



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 June 2023

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/22/3299305

Grass Verge, Cambridge Road, St Neots PE19 6AH

- 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 Great British Communications against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/00091/TELDET, dated 14 January 2022, was refused by notice dated 9 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is a 18m high 'slim line' phase 8 monopole c/w wraparound cabinet at base, 3 no. additional ancillary equipment cabinets and associated ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The proposal is permitted development under Part 16 Class A of the 2015 Order but prior approval is required for its siting and appearance under paragraph A.3(3). The main issue is therefore the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and the visual amenity of local residents.

Reasons

3. The proposal is for a 18 metre slimline monopole with associated ground level cabinets on the grass verge on the southern side of the B1428 Cambridge Road opposite Loves Way in St Neots. The verge forms part of a newly established landscaped corridor with realigned road, pedestrian/cycle route and extensive tree planting which runs between Wintringham, a new neighbourhood under construction to the south and the Loves Farm development to the north.
4. The appellant is in the process of building an upgraded 5G telecommunications network and requires a new mast site to improve digital connectivity in this fast growing residential neighbourhood. The sparse information submitted with the application appears to show an existing mast on Cambridge Road near the railway bridge, with the red area, presumably the gap in coverage, to the south east affecting Wintringham. However, the 'search area' with its radius of 300m around the Stone Hill/Leveret Way junction concentrates on the Loves Farm estate to the north east. It is thus not clear if the identified gap in coverage is existing or proactively takes into account future demand from Wintringham. In any event, the provision of the necessary infrastructure to provide mobile connectivity in the area has not been taken into account in its overall planning

and this is a significant omission that needs to be resolved.

5. The 300m radius search area covers a modern, densely developed housing estate with minimal opportunity for a freestanding mobile telecommunication mast given the close-knit residential environment. In the circumstances, a site somewhere within the wide landscaped corridor along Cambridge Road may be the best available due to its large scale with three storey development set well back on either side and extensive tree planting that will provide increasing levels of screening over time. Tall monopoles are increasingly common and thus not unexpected on radial route corridors within towns. However, in this case, much time has been spent on the design and landscaping of the corridor concerned and further consideration is needed.
6. The precise location selected for the relatively thick 18 m high monopole, just 2 or 3 m from the carriageway edge on the grass verge opposite Loves Way, would be located forward and to one side of the adjacent tree, currently just 5 m or so high. In this exposed position it would be wide open to view by road users travelling east along Cambridge Road. Particularly serious, it would be sited just a few metres away from the living room windows of the flats on the corner of Cambridge Road and Loves Way opposite, dominating their outlook. In the chosen location the adjacent trees would not 'help to reduce any visual impact' as claimed by the appellant, except perhaps in the long term when approached from the east. Whilst there are constraints such as the nearby gas pipeline, there is no evidence that the full width of the landscaped corridor between the two roundabouts, taking account of existing and further potential tree planting, has been examined to identify the optimum location. In addition, there may be suitable sites further afield.
7. The Town Council have no objection, but there has been no engagement to date by the District Council or the two developers, Durkan and Urban&Civic, who offer to assist with site finding and may own suitable land. Consultation appears to have been perfunctory, with the application submitted just four weeks after the Council were notified of the requirement, a period which included an extended Christmas/New Year holiday. Given the ambition for a high-quality new neighbourhood, in the absence of meaningful discussion it has not been demonstrated that the most appropriate site has been selected.

Conclusion

8. Mobile connectivity for the new neighbourhood on the eastern side of St Neots is a necessary part of a successful development and the infrastructure required has not been built into the layout to date. The strong policy support for advanced and high-quality communications set out in paragraphs 114-118 of the National Planning Policy Framework is fully recognised and the numerous technical and locational requirements that limit the availability of sites for an installation are appreciated. However, paragraph 117 states that applications for such development (including prior approval) should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify it.
9. In the location selected, the proposed monopole would significantly detract from the character and appearance of the landscaped corridor and would be intrusive in the outlook from the flats on the corner of Loves Way and Cambridge Road. Whilst a site within the corridor may be necessary, in the absence of dialogue between the appellant, Council, Durkan and Urban&Civic, it is not clear that the most appropriate site has been chosen. Consequently, at

this stage, the undoubted public benefits of improved digital communications have not been demonstrated to outweigh the significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and the visual amenity of local residents. As drawn up the proposal conflicts with Policies LP 12 and SEL 2 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 2019 and Policy A2 of the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2016. These require new development to be well designed with attractive streets and the St Neots East site to include a wide boulevard with high quality environment on the main approach into the town.

10. Having regard to the above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR