
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 January 2021

by John Morrison BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/20/3258590

Stotfold Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 4JS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)
 - The appeal is made by MBNL (EE UK LTD & H3G UK LTD) against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00932/TD, dated 4 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 12 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a 20m high slimline tower supporting 12 no antenna apertures with the installation of 7 no ground-based equipment cabinets and ancillary development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is the corner of a flat grass field adjacent to a double roundabout road junction. A cemetery lies on the opposite side of Stotfold Road (to the west). To the south east is the edge of the built up area of Letchworth. There is a small amenity area which includes two wooden benches to the front of the appeal site, surrounded by trees and hedges. Stotfold Road is the main route into the western side of Letchworth. There is an existing telecommunications mast on Stotfold Road, directly outside the access point for the cemetery. Stotfold Road is lit by street lampstands in the vicinity of the appeal site.
4. The proposed pole would be substantial in height. At 20 metres, it would be twice the height of the lampstands that line the local roads and thus noticeably out of scale with any other slim profile local feature. It would become a focal point in its own right and therefore something of an overly obvious industrial type structure set in a predominantly rural context on the edge of a residential area. Its visual influence would be very wide given the general flatness of the local landscape, an effect exacerbated by the noticeably wider profile sections at the top. The tree cover around the road junction would offer some screening

and natural backdrop but their effect would be very localised and seasonal and their stature in any event would not sufficiently compete with the pole to acceptably reduce its visual impact.

5. The evidence suggests that the scheme before me is for replacement apparatus but no indication that the existing pole on Stotfold Road will be removed. In any case, the proposed pole would be noticeably taller even than that and with a more bulky, open profile and substantially less sleek top than the existing which itself is also sat in amongst a row of street lampstands. The appeal site is the edge of a green field, largely bereft of built form or other infrastructure. In addition, the area to the front of the appeal site is currently used as a small seating and amenity area. The appeal of which would be significantly reduced by this overbearing structure.
6. The ancillary cabinets, in terms of their intended finish, number and size, would be able to sit closer to ground level and thus be largely unobtrusive. I also note that the pole would be finished in a neutral colour, similar to existing street furniture. Be these matters as they may, they would not be sufficient to reduce the harm the height and design of the pole as a whole would cause, for the reasons I have set out.
7. The appeal scheme would therefore, with the above in mind, be inappropriate in terms of its siting and design. This would render the scheme unacceptable under the prior approval requirements of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO¹.

Other Matters

8. I see from the evidence that the appellant does undertake a careful site selection process albeit their assessment seems to be more geared towards optimising coverage than considering the visual context. In addition, I have not seen a sufficiently comprehensive assessment that dismisses other sites in favour of this one. In any case, the dismissal of alternative locations does not mean the erection of the pole at the appeal site would be acceptable and not give rise to harm. I am also mindful that the establishment of a support network for the roll out of 5G is an important priority for improving telecommunications in the UK. That said, I remain unconvinced, for the above reasons, that the appeal site is the right location for the pole proposed. I am not therefore led to allowing the appeal for this reason.

Conclusion

9. For the reasons I have explained above, the appeal is dismissed.

John Morrison

INSEPECTOR

¹ Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)