



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 December 2025

by H Whitfield BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/C5690/W/25/3373749

Montpelier Row, Blackheath Village, London SE3 0TJ

- 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 Ms Abbie Campbell of Shared Access Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Lewisham.
 - The application Ref is DC/25/140283.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a 20m monopole which will support 4No. antennas and 1No. GPS module.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (the GPDO), under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A, Paragraph A.3(4) 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. My determination of this appeal has been made on the same basis.
3. The Council has referred to development plan policies on its decision notice. However, the principle of development is established by the GPDO and the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO do not require regard be had to the development plan. I have had regard to the policies of the Lewisham Local Plan (2025) (the LLP), the London Plan (2021) (the LP) and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) only in so far as they are a material consideration relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

Preliminary Matters

4. The Appellant has used a different street name on their appeal form to that which appears on the application form. Given the former more accurately describes the location of the site, I have used it in the banner heading above. As a description of development was not provided on the application form, I have also used the description given on the appeal form in the banner heading above.
5. The appellant has submitted amended plans and photomontages with this appeal which show a reduction in the height of the monopole to 17.5m. This amendment does not make a substantial difference or fundamental change to the development when compared to the plans upon which the Council assessed in its evidence. The

Council has also had the opportunity to review and comment on these plans such that accepting them would not cause unlawful procedural unfairness to anyone involved in the appeal. I have therefore determined the appeal on the basis of the amended plans.

Main Issue

6. The main issues are:

- the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed installation on the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets; and
- if any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed, taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Reasons

Siting and appearance

7. The appeal site relates to a section of the footpath on Montpelier Row at the junction with Montpelier Vale. The surrounding area includes both commercial and residential buildings which are generally of three-storey scale. Nearby streets include trees, various pieces of street furniture and vertical features, including streetlights and signage. The Heath, which is a large open green space, lies to the north and gives the local area a verdant and spacious character, despite the traffic experienced along surrounding roads.

Designated and non-designated heritage assets

8. The appeal site lies within the Blackheath Conservation Area (the CA). Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. The CA is large, and the wide, open spaces of the Heath, which cover much of the northern part of the CA, are defining features of the immediate area. Insofar as is relevant to this appeal, the significance of the CA is largely derived from the historic and architectural quality of many of the buildings within it, the arrangement of these buildings and the streets they form, and their relationship and interactions with the Heath which all form key parts of the Area's character and appearance.
9. In the vicinity of the appeal site, the Heath is enclosed by several Grade II listed buildings on Montpelier Row which provide enclosure, visual interest and punctuation to the Heath at the southern edge as it transitions into the more intimate and urban character of Blackheath Village. The Conservation Area Appraisal¹ (the CAA) identifies topographical changes across the Heath as providing constantly changing views, way-finding landmarks and points of reference which enable its special interest to be appreciated. The CAA also identifies roofscape as an important feature within the immediate area of the appeal site, and given the extended views of all built form that are achievable, is highlighted as being particularly sensitive to even modest changes. The appeal site sits at the interface between the Heath and Blackheath Village. However, as a small section of modern pavement it makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the CA as a whole.

¹ Blackheath Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Supplementary Planning Document (2007)

10. To the north-east of the appeal site is the Grade II listed All Saints Church², a Kentish Rag stone Gothic Revival church which sits prominently on an elevated position at the edge of the Heath. The church spire of the building is a prominent landmark feature of many near and distant views to varying degrees, including across the Heath into the CA from the Grand Axis and Blackheath Gate and from Blackheath Village when travelling along Montpelier Vale. The special interest and significance of the Church is derived in part from its architectural and historic interest. The Church is a focal point of the surrounding area and when travelling towards the village. This interrelationship, along with the open aspect provided by the Heath, positively contributes to the building's significance.
11. On the opposite side of Montpelier Row to the appeal site are several Grade II listed buildings which, despite comprising separate buildings, read as a consistent terrace from a distance. Closest to the appeal site is the Grade II listed 22 and 23 Montpelier Row³ which is a broadly symmetrical pair of Georgian style, yellow brick, three-storey houses. This building, and the group it is part of, are prominent enclosing features of the Heath which are visible to varying degrees when travelling towards the Village from Montpelier Vale and across the Heath. From my observations, such views were not significantly filtered by nearby trees, which were not all in leaf at the time of my visit. The interrelationship between the Nos 22-23, the Heath and Blackheath Village contributes positively to its special interest and significance, which, insofar as is relevant to this appeal, derives from its architectural and historic interest, townscape quality and setting.
12. The appeal site has a close relationship with All Saints Church and Nos 22-23 Montpelier Row and is intervisible between these two listed buildings. The intervisibility between the listed buildings on Montpelier Row, All Saints Church and the Heath, as well as the openness of the surroundings, positively contributes to the spaciousness of their settings and forms part of the surroundings within which these listed buildings are experienced. However, as a small section of modern pavement, the appeal site itself makes a neutral contribution to their settings.
13. Further along the row to the north-east are the Grade II listed 18, 19 and 20 Montpelier Row⁴, Heathview Hotel (15 & 16 Montpelier Row)⁵, Clarendon Hotel (12-14 Montpelier Row)⁶, Former Regency Hotel and 5-7 Montpelier Row⁷. These listed buildings have a group townscape value and are important features that enclose the Heath. The significance of these listed buildings, insofar as is relevant to this appeal, is considered to derive from their individual historic and architectural interest and settings, which includes the interrelationship with the Heath and transition towards the more urban environment of the Village. However, due to the increased separation between the appeal site and these listed buildings further along Montpelier Row and the fact the site relates to a small section of pavement, the appeal site makes a neutral contribution to their settings.
14. Further away from the appeal site to the south, at the junction of Tranquil Vale and Montpelier Vale are the Grade II listed 3-9, 11-21 and 23-27 Tranquil Vale⁸. These buildings lie within Blackheath Village, and their significance is principally derived from

