

CD 9.11 (a)

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Land adjacent to Colney Heath Football Club, Colney Heath, St Albans

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

GREEN BELT,
OPENNESS AND VISUAL IMPACT, and
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

Colney Heath Parish Council Rule 6 Party

Planning Inquiry

PINS Ref : APP/B1930/W/23/3333685

LPA REF: 5/2022/0599

SUMMARY

In section 1 Green Belt purposes

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF December 2023 (CD1.4) establishes that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The appeal proposal would constitute a substantial incursion of built area of the settlement into the open countryside to the north of Colney Heath. This would contravene the key purpose of the Green Belt in assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

In section 2 Openness (spatial)

Openness is one of the essential Green Belt characteristics. The loss of spatial openness on the site would be permanent and not remediable.

In Section 3 Openness (visual) and visual impact

The impact on visual openness and the visual impacts of the proposal would be very substantial from viewpoints used by the public and from adjacent properties.

In Section 4 Landscape character and appearance

As a result of the proposed development, the contribution and value of the site to the rural character of the area and the setting of Colney Heath would be permanently and irretrievably lost. The change to the character and appearance of the appeal site ("site") itself would be substantial, visually intrusive and could not be adequately mitigated. There would be a substantial adverse effect on the landscape character and appearance of the site and its immediate environment.

1. GREEN BELT PURPOSES

1.1 Green Belt harm

Colney Heath is a “washed over” village within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The appellant’s proposal is within the Green Belt and, as per NPPF paragraph 152, is by definition inappropriate and would therefore cause harm to the Green Belt.

1.2 Green Belt review

The site is spatially entirely outside the existing settlement boundary forming part of the open countryside to the north-east of the nucleated cluster “A” (shown in Figure 1A below) identified on page 10 of the ARUP Green Belt Review, Washed Over Villages Study (CD 3.5).

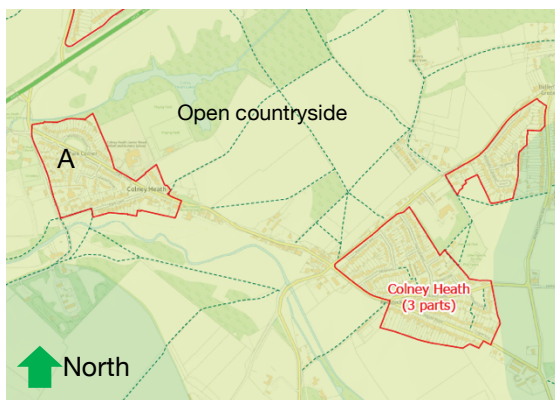


Figure 1 A Context

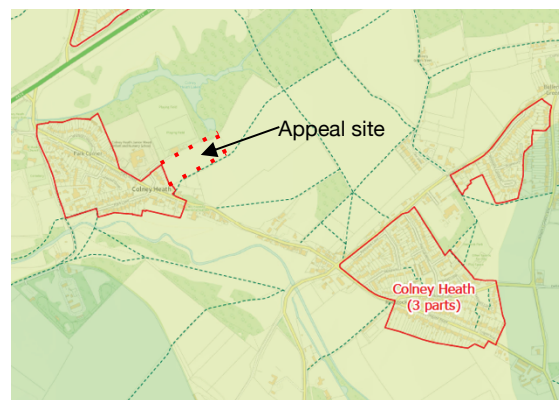


Figure 1 B Encroachment of the appeal site in to the open countryside

Regarding settlement edge characteristics and setting, ARUP noted the east of area A is a mix of intact back garden hedgerow boundaries but also relatively undefined or intermittent boundaries with a mix of man-made and natural features in the gaps between residential developments.

ARUP concluded the open character of the village makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt and recommended it should be retained as washed over.

1.3 Physical encroachment

Measured from the High Street the edge of the settlement varies from c.40m at the Crooked Billet, c75m at 106 High Street to c90m at Wistlea Crescent. The proposal would extend the settlement edge c.235 m into the open countryside.



