

CD11.27

Rebuttal Evidence

Agriculture

From

Greenbelt (Rule 6 Party)

Presented by Paul King
(Member and Advocate for Greenbelt)



In the appeal: APP/B1930/W/24/3343986

Planning Application Reference: 22/0267

Land between caravan site and Watling Street,
Park Street, St Albans, AL2 2PZ

Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Mr Garrard's Comments**
- 3 Land Management**
- 4 Wheat Production**

Appendices

- A Shooter Location & Typical Distance to an Old Orchard House**
- B Summary email to residents**
- C Resident emails**

Personal Profile

I graduated from Liverpool University with an Honours degree in Engineering. I then spent 10 years in logistics and planning, running and designing transport systems and setting up distribution networks. After 10 years I moved into residential estate agency. I set up, and ran a sales and lettings company operating in the local area, which entailed undertaking every aspect of the business including sourcing land for development, interfacing with developers, but most of all ensuring that all clients received a professional service. I trained numerous staff to undertake their roles to a similar professional standard, including valuing properties and interfacing with clients and the public.

After 20 years I sold the business and became involved in addressing local issues relating to planning, specifically applications relating to Green Belt development. This included establishing the local campaign group *greenbelt* and forming a working relationship with other campaign groups around the district, to form the District Green Belt Alliance (DGBA) as well as interacting with local politicians, media outlets and of course supporters. I have been involved in this, on and off over the past 10 years, but have no professional qualification specific to planning issues.

I have lived in Park Street for 32 years, within 25m of the agricultural land in question.

The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal reference APP/B1930/W/24/3343986 in this proof of evidence, is true and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true personal opinions.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I address matters raised in the technical note from Charles Garrard of Ceres Rural (CD9.7), on behalf of the Appellant pertaining to Agricultural matters.



- 1.2 I will only address additional matters, or such matters that appear to be additional to my Proof of Evidence, although there is inevitably some overlap.
- 1.3 Lack of comment about other matters, does not represent acceptance of those matters, rather a perception that these are already covered in my Proof of Evidence.

2. Mr Garrard's Comments

- 2.1 It is recognised that just because the land has been successfully farmed for many decades, it does not change its ALC rating, no such claim was ever made. The point made was simply that it had successfully produced a crop on a continuous basis.
- 2.2 Mr Garrard states that a greater range of crops can be grown on 3a land. This is not in doubt, since as already stated in my proof, the slightly stonier 3b land is not as good for growing such crops as potatoes, however this is irrelevant since (to my knowledge) potatoes have never been grown here. Unsurprisingly the farmer has produced grass crops that are little affected by the stonier environment.
- 2.3 Mr Garrard makes a great distinction between 3a and 3b land. Whilst in the two extremes, 3a that is almost 2, and 3b that is almost 4, might display quite different qualities, in his instance we have one, relatively small field of 4.3ha where some is 3a and some 3b. This would strongly suggest that they are not dissimilar in their qualities, albeit the northern end being slightly better. Thus the idea that there are significant differences in the value of the two parts of the same field with regard to crop productivity is rather unlikely.

3. Land Management

- 3.1 As previously stated the farmer of the proposed site also works the adjacent 18.4 hectare agricultural land, part of SA107, typically growing the same crop on both sites. He uses the same machinery on both pieces of land and treats them the same in terms of harvesting.
- 3.2 He has also employed various pest control features over time, including gas bangers, which he has positioned on the far field to minimise disturbance to residents. However, because the sound waves are un-impeded whilst travelling across the open land, they are easily heard inside properties around the Appellant's land.
- 3.3 Additionally he employs "Shooters" to kill pigeons, especially after a harvest and after planting crops for the new season and they are positioned between this field and the adjacent one to the west. Being located on the edge of the tree line, they are out of sight of the birds. Even if there was no requirement to keep the pest birds clear of the development site, there would be a need to continue to protect the fields the other side of the trees, and the firing positions within the trees, provide the cover required for the shooters.

