



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 July 2022

by S Edwards BA MA TCP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8 August 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/21/3288133

Worplesdon Road, Worplesdon, Guildford GU3 3RT

- 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.
 - The appeal is made by CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/W/00097, dated 30 July 2021, was refused by notice dated 24 September 2021.
 - The development proposed is "proposed 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 Matter

2. The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (the GPDO), under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A, Paragraph A.3(4) 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. Policies of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) may be considered relevant, but only in so far as they relate to these matters. My determination of the appeal shall proceed on the same basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposal on the surrounding area, having particular regard to whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Worplesdon Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises a grass verge located prominently at the junction between The Avenue and Worplesdon Road, a busy thoroughfare running through the settlement. The surrounding area includes a number of different uses, but is predominantly residential in nature. The site lies within the Worplesdon Conservation Area, which covers a large proportion of this historic village. From the presented evidence, I find that the special interest and significance of the Conservation Area are largely derived from its pleasant

spacious, verdant and rural character, which the appeal site makes a valuable contribution to.

5. The monopole would be significantly taller than existing manmade features within the site's immediate surroundings, including nearby streetlights, which also have a slimmer profile than the proposal. As a result, the new development would unduly stand out as a prominent and incongruous addition, which would detract from the character and appearance of the site's surroundings and erode the special interest of the Conservation Area.
6. Whilst it is argued that the development would be perceived against the backdrop of mature trees, these are set at considerable distance away from where the monopole would be installed and the existing vegetation would therefore do little to soften the visual impact of the proposal. The harm would be even greater during the winter months when the leaf cover would be reduced further. Although it is suggested that the colouring of the equipment could be specified to ensure that it blends in with its surroundings, this would not overcome the identified harm.
7. By reason of its siting and appearance, the appeal scheme would cause significant harm to the surrounding area, and fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Worplesdon Conservation Area. Consequently, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It would also be contrary to Policies D1 and D3 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan (Adopted 25 April 2019) regarding design aims and heritage assets, as well as the relevant provisions in section 10 of the Framework, in so far as they are material considerations to this appeal.

Other considerations

8. The proposed development would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the Worplesdon Conservation Area, to which I ascribe considerable importance and weight. In such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
9. There would be significant connectivity improvements as a result of the development, which would improve digital wireless, mobile coverage in the area with new equipment to facilitate 5G coverage. The provision of enhanced digital communication for residents and businesses in the cell search area can be regarded as important public benefits.
10. The appeal is supported by site specific supplementary information, setting out the sequential approach which the appellant has sought to follow. The appellant's submissions explain why existing structures providing an installation for another operator are not considered suitable, due to the nature of 5G and the network services it provides. However, it remains unclear whether existing the possibility of using an existing building has been considered.
11. Furthermore, and whilst alternative options appear to have been considered, the reasons provided to discount them are not supported by detailed evidence. I appreciate that this is a highly constrained cell search area but, having regard to the available information, I cannot be certain that there are no suitable alternatives to the appeal site, notably outside the Worplesdon Conservation

Area, where the proposal would be less harmful, yet secure the same public benefits.

12. Whilst the Framework supports advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure, it also makes it clear that proposals for electronic communications development should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify such installations. Moreover, the Framework places great emphasis on the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets. Heritage assets are irreplaceable resources which should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed by existing and future generations. Overall, the considerable importance and weight which I ascribe to the identified harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits associated with the proposal.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons detailed above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S Edwards

INSPECTOR