Figure 2: dimension of the encroachment beyond the settlement boundary

One of the purposes of the Green Belt defined in paragraph 134 of the NPPF (CD 1.4) is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The proposal would represent a substantial encroachment.

1.4 Local Plans

St Albans District Council have completed their draft Local Plan at Regulation 18 and are proceeding with the Regulation 19 Stage. No sites were allocated in Colney Heath village.

Hertsmere Borough Council have published their revised draft Local Plan for consultation at Regulation 18 stage. This includes the proposed 5,000 dwellings development, “Bowmans Cross”, on Green Belt land between Coursers Road and the M25 (appendix A) towards the end of their plan period. If Bowmans Cross were to materialize this would

- a. result in the coalescence of Colney Heath and London Colney and
- b. have significant impacts on the demands on the physical, highways and social infrastructure. However, any benefits such as school provision would not be delivered in the short to medium terms due to the delay of land release from quarrying works.

2. SPATIAL ASPECTS OF OPENNESS

2.1 The site is part of the open countryside to the north-east of cluster A. The nature of the land is consistent with, and undifferentiated from, the land to the north-east and to the south-east.

2.2 The site is not spatially “enclosed” by either man-made or natural features.

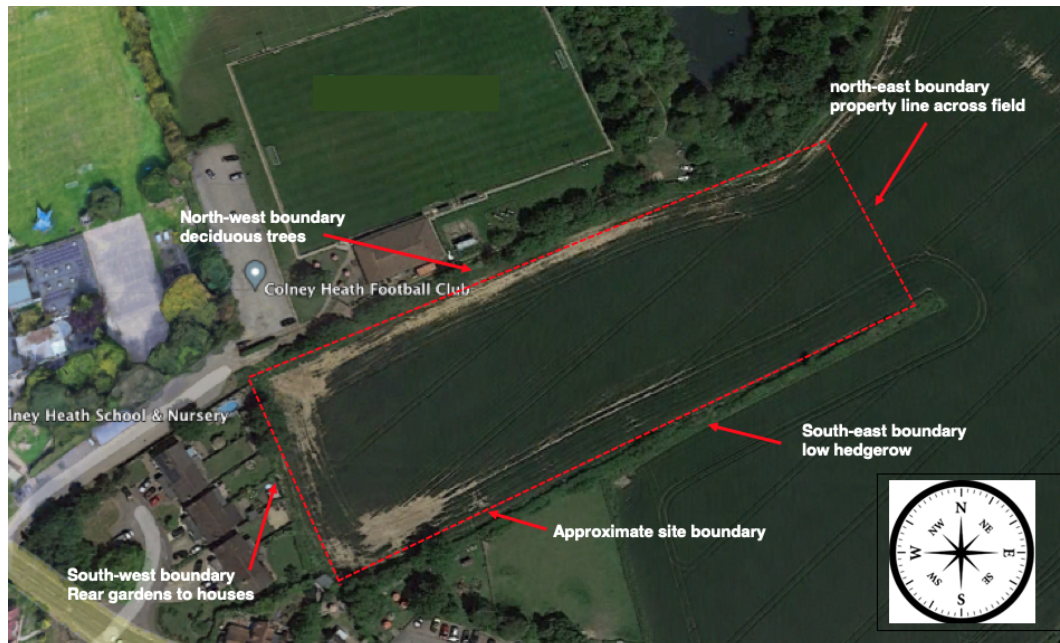


Figure 3: the nature of the edges of the site

- The south-west boundary of the site (c75m) is edged by rear gardens to the Crooked Billet public house and the residential properties 90-106 High Street. The north-east boundary (c.67m) is simply a virtual line across the agricultural farmland.
- The south-east boundary (c.205m) is a low hedgerow
- The north-west boundary (c.210m) is fringed with trees that border the public right of way footpath.

2.3 Only the rear gardens on the south-west boundary form a boundary; this constitutes c.14% of the site perimeter. The low hedgerow on the south-east boundary, and the short edge on the north-east boundary, do not constitute features which create an “enclosure” within open countryside.

