
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 August 2025

by **S Burch BSc MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 September 2025

Appeal Ref: 6000277

Maylands Golf Club, Colchester Road, Romford, Havering RM3 0AZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Miss E Frasle against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Havering.
 - The application Ref is P1692.24
 - The development proposed is to demolish existing stable blocks and erect new stables, sixteen containers, 30x16m menage and eleven parking spaces.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development in the heading above from the decision notice. The description provided in the application form references 13 containers, however the submitted plans showed 16. The appellant has confirmed that the description provided in the application was an error.
3. On my site visit, the containers appeared to be largely in situ. For the avoidance of doubt, I have considered the appeal in accordance with the proposed plans.
4. The Council outline how there are numerous planning enforcement cases at the site including the allegedly unauthorised laying of a hard surface and the change of use of the land to a scaffolding yard and for vehicle storage/sales. Within the context of an appeal made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (the Act) it is not within my remit to formally determine whether a particular use or structure is lawful. I have considered any such matter as far as is relevant to my decision.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including the effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the living conditions of nearby residents, with regard to noise and disturbance;

- the effect of the proposed development on highway safety;
- the effect of the proposed development on protected species (bats); and
- whether the 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

Inappropriate development including openness

6. The site is situated in the Green Belt. The appeal seeks permission to demolish the existing stable blocks and erect new stables, 16 shipping containers (which are already in situ), a menage and eleven parking spaces.
7. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It goes on to state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Policy G2 of the London Plan (2021) (LP) similarly states that the Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development. The Framework further establishes that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions as set out in paragraph 154.
8. The appellant puts forward that the scheme would meet the exception set out in paragraph 154 (b) which relates to the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, 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.
9. There is however limited evidence before me to confirm that the existing use of the land is for equestrian purposes. Given this, I am not satisfied that the scheme would comprise appropriate facilities in connection with the existing use of the land. Furthermore, even if I was satisfied that an equestrian use did exist, given the lack of information regarding the use of the 16 shipping containers, I cannot be sure that all the components of the proposal would be used in conjunction with the equestrian use. I also cannot be sure that a change of use to an equestrian use would be granted given the site limitations and lack of paddock. In any case, the scheme does not seek permission for a change of use of the land. I am therefore not satisfied that the scheme would meet the exception set out under paragraph 154 (b) of the Framework.
10. It is also put forward that the proposal would meet the exception set out in paragraph 154 (g) of the Framework, which allows for the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. The Framework defines previously developed land as land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land. It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed.

11. However, there is no evidence that the land has been developed lawfully. I am therefore not satisfied that it would comprise previously developed land. The scheme would not meet the exception set out in paragraph 154 (g).
12. In any case, in order to comply with the exceptions set out in paragraphs 154 (b) and (g), it is also necessary to consider whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt or conflicts with the purposes of including land in it. A fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to keep land permanently open. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects.
13. The proposal would rationalise built form by demolishing scattered, dilapidated structures and replacing them with a more cohesive, low-level layout. In addition, the footprint of the proposed stables would not significantly exceed the cumulative footprint of the existing stables. However, the proposal would introduce significant built form into an area of land formerly largely devoid of such structures. 13 of the shipping containers would occupy a large portion of the southern boundary of the site on one side of the lane whilst 3 would be sited close to the stables. The proposed menage would occupy a portion of the site to the western boundary. An existing commercial unit, which the evidence suggests does not have planning permission, would also be retained close to the laneway. Overall, the built form would be significantly greater in terms of both footprint and volume and would cover a large portion of the site.
14. The existing trees to the north of the site would offer some screening of the site, when viewed from the golf club. The proposed landscaping may also offer some additional screening when travelling up the lane, however given the overall scale of the development, in particular the large shipping containers, it would still be readily visible when travelling up the lane and from the wider landscape surrounding the site. In this regard the proposal would reduce the openness of the site. The openness of this part of the Green Belt would thus be harmed. The Framework advises that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt.
15. Overall, for the reasons outlined above, the scheme would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would also fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt, resulting in substantial harm to openness. It would therefore conflict with Policy G2 of the LP and the aims of the Framework.

Character and appearance

16. The site is accessed from a laneway off Colchester Road. The site is situated adjacent to Maylands Golf Club clubhouse and car park. Most of the site is surrounded by open fields. Overall, the surrounding area is rural in character. Although the existing site comprises a range of structures and uses, there is no particular evidence that these structures are authorised. The Council advise that until recently the site was devoid of large structures and mostly laid in grass, with a pleasing rural character.
17. The proposed development would introduce a significant degree of hardstanding and introduce a range of structures on the site, including 16 shipping containers. The containers are a particularly incongruous feature given their size, quantity and scale which results in a substantial and intrusive form of development in a primarily rural landscape. They fail to respect or enhance the predominately rural character and appearance of the area. I am not satisfied that painting them a different colour

or covering them in cladding would sufficiently mitigate any harm, as they would still have the appearance of an unduly large structure.

18. The proposed gates and fencing at the laneway would also be a dominant feature given their large size and height and the hardstanding would detract from the verdant character of the surrounding fields.
19. The scheme would remove the existing stables, which the appellant admits are dilapidated. The scheme may also remove visual clutter, such as various palettes and boxes as shown in the appellant's evidence. These considerations would however not outweigh the harm identified.
20. The site includes a landscaping scheme to incorporate 2.6 metre high shrubs on part of the southern boundary of the site. Whilst this would help soften the visual impact of the proposed development when travelling up the laneway towards the golf club, I am not satisfied that it would sufficiently mitigate the harm identified.
21. Overall, the proposed development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. The scheme would be contrary to Policy 26 of the Havering Local Plan 2016-2031 (HLP) which seeks to promote high quality design that respects the character and appearance of an area.
22. I do not find any conflict with Policy 27 of the HLP. This policy seeks to ensure a detailed and high-quality landscaping scheme. I also find no conflict with Policy D4 of the LP in this regard. This policy sets out the processes and actions, such as visual modelling assessments, to ensure development delivers good design.

