
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 February 2018

by Stephen Hawkins MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 13 March 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/17/3181357

Penhallow Farm, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8DB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under Part 16 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015.
 - The appeal is made by Vodafone Ltd against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA16/11299, dated 28 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 17 March 2017.
 - The development proposed is 1 no 17.5m high Swann 1 S lattice tower with delta headframe, 3 no antennae on headframe support poles, 2 no 0.3m transmission dishes on headframe support poles, 1 Huawei BTS3900AL equipment cabinet, 1 no CTIL TSC cabinet & associated ancillary equipment.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. I have taken the site address from section D of the appeal form in the interests of accuracy. The Council used a similar address on their decision notice.

Application for Costs

3. An application for costs was made by Cornwall Council against Vodafone Ltd. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed mast on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside and whether any harm is outweighed by the requirement for the installation, having regard to the potential availability of alternative sites.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The proposed mast would be around 17.5 metres high and it would be of a lattice design, supporting three antennae and two dishes on headframe support poles. The mast would provide improved network coverage for 2G, 3G and 4G services in and around the village of Mount Hawke for two telecommunications providers.
6. The mast would be sited in an open field around 250 metres to the east of the built-up part of the village. It would be set back from a country road,

alongside a low boundary hedge separating two fields. A monopole mast of around 15 metres in height has recently been erected in a similar location, pursuant to a decision by the Council on 5 September 2017 that prior approval was not required¹.

7. The countryside surrounding the site largely consists of a wide, raised plateau of open fields offering far-reaching views over an exposed, gently undulating and predominantly rural landscape. The telegraph poles along the roadside are considerably lower and more slender features than either the recently erected monopole or the proposed mast. Therefore, aside from the monopole there is a noticeable absence of any significant vertical structures in the surrounding countryside. This part of the countryside is in the Landscape Character Area CA11-Redruth Camborne and Gwennap in the Cornwall and Isle of Scilly Landscape Character Study (LCA).
8. The appellant's evidence is that the design and more limited height of the recently erected monopole means that it does not provide them with the required level of coverage. There is no firm evidence before me to suggest that the proposed mast antenna would not be at the minimum height necessary to achieve the level of coverage sought. Nevertheless, the mast would be significantly higher than the monopole. Due to the lattice design of the frame, the mast would be appreciably wider than the slim profile of the monopole. The frame would give the mast a cluttered appearance and would not be particularly permeable in terms of views between the frame members. Further, the bulky headframe, antennae and dishes would give the mast a top heavy appearance. Consequently, the mast would have an appreciably greater overall scale compared with that of the monopole.
9. Given the largely open nature of the surrounding landscape, the mast would be readily apparent in views when approaching along the road in either direction, where it would generally be seen against the skyline as an isolated vertical feature of substantial size, unrelated to the largely horizontal landform of the surrounding countryside. There would be little potential for any planting to screen the mast or to soften its appearance. In any event, such planting would be likely to draw unwanted attention to the mast. As a result, the mast would be seen as a visually disruptive, urbanising feature, entirely at odds with its open landscape setting. In addition, the open and exposed location on raised ground would have the effect that the mast would be readily apparent in wider views in the surroundings particularly when approaching the village from the north, where it would also be seen as an isolated and alien feature in the predominantly open landscape.
10. Reference has been made by both main parties to a lattice mast adjacent to the B3277 at Two Burrows, about 1.4 kilometres to the east of the site. Although that mast is situated on a ridge and is largely seen against the skyline, its setting includes substantial electricity pylons. Accordingly, that mast is not comparable with the appeal scheme.
11. It therefore follows that the mast would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside. Consequently, the mast would not accord with Policy 23 of the adopted Cornwall Local Plan (LP), as it would not sustain local distinctiveness and character, protect the natural environment or respect the character of the landscape. In particular, the mast

¹ Council Ref: PA17/06779.

would not be of an appropriate scale and design that recognises and respects the character of the landscape taking the LCA, which envisages new development being well integrated into its surroundings, into account. The mast would also not accord with LP Policy 12, as it would not ensure Cornwall's enduring distinctiveness by maintaining and enhancing its distinctive natural character. Furthermore, the mast would not accord with LP Policy 2, as it would not maintain and respect the character of Cornwall by protecting the natural landscape.

12. Moreover, the mast would not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside or be integrated into the natural and built environment as required by paragraphs 17 and 61 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

Availability of alternative sites

13. The appellant adopted a sequential approach in selecting the site for the mast. I accept that there are no other available masts or sharing opportunities within the required coverage area and that there is an operational need for the installation. I also acknowledge that the sharing of the mast by two providers would be consistent with best practice, as it would help reduce the proliferation of masts.
14. The Council did not comment on the potential suitability of any of the alternative locations in the appellant's search. Nevertheless, it appears that the number of sites reviewed in the search was limited, having regard to the size of the search area and its environs. Moreover, from what I saw during my visit it seemed to me that there may be other potentially suitable sites with a significantly less open or a more built-up context either within or on the edges of the search area. Consequently, I am not persuaded that a thorough search of alternative locations was undertaken before the appeal scheme was pursued or that all other alternatives would necessarily have a more harmful visual impact compared with that of the mast. As a result, I cannot be assured that a more suitable site for the mast would not reasonably be available.
15. I have been referred to two appeal decisions which the appellant considers supports their case². However, in both cases the visual harm identified was limited and it appears that there was a clear lack of any alternative locations for a mast. Consequently, from the limited information before me those cases do not compare with the appeal scheme.

Planning Balance

16. The Framework supports improvements to telecommunications infrastructure and recognises that it can play a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services. However, the Framework also advises that operational efficiency should be balanced against such equipment being sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.
17. The appellant's requirements for improved network coverage and any social, economic and public benefits that would arise are matters which weigh in favour of the proposal. Nevertheless, to my mind the available evidence does not demonstrate that a potentially more suitable site would not be reasonably available which would provide the required level of coverage.

² Ref: APP/V2004/A/11/2154903 & APP/B5480/W/15/315120.

18. Therefore, the above benefits would not outweigh the substantial visual harm to the character and appearance of the countryside that would be caused by the proposal, and the consequent failure to accord with the policies of the LP identified above. Having regard to the failure to accord with those LP Policies, the proposal would also not accord with LP Policy 1, as it would not amount to sustainable development.

Conclusion

19. The siting and appearance of the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the countryside, it would not accord with the Development Plan and it would be inconsistent with the Framework. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stephen Hawkins

INSPECTOR