



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 June 2022

by James Blackwell LLB (Hons) PgDip

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 June 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/21/3289214

Land at Bathurst Road, Winnersh, Wokingham RG41 5JA

- 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 and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
 - The appeal is made by CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 213194, dated 19 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 12 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is a 15.0m phase 8 monopole C/W wrapround cabinet at base and associated ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Because this is an application for prior approval, the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO) require the local planning authority to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account any representations received. This appeal will be determined on the same basis.
3. The principle of the proposed development is established by the GPDO and the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A do not require regard to be had to the development plan. Nonetheless, I have had regard to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (Framework) insofar as it is relevant to matters of siting and appearance. The Framework also promotes the need for high quality mobile communications, which is a material consideration to which I have had regard.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area and on highway safety, and where harm is identified, whether this would be outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed, having regard to the potential availability of alternative sites.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site comprises a triangular pocket of grassland, located on the corner of the junction between Bathurst Road and Abor Lane. A railway line runs just north of the site, which is heavily screened by mature trees. The area immediately surrounding the site is predominantly made up of residential dwellings, many of which are single-storey bungalows. Given the relatively low level of surrounding built form, the area benefits from a degree of openness which contributes positively to its overriding character. As an undeveloped expanse of grassland, the appeal site itself contributes to this sense of openness, as it provides clear and open views between the adjoining roads, owing to its location on the corner of the junction.
6. The roads around the appeal site already include several vertical structures, including telegraph poles, streetlights and another monopole. In this regard, the proposed monopole would reflect the vertical emphasis of these other pieces of nearby street furniture, without appearing unduly alien.
7. Nonetheless, owing to its open corner location, the siting of the proposal would appear significantly more prominent than the surrounding street furniture. Indeed, the monopole would introduce a disruptive and domineering feature to the grass verge abutting the highway, which would dominate views when approaching the site from both directions along Abor Lane, as well from an easterly direction along Bathurst Road. This disruptive effect would be exacerbated by the substantial height of the monopole, as it would project beyond the height of much of the adjacent street furniture, as well as many of the nearby bungalows. In turn, it would undermine the prevailing sense of openness that surrounds the site, which would harm the character and appearance of the area.

Highway Safety

8. The proposed ground-based equipment is relatively low level, which means it should not entirely block the views of oncoming traffic to road users, whichever direction they may be travelling in. As for the taller monopole, the slimline nature of the pole would again ensure views of oncoming traffic should not be unduly impeded. Moreover, the speed limit in and around the site is 30mph, which means drivers should not be travelling at excess speed. This would help minimise any risk of accident or collision. On account of these factors, I am satisfied that the siting and appearance of the proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

Alternative Sites

9. The appellant has explored a number of alternative sites for the development, which appear to have been legitimately discounted. Nonetheless, the Council has suggested that the development may have a less harmful impact, if it were sited on the same grass verge, but closer to the tree canopy which borders the railway. Indeed, the nearby monopole further along Bathurst Road manages to assimilate effectively with its surroundings, owing to the tree canopy backdrop, and the greater separation from the road. The appellant has not provided any detail as to why the monopole could not be sited more discreetly, albeit within this similar location. This means I cannot properly assess whether there is a

more suitable location for the monopole (however close to the appeal site that may be), where it may have a less harmful impact.

10. Whilst I appreciate the need to find a viable site, in light of this factor, I am not able to conclude that less harmful alternatives have been fully explored. Even accounting for the importance that the Framework places on the need for high quality mobile communications, the need for installation in the particular location proposed has therefore not been sufficiently demonstrated to outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the area.

Other Matters

11. Whilst I acknowledge there are significant social and economic benefits associated with the proposal, consideration of this appeal is limited to matters of siting and appearance only. These factors cannot be taken into account, as they go beyond the scope of the GPDO.

Conclusion

12. The siting and appearance of the development would harm the character and appearance of the area, and the need to site the proposal in the location proposed would not outweigh this harm. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR