

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 01 JUNE 2022

Ward: Abbey

App No.: 211376/FUL & 211407/LBC

Address: 41 Minster Street, Reading, RG1 2JB

Proposal: The proposed development will include installation of a 10m stub tower, 6 no. antennas, 2 no. 300mm dishes, a GPS dish and associated ancillary equipment, alongside the removal of the existing 2.5m stub tower with 6 no. antennas and associated equipment and fixings.

Applicant: McCarthy

Date received (211376/FUL): 20/08/2021

Date received (211407/LBC): 25/08/2021

Date validated: 25/08/2021

8-week target decision date: 20/10/2021

Extension of time date: 10/06/2022

RECOMMENDATION

211376/FUL

Grant Full Planning Permission

CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE

1. Full - time limit - three years
2. Standard approved plans condition
3. Materials as applied for
4. Noise Levels of Plant/Equipment Restricted

INFORMATIVES TO INCLUDE

1. Standard positive and proactive informative.
2. Listed Building Consent ref. 211407 relates to this permission

211407/LBC

Grant Listed Building Consent

CONDITIONS TO INCLUDE

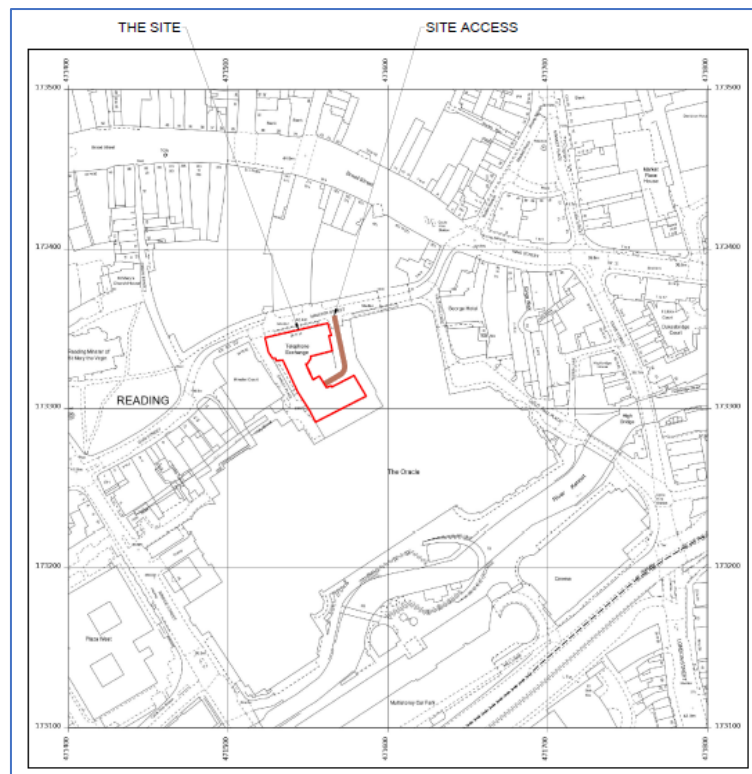
1. Full - time limit - three years
2. Standard approved plans condition
3. Materials as applied for
4. No other works approved

INFORMATIVES TO INCLUDE

1. Standard positive and proactive informative.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The proposal site is a Telephone Exchange at 41 Minster Street. The Telephone Exchange is a Grade II Listed Building (listing 1302939). While the listing specifically refers to the Telephone Exchange, the address on the listing is 41-45 Minster Street. The listing describes Telephone Exchange, 41-45 Minster Street as:
- 1.2 *“MINSTER STREET 1. 5128 (South Side) No 41 to 45 (consec) (Telephone Exchange) SU 7173 SE 3/131A 26.7.73. II 2. Circa 1900. Architect Leonard Aloysius Stokes (a Voysey/Lethaby follower who had married Miss Gane daughter of the General Manager of the National Telephone Company). His aim was to develop a British style of architecture, free from revivals of past styles. The building consequently appears somewhat plain. 3 storeys of red brick with stone dressings in an attenuated Georgian style. Concealed roof. 5 bays wide, the end bays project slightly. To right is door with cornice and lunette window above. To left a window treated in a similar runner. Centre 3 bays divided by chamfered piers supporting cornice at 2nd floor level. Large windows between on each floor, 6 windows on 2nd floor. Single sash windows in breaks.”*
- 1.3 The proposal site is within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). It is outside a Conservation Area (CA), but adjacent to St Mary's Butts / Castle Street CA and close to Market Place/London St CA too.
- 1.4 An existing telecommunications base is located to the roof of 41 Minster Street. The telecoms base is a shared site between two operators.



