



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 3 November 2021

by Paul Martinson BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 December 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P4225/W/21/3279970

Land to the rear of Gale Street Bus Stop, Whitworth Road, Rochdale OL12 6EH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
 - The appeal is made by Mr Will Osbourne of MBNL (EE (UK) Ltd and H3G (UK) Ltd) against the decision of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/00264/TELE, dated 22 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 15 April 2021.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as: 'installation of a 20m high monopole, electronic communications mast to support 12 no. antenna and 2no. dishes with wrap-around cabinet at base. Additionally, 9 no. radio equipment cabinets to be installed in two blocks at the base of the mast'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Consistent with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (GPDO), under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A, Paragraph A.3(4) I have assessed the proposal on the basis of its siting and appearance.

Planning Policy

3. The principle of development is established by the GPDO and the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO do not require regard be had to the development plan. I have nevertheless had regard to the policies of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) only in so far as they are a material consideration relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is located alongside a bus stop at the back edge of the pavement along Whitworth Road; a wide, straight and busy thoroughfare leading to Rochdale town centre. A wooded area lies immediately adjacent,

which slopes down from the appeal site, and is designated as a Greenspace Corridor by Policy G/8 of the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan (2006) (UDP). The canopies of some of the trees overhang the appeal site. The Greenspace Corridor is reasonably substantial and its natural, verdant appearance provides a pleasant contrast to the otherwise more urban nature of Whitworth Road.

6. Street furniture is common in the vicinity and there is a regular pattern of lighting columns to either side of the road, which due to its straight alignment, are visible for some distance in either direction. The surrounding buildings are a mix of two storey terraced dwellings and commercial premises and three storey flats, all of which are located on the opposite side of the road to the appeal site.
7. Despite the height of the nearby buildings, the proposed height of the monopole mast at 20 metres would mean that it would become the tallest structure in the vicinity. As a result, the structure would appear clearly discordant in views from the adjacent Greenspace Corridor, from which it would be seen as an incongruous utilitarian structure, at odds with natural character. The mast would rise well above the surrounding trees with the harm to views within the Greenspace Corridor exacerbated by the comparatively elevated nature of the appeal site. The proposal would therefore significantly detract from the visual quality of the area.
8. Whilst the structure would be seen alongside the adjacent lighting columns, at 8 metres high, they would only serve to emphasise its significant height. As a result of its height, the mast would become a dominant vertical feature of the streetscene, at odds with the scale of its surrounding built form. This would be experienced by motorists and pedestrians for some distance along this well-used road.
9. The proposal would be sited extremely close to a semi-mature ash tree which contributes positively to the character area. I accept that there are circumstances where hand-digging can avoid adverse effects to the wellbeing of trees. However, in the absence of any detailed information regarding potential effects of construction, I cannot conclude that the wellbeing of that tree would be preserved (nor that the adverse effects on character and appearance would be limited to those assessed above).
10. I note that various alternative sites have been assessed and discounted for different reasons. Nevertheless, in several cases sites have been discounted on the basis of negative impacts on local character; which is equally the case here as reasoned above. The evidence before me is insufficient to demonstrate that this particular proposal, whether in respect of its siting or appearance, is the sole or preferential means of achieving the benefits identified previously. I have had regard to the support in the Framework infrastructure and the expansion of networks. However, I must balance this against the encouragement for equipment to be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate, as well as the Framework's aims for the achievement of well-designed places for the long term.
11. I have taken into account that this is a proposal for two providers to share a mast, whilst I have also had regard to the lack of 5G coverage in the area. Both these points weigh in favour of the scheme. I note that mast sharing has been considered and that the proposal has come forward due to having to vacate an existing rooftop site.

12. I conclude that the siting and appearance of the proposed monopole would be significantly harmful to the character and appearance of the area and that the harm identified would not be outweighed by the need for that installation. The proposal would be contrary to Policies P1, P3 and DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy (2016) (the RCS) which, amongst other things, seek to secure high quality design that integrates with, and takes account of its surroundings. It would also conflict with Policy G6 of the RCS which, in part, seeks to protect the visual amenity of green spaces. There would also be conflict with Policy G/8 of the UDP which requires that any new development permitted within or adjacent to Greenspace Corridors is of a design and uses materials appropriate to the character and setting of the corridor.
13. The proposal would conflict with the provisions of the Framework, specifically paragraph 115 which requires new telecommunications sites to be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate; and paragraph 130 which, amongst other things, requires proposals to add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive, and sympathetic to local character.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

Paul Martinson

INSPECTOR