



A lesson in Green Belt development?

A controversial plan to build 446 homes on Green Belt land near Horley, Surrey, has been approved on appeal, overturning the local council's initial rejection.

The development, proposed by Rydon Homes, will include up to 446 homes – including 201 affordable homes (45 per cent), and four Traveller pitches on land west of Reigate Road in Hookwood. Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) confirmed there is a significant unmet need for this type of specific housing within the local area.

Despite concerns about its impact on the Green Belt, the planning inspector ruled that the “very substantial public benefits” of the housing outweighed the harm to the protected area. This decision comes amid what the inspector called “an acute need for affordable housing” in the district.

MVDC rejected the outline planning application, claiming it could appear “cramped” and “incongruous” with the surrounding area. MVDC's initial decision report from November 2023 said the development will have a “detrimental transport impact”.

However since then, the authority changed the site from being a ‘protected area’ in the Local Plan to a ‘potential development site’ – so they could not defend their original decision. The developer launched an appeal.

The scheme was allowed after the developer Rydon Homes attended the inquiry with a team of 16 headed by a KC. At the start of the hearing MVDC & Charlwood Parish Council withdrew their objections to the planning application.

The inspector noted the opportunities for transport, employment and other facilities due to its proximity to Hookwood, Horley and Gatwick Airport. He also found transport options were satisfactory and in agreement with Surrey County Council.

Concerns were raised by locals that the increase of around a thousand new residents would put pressure on GPs and schools. Rough plans put forward by the developer suggests it will create new community facilities like early education, but details are not yet apparent.

Although the inspectorate agreed there was a degree of harm to the character and appearance of the neighbourhood, he concluded there was “very special circumstances” to build on the Green Belt.

Image: View of development land west from Hookwood, Horley. (Credit: Google Street View)