Location Plan

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The application seeks full planning permission and associated Listed Building Consent for the removal of six existing antennas and internal equipment

cabinets located within the existing rooftop cabin, with the installation of six new antennas, and eight cabinets and associated ancillary works thereto.

- 2.2 The proposed upgrades are designed improve existing 2G, 3G and 4G services, as well as introduce 5G technology to cater for current and future customer needs. The upgraded infrastructure will 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 Vodafone and O2.
- 2.3 As the proposed replacement antennas are located on a building more than 15m and is a listed building, the proposed development requires planning permission and listed building consent.
- 2.4 A declaration has been submitted by the applicant confirming compliance with the International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation (ICNIRP) guidelines.
- 2.5 The current application is on the committee agenda because the Council's scheme of delegation requires all applications for new/replacement telecommunications masts to be determined by Planning Applications Committee. The telecommunications base is also within the curtilage of (physically attached to, in this case) a Listed Building.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 Various applications concerning the replacement of windows with louvres. The following applications concern the existing telecommunications base station.
- 3.2 172295/FUL - Upgrade of existing rooftop base station comprising the relocation of an existing antenna and the provision of additional 3 No antennas together with feeder cables, steelworks and ancillary development thereto. - Application permitted on 27/04/2018 (Committee Decision)
- 3.3 172296/LBC - Upgrade of existing rooftop base station comprising the relocation of an existing antenna and the provision of additional 3 No antennas together with feeder cables, steelworks and ancillary development thereto. - Application permitted on 27/04/2018 (Committee Decision)

4. CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1 The following addresses were notified of the application by letter:
Conservation & Urban Design Officer
Environmental Protection
Transport Development Control
Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee
- 4.2 Environmental Protection have raised concerns regarding noise arising from the development from cooling equipment. With specific concerns to the living conditions at Minster Court, west of the proposal site. It was recommended that a noise assessment be submitted prior to determination, however, it was also stated that a condition be attached to any approval requiring a noise assessment prior to installation.
- 4.3 Transport Development Control raised no objections to the applications.

- 4.4 The Conservation and Urban Design Officer raised no objections to the application, stating that visual impact of the proposed development is a lesser harm in accordance with paragraph 202 of the NPPF. The development is acceptable given the community benefits in relation to communication.
- 4.5 The site notice for application 211376/FUL was displayed from Wednesday 8th September 2021, expiring on Wednesday 29th September 2021. The site notice for application 211407/LBC was displayed from Wednesday 8th September 2021, expiring on Wednesday 29th September 2021. A press notice was published from Thursday 23rd September 2021, expiring on Thursday 14th October 2021. No responses have been received.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 5.1 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'.
- 5.2 Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.
- 5.3 The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:
- 5.4 National Planning Policy Framework 2021
Part 10 - Supporting high quality communications infrastructure
Part 12 - Achieving well designed places
- 5.5 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 EN15 Air Quality
Policy EN17 Noise Generating Equipment
Policy OU3 Telecommunications Development
Policy CR2 Design in Central Reading
- 5.6 Other documents
St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal
Market Place/London St Conservation Area Appraisal

6. APPRAISAL

- 6.1 Paragraph 114 of the NPPF 2021 sets out that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Paragraph 115 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, Historic Character of the Listed Building and setting of the Conservation Area

6.3 Paragraph 202 of the NPPF states that; "Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use."

6.4 In addition to Policy OU3 as set out above, Policy CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) seeks 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.

6.5 Policy EN1 of the Reading Borough Local Plan states; "Applications which affect Listed Buildings will not have an adverse impact on those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest including, where appropriate, their settings."

6.6 The proposals relate to the upgrade of an existing rooftop telecommunications base station and mast and therefore the key assessment is the additional visual impact of the proposed replacement equipment.

