



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 December 2025

by K Williams MTCP (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2 February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/P4225/W/25/3371622

Land at Rochdale RUFC, Clubhouse Close, Rochdale, OL11 5LU

- 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 Cornerstone against the decision of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00155/FUL.
 - The development proposed is for the removal of the existing 15m monopole supporting 3 no. antennas, removal of 4 no. equipment cabinets, 1 no. electric meter cabinets, timber fence and the installation of a new 12m pole with flood lights, new 20m lattice tower supporting 6 no. antennas, 2 no. transmission dishes, 4 no. replacement equipment cabinets, 1 no. replacement electric meter cabinet, 2.4m palisade fence and ancillary development there to including Ericson Radio Systems (ERS's) and 1 no. GPS module.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have removed words not related to acts of development from the description of development in the banner heading for clarity.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and on the living conditions of neighbouring residents with particular regard to outlook 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

Character, appearance and living conditions

4. The proposed 20-metre lattice tower and associated infrastructure would be sited beyond the western side of the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club (RRUFC) pitch, replacing the existing 15-metre monopole. The site is close to residential properties on Broadhalgh Avenue and Club Close and adjoins open land. It also lies within the wider setting of the Moorgate Conservation Area (CA) and the Grade II listed building¹ at No. 15 Broadhalgh Avenue, although separated from both by distance, screening and intervening residential development. Despite being within the Council's Defined Urban Area, the area possesses a distinct and attractive open, semi-rural character.

¹ List Entry Number: 1346262

5. The surrounding recreational and undeveloped land features gently undulating topography with clusters of trees, shrubs and hedgerows defining field and site boundaries, and the area is intersected by private roads and public rights of way, including routes from Broadhalgh Avenue and Hands Lane. From footpaths to the east and west, elements of the existing RRUFC infrastructure are visible between trees, buildings and above rooftops.
6. The proposal includes installing a new 12-metre floodlight to replace the existing lights that would be removed from the current monopole. The structure's highest point would still be lower and more slender than the existing monopole. As it would occupy broadly the same position and have a similar overall visual effect, on its own it would not result in any additional harm.
7. In contrast, the proposed lattice tower would introduce a substantially more intrusive and visually overbearing structure. Its considerable height, headframe and overtly engineered form would significantly exceed surrounding rooftops and tree cover, resulting in a feature that would appear visually discordant within its setting. The contrast with the existing, more modest and slender monopole would be marked; the new structure would read as a large, utilitarian and dominant vertical element within a relatively open area. Its prominence would be unavoidable from nearby paths, public rights of way and within the RRUFC grounds, eroding the area's semi-rural qualities.
8. Although existing evergreen and other vegetation along the edges of RRUFC boundary provides some degree of screening for the properties at Nos. 70, 72, 74 and 76 Broadhalgh Avenue, the proposed lattice tower would significantly exceed the height of the surrounding trees. It has not been shown that the mast would result in unacceptable effects in terms of daylight, sunlight or noise, but the upper sections of the tower would remain visible and prominent from nearby homes and gardens. The separation distance from the nearest dwelling would not be sufficient to mitigate its incongruous and dominating form given the considerable scale of the structure.
9. No evidence has been submitted to demonstrate ownership or long-term control of the existing vegetation near the properties on Broadhalgh Avenue. The outlook of several nearby properties could be dependent on vegetation maintained by third parties unconnected to the appellant or RRUFC, who may at any time undertake works that reduce or remove screening. As such, the continued presence, height and condition of the vegetation cannot be guaranteed, and it would not be reasonable to impose conditions seeking to secure the retention or suitable tree works.
10. Harm arises from the scale, engineered design, and starkly incongruous, dominant form of the proposed lattice tower. The relative openness of the surroundings, its wide visibility, and the uncertainty regarding long-term vegetation screening compound this impact. Given the number of nearby footpath users, spectators, and residents with direct views from homes and gardens, the structure would noticeably diminish the quality and enjoyment of the area homes and gardens, making them less enjoyable to use as a result. This harm carries significant weight.
11. Notwithstanding my views on the floodlight, I conclude the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and the living conditions of neighbouring

residents with particular regard to outlook. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policies P1, P3 and DM1 of the Rochdale Adopted Core Strategy (2016), and Policies JP-P1 and JP-C2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (2024), all of which require high-quality design that respects local character and townscape quality. It also conflicts with the National Planning Policy Framework, (The Framework), insofar as it seeks to ensure telecommunications development is sympathetically designed and minimises visual impact.

