

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.

25/00155/FUL

CASE OFFICER

Rosalind Gralton

DETERMINATION DATE 09.05.2025 **EXT OF TIME****Address:** Land At Rochdale RUFC, Clubhouse Close, Rochdale, OL11 5LU

Proposal: Removal of existing 15m monopole supporting 3 no. antennas, 4 no. equipment cabinets, 1 no. electric meter cabinets and timber fence, installation of a new 12m pole with flood lights, 20m lattice tower supporting 6 no. antennas, 2 no. transmission dishes, 4 no. replacement equipment cabinets, 1 no. replacement electric meter cabinet, 2.0m palisade fence and ancillary development there to including Ericson Radio Systems (ERSs) and 1 no. GPS module

PUBLICITY	Weekly list expired?	Y	Site notice expired?	Y
	Neighbour letters expired?	Y	Press Notice expired?	NA

DELEGATION	Significant departure from local plan?	N	Contrary to national policy?	N
	Applicant a Council Member or officer?	N	Contrary to previous decision?	N
	Major with 10 or more objections and recommending approval?	N	Called in or Planning Panel objection?	N

COMMENTS	Planning Panel comments received?	NA
	Neighbour comments received?	Y

EIA	Screening opinion completed and saved to Onbase?	NA
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CONDITIONS	Pre-commencement conditions proposed?	NA
	Pre-commencement conditions agreed (or notification period expired)?	NA

RECOMMENDATION	REFUSE
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CHECKED AND SIGNED OFF BY: TH

DATE: 09.05.2025

SITE

The site relates to the Rochdale Rugby Union Club, located on Moorgate Avenue, Rochdale.

The site is one of three existing masts, located in a linear arrangement, sited within the grounds of the Rugby Club. The topography is flat, and residential properties are located immediately south and to the east of the site.

The site is not within a conservation area, but lies to the north of Moorgate Conservation Area.

PROPOSAL

The application proposes the removal of the existing 15m pole and the existing 3 no. antennas, 4 no. equipment cabinets, 1 no. electric meter cabinets and timber fence supporting 6no. antennas and replace this with the installation of a 12m pole with flood lights, and 20m lattice tower supporting 6no. new antennas on a headframe, 2 no. transmission dishes, 4 no. replacement equipment cabinets, 1 no. replacement electric meter cabinet, 2.4m palisade fence and ancillary development there to including Ericson Radio Systems (ERSs) and 1 no. GPS module.

Ancillary works would also remove 3no. equipment cabinets, 4no. replacement cabinets, 1 electric meter cabinet and timber fence.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-C2 Digital Connectivity

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

S01 Delivering a more prosperous economy

E1 Establishing thriving town district and local centres

S03 Improving design, image and quality of place

P1 Improving image

P3 Improving design of new development

DM1 General Development Requirements

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

Supplementary Planning Guidance note 'Guidelines and Standards for Residential Development' (June 2016).

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

22/01192/FUL - Removal of the existing 15m pole supporting 6no. antennas and installation of a replacement 20m lattice tower supporting 12no. new antennas on a headframe, 4no. transmission dishes and 36no. ERS units behind the antennas.

Removal of 5no. equipment cabinets and installation of 4no. replacement cabinets, together with additional ancillary development thereto, including 2no. GPS modules, 2.1m high palisade fencing, relocation of floodlight meter cabinet and floodlights to proposed replacement lattice tower – Refused for the following reason:

- 1. The proposed installation, by virtue of its height, siting and appearance, would represent an incongruous and dominant feature of the street scene in a prominent residential location. Furthermore, no thorough justified information in relation to alternative ground or rooftop based sites has been provided as part of this proposal, required under paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The development would therefore result in unacceptable harm to the street scene and visual amenity generally and be contrary to policies P1, P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

14/00812/TELE – Determination of prior approval for the replacement of a 15m high dual communications monopole housing 3 antennae and floodlights, including removal and replacement of one equipment cabinet – Grant 21/08/2014

All other permissions relate to the extension or works to the rugby club itself.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways And Engineering

No objections

Env Health - Noise/Odours

No objections

Conservation

No response received

REPRESENTATIONS

The application was publicised by way of neighbour notification and site notice.

