

## **DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT**

**Ward:** Norcot

**App Ref:** 230011/TEL

**Address:** Site to East of, 121 Cockney Hill, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 4EY

**Proposals:** Application for prior notification of proposed installation of an H3G 15m street pole and three additional equipment cabinets by telecommunications code systems operators (amended)

**Case Officer:** Beatrice Malama

**Applicant:** CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd

**Date received (valid from):** 6 January 2023      **Target Decision date:** 3 March 2023

### **1. Site Description and Surrounding Area**

The site is to the east of 121 Cockney Hill, Tilehurst. The area is characterised by mixed use development comprising of residential, commercial, health, educational and recreational facilities. Asda Supermarket and Meadway Shopping centre are located north of the site on Honey End Lane. To the east across Honey End Lane is Prospect Park Hospital and residential dwelling houses to the west. Surrounding Prospect Park Hospital is land designated within the Reading Local Plan as 'Historic Park or Garden' and 'Local Green Space and Public Open Space'. The southern side of Cockney Hill comprises of residential properties and beyond which are properties of various uses including educational and recreational facilities.

### **2. Proposal and Supporting Information**

Prior approval is sought for the proposed installation of a 15m high street pole and 3 additional ancillary equipment cabinets and associated ancillary works by telecommunications code systems operators. The lower part of the pole would measure approximately 0.5m in diameter, the antennas would be approximately 0.6m and the rest of the pole would be approximately 0.4m.

#### **Plans and Documents Considered:**

- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 002 Site Location Plan dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 265 Proposed Site Elevation dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 215 Proposed Site Plan dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 001 Drawing Register dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- Government statement dated 7 March 2019, received 6 January 2023
- The Declaration of ICNIRP Compliance dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023

- Developer's Notice to Planning Services and Highways Services ref: RDG14802 - HONEY END LANE, dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023
- 5G Site Specific Supplementary Information and Planning Justification ref: RDG14802 dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023
- 5G Health and Network Briefing received 6 January 2023
- Application Form dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023

### **3. Relevant Planning History**

No relevant history

### **4. Consultations**

#### **4.1 Internal**

RBC Transport - No Objection - comment received on 26 January 2023 as follows:

*The proposed location of the additional equipment cabinets and pole will not impact on any visibility splays at the adjacent junction or obstruct pedestrian movement given that equipment will be located at the back of the footway. It should be noted that this is Council owned land and separate permissions may be required from the Asset's Management department within the Council. A crane license must be obtained for work carried out on the highway including the erection of the 15.0m Street Pole.*

*Therefore, there are no transport grounds to object to this proposal subject to suggested informatives.*

Ward Members: No comment

#### **4.2 Public consultation**

Letters of consultation were sent on 13 January 2023 to the owners and occupiers of properties located within the site's immediate surrounding area. In addition, a site notice was displayed for 21 days. No representations have been received.

### **Equality Act 2010**

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

### **5. Relevant Policies**

The application has been assessed against the following policies:

## **National**

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

## **Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019)**

- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- EN1: Protection And Enhancement Of The Historic Environment (Historic Park or Garden)
- EN7: Local Green Space and Public Open Space; EN7Wo: Prospect Park
- OU3: Telecommunications Development
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

## **6. Appraisal**

This application has been submitted under the Prior Approval procedure under Part 16, Class A.3 (3) of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended) and the Local Planning Authority (LPA) has 56 days in which to decide whether prior approval is required or not. If prior approval is required, such approval can either be given or refused by the LPA.

### **6.1 Principle of development**

Part 16 Class A (as amended by the 2016 GPDO) only allows LPAs to determine whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the siting and appearance of the development.

In accordance with Reading Borough Local Plan Policy OU3: Telecommunications Development, proposals for telecommunications development will be permitted provided that:

- They do not have an adverse impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area or on the significance of a heritage asset;
- The apparatus will be sited and designed so as to minimise its visual impact by the use of innovative design solutions such as lamp column 'swap-outs' or concealment/camouflage options; and
- Alternative sites and site-sharing options have been fully investigated and it has been demonstrated that no preferable alternative sites are potentially available which would result in a development that would be less visually intrusive.

In the first instance, the proposed monopole and associated cabinets will be appraised for their impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposal will then be assessed to determine if alternative sites (where possible) have been fully investigated within the supporting documentation for this application. The proposed monopole will be assessed from three viewing angles based on the flow of vehicle traffic within the surrounding area.



*Fig 1. Aerial image showing the proposed location of the antenna and three different viewing angles to be assessed*

| Icon                                                                                | Icon Name        | Description                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Proposed Antenna | The proposed location for the monopole and associated cabinets.        |
|  | Viewing Angle 1  | The view to be appraised south of the proposal site on Honey End Road. |
|  | Viewing Angle 2  | The view to be appraised north of the proposal site on Honey End Road. |
|  | Viewing Angle 3  | The view to be appraised west of the proposal site on Cockney Hill     |

## 6.2 Siting and Appearance

The proposed site lies to the east of 121 Cockney Hill on Honey end Lane. The site is near the junction Cockney Hill and Honey End Lane. All of the equipment will be sited on highway and Council owned land.

The area is characterised by mixed use developments and consists of one to three storey buildings. Within the site's immediate surrounding are residential, commercial, health and recreational facilities of various types.

There are existing street poles dotted around on Honey End Lane and Cockney Hill. Due to the site's prominent location with no trees nearby to act as a screen, it is very visible from all directions.

The proposal is for the installation of a 5G 15m high street pole and 3 no. additional equipment cabinets and ancillary works. The proposed equipment is required for improved network coverage and capacity, particularly in relation to 5G services. In addition, the proposed equipment is required in order to assist with meeting the Governments aims to roll out 5G technology.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Feb 2021) states that; "Where new sites are required (such as for new 5G networks, or for connected transport and smart city applications), equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate".

The submitted Site Specific Supplementary Information (SSSI) on page 5 states that *"the proposed design has been selected to minimise visual impact upon the streetscape by integrating with the existing built environment. The design of the proposed antenna and ground-based cabinets is considered to be the least visually intrusive option available"*.

Whilst the statement appears to indicate that the proposed development has been designed so as to minimise the visual impact on the street scene by integrating with existing street furniture, the Council does not agree with the above claim. The existing nearby street poles are significantly shorter and smaller in diameter than the proposed street pole which would be significantly taller and bulkier than any nearby structure. The adjacent bungalow is approximately 5.5m in height and therefore at 15m, the proposed mast would be almost three times the adjacent bungalow. The proposed street pole would significantly exceed the height of any nearby structure and would be clearly visible from a wider radius. The visual impact of the monopole would be exacerbated by the lack of trees to act as a screen and the site's prominent location at a junction where its height would be much more pronounced.

Given the design, height, bulk and its siting at a junction, the proposed 15m high monopole would appear as an overly prominent, obtrusive structure that would tower above other street furniture and other properties that would surround it.

The applicant acknowledges that *"the proposed installation of additional equipment would result in a localised visual increase"* whilst claiming that *"this will not overly detract from the character of the existing streetscape"*. However, the applicant has not submitted any supporting information to justify the claim that this proposal would not detract from the character of the existing

streetscape. It is not clear therefore if any attempts to make the proposed equipment less visually intrusive such as through the use of a more sympathetic design has been made. The proposed telecommunications equipment on this part of the highway would cause a significant change in the appearance of the area and its surrounding in comparison with the existing context. The siting and design of the proposal makes little attempt to minimise its visual impact, through innovative design such as concealment options.

Whilst the Council acknowledges the importance installing the proposed equipment and the benefits it would bring about within the area such as educational benefits, providing access to vital services, improving communications with the associated commercial benefits for local businesses, enabling e-commerce, working from home and leisure time activities, in this instance, the benefits are not considered to significantly outweigh the adverse visual impact the proposal would have on the character and appearance of the area.

In light of the above, it is considered that the proposed development would detract from the visual amenity and appearance of the surrounding area, including the nearby green space, contrary to Policies CC7 and OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2021). On this basis the proposal is recommended for refusal.

### 6.3 Residential Amenity

The site is located adjacent to the boundary fencing of 121 Cockney Hill which is a bungalow. The proposed monopole would be approximately three times the height of the bungalow and in close proximity to many other residential properties. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal would likely result in some level of shadowing of the adjacent property (no. 121) and would likely have an overbearing effect to a certain degree, it is considered unlikely that it would significantly harm the living conditions the residents to the point of refusal.

### 6.4 Transport Matters - Siting

In accordance with the accessibility and ease of movement aspect of policy TR3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, the proposed development is considered to allow for appropriate movements along the adjacent pathway. This is also confirmed by Reading Borough Council Transport that the proposed development would not compromise highway safety. The proposed location of the additional equipment cabinets and pole will not impact on any visibility splays at the adjacent junction or obstruct pedestrian movement given that equipment will be located at the back of the footway. In this regard, the proposed development is considered to allow for the free movement of highway traffic in accordance with policy TR3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Given that the proposed development would be on Council owned land, should the application otherwise been permitted, separate permissions may have been required from the Asset's Management department within the Council. A crane license would have been required to be obtained for work carried out on the highway including the erection of the 15.0m Street Pole.

