
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 June 2020

by Andrew Bremford BSc (Hons) MRICS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/F5540/W/20/3245235

Staines Road Junction of Grovestile Waye, Staines Road, East Bedfont, Hounslow, Middlesex TW14 8DF

- 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 MNBL against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hounslow.
 - The application Ref 01054/GJ/P1, dated 30 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 24 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'the removal and replacement of the existing 11.7m monopole, with a 20m monopole, 12 no. antenna apertures, equipment cabinets, the removal of the existing 11.7m monopole, 3 no. antennas, redundant equipment cabinets and development ancillary thereto'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Bedfont Green Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site lies adjacent to Staines Road, close to the junction of Staines Road and Grovestile Waye, within the Bedfont Green Conservation Area (the Conservation Area). The site is surrounded by green open space and some mature trees.
4. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (paragraph 184). The Framework is clear that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (paragraph 193). It goes on to advise that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated asset, should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 194) and where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated asset, this harm

should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (paragraph 196).

6. The Conservation Area itself is located along the Staines Road. It is centred on the historic core of Bedfont Village and its significance derives from its special architectural and historic interest. The Conservation Area Appraisal (November 2018) identifies seven distinct character areas. The appeal site lies on the boundary of two of these areas, namely 'Staines Road East' and 'Grovestile Waye'.
7. The Staines Road East area is characterised by a long, regular greensward, essentially a particularly wide grass verge between Staines Road and a residential access street. The greensward is of great importance in defining the core green link running through the Conservation Area, and for maintaining the semi-rural character of the houses' setting. The greensward is flanked on the north side, opposite the appeal site, by a row of early post Second World War two storey semi-detached houses.
8. The Grovestile Waye character area extends southwards from Staines Road and is a particularly good example of mid twentieth century Middlesex County Council housing. It is primarily a residential mix of early post Second World War, one and two storey terraces, with Arts and Crafts style steep, tall, hipped roofs bookended by gable fronts, in red brick. Moreover, it consists of an extensive residential Garden Suburb style linear greensward. It also has a library, a grade II listed milestone and the East Bedfont War Memorial just south of the Staines Road adjacent to Grovestile Waye in proximity to the site of the proposed development. The war memorial commemorates servicemen who died in the service of their country during the First World War and those who died in the Second World War and is a key monument within the conservation area given its architectural, artistic and historical importance.
9. The proposal is to erect a 20 metre high monopole and associated ground level equipment cabinets, designed to accommodate 5G services in the area. The principle of using the site for a variety of communications equipment has previously been established, with a 11.85 metre high monopole and a number of cabinets currently on the site. The existing monopole and redundant cabinets would be removed as part of this proposal. The proposed monopole would be positioned approximately 12.5 metres from the existing monopole.
10. The existing curb forming the rear edge of the pavement at the site would be removed to accommodate the construction of a concrete plinth. The proposed ground level equipment cabinets would be low level and would be located to the rear edge of the pavement to facilitate pedestrian access for all. Thus, taking into account their location and scale, the cabinets would not have an adverse impact upon the street-scene, therefore would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Moreover, for the same reasons, they would not have an adverse effect on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
11. The defining characteristic of buildings in the vicinity of the site is that of low-rise predominantly residential development. The vertical features within the street-scene include street lights, road signs and mature trees. Within these surroundings the proposed monopole would extend to more than twice the height of most dwellings in the area. Although the proposed monopole is described as having a slim profile it would be 8.15 metres taller

and somewhat greater in diameter than the existing monopole. Moreover, it would be considerably taller and wider in diameter than the street lights. Thus, it would not be similar in vertical appearance to street lighting columns or any other local structures and would be significantly taller than most of the mature trees in the vicinity of the appeal site. As a result, the proposed monopole would be an incongruously tall feature and jarring addition to the street-scene; its sheer scale would dominate the low-rise built form of the area including the war memorial. For these reasons, the proposed monopole would have an adverse impact upon the street-scene. Therefore, it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.

12. In the context of the surrounding greensward and the nearby war memorial, as a result of its significant scale and exposed location, the proposed monopole would represent an excessively prominent feature within the core green link running through the Conservation Area. Although there are some trees in proximity to the site, by virtue of its height it would be readily visible above them and would thus be conspicuous in the skyline when viewed from the surrounding area, and especially evident in views from the east and west along Staines Road and in views looking north along Grovestile Way. It would be an unsympathetic and inharmonious feature that would draw the eye and relate poorly to the historic environment of the Conservation Area.
13. Accordingly, for the above reasons, the proposed monopole would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Having regard to the Framework the harm to the significance of the Conservation Area as a heritage asset is less than substantial. The less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
14. Paragraph 112 of the Framework is clear that planning decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology such as 5G. I have no reason to question the appellant's contention that the proposal is required to improve services and create 5G coverage in the area. I also recognise the proposed installation has been designed to be shared between two operators. These factors weigh in the proposal's favour.
15. The appellant says that the monopole's proposed height is necessary to ensure that interference is avoided, the topography of the landscape does not have an unacceptable impact upon mobile signal quality, is able to support the 5G antenna and other apparatus, and to satisfy the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection guidelines. Whilst I have no reason to doubt the latter point, the Framework (at paragraph 115) sets out that applications for electronic communications development should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development, including, for a new installation evidence that the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure has been explored.
16. I have had regard to the appellant's Supplementary Information which states (on page 9) *'in order to keep the number of base stations to a minimum, the use of existing sites is considered to provide the optimum solution and accordingly the proposed site upgrade should be viewed positively. As such, no alternative locations were sought in this instance.'* Thus, there is no evidence before me to demonstrate that alternative sites were considered for the proposed infrastructure contrary to paragraph 115 of the Framework.

Consequently, I cannot rule out the possibility that an alternative site could yet be found for the proposed infrastructure. Given the sensitive location of the appeal site, and the effect of the proposal on the Conservation Area, it is important that other options which could lead to a more sensitive solution are fully appraised.

17. Additionally, whilst I acknowledge the benefits of the upgraded installation, including the seemingly endless possibilities afforded by the provision of 5G referred to by the appellant, these would largely benefit the customers of the two companies sharing the monopoly rather than the wider public.
18. Although guidance in the Framework supports the growth of communications infrastructure, it also places great emphasis on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. I have considered the public benefits of the proposal put before me by the appellant, however these would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the historic environment.
19. For the collective reasons outlined above, the proposal conflicts with Policies CC1, CC2 and CC4 of the London Borough of Hounslow Local Plan (2015-2030) which, amongst other things, seek to ensure development proposals conserve the Borough's heritage; respond to the wider context and history of an area; respond sensitively to the site and its characteristics; and take opportunities to enhance heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. It would also conflict with the provisions of the Framework which seek to ensure development proposals are sympathetic to local character and history, and conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Andrew Bremford

INSPECTOR