

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 3 June 2020

Ward: Redlands

App No.: 200408/FUL

Address: Berkshire House 252-256 Kings Road

Proposal: Removal of 6 No. antennas, 1 No. equipment cabinet and other equipment & installation of 6 No. upgraded antenna apertures onto existing rooftop mast, 2 No. rooftop cabinets, 1 No. ground-based cabinet, plus ancillary development

Applicant: MBNL Ltd

Date validated: 13 March 2020

8-week target decision date: 8 May 2020

RECOMMENDATION

Grant Full Planning Permission

CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE

1. Full - time limit - three years
2. Standard approved plans condition
3. Materials as approved

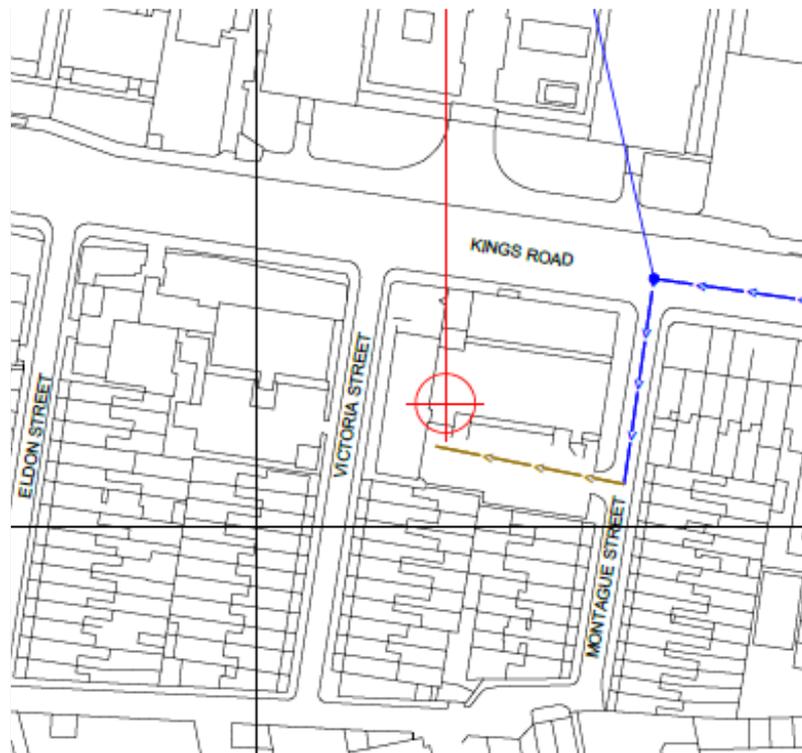
INFORMATIVES TO INCLUDE

1. Standard positive and proactive informative.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The site comprises a five-storey student accommodation building fronting onto the southern side of Kings Road and spanning the block between Montague Street and Victoria Street. An existing retail unit is located at the ground floor of the building on the corner to Victoria Street.
- 1.2 The building already has an existing 3m high roof top lattice mast and antennas together with ancillary rooftop equipment cabinets and other associated equipment.

- 1.3 The site is located within the Eldon Square Conservation Area. The main Reading College campus is sited on the opposite side of Kings Road to the north. A row of two and three-storey terraced houses exists to the east with a late twentieth century four-storey block of flats to the west. The area to the south of the site is residential and characterised by two storey Victorian terraced housing.



Site Location Plan



Existing rooftop mast, antennas and cabinets



View east along Kings Road towards Berkshire House showing the existing rooftop telecommunicaitons mast

2. PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The application seeks full planning permission for the replacement of 6 antennas, 1 equipment cabinet and other equipment with 6 upgraded antenna apertures onto the existing 3m high rooftop lattice mast, 2 rooftop cabinets and 1 ground-based cabinet.
- 3.2 The proposed upgrades are designed to accommodate 5G technology and improved 2G, 3G and 4G services. 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 and improved service for the emergency services network. The telecommunications base station is shared by the mobile operators EE and Three.
- 3.3 The proposed replacement antennas would be attached to the existing 3m high rooftop lattice mast. The antennas are required to be positioned at the top of the existing mast to enable the signal to clear surrounding structures without interference. To accommodate the upgraded technology the replacement antennas are slightly larger than existing. The larger size of the replacement antennas would result in a 0.3m increase in the overall height, width and depth of the apparatus. The proposed mast, cabinet and apparatus would be coloured grey as is the existing.

