



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 March 2026

by K Williams MTCP (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 April 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/25/3376104

**Land adjacent to Mulberry House, Frog Lane, Pickmere, Knutsford, Cheshire
WA16 0LJ**

- 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 Lockwood Construction against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
- The application Ref is 25/2276/PIP.
- The development proposed is for the permission in principle for the construction of up to 2 dwellings.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the permission in principle for the construction of up to 2 dwellings at land adjacent to Mulberry House, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0LJ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/2276/PIP, and the plans submitted with it.

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 (or permission in principle stage) 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 two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle, as set out in the PPG¹ is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent technical details consent application if permission in principle is granted.
4. An applicant can apply for permission in principle for a range of dwellings by expressing a minimum and maximum number of dwellings as part of the application. In this instance, the range is up to two dwellings. Only a location plan has been submitted.
5. The appellants drew my attention to a recent decision by the same Council within Pickmere. The Council were afforded the opportunity to comment on the submitted details.

¹ 1 PPG Permission in Principle Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

Main Issues

6. 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, the proposed land use, and the amount of development.

7. The site lies adjacent to existing ribbon development along Frog Lane, close to but outside the defined settlement boundary of the village of Pickmere. The site is currently undeveloped land. It contains very limited structures and physical containment akin to that seen in a typical rural environment. The houses would be spatially located outside the village boundaries of Pickmere. However, there is not a particularly clear distinction between where the settlement ends and the countryside begins by virtue of the sporadic form of development lining Frog Lane.
8. Policy SD1 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030, adopted July 2017 ("the CELPS") provides the overarching framework for sustainable development in and reflects the aim of National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) to ensure that development contributes positively to economic, social and environmental objectives in a balanced way. The policy directs growth to the most sustainable locations, prioritising Principal Towns and Key Service Centres where jobs, services and infrastructure already exist and promotes the creation of sustainable communities with good access to services and public transport, reducing reliance on the private car.
9. As such, development in the open countryside is not a preferred location within the settlement hierarchy. Policy SD2 of the CELPS expands on the above objectives of policy SD1 by setting out detailed, criteria-based principles against which development proposals are assessed. It focuses on how development is designed, located and delivered, and includes guidance on accessibility, including threshold distances to services, facilities and public transport when assessing the accessibility of proposals. I return to these matters later in the decision.

Green Belt considerations

10. The appeal site is also located within the Green Belt where, according to the Framework, development is inappropriate unless it falls within identified exceptions set out at paragraph 154 and 155. Paragraph 155 introduces the concept of grey belt and is a new exception included in the revision to the Framework when it was revised in 2024. For the purposes of decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined 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.
11. Policy PG3 of the CELPS does not include this provision. As a result, Policy PG3 is not fully consistent with the Framework. In accordance with paragraph 232, I have therefore afforded greater weight to the Framework in this regard. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and it should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework indicates that, subject to other considerations, the development of homes should not be regarded as inappropriate development if it would utilise grey belt land.

Whether grey belt and the Green Belt purposes

12. As Pickmere is a small village rather than a large built-up area or town, the site performs weakly against Green Belt Purpose (a), which is concerned with checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. Nor does it perform any meaningful role in preventing the merging of neighbouring towns under Purpose (b), as it does not lie between settlements or within a strategic gap and is a village. Purpose (d) is similarly of limited relevance, as Pickmere is not a historic town and the site does not contribute to the setting or special character of any such settlement. Accordingly, and consistent with the Council's position, the site can be regarded as grey belt land as it does not strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d).
13. Whether the proposal constitutes inappropriate development therefore depends on an assessment against the tests set out at paragraph 155(a) to (c) of the Framework, which apply specifically to grey belt land. In this context, it is necessary to consider the extent to which the appeal site contributes to the Green Belt purposes identified at paragraph 143 of the Framework, and whether its development would undermine those purposes in a meaningful way.
14. The proposal would result in a modest outward extension of built form; however, its effect on Green Belt purpose 143(c), which seeks to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, would be limited. The site lacks a clear transition between settlement and open countryside and is closely associated with existing built development, such that its role in resisting encroachment is weak. Given the modest scale of the proposal it would not materially undermine the objective of encouraging urban regeneration elsewhere, as required by purpose 143 (e). Accordingly, the proposal would not fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes when taken together, and criterion (a) of paragraph 155 is satisfied.