#### 6.4 Alternative Sites

In accordance with the sequential approach outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consideration should always be given to sharing any existing telecommunication structures in the area, secondly consideration is then given to utilising any suitable existing structures or buildings and thirdly sites for freestanding ground-based installations are investigated.

Similarly Policy OU3 of the Reading Borough Plan (2019) requires that alternative sites and site-sharing options be investigated fully and that it should be demonstrated that no preferable alternative sites are potentially available which would result in a development that would be less visually intrusive.

The evidence contained within the Site Specific Supplementary Document shows that a total of six other sites were considered in the area and discounted for various reasons which included visibility splay issues, location in a residential area and unsuitable pavements. However, information with details of the analysis of various sites was not supplied making it difficult for the Council to assess if a thorough and robust search was conducted. In addition, without this information it is difficult to ascertain if the selected site is the best possible available site within the designated search area.

Furthermore, site being in a residential area appears to be one of the main reasons for discounting three of the sites (D1, D3 and D6), however it is unclear how the selected site compares with other discounted sites and why it was found to be the best option as it is also within a residential area and in close proximity to a lot of low rise dwelling houses. The sites appear focused on highway land without proper consideration of all available alternatives such as rooftops and site sharing. The application has not stated if alternative options such as rooftops were adequately considered and discounted. Considering the nature of the area, there is potential for other options which would be less visually intrusive to be considered.

Given the limited assessment of alternative sites and supporting evidence in respect of each site, and insufficient information provided to justify the choice of the site and the reasons for discounting alternative sites, it is difficult to assess whether this is the best available option within the area.

In view of this, it is considered that the assessment of possible alternatives with reduced visual impact have not properly and robustly been reviewed and

discounted by the applicant in line with guidance contained within the NPPF. This therefore forms the second reason for refusal.

## 6.5 Health Issues

The NPPF states that “Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the telecommunications system, or determine health safeguards if the proposal meets International Commission guidelines for public exposure”. The supporting text to Policy OU3 states that “ICNIRP declarations should be based on the cumulative effects of electromagnetic fields emitted by other nearby base stations and antennae as well as the proposed development”.

The applicant has provided an ICNIRP certificate to support this application. This certifies that the proposed development (which also takes account of the cumulative effect of emissions from the proposed installation and all nearby base stations) would be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of ICNIRP. Therefore, the ICNIRP certificate complies with current Radio Frequency exposure guidelines, as defined in the EU Council recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300 GHz).

The ICNIRP guidelines continue both to exclude known health risks and to minimise unascertained health effects. The ICNIRP guidelines are the most up-to-date and relevant tool to ascertain the acceptability of telecommunications development within the planning process. Bearing in mind the Government's view on mobile phone masts and health issues, as expressed in the NPPF, it would not be appropriate for this Council to substitute its own "opinion" on health issues for that expressed by ICNIRP.

On balance, the suggested health risks associated with this development and the fear and/or stress associated with these perceived risks are outweighed by the reassurances provided by the technical information submitted by the applicant. As such, the possible health implications of such apparatus are not considered sufficient reason to refuse prior approval.

## 7. Conclusion

Whilst the proposed development benefits from permitted development under Article 3 in Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015, the prior approval of the local planning authority required in terms of the siting and appearance of the development. The proposal has been assessed in terms of siting and appearance and has been found to conflict with Local and National Policy guidance as such the development is recommended to be **REFUSED**.

## Recommendation

### PRIOR APPROVAL REFUSED

#### Reasons for Refusal:

1. The proposed 15m high 5G monopole and its associated cabinets, by reason of its design, height, bulk and siting, would detract from the visual amenity and appearance of the surrounding area, including the nearby Historic Park or Garden and Local Green Space and Public Open Space, contrary to Policies CC7, EN1, EN7 and OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
2. The proposed development, in the absence of sufficient detail on potential alternative sites for the development, has failed to demonstrate that no preferable alternative sites are potentially available which would result in a development that would be less visually intrusive, contrary to Policy OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the NPPF (2021).

#### Informatives:

##### I00: Plans

The refusal relates only to the following plans and information as received by the local planning authority:

##### Plans and other documents considered:

- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 002 Site Location Plan dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 265 Proposed Site Elevation dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 215 Proposed Site Plan dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- RDG14802\_RDG209\_89983\_RG6716\_GA\_REV\_A\_Issue A - 001 Drawing Register dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- Government statement dated 7 March 2019, received 6 January 2023
- The Declaration of ICNIRP Compliance dated 13 December 2022, received 6 January 2023
- Developer's Notice to Planning Services and Highways Services ref: RDG14802 - HONEY END LANE, dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023
- 5G Site Specific Supplementary Information and Planning Justification ref: RDG14802 dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023
- 5G Health and Network Briefing received 6 January 2023
- Application Form dated 6 January 2023, received 6 January 2023

