



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 January 2022

by A.Graham BA(hons) MAued IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/G2625/W/21/3275214

St Vedast House, St Vedast Street, Norwich NR1 1BT

- 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 (EE (UK) Ltd & H3G (UK) Ltd) against the decision of Norwich City Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00838/F, dated 21 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 23 November 2020.
 - The proposed development is for the installation of 6no. antenna apertures, 4no. 600mm dishes and 8no. equipment cabinets at rooftop level, the installation of 1no. meter cabinet at ground level along with development ancillary thereto.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the Norwich City Centre Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. St Vedast House is a modern, six-storey office building that occupies the corner of St Vedast Street and Rose Lane, in the Norwich City Centre Conservation Area (the CA).
4. The CA designation covers the whole of the city of Norwich within the medieval city walls. The Council's Norwich City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) identifies the site as being within Character Area 7, Prince of Wales, which is summarised as a predominantly commercial area that was developed in the Victorian era and partly subject to late 20th century redevelopment. The characteristics of the CA is largely defined by the concentration of attractive 19th century buildings in the vicinity of Prince of Wales Road, a number of which are identified as Locally Listed buildings. The quality of historic buildings, the interrelationship of streets and spaces, and the legibility of changes over time within the Prince of Wales area that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA as a whole, which in part underpins its significance as a designated heritage asset.
5. South of Prince of Wales Road, Rose Lane rises towards the Castle area and rounds where it meets St Vedast Street. Owing to its corner position and height

compared to neighbouring development, St Vedast House appears as a prominent feature within the local townscape.

6. The CAA identifies a 'negative vista' extending along Rose Lane directly towards St Vedast House. I saw on my site visit that due to the slight change of topography along Rose Lane, the roof of St Vedast House terminates this vista. I also observed it to be prominent from Prince of Wales Road and Cathedral Street, where the stark transition in scale causes it to appear monolithic, particularly in the context to smaller buildings nearby, many of which are Locally Listed. Due to its scale, location and overall form, I concur with the Council's assessment within the CAA and find St Vedast House to be a 'negative building' that fails to make a positive contribution to the local area, or the character and appearance of the CA as a whole.
7. With respect to any buildings in a conservation area, Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) requires special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework, revised 2021 (the Framework), states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Policy DM9 of the Norwich Development Management Policies Local Plan, 2014 (the LP) amongst other things seeks to ensure proposals take account of the contribution that heritage assets make to the character of an area and that development shall maximise opportunities to preserve, enhance, or better reveal the significance of heritage assets. LP Policy DM10 provides support for the provision, upgrading or enhancement of telecommunications and associated infrastructure where, amongst other things, there is no unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area; and, designed and sited to be as unobtrusive as reasonably practicable. LP Policy DM3 requires proposals, amongst other things, respect, enhance and respond to the character and local distinctiveness of the area.
8. The proposal is to install various items of telecommunications equipment at St Vedast House, including an antenna some 6.5 metres high that would be mounted on three corners of the building's flat roof. Despite the reduction in height proposed in revised plans, the apparatus would still exceed the height of the existing lift room and flagpole on an already prominent and harmful building within the townscape. The placing of this apparatus upon the corners of the building using steel mounts would introduce large and unsightly interventions in an area where, for the most part, only television aerials, flagpoles and lamp posts are visible above the roofs of nearby buildings.
9. Some of the items proposed may not be obvious viewed from ground level along Rose Lane or St Vedast Street. However, at least some of the extra handrails and gates, dishes, equipment cabinets and supporting structures would be visible from both Prince of Wales Road, Cathedral Street and from the higher levels of Rose Lane and would exacerbate clutter and height in addition to the lift room. Moreover, the noticeable absence of similar paraphernalia nearby would make the proposed changes all the more obvious. In my judgement, viewed from Prince of Wales Road and Cathedral Street, the upper reaches of Rose Lane, and in the context of nearby Locally Listed buildings, the proposal would be an unsightly protrusion that would exacerbate the already starkly conspicuous and detracting characteristics of St Vedast House.

10. For these reasons, I consider the proposals would fail to enhance the quality of the local area and fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA as a whole, causing harm to its significance as a designated heritage asset, carrying significant negative weight. Taking into consideration the scale and nature of the proposals, I concur with the main parties that the degree of harm to significance would be less than substantial, which paragraph 202 of the Framework requires be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
11. The proposal is intended to enable effective telecommunication for two operators in their provision of 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G services. The provision of such services would provide continued connectivity and faster, more reliable communications services and internet connection on mobile networks within this area of Norwich. This would be in support of economic growth and in the context of general national policy support for improvements to mobile communications and wireless technology. The proposal would also be in compensation for lost service provision at another nearby site. I attribute significant weight to the cumulative public benefits of the proposal.
12. Paragraph 115 of the Framework requires, where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate. The proposal would not be. Furthermore, although I note the aims of the Government to support 5G telecommunication infrastructure, however, this needs to be carefully balanced against the impact of such proposals upon the historic environment and designated heritage assets, which are an irreplaceable resource. Therefore, in weighing the public benefits of the proposal against the less than substantial harm to the CA as a designated heritage asset, I do not find that the benefits of the proposal are sufficient to outweigh harm identified.
13. The proposal therefore runs contrary to Section 72(1) of the Act; the historic environment policies within the Framework; as well as LP Policies DM9, DM10 and DM3.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons above, taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Graham

INSPECTOR