



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 July 2025

by R Morgan BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/H4315/W/25/3363884

Newton le Willows Railway Station, Mill Lane, St Helens, WA12 9SF

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) 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 Cornerstone against the decision of St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is P/2024/0430/TELPA.
 - The development proposed is 20m high lattice tower on a new concrete base supporting 3no. antennas and 1no. 300mm dish, 2no. cabinets, 1no. meter cabinet and associated ancillary works to be sited at ground level. Existing trees and shrubs to be relocated next to/around the compound.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposed telecommunications mast and associated equipment is permitted development under the terms of Part 16 of Schedule 2 of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO). The principle of the development, including the need for the facility, is accepted by the legislation, and is not a matter for consideration in this appeal.
3. Part 16 of the GPDO requires that the proposal is assessed in terms of siting and appearance only. It is not a requirement to take development plan policies into account, but they may be a material consideration where relevant to matters of siting and appearance.
4. Relevant policies within the St Helens Local Plan 2022 include policy LPD01, which is concerned with the effect of development on the character and appearance of the area, and policy LPD06, which relates to development at or visible from prominent gateway corridors including railway stations. Policy LPD07 sets out criteria for assessing proposals for new digital communications equipment so is also of relevance, as are policies LPC09 and LPC10 which deal with landscaping and trees.
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) includes sections on supporting high quality communications and achieving well designed places. The Framework is also a material consideration in this appeal.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed telecommunications development on the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on existing landscaping.

Reasons

7. The proposed telecommunications equipment would be sited at the edge of the large, busy car park which serves Newton-le-Willows railway station. The 20m slimline lattice mast would be sited within a small area planted with trees and shrubs, which forms part of the landscaped car park perimeter.
8. The area surrounding the station car park is predominately residential in character, but there are a number of commercial properties, including the Millstone pub, close to the appeal site.
9. From Mill Lane (A49), views of the proposed mast would be largely screened by intervening trees and buildings, but it would be visible across the Millstone pub car park. Although it would be set well back from the road, the mast would appear as an unusually tall feature, exacerbated by its siting in an elevated position. Its prominence would be even greater from the pub car park itself.
10. From the surrounding residential areas, the proposed structure, with its lattice form, would appear alien and out of character. That said, views from nearby houses would be limited in extent. Whilst it would be clearly visible from the upper windows of a small number of houses on Owlsfield, the mast would be a reasonable distance away, across Mill Lane and the pub car park, so would not be overbearing or intrusive.
11. From the residential streets of Banastre Drive and Roscoe Avenue which back onto it, the mature trees and vegetation around the station car park would provide significant screening, particularly in the summer months. Screening would be reduced when the trees were bare, and at these times the mast would likely be visible from the rear upper windows of some houses on Banastre Drive. However, it would be seen across the station car park, and through intervening trees, so would not be overly prominent.
12. The appellant's photomontages suggest that the mast would not be visible from Roscoe Avenue. I am not convinced that would apply to all vantage points, but any views from the street, or from the gardens of the bungalows at 24 and 22 Roscoe Avenue, would be limited to the upper part of the mast. Existing vegetation, buildings and fences would effectively screen much of the installation from view, so that whilst it would likely be visible from areas of Roscoe Avenue and may be considered unattractive, it would not be a dominant feature within the streetscene.
13. The proposed equipment would be most clearly visible from within the station car park, which is inherently open in character, despite internal tree planting. Here, the mast would be seen in the context of the many other vertical structures within and around the car park, but would be notably taller, and its proposed siting on a raised area of soft landscaping would add to the impression of height.
14. The proposed installation would provide much improved 4G coverage for the local area on behalf of Vodafone. The mast needs to go somewhere, and the presence

- of telecommunications equipment would not be unexpected in a car park location such as this, close to a railway station and with commercial uses close by. That said, the proposed 20m lattice structure would be significantly higher and bulkier than the lighting columns, signs and other vertical features within the car park.
15. The appellant has stated that the height of the proposed mast is the minimum necessary to provide the required coverage, and that the design is the least obtrusive to support the necessary antenna, with scope to add further equipment in future if necessary. I have no reason to doubt the technical specifications, but even so, the proposal would be an incongruous feature here, and would be far more obvious than the existing telecommunications mast, which is sited near to the station entrance.
 16. The appellant has undertaken a fairly extensive site search exercise which has not identified any other options which would be preferable. The Council has not suggested any either, other than sharing the nearby monopole. That option has been discounted by the appellant due to height restrictions close to the railway. Having visited the area and reviewed the information provided, I am satisfied that, within this constrained area of search, the appeal site may well be one of the 'least worst' options.
 17. However, Local Plan policy LPD06 seeks to improve the visual appearance of gateway corridors, including railway stations. When visiting the area, I saw that considerable effort has been made to enhance the appearance of the station car park. The extensive boundary planting provides an attractive green backdrop, which also screens the large car park from the surrounding houses. The existing landscaping in and around the car park makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.
 18. The existing landscaping at the appeal site is established and contains at least one tree which has reached a reasonable height. This could provide some useful screening for the proposed installation, but from the information provided, it is unclear how much of this vegetation would need to be removed to provide the site compound, where any replacement planting would be undertaken, or how this could be achieved.
 19. I acknowledge that this is an application for prior approval rather than full planning permission, so is a 'light touch' regime. Nonetheless, the effect of the proposed installation on existing landscaping is relevant to consideration of siting. That is particularly the case here, given the positive contribution of the site in its current form to the character and appearance of the area, forming part of the wider landscaping around the car park.
 20. Whilst not determinative, Local Plan policy LPD06 requires new development within or visible from a prominent gateway corridor to provide appropriate landscaping as part of the design or layout. Removal of vegetation here would detract from the green surround to the car park, which is visible from the station and forms part of the wider gateway area. The result would be harm to the character and appearance of the area. Loss of landscaping would also limit its scope to provide screening of the proposed installation, both from within the station car park and that of the Millstone pub.
 21. In an application for prior approval under Part 16 Class A, there is no scope to deal with landscaping matters through a condition. If I were to grant prior approval for

the scheme on the basis of the information provided, there would be nothing to require the appellant to work with the LPA on this matter, notwithstanding their comment that it would be done as best practice. I note the appellants suggestion that this matter could be dealt with through an exchange of emails, but it seems to me that paragraphs A.3 (9) & (10) of the GPDO provide for instances where the developer is seeking changes to a scheme, rather than the local planning authority. In any case, the submission of landscaping information would not be a minor amendment, as referred to in paragraph A.3 (10). The appellant's suggestion does not provide a suitable way to satisfactorily address this issue.

22. Taking all of the above into account, I conclude that the proposed siting and appearance of the installation would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on landscaping.

Other Matters

23. Framework paragraph 119 highlights the importance of advanced high quality and reliable communications infrastructure, and the appellant has identified various social and economic benefits of the proposal. I agree that these matters are important, but the provisions of the GPDO mean that, in assessing this appeal proposal, I am only able to consider matters of siting and appearance.
24. The appellant has provided a certificate to confirm that the equipment would not exceed the guidelines for public exposure set by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection. The proposal therefore meets the requirements of Framework paragraph 122 in relation to public health. This represents a lack of harm, but does not outweigh the concerns in relation to character and appearance.

Conclusion

25. With a lack of obvious alternatives, the station car park may be a suitable location for additional telecommunications equipment. However, owing to the lack of information about the effect of the proposal on existing landscaping, including measures for mitigation planting, I have found that the siting and appearance of the proposed telecommunications equipment would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

R Morgan

INSPECTOR