Northumberland NE43 7LQ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 22/03027/FUL, subject to the following condition:

- 1) The development hereby permitted is as shown and identified on the following approved plans:

Scaled Site Plan - MBF – 001

Storage Sheds Roof Plan and Front, North and South End Elevations - MBF – 002

'UK Planning Maps' Location Plans - MBF - 003

Storage Shed Layout Plan/Rear Elevation - MBF – 004

Preliminary Matters

2. The storage sheds building the subject of the appeal is built on site. Therefore, I have determined the appeal on a retrospective basis. However, in the banner heading and decision above, I have removed the expression 'Retrospective Application for' from the description of the development, as it does not describe an act of development.
3. The Council refused planning permission for the development in November 2022. Since that time, revised versions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) have come into force, the last being published in December 2024. In making my decision, I have had regard to the most up-to-date Framework and any comments in respect to it submitted by the appeal parties.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether the development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt; and

- Whether the development complies with relevant policies within the development plan which control the erection of buildings in the countryside.

Reasons

Green Belt

5. The Framework sets out the particular types of development which do not constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt. They are identified at paragraphs 154 and 155. If a development falls within any of those exceptions, it will not constitute inappropriate development.
6. One of these development types is identified at paragraph 154 g): limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
7. Therefore, paragraph 154 g) effectively sets out three tests which must be met in order for a development to not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In summary, these are:
 - i. the development must involve previously developed land (PDL);
 - ii. the development must constitute limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of the PDL; and
 - iii. the development must not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
8. The Framework's glossary defines what is meant by PDL. Amongst other matters, this definition establishes that large areas of fixed surface infrastructure, such as large areas of hardstanding, constitute PDL provided it has been lawfully developed and has not blended into the landscape.
9. Beneath, and in the surroundings of, the erected storage sheds building is a large hardstanding. It is clearly visible, has not blended into the landscape and has an aged appearance. Photographs and satellite imagery submitted by the appellant¹ show a hardstanding with a very similar layout serving the site and its surrounds for many years, including a building which caught fire back in 1998. I'm quite certain that the hardstanding I saw on site, and which is depicted on the submitted plans, is the same one which the photographs and imagery show.
10. Given how long it's been in place, and even though lawfulness has not been formally ascertained via an application under Section 191 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, I am satisfied that the hardstanding is lawful for the purposes of the Framework's PDL definition. Therefore, regardless of whether permanent buildings have been on the site since some commercial stables were removed in 2012, the hardstanding's presence alone means that the development site constitutes PDL, passing the first test I have set out above.
11. Seeking permission for a building, the appeal scheme clearly constitutes a form of redevelopment of the PDL. Therefore, it passes the second test.

¹ Appendix (B(d) and (i) of the appellant's Statement of Case, by Hedley Planning Services, dated April 2022.

12. The third test requires an assessment of the development's effect on the openness of the Green Belt. Although the storage sheds building provides quite a considerable amount of floorspace, positioned atop of the hardstanding, its footprint has not resulted in encroachment into undeveloped areas of land. The Mickley Bank Farm site includes other buildings near to the storage sheds building, therefore, this particular part of the Green Belt has some built-up characteristics already and does not strongly convey a sense of openness. Reaching a height of only 2.9 metres, and served by a very shallow mono-pitch, the building has a low-slung appearance. Therefore, its scale and massing are not imposing. To the immediate surroundings of the building there is mature landscaping, including coniferous trees. This means that at any distance aside from these immediate surrounds, the building is very well concealed, as will be any vehicles which visit and park beside it. Furthermore, I have no compelling evidence that the development generates significant activity or trips.
13. Given these case and site-specific circumstances, even adopting the pre-development (the storage sheds building) baseline as being just the hardstanding, the erected storage sheds building has reduced the openness of the Green Belt to an extent, but not to a level which has caused substantial harm to it. This means that the third test is passed, and the development does not constitute inappropriate development. As a result, there is no need for me to come to a definitive position on whether the site constitutes PDL on other grounds as well, as the effects of the development upon openness would be even less pronounced.
14. Therefore, I conclude that the development has resulted in the redevelopment of previously developed land which has caused no substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, the development accords with the Framework's paragraph 154 g) development type and is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
15. Policies STP 7 and STP 8 of the Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036 (the LP) relate to development within the Green Belt. Together, and amongst other matters, they seek to protect the Green Belt having regard to its purposes, and set out that development which is not inappropriate, as defined in national planning policy, will be supported. As I have identified that the development is not inappropriate development set against the policies of the Framework, it follows that the Green Belt has remained acceptably protected in accordance with Policies STP 7 and STP 8 as well.

Building in the countryside

16. LP Policy STP 1 sets out a spatial strategy for Northumberland. Criteria g) and h) set out the development types acceptable within the open countryside where the site is located. One of those acceptable development types is those developments that support the sustainable growth and expansion of existing business or the formation of new businesses where in accordance with Policy ECN 13. The operation of Policy STP 1 is such that, in order to comply with it, a development need only constitute one of its acceptable countryside development types. Furthermore, criterion i) of STP 1 requires development in the countryside to be sensitive to its surroundings, to not have an unacceptable impact on the local road network and use previously developed land where opportunities exist.

17. LP Policy ECN 13 is entitled 'Meeting rural employment needs (Strategic Policy)'. It recognises the role rural locations have in providing employment opportunities to meet the needs of those living in such areas. Therefore, Policy ECN 13 applies to, and supports, those developments that generate employment opportunities, subject to certain provisos being met.
18. The purpose of the building the subject of the appeal is for storage, including for commercial purposes. The appellant has set out that the building supports a wider storage business, and I have no compelling evidence before me which leads me to conclude otherwise. In part, the development will be assisting with sustaining the storage business itself. However, it will also be providing a storage service which in turn will be supporting any services and businesses utilising it as well. Consequently, I find that the development will be making a positive contribution to the rural economy sufficient to conclude that it is generating employment opportunities, even if it has not directly created any new on-site jobs as such.
19. The first of Policy ECN 13's provisos sets out support for reusing existing buildings or, where this is not possible, extensions or new buildings which contribute positively to local landscape character and local building traditions as applicable. Secondly, it requires developments to be related as closely as possible to the existing settlement pattern, existing services and accessible places. Thirdly, it requires developments to result in no adverse impacts on the operational aspects of local farming or forestry.
20. The storage sheds building has a utilitarian appearance. However, this is reflective of the functional purpose of the building, and of the appearance of other buildings within close proximity. Its muted material finish, low-slung character and heavily landscaped setting means that the building is unassuming within its context. Consequently, it is sympathetic to the local landscape, and to the character and appearance of the area.
21. Although the site is within the countryside, it is located on the fringes of Stocksfield, near to Stocksfield's built-up areas. The nearer parts of Stocksfield include the likes of bus stops, a convenience store, a petrol station and a pharmacy. Therefore, the development site is closely related to Stocksfield's settlement pattern, and its services and facilities too.
22. The building has also resulted in no adverse impacts on local farming or forestry. The aforementioned Policy ECN 13 provisos are therefore all met.
23. For these reasons, the development amounts to an acceptable form of sustainable growth and expansion within the countryside in accordance with LP Policy ECN 13, and criteria g) (i) of LP Policy STP 1, and one which is suitably sensitive to its surroundings in accordance with STP 1's separate criterion i). The development's re-use of PDL is advocated by criterion i) as well, whilst I have no grounds on which to conclude that the development results in any unacceptable effects on the local road network, again, in compliance with criterion i).
24. Therefore, overall, the development complies with relevant policies within the development plan which control the erection of buildings in the countryside: LP Policies STP 1 and ECN 13.

Conditions

25. As the development has already taken place, a condition relating to the standard implementation period is unnecessary. However, in the interests of certainty and enforceability, I have imposed a condition which sets out the approved plans.
26. The landscaping around the development provides effective screening throughout the year, and I have no reason to believe it won't continue to do so. Therefore, it is not necessary to impose a condition requiring additional planting.

Conclusion

27. The development accords with the development plan as a whole, and there are no material considerations which indicate a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed, subject to the condition above.

H Jones

INSPECTOR