

PLANNING APPLICATION IN PRINCIPLE

PROPOSED DWELLING (S)

ADJACENT 20 RAMSBOTTOM ROAD, HAWKSHAW BL8 4JS

A pre-application enquiry was submitted earlier this year to find out whether planning permission was likely to be granted on land adjacent to number 20 Ramsbottom Road, which has been used as a garden by number 18. The planning officer's response confirmed that, although the development was in the Green Belt, it would qualify as Grey Belt, but it was not considered to be in a sustainable location. This advice is contradicted by recent planning approvals and appeal decisions elsewhere in the borough, in particular land adjacent to 329 Whalley Road (application number 73445) as referenced below.

The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was issued on 17 August 2026, after the planning officer's advice was issued. The NPPF has been completely reworked and replaces the previous NPPF published in December 2024.

The new NPPF contains "Policies" rather than Guidance. Throughout the document Policies aimed at delivering new development have been strengthened, particularly to promote new housing. The presumption in favour of sustainable development is now mandatory. Policy TR3 requires development to be located where it can make the most of existing transport infrastructure. Where local development plans, such as Places for Everyone and the emerging Bury Local Plan, are not in accord with the NPPF, it is the NPPF that is paramount.

Guidance on new development in the Green Belt has changed, although the purposes of including land in the Green Belt remain the same. These are to:-

- a. Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas:
- b. .Prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another:-
- c. Assist in safeguarding the country side from encroachment.
- d. Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e. Assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

As before, most forms of development in the Green Belt are “inappropriate” (Policy GB6). Policy GB7 lists the categories of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. These include development where:-

- “1. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
2. There is evidenced unmet need for the type of development proposed;
3. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to Policy TR3 of this Framework.”

“Grey Belt” is defined in the glossary of the NPPF “as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that does not strongly contribute to any purposes (a),(b) or (d) in Policy GB2”. The relevant purposes for this application are a and b. Annex E of the NPPF sets out the considerations to be used in assessing the contribution that land makes to the purposes of the Green Belt as strong, moderate or weak.

Criterion 1 – Purposes of the Green Belt

Purpose (a) – Unrestricted sprawl

The planning officer has previously concluded that *“the guidance is clear that this relates to the sprawl of large built-up areas, not villages. The site is currently free of existing development and lacks physical features that could restrict and contain development; however the site is not adjacent to a large built-up area. Therefore it is considered that that the site makes a weak contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas”*.

Purpose (b) – Prevent neighbouring towns merging

The planning officer’s conclusion was that *“the guidance states that this purpose relates to the merging of towns, not villages. The site does not form a substantial gap between any towns and development of the site would not lead to loss of visual separation between the towns. As such, it is considered that the site makes a limited contribution towards purpose B”*. I interpret this as meaning a “weak” contribution to Purpose b.

The NPPF focuses on large Grey Belt developments in the Green Belt, The development of such a small site would not fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the area of the plan (NPPF Annex E para 1c). This has been confirmed by the planning officer.

Criterion 2 – Unmet demand for the type of development proposed

As the planning officer stated in her report, there is a demonstrable unmet need for deliverable housing land which means:

- *“A lack of five year supply of deliverable housing sites, including the relevant buffer where applicable; or*
- *Where the Housing Delivery Test is below 75%of the housing requirement over the previous three years.*

As a result of the lack of five-year supply and the latest published Housing Delivery Test result there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed and Criterion B is met.”

Criterion 3 – Sustainable Location

In assessing this issue the planning officer concluded that *“whilst the site is considered Grey Belt land, it does not satisfy Criterion C relating to sustainable location”*. This conclusion was on the basis of distances to local amenities but is contrary to the latest NPPF and approvals and/or appeal decisions on similarly located sites elsewhere in the Borough including land north of 329 Whalley Road, Ramsbottom.

NPPF Policy TR3 seeks to locate development in sustainable locations. Paragraph 1b states that *“opportunities should be taken to utilise existing or proposed transport infrastructure in optimising the amount or density of development which can be accommodated in different locations, especially where this can support more walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use”*.

As with Ramsbottom Road, the Whalley Road land fronts a main road and is next to a short terrace of houses. The Whalley Road application was supported by bus timetables although two of the quoted routes run nowhere near the site. The third bus service does actually pass the site but the bus cannot be boarded because the nearest bus stops are in Edenfield and Walmersley !

The site plan submitted with the current application plan confirms bus stops directly opposite and adjacent to the application site. The 480 bus is an hourly service in one direction to Bury and in the other to Bolton via Harwood and Bradshaw. Harwood is approximately two miles away and has a large supermarket and other amenities. A primary school is ten minutes walk away from the site and a public house and restaurant within 5 minutes walk.

It is acknowledged that the site will be difficult to develop because of its ground levels and the need to provide safe vehicular access and this will govern the size and number of dwellings if and when a full planning application is submitted. However, it is only the principle of residential development that is the subject of this planning application.

The pre application enquiry established that site met the requirements to be considered as Grey Belt. The NPPF regards existing transport infrastructure, in this instance a regular bus service, as supporting sustainability. Decisions on sites elsewhere in the Borough, either by the LPA or a Planning Inspector are a precedent for the development being sustainable. I look forward to permission in principle being granted.