



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 November 2025

by F Rafiq BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/T4210/W/25/3371830

Land between 145 & 115 Holcombe Old Road, Bury, BL8 4NF

- 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 Oliver Steven against the decision of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 71905.
 - The development proposed is the removal of barn and storage shed and construct a three bedroom detached house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The permission in principle procedure, under Section 58A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, is limited to matters of location, land use and the amount of development only. I have considered the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are whether the site is suitable for residential development having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development proposed, with particular reference to:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including the effect on the openness of the Green Belt, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - whether the proposal would make effective use of land; and,
 - whether any 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

Inappropriateness

4. The appeal site is situated in the Green Belt. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

5. The Framework establishes that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the exceptions set out at paragraph's 154 / 155 of the Framework apply. This includes the development of homes in the Green Belt which should not be regarded as inappropriate where the development would use 'grey belt' land, and where various other criteria are met.
6. The main parties agree that the site meets the definition of grey belt provided in the Framework Glossary. This is 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 the purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143 of the Framework¹.
7. Given the small size of the appeal site, the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes taken together of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. It is also acknowledged by the Council that there is a demonstrable unmet need for housing as set out at paragraph 155 b) of the Framework.
8. Paragraph 155 c) of the Framework requires development to be in a sustainable location. The appeal site is referenced as being within Holcombe, but the linear group of properties that the appeal site forms part of, is separated by open areas of land from the core of the village, which is around the junction of Helmshore Road and Lumb Carr Road. To the south of the appeal site, further facilities can be found around the junction of Bolton Road West and Longsight Road. However, given the distances involved, which the Council has referenced as around 700m-900m, and that part of the route to either of these locations would entail walking along Holcombe Old Road that does not have a separate footway, the proposal would not provide a comfortable walking route to public transport connections and services. The changes in topography and the cobbled surface on Holcombe Old Road would also not make it suitable for cycling.
9. Ramsbottom provides a range of shops, schools and public transport connections, but for the reasons set out above, future occupants would be overly reliant on private vehicles to reach them. In relation to paragraph 155 c) therefore, the development would not be in a sustainable location, and it would not therefore contribute to the Framework's aim of actively managing patterns of growth in support of sustainable transport objectives.
10. Reference has also been made by the appellant to the development being considered under the exception at paragraph 154 e) of the Framework relating to limited infilling in villages. The Framework does not define a 'village', and nor have I been provided with a definition from the development plan.
11. Although the appeal site forms part of a linear area of development, given the separation created by open areas of land between this group of properties that the appeal site forms part of and development around the junction of Helmshore Road and Lumb Carr Road, there is a distinct physical break with the main area of the village as referenced by the Council.
12. The Appellant makes reference to an appeal decision², where an appeal site was found to have the characteristics of a village location despite it being detached

¹ but excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

² Appeal Ref: APP/B5480/W/18/3200843

from it by an area of open fields. Whether a proposed development is within a village for the purposes of the Framework is a question of planning judgement, and although limited information is before me on the circumstances of the referenced case it is evident from the extract of the appeal decision provided, that the Inspector had regard to the particular merits of that case including attributes that provided for a cohesive character.

13. In the case of the appeal proposal, whilst it would infill a gap between buildings on neighbouring sites, and Holcombe is defined as a village³, I have found that the appeal site would not be within a village for the purposes of paragraph 154 e) of the Framework.
14. I therefore conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development. As such, it would conflict with Policy OL1/2 of the Bury Unitary Development Plan and paragraph 153 of the Framework, which state, amongst other matters, that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
15. The proposal, whilst resulting in a more consolidated form of development, would also introduce a residential dwelling, and associated domestic parking and residential paraphernalia that would result in both a spatial and visual loss of Green Belt openness.

Effective use of land

16. The proposal would provide for a single dwelling following the removal of the existing buildings. Reference is made to Policy JP-H4 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (Place for Everyone DPD) which sets out that new housing development should be delivered at a density appropriate to its location. The appeal site is in a location where a minimum net residential density of 35 dwellings per hectare is sought.
17. The proposal would result in a development density of 11 dwellings per hectare that would not comply with the density sought by Policy JP-H4 of the Places for Everyone DPD. However, the policy states regard should be had to the minimum densities set out and that density should be appropriate to its location.
18. The submitted Proposed Block Plan, although indicative as the proposal is for permission in principle, provides an illustration of how the site could be developed. Given the need to make provision for parking, outdoor amenity space and biodiversity enhancements, I consider that on this relatively small site at 0.09ha, that the density would be appropriate. I am not persuaded that this quantity of development would necessarily have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area, as the design, had the development been otherwise acceptable, would be addressed at technical detail stage.
19. I acknowledge the location of the site in a conservation area does not necessarily preclude higher density development nor is limited infilling confined to a single dwelling. A terrace of cottages, providing more than one dwelling may be appropriate to the character of the area. However, I am required to determine the appeal proposal that is before me.

³ in the Holcombe Conservation Area Appraisal

20. I therefore conclude that the proposal would make effective use of land, and as such, it would not be contrary to Policy JP-H4 of the Places for Everyone DPD and Section 11 of the Framework, which seek, amongst other matters, to achieve appropriate densities and make efficient use of land.

Other considerations

21. The proposal would contribute positively economically to the area, both during the construction phase and through ongoing expenditure by future occupants. It would add an additional dwelling that would contribute to the delivery of housing in the area and sustain local services. These matters weigh in favour of the appeal, although as the development involves a single residential dwelling, they attract limited positive weight.

Other Matter

22. Reference has been made to the proposal adopting materials and detailing that would complement the surrounding area. These are not however matters that are before me for consideration under the permission in principle procedure.

Conclusion

23. The proposed development would be inappropriate development, which the Framework clearly sets out is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Although the proposal would consolidate built form within the appeal site, it would be overall harmful to openness for the reasons set out. 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.
24. I have attached limited weight in favour of the proposal in terms of economic and social benefits given it involves a small residential scheme. The acceptability of the proposal in terms of the effective use of land is a neutral consideration.
25. With this in mind, the substantial weight I have given to Green Belt harm and other harm is not clearly outweighed by other considerations sufficient to demonstrate very special circumstances.
26. I conclude that the proposal would not accord with the development plan as a whole, and there are no other considerations, including the Framework, that indicate that I should take a decision other than in accordance with this. I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Rafiq

INSPECTOR