

DELEGATED REPORT

App No.: 200624/FUL

Address: Opposite 95 Henley Road

Proposal: Installation of 17.5m high telecommunication pole and ancillary equipment following the removal of a 12.5m high pole and associated equipment (amended description)

Applicant: Vodafone Limited

Target Date: 26/06/20

SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

The site is located in south east Caversham in northern Reading. The land use in the immediate area is split between predominantly residential on the southern side of Henley Road and recreational grounds to the north. The subject site is located upon a section of pavement on the northern side of Henley Road, approximately 65m west of the Grosvenor Road junction. There are also a significant number of mature trees present. The topography of the locale is relatively flat.

Henley Road is a busy 'A' road containing various street furniture, including a number of other telecoms posts, street-lights, CCTV cameras and telegraph poles. The area is residential.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks full planning permission for the installation of a 17.5m high monopole with 6 antennas (colour: grey) and 2 ancillary equipment cabinets (RAL Green). The existing 12.5m high monopole with 3 antennas and is to be removed, and the existing equipment cabinet to be retained as a transmissions cabinet. The new equipment is to be positioned slightly to the west than the existing structures. The existing monopole doubles up as a street light. As part of the original proposal, the new pole would also have a street light. However, following on from discussion transport officer, a new standalone street light is to be proposed rather than combining the street light on the proposed monopole. The street lamp would measure 10m in height.

The proposed upgrades are designed to provide upgrades to existing 3G and 4G technology and also accommodate 5G technology. The upgraded infrastructure would provide high mobile download speeds and more reliable, quicker phone connections as well as increase capacity to provide services to a higher number of people at the same time.

Ordinarily, full planning applications for telecommunications equipment are required to be presented to and determined by the Planning Applications Committee. However, following the Covid-19 outbreak, the Council's scheme of delegation has been revised, and where there is a recommendation of refusal the application can be determined under delegated powers.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

151939/TEL - Replacement of existing 11.3m high lamp post with a new 12.5m high lamp post, installation of 1 no. proposed equipment cabinet unit, installation of no. proposed meter cabinet; plus ancillary work - Prior Notification - Approval

141867/TEL - Replacement of existing 11.3m high mobile phone mast (incorporating street light) with a 15.0m high mobile phone mast (incorporating street light), installation of 1 no. new equipment cabinet, 1 no. meter cabinet and associated works - Withdrawn

051070/TEL - Installation of a 10m lamp post swap out pole with 3 antennas in a shroud, one radio equipment cabinet and ancillary development, measuring 11.4 metres height in total - Prior Notification - Approval

PLANS/ DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED

100 Rev A - Site Location Maps

200 Rev A - Existing Site Plan

300 Rev A - Existing Site Elevation

Supplementary Information

Clarification of the Declaration of ICNIRP Compliance Issued by Cornerstone dated 28th April 2020

Letter from agent dated 30th April 2020

Letter titled 'Health and Mobile Phone Base Stations' prepared by Cornerstone General Background Information for Telecommunications Development

Received 1st May 2020

301 Rev C - Proposed Site Elevation

201 Rev B - Proposed Site Plan

Received 18th November 2020

Letter from GallifordTry: 'The Covid-19 pandemic and its context with the provision of mobile network services'

Received 3rd December 2020

Arboricultural Report prepared by ACS Consulting dated December 2020
Arboricultural Layout

Received 14th December 2020

CONSULTATIONS

Internal Consultations

Transport - Following the receipt of revised plans, there are no objections.

Natural Environment - Object due to insufficient site-specific information being received showing the proposal's acceptability in relation to trees.

External Consultation

A site notice was erected between 24th November 2020 - 15th December 2020 by the case officer. A site notice was sent to the agent to display in May 2020, but there are concerns that this was not done due to the coronavirus restrictions.

One letter of representation was received which stated the following:

1) Despite proximity to site no formal notification from Reading Borough Council was received that planning approval was being sought.

2) The documentation presented makes no reference to the noise from the cooling fans within the new cabinet. Current noise values are a constant 40db at our front door from the fans in the existing cabinet 30m away. On summer nights this makes sleep difficult.

Officer comment: *A site notice was displayed for the required time of three weeks informing members of the public of the proposal. As such, the Local Planning Authority has fulfilled its statutory duty to notify members of the public. Issues around noise will be discussed as part of the appraisal below.*

DISCUSSIONS WITH APPLICANT/ AGENT

The agent was advised of the outstanding issues with the application. Received plans were received addressing Transport matters and additional information provided for the Natural Environment Officer. However, this was still not considered sufficient. Concern was also raised over the scale (height) of the proposed monopole, particularly following previous concerns over proposals at the site. The agent was also advised that as no alternative sites had been presented, officers do not consider that it has been successfully justified that this location would be the least visually intrusive.

The agent advised that due to the proposal relating to an upgrade of an existing base station, the principle of development should be accepted and that the benefits of the development would outweigh the harm. No further information was provided to address Natural Environment concerns, and the applicant requested the application be determined. It should be noted that the officer provided multiple opportunities for revised/ additional information to be received.

The case officer advised that the application would be recommended for refusal and could be dealt with under delegated powers. A period of time to withdraw the application was provided, but the agent did not request such.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

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'.

The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Planning Policy Framework 2019

Part 10 - Supporting high quality communications infrastructure

Part 12 - Achieving well designed places

Part 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Part 16 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

Policy CC7 Design and the public realm

Policy CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

Policy EN1 Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

Policy EN14 Trees, Hedges and Woodland

Policy EN16 Pollution and water resources

Policy OU3 Telecommunications development

APPRAISAL

Paragraph 112 of the NPPF 2019 notes that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social wellbeing. Paragraph 113 states that the number of radio and electronic communications masts, and the sites for such installations, should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers, the efficient operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for future expansion. Use of existing masts, buildings and other structures for new electronic communications capability (including wireless) should be encouraged.

Policy OU3 states that 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 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.*

Impact on Visual Amenity

In addition to Policy OU3, Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) requires that all development is of high design quality which maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the surrounding area with respect to issues such as scale, height, massing and landscape impact.

Given that the proposal relates to the upgrade of an existing telecommunications base station and that the key assessment is with respect to the additional visual impact of the proposed replacement equipment.

Looking at the history of the site, telecommunication application 141867 was withdrawn following officer concerns over a 15m high monopole. Under application 151939, the height was reduced and approved at 12.5m; this application seeks to increase the height by a further 5m.

It is considered that the proposed replacement 17.5m high monopole would be a more visible and prominent structure within this primarily residential area. At 17.5m the current proposal would be far higher than any highway structure in the vicinity and would not be considered to be mistaken for a lamp column, or any other typical highways infrastructure. The existing mast at Henley Road is successfully screened by the surrounding trees; the proposed mast would rise well above the trees and any screening would be minimal. These concerns were raised as part of application 141867 for a pole of a lower height. It is not considered that the surrounding area has altered significantly since this previous application, and so the context is still not considered suitable to accommodate a monopole of an excessively increased height without substantial justification.

Justification was made by the agent in response to the above comments by stating that taller equipment is needed in order for 5G to operate successfully. Whilst this is acknowledged by the case officer, the Local Planning Authority has to assess the proposal from multiple perspectives including the impact on visual amenity. The harm that is considered to be caused in terms of visual amenity as a result of the proposal is not considered to be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme in this particular case.

Based on the concerns stemming from previous applications at the site, and little justification to support the height of the mast in this residential area, the proposal would be considered a visually intrusive and dominant addition to the street scene and therefore would not comply with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Impact on Heritage assets

The proposed mast would be located on the boundary with the Queen Anne's School grounds. Trees line this boundary. The school is Grade II Listed and so its grounds are within the Listed curtilage. No mention of the impact of the proposal on the heritage asset is made within the submitted supporting statement provided by the applicant. In relation to Policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), proposals which affect Listed buildings should not detract from the character, appearance and setting of them.

The proposed monopole, by virtue of its height, would extend above the tree canopy bordering the school site (unlike the existing situation) and so would be a more prominent and dominant modern feature from the grounds of the historical school site. This concern was not raised with the applicant during the application, as the historical setting was further considered by the case officer prior to issuing the decision. It is considered that the proposal, by virtue of its height, would detract

from the character and appearance of the listed curtilage which is not considered to comply with Policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Impact on neighbouring amenity

The proposed infrastructure would be located on the northern side of Henley Road. The properties closest/ with the most direct views of the pole would be no. 95 and 99 on the southern side of the road, opposite the application site (separation distance of over 20m). The closest property to the application site, on the northern side of Henley Road, would be located over 10m away.

Whilst these residents may notice the increase in height of the apparatus, the structures are considered to be located a sufficient distance to conclude they would not result in substantial harm in terms of being overbearing to neighbouring windows.

An objector raised concern over the potential noise generated from the equipment given the noise emitted from the existing cabinets (at a constant 40 db). Had the application been considered acceptable in other respects, consultation with Environmental Health Officers and the agent would likely have been undertaken to discuss this matter more in depth. However, the site is located on a Classified A road and so is subject to noise from passing traffic. It is not considered that the noise potentially emitted from the equipment (cabinets) would emit a level of noise to disturb neighbouring residents to a harmful degree given the highway.

As such, based on the location of the site on a Classified A road, and proximity of the monopole from neighbouring dwellings, it is not considered that the proposal would affect neighbouring residents to a substantially harmful degree in terms of noise so is considered acceptable in relation to Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Alternative Sites

The proposal would accord with the requirements of the Paragraph 115 of the NPPF and Policy OU3 in that the works propose an upgrade to an existing telecommunications base station as opposed to creating a new base station in an alternative and non-established location despite the location of the existing equipment is not being re-used exactly (new equipment would be located slightly to the west).