3.4 The noise from these shot guns is extremely loud and quite frightening when heard from the houses surrounding the field and on the northern side of Old Orchard, which are approximately 200m away from the shotgun positions. The shooting often continues for over 8 hours during the summer months.

3.4 Should this development proceed, the nearest houses would be as close as 10m from this firing, which would be very disturbing indeed.

3.5 If any of the children from the new development chose to play in the adjacent woodland (which would be trespassing), they would be in close proximity to the gunshot, which would pose a danger.

3.6 The shooting happens every year usually around harvest and planting times and the residents that are disturbed by it (200m away), have accepted it within reason. However before the farmer moderated his approach, specifically in 2019, formal complaints were raised with the authorities including calls to the police (see appendices).

4. Wheat Production

Mr Garrard states at point 5: *“The paper notes that the UK is already mostly self-sufficient in wheat (p. 13), noting we already produce 88%”*.

Whilst this may be the case, the outlook is not particularly positive. The Guardian, under the headline: *“Farmers warn ‘crisis is building’ as record rainfall drastically reduces UK food production”*, reported on 10 April 2024, a reduction in yields, leading to dependency on imports. It stated:

“Wheat production is down 15% since November, the biggest reduction in cropped areas since 2020. Oilseed rape is down 28%, the biggest reduction since the 1980s, and winter barley is down 22% at 355,000 hectares, the biggest reduction since 2020.”

The question then remains, why eliminate a field which has successfully produced a crop for decades, and at the same time endanger the adjacent field through a reduction of economies of scale.

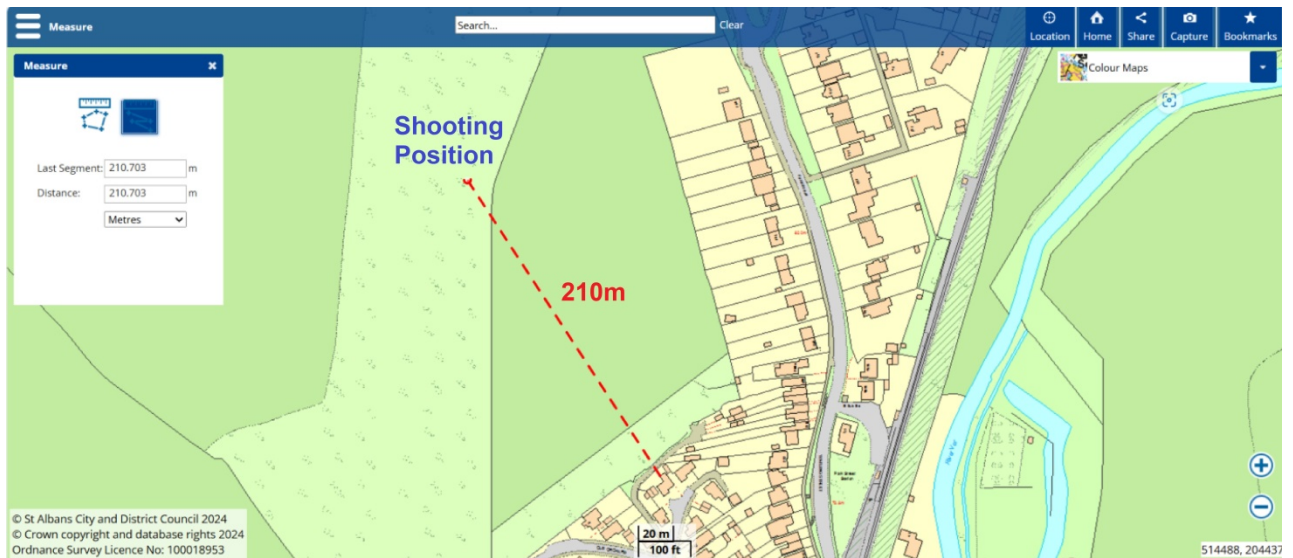


Appendix A1



Appendix A2

Typical Distance to an Old Orchard House



Appendix B

Greenbelt

From: Greenbelt [REDACTED]
Sent: 21 October 2019 00:46
To: greenbelt@gmx.com
Subject: Shooting Update

