

Officer Report

Case Reference: 25/01105/TELE
Location: Middleton Cricket Club Towncroft Avenue Middleton M24 5DA
Proposal: The proposed installation of a telecommunications base station comprising a 22.5m monopole together with equipment cabinets within a new fenced compound and ancillary development thereto.
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions
Officer: Aimee Bovaird

SITE

The site relates to an area within Middleton Cricket Club, the wider site consists of the cricket pitch, car park, tennis courts and the sports pavilion. Trees and some vegetation are situated around the northern and southern boundaries of the site.

The site is accessed off Hollin Lane and there is a gated pedestrian access via Towncroft Avenue.

This site lies within the northern edge of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area. To the southeast of the cricket grounds are two Grade II Listed Buildings no's 51 and 53 Rochdale Road. South of the site is Arkholme House by Edgar Wood which is also a Grade II Listed Building and no's 37 and 39 Rochdale Road to the south of the application site are also Grade II Listed Buildings.

The site is located in a predominantly residential area with dwellings surrounding the cricket grounds.

PROPOSAL

The application originally proposed installation of a telecommunications base station comprising a 25m pine tree mast, together with equipment cabinets within new fenced compound and ancillary development.

The proposal has since been amended to an approximately 22.5m monopole painted Fir Green (RAL6009). The revised design would concentrate the headload into a single area however this consolidation and general reduction in scale due to be lower total height and the removal of the artificial pine tree features is considered to reduce the visual impact and attention it would draw. The height has also been reduced by an amended regrading of the existing ground levels to bring the base of the proposals 1m lower and more in line with surrounding ground levels.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (As Amended).

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Places for Everyone

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-C2 Digital Connectivity

JP-P2 Heritage

JP-G7 Trees and Woodland

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO3 Improving design, image and quality of place

P2 Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

P3 Improving design of new development

G6 Enhancing green infrastructure

G7 Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity

DM1 General Development requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

G/D/1 Defined Urban Area

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

24/01035/TELE - Prior notification of the Installation of new 25m high lattice mast on new root foundation to accommodate 6 no. antennas and ancillary radio equipment and 2 no 0.3m dishes along with 6 no. equipment cabinets in a new fenced compound along with ancillary development thereto – Refused.

25/00626/TELE - The proposed installation of a telecommunications base station comprising a 25m pine tree monopole supporting 6 no. antennas and 2 no. transmission dishes, together with 6 no. equipment cabinets and 1 no. meter cabinet within new fenced compound and ancillary development thereto. – Withdrawn.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways and Engineering

No objections.

Env Health - Noise/Odours

No response received.

Conservation and Design

Repeats comments made on the previous proposals that they would result in less than substantial harm to the conservation area which must be weighed against any public benefits.

ANALYSIS

Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) states that development consisting of the installation, alteration or replacement of electronic communications apparatus (other than on a building) is not permitted by Class A(a) if –

(a) in the case of the installation of electronic communications apparatus (other than a mast), the apparatus, excluding any antenna, would exceed a height of 15 metres above ground level.

(b) in the case of the alteration or replacement of electronic communications apparatus (other than a mast) that is already installed, the apparatus, excluding any antenna, would when altered or replaced exceed the height of the existing apparatus or a height of 15 metres above ground level, whichever is the greater.

(c) in the case of the installation of a mast, the mast, excluding any antenna, would exceed a height of—

(i) 30 metres above ground level on unprotected land; or

(ii) 25 metres above ground level on article 2(3) land or land which is on a highway:
or

(d) in the case of the alteration or replacement of a mast, the height of the mast, excluding any antenna, would when altered or replaced exceed the greater of the height of the existing mast or a height of—

(i) 30 metres above ground level on unprotected land; or

(ii) 25 metres above ground level on article 2(3) land or land which is on a highway:
or

(e) in the case of the alteration or replacement of a mast—

(i) the mast is on any land which is, or is within, a site of special scientific interest;
and

(ii) the mast would, when altered or replaced, exceed the original width of the mast by more than one third.

The erection of a pole up to 25m in height on to support electronic communications transmission apparatus with associated infrastructure would be development permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A.

The application is therefore made for the determination as to whether the prior approval of the Council will be required as to the siting and appearance of the installation, as required under paragraph A.3 of the Order.

Procedural Point

The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (GDPO 2015), under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A Paragraph A.3 (4) require the LPA to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account any representations received. The provisions of Schedule 2 above do not require regard to be had to the development plan; however regard has been made to those policies in the development plan and related guidance and the NPPF only in so far as they are material considerations relevant to matters of siting and appearance.

The main issues are:

- 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 that is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Section 10 of the NPPF, sets out the Government's general policy position supporting high quality communications infrastructure. Paragraph 119 states that, "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".

Furthermore, paragraph 120 states, "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."

Paragraph 122 at point c) talks about evidence that justifies development proposals. For a new mast evidence that existing buildings, masts and other structures have been considered alongside the ICNIRP certification on public exposure guidelines have been met.

PfE Policy JP-C2 emphasises the ambition for Greater Manchester to become a digitally connected city region, however, does explicitly set out that this should not come at the expense of townscape quality. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is also a material consideration, and this includes a section on supporting high quality communications. Paragraph 139 of the Framework is explicit in that development which is not well-designed should be refused.

