
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 May 2017

by Grahame Gould BA MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 30th May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/K3605/W/17/3166850

Land at the junction of Burwood Road and Eriswell Road, Walton on Thames KT12 4AS

- 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 CTIL and Vodafone Limited against the decision of Elmbridge Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2016/1255, dated 19 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 19 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a 20 metre monopole supporting 6 no. antenna, the installation of a radio equipment cabinet and development works ancillary thereto.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The siting for the development was amended prior to the application's determination by the Council and I have therefore only had regard to the amended application plans.
3. At my request and for the purposes of clarifying the development site's location relative to the Metropolitan Green Belt (the Green Belt) the Council has provided an extract from the Policies Map that accompanies its development plan. I have had regard to the information shown on the Policies Map extract in determining the appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are: whether or not the development would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt; and the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The development would involve the installation of a 20 metre tall, slimline, telecommunications mast, which would support six antenna. The development would also involve the installation of an equipment cabinet. The mast and cabinet would be sited in the verge just to the east of the access to Burnhill Park golf course, opposite Burwood Road's junction with Eriswell Road. The development would be shared by O2 and Vodafone and would expand the capacity of their '3G' and '4G' networks.
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Green Belt

6. The Policies Map extract that has been provided shows the site to be outside the Green Belt¹. As the development would be outside the Green Belt it would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and because of that there would be no conflict with section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and Policy DM17 of the Elmbridge Development Management Plan of 2015 (the DMP).

Character and Appearance

7. The development would occupy part of the highway verge in front of 1 Gate Lodge (No 1), a two storey detached house. No 1 has an extensive open front lawn and 2 Gate Lodge (No 2), the other house on the opposite side of the golf course access road, has a similar front garden. The trees in front of No 1 shown on the photograph included on drawing 100A have been removed since that photograph was taken. Unlike other parts of Burwood Road the site does not benefit from a woodland backdrop and the 20 metre mast would therefore be very prominent in the streetscene sited because of the absence of visual screening.
8. There are some items of street furniture in the verges along Burwood Road and bounding the golf club's access. However, the tallest of the existing items of street furniture, ie the telegraph poles and streetlights, are only seven and eight metres tall². The mast would therefore be two and a half times taller than the streetlights and I consider that this mast, given its height and relative isolation, would have an incongruous appearance that would be incompatible with the generally verdant, semi-rural character of Burwood Road's streetscene. While the exterior of the mast has been designed to mimic the appearance of a wooden telegraph pole, I consider that treatment would be unconvincing because the mast's height would be totally out of scale with the telegraph poles in the immediate area. I am therefore of the opinion that this development would not be inconspicuous when seen by the occupiers of Nos 1 and 2, pedestrians and drivers.
9. While there are two existing masts in Burwood Road, respectively at its junctions with Seven Hills Road and Eastwick Road, those masts are much shorter than the proposed mast, being of heights that relate well with the nearby street furniture. I therefore consider that the proposed mast is not comparable with the existing masts.
10. I therefore conclude that the height and siting of the development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. There would therefore be conflict with Policy CS17 of the Elmbridge Core Strategy of 2011 and Policies DM2 and DM16 of the DMP because the development would not enhance the street scene and it would adversely affect the appearance of the area, with the mast failing to integrate sensitively with its surroundings. I also consider that there would be conflict with the fourth core planning principle (paragraph 17) and paragraphs 56, 58 and 64 of the Framework because the development would be of a poor design that would not add to the overall quality of the area.

¹ The Council has confirmed this to be the case in the covering email that accompanied the submission of the Policies Map extract

² Based on the dimensions provided by the appellants

Other Matters

11. I recognise that O2 and Vodafone are obligated to provide services under the operating licences they have been granted and that there is a coverage deficiency within the vicinity of the appeal site. I am also mindful of the fact that appellants have undertaken an alternative site search, with the search for a site having begun in 2012. Technical reasons and the unavailability of privately owned sites have resulted in a number of alternative sites being discounted. I am mindful of the fact that the Government is supportive of telecommunications development, with the availability of high quality communications infrastructure being considered to be essential to support sustainable economic growth (paragraph 42 of the Framework). Further support for providing extensive and up to date telecommunications infrastructure throughout the UK is set out in the Government's policy paper 'Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation' of July 2015, which formed part of that year's budget announcement.
12. However, paragraph 43 of the Framework states that 'Where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate'. The proposed mast would be a very obvious installation within the streetscene and I therefore consider that this development would be incompatible with guidance contained in paragraph 43 of the Framework. I am also of the opinion that this development's economic and social benefits would be outweighed by the harm to the character and appearance of the area that I have identified.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

Grahame Gould

INSPECTOR