



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 September 2025

by **B Plenty BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4625/W/25/3363234

Cranmore Park, Cranmore Drive, Solihull B90 4RZ

- 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 EE UK Ltd and Hutchison UK Ltd against the decision of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2024/02949/PPFL.
 - The development proposed is a telecommunications installation, 40m High FLI ATS1301 5G Lattice Tower on 7.7 x 7.7 x 1.2m deep concrete base with 3m circular Headframe for 6No. Antennas Apertures at 350°/130°/220° and 4No. 600mm Dishes. RRU's, BOB's and Active Routers to be fixed to Headframe below Antennas and associated ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed mast on the character and appearance of the area, and whether any harm caused would be outweighed by the need to site the installation in the location proposed having regard to any alternative sites.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site is located within the northern part of a large commercial estate, with residential areas found to its north and west. The commercial estate consists of two and three storey office and warehouses buildings amongst car parks, access roads and landscaping. The site is within an overspill car parking area, set away from, but close to, the boundary of the commercial estate. Boundary planting, to the edge of the estate, provide some trees and hedge screening. These diffuse some intervisibility between the commercial estate and the wider area. The site, being an open area of land, makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the area.
4. The proposed tower would be a tall and relatively wide structure that would exceed the height of existing local buildings. Whilst acknowledging that the mast would be tall, this height is required to deliver the proposed 5G service and it appears that a more sympathetic design is not available.
5. Nonetheless, the proposed lattice tower would be a strident feature viewed from within the site. It would be substantively taller than adjacent built form, streetlights and nearby landscape planting. It would also be divorced from nearby

development and set away from nearby trees resulting in a significant adverse visual effect to its immediate area. Views of the proposed mast would be obtrusive from viewpoints within the estate, including from within the overspill car park, occupiers of adjacent commercial buildings and from road users on parts of Cranmore Drive. The mast's utilitarian appearance would be in marked contrast to the surrounding more subdued buildings and street furniture having an adverse visual effect on its immediate surroundings.

6. Furthermore, views of the proposal would also be possible from several points outside the estate. Views from within Clifton Crescent would reveal the mast over houses as a prominent feature, creating an obtrusive and overt presence. Also, strident views of the mast would be likely to be possible from the playing fields of Widney Junior School and Cranmore Infants' School. Accordingly, the site's commercial setting would only be moderately screened from the surrounding residential areas, by boundary planting and existing built form, creating further adverse visual effects in the wider area.
7. Consequently, the proposal would be visually disruptive within the comparatively low-lying context of the surrounding built form, harming the character and appearance of the area. As such, the proposal would conflict with policies P14 and P15 of the Solihull Local Plan [2013] (LP). These seek, among other matters, for telecommunication equipment to ensure visual impact is minimised through design and location, and to be of an appropriate scale that respects the surrounding natural and built environment.

Alternative sites

8. The Framework supports the development of a high-quality reliable communication infrastructure as this is deemed to be essential for economic growth and social well-being. Nonetheless, it requires sites to be kept to a minimum and encourages the reuse and adaption of existing base stations. Paragraph 122 c) of the Framework expects evidence to be submitted to justify all applications. For a new mast or base station this includes evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure.
9. The existing mast in the area has been issued with a Notice to Quit as the occupiers at Highland Solihull ASC are leaving the premises and therefore a new installation is required. Accordingly, the appellant asserts that the proposal would be a replacement mast, which would support the sequential approach of new site identification, resulting in no net increase in masts in the area. The Council acknowledge that there is a technical requirement for a mast within the indicative search area for this cell. However, in having found that the proposed mast would harm the character and appearance of the area, it is necessary to consider whether an alternative site would provide a less intrusive visual impact.
10. The appellant has undertaken the sequential approach and demonstrated that the erection of a ground based new mast is the only suitable option. This process considered mast sharing. An existing lattice tower is evident from Cranmore Boulevard behind David Lloyd Gym, but in consideration of the sequential approach to the provision of telecommunication equipment, the appellant has demonstrated that mast sharing would not be possible but did not specifically demonstrate why the existing mast would be unsuitable for adaption.

11. The search area for a new mast is restricted due to the size of the coverage cell, being small as it seeks to deliver 4G and 5G coverage, and by the extent of residential areas around the commercial estate offering limited suitable sites outside the estate. The site search process has considered the suitability of a range of alternative sites. These are located within Cranmore Estate as illustrated at figure 5.3 of the appellant's Statement of Case. These sites were found to be unfeasible due to technical constraints, environmental or aesthetic concerns.
12. However, some discounted sites have been excluded for unclear reasons. For example, it is not clear whether Tangent Court requires its current parking provision or if the site could be reconfigured to accommodate land for the mast to reduce the anticipated impact on parking provision. Also, Cogen Court was eliminated due to its proximity to residential properties but this seems to be a similar separation distance as the proposal and has not been eliminated for a clear preventative reason. Also, Cranmore Park and Cranmore Place were eliminated due to weak roof structures, but these could be upgraded. Also, other buildings could also have been explored for suitability prior to proposing the appeal site which do not appear to have been considered.
13. Figure 5.3 shows alternative sites around the perimeter of the commercial estate but excludes sites within its central area which should have also been considered. There may be reasons why such sites are deemed unsuitable to the appellant, but I have insufficient information to demonstrate that a less harmful location could be available. Accordingly, I find based on the submitted evidence that the site search undertaken is incomplete and therefore not robust. As such, I am unconvinced that the proposed site, in comparison to alternative sites, would cause the least harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Planning balance and Conclusion

14. I have concluded that the appeal scheme would result in visual harm to the character and appearance of the area, and cause conflict with LP policies P14 and P15 of the development plan.
15. In contrast, the Framework identifies that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Furthermore, it states that the number of radio and electronic communication masts, and the sites for such installations, should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers. These objectives are also supported by LP policy P14 which seeks to support the development of electronic communications networks and have regard to the needs of operators and any technical constraints on location. As such, the provision of a robust network is of substantial public benefit.
16. Furthermore, the appellant has demonstrated that in applying a sequential approach to new equipment, a new mast is the only option to provide the required coverage. Although not fully evidenced by the appellant it has also been asserted the proposed mast would replace an existing mast elsewhere within Cranmore Estate, preventing a net gain of such equipment in the area.
17. The proposed mast would provide improved coverage for EE, HSG TLE and the Emergency Service Network (ESN) in this area of Solihull, providing a mast for a shared network. The area currently suffers from gaps in network coverage that the proposal would help to infill. Also, the replacement mast would ensure the ongoing

provision of a service in the area and if the existing site is not replaced users would be likely to experience a loss of network coverage and the creation of dead spots. These benefits weigh in favour of the proposal.

18. Nonetheless, the benefits of the proposal would not outweigh the conflict found with the development plan with respect to the harmful visual effects of the development. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

B Plenty

INSPECTOR