² List Entry Number: 1080025

³ List Entry Number: 1079961

⁴ List Entry Number: 1079960

⁵ List Entry Number: 1079959

⁶ List Entry Number: 1079958

⁷ List Entry Number: 1079957

⁸ List Entry Numbers: 1079941, 1285841 & 1358515

their townscape value, historic and architectural interest. There is some intervisibility between these listed buildings and the appeal site where a channelled view along Montpelier Vale is achievable towards the Heath. However, as the appeal site relates to a small part of pavement some distance from these listed buildings, it makes a neutral contribution to their settings.

15. Beyond these buildings to the south of the railway is Winchester House (9 Independent Place), a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA), which can be seen when travelling from the Heath down Montpelier Vale due to the changing topography. Insofar as is relevant to this appeal, the significance of the NDHA derives from its historic and architectural interest. Similarly to the relationship with the buildings on Tranquil Vale, there is some intervisibility between the NDHA and the appeal site. However, as above, due to the separation distance and intervening buildings and land, the appeal site makes a neutral contribution to its setting.

The effect of the proposed development

16. It is noted that the proposed height of the monopole is necessary for the apparatus to operate effectively, and the development has been specifically designed to reduce the level of infrastructure typically associated with such installations. However, even at the reduced height and painted black to match surrounding streetlights, it would be significantly taller and wider than existing vertical features in the street scene and would sit above the ridge of surrounding buildings. Despite the more slimline design, the monopole would still have a bulky, wide and industrial appearance and the height of the pole, coupled with the top-heavy design would introduce a stark, incongruous and dominant vertical feature into the local area. While there are some nearby trees, due to the separation from the proposed monopole, they would not offer a significant level of screening in the street scene from all directions, even when in full leaf.
17. The photomontages demonstrate that in some specific longer-range views, the monopole would appear similar in height to other existing street furniture and would be obscured by existing building such as All Saints Church. However, in short and medium range views, the location of the monopole would result in a highly visible addition within the street scene that would be significantly taller than surrounding street furniture and would draw the eye to its height in relation to surrounding built form.
18. The height and design of the proposed mast would introduce a new and noticeably different structure to the area, adding an incongruous intrusion into a sensitive roof scape within the CA and interface between the Heath. The development would also reduce openness and distract in views between All Saints Church, 22 and 23 Montpelier Row, the Heath and Blackheath village when travelling to and from the Heath. Irrespective of whether these are designed views, the mast would draw the eye and compete for primacy in views in this historic townscape environment when transitioning between the Heath and the village. This would be harmful to the intervisibility between these buildings and diminish the ability to appreciate the transition between the openness of the heath and the more urban form of the village.
19. In addition to the above, travelling out of Blackheath village towards the Heath, the monopole would be seen in conjunction with All Saints Church, which is an important focal building within this part of the CA. The development would become a dominant, modern and incongruous feature in the foreground of the Church which would distract the eye, particularly in short and medium distance views. Similarly, views of 22 and 23 Montpelier Row in the street scene would be dominated by the proposed mast which,

due to its positioning to the front of the building, would detract from the character and appearance of this listed building to the detriment of its contribution to the street scene. The development would therefore detract from key views and thus impact the ability to experience and appreciate these listed buildings, through development within their settings.