- 2.4 An existing 0.9m high galvanised steel grey rail safety fence surrounds the existing rooftop telecommunications base station. As part of the site upgrade it is proposed to replace the fence with a slightly larger 1.2m high grey rail fence. The proposed single ground based equipment cabinet would be 1.2m wide, 0.6m deep and 1.5m high positioned on the east elevation of the building.
- 2.5 A declaration has been submitted by the applicant confirming compliance with the International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation (ICNIRP) guidelines.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 02-00435 - Erection of a roof-top mounted telecommunications base station, including 6 cross polar antennae, 4 x 600 mm dish antennae and equipment cabinet - Granted
- 3.2 141986 - Change of use and extension of the existing office building Berkshire House (252 - 256 Kings Road, Reading) to create a six-storey student residential building - Granted
- 3.3 182198 - Replacement of existing telecommunications equipment to the roof. To include replacement of existing 3m high roof tower, 6 x antennas, 1 x 300mm dish and 5 x equipment cabinets with a new 10m high roof tower supporting 12 x antenna apertures, 3 x 600mm dishes. 8 x equipment cabinets to be installed on the rooftop and 1 x meter cabinet to be installed at ground level - Withdrawn.

4. CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 Conservation Area Advisory Committee - The replacement equipment would be slightly more intrusive but accepts the need for the upgrade to provide 5G technology.
- 4.2 RBC Conservation Consultant - A proposed addition of telecommunication antenna within a Conservation Area, would generally be considered to harm its character and appearance. However, there are existing telecommunications antennas on the roof of Berkshire House and the proposed development intends to replace these with new antennas in the same location. Berkshire House is not of any architectural interest and, whilst the proposal would increase the prominence of the telecommunication equipment slightly, the antenna is not currently prominent within views from the Conservation

Area and so any additional harm would be considered less than substantial.

4.3 Public consultation:

No. 252-256 Kings Road, Davina's Kings Road, Flats 1 and 2 258 Kings Road, no.s 3 and 8 Montague Street, no. 3 Victoria Street and Thames Valley University Kings Road were notified of the application by letter.

4.4 No letters of representation have been received.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

5.1 Full Planning Permission has been applied for as the site is located within a conservation area and therefore permitted development rights under Class A, Part 16 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) do not apply.

5.2 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'.

5.3 Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

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

5.5 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

5.6 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 EN3 Enhancement of Conservation Areas

Policy EN6 New Development in a Historic Context
Policy EN16 Pollution and water resources
Policy OU3 Telecommunications development

6. APPRAISAL

- 6.1 Paragraph 112 of the NPPF 2019 notes that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. 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.
- 6.2 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

- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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.

- 6.5 Berkshire House is a modern building that is not considered to be of any architectural merit that is located on the north east edge of the Eldon Square Conservation Area. The appearance of the building is not considered to contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. The existing 3m high rooftop lattice mast and equipment are modern utilitarian additions to the building which are also not considered to contribute positively to the character of the conservation. However, whilst the existing rooftop equipment forms part of views from the West and South along Kings Road, Eldon Road and Eldon Terrace, the narrow nature of the surrounding streets is such the equipment is not seen within views from the majority of the Conservation Area.
- 6.6 Given that the proposals relate to the upgrade of an existing rooftop telecommunications base station and mast the key assessment is the additional visual impact of the proposed replacement equipment.
- 6.7 The proposals would retain and reuse the existing 3m high rooftop lattice mast structure and whilst the proposed replacement antennas are bulkier than those existing this would only result in a modest 0.3m increase in the overall height, width and depth of the structure. 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 mast would be retained in its current grey galvanised steel form whilst the antennas would also be grey and white in appearance as existing.
- 6.8 It should also be noted that an earlier application (ref. 182198) to replace the existing 3m high mast with a 10m high rooftop mast was withdrawn by the applicant in in 2019 due to officer concerns with the proposed significant increase in height of the mast. The current proposal which re-uses the existing mast is considered to be much more preferable in visual impact terms.

- 6.9 The additional equipment cabinets and modest 0.3m increase in height of the rail safety fence surrounding the rooftop base station are also not considered to result in any significant additional visual impact when compared to the existing base station. The single proposed grey steel ground-based equipment cabinet to the east elevation of the building would also have marginal visual impact due to its small size.
- 6.10 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.
- 6.11 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 of this report.

Alternative Sites

- 6.4 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. The proposal would also demonstrate further adherence to the NPPF and Policy OU3 in that it would continue to operate as a site share between the operators EE and Three further reducing the need for multiple masts located elsewhere in the close locality.
- 6.5 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. The Applicant has also confirmed that an alternative site would need to be located within very close proximity

to the existing site in order to replicate its radio coverage pattern and provide an effective service for all users and therefore any alternative site would very likely also be within or impact upon views from the Eldon Square Conservation Area.

- 6.6 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.

Other

- 6.16 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.
- 6.17 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.
- 6.18 As such, the proposal is deemed acceptable in terms of health-related issues.

Equalities impact assessment

- 6.19 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.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in the context of national and local planning policy and other material considerations as set out in this report.

7.2 With regard to heritage impact, as set out in paragraph 6.11 of this report officers consider the proposal to result in less than substantial harm to the setting of the Eldon Square Conservation Area. As per paragraph 193 of the NPPF this must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal development.

7.3 As discussed in the main body of the report the notable public benefits of the proposals include providing improved network coverage for nearby residents and the emergency services network, together with the fact that the proposals are for an upgrade of an existing telecommunications base stations that is shared between operators therefore, reducing the potential for new telecommunication base stations and masts to be established elsewhere in this locality and within the Conservation Area. It is considered that these benefits would outweigh the minor additional visual impact of the proposed base station upgrade works upon the setting of the Eldon Square Conservation Area.

7.2 The proposals are considered to accord with Policies CC7, EN1, EN3, EN6, OU3, CC8 and EN16 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 as assessed above. It is therefore recommended that approval be granted, subject to the recommended conditions.

Drawings Considered:

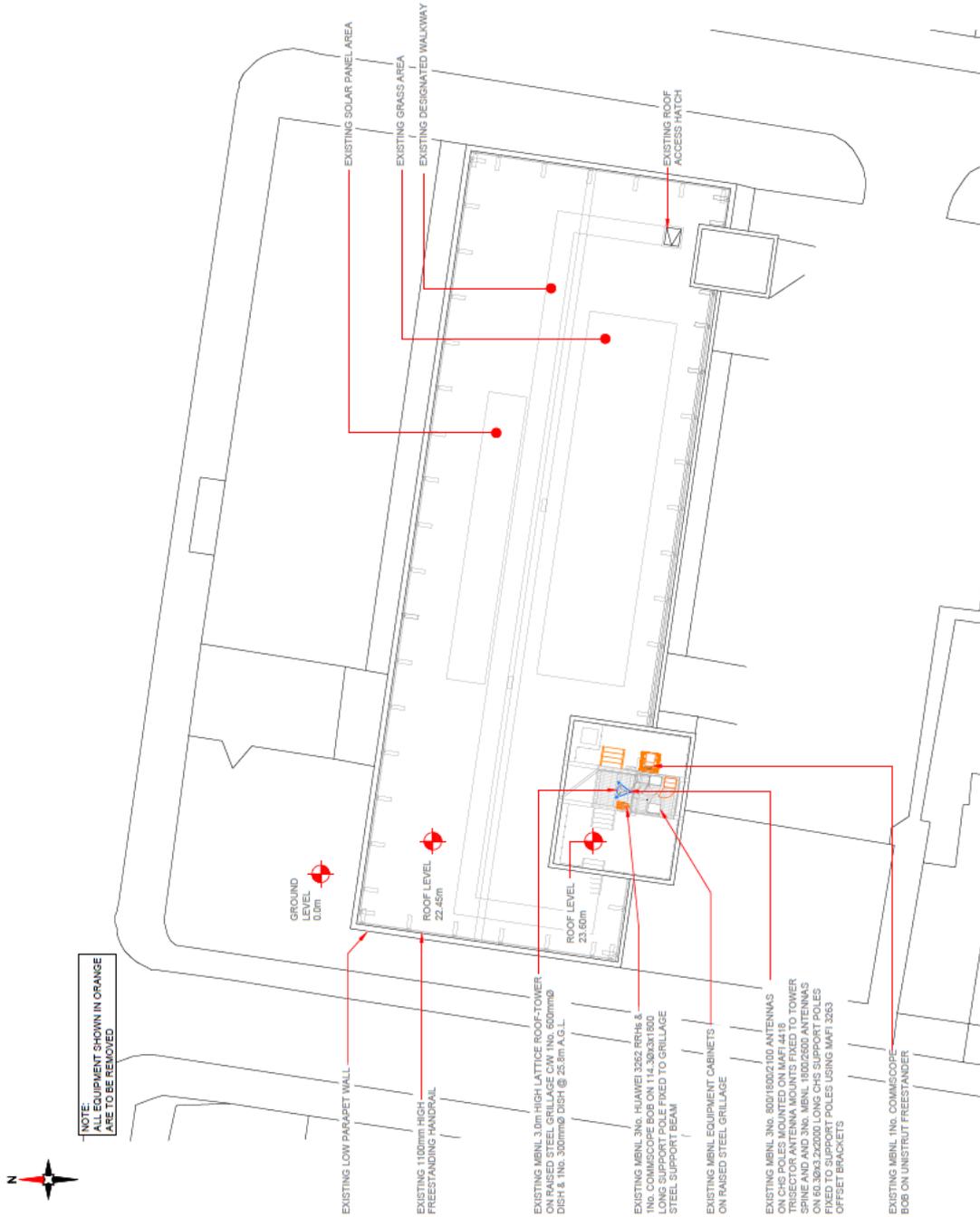
Drawing no.s:

- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 002 Site Location Plan
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 100 Existing Site Plan
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 150 Existing Site Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 151 Existing South Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 152 Existing Site Elevation

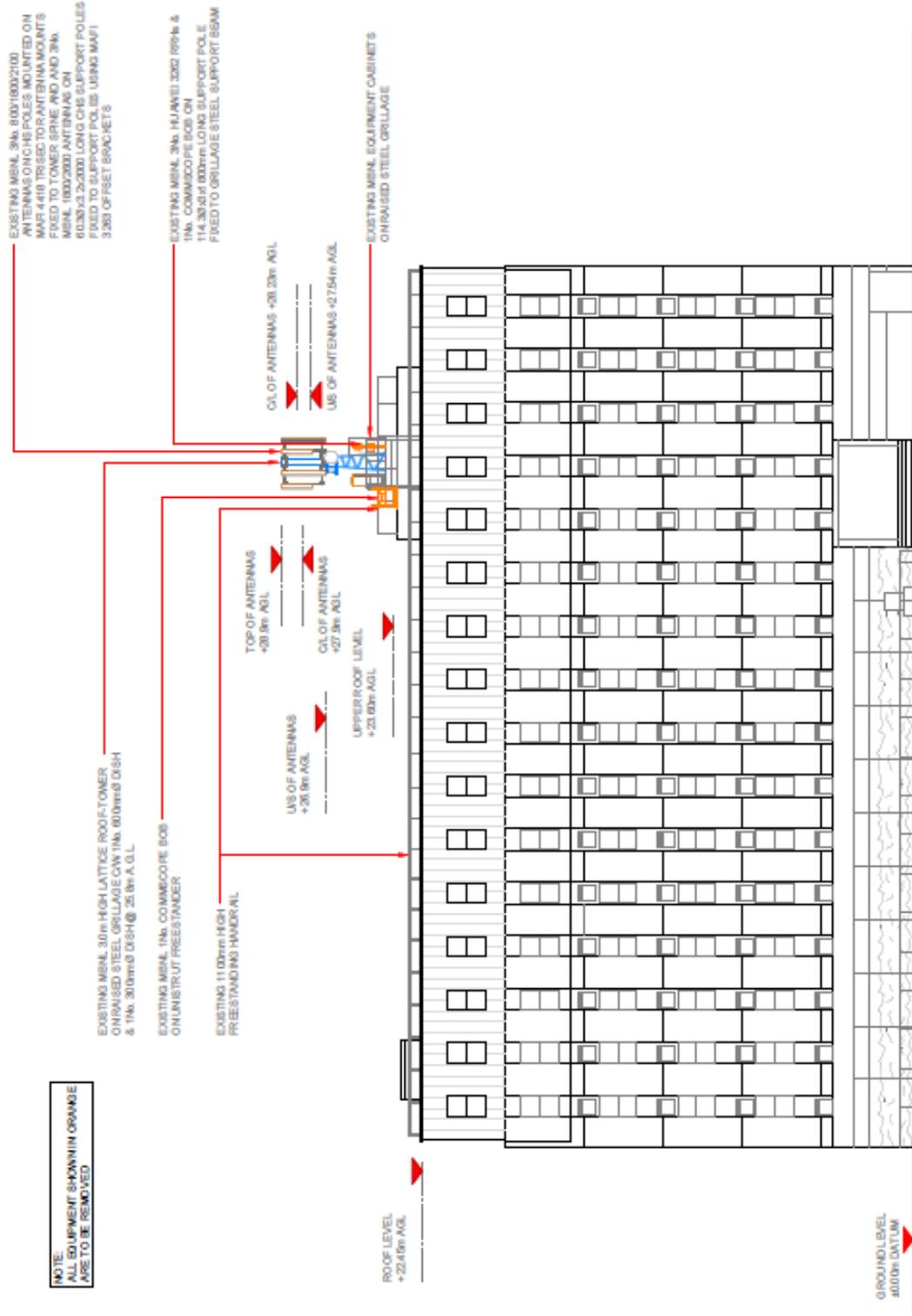
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 153 Existing Site Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 215 Proposed Max Config Site Plan
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 265 Proposed Max Config Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 266 Proposed Max Config Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 267 Proposed Max Config Elevation
- 795494_RDG024_61354_RG4406_M004 rev D - 268 Proposed Max Config Elevation
- Supplementary Information Document ref. 61354
- Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines signed and dated 26/02/2020.

