



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 November 2025

by R Gravett BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/V4250/W/25/3372999

Winstanley Warriors FC, Little Lane, Wigan WN3 6PZ

- 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 Order).
 - The appeal is made by EE Ltd & Hutchison 3G UK Ltd against the decision of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is A/25/099272/TCSO.
 - The development proposed is Proposed telecommunications installation. Proposed 20m high FLI Slimline Climable Lattice Tower on 5.0x5.0x1.2m deep concrete base, and ancillary associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Because this is an application for prior approval, the provisions of the Order require the local planning authority to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account any representations received. This appeal will be determined on the same basis.
3. The appeal submission includes viewpoint photomontages that were not before the Council at the time of its decision. The Council and interested parties have had the opportunity to comment through the consultation that forms part of the appeal timetable. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the interests of no party would be prejudiced by taking account of this material in my assessment below.
4. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework was published for consultation during the course of the appeal. Having regard to its content and the nature of the disputed matter, I am satisfied that no prejudice would arise to either party by proceeding to issue this decision without seeking comments.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed installation on (i) the character and appearance of the area; and (ii) if any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed and taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The appeal site is a grassed area located on the far side of a large area of open space to the north of Little Lane, which includes grass playing fields and pitches, a 3G pitch and the clubhouse of Winstanley Warriors FC.
7. Existing vertical structures in the area include street lighting columns and road signage, particularly at the roundabout junction of the A49 to the east of Little Lane. There is also floodlighting around the grass football pitch furthest away from Little Lane and tall mesh fences and floodlighting around the 3G pitch. These structures are largely seen against a backdrop of existing trees at the back edge of the pavement, or against the landscape margin between the playing fields and the industrial area beyond, which gives this section of Little Lane a leafy and verdant appearance.
8. It is proposed to install a 20m high lattice tower mast, with a headframe accommodating 6 antenna apertures and 4 dishes, sited in a secure compound, located close to the north-west corner of a grass football pitch. In close-by views from the open space, the mast would appear a sizeable, bulky structure, despite the lattice design allowing light to pass through the tower. This would be in stark contrast to the slimline profile of the floodlighting either side of the football pitch. The width of the headframe hosting the apertures and dishes on the upper section would exacerbate this, seen above the backdrop of trees and the flank elevation of the industrial building to the north.
9. Further, the perimeter compound would take up a sizeable area of green space, and the high mesh fencing would add to the prominence of the installation. The trees behind afford the installation no screening and when not in full leaf they would also provide little effective softening of its appearance, even if the tower was painted a fir green colour.
10. From Little Lane, the mast would be some distance away seen beyond boundary fencing, the dugouts, goal posts and fencing around the football pitch. In these longer views, the lower part of the mast and the compound would be seen against the backdrop of the existing trees along the northern boundary of the playing fields. Although part of the headframe would be visible on the skyline, the visual effects would therefore be moderated. Similarly, from the A49 roundabout and the housing opposite on Manse Gardens, the mast would be seen in the distance behind the fencing and floodlights of the 3G pitch.
11. Nevertheless, although the lowest height required to provide adequate coverage, from close vantage points the tower and compound enclosure would appear unduly dominant and visually intrusive, at odds with the open, verdant character and appearance of the surrounding open space. I therefore conclude that the siting and appearance of the proposed installation would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.

Suitable alternatives

12. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology, (such as 5G). Where new sites are required,

equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

13. The appeal site is not an established telecommunications site. It would be a new installation, although the appellant's evidence is that it would replace an existing rooftop installation at the T. Jones (Delph Garage) site, following a 'Notice to Quit' (NTQ). The proposal is required to maintain coverage and provide enhanced 4G and 5G mobile network coverage for the EE, H3G, LTE and Emergency Services networks, as well as other telecommunications providers who would rely on the mast for their services. It would further reduce connectivity issues such as call dropouts and slow data speeds. Therefore, the site is clearly within an area with a demonstrable need for a telecommunications installation.
14. The appellant has undertaken a search for alternative sites, applying a sequential site selection process. I appreciate that due to the physics of radio frequency, each base station can only provide service to a limited geographic area, and this is reduced further by topography, population density and 'clutter' such as high trees or buildings which can obstruct the signal. However, although the appellant refers to the search area as being 'highly constrained covering a small radius,' a map of the cell centre and adjoining cells has not been provided and the extent of the search area is unclear.
15. Ten potential alternative sites have been assessed to accommodate the proposed development, principally within the industrial estate to the north of the appeal site off Stephens Way. The reasons for discounting the sites are very brief, but include insufficient space, impact on nearby business operations or residential development and fall distance from the railway. One site, identified as 'D3-GF D Cain & Son', has been discounted on the basis that the landlord had planning permission¹ to erect a new workshop, but the Council's evidence is that this has now lapsed. It is not clear from the appellant's evidence why this site is still being discounted, particularly as it is in such close proximity to the appeal site, comprises the rear yard of an industrial building and would be largely screened from the open space off Little Lane by the landscape margin along its northern side.
16. Paragraph 122 of the Framework states that applications for prior approval under the Order should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development. For a new mast or base station, this should include evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure should be submitted. Although the appellant has commented that there are no viable rooftops, I have insufficient evidence before me that equipment could not be housed on an existing building, or that this has been fully considered as an option, particularly given the nearby industrial buildings.
17. As such, despite the Council raising no alternatives, the appellant has not robustly demonstrated that all options have been fully explored and that there are no other operationally suitable sites. Moreover, the appellant has not provided sufficient evidence to justify why the DC Cain & Son site has been discounted. Therefore, I conclude that the harm the siting and appearance of the proposed installation would cause to the character and appearance of the area is not outweighed by the

¹ A/17/83666/FUL

need for the installation to be sited as proposed, taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Other Matters

18. While I recognise that there are wider social and economic benefits arising from telecommunication installations, the Order is clear that the only considerations should be the siting and appearance of the proposal.
19. The appellant has drawn my attention to examples of appeal decisions in Winchester² and Barnet³ where prior approval was granted for monopole telecommunications masts. From the limited information before me, I cannot be certain that these share similar site or locational characteristics to the appeal proposal, and they are clearly different in design. Therefore, the question of how the overall balance is struck is not necessarily comparable and consequently, the examples do not alter my findings on the main issue above.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

R Gravett

INSPECTOR

² APP/L1765/W/18/3197522

³ APP/N5090/W/20/3261084