6.7 The most significant physical alteration to the roof of 41 Minster Street is the replacement stub tower. The existing roof top stub tower to be upgraded is 2.5m in height but incorporates large antennas which effectively results in a structure of 5m in height. The replacement stub tower is to be sited in the same location as the existing stub tower, however the maximum height of the replacement stub tower would be 10m.



Fig 1. Existing rooftop equipment to 41 Minster Street as viewed from the roof of Holy Brook Car Park.



Fig 2. Existing rooftop equipment to 41 Minster Street as viewed from ground level on Minster Street.

- 6.8 Despite the increase in height and width, the stub tower would still be located central to the roof of 41 Minster Street and would not be readily visible from Minster Street or surrounding roads. The proposed stub tower would only be visible from very specific views, such as through the car park to the east of 41 Minster Street, from the rooftop of Holy Brook car park, and from the Minster Street pedestrian access to the Oracle shopping centre.



Fig 3. 41 Minster Street as viewed from ground level on Minster Street.



Fig 4. Existing rooftop equipment to 41 Minster Street as viewed from the walkway from Gun Street/Minster Street to The Oracle Shopping Centre.

- 6.9 In this context the additional/replacement equipment would be viewed in the setting of the existing, more significant roof top equipment, and the proposals are not considered to result in any material harm to surrounding visual amenity or the setting of the adjacent St Marys Butts/Caste Street Conservation Area.
- 6.10 The applications have been discussed with the Conservation & Urban Design Officer. The increase in height and width of the proposed sub tower from existing is acknowledged, however, given the fact the building is surrounded by other modern buildings, this single mast will have “lesser harm” but in accordance with paragraph 202 of the NPPF, the development is considered to be acceptable given the community benefits in relation to communication and the less than substantial harm of the development to the heritage asset.
- 6.11 Overall, the proposed base station upgrade is not considered to have an adverse impact on the elements which contribute to the special architectural, setting, and historic interest of the Grade II Listed Building or the character and appearance of the surrounding area in accordance with Policies CC7, EN1 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

Alternative Sites

- 6.12 Paragraph 115 of the NPPF 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. 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.”*
- 6.13 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.
- 6.14 The supporting information submitted with the application does provide details of two alternative sites with reasons why these options were discarded with the proposed development to 41 Minster Street being the preferred choice. The preferred choice in this instance was to upgrade an existing telecommunications site.
- 6.15 Given the minimal additional visual impact of the development, Officers are of the opinion that the re-use and upgrade of an existing established site is the preferred approach. It is acknowledged that the surrounding area is heavily constrained in alternative site options given the proximity to Conservation Areas. In this instance it is considered that the upgrade of an existing shared site is preferable to a proliferation of additional masts and/or base stations.

Noise arising from development

- 6.16 Environmental Protection raised concerns with regards to noise arising from the development, specifically with noise generated from cooling equipment. Therefore, a noise assessment was requested to confirm the impact of the proposed development on the living conditions of nearby residents. In particular

those residing at the serviced apartments to the west of the application site at Minster Court.

- 6.17 A noise assessment was submitted and concluded that the potential noise impacts of the fixed plant installation on the closest residential receptors will not exceed the assessment criteria (BS:4142 assessment) and will be significantly below both the background sound level and existing ambient noise levels.
- 6.18 The noise assessment submitted has been reviewed by Environmental Protection with the conclusions agreed. The development is therefore considered in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan with regards to noise and disturbance, subject to condition restricting the noise levels of the proposed equipment to at least 10dB below the pre-existing background sound level.

Other matters

- 6.19 Paragraph 118 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.
- 6.20 The applicant has provided an International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation (ICNIRP) certificate 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 118 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.
- 6.21 As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of health-related issues.

Equalities impact assessment

- 6.22 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 will be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The proposed development/works are 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 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, reducing the potential for new telecommunication base stations and masts to be established elsewhere in this locality. It is considered that these benefits outweigh the visual impact of the base station upgrade works upon the setting of the surrounding area.
- 7.3 The proposals are considered to accord with Policies CC7, CC8, OU3, EN1, EN3 and EN17 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 as assessed above. It is therefore recommended that approval be granted, subject to the recommended conditions.

