



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 May 2021

by Graeme Robbie BA(Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W5780/W/20/3260446

Cleves Walk, Ilford, Redbridge, London IG6 2NQ

- 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 the Council of the London Borough of Redbridge.
 - The application Ref 0545/20, dated 13 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 6 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a 20m monopole, 12 no. antenna apertures, equipment cabinets, the removal of the existing 14.7m monopole, 3 no. antennas, redundant equipment cabinets and development ancillary thereto.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effects of the proposed development upon:
 - The character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - Pedestrian and highway safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site is a pavement location on Cleves Walk, close to its junction with Fencepiece Road and New Road. There is already an existing monopole installation and five equipment cabinets in a similar pavement location on the other side of a gated car park access to the adjacent public house. The existing monopole and equipment cabinets are located at the back edge of the pavement directly adjacent to a low brick wall which marks the perimeter of the pub's car park. The remaining pavement width directly in front of the existing installation is restricted by a line of bollards and a streetlight column.
4. The character of the area around the appeal site is mixed; immediately around it are commercial influences of the pub and a nearby parade of shops, but with residential above the shops, and housing on Cleves Walk, Fencepiece Road and Katherine Gardens, there is a predominant residential character beyond the site's immediate surrounds. The entrance to the shop unit's service yards lies opposite the appeal site.
5. The replacement monopole would, at 20 metres in height, be substantially taller than the existing monopole. At around 5.3 metres taller than the existing mast, the Council are not incorrect in stating that it would be over a third

taller. This would not, as the appellant asserts, be a slightly higher mast. It would be significantly and substantially so, the extent of which would be further compounded by its much thicker base and the larger antennae array situated between 13.86m and 19.95m above ground level.

6. Notwithstanding the nearby three storey commercial parade, the public house's forecourt and car park is an open expanse. Whilst the proposed installation would be relocated around 20m further east along Cleves Walk, the car park would nevertheless be a significant, and open, feature against which the monopole would be seen as a harmfully strident vertical element. Although in longer views along Fencepiece Road from the north and south the installation's revised siting would allow the commercial parade and public house to provide a slightly greater degree of additional screening and lower to mid-levels, its greater height would offset any slight gain in terms of screening from the existing built environment. The increased height and bulk of the monopole would, however, be largely unscreened and more keenly felt from closer views across the open car park and junction, and in longer views along a considerable length of New Road.
7. Moreover, the screening effect of the commercial parade is, in my judgement, overstated by the appellant. Notwithstanding the proposed installation's revised position about 20 metres further east than the existing, its additional height would render it visible above the commercial parade in longer viewpoints along Fencepiece Road from the north. However, the additional height of the appeal proposal would be more clearly felt from nearby residential streets such as Cleves Walk to the east of the site, and Katherine Gardens to the north, where from the latter of which it would be a significant visible structure seen above intervening roofs.
8. I acknowledge that there is a substantial amount of street furniture and clutter around this signalised junction. Traffic and crossing lights, pedestrian barriers, streetlights and road signs, as well as the commercial signage at the public house are all visual factors in the setting of the existing and proposed installations. However, with the exception of the streetlights, most of this clutter is at a lower, pedestrian level.
9. With regard to the streetlight columns, the proposed monopole would be very considerably taller than the prevailing heights of nearby streetlights. Although the closest column on Cleves Walk is somewhat mundane in its appearance, the design of streetlight columns along the other three approaches to the nearby junction is a pleasantly distinctive wishbone bracket style design mounted on slender columns. Despite the verticality of the streetlighting columns, the difference between them and the proposed monopole in visual terms would be stark and incongruous and would highlight, rather than mask, the harmful visual impact of the proposal's additional bulk and height.
10. Turning to the proposed cabinets, I acknowledge that there would only be a short period of time, during commissioning of the proposed monopole, where both sets of cabinets would be present. Nevertheless, the proposal would result in an increase in the number of cabinets. Furthermore, unlike the existing cabinets which are located towards the rear edge of the pavement adjacent to the low wall surrounding the pub car park, they would be far more significant features. Thus, their proposed positioning within the pavement would add substantial clutter to the street scene as they would be essentially

‘free-standing’ cabinets within the pavement. The proposal may facilitate a net benefit in terms of the available pavement width when compared with the existing installation, but this would not overcome the harm identified above.

