



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 June 2026

by **E Heron MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 July 2026

Appeal Ref: 6006642

Land adjoining Plane Trees Farm, Bradley Fold Road, Ainsworth BL2 5QR

- 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 and Mrs S O Gara against the decision of Bury Council.
- The application Ref is 72495.
- The proposed development is described as 'Proposed stables and menage.'

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area;
 - the effect of the development on highway safety; and
 - whether harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm is outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to very special circumstances required to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

3. The appeal site is within the Green Belt. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, with the essential characteristics of the Green Belt being their openness and permanence. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions including those set out in paragraph 154.
4. Paragraph 154 b), allows for the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries, burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

5. Policy OL1/2 of the Unitary Development Plan¹ (UDP), broadly reflects the requirements of paragraph 154 b) of the Framework, but states that facilities must be essential, rather than appropriate. As this pre-dates the provisions of the Framework, I attach more weight to the tests set out within the Framework. There appears to be no dispute that the development would be an appropriate facility for outdoor recreation.
6. To comply with paragraph 154 b) an assessment must also be made as to whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and whether it would conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The Council has not raised a conflict with Green Belt purposes, but in its officer report has found harm in relation to openness. Accordingly I have limited my assessment to that of openness.
7. Openness has spatial and visual aspects and can take account of activity. The appeal site is an open and undeveloped grassed field sloping from north to south that merges with the adjoining open land, with little separating it from fields to the east other than hedgerows. There are localised views towards the site from Bradley Fold Road and Bury and Bolton Road, and longer distance views from further south, interrupted by hedges and trees.
8. The development would not be adjacent to the building group to the north. It would be visually and spatially isolated from it and would be set apart from the nearest field boundaries. When viewed from the south, the space around the stable building would be particularly apparent, due to a combination of the building's volume and massing, the openness of the land, and the height difference between it and the nearest building group. It would introduce built development into an isolated open space.
9. The horse arena would have negligible volume and massing, would not be lit, and the post and rail fencing would be open aspect. As such it would not harm Green Belt openness. I also note the Council has not raised a concern in this respect. Nonetheless, there would be a low degree of harm to the openness of the Green Belt, taking account of the low-profile form of the stable building. This harm would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. As the proposal fails this test, it is not necessary for me to further consider whether the proposal conflicts with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
10. Accordingly, the stable building would not fulfil the requirements of paragraph 154 b) of the Framework, and it would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Moreover, its harm to openness would conflict with the requirements of Policy JP-G9 of Places for Everyone, which states that the beneficial use of the Green Belt will be enhanced where this can be achieved without harm to its openness, amongst other things.

Character and Appearance

11. Policy OL4/7 of the UDP allows for development involving horses where it would not adversely impact on the appearance of rural areas. Policy JP-G1 states that within Landscape Character Areas development should reflect and respond to the special qualities and sensitivities of key landscape characteristics, including topography, views and perceptual qualities, amongst other things.

¹ Bury Unitary Development Plan, 'Creating a Brighter Borough,' Adopted Plan (1997)

12. Details of the wider Landscape Character Area are not before me. However, from a localised perspective the context is rural. Hedge-lined, spacious fields prevail, with sporadic but generally tight-knit, building groups leading from roads and lanes. Views across the site and wider field are afforded from the south, with more fleeting views along Bradley Fold Road to the west.
13. The stable would comprise a large U-shaped building with lengthy elevations, resulting in a visually prominent form. Its isolated position, removed from existing buildings and boundary features, would accentuate its presence within the landscape. SPD10² advises that stables are preferably sited adjacent to existing buildings or close to boundaries. By contrast, the proposed stable would appear detached and incongruous, increasing its harmful visual impact.
14. The appellant asserts that limited weight should be afforded to the guidance in the SPD10. SPD10 supports the policies of the UDP. The Framework is clear that Supplementary Planning Documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions, even though they are not part of the development plan.
15. The stables would incorporate a shallow profile, sheet roof and simple timber walling. Windows and rooflights would provide natural light to what would otherwise be dark stables, leading from a central unlit space. As such the design of the building would be functional, rather than domesticated. The elevation which incorporates most windows and the rooflights faces north and would not be widely visible from outside of the site. Moreover, the post and rail fence around the horse arena, would be harmonious with the rural character of the surroundings. I am also satisfied that the arena's surface colour would be a matter reasonably dealt with by way of planning conditions.
16. Nevertheless, I conclude that the stables, by way of their siting and size, would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, and would conflict with the relevant provisions of Policies OL4/7 of the UDP, and Policy JP-G1 of Places for Everyone³. It would also conflict with Policy EN1/2 of the UDP, which is favourable towards development that does not have adverse effects on local character, amongst other things.

