

Green Belt Assessment

1.0 Introduction

This section provides an assessment of the proposed development in the context of national Green Belt policy set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) and relevant policies of the Rochdale Core Strategy. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the proposed change of use, together with the associated external works to create a safeguarded outdoor play area, constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt and results in no harm to openness, either spatially or visually.

The assessment has been prepared in accordance with the approach typically adopted by Rochdale Council in similar schemes involving the reuse of existing buildings and modest operational works within established commercial curtilages.

2.0 Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

Section 13 ("Protecting Green Belt Land") establishes the fundamental aim of the Green Belt and defines categories of development that are not inappropriate. Paragraph 154(d) confirms that the re-use of buildings of permanent and substantial construction does not constitute inappropriate development, provided that the proposal preserves openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted 2016)

The following policies are relevant:

- Policy G4 – Protecting Green Belt

Requires that proposals within the Green Belt are assessed against the NPPF and that development should preserve openness and avoid conflict with Green Belt purposes.

- Policy C1 – Delivering Community Facilities

Supports development that provides or enhances childcare, education and community services, particularly where located in accessible and sustainable locations.

- Policy P3 – Improving Design

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Requires high-quality, contextually appropriate development that avoids harm to the character or appearance of the locality.

- Policy T2 – Improving Accessibility

Encourages development that reduces the need to travel and makes efficient use of sustainable transport infrastructure.

- Policy G9 – Reducing Pollution

Supports schemes that reduce noise, disturbance, traffic impacts and environmental harm.

3.0 Assessment of the Proposal in Green Belt Terms

3.1 Re-use of a Permanent and Substantial Building (NPPF Para. 154(d))

The proposal seeks to change the use of the existing, permanent, two-storey restaurant building to a mixed day nursery and education centre, without any extensions, demolition, or increase in built form. The structure is modern, structurally sound and of indisputably permanent construction.

The NPPF exception under paragraph 154(d) therefore applies in full, and the development should be treated as not inappropriate.

This approach is wholly consistent with previous RMBC decisions supporting:

- the conversion of existing rural/commercial buildings,
- operational development confined to existing hardstanding, and
- safeguarding measures (e.g. fencing, play surfacing) that have no material impact on openness.

3.2 Openness of the Green Belt

Openness has two components—spatial and visual—and both are fully preserved here.

Spatial Openness

- No alteration to the footprint, height or massing of the existing building.
- All activity remains within the lawful curtilage.
- External works (play surfacing, fencing) occur entirely on existing hardstanding.
- No volumetric increase whatsoever.

Visual Openness

- The street-facing elevation remains unchanged.
- Fencing is modest (1.8m timber), domestic in character, and screened within the rear curtilage.
- The perception of built form from public viewpoints remains identical to the baseline.
- Activity is reduced compared with the lawful restaurant fallback, particularly in the evening and at weekends.

On this basis, the proposal preserves openness, meeting both the NPPF test and the requirements of Policy G4.

3.3 Purposes of Including Land Within the Green Belt

The proposal also avoids conflict with the five statutory Green Belt purposes:

1. Checking unrestricted sprawl – No outward spread of development; the curtilage is unchanged.
2. Preventing merging of towns – The site sits within an established ribbon of uses; no merging occurs.
3. Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment – No development beyond the long-established commercial envelope.
4. Preserving historic towns – No heritage constraints are engaged.
5. Assisting urban regeneration – The reuse of an existing vacant building directly supports regeneration objectives.

4.0 Compliance With Local Policy

Policy G4 – Protecting Green Belt

The proposal meets the NPPF exception for the re-use of buildings. No harm to openness arises.

Policy G4 is fully satisfied.

Policy C1 – Delivering Community Facilities

The development provides essential early years provision and educational enrichment in an accessible location, meeting demonstrable local need.

The proposal is directly supported by Policy C1.

Policy P3 – Improving Design

No changes are proposed to the architectural character of the building. External works are discreet and proportionate.

Policy P3 is met in full.

Policy T2 – Improving Accessibility

The site lies on a key transport corridor with immediate access to bus services; trip generation is significantly lower than the lawful fallback restaurant use.

Policy T2 is satisfied.

Policy G9 – Reducing Pollution

Replacement of a late-night, high-impact restaurant with a daytime-only childcare use results in significantly reduced noise, traffic peaks and environmental disturbance.

Policy G9 is fully satisfied.

5.0 Conclusion

This Green Belt Assessment demonstrates that:

- The proposal falls within the NPPF paragraph 154(d) exception for re-use of buildings.
- The openness of the Green Belt—spatial and visual—is fully preserved.
- The proposal does not conflict with any of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
- All relevant Rochdale Core Strategy policies (G4, C1, P3, T2, G9) are either fully satisfied or provide positive support for the development.
- No very special circumstances are required because the scheme constitutes appropriate development in Green Belt terms.

The proposal represents a sustainable, policy-compliant, and beneficial re-use of an existing commercial building that enhances community infrastructure without harming the Green Belt.