2.4 The north-west boundary is flanked by taller deciduous trees which form a visually permeable edge as shown in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4: view from beyond the north-east boundary of the site looking south-west

2.5 During the Inquiry for Roundhouse Farm, Land off Bullens Green Lane, Appeal Decision APP/B1930/W/20/3265925 and APP/C1950/W/20/3265926 (CD 14.6) the openness of the site was considered. That site lay between the two nucleated clusters of Bullens Green and Roestock. The site has seven sides partially fringed with built-on areas and Roestock Park.



Figure 5: Roundhouse Farm site off Bullens Green Lane.

2.6 In the Appeal Decision Inspector Masters noted that *“the residential development proposed would have the effect of a considerable reduction in the openness of the site”*, and *“that harm, in addition to the harm by inappropriateness, carries substantial*

weight against the proposals” (Appeal decision, paragraph 23). She concluded that the adjoining natural and man-made features enclosed the site and provided a degree of containment from the wider countryside and the site resonated with the urban edge definition in the 2007 Landscape Strategy. It is evident that the appeal site is not similarly “enclosed” to the Roundhouse Farm site on Bullens Green Lane.

- 2.7 The proposed development would have a significant spatial impact on the openness of the Green Belt in this location.

- 2.8 The proposed development would not assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment so would conflict with the purpose of the Green Belt as defined in paragraph 143(c) the NPPF. The proposal would do the opposite. At present the appeal site makes a strong contribution to the purpose in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment in this part of the District.

3. VISUAL OPENNESS AND VISUAL IMPACT

3.1 The proposal would constitute a significant impact on the visual aspects of openness of the Green Belt.



Figure 6: View of the settlement from the footpath to the east of the site.

3.2 The proposal would interrupt the visual openness from a wide range of positions used by the public and shown in Figure 7 below. Vehicular movement on the site, and lights from dwellings and street lights after dusk, would visually disrupt what is presently an unlit open site with movement on footpaths and bridleways, and occasional seasonal farm work.

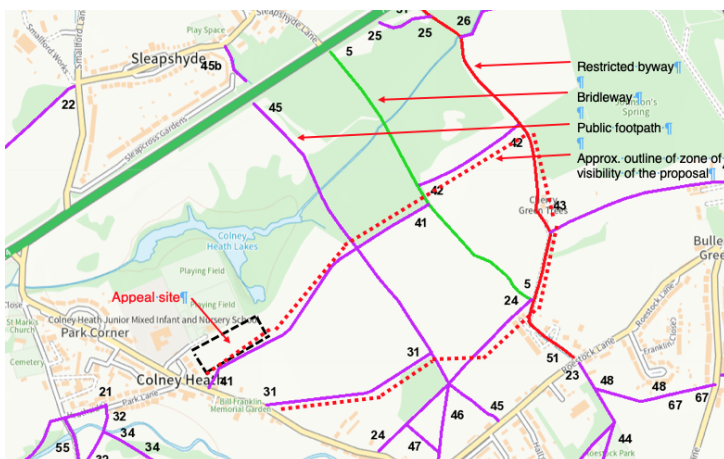


Figure 7: zone of visibility of the site (outlined in red) from PROWs

3.3 Photomontages of the indicative development have been prepared from key viewpoints. A computer model has been created based on the appellant's illustrative layout (CD 4.11) and house types indicated on page 50 in the Design and Access Statement (CD 4.7). The computer-generated images of the model have been superimposed on the photographs to form photomontages.

The appellant's illustrative masterplan represents the basis of the appellant's references to the capacity of the site, access and road space, disposition of the buildings, and open spaces. The illustrative masterplan represents the appellant's design intent. The Parish Council considers that, like the design intent for Bullens Green Lane (see Appendix B), this would approximate to a final design. The Parish Council considers the photomontages reasonably represent of the potential spatial and visual impact of the proposal.

3.4 Positions of the photographs for the photomontages are shown in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8: positions of photographs taken for photomontages

3.5 The view at position A (Figure 9 A below) on the edge of the site by the main car park for the school and the entrance to the Football and Social Club is the village location most visited, both in number and frequency, by the public - parents and school children, football teams and supporters, patrons of the social club, and walkers using the edge of the field.