Suitable alternatives

12. The Framework requires planning policies and decisions to support the growth of electronic communications networks, including 5G and full-fibre broadband. The Council accepts the principle of the new mast, as it aligns with Policy E1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy and Policy JP-C2 of Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, both of which promote next-generation mobile technology and aim to maximise coverage while safeguarding townscape quality. Although not referenced by the Council, Policy CF/6 of the Rochdale UDP (2006) remains consistent with the Framework, insofar as it supports telecommunications development, subject to evidence of alternative sites, health compliance, and consideration of site-sharing opportunities.
13. The existing monopole is at end-of-life and cannot be upgraded and is incapable of supporting heavier 5G equipment. The appellant identifies issue regarding ongoing provision of 3G and 2G. Existing capacity has been identified as insufficient. Coverage plots show a complete absence of provision for other operators in this area. The proposed installation needs to be located as close to the existing base station site because there is a requirement to provide equivalent replacement coverage and capacity for the surrounding area in lieu of decommissioning 3G.
14. Some interested parties have identified that have adequate mobile signal in the area; however, this is not conclusive and without the replacement equipment, customers would likely face growing dropped calls, buffering, and inability to connect at busy times and coverage gaps. The proposal would provide an effective coverage solution, consolidating three operators onto a single structure.
15. I do not doubt that the proposal critical to maintaining network continuity following the removal of the existing station and is essential for delivering 5G connectivity to the area. The Greater Manchester strategies, Innovation Region, the UK Infrastructure Strategy, Mobile UK and other strategies identify and emphasise 5G as a tool for improving public services, supporting decarbonisation, and boosting quality of life. This upgrade would facilitate local economic growth, improve digital inclusion for residents, and strengthens public services. There is a demonstrable operational need for the proposed installation and the associated socio-economic and environmental public benefits attract very significant weight.
16. However, harm has been identified and it is reasonable to expect the appellant to have explored other locations, despite it not being an entirely new location for telecommunication equipment given the difference in design, scale and increase in the number of operators. Accordingly a site search assessment was provided, identifying alternative locations including rooftops, greenfield sites, the RRUFC car park and nearby pavements.
17. The Council disputes the reasons given for discounting several of the alternative sites and has identified additional options. The appellant's evidence explains that

the discounted sites were ruled out for technical reasons, including falling outside the operational area required to achieve cell coverage, structural instability, poor access, proximity to residential properties and heritage assets, the presence of underground services, and the need for taller masts to achieve International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) compliance near buildings.

18. Wherever located, a mast would still introduce a vertical structure within the established RRUFC pitch environs and its vegetated edges close to residential homes. Whilst I have no evidence to dispute new locations to the west suggested by the Council would be successful operationally, the alternative location suggested by the Council the north of discounted site D5 and site D6 and close to the clubhouse would be farther from residential properties on Broadhalgh Avenue and less likely to involve direct views from residential room windows and gardens on Clubhouse Close and Hands Lane.
19. Such alternative locations within the RRUFC grounds the north of discount site D5 and at site D6 and close to the clubhouse would be perceived in the context of this building hardstanding, access road and car park, with a backdrop of lower semi-mature trees. On this basis, there is a reasonable prospect of reduced overall effect on residents outlook, and those undertaking recreational activity and visitors watching rugby when compared with the appeal site.
20. While the appellant asserts that moving the mast north would draw coverage away from target areas, no like-for-like coverage plots for D5/D6 have been produced to demonstrate a material deficit relative to the appeal site. It has been asserted that relocating the mast would require additional height; however, no height assessments have been provided to substantiate this. It has therefore not been demonstrated that alternative locations would necessitate an unacceptable increase in height, or that they would result in significantly greater visual harm to the area's character and appearance.
21. Although some offset from drains or underground services may be necessary, the proposal does not demonstrate how these constraints would impede the construction of the mast or associated substructures, nor is it clear whether any resulting loss of parking would be significant. The appellant's assertion that site D6 is unavailable due to player-welfare facilities is unsupported by evidence that these facilities are permanent, cannot be relocated, or cannot be secured by alternative means.
22. Although the evidence indicates that the appeal site is operationally necessary, and consolidating three operators onto a single structure aligns with national policy to minimise mast proliferation, it has not been demonstrated that, in the context of this specific site with its numerous slender vertical elements, other suitable options for multi-operators or multiple alternative sites do not exist. The Framework seeks to minimise unnecessary duplication but does not prohibit multiple installations where these would be a more balanced response to local circumstances, particularly if a single, larger structure would have a greater overall impact. As such, I am not convinced it has been substantiated that dismissal of the appeal would limit competition between mobile networks or favour one provider over another.

23. I therefore attach significant weight to the likelihood that there may be alternatives within the RRUFC holding that could reduce impacts on residential outlook while still meeting operational needs. Even giving very significant weight to the public benefits of network continuity, consolidation and improved 4G/5G coverage, those benefits have not been shown to depend on this precise location, and the appellant has not provided the comparative technical evidence necessary to discount nearby options convincingly.

