

Our Ref: LF/23-146_03

24 February 2025

Mr T Ameson
The Planning Inspectorate
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Dear Mr Ameson

Objection to Planning Appeal APP/X1925/W/25/3358840
Altered vehicular access to facilitate the use of land as a community car park
together with the installation of new gates and fencing and associated
landscaping at Land East of Old Hale Way, Hitchin, SG4 0SA

Barker Parry Town Planning has been instructed by Ms Monk, to review and comment on the above planning appeal in relation to the impact the proposal would have on the surrounding area. Ms Monk is the tenant of one of the allotments located to the south east of the Application Site.

In reviewing the Council's officers report and decision, we consider that the reasons for refusal are well founded and comment on the appeal submissions as follows:

Existing and Proposed Use

The wider site has been subject to various planning applications since 2020, details of which are set out below:

- 20/00617/AG: prior approval for the construction of an *"agricultural building to store machinery and other such equipment required to farm the land"*.
- 21/01962/FP: retrospective planning permission sought and granted for the *"retention of a new vehicular/pedestrian bridge over the River Hiz and new farm track"*.
- 21/03485/LDCE: Lawful Development Certificate sought and granted for the *"continued use of existing agricultural land for use as private allotments"*.
- 22/02693/AG: prior approval for the *"erection of a polytunnel"*.
- 23/01652/FP for the *"Use of Land as a Community Car Park, New Gate and Associated Tree Planting and Landscaping"* (withdrawn).
- 24/02009/FP for the *"Erection of one detached 2-bed farm workers dwelling"* which has been refused.

Steven Barker

Director
MA (Cantab) MA

Liz Fitzgerald

Managing Director
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This recent planning history strongly suggests that the land is solely used for private, agricultural purposes.

The Appellants submissions state that unofficial footpaths have been established, allowing the public to walk and cycle through the site which is also being utilised for a range of “community purposes”, and it is suggested that the car park would serve those wishing to use the land.

There is no evidence within the application (or previous applications) or now this appeal to suggest that any footpaths have been established, where they are located or how many people use them. It is also difficult to see how anyone could enter the wider site to use any such footpath or alternative community uses from Old Hale Way/Arlesey Road given that its access road, which leads straight up to the agricultural barn, is gated and locked with a chain as seen in Image 1 below.



Image 1: Locked gate preventing access to fields from Old Hale Way/Arlesey Road

It is therefore highly likely that those using the footpaths would do so from the village of Ickleford – a place that one would not specifically travel to by car in order to walk around a field that does not contain any official footpaths.

The Appellant asserts that the proposed car park will have multiple benefits including:

- To serve those using the land;
- As an overflow car park for Ickleford; and
- For farmers markets, car boot sales and the like.

We will consider the need for each in turn.

To serve those using the land

There is no evidence within the submission that there is a need for any additional parking provision associated with the use of this land or adjacent land. Where permission has been granted for elements of the uses suggested, parking has been provided and if there is a need for additional parking in association with those uses, the allotments for example, that parking should be located adjacent to the allotment plots to allow for more ready access.

This parking area is remote from those other uses and there is no evidence to demonstrate how it would facilitate those uses or be of meaningful benefit.

The claim is a mere assertion of need, not an actual need to justify development within the Green Belt, based on transitory parking of vehicles along the access track near the allotment. There is no evidence to demonstrate why this is problematic to justify a formal car park being required.

As an overflow car park for Ickleford

The Appellant asserts that the car park could serve the neighbouring village of Ickleford as '*overflow parking*', a change from the position advanced as part of the application where it was cited that Ickleford had "*insufficient parking provision*".

The number of services within Ickleford is limited to a handful of village shops, two public houses, one primary school, a village hall and church, all of which benefit from their own parking facilities. A sports and recreation club is also located to the north of the village, which again provides a car park on site.

There is no evidence to suggest that parking within Ickleford is not sufficient, let alone that a 30-space car park is required to service any (unfounded) need. This is supported by the comments received on the application from residents of both Hitchin and Ickleford. Ickleford has no overflow requirement or an insufficient provision of parking generally that could justify this proposal.

For a farmers market, car boot or similar

Finally, there is a distinct lack of information provided as to the details of the proposed car boot sales that could be held on this land, both in terms of frequency and the number of buyers/sellers that would be permitted at any one time.

Markets should be targeted towards town and village centres, where residents can be encouraged to walk to the location and/or carry out multi-purpose trips. Hitchin already benefits from such activities which are popular and the Appellant has submitted no evidence to demonstrate that a further location is required.

It is noted that reference has been made to the ability to use the land for 14/28 per annum without the need for planning permission, it is therefore clear that the Appellant has the intention of using the land more frequently for these purposes, or planning permission would not be required.

What does 'similar uses' entail, given this Green Belt location; this is imprecise.

It is important that the nature of these uses be fully understood given their potential impact and the need for other facilities such as WC's or utility provisions.

We consider that the siting of a car park is an unnecessary incursion in what is currently a greenfield, open countryside location.

Green Belt

The site is located within the Green Belt on a parcel of land forming part of an agricultural holding.

Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 153) advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved unless very special circumstances exist whereby any potential harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 154h sets out forms of development that are not considered inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with its five purposes (our emphasis). The Appellant cites 154h iii) and v).

iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location. The Appellant has provided no evidence to demonstrate why this car park should be considered to be local transport infrastructure, or why there is a requirement for it to be located in the Green Belt.

v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds). It is accepted that the use of the words "such as" in this paragraph means that the identified uses listed are not exhaustive (i.e. not a closed list) and therefore a car park could be deemed an acceptable change of use, subject to the test of openness and the impact on the purposes of including the land in the Green Belt.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides advice on how to assess a proposal's impact on the openness of the Green Belt, with a judgement required based on the circumstances of the case.

Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722 advises that a number of matters should be taken into account when making this assessment, including:

- *The spatial and visual impact of a development;*
- *The duration of the development and its remediability (i.e. the ability to return the land to its former or improved state of openness); and*
- *The degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.*

Spatial and Visual Impact

The Appellant states that there are currently "*limited views through the site*" due to an existing bund at the frontage, and that the siting of cars would not affect the Site's openness as the bund would prevent them from being visible.

Whilst it is true that there is a grass bank adjacent to the footpath at the Site's frontage with unkept vegetation growing on top at present (as seen in Image 2) and a newly formed unmade footpath behind, it is clear that the land on which the car park is proposed does not fall back down to the footpath's level within the site as is suggested by the Applicant. Instead, the land only falls behind the bund by circa 200mm, as seen on the topographical information included on the Proposed Site Access, Visibility and Parking Layout plan submitted with the application.

As a result the cars will not be hidden behind a bund (unless of course they are less than 200mm high!) but raised onto a plateau visible from the surrounding area and elevated above the road level. It is acknowledged that the land does continue to fall away to the east, so cars located further away from Old Hale Way will be less visible. The Appellant has not proposed any engineering works that would lower the ground levels.

Further openness will be affected by the 0.5-1m high bund proposed on the southern boundary of the site. Given no precise height has been given, it must be assumed that this will be 1m in height and will be highly visible from Old Hale Way, with existing views across the site being obscured and obstructed.



Image 2: Photograph looking towards the Site from Old Hale Way (2023)



Image 3: Google street view looking towards the Site from Old Hale Way (2018)

Further intrusions will occur into the landscape, with the introduction of EV charging points, cycle stands and the enclosing post and rail fencing.

Moreover, when considering the visual and spatial aspects of openness, it is not only what can be seen when looking at the Application Site from the highway, but views across the whole Site from all directions, public or private. The openness that is currently viewed when looking across the wider Site from the east (i.e. where the so-called footpaths are located) would be severely impacted, particularly if the car park was being used to its maximum 30-vehicle capacity, especially as this application does not include any landscaping as the previous application included.

The Appellant makes the assumption that cars would only be parked for short periods of time, and would therefore not form a permanent presence, but this cannot be proven or indeed enforced by the Local Planning Authority. It would also not be the case if the car park were being used for a market or car boot sale, which is one of the reasons that the Appellant is seeking permission for this car park.

The consideration of openness and car parking was considered in appeal reference: APP/R4408/W/21/3267860 (attached). The Inspector in that case stated:

"Furthermore, given the open nature of both the appeal site and the agricultural land beyond it, there is a clear link between their respective senses of 'openness' which when assessed as a whole would be significantly harmed by the introduction of the proposal. The proposal would therefore have a discernible adverse visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

I acknowledge that the car park would not be full all the time. However, given its location, the car park itself and the vehicles using it would have a clear visual impact

leading to a loss of openness, nonetheless. For similar reasons, the access track and the vehicles using it would also have a comparable visual impact."

The same is true in this case, the car park will visually harm the openness of the site, with a clear visual impact.

Traffic Generation

The second matter pertaining to assessing a scheme's impact on the openness in the Green Belt is the amount of traffic likely to be generated as a result of the development. The Appellant has failed to address this matter, claiming cars are in the area already so there is no impact.

The submitted Transport Assessment fails to acknowledge that there are no current movements from this site, however it is safe to assume that the number of vehicle trips to and from the Site will increase exponentially, particularly given the number of parking spaces that are proposed. Whilst the Transport Statement asserts that there will be a negligible impact on highway safety, this is not the test for impact on openness. We have to assume, as the Appellant has provided no evidence, that this car park is needed and will be used to capacity, accordingly, 30 vehicles entering and leaving the site at regular intervals Monday-Sunday in daylight hours, is a significant change from the use of the land for agricultural purposes. It therefore has a meaningful impact on the openness of the site.

Taking all of the above into account, it is our opinion that this development would have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt and therefore Paragraph 155e) of the NPPF does not apply.

Additionally, the proposed development would undermine the purposes of retaining this land as Green Belt. Having regard to the Green Belt Review supporting the Local Plan, the site falls into Parcel 13C which is considered to play a significant contribution to the Green Belt as it prevents urban sprawl northwards out of Hitchin and separates the settlements of Hitchin and Ickleford. The introduction of any development in this space will undermine the purposes of retaining it as part of the wider Green Belt. This is even more significant with the now approved residential development at Ickleford Mill, which brings residential development in an exceptionally close proximity to this site. The proposal would therefore undermine the purposes of the Green Belt, both in respect of encroachment into the Countryside and leading to coalescence of the settlements of Hitchin and Ickleford.

The Appellant has dismissed any harm to purposes a), d) or e). It is agreed that d) and e) are not affected, but a) simply cannot be dismissed. Hitchin is a large urban area, and this part of the Green Belt serves the clear purpose of preventing urban sprawl of this large built up area and its coalescence with Ickleford. The Green Belt

Review supporting the now adopted local plan considers the Green Belt against the purposes in this area:

					Southwestwards into open countryside and providing the setting for Hitchin.
13 Ickleford	3 - Plays significant role in preventing sprawl northward of Hitchin.	1 - Plays no role in preventing merger of neighbouring towns.	2 - Prevents encroachment into accessible countryside.	2 - Contributes to the setting of Hitchin. However no direct visual link with the historic core.	Links to the wider countryside to the north of Hitchin and into Bedfordshire. Overall makes a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes, helping to prevent sprawl north of Hitchin.
14 Willian	3 - Creates a strong	3 - Plays a significant	3 - Although some	3 - Important in the setting	Plays an important role as key

NHC Green Belt Review 2016

A600 Bedford Road and Snailswell Lane.	Northwards out of Hitchin.	Towns.	Countryside to the north of Hitchin.		
13c Area lies between northern edge of Hitchin and southern edge of Ickleford bounded by A600 Bedford	3 - Plays significant role in preventing sprawl northwards out of Hitchin.	3 - Separates the settlements of Ickleford and Hitchin.	2- Prevents encroachment into the gap between Hitchin and Ickleford.	1 - No direct link with historic core of Hitchin.	Lies between southern edge of Ickleford and northern edge of Hitchin. River Oughton flows through it. Significant Contribution.

Specific Parcel NHC Green Belt Review 2016

It is not considered that there would be any conflict with purpose b), as Ickleford is classed as a village not a town. There is however conflict with purpose c). The Appellant asserts that there is no conflict with purpose c) as they consider that there is minimal works required and there would be no permanent impact.