Figure 9 A: view of the site from position A looking east across the open countryside



Figure 9 B: photomontage of the proposal from position A

The proposal would not be perceived as part of the existing settlement, would totally sever wider views across the Green Belt, and result in a perceived reduction in openness to views (contrary to the contention in the LVIA paragraph 8.14).

3.6 The view at Position B on the public footpath leading from Roestock Lane looking south-east



Figure 10 A: view of the site from position B looking south-west



Figure 10 B: photomontage of the proposal from position B

The settlement edge would appear much closer and would be more prominent. The LVIA (CD 4.12) notes that through breaks in vegetation, there would be some views of the proposed buildings (paragraph 8.15). The LVIA goes on to state that, following establishment, the strengthening of boundary hedgerows and new tree planting to the north-east and south-eastern boundaries would reinforce the existing characteristics of the landscape. This strengthening of hedgerows and tree planting would actually mean that the visual intrusion would be reinforced while the development would still be visible.

- 3.7 In the appeal decision for Land to the rear of 42-100 Tollgate Road APP/B1930/W/23/3323099 (CD 14.37), Inspector Hayden similarly noted any containment or screening provided by the proposed landscaping at the edges of the appeal scheme would serve to reduce the visual openness of the site, rather than mitigate the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt (Appeal decision paragraph 24).

3.8 The view at Position C from 100 High Street looking north-east, c.15m from the boundary of the site.



Figure 11 A: view of the site from position C



Figure 11 B: photomontage of the proposal from position C

The dwellings at 90-106 High Street have open views over the appeal site, both from ground and first floor windows. These residential views of the existing open field have a high degree of visual sensitivity. The existing views are only partially filtered by garden and boundary landscaping. The distance between the existing dwellings and indicative proposed development would be c.35m. The development would be visually very prominent and the existing views would be permanently lost. The adverse effect would be very substantial.

- 3.9 Views from private dwellings were considered in the Tollgate Inquiry for the Land to the rear of 42-100 Tollgate Road (CD14.37). There the distance between the existing and proposed dwellings was (indicatively) c.70m from the majority of properties.



Figure 12 Tollgate Road Inquiry part of illustrative masterplan

- 3.10 Inspector Hayden noted *“the dwellings along Tollgate Road, including nos. 42-100, have open views over the appeal site, both from ground and first floor windows. Based on the criteria in the LVIA these residential views have a high degree of visual sensitivity to change. Whilst the existing views are filtered by garden and boundary landscaping, the proposed development would still have a ‘moderate adverse’ visual impact on them”*. (Appeal decision paragraph 50)

4. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

- 4.1 The proposed development site is part of the area defined as the Colney Heath Farmland Landscape Character Area. It is flat arable farmland physically integral – and perceived as visually so - with the farmed land forming the open countryside to the north and northeast of the nucleated cluster at the west end of Colney Heath village.
- 4.2 The site is well maintained productive farmland, having intrinsic tranquil beauty as evidenced by the photographs in Figures 9 A, 10 A, and 11 A above.
- 4.3 In its current form the site makes a significant positive contribution to the rural setting of the village and the listed buildings. The transition from the village High Street to the rural landscape is immediate with the site providing a rural setting for the Football Club. The site also provides a rural setting for the garden of the Crooked Billet pub.
- 4.4 The site is visible from the PROWs that cross the open countryside to the north and north-east of the site (see Figure 7 above).
- 4.5 As evidenced by the photographs in Figures 9 A, 10 A and 11 A above, the site is arable farmland and rural in character. It is perceived as open countryside from a wide area of public and private viewpoints. Only c.14% of the site perimeter abuts the settlement edge.
- 4.6 The proposed development would result in the loss of the rural character of the site. This is illustrated by an aerial view of the model created for the photomontages in Figure 13 below. Inevitably the buildings and tarmac surfaces for the infrastructure required for vehicular access and parking would result in a total transformation of the site from a rural to an urban character.



Figure 13: aerial view of the computer model created for photomontages

4.7 As a result of the proposed development, the contribution and value of the site to the rural character of the area and the setting of Colney Heath would be permanently and irretrievably lost. The change to the character and appearance of the site itself would be substantial, visually intrusive and could not be adequately mitigated. There would be a substantial adverse effect on the landscape character and appearance of the site and its immediate environment.

CONCLUSION

The appeal proposal would cause substantial harm to the Green Belt from the extent of encroachment, and negative impacts on spatial and visual openness, visual impact, and landscape character and appearance.

End

APPENDIX A Hertsmere Borough Council draft Local Plan 2024

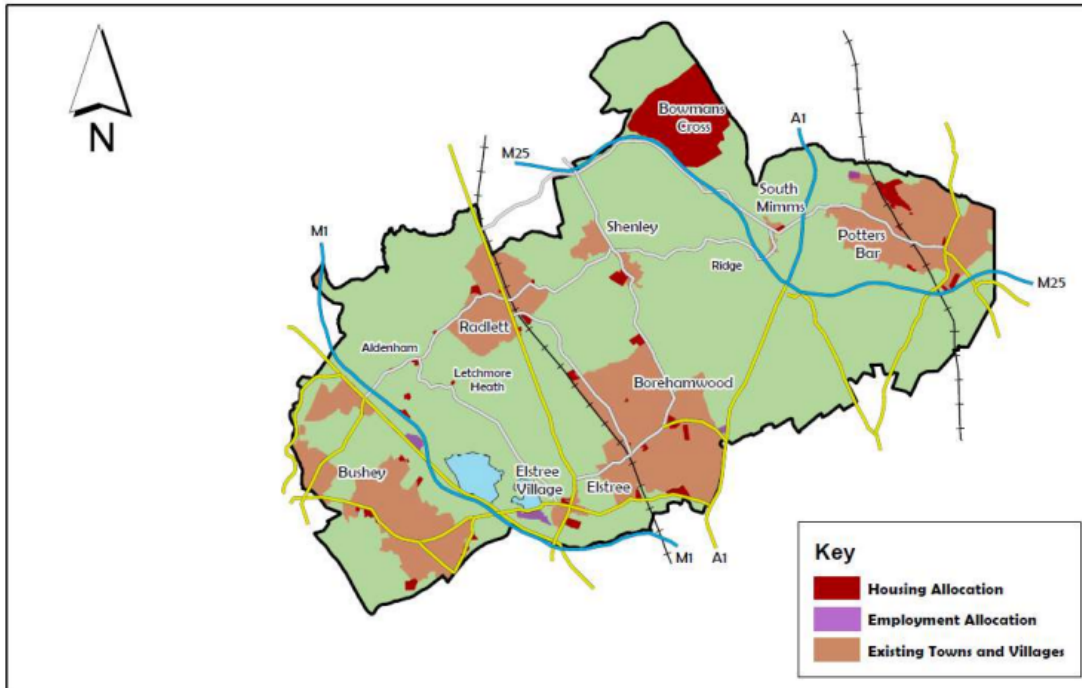


Figure A1 proposed Housing allocation
"Bowmans Cross" site for 5,000 houses on top right