7 objections were received, with the concerns raised summarised below:

- Impacts on views in residential area
- Too large in height
- Negative health consequences caused by masts
- Inappropriate location next to children and adults
- Request removal of existing masts on the site
- Impact of masts on children and wild animals
- Masts are ugly and detrimental on open green areas
- Rugby club seek to profiteer from the negatively impactful business
- Not good around kids, including a link to a study on the impact of such masts.
- Increasing evidence radiofrequency waves from 5G technology could be harmful and carcinogenic
- Impact of 5G not yet fully understood
- More research into 5G required prior to erection of masts.
- Applicant hasn't provided enough evidence to show impact if 5G is safe.
- Aesthetic degradation of community space and visual intrusion
- No demonstrable need for the upgrade
- Footprint of the application site will disturb local ecosystem
- Mast will detract from the recreational enjoyment of the fields and golf course
- Concern of lowering property values

- Approving the scheme will set a precedent
- Benefits are speculative

Officer Response:

Comments regarding the health impacts surrounding mobile telecommunications are noted. Paragraph 123 of the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that states '*Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure*'. The developer has provided a declaration which states it accords with International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines which is in accordance with paragraph 123 of the NPPF.

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development

Chapter 10 of the NPPF promotes the development of telecommunication infrastructure but advises that best practice is applied to reduce the proliferation of installations.

Para.119 states, "Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections.

Policy E1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy states the council will 'promote the delivery of infrastructure, such as [...] information and communications technology (including high speed broadband)'

Policy JP-C2 of the PfE Joint Development Plan states 'to support provision of affordable, high quality digital infrastructure, in making decision we will support a range of measures including ... Enabling the roll-out of latest generation mobile technology and full fibre to the premises connectivity, in a way that maximises coverage whilst protecting townscape quality and ensuring an ability to respond to updated/changing technology'

Para.120 states, "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".

Para.121 states "Local planning authorities should not impose a ban on new electronic communications development in certain areas. They should ensure that: a) they have evidence to demonstrate that electronic communications infrastructure is not expected to cause significant and irremediable interference with other electrical equipment, air traffic services or instrumentation operated in the national interest; and b) they have considered the possibility of the construction of new buildings or other structures interfering with broadcast and electronic communications services.

Para.122 states "applications for electronic communications development (including applications for prior approval) should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development. This should include: a) the outcome of consultations with organisations with an interest in the proposed development, in

particular with the relevant body where a mast is to be installed near a school or college, or within a statutory safeguarding zone surrounding an aerodrome, technical site or military explosives storage area; and b) for an addition to an existing mast or base station, a statement that self-certifies that the cumulative exposure, when operational, will not exceed International Commission guidelines on non-ionising radiation protection; or c) 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 and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met.

Para. 123 states "Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure".

In principle, the erection of a new telecommunications mast is acceptable, with clear reference to policies E1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy and Policy JP-C2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, and the above paragraphs of the NPPF, subject to assessment of development management considerations as discussed in turn below.

Heritage Impact

When making a decision on a planning application for development that affects a listed building or its setting, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

The 1990 Act also requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. This duty goes beyond just decisions on permissions and applies to the exercise by the local authority in all of its functions under the planning acts.

Rochdale CS policy P2 seeks to protect the borough's heritage by conserving, enhancing and promoting key heritage assets, which include listed buildings and conservation areas.

To the south lies the Moorgate Conservation Area. This Conservation Area centres on Broadhalgh Avenue and Moorgate Avenue. The area was developed after 1900 with the majority of building taking place after 1920. Moorgate Avenue is a good example of an interwar suburban avenue largely comprised of semi-detached houses. Broadhalgh Avenue has a different but complementary character, which reads as a modified country lane, with landscaping playing an important role in its character.

Also to the south is the 15 Broadhalgh Avenue. To the south is 13 Broadhalgh Avenue. The property dates from around 1920, and is one of several large properties built at this time along Broadhalgh Avenue. The house was designed with the principal elevation facing southwards into the garden, with outbuildings along Broadhalgh Avenue, similar to the neighbouring listed dwelling, 15 Broadhalgh Avenue. Whilst the dwelling is not listed, it is locally important, and has been identified as a non-designated heritage asset.

