



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 December 2022

by M. P. Howell BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 December 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/22/3303138

Grove Road SWS, Grove Road, Reading RG4 8SD

- 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 Hutchison CK Network UK Ltd against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 220638, dated 29 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 20 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is a telecommunications installation: Proposed 'slim line' phase 8 monopole c/w wraparound cabinet at base, 3no. additional ancillary equipment cabinets and associated ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO) require the local planning authority, and therefore the Secretary of State, to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance. I have had regard to the policies of the development plan, as well as any representations received but only in so far as they are a material consideration that are relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the siting and appearance on the character and appearance of the area; - and
 - If any harm is identified, whether it would be outweighed by the need for the installation and the lack of less harmful alternative sites.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site forms part of the highway grass verge situated on a corner near to the junction between Grove Road and Kidmore End Road. It comprises a footway that circles a small, grassed area with a flower bed and a low-lying street sign. Small wooden posts enclose the flower bed.

5. There are commercial uses near to the site on Kidmore End Road and Peppard Way, but the area is predominantly residential. The area comprises mostly 2 storey residential properties fronting Kidmore End Road and Grove Road on the one side and a large playing field on the other. The playing field is open, with a low-lying hedgerow and a line of deciduous trees of varying sizes adjacent to Kidmore End Road and Grove Road. As such, the surrounding built form is generally 2 storey, which together with the playing field and landscaping results in an open and green character and appearance of the area.
6. The proposed development would be within an area that would be highly visible along this section of Kidmore End Road and Grove Road. Although the proposed development would have a slim design, the 15m height would still be noticeably higher than the surrounding two storey-built form, and significantly contrast with the open playing field and low-lying hedgerow boundary. I am also conscious that the proposed development would be in an area with very few structures with a vertical emphasis. Furthermore, of those that exist, the proposed development would still be appreciably higher and wider than the nearest telegraph pole and street lights.
7. The closest tree to the proposed development is adjacent to Kidmore End Road. It is a mature tree and would provide some screening when viewing the proposed development from the north. However, it would still be a prominent development from close and mid-range views near to the appeal site and from the junction with Peppard Way. Also, during prolonged periods of the year when the trees are not in leaf, the prominence and impact of the proposed development would be exacerbated from wider views to the north. The proposal is also likely to project above the majority of trees situated in the playing field, adjacent to Grove Road. The position and height of most of the trees would limit any meaningful screening from longer views on Grove Road. As such, the proposed development would appear incongruous within the open street scene, impacting upon the character and appearance of the area.
8. A condition to finish the proposed development in grey would not sufficiently ameliorate the impact. Although finishing the monopole and cabinets in a colour such as grey could provide some softening, it would not alter the fundamental issue of its scale height and siting in this context. Set within a relatively open area with predominantly low-lying built form and against the greenery of the trees, the grey finish would fail to integrate the development into the area.
9. Accordingly, having regard to its siting and appearance, the proposed development would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. Insofar as they are a material consideration, the proposal would also be contrary to the aims of Policies CC7 and OU3 of the Reading Local Plan 2019. Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure that telecommunications development is a high quality in design that protects the character and distinctiveness of the locality.

Alternative sites

10. Paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states, among other things, that applications for electronic communications development (including applications for prior approval under the GPDO) should be supported by necessary evidence to justify the proposal. Where this relates to a new mast or base station, this evidence should include that the applicant

has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structures.

11. The need for this installation weighs in favour of the appeal, and I note that the appellant has provided a map detailing four discounted options and set out that no mast sharing sites or buildings have been identified.
12. However, there is limited evidence before me that indicates what existing buildings within the locality have been investigated and the reasons for them being discounted. Further to this, the map detailing the four alternative site options does not match the table identifying the street name, description of the site or the reasons for discounting the location. For example, D1 is shown as being situated on Peppard Road on the map but is indicated as Kingsbridge Road in the table description. In addition, the discounted reason for D1 is that the pavement is too narrow and there are visibility issues. However, from what I saw on site, the D1 location is a wide footway along a straight road with good visibility in either direction. As such, the evidence is unclear, and the reasons behind discounting the sites identified on the map appear misplaced.
13. I am not, therefore, in a position to fully review the appellants' conclusion that no alternative sites are available and other locations have been fully considered. Insofar as they are a material consideration, the proposal would also be contrary to the aims of Policy OU3 of the Reading Local Plan 2019. Amongst other things, this policy requires alternatives sites and site sharing options to be fully investigated.

Other Matters

14. In order to meet health safeguards, the appellant has provided a certificate to confirm that the proposal has been designed to comply with the guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). I note that the Council has questioned whether the submitted certificate is sufficient, citing the fact that the drawing reference on the certificate does not accord with the plan drawing reference. However, as I have found harm in respect of the siting and appearance, there is no need to examine this matter further for the purposes of making my decision.

Conclusion

15. I note the support in the Framework for high quality communications, and that advanced, high quality, reliable communication infrastructure is considered essential for economic growth and social well-being. Also, the benefits that modern telecommunications give to emergency services within the area, and its importance for home working during the recent pandemic. Nevertheless, I must balance this against the requirement for equipment to be sympathetically designed and sited. In this case, the considerable benefits do not outweigh the substantial harm to the character and appearance of the area
16. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

M. P. Howell

INSPECTOR