20. The proposal would therefore harm the settings and significance of the Grade II listed All Saints Church and 22 and 23 Montpelier Row and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, resulting in harm to its significance. It follows that the proposal would fail to accord with the statutory presumption under s72(1) of the Act. Given the nature and extent of the development, the harm to the significance of all three assets would be localised, and less than substantial, at the lower end of the scale, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.
21. The mast would have an indirect relationship with the listed buildings further north-east along Montpelier Row (18, 19 and 20 Montpelier Row, Heathview Hotel, Clarendon Hotel, Former Regency Hotel and 5-7 Montpelier Row), where any views of the development would be at an oblique line of site. Given the degree of separation and fact that the mast would not become a key feature of views of these listed buildings, despite their group value with 22 and 23 Montpelier Row, the development would preserve the settings and special interests of these buildings. Similarly, while the mast would be visible from some of the listed buildings on Tranquil Vale and the NDHA (Winchester House), given the separation distance and presence of intervening buildings, the development would not harm the settings and special interests of these buildings either. The significance of these designated and non-designated heritage assets would therefore be preserved.
22. The Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of such an asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the development, which I shall return to.
23. Nevertheless, for the above reasons I conclude the development would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Blackheath Conservation Area, resulting in harm to its significance. The development would also harm the significance of the Grade II listed All Saints Church and 22 and 23 Montpelier Row, through development within their settings. As far as they are material considerations, the proposal would therefore conflict with Policies HC1 and SI6 of the London Plan (2021) and Policies HE1, HE2, QD1, QD3 and TR7 of the Lewisham Local Plan (2025) which seek to ensure that developments, including digital connectivity infrastructure, respect local character, secure a high-quality public realm and preserve or enhance the value and significance of the historic environment. It would also conflict with the Framework which seeks to conserve and enhance the historic environment and highlights that telecommunication development should be sympathetically designed.

Alternative sites

24. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposed installation is necessary to provide improved 2G, 4G and 5G services in the area due to a coverage 'not-spot' in the Blackheath village area.
25. Paragraph 122 of the Framework states that applications for electronic communications development (including applications for prior approval under the

GPDO) should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development. The appellant indicates that there are no existing base stations that can feasibly be upgraded, no existing telecommunications structures within the area that could accommodate the equipment required and no better operationally viable rooftop sites or other structures. As such, they contend that the erection of a new ground-based mast in this location would be the only viable route to ensure the delivery of the necessary service.

26. Six alternative rooftop sites were considered and discounted for reasons cited as lack of access to the roof, structural suitability to accommodate equipment, lack of agreement from building owners and ICNIRP⁹ compliance. In addition, six alternative ground-based sites were considered and discounted for reasons stated as ICNIRP non-compliance, increased visibility, land ownership and pavement width. As such, the appellant considers that there are no alternative locations.
27. While these sites have been discounted for various reasons, the appellant in each instance, has reached a view on their unsuitability in comparison to the appeal site based on very little information. There is very little detailed information before me on the alternative sites and therefore I cannot accurately determine whether the reasons for discounting these other sites are reliable or robust. Particularly as the reasons given for discounting them are brief, generic and unsupported by other evidence. Moreover, there is no substantive evidence demonstrating why other buildings and land not within the appellant's area of search or close to it have not been considered. The appeal site is stated to be the *most viable location*; however, this does not demonstrate that the alternatives explored are completely unviable with clear reasons.
28. Consequently, I am not satisfied that a comprehensive review of the availability of alternative sites within the search area has been undertaken to demonstrate that the appeal site represents the only viable option.

Heritage and planning balance

29. The submission details how the proposal is required to facilitate improvements to 2G, 4G and 5G coverage within an identified area. The development would therefore facilitate reliable, up to date, connectivity for the operator network. The public benefits associated with the provision of enhanced digital communication include benefits to the wider economy, improved connectivity for businesses and communities and high quality and widespread coverage. This is supported by paragraph 119 of the Framework which states that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being and that planning decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G).
30. However, heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations, as set out in paragraph 202 of the Framework. Therefore, although the government aims to facilitate the growth of new telecommunications systems and digital technologies, it also places great emphasis on protecting designated heritage assets and their settings.
31. Having regard to the benefits of the proposed development, on the basis of the evidence before me and my own observations on site, the proposed installation would result in

⁹ International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection

less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the scale, to the character and appearance of the Blackheath Conservation Area and the significance of the Grade II listed All Saints Church and 22 and 23 Montpelier Row through development within their settings. There is no clear and persuasive evidence to demonstrate that the appeal site represents the only viable option. Therefore, notwithstanding the need to upgrade the network and assist in the government's aspirations along with the associated public benefits, I do not consider that this would outweigh the harm that would arise from the siting and appearance of the proposed development in this instance.

Other Matters

32. The appeal site is located adjacent to the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site (WHS) Buffer Zone. The Council have not identified any harm to the WHS arising from the development. Given the intervening distance, buildings and land between the WHS and the appeal site I see no reason to come to a different conclusion.
33. The scheme has received support from some interested parties which reiterate the benefits of the development and have been duly taken on board. However, such support does not outweigh the harm identified above.

Conclusion

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

H Whitfield

INSPECTOR