Received by the Local Planning Authority on 19th March 2020

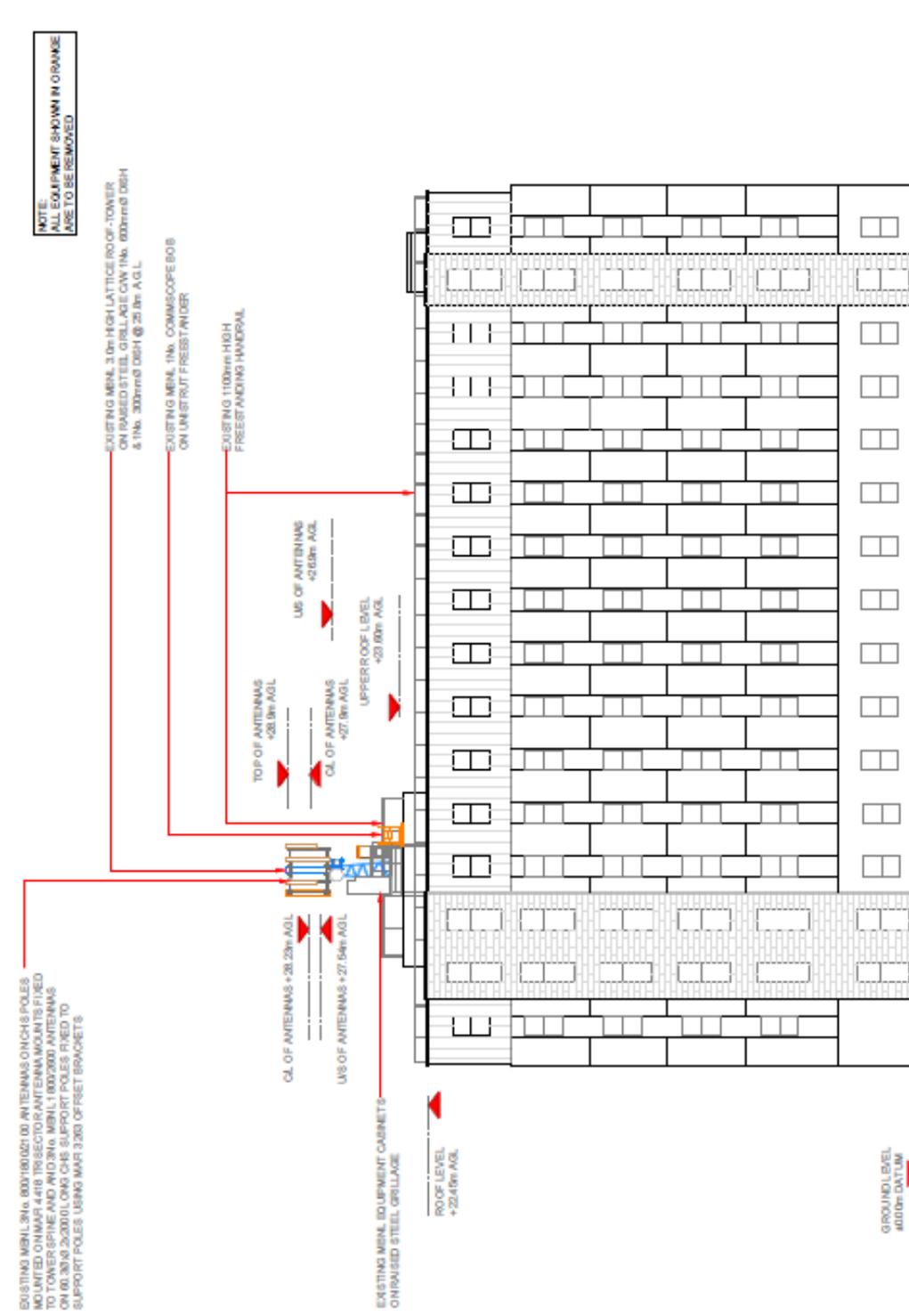
Case Officer: Matt Burns



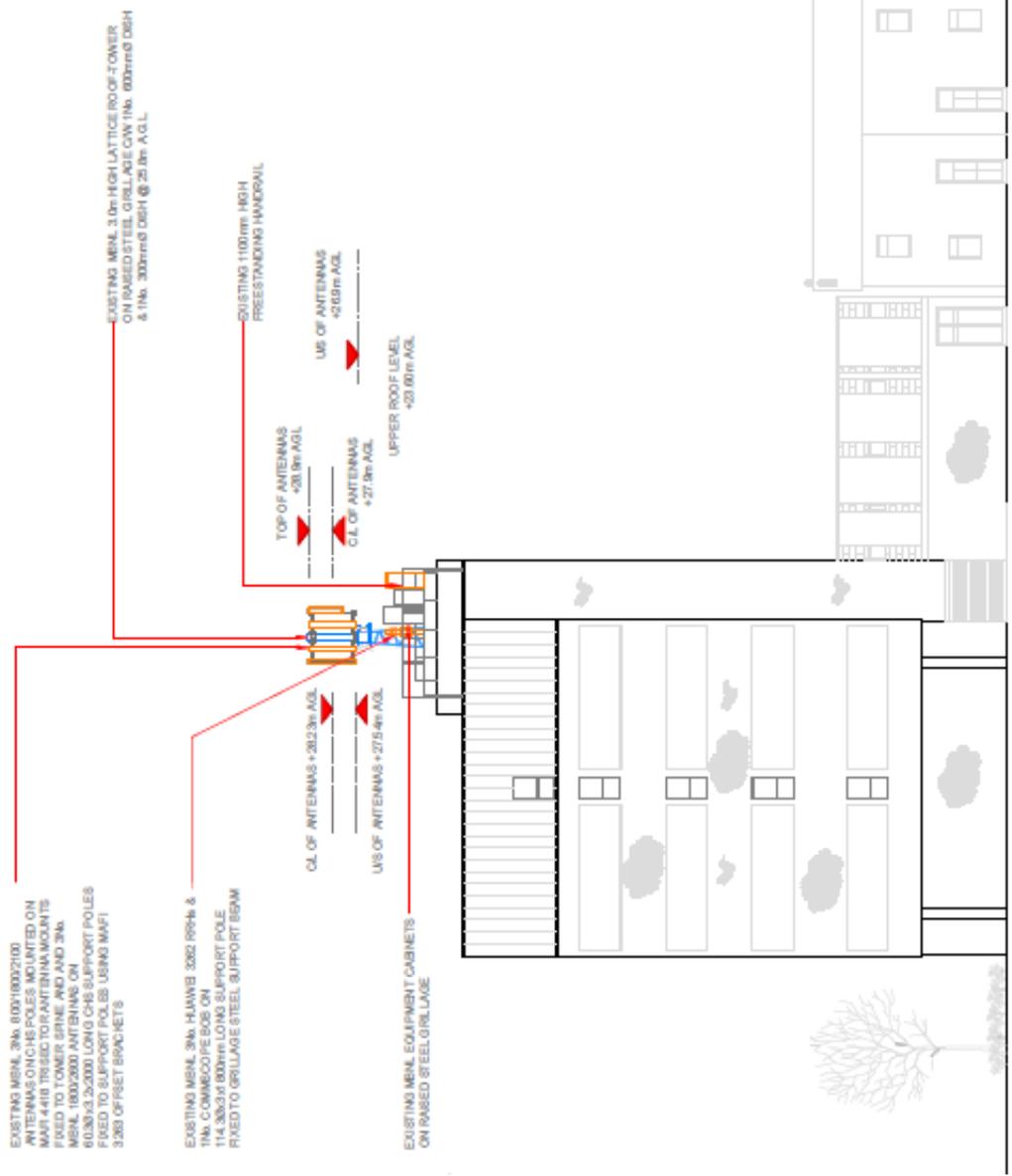
Existing Site Plan



