



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2020

by A M Nilsson BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C4235/W/19/3243020

Streetworks, Gorton Road, North Reddish, Stockport SK5 6RY

- 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 EE (UK) Ltd and H3G (UK) Ltd against the decision of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref DC/073921, dated 21 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 28 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a replacement 20m high monopole, accommodating 12 no. antenna in an open headframe together with the upgrade of the equipment cabinets and ancillary development thereto.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have inserted the word 'high' to the description to clarify that the reference to 20m is in relation to height.

Background

3. The proposal involves the replacement of an existing 11.7m high monopole and associated equipment that are situated adjacent to the appeal site. The proposal is required to facilitate the roll-out of the 5G (fifth generation) mobile telecommunications network in the area.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on 1) the character and appearance of the area and 2) the living conditions of surrounding residents.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site is located on the pavement at the junction between Gorton Road and Ashbrook Lane. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in nature, however there are some commercial premises close to the appeal site on Gorton Road. The majority of buildings surrounding the site are two-storey, however there are also some three storey buildings. The appeal site is adjacent to a residential block called Spey House, that is part single, part two

- and part three storeys in height, which is surrounded by hedges and trees. This building is set back into the site and combined with the small car park on the opposite side of the junction, the site has a relatively open feel.
6. There is an existing telecommunications monopole on the opposite corner adjacent to the car park. This structure and the associated equipment cabinets would be removed as part of the proposed development. The existing monopole is a relatively slender and innocuous installation. It is not overly obtrusive and sits comfortably with the other structures and buildings in the area. In comparison, the proposal, due to its height, width and bulky headframe would be significantly more prominent.
 7. The installation would be significantly taller than any other building, structure or piece of street furniture within the immediate vicinity. It would extend above the streetlights on the street. It would also be taller than the two-storey residential properties in the area, which are approximately 6.25m in height, and the three storey elements of surrounding buildings. The width of the column and the headframe are also considerably greater than any of the other street furniture in the area. The exposed antenna gives the structure a cluttered appearance that considerably adds to its prominence. Therefore, as a result of its scale and appearance, it would be highly visible within the street scene and would in my view, represent an incongruous and dominant addition adversely affecting the character and appearance of the area.
 8. The installation would, due to its siting on a prominent corner, be highly visible from a wide area, particularly from long range views along the relatively linear form of Gorton Road. Views of the structure would, to a degree, be broken up by the existing buildings and trees, however, the mast and its headframe would still be higher than these buildings and trees, and be visible as a result, causing harm to the townscape.
 9. The Council consider that the associated equipment cabinets will add unacceptable levels of visual clutter to the detriment of the area. The appellant argues that the equipment cabinets would be permitted development. The proposal before me relates to the whole installation and therefore the cabinets should also be considered in terms of their impact on the character and appearance of the area. As the proposal will include the removal of existing equipment cabinets and their replacement with cabinets of a similar size, albeit on the opposite corner, I do not find that there would be harm overall. The equipment cabinets would be largely set against the boundary landscaping and due to their height and scale, would not be overly prominent in the street-scene and would not cause harm.
 10. The appellant suggests that should it be deemed necessary, an alternative colour, other than the grey that is proposed, could be used. I do not find that the use of an alternative colour would overcome the harm I have identified.
 11. For the reasons set out above, the mast would cause significant unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. In this regard, it would be contrary to Policies SIE-1 and SIE-5 of the Stockport Core Strategy DPD (2011) which require, amongst other things, that development contributes to the creation of quality places, and that for telecommunications development, proposals do not have an unacceptable effect on the character or appearance of the area and that the siting and external appearance of apparatus is such as to minimise the visual impact.

12. The proposal would also be contrary to guidance contained in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) – Radio Telecommunications Development (2003) which outlines that operators should select a shape, height and design appropriate to the character of the area where the mast/antenna equipment is to be sited.

Living conditions

13. Despite the presence of a small parade of commercial units, the appeal site is located in a predominantly residential area. Some residential properties, such as those on Gorton Road and in Spey House, would look directly onto the proposed monopole, whilst others, such as those on Criterion Street, would have angled views or views from a greater distance.
14. I consider that due to its height, scale and appearance, the monopole would appear highly prominent when viewed from surrounding properties and cause harm to their outlook.
15. For the reasons set out above, the mast would cause harm to the living conditions of surrounding residents in relation to outlook. In this regard, it would be contrary to Policy SIE-5 of the Stockport Core Strategy DPD (2011) which requires, amongst other things, that telecommunications development proposals do not have an unacceptable effect on the visual amenities of residential occupiers.
16. The proposal would also be contrary to guidance contained in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan SPG – Radio Telecommunications Development (2003) which outlines that operators should select a site that would not be unduly conspicuous when viewed from a sensitive location such as a residential property.

Other Matters

17. The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (the Framework) outlines the significance of high-quality telecommunications infrastructure including in relation to being essential for economic growth and social well-being. The Framework also outlines that masts and sites should be kept to a minimum, thereby site sharing between operators, as in the appeal proposal, would be consistent with this requirement.
18. The appellant has highlighted how they consider the proposal complies with the Framework and have also submitted a copy of the joint correspondence from DCMS and MHCLG (March 2019) titled Collaborating for digital connectivity, and extracts from the Code of Best Practice (2016). Both these documents echo the content of the Framework. Such factors weigh strongly in favour of the proposal, however, for the reasons outlined above, I do not consider that either singularly or collectively, they outweigh the significant harm I have identified would be caused.
19. I have been referred to a number of previous appeal decisions where the weight given to such matters as mast sharing and the need for the development in terms of its contribution to the provision of telecommunications infrastructure outweighed any harm. I do not have full details of the proposals or their locations. However, each case must be decided upon its own merits.

20. I concur with the previous Inspectors that a balancing exercise should be carried out and the need to provide additional telecommunications coverage within the locality, and the Government's support for telecommunications infrastructure, are essential parts of that exercise. However, in this instance I do not consider that the operational and locational needs of the operator, or the fact that two operators will be accommodated within the installation, outweigh the significant harm I have identified from the siting of the monopole in this particular location.
21. The appellant has also referred to the use of the installation as part of the Emergency Services Network (ESN). I have not been provided with any evidence to demonstrate the significance of the current installation in this context or that there is a specific need or demand for the proposal to meet a deficiency in the ESN. I therefore give this argument little weight.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

22. I do not consider that the public benefits of the installation in terms of the enhancement of the telecommunications network, its contribution to economic growth and the operational and locational needs of the operators outweigh the significant harm that I have identified to the character and appearance of the area and the living conditions of surrounding residents.
23. For the reasons given above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, I therefore conclude that the appeal be dismissed.

A M Nilsson

INSPECTOR