Siting and Appearance

Firstly, the representations submitted against this application are recognised and considered throughout this assessment.

Policies P1, P2, P3 and DM1 of the Core Strategy are also material considerations as they relate to issues of siting, appearance, landscape and heritage.

Significantly, the application site sits within the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area. The proposed mast will be 22.5m high and is considered to be a substantial structure within the Conservation Area. The trees immediately adjacent the mast as shown on the elevations are approximately 17m high. The submitted photomontages showed trees of a greater scale and thus officers requested further clarification on this matter. The applicant has undertaken panoramic photographs at 23.5m and 25m which demonstrate that within the close vicinity to the northeast and west, there are additional taller trees within the site boundary. As such, the proposed mast, whilst still visually imposing, would not be seen as the tallest feature along the site frontage.

The applicant has explored a number of options for reducing the scale, massing and appearance of the structure. Whilst a pine tree design was proposed, this was considered by officers to risk being too visually imposing and drawing greater attention to the artificial nature and given this would increase the overall mass. As such the applicant has reduced the proposal to a standard monopole design, painting the base in fir green to assimilate against the vegetated backdrop, whilst reducing the overall height of the mast and the ground level on which it will sit. Consideration was given as to whether the mast could sit more closely behind the taller trees on the site, however due to constraints including damage to tree roots and the position of underground services, this was not possible.

The mast cannot be hidden entirely and whilst its position and design relative to sensitive receptors seeks to reduce its visual impact and this is recognised by Planning Officers, it would remain a prominent feature with impacts upon visual amenity for surrounding properties and upon the conservation area.

Heritage

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

The Council's Conservation Officer was consulted on this application.

Grade II Listed Buildings numbers 51 and 53 Rochdale Road are situated approximately 177m from the application site and Grade II Listed Building Arkholme House is approximately 190m from the proposed site. The proposal will be visible from these designated assets. Slightly further south lies no 37-39 Rochdale Road which are semi-detached dwellings also designated as Grade II Listed Buildings.

However, whilst numbers 51 and 53 Rochdale Road back onto the cricket club and there are some views from Hollin Lane across the cricket club towards these Listed Buildings, particularly during winter months when there is less vegetation, given the distance of separation and the orientation of the Listed Buildings, the overall impact on their setting would be limited.

Arkholme faces onto the Towncroft Avenue side of Middleton Cricket Club and there would be some intervisibility with the site, particularly in winter months. As above, the 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.

As already identified, the mast would be located within the northern boundary of the Conservation Area and close to a group of mature trees. While it is agreed that the late 20th century structures nearby are not of particular interest, the principal issue is the height of the structure and its appearance and its impact on the Conservation Area.

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

Site Selection

Information provided in support of the application sets out that alternative sites have been considered and the applicants network rollout team investigated a number of siting and design options using a sequential approach to site selection such as:

- Upgrading their own existing base stations.
- Using existing telecommunications structures belonging to another communications operator.
- Installations on existing high buildings or structures.
- Using small scale equipment.
- Erecting a ground-based mast with camouflaging or disguising equipment.

The application sets out the need for an expansion of infrastructure as necessary for business development and meeting specific technical and operational requirements. The application includes a Site-Specific Supplementary Information, which details the site selection process providing details of alternative sites considered for development. A total of 21 alternative sites have been considered within this assessment and have been discounted due to planning or physical constraints which discount the sites for development.

Due to previous concerns over the robustness of the assessment, officers have sought further clarifications during the course of the application with regards to the specific cell area coverage required to be met, further detail on the reasoning for discounting sites, and consideration of other potential alternatives. Due to the constrained nature of the local area, which is largely built up, and much of which is in the conservation area, the site selection process is particularly constrained, and requires a careful balancing of material considerations. Through detailed discussions with the applicant, officers accept that the site selection assessment carried out is robust and that alternative sites with reduced impact on visual amenity or the conservation area are not feasible within the search area which has been reasonably defined with respect to the intended coverage.

Public Benefits

It is acknowledged the proposed development will result in public benefits comprising of economic and social benefits. Information submitted within the application sets out that such benefits will comprise of access to a reliable mobile network that would provide key benefits such as connecting with family, friends and colleagues around the world at any time, the ability to manage personal information 24/7, keeping us always entertained and informed with latest news and creating more productive and

cost efficiencies for businesses. It is also acknowledged that national and regional strategy strategies place significant importance on the connectivity afforded by the proposal.

Given that clear public benefits exist, it is considered that in light of the site selection process which has not been able to identify an alternative site, and the amendments made by the applicant to reduce as far as possible the visual impacts, the proposal would accord with local and national policy and that the less than substantial harm would be outweighed in this specific case.

Conclusion

Prior approval for the siting and appearance is therefore required and in accordance with the above assessment, the application is approved.

REPRESENTATIONS

The application was publicised by way of neighbour notification letters delivered to residential dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the site and a sit notice displayed in the vicinity.

A number of representations were received which raised the following concerns:

- This will ruin the outlook of the Cricket Club.
- Impact local wildlife.
- Devalue properties.
- The development would not blend into immediate surroundings.
- Health concerns.
- Negative impact on conservation area.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Condition(s) (1)

- 1 This approval relates to the following plans received on 27/04/2026: Site Location Maps (100 rev C); Proposed Site Plan (201 rev F); Proposed Elevation (301 Rev G). The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.