11. Whilst Redbridge Local Plan (RLP) policy LP25 is supportive of telecommunications development, that support is subject to a range of factors. For the reasons I have set out above, the proposed installation would be an intrusive feature within the street scene and, notwithstanding the presence of the existing installation, would be of a scale, height and appearance that would dominate the local surroundings and disrupt the pleasantly low key mixed character of the area. For the same reasons, the proposal would also fail to secure the standards of high-quality design set out by RLP policy LP26. The proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area as such would be contrary to both RLP policy LP25 and LP25.
12. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) recognises the importance of advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure to economic growth and social well-being. It goes on to state that planning decisions should support the expansion of networks, including next generation mobile technology such as 5G. The number of masts and sites for installations should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of customers and efficient operation of the network, and existing masts, buildings and other structures should be utilised. Where new sites are required, such as for new 5G networks, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.
13. The suitability or availability of alternative sites has not been disputed by the Council, and I have no other reason to doubt the appellant’s submissions in this respect. The proposal does not directly replace the existing installation, but its positioning close to the existing installation is such that it would not increase the amount of telecommunications installations in this mixed but predominantly residential area where the existing monopole and cabinets have been part of the area for a considerable period of time. The proposed monopole would replace the existing installation, albeit at a different location, as a means to facilitate the roll out of 5G services as well as continuing to allow the sharing of facilities with between existing providers.
14. In line with the provisions of the Framework, these are all factors to which I give substantial weight in support of the proposal. However, on balance these factors are not sufficient to overcome the harm that I have identified as arising from the increased height and bulk of the monopole and the plethora of poorly sited cabinets and the impact that these would have on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposal would be inconsistent with the principles of RLP policies LP25 and LP26 in seeking to ensure high-quality and appropriate design in relation to telecommunications development and, development more generally.

Pedestrian and highway safety

15. The pavement at the location of the appeal site is not as encumbered by the presence of bollards as it is in the vicinity of the existing installation. On the basis of the plan¹ attached to the Cotswold Transport Planning statement submitted in response, it would seem clear that the proposal would allow

¹ Drwg No: SK01 – Footway width Dimensions

greater width between cabinets / wall than the existing arrangement between cabinets / bollards.

16. However, the 'general arrangement' plan² submitted with the application shows one of the cabinets to be sited between two pavement bollards adjacent to the emergency access gate across Cleves Walk. From my assessment of the indicated position of this cabinet and the existing bollards, any reduction of the gap between the bollards arising from the siting of one of the cabinets would render the increases in width described above largely meaningless.
17. Furthermore, their siting adjacent to the kerb line and carriageway, rather than adjacent to the brick wall at the rear edge of the pavement, would present a substantial barrier to crossing the road and re-joining the pavement at this point. Although not a particularly busy road, the proposed monopole and cabinets would, when taken together with existing bollards and gates, present significant impediments to the safe movement of pedestrians and would not be conducive to promoting and encouraging walking and an attractive or safe public realm. As such, the proposal would be contrary to RLP policy LP26.

Conclusion

18. There would be economic and social benefits arising from the upgrading of the existing telecommunications infrastructure to cater for the roll out of 5G technology as well as accommodating existing 2G/3G and 4G technology. As such, the proposal would be consistent with the Framework's recognition of the importance of high-quality communications to economic growth and social well-being.
19. However, for the reasons I have set out above, the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area and would also trade one impediment to safe pedestrian movement with another. Taking all these matters together, and having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Graeme Robbie

INSPECTOR

² Drwg No: 002 Site Location Plan