



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 5 January 2021

by Mr Martin Allen BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/W/20/3256096

Junction of Crown Woods Way and Bexley Road, Greenwich, London, SE9 2PR

- 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 against the decision of Royal Borough of Greenwich.
 - The application Ref 20/0424/F, dated 6 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 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.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises a grassed verge, directly adjacent to Crown Woods Way. The verge forms part of a larger, open grassed and landscaped area, behind which is an existing telecommunication mast with associated cabinets and a petrol filling station. Near to the site is a road intersection, with open aspects to its corners which create a distinct sense of spaciousness to the locale. Built development is set back some distance from the intersection, further contributing to the spaciousness of the area. The area is not devoid of vertical structures, most notably there are two telecommunication masts, one bordering the grassed area adjacent to the appeal site which rises to just below 12 metres (m) and a taller one on the other side of the highway. There are also a number of trees in the vicinity, as well as streetlights which rise to approximately 10m in height.
4. The proposed monopole, at 20m in height, would be a substantial feature, in the region of twice the height of the nearby streetlights and trees and significantly taller than the existing mast near to the proposed location. In this respect, it would be conspicuously out of scale with existing features. Its prominence would be exacerbated by its proximity to the highway, being sited on the verge directly alongside it, as well as that from many vantage points it would be viewed extending above existing features intruding into the open sky. It would thus be a highly discordant feature, intrusive in the streetscene and

harmfully at odds with the existing development in the vicinity. I acknowledge that there is a mast on the other side of the highway which is taller than the existing one near to the proposed location, however that one is viewed against the backdrop of tall trees, with associated cabinets at the back of the footway against a wall. The proposed mast would not benefit from such an immediate context, with the much more open nature of the appeal site offering little in the way of screening or softening. In this respect, the mast would be highly visible and conspicuous, particularly when approaching from various directions along the highway.

5. In addition to the proposed mast, the scheme includes several ancillary equipment cabinets which would be located alongside, also within the grass verge. Whilst some cabinets at the location of the existing mast would be removed, one would remain. However, the existing structures are positioned further back from the road and are substantially less prominent. The new cabinets would result in a greater number of structures present at the site and would be sited at a noticeably more prominent location, stretching along the length of the verge for a considerable distance. They would be strident and stark features due to their position, size, and number. This would result in an unacceptably cluttered appearance, which would not be mitigated by the presence of the surrounding street furniture.
6. I note that the appellant seeks to redevelop the site, rather than seek a new one. However, for the reasons given above, the new development would be sited so as to be markedly more obvious than the existing apparatus that is to be removed. Furthermore, the application of colour to the mast would do little to ameliorate its impact. As such, these matters do little to persuade me of the acceptability of the proposal.
7. Accordingly, I find that the proposal would be unacceptably harmful to the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with policies DH1 and DH(c) of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014), as well as policies 7.4 and 7.6 of the London Plan (2016). Together, and amongst other things, these seek to ensure that development positively contributes to the built environment, that telecommunications development is sited so as to minimise its visual impact, that development makes a positive contribution to the character of a place and that structures are of a scale that enhances the public realm.

Other Matters

8. I have been provided with a previous appeal decision, for a different site, which it is contended is similar to the appeal site. However, from the limited details that are before me, I find that the context of the two sites are sufficiently different that no useful comparisons can be drawn between them. There is also reference to a mast of the same height, but not of the same width, being permitted development. Nonetheless, planning permission is required for the appeal scheme. In any event, it is with the specific circumstances of this appeal proposal with which I have found harm.

Planning Balance

9. The proposal would support the delivery of high-quality communications through the upgrading of existing infrastructure to facilitate additional coverage and capacity, including 4G and 5G technology. The National Planning Policy

Framework sets out that advanced, high-quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being, as well as that planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections. Thus, the benefits from improved digital, high-quality communications attract considerable weight.

10. Information has been provided in respect of alternative sites for the location of the proposal, all of which have been discounted. However, the list of alternate sites is less than exhaustive. Moreover, this does little to persuade me that the proposed location is acceptable given the harm I have identified. I am also conscious that the existing mast would be removed following installation of the proposal, ensuring there is no proliferation of masts.
11. In my judgement, the harm to the character and appearance of the area would be significant and weighs heavily against the proposal. As such, even when taken cumulatively, I find that the above matters are not sufficient to outweigh this harm.

Conclusion

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

Martin Allen

INSPECTOR