



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 October 2022

by F Rafiq BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 November 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/J4423/W/22/3290688

Land adjoining Manor House, 706 Stannington Road, Sheffield S6 6AH

- 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 & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
 - The appeal is made by Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited against the decision of Sheffield City Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02365/TEL, dated 18 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 14 July 2021.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 17.5 metre streetpole with 6 no. antennas, 1 no. GPS module, 2 no. ground-based equipment cabinets and meter.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application form references the applicant as 'Cornerstone & Vodafone Ltd', but the name of the appellant on the appeal form is 'Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited'. It has been clarified that this is the full name of 'Cornerstone' and I have therefore utilised the full name in this decision.
3. I have used the address from the appeal form as this more accurately describes the location of the appeal site on Stannington Road.
4. The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO) require the proposed development to be assessed solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account any representations received. My determination of this appeal has been made on this basis.
5. The principle of development is established by the GPDO and the provisions of the Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO do not require regard to be had to the development plan. I have, though, had regard to the saved policies of the Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (UDP), the Sheffield Development Framework Core Strategy (Core Strategy) and the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) insofar as they are a material consideration relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed installation on the character and appearance of the area; and if any harm

would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Reasons

7. The appeal site is a grass verge area between the vehicular carriageway and the footway along Stannington Road. On the opposite side of this road is Stannington Park which is situated on rising land and contains trees on its periphery. Although there are a range of properties in the vicinity of the appeal site, the presence of grass verges along the road, the large area of open space and various planting in the nearby open space and within the grounds of surrounding properties gives the area a spacious, verdant character.
8. The proposed mast would be near an existing streetlight and there are a variety of street furniture items and other structures, such as a bus shelter and signage to the public house near the appeal site. These are however predominantly low-level structures, with the tallest of these, the streetlight at around 7.9m, still being less than half the height of the proposed mast. I was able to see mature trees in the area, which would provide some screening from locations to the east of the appeal site and with trees and vegetation providing a backdrop from other locations. However, the grass verge to the front of Manor House where the appeal scheme would be located contains much shorter trees and has an open aspect. Although the appellant does not consider the mast to be excessively tall, given its 17.5m height, it would be clearly seen in such views along the highway and as well as from various vantage points in Stannington Park, where the siting and height of the mast would result in it appearing as an obtrusive feature.
9. The design of the mast would be slender, and it avoids a bulky open antenna headframe. The appellant refers to the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Development in England (Code) and how they have sought to use the principles it sets out in the siting and appearance of the proposal. The intended grey colouring would assist with minimising its visual impact, but this would not overcome the impact of its height which would rise noticeably above street furniture items, trees and nearby buildings and thereby harm the spacious quality of the area, despite being set to the rear of the grass verge.
10. The site is located within an 'Area of Special Character' and there are a number of traditional stone buildings nearby such as the Public House, but equally, there are a range of other buildings of varying styles and designs, including the more modern Manor House building. I do not therefore find the modern appearance of the proposal would be harmful in this respect.
11. The Council has raised concerns that the cabinets would give rise to street clutter. However, as they would be low level structures positioned in a linear arrangement and seen against existing brick and stone walls, they would not unduly add to street clutter or in themselves unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area.
12. Nevertheless, I conclude that the siting and appearance of the proposed installation would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with paragraph 115 of the Framework and although the development would not be contrary to saved UDP Policy BE18 in relation to the Area of Special Character, it would be contrary to saved UDP Policies BE14 and H14 and Core Strategy Policy CS 74 which are material in this case and seek,

- amongst other matters, high-quality development with telecommunications developments being sited and designed to minimise visual impact.
13. I note the appellant's comments that the requirement for sympathetic design in the Framework and for siting and design in saved Policy BE14 are not absolute. As set out earlier in the decision, they are however material considerations in assessing the siting and appearance of the proposed scheme. Reference has been made to saved UDP Policy LR4, but this relates to protecting open space areas from built development which I do not consider relevant as the proposal is not to be sited on an open space area as defined by the UDP.
14. The Framework sets out that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being and in this respect, there is a need to support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology. The proposed mast would introduce 5G coverage and improve existing 2G/3G/4G coverage and capacity to both residential and business users. Mobile connectivity is important and can improve home working and people's ability to access services, but social and economic benefits have been recognised by the grant of permission under Article 3(1) and have not been taken into account in considering the matters of siting and appearance.
15. The appellant has set out that a robust site search was undertaken and that there was a lack of alternative viable options with the appeal site comprising of the least sensitive location within the search area. Of the sites considered and discounted, site '3'¹ was done so due to the impact upon vehicle access arrangements to shop forecourts. I was able to visit this area and although there are some dropped kerbs which provide access to forecourt parking, there are also some areas along the highway to the front of these properties that do not have any such access arrangements. This broad location, to the front of commercial properties, could therefore potentially accommodate the proposal and I find the reason for discounting this area to be too generalised to eliminate it as an option.
16. The proposed installation would introduce 5G coverage in the area which has historically been poorly served by 2G/3G/4G with a number of failed planning applications. It has received some public support and would provide a mixture of voice, data and text from a single base station, minimising the number of sites. This weighs in favour of the scheme, as does the adherence by the appellant to the sequential approach to site selection in considering upgrading base stations/using existing structures, using small scale equipment, site sharing or installing on an existing building or structure. The siting and appearance of proposal would, however, for the reasons set out above, be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. The height of the mast is the minimum required to cover the target area and to avoid interference from trees and urban clutter. I have also no reason to doubt that site sharing would result in a move away from a slimline street furniture to a taller, more bulky installation. However, on the evidence before me I am not convinced that a less harmful alternative has been properly explored and it is my overall view that the need for the proposal does not in this case, outweigh the harm.

¹ 299 Shops, Stannington Road, Stannington, Sheffield, S6 6AH

Other Matters

17. The appellant has engaged with the Council and other stakeholders in pre-application discussions, which is in line with the Code, and has also included considering alternative site options. This appeal follows the Council's formal decision, and I can confirm that I have assessed the development on both its merits and impacts.
18. The proposal has been positioned to avoid direct views of nearby residential properties and avoids more intensive residential areas as this may give rise to living conditions harm. I note also that the nearest listed building is some distance from the site. A lack of harm in these areas are neutral matters and do not weigh in favour of the proposal.
19. A general reference has been made by the appellant to other installations at 20m in height that have successfully assimilated into their surroundings in Sheffield. I have not been provided with the details of such cases, and whilst I accept that telecommunications equipment is to be expected in urban settings, including areas where there is a mix of uses, it is necessary for an assessment to be made on the circumstances of each case. I can confirm that I have dealt with this appeal on its own merits.

Conclusion

20. For the above reasons and having had regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Rafiq

INSPECTOR