



GREEN BELT JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT FOR PLANNING APPLICATION

CHANGE OF USE TO DOG EXERCISE FACILITY

LAND AT SOUTH LANE WA8 3TZ

Introduction

This Statement has been prepared on behalf of Ms Rebeckah Vaughan ('the applicant') to support a planning application to Warrington Borough Council ('the local planning authority') for a the change of use of land to a dog exercise field ('the proposed development'). The application relates to land at South Lane WA8 3TZ (to be referred to as 'the site') as indicated in the associated submitted site location plan.

The land at South Lane forms part of as part a landholding that is redundant having previously been used for agriculture. The proposals has been identified as a way to take forward diversification of the land that would provide essential community facilities. It is anticipated that the facility would be in use for more than 28 days in total in any calendar year and therefore the application seeks permission for the change of use of land in addition to a shelter, fencing hardstanding and gate.

Currently in the UK there is significant demand for spaces where dogs can be allowed off lead. Such facilities allow dogs to be safely exercised or trained away from other dogs and people and also avoids the potential for dogs chasing livestock. The applicant has significant experience in working with dogs running successful businesses associated with dog welfare and kennel provision and highlights the need for this type of facility in the area.

This statement has been prepared taking into account the pre-application response that was provided electronically by Pauline Shearer on 17 June 2021 and seeks to provide clear justification of how the proposal satisfies Green Belt policy requirements as well as wider policy accordance associated with both Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy and also NPPF.

It is considered that the proposal would constitute development that preserves the openness of the Green Belt and it is hoped that the LPA will concur that the level of development proposed upon the site is in accordance with both local and national planning policy.

The Proposal

The proposed development site is located off South Lane adjacent to White Moss Garden Centre postcode WA8 3TZ. Change of use of land to a dog exercise facility is proposed including erection of a shelter, hardstanding, gate and sheep fencing. Details are shown on the application drawing ref. PLO02.

The Development Plan

The Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy identifies the site as sitting within the Green Belt and contains policy CS5 Overall Spatial Strategy Green Belt, which is therefore applicable to the determination of this application. The policy states that in order to be supported development proposals shall accord with the relevant national policy provisions regarding the Green Belt.

It also reiterates national policy stating that the aims of the Green Belt are “to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land”.

Policy CC 2 Protecting the Countryside is also relevant and this states “Development proposals in the countryside which accord with Green Belt policies set out in national planning policy will be supported provided that; the detailed siting and design of the development relates satisfactorily to its rural setting, in terms of its scale, layout and use of materials; they respect local landscape character, both in terms of immediate impact, or from distant views; unobtrusive provision can be made for any associated servicing and parking facilities or plant, equipment and storage; they relate to local enterprise and farm diversification; and it can be demonstrated that there would be no detrimental impact on agricultural interests”. National Policy

The government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in February 2019. Relevant elements of national policy as set out in the NPPF include the following:

- NPPF para 134 sets out that the Green Belt serves five purposes: “a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;5 c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; d) to preserve 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”.
- Paragraph 144 sets out that in determining planning applications “substantial weight” is given to any harm to the Green Belt and paragraph 143 makes clear “Inappropriate development” should be considered harmful to the Green Belt and “should not be approved except in very special circumstances”.
- Paragraph 145 states that construction of new buildings are “inappropriate in the Green Belt” subject to a number of specified exceptions. These include “buildings for agriculture and forestry” and “the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and 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”.
- Paragraph 146 goes on to set out that “certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”. These include “material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds).

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Impact upon the Green Belt

National policy makes clear that, whilst construction of new buildings are “inappropriate in the Green Belt” the specified exceptions include the provision of appropriate facilities in connection with a change of use for outdoor recreation “as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it” (NPPF paragraph 145).

It is therefore necessary to consider whether proposals would comprise facilities that are appropriate in connection with a change of use of land for outdoor recreation:

- The proposed development would comprise change of use of land to a dog exercise facility. This would be for use by customers and their dogs and as such is an outdoor recreation use, in accordance with NPPF paragraph 145.
- The proposed development includes erection of a gate, fencing, shelter and grasscrete parking. The means of enclosure is required as the field is currently ungated and this, along with secure sheep fencing around the perimeter are required in order to ensure dogs will be contained within the field. The shelter is needed as customers would require some cover in poor weather. The parking provision is proposed to allow on-site parking of customer’s vehicles where required. 4.3 The facilities (i.e. gate, fencing, shelter and hard standing) are therefore all directly required in connection with an outdoor recreation use, in accordance with NPPF para 145.

In respect of the impact on the openness of the Green Belt the changes would be small scale and of materials and design appropriate to the open countryside location: • gate would be of metal bar construction typical for agricultural use. Similarly the fence would be formed of posts and stockproof mesh. The shelter would be of small scale and formed of timber. The shelter is likely to appear similar in appearance to a small tackstore or comparable building, such as is often seen in the open countryside. Illustrative images of the proposed shelter and the fence are seen on the application drawing ().

- It is proposed to screen the parking and timber structures by appropriate use of planting as recommended in the pre-application response to help minimise any visual impact. The shelter would be located close to the entrance of the site and would be screened both by the new landscaping and also taking into account the signage for White Moss Garden Centre as you approach from the west on the A5080.

As such the proposed facilities would preserve the openness of the Green Belt in accordance with NPPF paragraph 145 4.6 In accordance with NPPF paragraph 14 the impact of the proposals on the purposes of including land within the Green Belt should be considered:

- National policy NPPF para 134 makes clear that the “fundamental aim” of Green Belt policy is “to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open”. As set out above the use is a recreational use requiring open land and could not realistically come forward in an urban setting. The changes proposed on site would be small scale and of materials and design appropriate to the open countryside location. The hardstanding created would be immediately adjacent to the existing wall/signage associated with White Moss Garden Centre. As such the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact upon the fundamental aim of the Green Belt to keep the land open and avoid urban sprawl in accordance with NPPF para 134.

- With specific regard to the five purposes of the Green Belt set out NPPF para 134: “(a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas” - the changes proposed on site would be small scale and appropriate to the open countryside location so there would be no contribution to sprawl from built up areas. “(b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another” - the proposals would not introduce urban features and therefore would not contribute to towns merging with one another. “(c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment”; the facilities proposed are appropriate to the countryside and would therefore would not therefore represent urban encroachment. “(d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns” - there would be no harm to historic towns arising as a result of the proposals. “e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land” - the proposals are not a form of development that could otherwise come forward on derelict land in an urban setting.

As such the proposed development would comprise development that is not “inappropriate in the Green Belt” as it would be in accordance with one of specified exceptions to general Green Belt controls as set out in NPPF paragraph 145.8 Impact on the open countryside.

It is also highlighted that Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy Policy CC 2 Protecting the Countryside states “Development proposals in the countryside which accord with Green Belt policies set out in national planning policy will be supported but the policy also provides additional criteria to be considered.

In this respect we note the policy advises that “the detailed siting and design of the development relates satisfactorily to its rural setting”. The changes would be small scale taking into account the site as a whole and the existing character of the neighbouring site with materials and design appropriate to the open countryside. The concentration of development will be around the entrance point and screened from the highway as indicated above.

The proposals also “relate to local enterprise and farm diversification” as proposed in the policy. As such, in accordance with the policy “there would be no detrimental impact on agricultural interests”