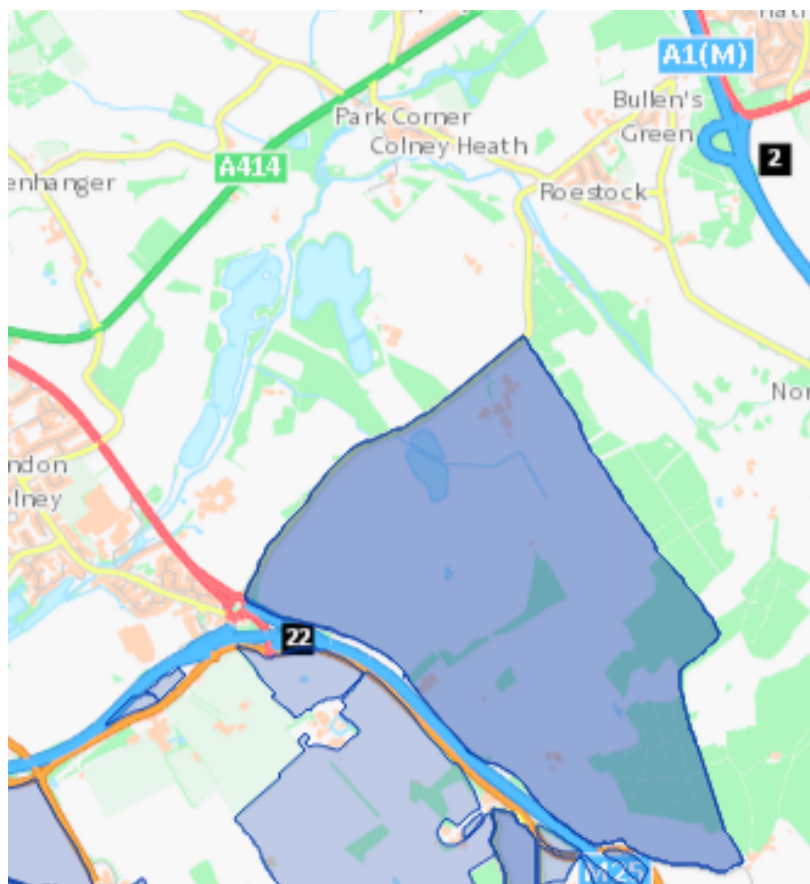


Figure A2 Promoted site in HELAA (dark blue colour)

APPENDIX B



Figure B1 Illustrative masterplan for Roundhouse Farm appeal

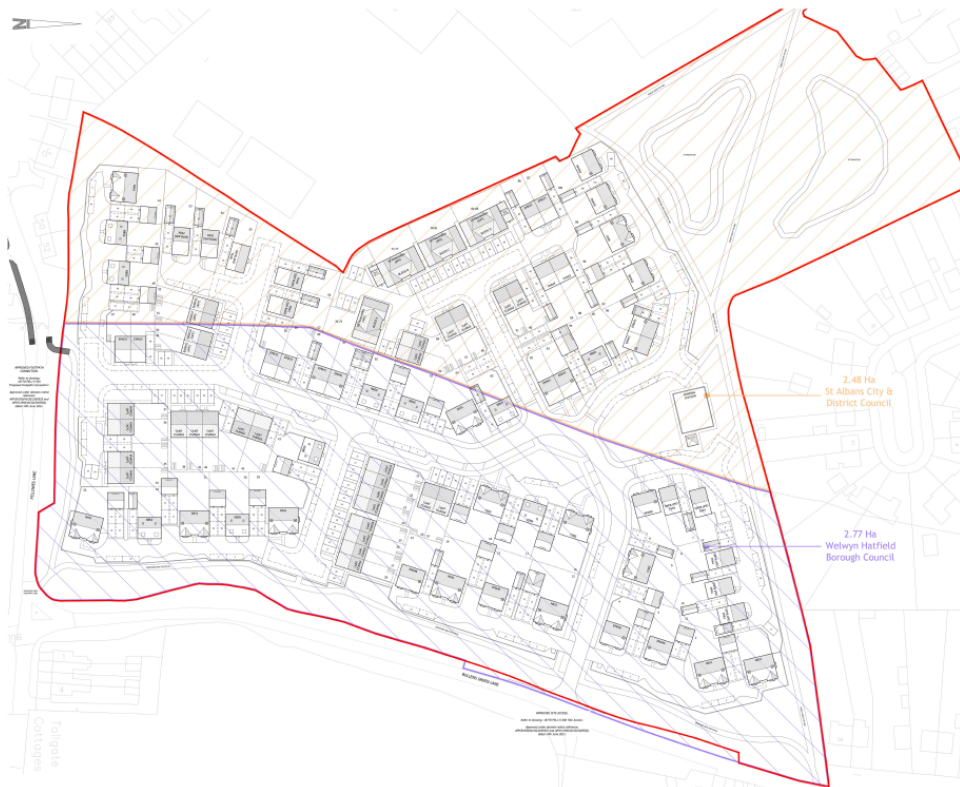


Figure B2 Final design for discharge of reserved matters