Other Considerations

24. The significance of the Moorgate CA derives principally from its historic layout and social development, while the significance of the listed building at No 15 is rooted in its architectural provenance and quality. In this context, the proposed installation, notwithstanding its height, would be visible, but views would be mitigated by existing development. The Council has identified no harm, and having regard to the siting, screening and overall spatial relationship. I have had special regard to the desirability of preserving a Listed Building and its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest as required², however, the proposal would not harm the significance or the setting of these heritage assets.
25. In determining this appeal, I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which sets out the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who do and do not share a protected characteristic. Age is among the relevant protected characteristics to which the PSED applies. Interested parties have raised concerns that the proposal would result in harm to children, while also affecting the health and well-being of the population.
26. In line with Framework paragraph 122, the appellant has provided evidence of consultation with relevant organisations and submitted a self-certification statement confirming compliance with International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines. Notwithstanding other studies, the Framework advises that health safeguards different from the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure should not be imposed. It does not indicate that the proposal would be unsafe for children or adults, nor that symptoms of those with existing health conditions would be worsened. No sufficiently authoritative evidence has been provided to show that a departure from national policy would be justified. The proposal would therefore not discriminate against persons with protected characteristics or conflict with the other aims of the PSED outlined above.
27. Furthermore, the Council's Environmental Health section has raised no objections regarding noise or odour. While some construction noise would be anticipated, the limited scale of the development, the existing tracks, allowing easy access to the site, and the distance from nearby homes indicate that any disturbance would not be significant or prolonged to have an unacceptable effect on the living conditions of neighbouring residents.
28. Interested parties raised concerns about potential harm to wildlife and habitat loss. The site already contains part of a concrete foundation and equipment cabinets. The proposal involves removing scrub and replacing grass with a concrete base, but no trees or hedgerows would be affected. The site also lies near an access

² Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

track, the RRUFC pitch, and existing floodlights, which are a replacement of existing ones. The Council did also not refuse the application on these grounds, and due to the above there is no substantive evidence that the proposal would result in harm to wildlife or habitats.

29. The appellant refers to appeal decisions at Fulwood Road, St Mildred's Road, Brewery Road and Totley Brook Road³ in support of the contention that operational requirements outweigh visual impact. I have already given very significant weight to operational need and the associated public benefits. However, I am not certain the circumstances in those cases do not differ materially from the semi-rural recreational landscape before me.
30. In Fulwood Road, the Inspector found no equivalent alternative site existed. In St Mildred's Road, the Inspector concluded that the operator had provided clear, detailed evidence addressing all alternatives, and the local planning authority had not challenged it. In Brewery Road and Totley Brook Road, the Inspectors determined that the resulting effect on character and appearance was acceptable within their urban contexts.
31. The example from Sidcup Sports Ground does not provide evidence of any wider landscape or residential context. There is too much detail on the mast height and therefore this does not alter my opinions on the proposal. The appeal site here lies within a more open, visually sensitive setting, and credible alternative locations within the RRUFC grounds remain insufficiently tested. The earlier decisions and other example therefore carries limited weight in the different circumstances of this case.
32. Concerns about property values and the financial motives behind the proposal are unsubstantiated. In any case, property values are a private interest, while planning decisions must focus on the public interest. Granting permission would not set a precedent, as each application is determined on its own merits and site-specific circumstances.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

33. The appeal proposal seeks the installation of a 20-metre lattice tower and associated infrastructure within the grounds of RRUFC. The combined socio-economic and environmental benefits referred to above carry very significant weight.
34. I consider the proposal would not discriminate against persons with the protected characteristic or the other aims of the PSED stated above. The effect of the development on the significance of the Moorgate CA or the Grade II listed No 15 and the replacement floodlight would be acceptable. These are neutral matters which weigh neither for nor against the proposal.
35. However the lattice mast would cause material harm to the character and appearance of the area and unacceptable harm to the outlook of nearby residents. The proposal conflicts with the development plan in these respects and this harm carries significant weight against the scheme.

³ PINs Reference: APP/J4423/W/20/3252355, APP/C5690/W/23/3334595, APP/E5330/W/16/3159250 and APP/J4423/W/17/3188962

36. I have carefully considered the risk to these benefits being delivered, should planning permission for this scheme be refused. However, as I am unable to conclude that there is a need to site the installation as proposed, in order to deliver the upgrade and increased coverage identified, because reasonable alternatives or other sites may exist, this tempers the weight to be given the benefits of the proposal. Whilst this is a finely balanced view, it has not been demonstrated that the harm resulting from the proposal is outweighed by the benefits.
37. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole. The material considerations, including those within the Framework do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it.

K Williams

INSPECTOR