



## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 June 2025

by A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/W/24/3356487**

**Northwood Cricket Club, Duck Hill Road, Northwood, Hillingdon HA6 2RX**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant approval required under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
- The appeal is made by CTIL against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
- The application Ref is 45817/APP/2024/938.
- The development proposed is the removal of 1 no. 15m monopole mast, and the installation of 1 no. replacement 20m monopole mast accommodating 6 no. antenna and ancillary radio equipment, the installation of 1 no. GPS Module at ground level within extended compound, internal upgrades to existing equipment cabinets within compound, and ancillary development thereto.

### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. As this is an application for prior approval the provisions of the 2015 General Permitted Development Order (the GPDO) require the local planning authority, subject to compliance with the other pertinent requirements of the GPDO, to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance taking into account any representations received. This appeal will be determined on the same basis, and I have had regard to the policies of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) only insofar as they are a material consideration relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

### Main Issues

3. The main issues are:

- Whether the proposed development contravenes the requirement set out at A.1(1)(e)(ii) of Article 3, Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO;
- If not, the effect of the siting and appearance of the proposed installation on the character and appearance of the area; and,
- If any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed, taking into account any suitable alternatives.

## Reasons

### GPDO

4. The first reason for refusal states that due to the width of the proposed development it would conflict with the requirement set out at A.1(1)(e)(ii) of Schedule 2, Part 16 of The GPDO and is therefore not permitted development.
5. The requirement in question, however, only applies to the alteration or replacement of a mast on any land which is, or is within, a site of special scientific interest. Neither is true of the appeal site. The appellant has made this point in their appeal submissions, and the Council has not contested it.
6. The proposed development does not contravene the requirement set out at A.1(1)(e)(ii) of Article 3, Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO. It would constitute permitted development, subject to the condition that prior approval must be sought in relation to its siting and appearance.

### *Siting and appearance*

7. The appeal site is at the western edge of a cricket ground (the ground), behind a pavilion. The ground is neighboured on one side by the western edge of suburban Northwood as set out along Rickmansworth Road and Ducks Hill Road, and on the other by open fields and belts of trees. Indeed, the ground marks the beginning of a large swathe of continuous open green space at the western edge of Northwood. Its characteristics are reflective of and contributory to this; it is treelined, secluded, and peaceful, with a largely open, undeveloped feel, made all the more noticeable for its contrast to the busyness of the built-up area alongside it.
8. An existing mast, which would be removed as part of the appeal scheme, is found behind the pavilion. At some 15m tall, the existing mast is clearly visible from within the ground, from a neighbouring carpark, from outside the access to the ground and, intermittently depending on tree coverage, from along Rickmansworth Road. That said, it is seen in the main against the backdrop of a bank of trees, some of which are as tall or taller than the mast. Open skies are seen, uninterrupted, above the trees behind the existing mast. This, along with its relatively slim and narrow shape, allows the mast to blend in sufficiently with the verdant setting that the open, undeveloped character of the ground is broadly maintained.
9. The appeal scheme involves the erection of a new mast which, at 20m, would be significantly taller than the existing one, and its equipment would be arranged in a much wider pattern, particularly at its highest point. It would protrude beyond the top of the trees behind it. Whilst its base would be screened by the pavilion, overall, it would be significantly more prominent than the existing mast.
10. The larger size of the proposed mast structure would be apparent from within the ground, from the neighbouring carpark, from the access to the ground and from where it could be seen along Rickmansworth Road. Based on the appellants photomontage, it would also be visible from Mount Vernon Hospital, whereas the existing mast is largely not. It would introduce a stark, utilitarian element, made all the more striking as it would breach the line of the treetops behind it, such that it would stand out against, and interrupt appreciation of, the open sky beyond. This

would be harmfully at odds with the open, undeveloped, and verdant nature of the ground and the wider swathe of open space it forms part of.

11. Along with harm to the character and appearance of the area, the decision notice cites harm to visual amenities, including views from neighbouring residential properties. No specific properties are listed, and the Council's planning report is explicit that the appeal scheme would not have a detrimental impact on residential amenity. I see no reason to view matters differently to the way they are set out in the report and, insofar as siting and appearance are concerned, have made my determination on the basis of the effect on the character and appearance of the area only.
12. My attention has also been drawn to consideration within the Council's planning report of Policy DMEI 4, which concerns development in the Green Belt. The principle of the proposed development is established by the GPDO, the provisions of which do not require regard be had to the development plan, and the fact that the appeal site is within the Green Belt does not alter this.
13. I do not doubt that the design of the mast is a response to technical and operational requirements, but I must nevertheless assess the proposed development on the basis of its siting and appearance. Overall, even given the presence of the existing mast, the appeal scheme would be visually invasive, and harmfully at odds with the character and appearance of the verdant, open, and comparatively undeveloped setting.

#### *Alternative sites*

14. The Framework states that the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures for new electronic communications capability (including wireless) should be encouraged, and that applications should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development. This includes, for a new mast or base station, evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure. A similar requirement is set out in Policy DMHB 21 of the Local Plan.
15. The appellant has supplied no such evidence, contending instead that the sequential approach indicates that upgrades to existing sites should be the first option, and that as the appeal site is an existing, well-established base station, it is the sequentially best location for the replacement mast. It is contended that the discussion and discounting of other alternative options would serve little purpose.
16. The appeal scheme does not involve the use of an existing mast, building, or other structure; Irrespective of the fact that the site currently has a mast, the proposed development is for a new, and different one. As such, there is a clear expectation of evidence that the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure has been explored. The appeal scheme does not meet this expectation.

#### **Planning Balance**

17. Under the terms of the GPDO the principle of the proposal is not at issue, rather it is for me to consider the matters of siting and appearance. Therefore, the various social and economic benefits presented by the appellant have not been taken into account.

18. The appeal scheme would provide improved and upgraded third, fourth, and fifth-generation connectivity to Northwood. However, it would harm the character and appearance of the area, and I have no evidence that less harmful alternatives have been properly explored. For these reasons I find the siting and appearance of the proposed development to be unacceptable.

### **Conclusion**

19. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*A Knight*

INSPECTOR