

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

APPEAL RELATING TO

**MANOR FARM AND LAND NORTH OF WRAYSBURY RESERVOIR , POYLE ROAD,
SLOUGH, SL3 0AA**

**APPEAL BY MANOR FARM PROPCO LIMITED AGAINST NON-DETERMINATION FOR
'DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS AND REDEVELOPMENT TO COMPRISE A
DATA CENTRE (USE CLASS B8) AND BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM (BESS)
WITH ANCILLARY SUBSTATION, OFFICES, ASSOCIATED PLANT, EMERGENCY
BACKUP GENERATORS AND ASSOCIATED FUEL STORAGE, LANDSCAPING,
SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE SYSTEMS, CAR AND CYCLE PARKING, AND NEW AND
AMENDED VEHICULAR AND EMERGENCY ACCESS FROM POYLE ROAD AND OTHER
ASSOCIATED WORKS.'**

Summary Proof of Evidence

Paul Stimpson

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY REF: P/10076/013

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: APP/J0350/W/25/3366043

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Paul Frederick Stimpson. I have a degree BSc (hons) in Town Planning and a post graduate diploma DipTP in Town Planning from the University of Wales, Cardiff.
- 1.2 I was a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute for over 40 years until 2024.
- 1.3 I have worked in various planning roles since 1980. I was employed by Slough Borough Council in 1995 and was responsible for producing all of the Statutory Plans and planning policy documents until I retired in 2022. Since then I have worked for the Council, most recently on the Simplified Planning Zone for Slough Trading Estate.
- 1.4 I am familiar with the Appeal site and the Colnbrook and Poyle area since it was transferred to Slough Borough Council in 1995.
- 1.5 I am familiar with the planning application (P/10076/013) which is the subject of this Appeal.
- 1.6 The evidence I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry (PINS Reference APP/ J0350/W/25/3366043) is true and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

- 1.7 This Summary Proof of Evidence relates to the reasons which the Council would have refused the planning application regarding Need for the Development, Green Belt, Strategic Gap and Colne Valley Park.

2.0 Summary on Need

- 2.1 The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2024 for the first time highlighted the need for Local planning Authorities to make provision for data centres.
- 2.2 The Council has anticipated and met all of the policy requirements of the NPPF by adopting a plan-led approach to making provision for data centres in the Simplified Planning Zone for Slough Trading Estate. The SPZ has identified *“strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy”*. It has paid *“particular regard to facilitating development to meet the needs of a modern economy, including by identifying suitable locations for uses such asdata centres”*. The SPZ has also made provision for *“clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries”* to such an extent that the Slough Trading Estate is now the second biggest cluster of data centres in the world.
- 2.3 The latest SPZ which was adopted in November 2024 effectively grants planning permission in advance for data centres and has relaxed the site parameters so that larger and taller facilities can be built in the future. Although we don't know exactly how many new data centres will be built the “Reasonable Case Scenario” for the SPZ assumes that 20 data centres would be built in the next ten years. This would mean that around half of the 197 ha Trading Estate would end up having data centres on it.

- 2.4 The extent to which this a “Reasonable Case Scenario” is correct can be seen from the fact that SEGRO, the owners of the Estate has confirmed that it has an active pipeline for 4.2 million square feet (390,000m²) in the next seven years.
- 2.5 Outside of the Trading Estate the Council has granted planning permission for hyperscale data centres on the former Akzo Nobel (Dulux) paint factory site in Wexham Road and on the former Langley Business Centre.
- 2.6 It can be seen that, by producing Simplified Planning Zones for the Slough Trading Estate, the Council has taking a proactive plan-led approach to meeting the needs of data centres in the Slough Availability Zone. It has therefore as complied with the policies in the NPPF which require Local Planning Authorities to pay particular regard to facilitating the development data centres and make provision for clusters of data centres.
- 2.7 There are also now a number of data centres within the part of the Slough Availability Zone which is in Buckinghamshire. As a result the combination of the expected 20 sites in the Slough Trading Estate Simplified Planning Zone, planning permissions granted by Slough Borough Council and permissions and applications in Buckinghamshire, there are around 30 sites within the Slough Availability Zone that have the potential to be developed for data centres.
- 2.8 The Appellant has commissioned two Alternative Site Assessments both of which concluded that that, contrary to all of the evidence, “*no alternative sites are available*”. The second study has only been able to do this by rejecting all

of the sites that it found with planning permission which were for some inexplicable reason “*not considered to be available*”.

- 2.9 Although it recognized the existence of the SPZ on the Trading Estate, the second study found that “*There are no undeveloped sites, and much of the Estate has been the subject of redevelopment and appears to be largely occupied. We understand that there are no land parcels of sufficient scale available for redevelopment.*” As a result it was concluded that the Trading Estate “*is therefore considered not to be available for development, and is not a suitable alternative site for the data centre element of the Appeal scheme.*”
- 2.10 The Council cannot possibly agree with the overall conclusion in the Appellant’s Alternative Sites Assessment and considers that Substantial weight should be given to the availability of alternative sites where the need for data centres could be met with less harm.
- 2.11 Another conclusion of the Alternative Sites Assessment was that Appeal Site is the *most sequentially preferable for the data centre element of the Development*”. In order to determine whether the Appeal Site has any special qualities which would justify this claim it was tested against the methodologies used in the two Alternative Site Assessments. This showed that the Appeal Site would score very poorly.
- 2.12 It was found that the Appeal Proposal has no special qualities which outweigh all of the planning and operation disadvantages that the site has, and the

harm that it would cause. As a result there is no qualitative need for a data centre in this location.

- 2.13 In terms of the quantitative need for data centres, it is important to stress that, for planning purposes, there are no Government targets for the provision of data centres either at a national or regional level.
- 2.14 The recent House of Commons Library Report on Data Centres notes that *“the UK had approximately 1.6 gigawatts (GW) of data centre capacity in 2024”*.
- 2.15 The Government “UK Compute Roadmap” Policy Paper which states that: *We forecast that the UK will need at least 6GW of AI-capable data centre capacity by 2030 – a threefold increase on the data centre capacity that is available in the UK today. Should the capabilities and adoption of AI accelerate, demand could exceed this baseline significantly.*
- 2.16 The Government’s solution to this is to create AI Growth Zones on sites across the UK which have available energy. This is an important factor in determining what the future need for data centres will be in Slough.
- 2.17 In the absence of any official figures for the level of need for data centres in the Slough Availability Zone estimates have been derived from the evidence given at the recent appeals in Buckinghamshire. It was as a result of the most recent one that the Secretary of State concluded that the need for data centres in the SAZ *“will continue to rise to some 2,858MW”*.

- 2.18 The Council does not agree that this is an appropriate figures to use in this Appeal because it is extraordinarily high and completely unrealistic. This would involve building 1.8 times as many data centres in Slough in the next five years as there currently are in the whole of country. It would also involve Slough building 65% of all of the new data centres that are needed for the country as a whole.
- 2.19 The introduction of AI Growth Zones means that it is now Government policy to meet the bulk of the increased need in locations in the parts of the country which have not previously had data centres. The cluster on Slough Trading Estate will continue to grow but most of the heavy lifting in terms of meeting national need for data centres will have to be done elsewhere where there is a readily available supply of electricity.
- 2.20 The biggest constraint to the delivery of data centres in Slough, which makes any calculations of need academic, is the lack of electricity supply. Data centres and other forms of development are having to wait for power to come available. National Grid is trying to address this issue by building a new substation at Uxbridge Moor next to the existing one at Iver. This will not come on stream for a number of years and it is understood that all of the extra power that this will supply has already been has been reserved by landowners and data centre operators.
- 2.21 There is not a shortage of sites in Slough compared to the availability of power. Any realistic assessment of the need for data centres in the SAZ must be completely constrained by the severe shortage of electricity supply.

- 2.22 As a result it can be seen that the Council has complied with the “Policy” need to make provision for data centres in accordance with the NPPF. There is an ample supply of new sites on the Trading Estate and elsewhere which are suitable alternatives to the Appeal Site. There is no “qualitative” need for the appeal site which has a number of planning and operational disadvantages. Previous predictions of the “quantitative” need for data centres in the SAZ are completely unrealistic. The need for data centres in Slough will not be restricted by a shortage of sites but a severe shortage of electricity supply.
- 2.23 The lack of a need for the development of the Appeal Site with a data centre should therefore be given substantial weight when considering the harm that it will cause.

3.0 Summary on Green Belt

- 3.1 The Colnbrook and Poyle area is recognised as being one of the most fragmented and vulnerable parts of the entire Metropolitan Green Belt. It is all that remains of the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London. It also forms part of the Colne Valley Regional Park.
- 3.2 The Green Belt in the Colnbrook and Poyle area also suffers from urban fringe type activities and the unauthorised use of land.
- 3.3 The fact that the Green Belt in the Colnbrook and Poyle area may not necessarily pristine and is so fractured does not make it less important. In fact it strengthens the case for ensuring that the remaining open areas are permanently protected in order to prevent urban sprawl and help to contribute to the other functions of the Green Belt. This is particularly important with the Appeal Site where we now have the opportunity not just to safeguard the countryside from development but also allow a positive improvement to be made.
- 3.4 The Appeal Proposal is not the type of “appropriate” development that is allowed in the Green Belt in accordance with Paragraph 154 of the NPPF.
- 3.5 Paragraph 155 of the NPPF states that a site could be considered to be “appropriate” development was utilising “Grey Belt”.