Drawings Considered:

- Location Plan - 167370-00-004-ML003 Rev 3
- Legal Plan - 167370-00-010-ML003 Rev 3
- Antenna Schedule Proposed CTIL - 167370-22-151-ML022 Rev 22
- Supplementary Information - Reading Central ATE (including Heritage Statement)
- Declaration of Conformity Public RF Exposure Guidelines
- Cabin Plan Proposed CTIL - 167370-22-101-MD022 Rev 22

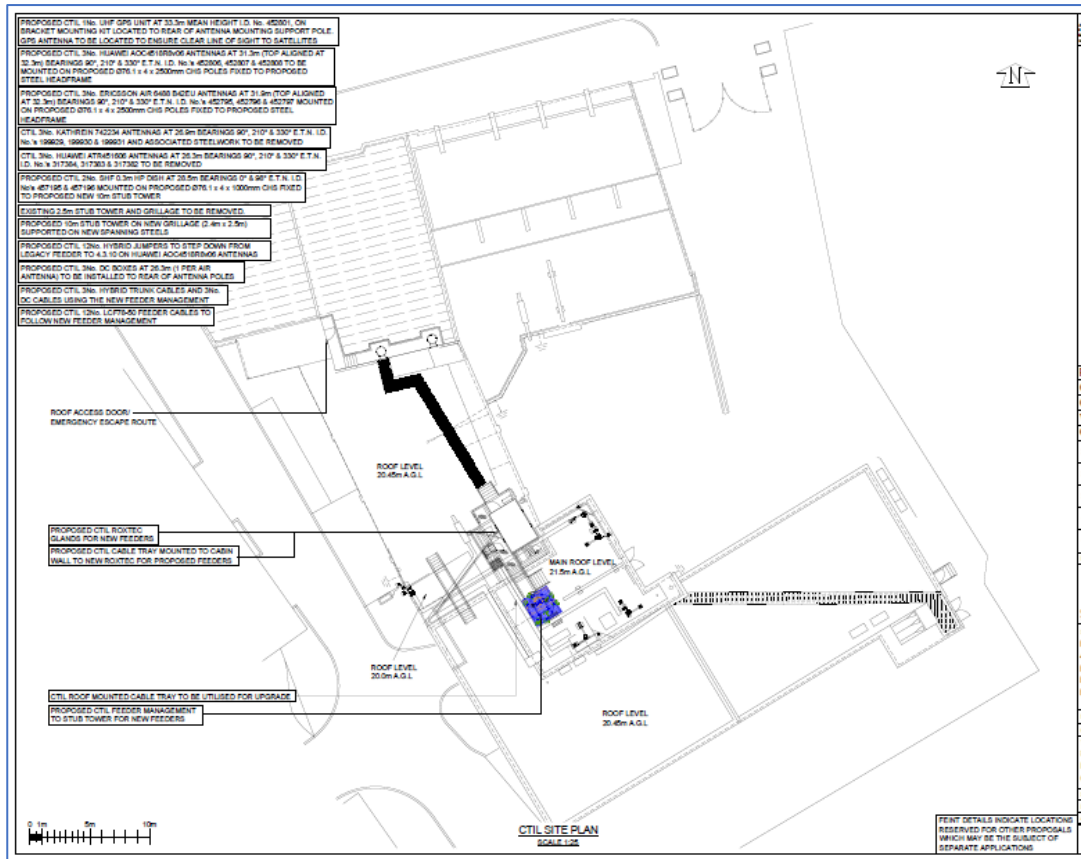
Received by the Local Planning Authority on 20th August 2021

- 41 Minster Street Reading Noise Impact Assessment - A4609/N/01

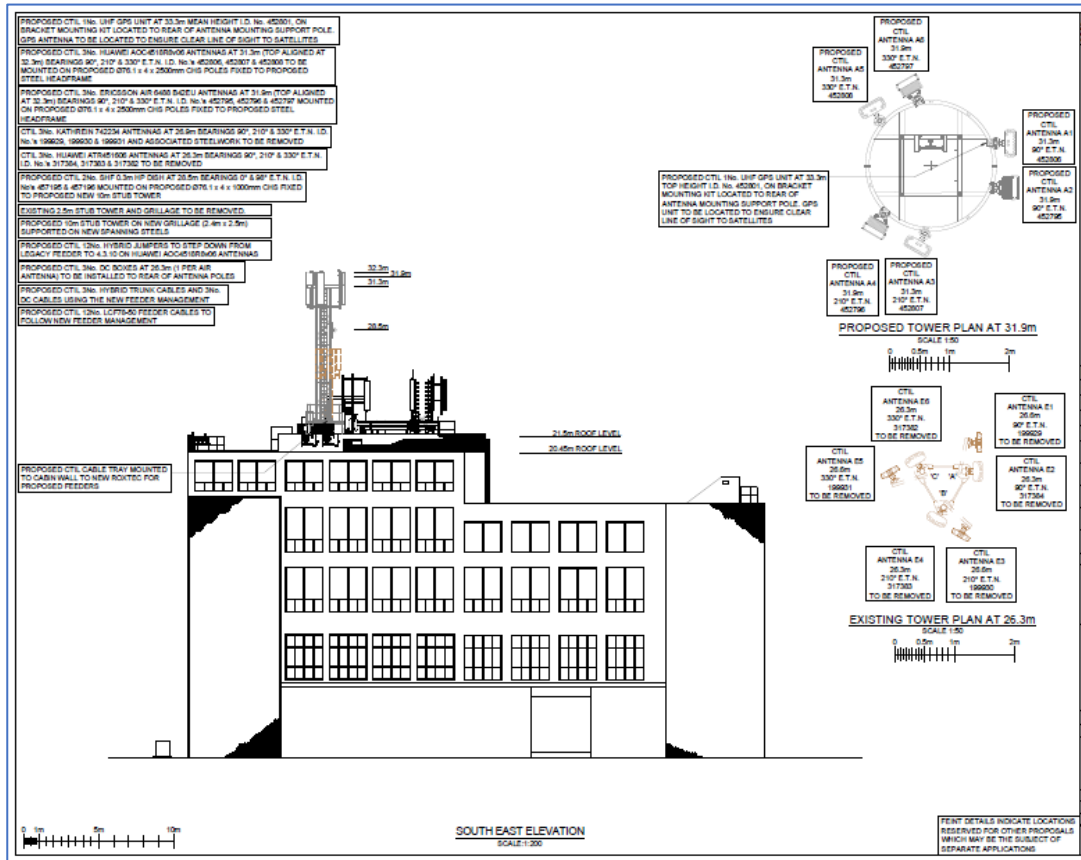
Received by the Local Planning Authority on 9th May 2022

Case Officer: David Brett

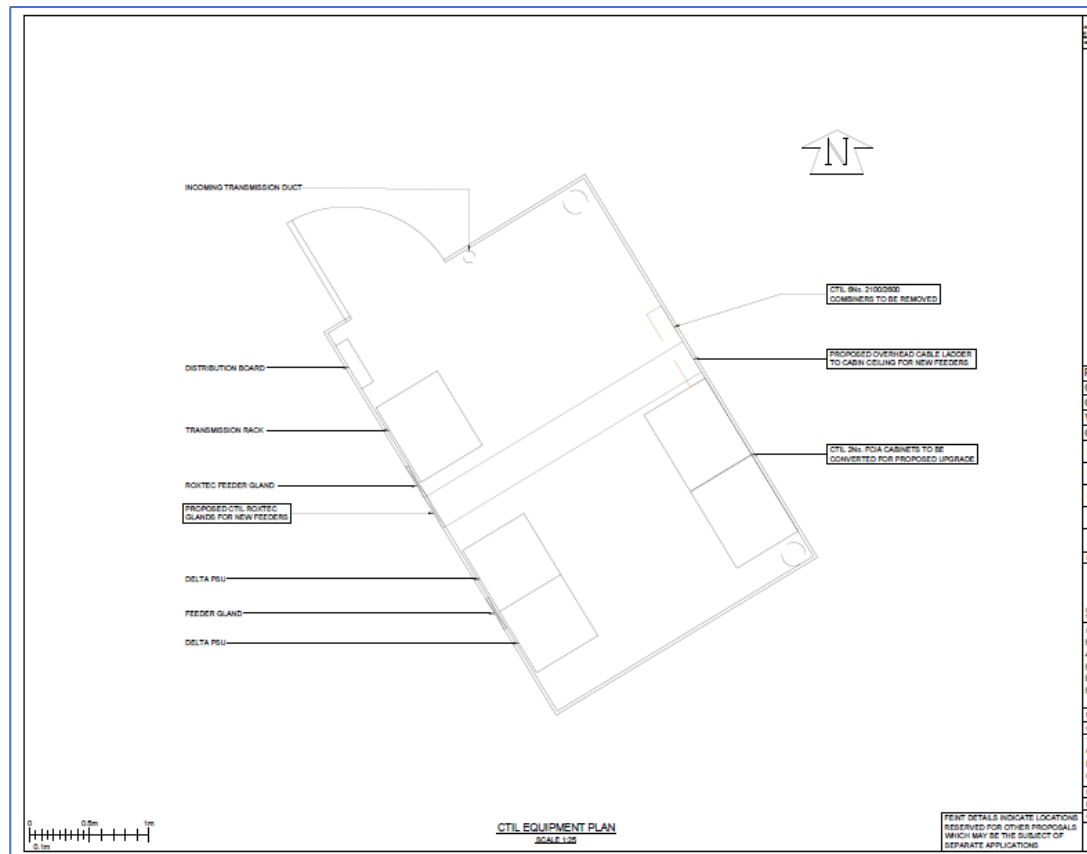
Appendix: Plans and Google Street View Images



