



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 April 2025

by **J Smith MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D5120/W/24/3353056

Grass Verge of Woolwich Road, Junction with Albert Road, Belvedere, London DA17 5EN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against to grant approval required under Article 3(1) and 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 against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Bexley.
 - The application Ref is 24/00412/GPDO8.
 - The development proposed is prior approval notification for the installation of 12.5m high monopole supporting 3 antennas within GRP shroud, 1 equipment cabinet and ancillary development thereto including 1 GPS module.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant has highlighted that the description of development on the application form was incomplete. Therefore, I have utilised the description as found on the decision notice.
3. It is sought to erect a 12.5m high monopole with associated antenna, GPS module and an additional equipment cabinet. The provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (the GPDO) requires the Local Planning Authority to assess the proposal solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account representations received. It does not require regard to be had to the development plan.
4. The London Borough of Bexley's Local Plan 2023 (LP) was adopted in April 2023, replacing the Bexley Core Strategy and remaining extant policies of the Bexley Unitary Development Plan 2004 (UDP). However, the reason for refusal refers to policies from the Core Strategy and UDP. The appellant notes that the Council considered that the proposal failed to comply with Policies DP8, SP6 and DP14 of the LP in their assessment of the proposal. Therefore, the appellant has sought to address the reason for refusal given with regard to these policies. The Council also note that these policies align closely with the intent of those policies cited in the decision notice.
5. As such, I have considered Policies DP8, SP6 and DP14 of the LP, Policy HC1 of the London Plan 2021 (the London Plan) and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), only insofar as they are material considerations relevant to the matters of siting and appearance.

Main Issue

6. The mast would be situated within the Woolwich Road Conservation Area (CA). I am therefore vigilant of my duty under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
7. It follows that the main issue is the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposal on the character and appearance of the street scene, with particular regard to the CA and, if any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited in this position by taking into account any suitable alternative sites and the public benefits.

Reasons

8. The CA draws its significance from its linear development of Victorian buildings in an area of verdant character upon an elevated position above the River Thames. Properties within this location are typically set within landscaped surroundings. These properties look out onto the tree lined highway of Woolwich Road and areas of green space found along it, such as the appeal site. Some of the historic features of the street scene have been eroded through the introduction of modern fascia signs, a small number of modern windows and street lighting. However, the historic character is still strongly apparent overall. Due to the character which is provided by the appeal site and the wider green space it forms part of, I consider that the site and its immediate surrounds make a positive contribution to the significance of the CA as a whole.
9. The mast would be situated on a small triangular grass and tree lined verge adjacent to Woolwich Road. Opposite the proposed site location is The Eardley Arms and the junction to Heron Hill and Albert Road. As such, this crossroad forms a central spine and location of the CA. This spatial context would therefore enable a clear and strong visibility of the mast within this central point of the grass verge on the approach to and along Woolwich Road.
10. Whilst it would be as low as operationally possible, the mast would be taller than the two storey buildings and street furniture, lighting columns and trees within this area of the CA. This would be an individual item within the street scene and therefore, its presence would be alien in this context, unlike the presence of street furniture and lighting columns which are ubiquitous items within the street scene. The appellant comments that the trees located on the verge would assist in its concealment. However, whilst these trees were in leaf at the time of my site visit, this may not be the case during the winter months. In addition, these trees would be visibly smaller in height than the proposed installation.
11. Given such, the siting and overall design of the structure would appear as a discordant and incongruous feature that would relate poorly to this historic environment. By reason of its design, the painting of the mast in a Fir Green colour would not mitigate this harm. The siting and appearance of the mast would cause less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the street scene and the CA. A Heritage Statement of Case (prepared by Pegasus Group, Ref: P24-1722) has been submitted by the appellant for this appeal. This statement also finds that the harm which would be caused to the character and appearance of the CA would be less than substantial.