- 3.6 One way that that the Appeal Site could qualify as “Grey Belt” is if it was “Previously Developed Land”.
- 3.7 Parcel B is an open grassed field. and so it is not therefore “Previously Developed Land”.
- 3.8 Most of the eastern half of Parcel A is subject to an Enforcement Notice which requires the land to be restored to agricultural use by reseeding.
- 3.9 There are no permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure on this part of the site which means that it is not “Previously Developed Land”.
- 3.10 The western part of Parcel A has structures on it as a result of granted planning permission at appeal for the use of the land for concrete crushing and screening and inert waste recycling and the erection of buildings. This permission is subject to a condition which requires the buildings and structures on the site to be removed and the site reinstated to agriculture if the use ceases. The waste recycling use has now ceased and so the whole of this part of the Appeal Site will have to be reinstated to agriculture and will not therefore be “Previously Developed Land”.
- 3.11 There four plots containing the house, HMO, warehouse and car parking near the entrance to the site that qualify as “Previously Developed Land” but this represents a very small portion of the Appeal site This means that the vast majority of the site “Greenfield” land that cannot be defined as “Previously Developed Land” and so cannot be considered to be “Grey Belt” on this basis.

- 3.12 The second reason that the Appeal Site could be considered “Grey Belt”, in terms of Paragraph 155 of the NPPF, is if it didn’t strongly contribute to Green Belt purpose a), which is “to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas” and purpose b) which is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- 3.13 The Appeal Site has previously suffered from the sprawl of unauthorised activities upon it but there is now the opportunity to clear it up and restore it to agricultural land. It does not have boundaries that are as clear cut or strong or permanent as the Poyle Road and so lacks the physical features that could restrict and development further ribbon development. As a result by keeping it open, the Appeal Site strongly contributes to preventing the sprawl of development from a large built-up area. It cannot be considered “Grey Belt” on this ground.
- 3.14 The Appeal Site also plays an important role in maintaining visual separation within a designated Strategic Gap and therefore strongly contributes *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another*. This means that it cannot be considered to be “Grey Belt” on this ground either.
- 3.15 As a result the Appeal Site cannot be considered to be “Grey Belt” which means that it cannot qualify to be “appropriate” development in the Green Belt in accordance with Paragraph 155 (a) of the NPPF.

- 3.16 The second part of the test in this Paragraph (a) that a development must also pass is that it would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.
- 3.17 The proposed development would however breach the strong established Green Belt boundary along the Poyle Road and threaten the integrity of the area of Green Belt around it, and undermine the role that all Green Belt sites have in preserving the strategic gap between Slough and Greater London. As a result it would fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan and so cannot be considered appropriate development on this ground.
- 3.18 Paragraph 155 (b) states that development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate, is if there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development propose. There is an ample supply of preferable alternatives to the Appeal Site on the Trading Estate and elsewhere Slough Availability Zone, which are better located and are generally on brown field sites within the urban area. As a result there is not a demonstrable need for a data centre in this location.
- 3.19 As a result the Appeal Proposal does not meet the criteria set out in Paragraphs 143 and 155 of the NPPF and cannot be considered to be “appropriate” development in the Green Belt.
- 3.20 Having established that the proposal does not constitute “appropriate development” and demonstrated the harm that it would cause to the Green

Belt, it is necessary to consider whether there are any “very special circumstances” that can be weighed in favour of the proposed development.

- 3.21 The demonstrable harm that Appeal Proposal would cause to the Green Belt can be summed up as follows:
- 3.22 Around 5 hectares of previously open Green Belt land will be lost to development. This means that in spatial terms there will be a significant loss of openness across the Appeal Site due to the size, bulk and spread of the proposed Appeal Development.
- 3.23 The proposed 30m tall data centre on the other open field within the Appeal Site would be very conspicuous from the Poyle Road so would erode the visual openness of the Green Belt.
- 3.24 The Proposed development would breach the very strong boundary of the Industrial Estate which is formed by the Poyle Road and its scale and nature would result in an “incongruous pattern of development” into the Green Belt. As a result it would fail to check the unrestricted sprawl of development from a large built up area.
- 3.25 The Appeal Site makes a strong visual contribution to the perception of there being some separation between Slough and Greater London within the Strategic Gap. As a result it would fail to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

3.26 Parcel B is a grass field. There is now the opportunity to restore the majority of Parcel A back to agricultural use. As a result the retention of the Appeal Site as open land won't just safeguard the countryside from encroachment but also allow a positive improvement to be made.

3.27 As a result it is considered that that substantial weight should be given the demonstrable harm that Appeal Proposal would cause to the Green Belt.

3.28 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that:

Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

3.29 The Appellants have argued that there are "very special circumstances" that can be weighed in favour of the proposed development.

3.30 They have argued that there is a clear and urgent need for the data centre, but there are in fact a large number of alternative sites available in the Slough Availability Zone which are capable of meeting the need for data centres in a less harmful way.

