



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 March 2020

by R Morgan MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/B4215/W/19/3243697

St Werburgh's Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 0XN

- 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 MBNL (EE Ltd & Hutchinson 3G UK Ltd) against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref 125032/FO/2019, dated 30 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is installation of a 20 metre high telecommunications mast with associated 7 no. equipment cabinets.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have used the description of development from the Council's decision notice and appellant's appeal form, which describes the proposal more succinctly than that used on the application form.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located on the western side of St Werburgh's Road in a predominately residential area of Chorlton. On approaching the appeal site from the south, the road is straight with a gradual incline as it rises up to cross the West Didsbury Metrolink tramline, where there is access to St Werburgh's Road station. On both sides of the road, the pavements are reasonably wide and are lined with trees and shrubs. This contributes to a spacious and green character in this suburban area.
5. The proposed 5G mast, which would be around 20 metres high, would replace an existing monopole with associated cabinets, which is located on the other side of St Werburgh's Road, slightly closer to the brow of the hill. Street furniture in the vicinity of the site includes street lights and 20mph speed restriction signs.
6. The existing mast and cabinets are sited at the back of the pavement, allowing them to blend in with the existing vegetation. This provides screening for the lower portion of the mast which, together with its dark colour and simple form,

- mean that it is not unduly prominent in the street-scene, despite being higher than the surrounding street lights.
7. The mast now proposed would be wider than the existing monopole and approximately 2.5 metres higher. It would also be of a different design, with a larger and more complex form at the top of the mast. I acknowledge the appellant's comments that the mast has been designed to be as discrete as possible, and that the proposed height is the minimum necessary to meet both the operators' requirements and the health requirements set by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) for 5G.
 8. However, the proposed siting adjacent to the kerbside, rather than at the back of the pavement, would mean that the proposed mast and cabinets would be visible in their entirety, and the location on a straight section of road would mean that, when approaching from the south, the equipment would be clearly seen from some distance away. Although there are street lights and road signs located close by, the proposed mast would be wider than them, as well as being significantly taller. As a result of these factors, the proposed mast would be prominent and obtrusive in the street-scene.
 9. The mast would be visible from Corkland Road and from a number of properties on that street, in particular Nos 97 - 101, which are the closest houses to the appeal site. Although the trees and vegetation at the back of these houses would help to provide some screening, the mast would be sited at a higher level than the houses, and due to its size and appearance, would appear as an alien and overbearing feature when viewed from those properties.
 10. Other nearby residential properties would be further away and set at an angle to the appeal site, so that views of the mast would be oblique, with existing vegetation providing some screening.
 11. I note the Council's concerns regarding the reduction in pavement width which would result from the proposal, close to the busy Metrolink station. However, the pavement is reasonably wide in this location, and the existing street trees and furniture already reduce its width to some extent. The Council has not provided any additional evidence regarding the levels of footfall in this location at peak times, and in the absence of any such information, I am not convinced that the reduction in pavement width would cause any significant problems for pedestrians and other users.
 12. Section 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) supports the development of high quality communications, which are essential for economic growth and social wellbeing. The proposed mast would enable 5G coverage which would provide significant benefits to the local community, in an area which the appellant says suffers from poor access to digital services.
 13. The equipment would be shared by two operators, EE Ltd and Hutchinson UK Ltd, and would provide services to the Emergency Services Network. This sharing of facilities would help to minimise the number of masts required in the area, so would meet guidance in paragraph 113 of the Framework.
 14. The proposal would upgrade and replace an existing facility, which would need to remain operational until the new equipment was ready to be switched on. I note that there are technical and ICNIRP restrictions which limit the options for

locating the proposed mast, both in relation to the existing facility and the next telecommunications cell. However, I am not convinced that other options do not exist which would enable the prominence and associated visual impact of the proposed development to be reduced, whilst providing the benefits of 5G for the local community.

15. I conclude that the benefits of the proposed development would be outweighed by the substantial visual harm to the area which would result from its siting, scale and design. The proposed development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Policy SP 1 of the Manchester Core Strategy 2012 which, amongst other considerations, requires new development to make a positive contribution to neighbourhoods of choice, including creating well designed places that enhance character, and protect and enhance the built environment. It would also conflict with Policy DM 1 of the same plan, regarding the impact on surrounding areas in terms of design and appearance, and consideration of siting, scale and form. There is further conflict with saved Policy DC17 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester 1995, which requires telecommunications development to be designed to minimise its impact on residential amenity.

Other Matters

16. I note the appellant's reference to the Letter to Chief Planning Officers: Planning for Growth, dated March 2011. However, this predates the Framework, which provides current national policy relating to telecommunications development.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

R. Morgan

INSPECTOR