



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 June 2021

by John Felgate BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 28th June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/D5120/W/20/3261263

**Land at the junction of Cambridge Avenue and Falconwood Parade,
Welling DA16 2PL**

- 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.
 - The appeal is made by Mobile Broadband Network Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Bexley.
 - The application Ref 20/01345/GPDO8, dated 10 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a 15.0m AGL Phase 8 monopole, with wraparound cabinet at the base, and associated ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matter

2. The appeal site lies at the junction of Cambridge Avenue with Falconwood Parade. On the eastern corner of this junction is an existing, 10.0m high monopole telecommunications mast, and an array of low-level cabinets, operated by the appellant company. The appeal proposal is to erect a new 15.0m mast, with three clusters of external antennas and four additional street-level cabinets, on the same street corner, a few metres to the north of the existing installation.
3. In their appeal statement, the appellants suggest that the intention is for this proposed new mast to replace the existing one on the same corner. However, that suggestion is contradicted by the plans and documents submitted at the application stage. Both the Proposed Site Plan and the Proposed Elevation indicate that the existing mast, and all but one of the existing cabinets, are proposed to remain, alongside the new mast and other new equipment. In addition, both the 'Site Specific Supplementary Information' and the covering letter dated 11 June 2020 state that, in order to maintain all current services, the intention is to retain the existing site, *"without the removal of any existing equipment"*. As far as I can see, there is nothing in the original application documents that supports the appellants' subsequent contention that the existing mast would be removed.
4. Consequently, the suggestion made now, that the proposed development would replace rather than supplement the existing installation, is at odds with the proposal in the original application. It might possibly be that the reason for

this is because the appellants' intentions have changed, but in the absence of any explanation or acknowledgement to that effect, this is not a matter on which I can speculate. In the circumstances, I have dealt with the appeal on the basis of the proposal that was before the Council.

Reasons for decision

5. The appeal site lies within the pleasant residential suburb of Falconwood. The surrounding streets, including Cambridge Avenue, comprise mainly detached and semi-detached housing. Falconwood Parade acts as a small neighbourhood centre, with a row of shops, a small local park and a church. The triangular road junction where these land uses meet forms something of a focal point for the locality.
6. From the supporting information submitted, it is clear that there is a need for new or upgraded telecommunications infrastructure in the area, to provide increased capacity and to enable the continuing roll-out of 5G services. The development now proposed would contribute to meeting these needs, in accordance with national policies. The need for the proposal, and the benefits that it would provide, do not appear to be in dispute.
7. The proposed new mast would have a slim profile, and a neat, streamlined appearance. Whilst its 15m height would exceed that of most other nearby structures, the mast would be seen against the backdrop of the surrounding buildings and trees, and in the context of the slightly elevated levels of pedestrian and vehicular activity associated with the adjacent shops and facilities. The new cabinets would be simple, functional items, set on the back edge of the footway, against an existing boundary wall. Judged in isolation therefore, the appearance of the proposed development would not be unacceptable in this location.
8. However, the development would not be seen in isolation. For the reasons already explained, it appears to me that the proposal before me is to include the retention of the appellants' own existing 10m mast and four of the existing cabinets. The new mast and cabinets now proposed would be viewed directly alongside and between these existing features, and thus would appear as part of a larger combined group. In addition, they would also be seen in the context of another existing telecommunications mast, with five further cabinets, which stand directly opposite the appeal site, on the western corner of the same junction. Viewed all together, there would then be a total of three masts, all of between 10 – 15m, plus 13 equipment cabinets, all clustered within a few metres of each other, around a single minor road junction.
9. Cumulatively therefore, the proposed development would give rise to an unusually extensive accumulation of telecommunications-related street furniture, in what is no more than a relatively small-scale local centre. To my mind the resulting clutter would appear disproportionate and incongruous, and would amount to an unacceptable visual intrusion in the street scene, harmful to the area's character and appearance.
10. In these respects, the development would fail to accord with the most relevant planning policies, including Policy CS07 of the Bexley Core Strategy (the BCS), adopted in February 2012, and Policy ENV39 of the Bexley Unitary Development Plan (BUDP), adopted April 2004. These policies seek to protect and enhance the Borough's built environment and to ensure that development

in the Welling area is sympathetic to local character. The lack of accordance with these policies reinforces my view that the development would be visually unacceptable for the reasons that I have identified.

11. I appreciate that BUDP Policy G25 and the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) give general support to necessary telecommunications enhancements. However, Policy G25 also requires that such developments minimise any adverse effects on local character and visual amenity. The present proposal fails to comply in this respect. In addition NPPF paragraph 113 encourages that the number of masts and sites be kept to a minimum, and in the present case it has not been adequately demonstrated that the appeal proposal achieves that aim.
12. I have had regard to all the other submissions, but none changes my conclusion that the development's visual impact on the street scene would be unacceptably harmful. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

J Felgate

INSPECTOR