Further to the emails regarding the shooting on the nearby Council land, I can now update as follows:

- 1) The “bangs” throughout the summer had come from people shooting Pigeons on behalf of the Farmer, in order to protect his crop
- 2) Since the August Bank Holiday, there have been 3 bangs per 40 minutes, 7 days a week. These have come from a “Gas Banger”, designed to frighten off pest birds like Pigeons, Crows and Geese
- 3) I contacted the Council Estates department who own the land and explained our concerns regarding the shooting and the disturbance
- 4) They wrote to the farmer and replied by quoting his belief that he needs to shoot to protect his crop
- 5) I raised further issues with the Council and they failed to respond. They have been very unhelpful, despite them owning the land where the disturbance is taking place
- 6) I contacted the local Councillors, all three of who, had failed to respond to the initial copy, stating that they hadn’t received them or had gone to their junk mail
- 7) Stella Nash contacted the Environmental Health department who sent me a standard noise recording sheet to “prove” that a disturbance was taking place
- 8) I tracked down contact details for the farmer and spoke to him direct to explain the problem from our perspective
- 9) He agreed to remove the gas banger, for the time being (from last Friday 18th). You may have noticed, that it is now blissfully quiet
- 10) I am in discussions with him about on-going shooting and use of the gas banger on the land, especially from the start of next year’s growing season

If you have anything that you can add that might be helpful, please let me know.

Paul



Appendix C1

Greenbelt

From: CoolDriver [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 August 2024 16:02
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting

Hi Paul,

As you know, shooting has been a regular event over the past few years at the edge of the trees adjacent to the large field behind our houses. I understand a guy is shooting certain wildlife from a camouflaged position, and sometimes there is more than one.

As this is a regular event that I hear quite a few times during the year, especially over the summer, I try to ignore it. However, it is very loud and when in the garden it feels like it's much closer than it is, so I find it quite unsettling. In fact, earlier this morning there was constant shooting coming from the woodland/fields to the rear of my house & my partner was terrified when she heard the shooting whilst caring for an eight year old child that was playing in my back garden. Can you imagine the effect on adults & children hearing shots being fired near to where they are playing & of course, the new builds are much closer to where the shooting is taking place.

I really do worry about its effects, especially on the children living right next to it, with the sound of a gun constantly going off as they grow up thinking this is a normal occurrence. I suppose at least they will understand that they are growing up in the countryside, and is a necessary thing for farmers to do; shoot vermin, pigeons, rabbits, foxes etc. to protect their crops.

All the best

Martin
28 Old Orchard

On Fri, 30 Aug 2024 at 15:09, Greenbelt [REDACTED] wrote:

Martin

I trust that you are well.

I was wondering if you have been hearing the shooting over the past couple of days and if so, how loud it is for you.

Paul

Greenbelt



Appendix C2

Greenbelt

From: Carole Pomerance <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 30 August 2019 18:40
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting

Evening Paul, Well you were probably aware it has been another lovely afternoon interrupted but the gun shots which has just finally finished (I hope) trying to have a cup of tea in the garden with my daughter, was not a pleasant experience, and we finally gave up!
Regards Carole

From: Greenbelt
Sent: Friday, August 30, 2019 8:21 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Shooting

Carole

The following email was sent to the road this morning:

You will probably be aware that there has been a considerable amount of shooting recently in the woods, to the north of Old Orchard.

This has been a particular disturbance over the sunny Bank Holiday weekend, when many were trying to enjoy their gardens in peace.

The land is owned by St Albans District Council and I have contacted their Estates Department, who have not given any authority for this to take place.

Could you please let me know if you are disturbed by the shooting.

Regards

Paul



Appendix C3

Greenbelt

From: Alex Bartman [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 August 2019 18:42
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting

Hi Paul

last summer, the shooting sounded so close to me at number 31, that I phoned 999 .