Living conditions

23. Two properties are situated along the laneway which provides access to the site. They sit around halfway up the laneway. Parking areas and small front gardens separate the properties and the laneway. The properties have numerous ground and first floor windows on their front elevations, facing the laneway at close proximity. The proposal would result in the creation of 11 parking spaces and a total of 9 stables.
24. At present, the existing golf club already generates activity including vehicle movements which would result in some noise and disturbance to the occupiers of the properties on the laneway. Whilst there may be additional noise and disturbance when the golf club is being used for events such as weddings, the evidence before me suggests that such events are infrequent in nature.
25. The proposal would result in additional comings and goings of cars throughout the day to care for the horses. The additional comings and goings would result in additional noise and disturbance from vehicles on the access which would be readily perceptible to the occupants of the two properties, given the proximity of these properties to the laneway.
26. The appellant suggests that the proposal would be unlikely to cause intensification of use beyond the existing conditions of the site. However, as previously outlined the appellant has not provided substantive evidence to demonstrate the existing use is lawful. As such, I have afforded limited weight to noise and disturbance arising from the existing conditions at the site.

27. The appellant has suggested that a condition could be used to restrict hours and manage access. I however have no information before me regarding what the hours could be restricted to. Furthermore, given the nature of the proposed development, it is likely that early morning visits and late evening visits would be necessary given the horse's needs and welfare. This would result in harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers as a result of noise and disturbance from vehicles, particularly at times when they can reasonably expect some peace and quiet. As such, I am not satisfied that a condition would satisfactorily mitigate any additional noise and disturbance.
28. Overall, the proposed development would likely result in additional noise and disturbance from vehicle movements, which would harm the living conditions of the occupiers of the two neighbouring properties located off the laneway. This would be contrary to Policies 7 and 34 of the HLP. Collectively, amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure that development does not result in unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance.

Highway safety

29. The scheme would introduce a total of 9 stables. Based on the information before me it appears that the development has the potential to increase traffic travelling to and from the site throughout the year to ensure the appropriate care of the horses. This would likely be at numerous times throughout the day given the needs and requirements of horses.
30. Policy T4 of the LP outlines how transport assessments are necessary so that the impact and opportunities which arise as a result of development proposals are identified and assessed so that appropriate mitigation and opportunities can be secured through the planning process.
31. No assessment or statement of the effects of the proposal on the surrounding highway network has been provided. I am not satisfied that this could be ensured via a condition, as the impacts must be fully understood before planning permission is granted.
32. It is noted that the existing golf club already generates vehicle movements during its operational hours, including during large events. However, in the absence of information relating to trip generation for the proposal, the effects of the proposed development on the surrounding highway cannot be known. I can therefore not be sure that the scheme would not detrimentally impact highway safety.
33. The appellant has not provided substantive evidence to demonstrate that the scaffolding yard, vehicle storage and sales are lawful. I therefore have afforded limited weight to the vehicular movements generated by these uses.
34. In light of the above there is no compelling evidence before me that the scheme would not detrimentally impact highway safety. Given this, the scheme would fail to comply with Policy T4 of the LP in that the impacts and opportunities which would arise as a result of the development have not been identified and can therefore not be assessed.
35. I do not find any conflict with Policy 24 of the HLP or Policy T6 of the LP in this regard. These policies outline parking standards. Furthermore, the Council has not

raised concerns regarding the amount of parking provided in their case officer report.

Protected species

36. The evidence before me outlines how the existing stables contain features that may be suitable for roosting bats, and these features would be lost through demolition. No bat survey has been provided. The appellant has suggested that this matter could be dealt with by a pre-commencement planning condition.
37. However, it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by a proposed development is established before planning permission is granted. It could therefore not be dealt with by a planning condition. Ecological mitigation measures and biodiversity enhancements do not justify the lack of a bat survey.
38. The absence of sufficient information means I cannot rule out harm to bats which are a protected species. The scheme would therefore be contrary to Policy 30 of the HLP. This policy seeks to ensure that developers demonstrate that the impact of proposals on protected species has been fully assessed.

Other considerations

39. The appellant suggests that the scheme would provide improved stabling facilities to suit new horse requirements and would contribute to meeting local demand for equine, although there is limited evidence before me to demonstrate this demand. It may also support rural leisure activities, would incorporate some landscaping and would remove existing clutter from the site.

Other Matters

40. The Council raise concerns regarding the scheme's failure to ensure biodiversity net gain. This is however not referenced in the refusal reasons. As can be seen from my findings above, this issue would not be determinative. I have therefore not considered it further.
41. The site is not situated within a Conservation Area nor is it within the curtilage of a listed building. These are however considered to be neutral factors and do not weigh in favour of, nor against the appeal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

42. The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, resulting in harm to openness. In addition, there would also be harm to the character and appearance of the area, to highway safety, to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers and potential harm to protected species. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
43. The benefits of the scheme are fairly minor and are therefore afforded limited weight in favour of the appeal. The substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm, and the other harms identified, is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations sufficient to demonstrate very special circumstances. Consequently, the appeal is dismissed.

S Burch

INSPECTOR