



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 February 2023

by H Miles BA(hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/22/3295320

Lockfield Drive, Knaphill, Woking GU21 3RB, 497263, 159151

- 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 Hutchinson Networks (UK) Ltd against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2021/1011, dated 3 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 3 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is 15.0m Phase 8 Monopole C/W wrapround cabinet at base and associated ancillary works.
-

Decision

1. This appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. This is an application for Prior Approval. Therefore, the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (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 this basis.

Planning Policy

3. Part 16 of the GPDO establishes that the proposal is permitted development and therefore it is accepted in principle by virtue of the legislation. Furthermore, there is no requirement to have regard to the development plan as there would be for any development requiring planning permission.
4. Nevertheless, Policies CS21 and CS24 of the Woking Core Strategy (2012) and Policy DM22 of the Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (2016) are material considerations as they relate to issues of siting and appearance. Together these Policies seek that communications infrastructure is sited and designed to minimise impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. They also set criteria for good design, including creating attractive places and conserving and enhancing townscape character. Similarly, the National Planning Policy Framework July 2021 (the Framework) is also a material consideration, and this includes a section on supporting high quality communications.

Main Issues

5. 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

Siting and Appearance

6. Lockfield Drive is a main road running through a residential area. This part is characterised by grass verges behind which are the gardens and rear or secondary elevations of two storey dwellings which front the residential roads behind, including Chequer Tree Close. The area around the appeal site is a reasonably wide grass verge with no footpath and an area of medium height dense hedge. There are a handful of tall trees close to the junction with Creston Avenue. There are also streetlights which are around 8m high and lower highways signage. The overall character is of modest height suburban development and the green and mainly undeveloped nature of the verge is a pleasant softening feature.
7. The proposed monopole would be a utilitarian piece of street furniture. However, the height and bulk of the installation would be considerably greater than the surrounding housing, streetlights and hedge. This would be the case even if it were painted a complementary colour. As such it would be incongruous and harmfully prominent in these regards. Consequently, it would be notably harmful to the attractive open green nature and modest height of the appeal site in these respects.
8. Therefore, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.

Alternatives

9. The proposed development is needed to improve coverage within the Knaphill area with new equipment to facilitate 5G coverage. The Area Coverage Map/Cell Search Area Map shows that the coverage for this operator terminates to the South West of the site. A 5G cell has a small radius and therefore the search area is highly constrained. However, no specific limit for the designated search area is provided, other than that shown in the Cell Search Area Map.
10. In the Site Specific Supplementary Information figure 1 does not show the site as shown on the site plans. I have undertaken a site visit to the location and have viewed the site and surrounding area. Whilst this is an unfortunate oversight, the written detail including the identification of alternatives reasonably relates to the position applied for. This is reinforced in the appeal documents. As such I am satisfied that the assessment of alternatives has been based on the correct location.
11. The appellant has provided detail of the nominal location and suggested alternative locations for the siting of the proposal, including D3 and 4 which are some distance from the nominal location. Some of these are similarly constrained to the appeal site, and others further constrained. Therefore, there is reasonable justification for discounting some options and whilst others would be alternatives the effects are likely to be comparable.

12. However representations from interested parties and the Council, which the appellant has had the opportunity to consider, have suggested alternative sites. In particular the nearby allotments, the former Robin Hood Pub and land at Beaufort School are within the Cell Search Area Map where coverage is lacking. I have not been provided with detailed evidence that these suggested locations have been assessed and discounted with reasonable justification. Therefore, the information submitted does not demonstrate that a sufficiently thorough review of the possible options within the search area has been conducted and the possibility of a suitable alternative site remains.
13. As such, the need for the installation to be sited as proposed, taking into account any suitable alternatives, does not outweigh the identified notable harm that would occur to the character and appearance of the area due to the siting and appearance of the proposal.

Other Matters

14. Reference has been made to various social and economic benefits of the development but these are not relevant to the considerations of siting and appearance.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Miles

INSPECTOR