Whilst it is noted that both these designated and non-designated assets are in the general vicinity of the application site, the application site is screened from them by No. 72-74 Broadhalgh Avenue. In addition, the site is set back within the Rochdale

Rugby Union Club. These properties provide a buffer to the setting of the Heritage assets, and while it is acknowledged that at 20m tall, the proposed lattice tower would be markedly taller than any other manmade structures within close proximity to the site. The vertical projection, combined with the associated proposed equipment would increase the visual bulk in comparison to the existing telecommunications.

The Conservation Officer was consulted as part of the proposals however no response was received. It is noted the recently refused application 22/01192/FUL is very similar in height, siting and design, (albeit this application reduces the bulk of the antennae). As such, the Conservation Officer's previous view that the considered harm the proposal would have upon heritage assets as neutral, is carried over onto this application. As such, the proposal is not considered to have any unacceptable impact upon adjacent heritage assets, and is compliant with Policy P2 of the Rochdale CS, and the relevant policies contained within the NPPF.

Siting and Appearance

Para 139. states "Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes."

The proposed site is on the site of the most southerly existing monopole at the southern rugby pitch, just north of the rear of residential properties located on Broadhalgh.

The proposed equipment cabinets would measure an area of 29sqm, which would be dramatically larger than the space required for the monopoles as existing.

Visually, the area is uncluttered and has an open character and appearance with limited street furniture. The site appears on the edge of the residential area and the properties along Broadhalgh Avenue present a clear divide from the open space of the rugby club. The existing monopoles appear uniform in height and their siting and the setting of them at a rugby club is not out of keeping with the overall character of the area.

The proposed lattice tower would be substantially taller and bulkier than the existing monopoles, street furniture and equipment. Due to both its height and bulk, it would form a visually dominant feature and one which would be out of character within its surroundings of the residential area. The proposed location means the lattice tower would be clearly visible from the rear of properties on Broadhalgh Avenue and properties located on Hands Lane, and located in the southern corner of the rugby club, it is the closest possible siting to the properties across the whole of the rugby club. It is noted the location of the mature trees relative to the proposed mast site; however this would not aid screening for the properties closest to the mast, and no tree protection order protects these trees from future removal. The existing ball stop fencing would not provide adequate screening and the site would be wholly visible, with the dominance of the mast further emphasised by the lack of large/tall buildings adjacent and the open and flat character of the adjacent land.

In addition, there is no screening that would soften the appearance of the lattice tower from approaching the club along Clubhouse Close. The proposal would also project above trees along the close and be clearly visible, this dominance would be further emphasised by the tall structures adjacent to the tower, in tandem with the bulky appearance of the lattice tower style and associated antennae and cabinetry.

Detailed in the supporting statement is the justification that the lattice tower is the most suitable design to support the proposed structures from a technical standpoint, and should this be slimmer, the operating requirements would not be met. While this may be the case, the lattice tower is not considered an appropriate design in a residential environment such as the proposed site. With regard to the rural location of the surrounding area, the site would be better suited on a parcel of land, well away from key views and a significant distance from residential properties.

The proposed height would be substantially taller than any surrounding features, being taller than the tallest adjacent monopole, flood lighting column, street lighting column, and also have a much wider diameter and the lattice style would in appearance detract from the openness of the spacious grounds and would result in a cluttered appearance at odds with the existing character. It is acknowledged the height cannot be reduced for operational reasons, however this does not consequently mean this specific site is therefore suitable for a 20m high structure.

Regardless of any potential changes in colour or materiality, the proposed lattice tower would still result in the introduction of a dominant and visually obtrusive feature in the street scene. The proposal would therefore appear at significant odds to the prevalent scale and character of the residential area and rugby club, of which the impact is emphasised by its inappropriate siting close to residential properties and views when travelling along Clubhouse Close. The removal of the existing monopole would not alleviate the impact of clutter within the area, as the proposal also includes the erection of a floodlighting column in its place, which would further demonstrate the excessive height of the proposed mast.