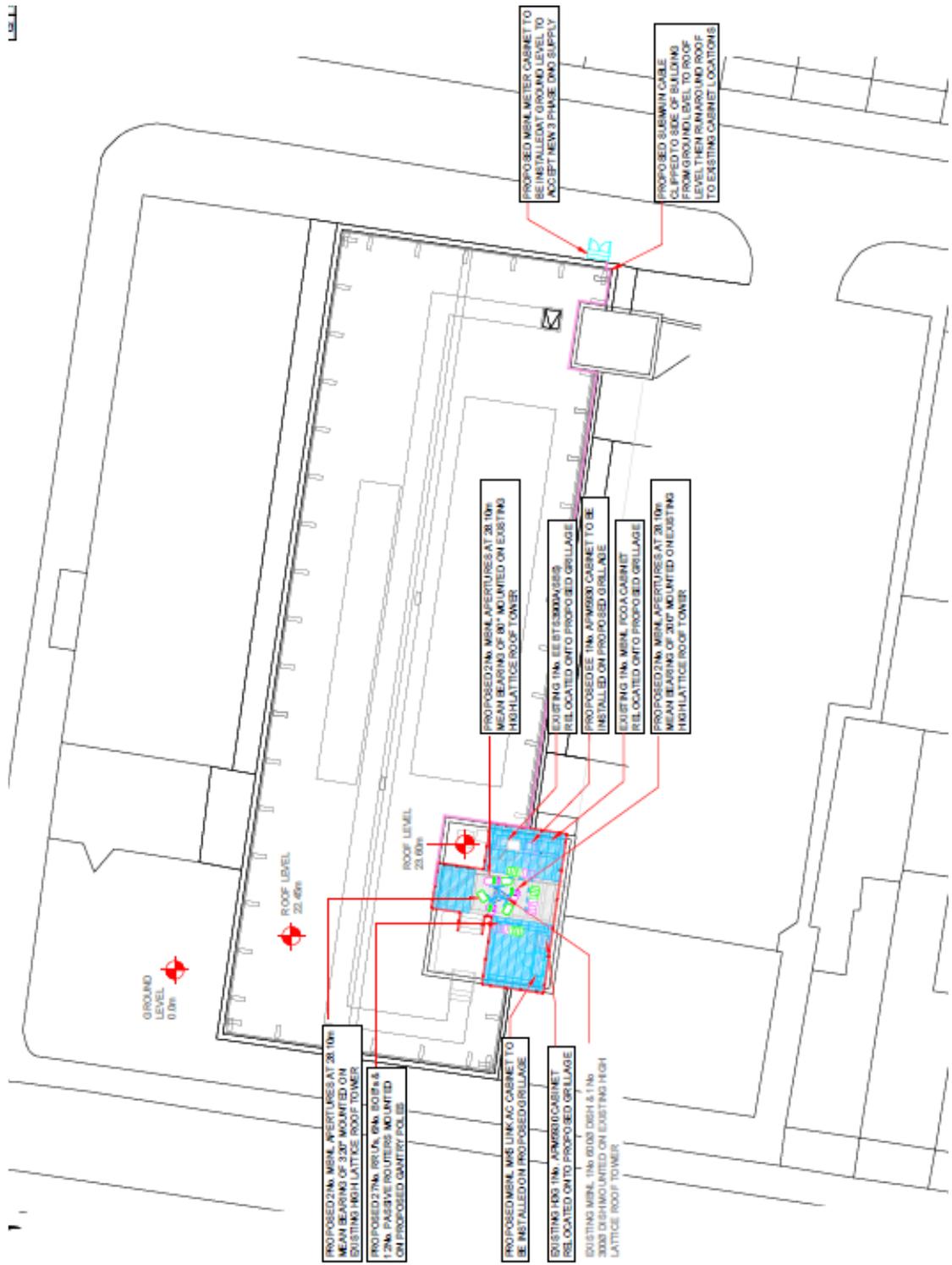
Existing North Elevation



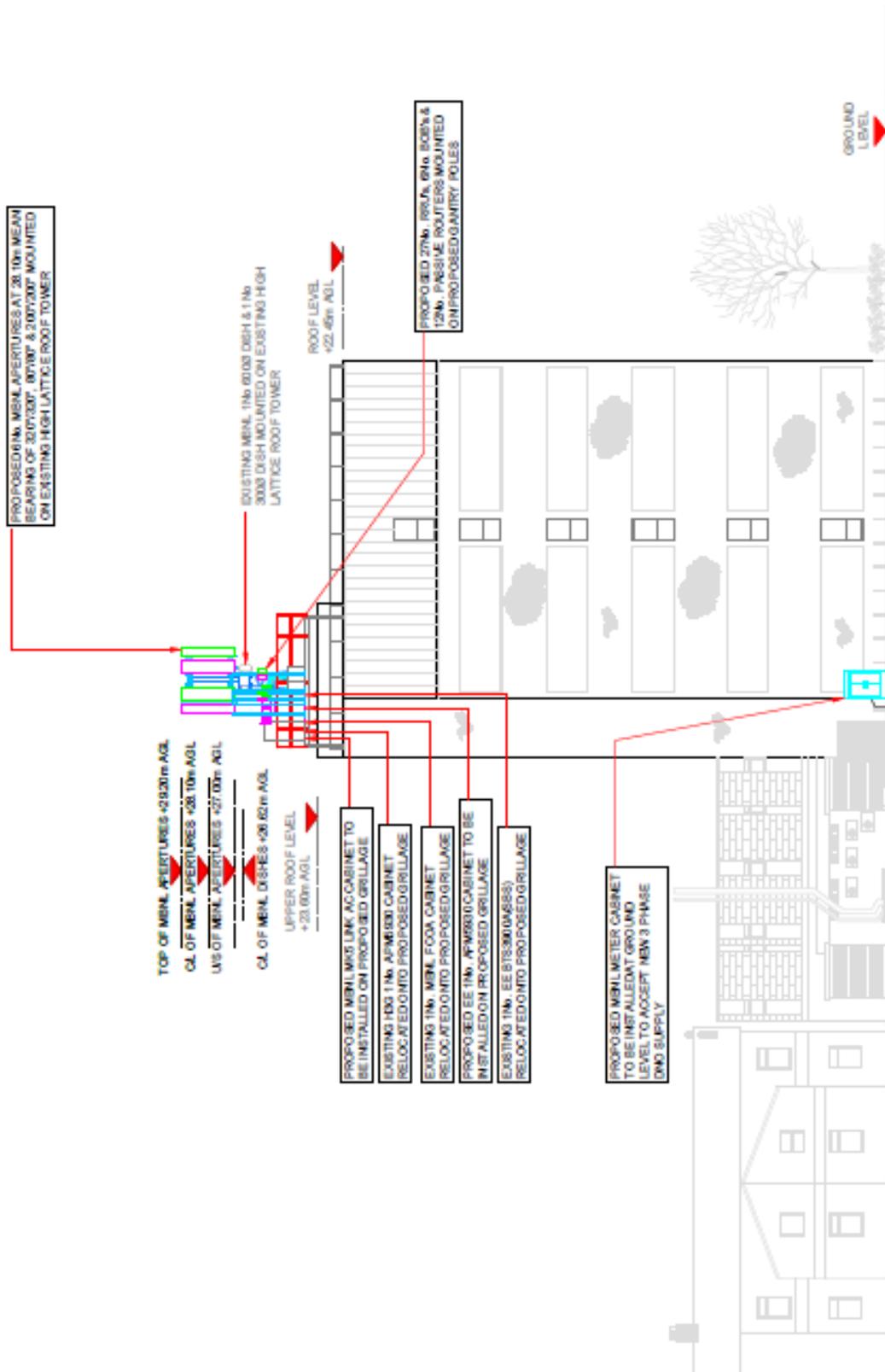
Existing South Elevation



Existing West Elevation



Proposed Site Plan



Proposed East Elevation