Demonstrable unmet need

15. The requirement in Framework paragraph 155(b) for a demonstrable unmet need to be met includes that such need is established where a five-year supply of deliverable housing land cannot be demonstrated. The Council's most recent Housing Monitoring Update, published in April 2025 with a base date of 31 March 2024, identifies a deliverable five-year housing land supply of 10,011 dwellings. When assessed against the five-year local housing need of 13,015 dwellings (2,603 dwellings per annum, including the appropriate 5% buffer), this equates to a 3.8-year supply. While the 2023 Housing Delivery Test result records strong historic performance, with a delivery score of 262%, this does not alter the current position that a five-year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated. This plainly demonstrates unmet housing need and confirms compliance with paragraph 155(b).

Whether a sustainable location

16. In order to meet the grey belt exception set out at paragraph 155(c) of the Framework, the proposal must also be located in a sustainable location, having regard to Framework paragraphs 110 and 115. The appeal site lies beyond the recommended distances to most key services. Assessment against the 20 public services and facilities detailed in Table 9.1 of the CELPS Policy SD2 demonstrates that the application site complies with the recommended distance standards for only four of the listed facilities, being a PROW, outdoor sports provision, a village

green and leisure facilities. Leisure and outdoor sports facilities at The Farm Club, together with some areas of amenity open space including the village green at Clover Drive, are comparatively closer to the site.

17. Whilst the above represent the closest facilities to the site, they would provide future residents opportunities for social interaction and health and well-being. Other facilities, such as the public house, village hall and bus stops, are also located within, or on the edge of the village. However, residents would need to travel beyond Pickmere to access schools, convenience shopping and other day-to-day facilities.
18. Frog Lane and sections of Park Lane are narrow rural roads lacking pavements and street lighting. While generally level, their edges are poorly defined and uneven in places, with inconsistent grass verges that cannot be considered as a footway and do not form a continuous pedestrian route. Parts of Park Lane include bends that restrict visibility and reduce intervisibility between road users, and there are no formal passing places, traffic-calming measures or dedicated pedestrian or cycling infrastructure. Although it has been put to me that traffic levels are relatively low and there are no recorded personal-injury collisions, accident records do not capture near-misses or unreported incidents. Existing features, including the 30 mph speed limit, signage and carriageway markings, may assist in moderating speeds, but they do not remove the exposure experienced by pedestrians walking within the carriageway.
19. Although a limited section of the route is unlit, it is bordered by residential properties and some businesses, which would result in occasional light spill from windows and security lighting, particularly in the early evening. However, the route would largely retain the low-lighting characteristics typical of a rural environment. In these circumstances and having regard to the generally flat nature of the surrounding lanes and the modest distances involved, walking and cycling would be achievable for some users, particularly those who are fit, confident and accustomed to travelling in rural road conditions, but would be less attractive or suitable for others.
20. The Highway Authority has not raised any objection on grounds of highway safety, and any mitigation could be addressed at the technical details stage. Nevertheless, these conditions would be particularly challenging for vulnerable users, including children, people with mobility impairments and those with pushchairs, who would be exposed to carriageway-level risk for longer periods and over extended distances. Poor weather and darkness would further reduce attractiveness and comfort. As a result, most future occupiers would be likely to rely to a significant degree on the private motor vehicle to access day-to-day services and facilities.
21. The Framework recognises that opportunities to maximise walking, cycling and public transport vary considerably between urban and rural areas, and that this context must be reflected in decision-making. Against this backdrop, the distance to the nearest bus stop and to Lostock Gralam railway station are material considerations. The railway station lies towards the upper end of what might reasonably be cycled for regular use, particularly given the rural road environment, the absence of dedicated cycling infrastructure and the limited lighting along sections of the route. While this distance would not be suitable or attractive for all

users, it could reasonably be cycled by some residents who are confident and accustomed to travelling in rural road conditions.