12. The appellant has undertaken an exercise to assess alternative new sites. The Council argue that the appellant has not properly addressed the potential sites in the area as they consider that the information provided to explain why each site has been discounted is limited.
13. Option D1 provides no convincing explanation as to why a redevelopment of this site would require more space for what would appear to utilise a similar spatial area when assessed against the proposed plans. It is suggested that options D5 and D52 have been discounted due to the low height of the buildings which would not provide an appropriate level of coverage. I noted during my site visit that options D5 and D52 are both tall two storey and three storey flat roof structures. Yet, no convincing evidence has been provided to suggest why an installation could not be constructed to the required height on top of these buildings, when taking their existing height into account.
14. The appellant suggests that they have discounted option D15 due the lack of sufficient room on the rooftop. During my site visit, from a street level position, this roof top appears both tall in height and of a significant width. This suggested absence of sufficient space is not particularly evidenced. D16 was discounted as the window openings of the All Saints Church Tower were deemed to not be of a sufficient height. The top of these openings were noted to not be of a too dissimilar height to the roof found opposite at option D15. As such, there is an absence of convincing evidence which would suggest that an installation within this tower is not possible. The appellant notes that options D24 through to D54 were discounted due to the presence of narrow footways in these locations. There has been little explanation of the magnitude of these constraints found at these sites on a case-by-case basis and why these sites have subsequently been discounted.
15. Given such, from the evidence before me, I find that a sequential approach to site selection has been followed. However, this is not with sufficient rigour with regard to a significant number of the discounted sites listed to enable me to ascertain that there are no realistic opportunities to erect an installation in a different location where its siting and appearance would be less harmful.
16. Accordingly, insofar as they are a material consideration, the proposal would be contrary to the aims of Policies DP8, SP6 and DP14 of the LP and Policy HC1 of the London Plan. Amongst other things, these policies seek for new telecommunications and associated equipment should be located to ensure that their siting and design will minimise their visual impact and appearance on the character or appearance of an area.

Heritage Balance

17. The Framework requires less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, giving weight to an asset's conservation.
18. The Framework advises that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. It further provides that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Decisions should support the expansion of electronic communication networks, including next generation mobile technology. Policy DP8

of the LP and the Growth Strategy notes that new or upgraded telecommunications will be supported, unless they would lead to adverse effects.

19. I recognise the importance of good, fast, reliable and cost-effective communications and the economic, social, health, environmental and education public benefits that this mast would provide in this locality. This mast would allow members of the public to have a greater connection with each other and provide access to the internet to undertake a variety of tasks which are explored in detail by the appellant.
20. These include being able to use smartphones and other mobile devices whenever and wherever, to enable communication between businesses, buy groceries, manage finances, apply for jobs, participate in social media and stream content from streaming platforms more easily, amongst other things. Moreover, there is no basis to question the appellant's contention that the equipment is necessary to provide greater coverage.
21. However, as I am not persuaded that there is an absence of more suitable alternative sites within the applicable coverage area, the public benefits of the mast do not outweigh the respective harm to the CA.

Other Matters

22. It is contended that the decision to not allow the proposed scheme would be anti-competitive. This is as the operator will not be able to provide a high-quality service in this area which would limit consumers to other operator services. However, as I am not persuaded that there is an absence of more suitable alternative sites, I do not concur that this decision would be anti-competitive as a more suitable alternative site may indeed exist.
23. The appellant has provided the details of an appeal decision at Sainsburys, Chislehurst (APP/G5180/W/23/3325138) and at Halfway Street, Sidcup (APP/D5120/W/15/3033745). These appeal decisions find that in the evidence provided in those appeals, there would be no other more suitable sites within the target area of each case. However, in this appeal, I have found that the evidence provided does not lead me to conclude that there are no realistic opportunities to erect an installation in a different location where its siting and appearance would be less harmful. A further appeal at Stonebridge Lane, Croxteth (APP/Z4310/W/20/3260439) is cited. In my reading of the evidence provided on this case, this appeal example is not located within a CA, nor would the surroundings described in this case be similar to that found in the appeal proposal.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

J Smith

INSPECTOR