



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 18 June 2006

Site visit made on 18 June 2006

by **R J Marshall LLB Dip TP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for
Communities and Local Government

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Date

31 JUL 2006

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/A/05/1183889

SSE Southcote Sub Station, off Burghfield Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 3NB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under a development order.
- The appeal is made by Scottish and Southern Energy Telecom. against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
- The application Ref 05/00326/TELE dated 23 March 2005, was refused by notice dated 17 May 2005.
- The development proposed is provision of 15m high monopole.

Summary of Decision: The appeal is allowed and approval is granted as set out in the Formal Decision.

Procedural matters

1. The application description is taken from the application letter. From the plans and all the evidence before me it is clear that the proposal also relates to the erection of 3 antennas on the monopole and the construction of ancillary ground based equipment. I shall have regard to this in my decision.
2. At the hearing an application for costs was made on behalf of Scottish and Southern Energy Telecom. against Reading Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and if harm arises whether that is outweighed by a need for the proposed freestanding mast in this location.

Planning Policy

4. The development plan for the area includes the Reading Borough Local Plan (1991-2006) (1998). This says that, subject to other Policies in the plan, telecommunications development will normally be permitted provided: no more acceptable sites are available; there is no reasonable possibility of sharing existing facilities, or erecting an alternative facility on an existing building or other structure; and the apparatus is sited and designed to minimise its visual and environmental impact, subject to technical or operational requirements (CUD 17). New development should be compatible with the character of the surrounding environment (CUD 14). Wildlife heritage sites shall be protected (NE 2). Development will not be permitted that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature such as the Kennett and Holy Brook floodplain (NE 4). On land

adjacent to Major Areas of Open Space, such as the Kennett Meadows, development will not be permitted which would jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public (LEI 2).

Reasons

5. The application site lies in countryside to the south of a residential area of Reading. The countryside is part of the Kennett and Holy Brook floodplain identified in the Local Plan as a Major Landscape Feature and a Major Area of Open Space. It is primarily low-lying agricultural land and provides an attractive rural setting for the southern boundary of the built-up area of Reading. A strip of land within the floodplain, and between the rear gardens of houses and a railway embankment, comprises part of the Southcote linear park, to which the public have access.
6. The proposed development would be within the boundary of an electricity substation. The substation lies to the south of the railway embankment forming the southern boundary of the linear park and to the west of Burghfield Road. It is on lower lying land than the adjoining highway and there is no substantial evidence that it is on significantly higher land than nearby areas north of the railway line.
7. For much of its length in the vicinity of the appeal site, Burghfield Road is flanked by tall hedgerow trees on both sides. In the summer months these trees would largely screen the proposed monopole from the road and from the countryside to the east. In the winter although the screening effect would be lessened it would still be sufficient to substantially reduce the impact of the monopole. At all times of the year the proposed monopole would be seen through a gap in the hedgerow trees at the access from Burghfield Road into the substation. However, only fleeting views of it would be obtained.
8. From that part of Southcote linear park to the east of Burghfield Road the proposed monopole would be well screened by trees along the roadside and the railway embankment. From the linear park to the west of the road, and from the rear of dwellings to the north of the park, the proposed monopole would be generally well screened in the summer by trees alongside the railway embankment and Holy Brook. In the winter the mast would be somewhat more visible from the north, but the trees in the foreground and background would lessen its impact. Moreover, to the extent that it would then be seen it would be visible in conjunction with existing, albeit lower, structures on the electricity substation site.
9. The proposed development would be seen from parts of Holy Brook. However, views from this stream would be limited and there is no evidence that it is a waterway in substantial use. The Kennet and Avon Canal is too distant from the site for the proposed development to be unacceptably intrusive in views from it.
10. Drawing together my views on the effect of the proposed development on character and appearance, the site is clearly in a sensitive area. However, its siting greatly minimises its visual and environmental impact so that only limited harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The Council expressed some concern about the thickness of the monopole and the design of the antennas. However, in my experience the proposed development would not be substantially different from others of a similar height in these respects. The appellant confirmed that the antennas would be as shown on the submitted plans and would not, as feared by some local people, be extended when in use.

11. I now turn to the need for the proposed development. The application has been made by the landowner with the support of T-Mobile who would operate from the site. T-Mobile says that it requires the proposed development to provide new and improved telecommunications coverage to nearby residential areas on the southern side of Reading and along nearby transport corridors. The benefits that modern telecommunications can bring, and the need for the telecommunications industry to expand its networks, is recognised in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: Telecommunications (PPG8).
12. Government guidance supports the sharing of existing masts where appropriate. T-Mobile has investigated 7 sites, all of which it ruled out on technical or other grounds. Masts investigated include an existing O² mast to the south of the appeal site. Some local residents consider that the appellant should share this mast. However, it is in open countryside and much more intrusive than the proposed development would be. The appellant says that it would need to be substantially raised in height to provide the required coverage, and no technical or professional evidence has been provided to the contrary. In my view increasing the height of this mast would be more detrimental to the character and appearance of the area than the proposed development, a point accepted by the Council. The same considerations will apply to the sharing of a recently permitted, but not yet constructed, Vodafone mast not far from the O² mast.
13. The Council did suggest that sharing one of the other 7 sites merited further investigation. This is a monopole in a work yard off the A4. However, professional evidence given for the appellant is that even if this structure was substantially raised in height it would not provide the required coverage.
14. Although not raised at application stage, or in its hearing statement, the Council suggested that consideration should be given to mounting antennas on nearby flats, constructing a freestanding street-work mast on the highway verge or utilising a lamp post swap-out. However, I have no substantial evidence to show that these solutions could either be practicably undertaken or provide the required coverage in an environmentally satisfactory way. Indeed, the residential character of much of the area, the existence of trees and tall buildings that would affect lines of sight, and the limited extent of the highway verge in some areas, all point toward significant constraints on finding an acceptable site. There was a third-party suggestion that the proposed development should be located in countryside on the opposite side of Burghfield Road from the appeal site. However, whilst it would not then be seen from residential areas it is likely that in such a setting it would be more intrusive in the landscape than the current proposal.
15. On the main issue, I conclude that the proposed development would cause only limited harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. This limited harm, and partial conflict with the development plan that would thereby arise, would be outweighed by the need for the proposed development in this location.

Other matters

16. The appellant supplied substantial evidence to show that the proposed development would not be detrimental to interests of nature conservation or archaeological importance, none of which has been challenged by the Council.
17. Guidance in PPG8 is that if a proposed mobile base station meets the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines for public

exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority to consider further the health aspects of the proposal. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised by some local residents on the health of those living nearby and those using the open space. I accept that their fears are relevant to my decision. On balance however, and bearing in mind that there was little objective evidence to support local fears and that the emissions from the masts would be well within the ICNIRP guidelines, I do not consider that health concerns are sufficient to justify refusing to grant permission.

18. There is no substantial evidence to support concerns on the effect of the proposed development on TV reception.

Conditions

19. As I am minded to allow the appeal I have considered what conditions if any should be imposed. There is no need to impose a condition on the time limit for the commencement of development as that is applied by the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) in prior approval cases. The development may only lawfully be carried out as approved, and I therefore see no reason to impose a condition specifying this. Given the relatively secluded nature of the site and the level of existing screening I see no need for a landscaping condition. Having regard to the distance of the proposed monopole from the hedgerow trees I see no need for a condition limiting the period of construction to protect wildlife.
20. Given the location of the site, and the findings of the appellant survey, I shall require the submission of a programme of archaeological work.

Conclusions

21. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Formal Decision

22. I allow the appeal and grant approval under the provisions of part 24 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended) for the siting and appearance of a 15m high monopole at land at SSE Southcote Sub Station, off Burghfield Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 3NB, in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 05/00326/TELE, as clarified in paragraph 1 above, dated 23 March 2005 and the plans submitted therewith subject to the following condition:

- 1) The development hereby approved shall not take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

RJ Marshall

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mr N Perring MRICS Appellant's agent
Mr J Page MSc(telecom) Of T-Mobile

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mr B Bradley MSc Senior Planning Officer

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Cllr P Ruhemann 66, Brooksbury Road, Reading.
Cllr D Edwards 26, Lea Close, Reading.

DOCUMENTS

Document 1 Letter notification of appeal and those notified.
Document 2 Copies of Local Plan Policies.
Document 3 Extract from Local Plan Proposals Map.

PLANS

Plan A The application plan being:
 - Drawing No. BS240569_01 Rev. D