22. The appellant places reliance on a number of planning permissions and appeal decisions² in and around Pickmere, and the nearby area. I have had regard to the Council's evidence that planning decisions must be determined on the particular circumstances of the site under consideration and that the cited examples differ in their context and policy position. Nonetheless, while not determinative, these decisions illustrate that limited development has, in some circumstances, been found acceptable beyond defined settlement boundaries where the scale of development is modest and the associated accessibility is limited.
23. In this case, the proposal is small in scale and would be likely to generate only very limited additional movement. The range of village services available to future occupiers would not be materially different from that experienced by residents living on the periphery of, but still within, the Pickmere village infill boundary, notwithstanding that the appeal site itself does not fall within the scope of Policy PG10. While reliance on the private car for many day-to-day journeys would be likely, the site lies within relatively short driving distance of larger settlements, including Knutsford, Northwich and Lostock Gralam. Access to higher-order services, including rail, would therefore be more realistically achieved by short car journeys and cycle and ride trips rather than by walking or cycling alone, reflecting typical travel patterns associated with small-scale development in rural locations.
24. I have considered the modest scale of the proposal, the character and built form of Pickmere, the relationship of the site to the wider village, the absence of any highway safety objection, and the limited level of additional movement likely to be generated. I have also had full regard to the walking and cycling limitations identified. The planning balance is finely balanced; however, having particular regard to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework, I conclude that the site is not so poorly located as to fail the test in paragraph 155(c). For these reasons, I conclude that the proposal accords with paragraph 155(c) of the Framework by reason of locational sustainability, and I find that the development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It is therefore not necessary for me to consider the effect on the openness of the Green Belt, or whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated.
25. Policy PG3 of the CELPS does not include provision for the grey belt exception. As a result, it is not fully consistent with the Framework. In accordance with paragraph 232 of the Framework, I afford reduced weight to Policy PG3 in this respect. Any conflict with that policy is therefore outweighed by the Framework and is not determinative of the appeal.

Land use and amount

26. The proposal would change the site from one experienced as rural in character to residential development. Although the appeal site is broadly bookended by existing built form, the extent of the site would result in a longer linear pattern of development that extends built form beyond the current settlement edge. This would create a more defined and outward-facing village edge that would be visible

² Planning Reference: Land to the South of Goldstone, Pickmere Lane (23/4148M); Fernside, Frog Lane, Pickmere (23/2706M); Land Adjacent To Springfield (25/2863/PIP); Land to the West of Frog Lane, Pickmere (APP/R0660/W/18/3211980); Land off Park Lane, Pickmere (APP/R0660/W/19/3233911); and Broadheath Farm, Over Alderley (APP/R0660/W/24/3354674).

in the wider landscape, reinforcing the perception of a settlement boundary. However, this would occur in a manner consistent with the continuation of ribbon development along Frog Lane.

27. The proposal would change the site from one experienced as rural in character to residential development. Although the appeal site is broadly bookended by existing built form, the extent of the site would result in a longer linear pattern of development that extends built form beyond the current settlement edge. This would create a more defined and outward-facing village edge that would be visible in the wider landscape, reinforcing the perception of a settlement boundary, albeit in a manner consistent with the existing ribbon development along Frog Lane.
28. The site is capable of accommodating up to two dwellings, and this scale of development is considered appropriate in spatial terms having regard to its size, frontage and relationship with neighbouring properties, with no inherent conflict identified in relation to residential amenity or technical constraints. The development would make a very small contribution to housing supply in the context of a five-year housing land supply shortfall.
29. Concerns raised by the Parish Council and consultees in relation to ecology, trees and hedgerows, landscape, drainage and flood risk fall outside the scope of the permission in principle stage and would instead be addressed through the technical details application, over which the Council retains full control.

Overall conclusion on location, land use and amount

30. In this case, the proposal would provide a form of development that is proportionate to its rural context, capable of supporting sustainable travel choices for some users. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not conflict with the aims of policies SD1 and SD2 of the CELPS, which seeks to promote sustainable development by prioritising the most accessible locations and encouraging travel by sustainable modes, while explicitly recognising that accessibility outcomes will vary depending on the size, scale and location of development.

Conditions

31. The PPG makes it clear that it is not possible for conditions to be attached to a grant of permission in principle, whose terms may only include the site location, type, and amount of development. Therefore, I have not imposed any conditions.

Conclusion

32. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would not conflict with the development plan and the Framework. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

K Williams

INSPECTOR