3.31 The Appellants have argued that there are a number of other benefits associated with the Appeal Proposal but these could equally be provided

through the development of any of the other numerous alternative sites for data centres and are not specific to this site. It not considered that these benefits are necessarily deliverable because of the uncertainty of the future of the site pending a decision as to whether the proposed third runway at Heathrow will go ahead.

- 3.32 As a result it is not considered that there aren't any "very special circumstances" that outweigh the demonstrable harm to the Green Belt that the Appeal Proposal would cause.
- 3.33 The Council would therefore have refused the planning application on the grounds that the proposed development would cause significant harm to this fragmented and vulnerable part of the Green Belt and there is no overriding demand or sufficient deliverable benefits to constitute the "very special circumstances" that are necessary to overcome the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

4.0 Summary on the Strategic Gap

- 4.1 The Appeal site is within the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London. In order to maintain a strategic sized gap it is important that all remaining open land in the Colnbrook and Poyle area is retained if at all possible. This is why Core Policy 2 assumes that all urbanising development on land outside the built up areas is harmful and should only be allowed if it is “essential to be in that location
- 4.2 The Appeal Site is almost entirely open land which is outside of the built-up area and so has to be considered against Core Policy 2. This is an additional test to Green Belt policy, which has been found to be a “Higher bar” to development. As a result even if the Appeal proposal is found to be acceptable in Green Belt terms it still has to meet the requirements of the Strategic Gap policy.
- 4.3 The Appeal Proposal will result in around 5 hectares of open land being lost to built development and man-made structures which will undoubtedly increase the urbanisation of the area and by definition cause harm to the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London.
- 4.4 Whilst any development in the open area of the Strategic Gap would be harmful and set a precedent for further erosion of the gap, the Appeal Site is in a particularly sensitive location on the only major north south road that runs through the Colnbrook and Poyle area.

- 4.5 The Poyle Road, has continuous development all the way along the eastern side of the road in the form of the Poyle Industrial Estate. As a result any sense of openness or lack of urbanisation can only be provided on the western side of Poyle Road.
- 4.6 The Appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment currently people will get glimpses of the buildings on the site and the presence of the hedge means that there is nothing to suggest anything but rural type activities are happening on the site.
- 4.7 This will be in complete contrast to what will happen if the huge 30 metre tall data centre is built on the site. This is because the proposed development would have a significant impact upon people's perception of there being a gap between Slough and Greater London
- 4.8 In the appeal into the proposed a solar photovoltaic farm on the site on the Poyle Road to the north of the Appeal Site (APP/J0350/W/16/3144685) the Secretary of State concluded that: *"the proposal would represent an urbanising feature within what are currently open fields and would close the strategic gap by introducing built form and man-made structures. (*
- 4.9 The data centre which is proposed on the Appeal Site would be much larger than the 3 metre high solar panels and so would have a much bigger built form and significantly increase the impression of urbanisation on the western side of Poyle Road which currently provides the only relief from urban development on this important through route within the Strategic Gap.

- 4.10 Although Core Policy 2 imposes a “stringent” presumption against any built development in the open areas of the Strategic Gap it does allow for exceptions in that the policy states: *Development will only be permitted in the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London and the open areas of the Colne Valley Park if it is essential to be in that location*
- 4.11 There are, however, no geographical, operational or planning reasons why it is “essential” to build the proposed data centre in this location which is far less suitable than alternative sites in Slough. It is not accepted that the ability of the site to obtain some of its electricity from the Laleham substation equates to an “essential” need for the development.
- 4.12 There are plenty of alternative sites that can meet the need for data centres in a less harmful way. As a result, it has not been demonstrated that the Appeal Proposal meets the test set out in Core Policy 2 of being “essential to be in that location”
- 4.13 As a result the Council would have refused the planning application on the grounds that the proposed development would result in the further coalescence of Slough and Greater London and the further loss of the separate identity of Slough

5.0 Summary on Colne Valley Park

- 5.1 A full explanation as to why the Appeal Proposal does not meet the “essential to be in that location” test in Core Policy 2 is set out above in the section on the Strategic Gap. As a result there is no need to repeat this again.
- 5.2 The main conclusion was that there are no geographical, operational or planning reasons why it is “essential” to build the proposed data centre in this location which is far less suitable than alternative sites in Slough. It is not accepted that the ability of the site to obtain some of its electricity from the Laleham substation equates to an “essential” need for the development.
- 5.3 As a result the Appeal Proposal does not meet the test for development being allowed in the open area of the Colne Valley Park set out in Core Policy 2 of being “*essential to be in that location*”.
- 5.4 The Council would therefore have refused the planning application on the grounds that “*The proposed development would result in the further urbanisation, loss of countryside recreation opportunities and severance of the Colne Valley Regional Park*”.