

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Application Details

Heritage, Conservation & Design team officer

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Date

31 July 2025

Application reference

25/00626/TELE

Address

Land at Middleton Cricket Club, Towncroft Avenue, Middleton, M24 5DA

Proposal

Proposed installation of a telecommunications base station comprising a 25m pine tree monopole supporting 6no. Antennas and 2no. transmission dishes, together with 6no. equipment cabinets and 1 no. Meter cabinet within new fenced compound and ancillary development thereto.

Affected Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets

- Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area
- Arkholme (grade II)
- 51 and 53 Rochdale Road (grade II)

Non-designated heritage assets

- Towncroft Cricket Pavilion
- 3 to 11 Towncroft Avenue (odds) and 17 Towncroft Avenue

Summary

The proposed mast would be an intrusive feature on the northern edge of the Middleton Conservation Area. It would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area. The proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Assessment

The proposal is for the installation of a 25m high telecommunications mast, along with associated cabinets and fencing. The application has been made for prior approval under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO 2015 (as amended). The only matters for consideration are the siting and appearance of the proposal. The impact on designated and non-designated heritage assets are material considerations when assessing these matters.

The site lies at the northern edge of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area. The Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area is identified as one of the borough's outstanding conservation areas and a key heritage asset for the purposes of Rochdale CS policy P2. Chapter 16 of the NPPF applies along with Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The Conservation Area's special interest in part comes from its links to Edgar Wood and the numerous examples of his work, found throughout the centre, alongside its industrial heritage, high quality open spaces and medieval buildings, including St Leonard's Church and the Olde Boars Head.

The houses along Towncroft Avenue, the Cricket ground and the northern portion of Rochdale Road were added to the Conservation Area in 2009. The Conservation Area appraisal notes that this area incorporated an *"important grouping of early twentieth century suburban houses including Arkholme..."*. It goes on to note that these houses are of significantly higher quality than other streets in the area in terms of plan form, design and gardens.

In relation to the cricket ground's historic interest, it notes that *"it reflects 'the evolution of the late Victorian social model, intended to improve the health of the working population by the provision of leisure amenities'"*. The appraisal also highlights the open vista allowed by the Cricket Club and the *"suburban synergy between the large open space of the cricket club and the detached and semi-detached properties of Towncroft Avenue with their large plots to front and rear"*. The Cricket Club Pavilion has also been identified as a non-designated heritage asset.

As noted, there are also several listed buildings within the vicinity of the site: 1 Towncroft, 37 to 39 Rochdale Road and 51 and 53 Rochdale Road. Designed by eminent Middleton architect, Edgar Wood, they are of special architectural and historic interest and contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. They sit alongside other houses of the period, which while not designed by Edgar Wood, are of good quality design and materials, and positively contribute to the area's character. These include the houses along Towncroft Avenue, which have previously been identified as non-designated heritage assets.

This application follows on from a previously refused scheme for a mast in a similar location (24/01035/TELE). It was concluded that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the nearby heritage assets, including the Conservation Area and that this harm was not outweighed by public benefits.

The scheme has been revised from this refusal and the mast has now been designed to replicate a pine tree. The application is now supported by a heritage statement, which details the designated heritage assets within the vicinity of the site and briefly acknowledges the non-designated heritage assets, including the cricket pavilion.

As noted above, the mast would be located within the northern boundary of the Conservation Area, within the grounds of the Cricket Club. It would be close to a group of mature trees. However, the

proposed mast would be substantially taller than these trees, and as such the degree of screening offered would be limited. While it is agreed that the late 20th century structures nearby within the cricket ground, are not of particular interest, the main issue is the height of the structure and its appearance. It would be substantially taller than any of the structures nearby and as such would be visible in long range views across and into the Cricket Club complex. The open character of this site and vistas is an important feature of the northern section of the Conservation Area and as such, the construction of a 25m high mast would be an intrusive feature within the setting of the Cricket Club and this part of the Conservation Area.

It is also queried whether the mast would look like a pine tree, and whether this would assist in blending it into the landscape. There are unsuccessful examples, where masts clearly are not the trees they are attempting to replicate.

Given the height and nature of the proposal, it would be an intrusive feature at the edge of the Conservation Area, it would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of this asset. This harm should be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal.

The submitted heritage statement includes a visual assessment of the relationship between the proposal and the identified listed buildings (listed above). 37 to 39 Rochdale Road are further from the site and separated by buildings. The visual impact of the proposal on these assets would be negligible.

51 and 53 back onto the Cricket Club. There are some views possible from Hollin Lane across the cricket club towards these listed buildings, particularly in winter months, when there is less vegetation. The height of the structure above the existing vegetation would make it more visible than the existing low-level structures and buildings.

Nevertheless, given the distance of separation and the orientation of these listed buildings, the overall impact on their setting would be limited.

Arkholme faces onto the Towncroft Avenue side of Middleton Cricket Club. There would be some intervisibility with the site, particularly in winter months. As above, the greater height of the mast would make it more visible than the existing trees and structures but overall the impact on setting would be limited.

Given the distance of separation, it is acknowledged that the impact on the identified listed buildings would be very limited. On balance the level of harm to the significance of the listed buildings, would be negligible.

The proposed development would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area, which is a designated heritage asset. It would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Re-consultation

Yes, if revised plans are submitted which alter the relationship with the affected heritage assets.