The police never even came or followed up in any way. I'm sure it's nothing to be "worried" about but I cannot see how it can be legal and am stunned that the police were not even interested enough to send an officer to investigate.

It bothers me a great deal and anything we can do would be reassuring....

Sent from my iPhone

On 30 Aug 2019, at 08:15, Greenbelt [REDACTED] wrote:

You will probably be aware that there has been a considerable amount of shooting recently in the woods, to the north of Old Orchard.

This has been a particular disturbance over the sunny Bank Holiday weekend, when many were trying to enjoy their gardens in peace.

The land is owned by St Albans District Council and I have contacted their Estates Department, who have not given any authority for this to take place.

Could you please let me know if you are disturbed by the shooting.

Regards

Paul

<mime-attachment.jpg>

"Keep the Green Belt green"



Appendix C4

Greenbelt

From: Susan Shanks [REDACTED]
Sent: 03 September 2019 18:27
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting

Hello Paul

This is to let you know I phoned the police this afternoon about the shooting. The officer said "Thank you for your call" but not that they would do anything!

Regards, Susan

On Fri, 30 Aug 2019 at 08:15, Greenbelt [REDACTED] wrote:

You will probably be aware that there has been a considerable amount of shooting recently in the woods, to the north of Old Orchard.

This has been a particular disturbance over the sunny Bank Holiday weekend, when many were trying to enjoy their gardens in peace.

The land is owned by St Albans District Council and I have contacted their Estates Department, who have not given any authority for this to take place.

Could you please let me know if you are disturbed by the shooting.

Regards

Paul



“Keep the Green Belt green”



Appendix C5

Greenbelt

From: Janet Davies [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 August 2019 19:43
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting

Hi Paul,

Thanks for your email re the shooting taking place in the woods at the back of Old Orchard. Being on the opposite side of the road, although we can hear the guns firing, we are lucky to be slightly further away than all our other neighbours whose homes back on to the woods but, having said that, we certainly were disturbed by the noise.

Slightly more worrying is the question of who is wielding guns in such close proximity to our houses and, if The Council have not authorised this activity, whether the persons in question are lawfully in possession of these weapons.

Please keep us advised of anything you may find out.

Many thanks.

Bill & Jan (No. 16)

Sent from my iPad

On 30 Aug 2019, at 08:15, Greenbelt [REDACTED] wrote:

You will probably be aware that there has been a considerable amount of shooting recently in the woods, to the north of Old Orchard.

This has been a particular disturbance over the sunny Bank Holiday weekend, when many were trying to enjoy their gardens in peace.

The land is owned by St Albans District Council and I have contacted their Estates Department, who have not given any authority for this to take place.

Could you please let me know if you are disturbed by the shooting.

Regards

Paul



Appendix C6

Greenbelt

From: Carole Pomerance [REDACTED]
Sent: 21 October 2019 09:23
To: Greenbelt
Subject: Re: Shooting Update

Thank you for the update Paul, and whilst appreciating that the Farmer must protect his crops – I feel that he must also appreciate the need for consideration to the local residents and people shooting the birds on the farm land is both alarming and frightening.

The Gas “Banger” isn’t so bad as it doesn’t have such a loud impact and you can tell that it is not actual Gun Fire.

I also contacted Environmental Health some time ago and got the same response as Stella Nash, most unsatisfactory.

And so the saga goes on, I doubt whatever we do will make any difference to the local council, and I would just like someone

to come down on a nice warm sunny afternoon, spend some time in the garden and see how the sound of gun fire impacts on them!

Regards Carole

From: Greenbelt
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2019 12:46 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Shooting Update

Further to the emails regarding the shooting on the nearby Council land, I can now update as follows:

- 1) The “bangs” throughout the summer had come from people shooting Pigeons on behalf of the Farmer, in order to protect his crop
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- 6) I contacted the local Councillors, all three of who, had failed to respond to the initial copy, stating that they hadn’t received them or had gone to their junk mail

