



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 June 2025

by Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Z0116/W/24/3354375

St Clements House, Marsh Street, Bristol BS1 4BH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Cellnex UK against the decision of Bristol City Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/00468/F.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 6no. replacement antenna, 1no. GPS module and ancillary radio equipment at existing rooftop site, internal upgrades to existing equipment cabinets and ancillary development thereto.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the installation of 6no. replacement antenna, 1no. GPS module and ancillary radio equipment at existing rooftop site, internal upgrades to existing equipment cabinets and ancillary development thereto at St Clements House, Marsh Street, Bristol BS1 4BH in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/00468/F, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out only in accordance with the following approved plans: 163363-00-004-ML006 6A; 163363-22-000-MD035 B; 163363-22-002-MD035 B; 163363-22-100-MD035 B; 163363-22-150-MD035 B.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the proposal is in a conservation area and affects the settings of listed buildings, I have had special regard to the statutory duties set out under Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
3. Appended to the appellant's Statement of Case is a photomontage pack. This sets out existing and illustrative proposed views from four nearby vantage points selected by the appellant. Evidence of this specific type was not before the Council when it resolved to refuse planning permission. Nevertheless, as the photomontage pack does not seek to evolve the scheme, I am content no party with a potential interest in the outcome of the appeal is prejudiced by me accepting its submission for information purposes.

Main Issue

4. Whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the City and Queen Square Conservation Area (the CA), including

consideration of the effect of the proposal upon the settings and thereby the significance of relevant listed buildings.

Reasons

5. The CA comprises the historic heart of the city of Bristol. Its significance and special interest as a designated heritage asset is drawn, in-part, from its array of high-value protected buildings, its rich history, its often dense and interconnected developments from various eras, and from Queen Square – a formal open space that offers considerable architectural and historical interest.
6. The aforementioned high-value protected buildings include the Grade II* listed buildings known as ‘Merchant Venturer’s Almshouses’ (the Almshouses) and ‘The Old Library and attached front area, wall pier and railings’ (the Old Library). Both are situated on King Street, a post-medieval street noteworthy for its high-value historic townscape, and are the listed buildings situated closest to the appeal building.
7. The significance and special interest of the Almshouses is drawn, in-part, from its age (dating to the late 17th-century), its formally arranged architectural features, and its historic associations with the Society of Merchant Venturers. Meanwhile the significance and special interest of the Old Library is drawn, in-part, from its 18th-century origins as a high-status civic building, its range of traditional external-facing materials, and its wide array of surviving decorative elements. Whilst the Old Library is identified as a key landmark building in the CA Character Appraisal (March 2009), both it and the Almshouses have settings of somewhat limited expanse in lieu of their inner-urban locations and a prevalence of large modern buildings close by that often constrain visibility.
8. The appeal building provides office/commercial floorspace, is of modern appearance and rises to ten storeys in-part. It already hosts a long-standing electronic communications base station at roof level, comprised of an equipment cabin, six antennas on support poles at four different roof locations, and other ancillary apparatus including two transmission dishes.
9. The scheme before me is centred upon the replacement of six antennas, which would be erected in conjunction with other ancillary/internal/below-parapet works and be coloured light grey. The replacement antennas are intended to be erected in pairs at three of the four existing antenna locations in association with replacement support poles and new yoke brackets. As clarified in the appellant’s Statement of Case and suitably consistent with the submitted elevation plans, a height increase of one metre would apply to each of the six new antennas when compared to those that they would replace.
10. I note here that seeking to upgrade existing infrastructure is sequentially preferable to any approach involving the establishment of a new base station. Further, having considered the suite of submitted evidence before me, I have no reason to doubt that the number and height of the proposed antennas are the minimum fairly required to meet technical and operational requirements and to deliver suitable network coverage improvements.
11. The intended antenna height increases are modest and any increased massing as a consequence of the intended detailed antenna design would be minor. It is also relevant that, to the eastern end of the building, the pair of replacement antennas

proposed would – unlike present circumstances – be consolidated to a single pole mount. This would curtail the potential for additional rooftop clutter to materialise and assist with minimising visual impact, most particularly in the context of long-distance views.

12. Moreover, when taken and considered against the baseline provided by existing roof-level equipment, the proposed replacement antennas and associated works would necessitate minor visual change from a somewhat narrow range of closely positioned publicly accessible locations. Such locations include Prince Street, Thunderbolt Square, and the western end of King Street. The photomontage pack assists in corroborating the minor nature of the works and the visibility constraints at play, including from close quarters within Queen Square.
13. The proposed equipment would not be visible at street level from along the majority of King Street owing to the presence of intervening buildings. However, close range views would prevail above both the Almshouses and the Old Library in northward/north-westward views. Nevertheless, owing to the precise specification and positioning of existing/proposed equipment (most pertinently at the eastern end of the appeal building's roof) and to a backdrop to views already influenced by modern development, it is my judgement that no materially adverse changes to the settings of these particular listed buildings would result as a consequence of the proposal. As such, their special interest would not be diminished. Further, in wider terms, no material harm to the character or appearance of the CA would arise.
14. There are other designated heritage assets located in the vicinity. These include the Grade I Listed Theatre Royal, and the Grade II* Listed buildings known as: 'King William and Naval Volunteer Public Houses', '16, King Street', '17, King Street', and '33, King Street'. Nevertheless, in-part owing to the minor nature of the proposed works as well as the distances of separation and specific physical relationships involved, I identify no harm to significance or special interest by virtue of development within the settings of these other assets.
15. For the above reasons, the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the CA and preserve the settings and thereby the significance of relevant listed buildings. The scheme accords with Policies BCS21 and BCS22 of the Bristol Development Framework Core Strategy (June 2011), Policies DM26, DM27, DM30 and DM31 of the Bristol Local Plan Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (July 2014), Policy BCAP43 of the Bristol Central Area Plan (March 2015), and the historic environment conservation and enhancement policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) in so far as these policies require development proposals to safeguard or enhance heritage assets and the character and setting of areas of acknowledged importance.

Other Matters

16. Concerns have been raised about potential effects on human health of deploying 5G technologies from the site. However, the appellant has provided a certificate to confirm that the proposal has been designed to comply with the guidelines for radio frequency public exposure published by the International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). The Framework indicates that decision-makers should not set health safeguards different from these guidelines.
17. Thus, even whilst recognising the proximity of neighbouring occupiers including children and elderly residents, and notwithstanding references made to studies

undertaken elsewhere and the presence of other telecommunications equipment in the local vicinity, there is no clear reason for me to consider the proposal unacceptable in a health context. I note that the Council came to the same conclusion when determining the planning application now subject to this appeal. Further, I am suitably satisfied that adverse implications for local wildlife would be avoided and external noise-generating equipment capable of effecting neighbouring living conditions would not be installed.

18. There would be public benefits associated with the delivery of enhanced communications infrastructure. However, on the basis of the outcome of my reasoning upon the appeal's Main Issue, there is no need for me to consider the implications of such benefits in any detail. Moreover, the proposal accords with the development plan when read as a whole and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

19. For the above reasons the appeal is allowed. The only conditions required relate to a time limit for the commencement of development, and the schedule of approved plans in the interests of certainty.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR