

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Application No: 200817/TEL

Address: "Telephone Exchange", 15 Church Street, Caversham

Proposal: Roof top antennae upgrade to existing equipment including new antennae and new support poles

Case Officer: Connie Davis

Applicant: Arqiva Ltd

Target Date: 07/09/20

Site Description and Surrounding Area

The application site is a three-storey detached building located on the southern side of Church Street, Caversham. The building has some architectural merit and dates back to the Georgian era. The roof of the building is an established base for telecommunications equipment.

The site is not listed but is within the St Peters Conservation Area.

Proposal

The proposal seeks for prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code systems operators for the extension of existing telecommunications equipment. More specifically, the proposal comprises of the upgrading of equipment, which will involve increasing the height of the masts by 3m to a maximum height of 18.5m with new antennae. The masts are operated by Arqiva.

Plans/Documents Considered

Drawing no.

167379-22-100-MD024 Rev 24 - Site Plan and Proposed CTIL

167379-22-101-MD024 Rev 24 - Equipment Plan Proposed CTIL

167379-22-150-MD024 Rev 24 - Existing Elevation Existing CTIL

167379-22-150-MD024 Rev 24 - Proposed Elevation Proposed CTIL

Received 7th July 2020

167379-00-004-ML001 Rev 1 - Location Plan

167379-00-010-ML001 Rev 1 - Legal Plan

Planning Statement

Developers Notice

Received 16th June 2020

ICNIRP Declaration

Received 2nd September 2020

Relevant Planning History

020639 - 3 no. sector antennas, 3 no. communication dishes and 1 equipment cabinet located on the roof of the Exchange - Application Permitted

040201 - The addition of three antennas on existing antenna poles - Application Permitted

Numerous pre-application enquiries

Internal Consultations

Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) - No comments received

It was not considered necessary to consult the Transport and Natural Environment departments due to the proposal being above ground level.

External Consultees

The following addresses were formally consulted via letter on 16/07/20:

19, 19a Church Street, Caversham

In addition, a site notice was sent to the agent on 16/07/20.

One response has been received from CADRA (Caversham and District Residents Association) which states:

CADRA welcomes the installation of new equipment to improve connectivity. However, the building lies within St Peters Conservation Area and every effort should be made to minimise the visual impact on the Conservation Area.

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

Part 16 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended by Statutory Instrument 2016 No. 1040)

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Feb 2019)

- Section 10 - Supporting high quality communications

Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019)

- CC7: Design and the Public Realm

- EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
- EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
- EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
- OU3: Telecommunications Development

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 new antennae is considered to comply with Part 16, Class A1 (4) a) iv) and A 1 (2) (f) of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 as amended in November 2016 as the development is to be carried out on the rooftop of a building within a Conservation Area so is bound by the restrictions under A1 (2) (f) as stated in A1 (4) a) iv). The extension to the equipment will increase the height of the masts by no more than 3m.

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.

Impact on Visual Amenity

Paragraph 170 of the NPPF sets out that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value. Paragraph 193 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. This is

irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

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. Policy EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment) states that proposals should protect and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and their setting, Policy EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas) requires that the special interest, character and architecture of Conservation Areas is conserved and enhanced and Policy EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context) seeks that in areas characterised by heritage assets that the historic environment informs and shapes new development.

As noted in the St Peters Conservation Area Appraisal, the telephone exchange is an early to mid 20C neo Georgian building which makes a positive contribution to the street scene due to the symmetrical facade of the building and its period brick and stone door. The site is located on the edge of the Conservation Area, but as noted earlier in the report, the site is an established base for telecommunication equipment. Due to the site's placement in the Conservation Area, and due to the proposed modest increase in height of equipment, it is not considered that the equipment is currently, and would be seen, from the majority of views of the Conservation Area. The additional visual impact of this increase is considered to be minor and the impact when viewed from ground level is considered to be marginal. The proposal is therefore not considered to conflict with the comments made by CADRA as part of the consultation process.

The overall visual impact of the proposed upgrade works to the existing base station upgrade works is considered to be minor and would maintain the character and appearance of the surrounding area in accordance with Policy CC7. In terms of heritage impact; the proposed upgrade works would result in very minor increase in size and prominence of an existing structure. However, in the context of Paragraph 193 of the NPPF the level of harm to the setting of the Conservation Area is considered to be less than substantial and therefore this must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed development as discussed in the following sections

Alternative Sites

The supporting information submitted with the application does not explore alternative locations for the equipment on the basis that the proposed works relate to an upgrade of an existing base station and therefore the principle of telecommunications apparatus on the site is already established. Whilst the proposals do relate to upgrade of an existing site this does not mean that alternative locations should not be considered, particularly if these could potentially have a lesser visual impact. However, in this instance given the built-up nature of the surrounding area any alternative location is likely to be very similar in context and located in a prominent roof top location in order to provide the necessary level of network coverage for residents and the emergency services network.

Given the above and the very minor increase in size of the apparatus as a result of the upgrade and the minimal additional visual impact Officers are of the opinion that the re-use and upgrade of this existing site is the preferred approach.

Health implications

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

The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in the context of national and local planning policy (Policies CC7, OU3 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)) and other material considerations.

Recommendation: PRIOR APPROVAL IS GIVEN

Development By Telecommunications Code System Operators. Determination By Reading Local Planning Authority that the Prior Approval of the Authority is GIVEN 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 16th June 2020, in respect of the proposed Roof top antennae upgrade to existing equipment including new antennae as shown on the submitted drawings and documents:

Drawing No.

167379-22-100-MD024 Rev 24 - Site Plan and Proposed CTIL

167379-22-101-MD024 Rev 24 - Equipment Plan Proposed CTIL

167379-22-150-MD024 Rev 24 - Proposed Elevation Proposed CTIL

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167379-00-010-ML001 Rev 1 - Legal Plan

Received 16th June 2020

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

INFORMATIVES

IF1: Positive and Proactive Working - Approval