The supporting information submitted with the application does not explore alternative locations for the proposal on the basis that the proposed works relate to an established site of telecommunications and therefore the principle of telecommunications apparatus on the site is already established. Whilst the proposals do relate to the upgrade of an existing site this does not mean that alternative locations should not be considered, particularly those which could potentially have a lesser visual impact.

Whilst the NPPF (paragraph 115 part 'c') states that "*for a new mast or base station, evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure*" as quoted by the agent, Policy OU3 of

the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) requires alternative sites and site-sharing options to be fully investigated. Without supporting evidence illustrating that this site is the most suitable, Officers are not persuaded that this residential area would be the most suitable site for new telecommunications infrastructure of a substantially increased height. Whilst the site may be able to accommodate smaller equipment (as per previous approvals), it is not considered that this will automatically mean the site is suitable for equipment of any height. Given the area is residential, it is considered there may be a limit of acceptability.

As such, it is not considered that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that this location is the most suitable site for the proposed development and so is not considered to meet the requirements of Policy OU3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Impact on trees

It is required to be demonstrated that the proposal could be implemented without harm to adjacent tree roots, and acceptable in relation to sight lines and tree pruning.

The new mast would sit within a row of conifers on the Queen Anne's School site which are lower in height than the existing mast. Therefore, the new, taller mast, would not be considered to impact these trees to a greater degree than the existing situation. There is another tree to the east in the adjacent property - indicated on plans but with no measurement - which is taller than the conifers and other trees opposite in the vicinity. The new cabinets and base of the mast will be within the RPA of adjacent conifers.

Following on from the Natural Environment Officer's comments that an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) was required to assess the potential impact on trees, both a Statement and tree plan were provided. The Arb/development impact part of the AMS focuses on the proposal in question, in relation to direct damage to adjacent trees, however the AMS then becomes too general and non-site specific. The principles of the AMS may be acceptable however it is not considered appropriate to agree an AMS that is not site specific.

In addition, the AMS relates only to the direct impact on trees and does not address other concerns regarding future pressure to prune other trees in the vicinity (only the row of Cypress are mentioned) or provide sight line information (to neighbouring masts). It is not appropriate to look at new 5G equipment in isolation but the LPA are required need to see the wider context.

As such, it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would be acceptable in relation to nearby trees and therefore is not considered compliant with Policy EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Transport Matters

Following consultation with the Transport Officer, revised plans were provided confirming that a standalone lamp column would be included within the scheme. A 10m high lamp column with a Mayflower Node would be fitted to the specification

of Reading Borough's Highway department. Originally, a combined telecom/streetlight unit was proposed but the Highways department no longer accept these as they have caused maintenance problems as the lantern on swapouts either have never worked or have failed.

In view of this, there are no transport objections to this proposal subject to informatives relating to works affecting the highway and telecom applications. The proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

Other Matters

Health Implications

Following the receipt of amended plans, the submitted ICNIRP certificate to support this planning application is no longer relevant as it refers to the original drawings submitted to support the application. No revised certificate has been provided to reflect the latest set of plans proposed to certify the development would be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of ICNIRP. Therefore, the ICNIRP certificate submitted does not comply 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.

Had the overall proposal been acceptable in other regards it is highly likely that this matter could have been overcome with further information. However, as the scheme is unacceptable overall, the fact that the implications of the proposal, in terms of its health implications are not known forms a further reason for refusal. It is not considered that the proposed development would be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of ICNIRP meaning the health implications of the proposal are not known and so is not considered acceptable in relation to Policy EN16 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Equalities Act

In determining this application the Committee is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender/sex, or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular planning application. In terms of the key

equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

Conclusion

The public benefits of 5G technology and the upgrading of telecommunications infrastructure is noted and has been taken into account when determining the application. However, in this particular instance it is not considered that these benefits would outweigh the harm identified in terms of visual amenity/ impact on heritage assets and the impact the proposal would have on nearby trees.

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE for the following reasons:

1. The proposed 17.5m high monopole, would, by reason of its height detract from the visual amenity and appearance of the surrounding area, including the appearance of the curtilage of the nearby Listed Queen Anne's School, contrary to Policies CC7, OU3 and EN1 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).
3. A failure to demonstrate that the siting of the proposed development would not detrimentally impact nearby trees, contrary to Policies CC7 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
4. A failure to demonstrate that the proposed development would be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of ICNIRP (International Commission on Non- Ionizing Radiation Protection) and as such the health implications of the development, with respect to its specific siting, could not be assessed, contrary to Policy EN16 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

Informatives:

- 1) Plans/ Documents considered
- 2) Pre-app