Highway Safety

17. Policy JP-C8 of Places for Everyone, requires safe and convenient access to sites for all users, ensuring appropriate connectivity to the existing highway network, and to make adequate provision for car parking, amongst other things.
18. I observed during my site visit that the access joins the highway at a bend in the road and that visibility in both directions is restricted. As such, use of the access would be hazardous due to the higher likelihood of conflict between vehicles, and I note similar observations were made by the highway authority consultee. The issue would be particularly acute for vehicles pulling trailers that are more likely to be moving slowly and potentially use more of the highway to manoeuvre.
19. The Council did not request access design details; however the access is existing and no design changes are proposed to it. I am also mindful that the use would not be commercial. The appellant asserts that the site is already used for grazing,

² Development Control Policy Guidance Note 10, 'Planning for Equestrian Development', adopted 10th January 2007.

³ Places for Everyone, Joint Development Plan for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan, 2022-2039, adopted 21 March 2024.

such that use of the access would be reduced, as horses would not need to leave the site for shelter or exercise.

20. Even so, the proposal is for five stables and a horse arena, on a site where there is currently no development. It is unclear, how many horses graze the site and the associated vehicle trips. It is also unclear as to the number of horses that would be kept on the site as a result of the development. The officer report refers to four horses on the land and two more owned by the appellant. The appellant refers to the stables being capable of accommodating five.
21. There is also no robust evidence to demonstrate that vehicle trips would significantly reduce or indeed stay the same. The lack of existing baseline data means it is not possible to make a comparison, and there is little evidence beyond an assertion that horses are less likely to be taken from the site due to the size of the land, and the proposed facilities. I am not persuaded that this would be the case, as travel may be required for vet visits, treks or events elsewhere.
22. The appellant states that there have been no highway safety issues to date, and I have no reason to disagree. Yet this relates to the existing use. The evidence does not persuade me that this is directly comparable to the proposal. I have also considered whether access details and visibility splays could be secured by way of planning condition. Due to the telemetry of the road and the access position, I am not persuaded that such details would be sufficient to overcome the highway safety concern.
23. The proposed drawings do not indicate parking or manoeuvring space within the site. The site is large enough to accommodate these requirements, far enough from the site's access without requiring vehicles to reverse into, park, or wait on the highway. I am also satisfied that the details of these space requirements could be dealt with by planning condition.
24. Policy JP-S4 of Places for Everyone expects developments to manage surface water run-off through sustainable drainage systems and as close to source as possible. There are no details of surface water drainage before me. However, the development is a significant distance from the highway, surrounded by grass, and the arena's surface would be permeable. In the absence of evidence to the contrary I am satisfied that such details can be agreed by way of a condition of planning permission. Even so, vehicles would still be required to utilise the existing access on to the highway, and I have already found the visibility to be inadequate.
25. Accordingly, I conclude that the development would have a harmful effect on highway safety. It would conflict with the relevant provisions of Policy JP-C8 of Places for Everyone. It would also conflict with Policy JP-C5 of Places for Everyone, which adopts a Streets for All approach, including ensuring streets are welcoming for all. It would also fail to accord with paragraph 116 of the Framework due to the unacceptable impact on highway safety.
26. The Council cites Policy EN1/2 in its reasons for refusals relating to highway safety and car parking provision. As the policy concerns itself with design and character, I identify no conflict with it.

Other Considerations

27. The proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would result in a loss of openness. It would also harm the character and appearance of the area and would be detrimental to highway safety. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be allowed except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
28. The development is capable of meeting the requirements for 10% biodiversity net gain, by way of details submitted to discharge the statutory biodiversity gain condition. The stable building would incorporate energy efficiency measures such as roof insulation and locally sourced timber, amongst other things. These are modest benefits given the small extent of development
29. Due to the intervening distances between the development and residential dwellings, there would be no harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. I am advised that Plane Trees Barn is included on a draft local list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. I am satisfied that the development would not adversely affect its significance through development in its setting, due to the aforementioned distances and the extent of development proposed. These are neutral factors that weigh neither for nor against the proposal.
30. The appellant refers to three appeal decisions within its Planning Statement. These were dismissed, and the case made by the appellant is that the appeal proposal differs from them. I have no details, such as the site context or proposals before me. I am therefore unable to assess whether the cases are comparable, and this limits the weight I can attribute to them.
31. The benefits attract modest weight in favour of the proposal. Therefore, the other considerations are not sufficient to clearly outweigh the totality of harm I have identified, including the substantial weight afforded to Green Belt harm. The very special circumstances needed to justify the development do not exist and the proposal conflicts with the Framework.

Other Matters

32. There is some dispute as to the post-planning permission requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain. I have not pursued this further with the parties given my other fundamental concerns.

Conclusion

33. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

E Heron

INSPECTOR