Cumulatively, it is considered that due to the significant height, thickness and exposed equipment on the lattice tower mast and the large area required to house the number of equipment cabinets, the proposal would be visually incongruous, being much taller than existing street furniture and buildings within the immediate area, and would have a materially harmful impact on the visual amenity of the area.

Alternative sites

The council is aware of the economic and social benefits of providing and enhancing electronic communications infrastructure and 'levelling up' digital connectivity. The technical requirements of the mobile telecommunications equipment are clearly explained and justified in the documents that were submitted in support of the application, this includes the need for the lattice tower to be of the height and design proposed, in the location it has been proposed and contains reference to eight other sites identified by the applicant. It is accepted that existing sites are considered preferable to existing masts. It is also noted that the design proposes changes from the previously refused submission, with a slimmer antennae and subsequent reduced capacity of the mast.

In the supporting statement, ten other site references were examined and discounted. The information submitted is limited to a brief explanation as to why each of the alternative sites are unsuitable.

The search presented is extremely limited and only includes the rugby club, and does not consider sites further away from residential properties; specifically no inclusion of land to the west. While the proposed site is heavily constrained between Rochdale rugby club, Rochdale golf club, Oulder Hill Academy and the residential properties to the south, aerial imagery shows parcels of open land to the west, which would have a greater distance away from residential properties than the identified sites that have been explored in this planning application. Without prejudice to the outcome of a future planning application, the land to the west would likely be a more

suitable site within the locality, with access along Regency Crescent and maintaining a significant distance away from key views and residential properties.

Therefore, from the submitted sequential assessment, it would not be possible to definitively conclude that there are no more suitable sites reasonably available that would result in a lesser degree of visual harm, harm to the amenity of nearby occupiers and harm to the significance of heritage assets. Taken as a whole, would fail to comply with the requirements of paragraphs 119 to 120 of the NPPF.

Benefits and planning balance

The requirement for enhancing electronic communication infrastructure and 'levelling up' digital connectivity must be balanced against the requirement for equipment to be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate. Having regard to all relevant considerations, including national planning policy and the potential availability of alternative sites, it is not considered that the benefits of the installation in terms of the enhancement of the telecommunications network, including its contribution to economic growth and the operational and locational needs of the operators outweigh the significant harm arising to the character and appearance of the area.

The Council acknowledge that a balance must be struck between the importance of telecommunications infrastructure and the need to protect visual amenity. It is considered that in this particular case, the scale of the unacceptable impact that the proposed installation would have on the character and appearance of the surrounding area cannot be outweighed or justified in this case by the public benefits. It is considered that the submitted search area is highly constrained and does not demonstrate the full extent of available sites within the locality. On the basis of the submitted information there is insufficient evidence to be satisfied that the site represents the least harmful option available in the area to meet the additional coverage and capacity requirements and so secure the same public benefits.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed installation would have a significant and detrimental visual impact and by virtue of this would fail to satisfy Policies P1, P3 and DM1 of the Rochdale CS, Policy JP-P1 and JP-C2 of the Places for Everyone JDP, and the NPPF.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse:

1. The proposed installation, by virtue of its height, massing, siting and appearance, would represent an incongruous feature which would fail to sit sympathetically with the residential area and open character and appearance of the site. In the absence of a comprehensive assessment of alternative sites for the proposed development it is not possible to definitively conclude that there are no more suitable sites reasonably available that would result in a lesser degree of visual harm. The development would therefore result in unacceptable harm to character and appearance of the site and its surroundings and be contrary to policies P1, P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-C2 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Procedure Statement

The proposal would not improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area nor does it comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.

Notes for Applicant:

For the avoidance of doubt, the decision relates to the following submitted plans and documents:

- Supplementary Information form including technical justification
- Site Location Maps – 100 Rev B
- Existing Site Plan – 200 Rev A
- Proposed Site Plan – 201 Rev E
- Existing Site Elevation – 300 Rev A
- Proposed Site Elevation – 301 Rev B
- Copy of the Developers Notice and letter served on the owner(s) of the site
- ICNIRP Compliance Certificate.

Report Author Rosalind Galton