Proposed Site Plan



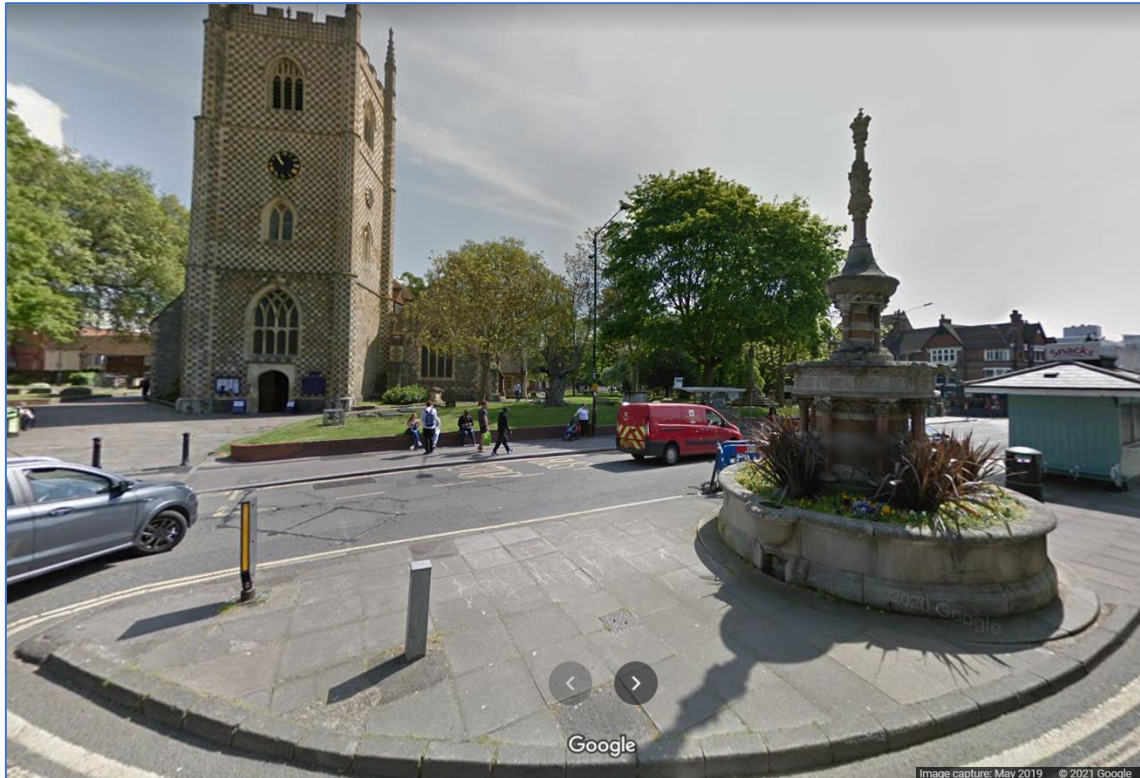
Proposed East Elevation



Proposed Cabin Plan



View of the application site from Castle Street. Google Street view image captured in July 2021.



View of the application site from corner of Hoiser Street and St Mary's Butts. Google Street view image captured in May 2019.