Encroachment by definition is an incursion into an area. This proposal is not for a temporary permission, it includes the use of concrete grasscrete, which whilst more sympathetic than a tarmac finish will still be visible, the inclusion of bunds, gates, fences, EV charge points and cycle stands are all visible and permanent demonstrating a real incursion into the countryside. A position also taken by the Inspector in the attached appeal decision.



Image 4: Image of a grasscrete car park.

That being the case, the scheme would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, with 'very special circumstances' needed to justify its approval.

Very Special Circumstances

As discussed previously, the NPPF advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved unless in very special circumstances (vsc). These will not exist unless harm to the Green Belt is outweighed by other considerations (Paragraph 153).

In attempting to demonstrate vsc the Appellant has just reiterated the proposed use of the car park, in association with alleged community uses both existing and proposed, as overflow car parking for Ickleford and for use as a farmers market or car boot sales etc. There is no evidence submitted to demonstrate that these uses are either wanted or needed. If there was a parking issue associated with existing uses, this should have been evidenced. If there was a parking issue in Ickleford, a parking stress survey could have been undertaken. If there was a desire to run car boot sales or hold farmers markets, where is the real business plan around it.

However, with a gate blocking access to the proposed car park and no understanding of how this will be operated, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the car park would truly be for the community.

There is no requirement for additional parking in association with Ickleford, residents simply will not park here and walk along the narrow footpath into the village. It is acknowledged that the Appellant, following the withdrawal of the last application, has sought to create an unmade footpath from this application site to join the public roadside footpath to the south of the bridge opposite the Mill. This footpath is unmade, thus not suitable in winter and wet months and is not adopted highway such that it can be closed at any time. It is also not within the application red line boundary and cannot therefore be conditioned to remain open or to be surfaced.

There is no parking needed in association with the private allotment. There is plenty of space adjacent to the allotment that negates the need for additional parking.

There is no evidence of a need for farmers markets, car boot sales or similar activities.

In short, there are no very special circumstances for this parking in this location, as the need for it has not been established.

It is considered that the proposal results in inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and vsc to justify development have not been demonstrated. The proposal is therefore in conflict with National Policy, and indeed North Herts Local Plan (NHLP) Policy SP5.

Highway Safety and Transport

The siting of gates at the entrance to the car park is proposed, however it is not specified how the gates would allow for access into and leaving the site. For example, would they open automatically, or would they have to be manually opened with a lock or otherwise? It would be somewhat odd to have a car park benefitting the community that is locked; preventing the land from being accessible. There are no hours of operation contained within the submission at all.

It is noted that the Local Highway Authority have raised no objection in highway safety terms to the use of the site as a car park but have concerns regarding the use of the site for farmers markets or car boots and have sought additional information.

In any event, depending on the number of vehicles entering or leaving at one time, this could create an issue in terms of highway safety with a potential backlog of vehicles waiting to turn into the site, especially if it is to be used as a car boot sale location. Alternatively, it could significantly increase on-street parking detrimental to the safe and free flow of traffic along Old Hale Way.

It is acknowledged that the Appellant can use the site for farmers markets or car boot sales under the permitted development regime. What is not clear is whether they can rely on this as a fallback position as they have not sought to utilise this provision to date, therefore it would appear that they would only undertake these events if the car park was granted consent.

As discussed above, the Appellant asserts that this will be used for overflow parking from Ickleford however, the footway running along Old Hale Way/Arlesey Road through to Ickleford is substandard by virtue of its width and lack of uniformity. The suggestion that a large number of residents and visitors to the area could use it to travel between the Site and Ickleford by foot is likely to result in further highway safety issues, as emphasised by a number of the comments made by local residents in their response to the application.

Moreover, the village is served by public transport in the form of three regular bus routes. Route 9B runs from Hitchin, through Ickleford and onwards to the nearby villages of Arlesey, Clifton and Shefford, before reaching Bedford approximately 15 miles to the north west. Route 74 from Hitchin also travels to Bedford but passes through Biggleswade, and route 89 ends up at Henlow making a number of stops within Henlow, Pirton, Shillington and Meppershall.

