

APPLICATION NO:

24/00271/FUL

CASE OFFICER:

Mark Quinn

WARD:

Prescot North

PARISH:

Knowsley Parish Council

LOCATION:

Existing Telecommunications Site At The Nursery , Knowsley Hall, Knowsley Lane, Prescot

PROPOSAL:

REMOVAL OF AN EXISTING 24M LATTICE MAST (26M TO TOP OF ANTENNAS) SUPPORTING 6 NO. ANTENNAS AND 2 NO. DISHES AND ASSOCIATED ANCILLARY EQUIPMENT. ERECTION OF A 30M LATTICE TOWER (30.2M TO TOP), SUPPORTING 12 NO. ANTENNAS, 2 NO. RELOCATED 0.3M DISHES AND 2 NEW 0.3M DISHES, 3 NO. EQUIPMENT CABINETS, ASSOCIATED ANCILLARY EQUIPMENT AND WORKS.

Site Description

The application site relates to part of a wooded area on the western edge of the Knowsley Park close to the boundary with the M57 motorway.

The site comprises an existing lattice telecom mast and surrounding woodland area.

Proposal

It is proposed to remove the existing 26m high mast and erect a 30m lattice tower with 12 antennas, 4 no 0.3m dishes and 3 equipment cabinets. The existing mast would be removed once the new mast becomes operational. The existing equipment cabin would be retained as this would be required in association with the new installation.

Consultations

Knowsley Parish Council - No Comments Received

Conservation & Design Officer - The proposals represent less than substantial harm to the Grade II Registered Knowsley Park and in turn the setting of the Grade II* listed Knowsley Hall. This identified harm should be weighed against any public benefits associated with the proposal.

Arboricultural Officer - No comments received.

Lancashire Gardens Trust - No objections

The Gardens Trust - No objections

Highway Authority - No objections

Historic England - No objections

Representations

This application has been publicised by letters sent to 40 neighbours. It has also been advertised by Site Notice and a Press Notice. No representations have been received.

Planning History

00/00738/FUL - INSTALLATION OF 24M HIGH SLIMLINE LATTICE TELECOMMUNICATIONS TOWER WITH 4 NO. POLAR ANTENNAE AND 1 NO. MICROWAVE DISH ANTENNA, TOGETHER WITH ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT CABIN AND COMPOUND. – GRANTED OCTOBER 2001.

Relevant Policy

Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or where the development plan is absent, silent or out of date planning permission should be granted unless the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF clarifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan, permission should not normally be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

The development plan in Knowsley comprises the Saved Policies of the Replacement Unitary Development Plan, the Core Strategy Local Plan and the Joint Waste Local Plan. The following policies are relevant to the determination of this application.

KNOWSLEY LOCAL PLAN: CORE STRATEGY

CS2 - Development Principles
CS5 - Green Belt
CS7 - Transport Networks
CS20 - Managing the Borough's Historic Environment
CS19 - Design Quality and Accessibility in New Development

SAVED POLICIES - KNOWSLEY REPLACEMENT UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN (ADOPTED JUNE 2006)

DQ4 - Trees and Development
ENV8 - Telecommunications Developments

National Planning Policy Framework

Article 35 Statement

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern within the application (as originally submitted) and negotiating with the applicant, acceptable amendments to the proposal to address those concerns. As a result, the Local Planning Authority has been able to grant planning permission for an acceptable proposal, in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Assessment

Principle of Development

The principle of reusing an existing telecoms site is in accordance with the guidance in paragraph 119 of the NPPF. This 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.”

The site is allocated as Green Belt and Historic Park and Garden on the Knowsley Local Plan Policies Map.

Local Plan policy G5 states “ Inappropriate development will not be permitted in the Green Belt except in very special circumstances in which it has been demonstrated that the harm to the Green Belt (including any harm to its openness, purposes or to its visual and recreational amenities) would be clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

Saved UDP policy ENV8 states “New telecommunications development will not be permitted within environmentally sensitive areas, such as Conservation Areas, residential areas or the Green Belt, unless the applicant has demonstrated that there are no other suitable alternative sites outside such areas and that appropriate steps have been taken to minimise any visual impact through careful siting, design and screening.”

