

APPEAL DECISION REPORT

Ward: Church

Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/22/3295590

Application Ref: 211542/TEL

Address: Land at Pepper Lane, Reading, RG2 7DH

Proposal: Installation of 18m monopole and ancillary equipment

Case officer: Beatrice Malama

Decision level: Delegated. Refused 11 November 2021

Method: Written Representations

Decision: Appeal dismissed

Date Determined: 4 January 2023

Inspector: Lewis Condé BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

1. Background

1.1 The appeal site is situated within the highway verge on the inside of a curve on the south side of Pepper Lane, next to buildings which form part of Leighton Park School. The application was to install an 18 metre high monopole with equipment atop and base cabinet and three further equipment cabinets along the highway verge. The prior approval of the LPA is required as to the siting and appearance of the installation. This 'prior approval' application was refused for two reasons, which in summary were:

- The proposed 18m high monopole and associated equipment would, by reason of its height, overall bulk and prominent siting, detract from the visual amenity and appearance of the surrounding area, including the setting of the Grade II listed building (RBLP policies CC7, EN1, EN4, EN6 and OU3); and
- The proposed development has failed to demonstrate it would be acceptable in terms of siting in relation to the Root Protection Areas of protected trees (RBLP Policy EN14).

2. Summary of the decision

2.1 The Inspector considered the main issues to be the siting and appearance on:

- The character and appearance of the area including protected trees
- Designated heritage assets; and
- If any harm is identified, whether this would be outweighed by the need for the installation in this location, having regard to the potential availability of alternative sites.

Effect on the character and appearance of the area including trees

2.2 The Inspector considered that this location on Pepper Lane was visually prominent and with the grass verge and numerous trees, retained a generally verdant character. He described the installation as of a typical/functional type, but due to the low-rise buildings in the vicinity (typically 1-3 storeys), he found that this height and bulk would rise significantly above these and present a dominant feature. There are numerous trees nearby in the school grounds which are protected, and these run along the northern perimeter of the school site. Whilst the pole and cabinets would not immediately affect trees, there was no information on how the required cables/services would affect tree roots, which

could cause tree harm and potentially their loss, which he considered would be harmful to the verdant character.

- 2.3 With regard to the harm on the listed building, Blandford Lodge within the University campus opposite (north), the Inspector noted its value and that there were intervening features. Nonetheless, he was required by the NPPF to balance the level of harm against the overall benefits of the proposal. He concluded that there was 'less than substantial harm' to the Heritage Asset as a result of the proposal, however that was not outweighed by the need for the proposal.

Availability of alternative sites

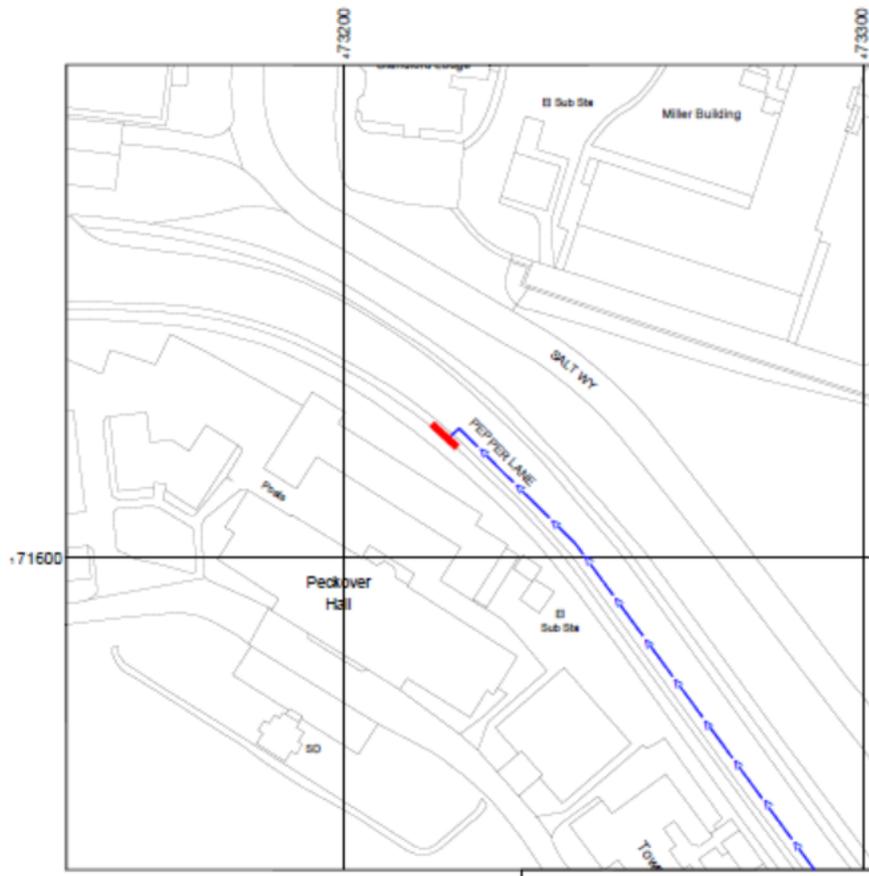
- 2.4 The Inspector found that persuasive evidence in favour of the location was lacking as insufficient investigation had been presented about the availability of potentially suitable alternatives, other than they were in private ownership; and other highway verge sites appeared to have been discounted over safety/visibility issues, but without any technical evidence to demonstrated this.

3. OFFICER COMMENTS

- 3.1 A pleasing decision. The verdant character of the area was recognised by the Inspector and the LPA's concern for the absence of tree information supported. The Inspector also confirmed in his conclusion that he attached great weight to the impact on the Heritage Asset, and confirmed the harm, although less than substantial, was not outweighed by public benefits. Whilst there was no specific reason for refusal in terms of alternative sites, this was clearly a concern for the Inspector and it is encouraging that inspectors are tending to support the LPA in that more thorough site investigation is required to demonstrate that other sites are genuinely unavailable, rather than simply less convenient for the operator.
- 3.2 Members are advised that the operator also received a refusal notice for a similar proposal on 7 November 2022, this was for a slimmer monopole, which was 15 metres high (and no base cabinet) plus three further cabinets (reference 221368/TEL). This was refused for very similar reasons (effect on the heritage asset, trees and lack of information on alternative sites). It is not clear whether the applicant intends to appeal against that refusal of prior approval.

Case Officer: Beatrice Malama

SITE LOCATION PLAN



Aerial view Google maps 2022