Policy T2 (Parking) of the NHLP seeks to influence car use through the promotion of alternative modes of transport. As described above, public transport in the local area is plentiful and an additional car park 10 minutes from Ickleford would only serve to promote an unsustainable mode of transport between Hitchin and

Ickleford. Further, the proposal does not comply with Policy D1 (Sustainable Design) which states that permission will only be granted for proposals that minimise the visual impact of street furniture and parking provision.

Biodiversity

As set out in NHLP Policy SP1, the LPA will support development that protects biodiversity and green infrastructure. Similarly, Policy NE4 (Biodiversity and geological sites) advises that permission will only be granted where biodiversity is protected, enhanced and managed, and that all development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity. It also requests that an ecological survey is submitted commensurate to the scale and location of development.

The Site is greenfield and therefore not classed as previously developed land; a BNG metric has been submitted with the application and it demonstrates a 16.49% loss of habitat. As part of the application, the Appellant has suggested that this can be provided off site. Given the nature of this site and the initial preference to provide on-site mitigation, the Appellant should explore the opportunities to provide on-site mitigation in the first instance, rather than dismissing this and seeking to provide a contribution for mitigation to be provided elsewhere.

It is noted that the appeal is not supported by a legal agreement seeking to secure these off-site contributions, or that there are any schemes available locally to mitigate against the loss. The nature of the detail required to demonstrate that the units purchased are registered and provided, along with monitoring cannot robustly be secured by means of an appropriately worded planning condition.

It is considered that the lack of a legal agreement results in a failure to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain.

Residential Amenity

Whilst located within the Green Belt, the application proposes a car park in close proximity to residential dwellings, with the potential for car boot sales or farmers markets. The potential for noise impact has not therefore been considered.

As there are no hours of operation proposed, one must assume that the normal set up times for farmers markets and car boot sales of circa 6-7am is a realistic prospect, with members of the public visiting from circa 7am. Given the lack of detail provided by the Appellant it can only be reasonably assumed that this level of activity at this time of the morning, especially at weekends, will lead to an unacceptable level of harm and nuisance to adjacent residential properties and detrimentally affect their residential amenity.

Summary

As outlined in previous sections, there are fundamental flaws with the proposed development, inaccuracies in the information submitted and a lack of supporting documentation or evidence to demonstrate need.

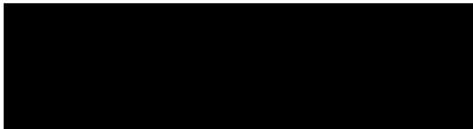
It is our opinion that the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt, with no very special circumstances provided to justify a grant of planning permission.

A number of highway safety issues would exist with no evidence to suggest that the siting of a car park, especially of this size, is required in this location. The current use of the wider site is vague and it is therefore unclear who, or what, the proposed development would serve.

Finally, the proposed off-site contribution to BNG without considering on site mitigation is flawed, with no legal agreement to secure off-site habitat units, and there is highly likely to be a detrimental impact on residential amenity from the early morning activities and parking associated with farmers markets, car boot sales and similar.

Overall, the scheme conflicts with numerous Local and National Policies, and we therefore respectfully request that the appeal is dismissed.

Yours sincerely,



Liz Fitzgerald
Managing Director



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 April 2021

by C Coyne BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17th May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/R4408/W/21/3267860

Spicer House, Spicer House Lane, Ingbirchworth, Barnsley S36 7GG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Jeff Pears against the decision of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2020/0670, dated 10 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is overspill car park and access track.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The Council's officer report refers to use class D2. Since the determination of the original planning application this use class has been revoked by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 and replaced with use class F2. However, this change has not affected the determinative issues to this case, and I have therefore decided the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant Development Plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - if the proposed development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is within a large area of open agricultural land to the side of Spicer House, a sizeable property comprising several conjoined barns and domestic buildings that have been converted for use as a wedding venue and for corporate events. Spicer House also has a large area of hardstanding on its other side which is used for the parking and turning of vehicles. Spicer House and its grounds are set within a wider open agricultural landscape which is part of the Green Belt.

