

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 211429/TEL
Address: Site Adjacent Prince of Wales PH, St Michaels Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 4RP
Proposal: Application for prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code systems operators.
Case Officer: James Schofield
Applicant: CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd
Received on: 31/8/2021
Valid on: 31/8/2021
Target Date: 26/10/2021

Site Description and Surrounding Area

The application site relates to a paved area on the corner of corner of St Michaels Road and School Road which is within the Tilehurst Triangle District Centre.

The surrounding area is urban with most buildings being two-storey mixed-use buildings; shop-fronts with dwellings above. At the intersection of School and St Michaels Road is the Prince of Wales pub and its associated parking area. Street furniture, like lampposts, are also in the immediate vicinity (which is 10m in height).

The site is not Listed, nor in a Conservation Area.

Proposal

The proposal seeks for prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code systems operators for the installation of a 15 metre high monopole with a wraparound cabinet at the base with associated ancillary works. Three new associated cabinets are also proposed. The proposed monopole (15m) would be set back from the road by approximately 4.5m. It would be made of steel with a grey finish.

The site does not currently facilitate telecommunications equipment.

Plans/Documents Considered

Application Form

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 002 SITE LOCATION PLAN

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 305 EQUIPMENT SCHEDULE & SUPPORT STRUCTURE DETAILS

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 100 EXISTING SITE PLAN

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 150 EXISTING ELEVATION A

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 210 PROPOSED SITE PLAN

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 211 VIS SPLAY PLAN

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 260 PROPOSED ELEVATION

RDG16689_M004 Issue B - 303 PROPOSED ANTENNA SCHEDULE & LINE CONFIGURATION

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Developers Notice dated 7th August 2021

Supporting Letter ref. RDG16689 dated 20th August 2021

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Site Specific Supplementary Information

ICNIRP Certificate dated 16th August 2021

Received 16th August 2021

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Relevant Planning History

None.

Internal Consultations

The Transport Officer objected to the scheme due to the lack of adequate information being provided by the applicant on visibility splays. The agent submitted this information on the 8th of October and the Transport Officer was not able to return a response prior to the 26th of October 2021; the end of the 56-day period. The Planning Officer discussed an extension of time with the agent, however, this was not forthcoming.

External Consultations

No properties adjoin the application site and so neighbour notification via letter was not required. A site notice was displayed on the 1st of October 2021 and the consultation period expired on the 22nd of October.

One response has been received from the Councillor for the respective ward. The full comment can be found on the public access portal. The comment objected on three grounds. The first disputes the claim the applicant makes that the proposal would be concealed by trees and shrubs;

“Given that the nearest trees are at least 50 metres away from the proposed site, I think they are being somewhat economical with the truth, which is that there is no way to screen or hide a 15 metre tall telecoms mast which will stick out like a sore thumb in the middle of Tilehurst village. ...”

The Councillor is correct in that there is no significant vegetation capable of screening the proposed mast in the area. The second reason for objecting relates to the impact on the character of the area;

“Hutchinson also contend that the proposed works are not to the visual detriment of the surrounding area and would not result in demonstrable harm to the character of the immediate or wider area. There is no way that a 15 metre tall mast is not going to change the street scene and character of Tilehurst village for the worse, let alone one which is in such a prominent place with no screening to lessen the impact.”

The officer agrees with this point with respect to the proposal site and the impact of the proposal is discussed further in the assessment. Councillor Duveens last reason for objecting relates to “false impressions” of the site described in written components of submitted documents.

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.

Relevant Policies

The application has been assessed against the following policies:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019)

- Section 10 - Supporting high quality communications

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
- OU3: Telecommunications Development
- RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
- RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres

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. As this is not a full planning application, the LPA is unable to impose any additional conditions.

The proposed mast and associated equipment complies with Part 16, Class A.1(1) and Class A.1(7) of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 as amended in November 2016 as the mast would not exceed (excluding antenna) 15 metres in height on land which is on a highway as required by A.1 (1) and the proposed cabinets would not be greater than 1.5 sqm for each structure as required by A.1 (7) of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2016.

Principle of development

Part 16 Class A.2(1)(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.

Siting and Appearance

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

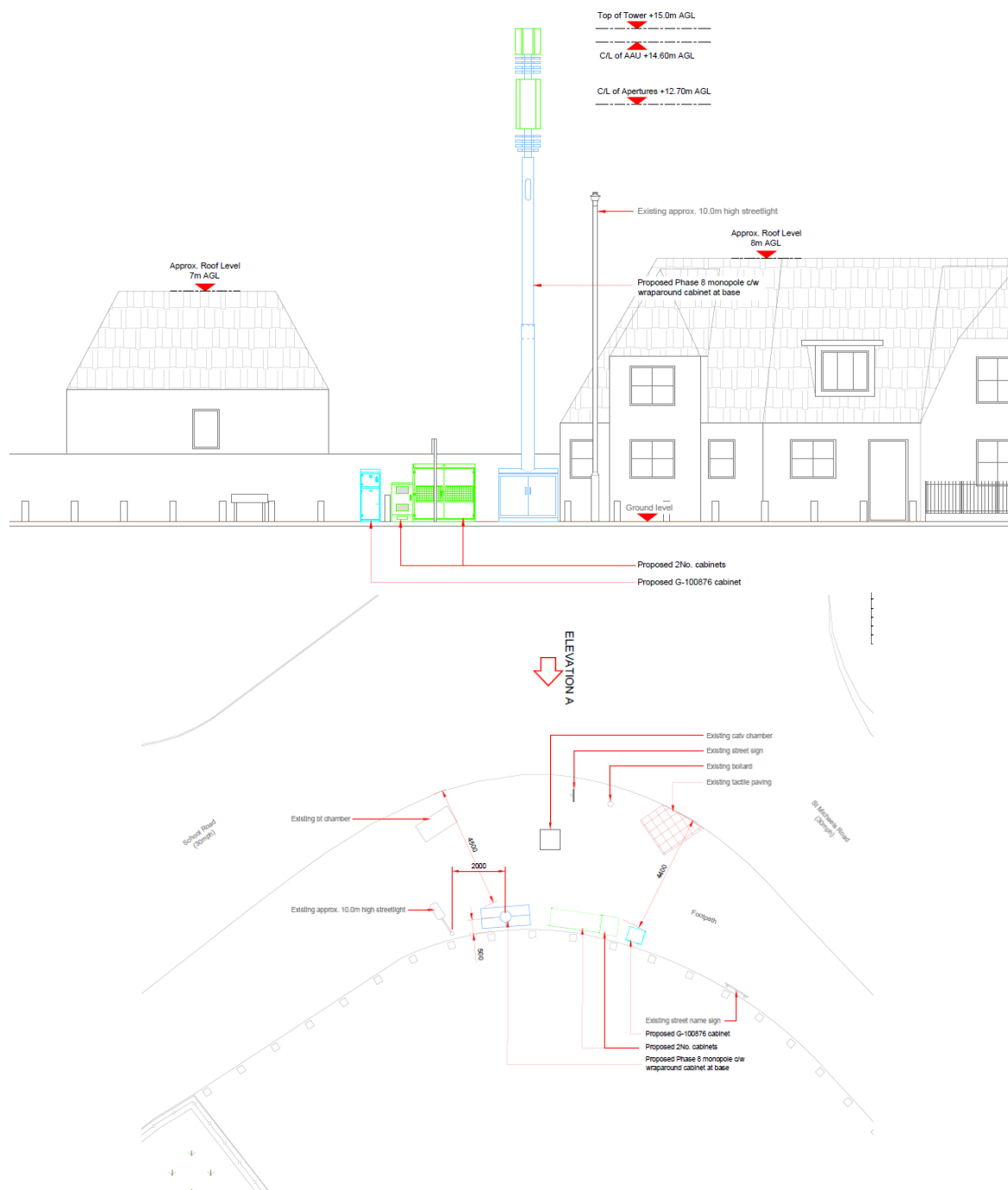
- They do not have an adverse impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area or on the significance of a heritage asset;
- The apparatus will be sited and designed so as to minimise its visual impact by the use of innovative design solutions such as lamp column 'swap-outs' or concealment/camouflage 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 within the surrounding area.

Appearance and Visual Impact

On the next two pages an abstract from 'RDG16689_M004 Issue D - 260 PROPOSED ELEVATION' is compared with site photographs taken by the Planning Officer.



Please note the monopole and boxes are indicated by red markers, but these are not to scale. Diagrams are purely for indicative use. Various viewing angles have been selected to make a balanced decision on this matter.

Location	Description
Viewing Angle 1	Facing northwest on St Michaels Road
Viewing Angle 2	Facing northeast on School Road

Viewing angle 1:



Viewing angle 2:



The proposal site is at an important intersection within a designated district centre called the Tilehurst Triangle. The Local Plan, specifically Policies RL1 and RL3, aim to maintain and enhance the overall vitality and viability of street frontages and associated environment within district centres to maintain access to services and gathering places which can foster a sense of community.

The proposed 15 metre monopole would surpass the height of surrounding street infrastructure such as lamp posts; the nearest one being ca. 10m in height. By reason of its height, width, utilitarian design (both the monopole and base of the monopole), and associated cabinet infrastructure it would be considered a visually dominant, prominent and detrimental structure in the streetscene of the Tilehurst Triangle district centre from all viewing angles. This would be out of keeping with the scale of structures in the vicinity. When assessed in relation to the composition of the surrounding area, which comprises a mix of commercial and residential uses, the proposed development is unacceptable with respect to siting and appearance; the proposal would harm the character and appeal of the district centre with a resultant detrimental impact on the vitality and viability of the District Centre.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Feb 2019) 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”*. This is not considered to have been achieved in this instance, given the character and appearance of the surrounding area. This also applies to policy OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019), which states that telecommunications development will be permitted where the apparatus will be sited and designed as to minimise its visual impact by the use of innovative design solutions or concealment/camouflage options. Whilst the proposed monopole would be grey (to help integrate with other surrounding infrastructure like lampposts), it is considered that the proposal does not go far enough to minimise its visual impact within its setting given its overall scale and the visual prominence of the site at the intersection of School and St Michaels Road. The local plan seeks to improve the district centre feel, and it is considered that the proposal would have a detrimental effect on the visual amenity of the area and the viability of the district centre.

Alternative Sites

8 alternative sites were presented within the supplementary information provided for this application. The applicant has discounted the alternative locations for various reasons including a need to prune a tree, proximity to residential development, and lack of space for the equipment. The reasons for discounting various alternative sites lack adequate analysis in planning terms to consider the exercise sufficient for it to accord with Policy OU3 requirements. The proposed site is also proximate to residential development and pruning a tree might be acceptable in some cases. Regardless, officers do not agree that the proposed site is acceptable. As discussed above the proposed siting and appearance are unacceptable.

Transport

The proposal was reviewed by the case officer and Transport Officer to assess if the proposal would be acceptable in terms of siting from a highways perspective. All of the equipment would be sited within the paved verge/footpath area located on land owned by the Council. The plans as originally submitted did not provide sufficient information for the Transport Officer to assess the visibility splays. The planning officer, having reviewed the visibility splay information, considers that the proposed siting would likely be acceptable from a highways perspective and therefore, this does not form a reason for refusal.

Health Issues

Paragraph 116 of 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 requirement is also outlined in the supporting text to Policy OU3.

The applicant has provided an International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation (ICNIRP) declaration to support this planning application. This certifies that the proposed development would be in full compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines. The ICNIRP guidelines are the most up-to-date and relevant tool to ascertain the acceptability of telecommunications development within the planning process. Paragraph 116 of the NPPF goes on to state that Local Planning Authorities should not substitute their 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. As such, the proposal is deemed acceptable in terms of health-related issues.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined in this report the siting and appearance of the proposal is not considered acceptable in terms of national and local level policy.

Reasons for refusal:

1. The proposed 15m high monopole and associated equipment would, by reason of its excessive height and overall bulk, detract from the visual amenity and appearance of the surrounding area and have a resultant detrimental impact on the environment of a district centre, contrary to Policies CC7, OU3, and RL1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
2. In the absence of sufficient detail on potential alternative sites for the development, it could not be assessed as to whether this proposed location would be the most suitable in terms of siting, contrary to Policy OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and the NPPF (2019).

Recommendation

PRIOR APPROVAL IS REFUSED

Development By Telecommunications Code System Operators. Determination By Reading Local Planning Authority that the Prior Approval of the Authority is REFUSED for the siting and appearance of development permitted by Part 16 Of Schedule 2 of The Town And Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

I refer to your letter which was received by Reading Borough Council on 21st of August 2021, in respect of the proposed installation of a Proposed 15.0m Phase 8 Monopole C/W wrapround Cabinet at base and associated ancillary works at Site Adjacent Prince of Wales PH, St Michaels Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 4RP as shown on the submitted drawings and documents:

The agent supplied the following information and plans:

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I am writing to advise that Reading Borough Council as local planning authority hereby do REFUSE approval for the siting and appearance of the development proposed in the above-mentioned application in accordance with the submitted drawings and documents.

INFORMATIVES

IF0: Positive and Proactive Working - refusal

The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively with the applicant to see if relevant concerns could be resolved to allow prior approval to be granted. However, that has not been possible within agreed timescale and therefore the decision to refuse the application has been taken.