
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 October 2022

by Helen B Hockenhull BA (Hons) B. PI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 7 November 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/V4250/W/22/3295496

School Lane, Standish, Wigan WN6 0HR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under a development order.
 - The appeal is made by CK Hutchinson Networks (UK) Ltd against the decision of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref A/21/92417/TCSO, dated 12 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 10 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is a 16.0 m 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. 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. My determination of this appeal has been made on the same basis.
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. Nevertheless, Policies CP10, CP11 of the Wigan Core Strategy, saved UDP Policy EV4A and the Council's Telecommunications Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) are material considerations as they relate to issues of siting, appearance and heritage.
4. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is also a material consideration, and this includes sections on supporting high quality communications and the conservation of designated heritage assets.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effects of the siting and appearance of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Standish Conservation Area and on the setting of the Grade I listed St Wilfred's Church.

Reasons

6. The appeal site lies to the south of School Lane adjacent to a small private car park near to the junction with High Street. It lies within Standish Town Centre and also within Standish Conservation Area (CA).
7. The CA focusses on the village centre and includes the Parish Church of St Wilfred and the adjacent Market Place. In the High Street, are a range of commercial and residential uses of modest scale dating from the mid to late 19th century. The significance of the CA lies in its demonstration of the historic development of the village with the spire of the Grade I listed St Wilfred's' Church dominating the skyline. St Wilfred's, in the Listing Description is described as a rare example of a late 16th Century Church and forms an important local landmark. Its architectural and historic interest, contribute to its significance and special interest.
8. The Council's Telecommunications Development SPG advises that monopole masts are not acceptable in the town centre unless they meet certain criteria. These require that they do not appear prominent in the street scene, will not be detrimental to the character and appearance of important buildings including listed buildings or buildings in a conservation area, will not affect the character of a conservation area and will not affect an important viewpoint.
9. The area around the appeal site consists of generally 2 storey development with the only vertical structures being the conservation style lighting columns, around 10.7 metres in height. The proposed 16-metre-high monopole would be relatively slimline and located in a prominent position in the street scene. It would project above the roof line of existing buildings and street lights in the vicinity and appear as an incongruous addition to the street scene, causing harm to the character and appearance of the CA.
10. The appellant in the Statement of Case refers to screening provided by surrounding trees. However, I noted on my site visit that there are no trees in close proximity to the site. Specimen trees are located within a grass verge by the car park area to the south west of the site at the junction of School Lane and Quakers Place. They are however offset from the highway and provide little effective screening to the site.
11. Looking to the northeast of the appeal site, the spire of St Wilfred's Church, located approximately 220 metres to the northeast, is important in the townscape. Looking from School Lane towards Standish centre, the proposed monopole would be seen in the same vista as the church spire and would represent a jarring discordant feature adversely affecting its setting.
12. The appellant has taken a sequential approach to the selection of an appropriate location for the mast as outlined in the Framework. Due to the constrained nature of the cell area, I am advised that there are no existing masts in the area that could be upgraded or opportunities for mast sharing. A number of alternative locations have been explored and discounted for a variety of reasons, including being too close to residential properties or having insufficient pavement width. A shortlist of 3 possible sites were identified, one being the appeal site, the other a site of a previous application which was refused and a third, a site discounted due to its proximity to users.

13. I note that the Council has not put forward any suggested alternative locations and I have no evidence before me to suggest that any others exist that would be less harmful to the appeal proposal. The appellant has suggested that the monopole could be painted black to match the nearby lighting columns. Whilst this is acknowledged, it would however be insufficient to overcome the harm I have identified to the setting of the Grade I listed Church and the character and appearance of the CA.
14. Having regard to the nature of the harm and the impact on the CA as a whole, I consider the harm to be less than substantial, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Under such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the Framework advises such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
15. I recognise that the Framework supports advanced high quality and reliable communications infrastructure as essential for economic growth and social wellbeing. The proposal would bring improved digital connectivity to this part of Standish benefiting those who live, work and visit the area. Nevertheless, I find that the public benefits of the proposal are not sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified.
16. I acknowledge that the proposed development would be compliant with the guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). This matter weighs neutrally and does not amount to a consideration in support of the appeal.
17. I therefore conclude that the proposal, in respect to siting and appearance, would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the town centre and CA, and the setting of the listed Church. It would fail to accord with the local and national planning policies set out earlier in this decision.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Helen Hockenhull

INSPECTOR