Whether inappropriate development

5. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) states at paragraph 143 that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful and should not be permitted except in very special circumstances. I consider Policy GB1 of the adopted Barnsley Local Plan (BLP) to be broadly consistent with the Framework as it states that the Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development in accordance with national policy. Consequently, I have afforded it substantial weight.
6. The proposal would create a new vehicular access and track from Spicer House Lane to the part of the appeal site which would become an overspill car park for weddings and other events held at the house. The access track and overspill car park would both be created using bound porous natural stone aggregate materials.
7. The creation of the proposed access track would be classed as an engineering operation under Section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Paragraph 146 b) of the Framework states that engineering operations are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
8. Additionally, the creation of the proposed overspill car park would in this case, be classed as a material change of use of land from agricultural use to a car park. Similarly, paragraph 146 e) of the Framework states that material changes in the use of land are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
9. The proposal would be located within an open agricultural field where there is currently no development. In simple spatial terms, this would have a clear and demonstrable effect on the openness of the Green Belt by introducing development to land which is presently permanently open. The construction of an access track and overspill car park on the appeal site would therefore bring about development where there is presently none. Accordingly, the proposal would also represent a clear encroachment of development into the countryside.
10. Furthermore, given the open nature of both the appeal site and the agricultural land beyond it, there is a clear link between their respective senses of 'openness' which when assessed as a whole would be significantly harmed by the introduction of the proposal. The proposal would therefore have a discernible adverse visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
11. I acknowledge that the car park would not be full all the time. However, given its location, the car park itself and the vehicles using it would have a clear visual impact leading to a loss of openness, nonetheless. For similar reasons, the access track and the vehicles using it would also have a comparable visual impact.
12. Consequently, I find that the proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt or safeguard the countryside from encroachment. The proposed development would therefore fall outside the exceptions set out in paragraph 146 of the Framework and should be considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal would therefore conflict with policy GB1 which aims to ensure that development proposals are not inappropriate in the Green Belt.

Character and Appearance

13. Given the size and location of the proposal, it would be clearly visible within the landscape thereby having a noticeable visual impact. It would also be located

within an open agricultural field where there is currently no development. In addition, it would be plainly visible from Spicer House Lane by persons travelling in both directions. As a result, the proposal would have an evident visual impact on the more open rural character of this landscape.

14. I acknowledge that the materials to be used for the surfacing of the access track and car park would be natural stone aggregate and that no external lights or urban features are proposed. However, this does not mean that the proposal would not be visually noticeable in the landscape at all.
15. Consequently, the proposal would be visually incompatible with the more open and agricultural landscape within which it would be situated. Therefore, it would not fit in with the character and appearance of the more open countryside it would be encroaching into. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would materially harm the character and appearance of the area thereby failing to meet the requirements of policy GB1 of the BLP.

Other considerations

16. I note that the Council has recently granted a licence for Spicer House to perform marriage and civil partnership ceremonies. However, according to the Council's officer report, Spicer House is still classed as a C3 use dwelling. I also have no evidence before me to show how often weddings and other functions are held at Spicer House. Consequently, I afford this consideration little weight.
17. I also note the appellant's point that while the current car parking capacity is adequate for family gatherings of approximately 40 people it is not sufficient for approximately 200 guests arriving in private cars as it is also shared with delivery and catering vehicles. However, no substantive evidence has been submitted to show that this would be the case. Moreover, it is unlikely that all the guests attending a wedding or conference would only travel there by private car without considering hiring a bus if they were part of a large group. Consequently, I also afford this consideration little weight.

Planning balance and conclusion

18. The proposed development would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. As such, it would result in inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal would also cause additional harm to the character and appearance of the area.
19. The development would therefore be harmful to the Green Belt. Paragraph 144 of the Framework makes it clear that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. It establishes that the very special circumstances needed to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
20. I have given limited weight to the other considerations cited in favour of the development. In my view, these would not clearly outweigh the substantial harm to the Green Belt or the harm to the character and appearance of the area. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not therefore exist. Accordingly, there would be conflict with policy GB1 and Paragraph 143 of the Framework. For these reasons, and having regard to all relevant matters, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Coyne

INSPECTOR