

Officer Report

Case Reference: 25/01068/HOUS
Location: Brearley Farm Rakewood Road Littleborough Rochdale
OL15 0AG
Proposal: Erection of a single storey side extension and additional
hardstanding
Recommendation: Refuse
Officer: Bob Melling

SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

The application relates to Brearley Farm, a locally important former laithe house which stands amidst extensive open farmland in Littleborough. The property comprises a pre-1851 vernacular house built in natural coursed stone with traditional weaver cottage style windows and a dual-pitched roof covered in natural slates. The previously annexed barn was demolished between 2010 and 2012 and replaced with a two-storey extension to the house. The house also benefits from an existing single-storey rear extension, an unauthorised front porch and an unauthorised detached double garage. It is unclear when the porch was built, however satellite imagery suggests that the garage was substantially completed in 2020.

The property, which is a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) due to its architectural and historical significance, is situated within the Green Belt and accessed via a single-track road which joins the Hollingworth Lake Country Park car park and Rakewood Road to the west.

The surrounding topography is varied, while the immediate area around the building is flat, the wider area is characterised by an undulating landscape which is in part due to a natural variation in levels and the river valley (Brearley Brook) which meanders at a much lower level to the north of the site. A definitive public right of way (ref: LitFp470) passes through the site along the front / western site boundary.

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for a single-storey side extension to the northwestern side elevation with a hipped roof form and central roof lantern. The extension would measure approximately 8m in length by 4m in depth with a height to eaves of approximately 2.5m and an overall height of 3.1m (excluding the roof lantern). The extension would be constructed from facing stone, natural blue slate and white uPVC / aluminium frames. It would include full height windows to the side and glazed sliding doors to the front and rear.

RELEVANT HISTORY

07/D50089 - Change of use and alterations to barn to provide additional accommodation including single storey extension to rear and detached double garage – Granted subject to conditions.

07/D49073 - Change of use and alterations to existing barn to form extension to dwelling including single storey rear extension – Withdrawn.

10/D53697 - Application for a new planning permission to replace an extant planning permission D50089, change of use and alterations to barn to provide additional accommodation including single storey extension to rear and detached double garage – Granted subject to conditions.

DC00406 - Submission of details to comply with conditions 3 and 5 to 8 of planning permission D53697 – Deemed withdrawn.

12/D55205 - Refurbishment and two storey side extension to existing farmhouse to provide B&B accommodation and additional living accommodation (part retrospective) – Refused.

12/D55540 - Refurbishment and two storey side extension to existing farmhouse to provide B&B accommodation and additional living accommodation (part retrospective - resubmission of D55205) – Granted subject to conditions.

22/00023/HOUS - Single storey side extension – Withdrawn.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

National

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Sub-Regional

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE) 2024:

JP-G1 Landscape Character

JP-G9 The Green Belt

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

JP-P2 Heritage

Local

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS) 2016:

P2 Protecting and Enhancing Character, Landscape and Heritage

P3 Improving Design of New Development

DM1 General Development Requirements

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD): Supplementary Planning Document 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development' (2016).

PUBLICITY

Weekly List: 12.02.2026

Site Notice: 07.02.2026

Press Notice: N/A

Neighbour notification letters: N/A

ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

Policy Position

Inappropriate Development

The application site is located within the Green Belt as allocated under PfE Policy JP-G9. The NPPF states that: '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 permanence'.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF establishes that:

When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF sets out that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it meets one of the exceptions. Exception c) is relevant to the current application:

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

Therefore, the main consideration in assessing the principle of development is whether the proposed extension constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, if so, whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated which may outweigh the presumption against development.

Section 5.20 of the Council's 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development SPD' states that 'normally, in principle, extensions that result in up to a 35% increase in floor space or volume over and above the original dwelling would normally be considered appropriate and not disproportionate.' However, the guidance goes on to state that 'the characteristics of properties and proposals will vary significantly and there may be instances when a 35% increase would be considered disproportionate and other occasions when a greater than 35% increase may be considered proportionate.'

The NPPF defines the 'original building' as: 'A building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally.'

The submitted Green Belt assessment suggests that the existing and proposed extensions would comprise an approximate 15% increase in the volume of the original building. However, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) contends this view, instead considering the existing and proposed extensions to comprise an approximate 57.5% increase in the volume of the original building, not including the unauthorised front porch and double garage.

It is noted that the applicant's assessment of what constitutes the 'original building' is based on a 1930 Ordnance Survey map which is considered to be of limited evidential value in establishing the 'original building' for Green Belt purposes as it predates the relevant 1 July 1948 baseline and illustrates only a cartographic footprint. It does not, in itself, establish the precise extent, form or cubic content of the building as it existed in 1948, nor whether the configuration shown remained unchanged from that date to more recent evidence supplied as part of recent applications from the turn of the millenia. Officers are also aware of a historical photograph of the laithe house which dates from the late nineteenth century, however, for the reasons set out above, it is not considered that this photograph provides sufficient evidential weight in the determination of the 'original building' as per the NPPF definition.

It should also be acknowledged that the applicant's Green Belt assessment states that: 'The main barn and farmhouse appear to remain intact on-site now.' However, we know from the planning history of the site that the annexed barn was demolished and replaced with a two-storey extension (see application references 12/D55205 and 12/D55540). Under planning application reference 12/D55205 it was considered by the LPA that the extensions (which are currently present) would constitute a 35% increase in the volume of the original building, which the LPA considered to be disproportionate and in conflict with the Green Belt purposes and openness. However, this calculation did not include what was then proposed as Bed and Breakfast ('B&B') accommodation. Given the previously proposed B&B accommodation is now used as part of the main dwellinghouse, this should also be taken into account when considering the increase in volume.

While the subsequent re-submission of the refused application was approved due to the demonstration of very special circumstances (application reference 12/D55540), it is important to note that the LPA considered it necessary to impose a condition which prohibits the dwelling from being extended or for detached outbuildings from being built within the curtilage as permitted development. This condition was deemed necessary in order to protect the Green Belt from further inappropriate development.

The available planning history for the site establishes what the LPA considered to be the 'original building' and is the most conclusive evidence available to the LPA at the current time. Based on the available evidence and taking into account the NPPF definition of the 'original building', it is considered that the accumulation of the existing extensions plus the proposed

extension would amount to an approximate 57.5% increase in volume over the original building. However, this figure does not include the existing garage, which has a footprint of some 68 square metres. Without detailed drawings, it is not possible to calculate the precise volume of the garage, however it is likely that this would be in the region of 200 cubic metres. If taken into consideration, this would take the overall volume increase to approximately 77%. Therefore, the cumulative effect of the existing and proposed extensions would represent a significant percentage increase in the volume of the original building.

Given this, it is considered that the existing and proposed extensions would result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original dwelling, and the cumulative effect of the existing and proposed extensions would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The NPPF is explicit in that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF states that when considering any application, LPAs should ensure that substantial weight is given to any Green Belt harm. Unless the Green Belt harm by way of inappropriateness, and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations, 'very special circumstances' will not exist.

What results in very special circumstances is not defined within either the NPPF or local policy. There could be a single and substantial factor that clearly outweighs the harms, or a number of seemingly ordinary benefits which, when considered in isolation might not be individually particularly noteworthy, but collectively, clearly outweigh the harms, to amount to 'very special circumstances' existing. The weight given to any particular factor, and their combination, is a matter of planning judgement for the decision taker.

In accordance with paragraph 153 of the NPPF, this report will evaluate harm to the Green Belt, any other harm and any other considerations, before coming to a conclusion as to whether very special circumstances exist. In assessing harm, the following weight has been ascribed to each matter either in favour or against the proposed development:

- Neutral;
- Limited;
- Moderate;
- Significant; or
- Substantial.

Harm to the Green Belt

Harm by Definition

Having established that there is definitional harm, it is necessary to consider other forms of harm to the Green Belt. The next sub sections will therefore consider the impact of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt and the impact on the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

Impact on Openness

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF sets out that 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. Given that the development has been identified as being inappropriate, the next test is to assess the impact of the development upon the openness of the Green Belt.

Planning Practice Guidance provides further advice on what factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on openness. This guidance clarifies that assessing this impact requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case in question. Furthermore, the guidance gives a number of examples where the courts have identified a number of matters which might need to be taken into account in making the assessment. In summary these include, but are not limited to:

- Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects;
- The duration of the development, and its irremediability;
- The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation or use of the land by future occupiers.

As alluded to above, openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects.

Given the secluded location of the property and the vast open land which surrounds it, it is considered that the proposed extension would retain unobstructed views of the surrounding Green Belt land and would not significantly harm its visual openness.

However, in assessing the spatial harm caused by the development on the openness of the Green Belt, it is important to recognise that the absence of any significant visual intrusion does not in itself mean that there is no impact on openness. The spatial openness of the Green Belt is clear around the building and the development now introduces a further extension to the side of the dwelling. There is now a greater impact on the openness by the simple merit of the quantum of development that exists compared to that which previously existed. Therefore, there is a reduction in the spatial openness of the application site, and this is harmful to the Green Belt.

Overall, the development would result in harm to spatial openness, contrary to the requirements of paragraph 142 of the NPPF. It is now important to consider the impact of the proposal on the purposes that land within the Green Belt should serve.

Impact on Purposes

Paragraph 143 of the NPPF sets out that Green Belt serves the following five purposes:

- a. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d. To reserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

e. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

A) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

The development applied for is not significant enough in size to contribute towards what could be considered to constitute a sprawl of a large built-up area and it would not conflict with this purpose.

B) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

The development and application site involved with this application serves no purpose in preventing neighbouring towns merging and as such it would not conflict with this purpose.

C) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

The development applied for is not significant enough in size to contribute towards what could be considered to constitute an encroachment into the countryside.

D) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

The application site does not abut an identified historic settlement and does not have a physical or visual relationship to the setting or significance of an historic town. The proposed development would not conflict with this purpose.

E) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

The application site does not conflict with this purpose as it does not assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Openness Conclusion

The development is inappropriate development within the Green Belt and therefore, is harmful by definition. In terms of harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt, Officers have considered the proposal having regard to its individual merits, including its location, scale and form and the site context and the development would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt as discussed above. However, the proposal would not conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

In conclusion, the harm upon openness and definitional harm by reason of inappropriateness is afforded substantial weight as required by NPPF.

The development is unacceptable in principle.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF requires analysis of other considerations in the planning balance and these are set out below.

Design / Heritage / Character of the Countryside

The NPPF establishes that achieving good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, and decisions should ensure developments are visually attractive and sympathetic to local character. This is reflected in PfE Policy JP-P1 and CS Policies DM1 and P3, which require development to respect local context with regard to siting, size, scale, massing, height and materials. In addition, SPD Section 5.1 states development proposals should be 'in keeping with the host property and generally should be subservient to it.'

NPPF Paragraph 216 states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account with a balanced judgement required when considering the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. Similarly, PfE Policy JP-P2 and CS Policy P2 seek to positively conserve, sustain and enhance heritage assets and their settings, including non-statutory heritage assets of local interest.

Significance, as defined in the NPPF, is:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

The setting of a heritage asset, as defined in the NPPF, is:

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

The proposal seeks to add a side extension to what was an annexed barn. The SPD provides guidance for barn conversions, in particular, section 4.8 which states:

To retain the character and architectural integrity of traditional rural buildings, alterations to existing fabric must be kept to the minimum necessary to facilitate residential use... Proposals which rely on substantial alteration or extension will not normally be permitted. Where an extension is permissible, the new build element should be strictly subordinate in scale to the existing building and respectful of it in the design detailing.

Historic England provides further advice on extensions to farm buildings in its guidance document 'Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings: Best Practice Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse' (2017), where it states, 'overtly domestic extensions ... are alien in character and can rarely work successfully within the context of historic farm buildings.' It also states 'extensions and new buildings should be subordinate in scale and relate to the massing and character of the existing farmstead group.'

In this instance the roof form with the glazed lantern and the large areas of glazing along the front and side elevations give the extension a clear domestic appearance, which is at odds with the simple form of the former laithe house. It is considered that the proposed extension because of the roof form and extent of glazing would appear as a discordant addition, which would result in minor harm to the significance of this non-designated heritage asset. This is a material consideration in the planning balance.

Overall, it is considered that the extension would represent an incongruous and unsympathetic addition to the host dwelling that would result in less than substantial harm a heritage asset. Having due regard to PfE Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2, CS Policies DM1, P2 and P3, the SPD and the NPPF, it is considered that the development would have a moderate harmful impact on the application property and its setting.

Residential Amenity

The development is not considered to have an adverse impact on residential amenity as the property is located a sufficient distance from neighbouring properties. Therefore, neutral weight is attributed against the development in this regard.

Highways

The development is not considered to have an adverse impact on highway safety and would not generate a level of additional traffic which would have a detrimental impact on the safe and efficient operation of the immediate local highway network, or strategic routes. Therefore, neutral weight is attributed against the development in this regard.

VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

A Court of Appeal judgement in *Redhill Aerodrome Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* establishes that ‘any other harm’ in paragraph 153 of the NPPF includes non-Green Belt harm that is to be taken into account in the weighing exercise of the planning balance as to determining whether or not very special circumstances exist which would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by inappropriateness and any other harm.

This Court of Appeal judgment is an important reminder that under paragraph 153 of the NPPF, when considering any planning application concerning proposed development in the Green Belt, LPAs should continue to ensure that substantial weight is given to harm to the Green Belt and any other harm.

In light of the above assessment, it is necessary to now consider whether there are ‘very special circumstances’ which clearly outweigh harm to the Green Belt (arising from the inappropriate development discussed above) and any other harm resulting from the proposal as set out in paragraph 153 of the NPPF.

THE APPLICANT’S CASE

The applicant has submitted a Green Belt assessment however they do not consider the extension to be inappropriate development, and, on this basis, no very special circumstances have been identified.

THE COUNCIL’S ASSESSMENT

No very special circumstances have been identified by the applicant and the Council does not consider that any very special circumstances exist.

PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that decision should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development by approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 153 also states that when considering any planning application, LPAs should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The LPA has identified that the proposed extension would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt including harm to the spatial openness of the Green Belt. Other harm has also been identified in terms of the less than substantial harm to a heritage asset. The NPPF requires substantial weight to be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including any other harm. No very special circumstances have been demonstrated that would clearly outweigh the identified harm and support the grant of planning permission.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning permission is refused

SUMMARY OF THIRD-PARTY REPRESENTATIONS

N/A

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Conservation Officer: (Summary)

While there are no objections to the principle of an extension in heritage terms, there are some concerns about the form and design of the proposed extension.

PROCEDURAL STATEMENT

Article 35 Declaration

The development does not comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.

Human Rights and Public Sector Equality Duty

The provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been taken into account in the processing of the application and the preparation of this report. In particular, Article 6 (1), of the European Convention on Human Rights in relation civil rights and a fair hearing; Article 8 of the ECHR in

relation to the right to respect for private and family life and Article 1 Protocol 1 of the ECHR in relation to the protection of property have all been taken into account.

In addition, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination in respect of certain protected characteristics namely: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, or beliefs and sex and sexual orientation. It places the Local Planning Authority under a legal duty to have due regard to the advancement of equality in the exercise of its powers including planning powers. Officers have taken this into account in the assessment of the application. In particular due regard has been afforded to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Officers are satisfied that the application material and Officers' assessment has taken into account these issues.

The application has been considered in accordance with the Rochdale Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy – Embracing All Voices (2024-2026), which seeks to promote a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion that benefit the community as a whole.

Recommendation: Refuse

Refusal(s) (3)

- 1 By virtue of its siting, size and scale and taken cumulatively with previous extensions, the proposed development comprises inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would fail to be a proportionate extension. The development would be harmful by definition and furthermore, fails to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Very special circumstances do not exist as the identified harm (by definition, to openness and other harm) is not clearly outweighed by other considerations, and the application is therefore contrary to PfE Policy JP-G9 (The Green Belt) and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2 As a result of its siting, form and design the proposed extension would constitute an incongruous addition to the dwelling which is unsympathetic to the character of the non-designated heritage asset. The proposed development is therefore visually harmful and detrimental to the visual amenity and character of the property, contrary to PfE Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2, CS Policies DM1, P2 and P3, the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Document 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development', and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 3 The proposal would not improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area nor does it comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or

conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.

For the avoidance of doubt, the decision notice relates to the following plans and supporting reports:

Location Plan. Dwg no. 1527/LP

Existing Site Plan. Dwg no. 1527/001

Proposed Site Plan. Dwg no. 1527/002. Rev B

Existing Ground Floor Plan. Dwg no. 1527/101

Proposed Ground Floor Plan. Dwg no. 1527/102. Rev A

Existing Elevations. Dwg no. 1527/201

Proposed Elevations. Dwg no. 1527/202. Rev A

‘Greenbelt Statement’, by HNA Architects Ltd. Ref: 1527-GBC

‘Heritage Assessment’ by Garry Miller dated December 2025