
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 November 2020

by Graeme Robbie BA(Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Q5300/W/19/3243558

Alexandra Business Centre, 52-52A Alexandra Road, Enfield EN3 7EH

- 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 Mr Peter Hickson against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Enfield.
 - The application Ref 19/01529/FUL, dated 25 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 20 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is alterations and additions to existing rooftop communications installation incorporating an upgrade to the existing rooftop communications apparatus consisting of 12 replacement antenna and 4 dishes on a new 8m roof structure at a max height of 14.5m AGL with grillage along with ancillary apparatus and 8 No. new cabinets at main roof level of 7m AGL.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. Although different versions of the Council's officer report were initially submitted by the main parties, the correct version has subsequently been identified, agreed and confirmed. I have also adopted a revised appeal site postcode in the banner heading above as it is clear that the postcode provided on the initial planning application form related to a different address elsewhere within the borough. In both matters I have determined accordingly.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effects of the proposed development upon:
 - The character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - The living conditions of occupiers of nearby residential properties, with particular regard to noise.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site, the building at No52-52A, is one of three broadly similar light-industrial buildings along the eastern side of Alexandra Road, with further industrial buildings and uses behind. On the opposite side of the road lie the rear gardens of residential properties on Brookfields.

5. The existing telecommunications installation comprises of a discretely located and scaled pair of slim monopole antennae located towards the rear corner of the brick-built, flat roofed building together with roof mounted equipment cabinets. The raised parapet walls around the edge of the building's flat roof provide an element of screening around the base of the antennae and associated paraphernalia. These factors combine to ensure that the existing installation is barely visible. Where visible, the installation and cabinets are unobtrusive and discrete.
6. Whilst located in largely the same position on the roof as the existing installation, the proposed replacement tower would be both taller and substantially more bulky. The proposed frame and tower would rise incongruously above the roofline in an incongruous manner that would disrupt the appeal building's relatively unadorned rooftop. From distance in both directions along Alexandra Road, and from the rears of the nearby residential properties, the proposed installation would be a dominant feature on the appeal building's roofline and also within the wider streetscene.
7. I acknowledge that industrial buildings and uses on the eastern side of Alexandra Road provide the immediate backdrop to the proposed installation and as such it would not necessarily be unexpected to see rooftop protrusions in such a context. However, the appeal building and those to either side of it have a simple, clear and consistent roofline, whilst flues, chimneys and extract ducts are not commonplace. In this context, the proposed installation would be an incongruously dominant and disruptive feature.
8. Furthermore, whilst the area to the east of Alexandra Road is industrial in character, the area immediately opposite is residential. The rears of properties on Brookfields face directly towards the appeal site at reasonably close proximity. Although there are intervening garden structures and fences, the proposed replacement installation would be clearly and directly visible above these structures and above the appeal building's rooftop parapet wall. Although the appeal site lies within an industrial setting, the proximity of residential properties cannot be ignored.
9. The appeal building, its immediately neighbouring buildings and the land around them are no things of beauty. They do, however, share a simple, relatively unadorned and uninterrupted roofline, within which the existing installation is a discrete and unobtrusive presence. By contrast, the proposed installation would be an intrusive, incongruous and dominant addition to an otherwise simple and non-descript building. It would incongruously disrupt the otherwise consistent roofline and fail to respond adequately or appropriately to the residential dimension of the area's mixed character. As such, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and would be contrary to Development Management Document (DMD) policy DMD37 and London Plan (LP) policy 7.4. Together, these policies seek to secure high quality development that capitalises on opportunities for improvement and has regard to its surroundings. The proposal would, for the reasons I have set out, fail to do so.

Living conditions

10. At present there are four rooftop cabinets serving the existing installation, a number which would increase to seven with the appeal proposal. The Council's concern is not that the proposal would cause noise disturbance to nearby residents, but that it has not been evidenced that it would not.
11. The appellant acknowledges that the cabinets would need to be cooled at certain times if ambient temperatures were sufficiently high. From this, it can reasonably be inferred that such instances would generally be during daytime, when the nearby industrial units would also generally be operational. It was evident during my visit to the site that the activities carried on in the industrial units generate background noise which is very much part of the area's noise environment.
12. It is not clear however, to what extent such cooling equipment would be required in time periods when surrounding industrial uses were not operational, such as into the evening and night. Nor is it clear what levels of noise may be generated by the equipment associated with the cabinets. However, the cabinets would be located partially behind the rooftop parapet wall and some distance, across a road from the nearest residential receptors. I am satisfied that such matters could reasonably be dealt with by the use of suitably worded planning conditions and, as such, the proposal would not be in conflict with DMD policy DMD68 or Core Strategy (CS) Core Policy 32 (CP32).

Other Matters

13. The Framework recognises that high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Proposals to support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation 5G technology should be supported and the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures should be encouraged.
14. The proposal would allow 5G coverage to be rolled out whilst maintaining existing 3G and 4G coverage and being capable of accommodating future technological upgrades and advancements. It would also allow two operators to share a site. I do not underestimate the importance of high-quality electronic communications network coverage, nor the changing patterns of use of such networks from telephone calls to data-intensive usage such as video streaming or the social and economic benefits and well-being that follows. The appellant refers to a range of documents, publications and written statements to this end. I therefore give these matters significant weight.
15. A number of appeal decisions going back to 2005 have been cited by the appellant regarding the value of connectivity and the contribution that connectivity facilitated by telecommunications installations makes to economic and social well-being. A number of the examples relate to streetworks and monopole installations, or cite street features, landscaping and vegetation as mitigating factors, none of which apply in the current instance. Nor has it been argued that the appeal proposal is to compensate for the loss of an existing installation. From the available evidence however, it is clear to me that the given examples are not directly comparable with the appeal proposal. I do not therefore consider the limited detail of the given examples to be directly comparable and I give them only limited weight in my consideration of this matter.

16. There a small number of other development plan policies referred to in the refusal reasons that I have not referred to above. However, having regard to the content and aims of those policies, I do not consider them to be directly relevant to a proposal of the scale and nature proposed in this instance and they have not therefore been determinative in this instance.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out, and having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Graeme Robbie

INSPECTOR