Paragraphs 152 and 153 of the NPPF states:-

“ Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. “

The principle of a telecom mast in this location has already been established by the existing lattice tower which was granted planning permission in 2001. This proposal would result in a slightly higher mast (increase in height of 4m) which would have a minor adverse impact on the openness of the green belt compared to the existing mast.

The proposed mast would still be predominantly screened from the surrounding viewpoints outside Knowsley Park (e.g Knowsley Lane/ M57) by the existing woodland.

The very special circumstances that the applicant has put forward relate to the fact that the proposal would be replacing an existing mast immediately adjacent and the public benefits arising from the proposal.

In their supplementary information report the applicant has provided the following information. *As part of O2 and Vodafone’s continued network improvement program there is a requirement for a radio base station upgrade at this existing telecoms site to provide enhanced connectivity to the area, however the current equipment cannot accommodate the*

operators latest requirements. As such new equipment is required for this upgrade at this location.

The existing lattice mast is proposed to be replaced with a new lattice mast of greater width to accommodate the amount and weight of the new equipment required to upgrade the mast. A lattice mast has been proposed as the most suitable design solution because it is able to support the amount of equipment required, it is structurally capable of supporting the size and weight of equipment (including modern antennas which are of larger sizing and greater weight) and is also able to provide the height required by all operators.

The height selected is essential for the operators equipment to reach the target coverage area. This height is chosen taking into account variations in land levels / topography, heights of existing vegetation and built form which can interrupt the transmission of different technologies and frequencies. The operators antennas must be able to rise above any obstruction within the environment and their dishes must also have a clear line of site to other dishes in the network to form a link. The minimum height has been selected to ensure that the operators antennas and equipment are free from interruption and can provide the required coverage to the target areas.

The proposed design has therefore sought to strike an appropriate balance between operational, environmental and planning considerations. The upgrade installation of this site shall maintain network services and provide improved coverage to this area.

The proposed development will ensure the continued delivery of high-quality coverage, improved capacity and meeting future technical requirement for VMO2 (O2) supporting people to work from home and businesses to get have access to superfast internet whether on the road, in their offices or working from home. The continued provision of coverage to the area and improvements in network capacity will deliver a host of community benefits, including access to online banking and health services to name but a few. The availability of coverage and capacity ensures access to friends and family, as well as groups and activities online which can improve physical wellbeing and reduce social exclusion.

This new site will facilitate the provision of upgraded coverage for two operators (VMO2 and Vodafone). The provision of improved coverage and capacity is a significant public benefit which would outweigh any minimal harm that may occur.

It is considered that the proposal utilises the most suitable design available to meet coverage demands and to provide suitable coverage. The benefits of the proposal also have to be considered. The provision of enhanced coverage, capacity and connectivity would be provided for VMO2 and Vodafone users. It is considered the public benefits of the proposal are significant in considering the acceptability of siting and appearance.

The applicant also states that there would be significant public benefits in the provision of 5G coverage, this will allow for quicker speeds, improved capacity and allowing dedicated and reliable networks for local emergency services.

On balance it is considered that any minor impacts on the openness of the green belt are outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal which in this instance would amount to very special circumstances. The proposal would therefore be in compliance with Local Plan policy CS5 , Saved UDP policy ENV8 and guidance in NPPF.

Heritage Considerations

Local Plan policy CS20 states “Development proposals in Knowsley should preserve or enhance the borough’s historic and architectural assets, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens and archaeological remains, together with other local areas, buildings and structures of historic importance.

The Council will: Where a development proposal will result in less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset or its setting, assess such harm against the benefits of the proposal”

Paragraph 208 of NPPF states “ Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”

The Application Site is located in the south-west section of Grade II Registered Park ‘Knowsley Park and falls within the wider setting of the Grade II* Knowsley Hall.

Knowsley Park was registered on the 1st of February 1986. While the park was only landscaped in the late 18th century with some incorporation of late 17 century and early 18th century features, it is a park that has 13th century origins. It is thought that some of the landscaping within the park are to the designs of the renowned landscape architect Lancelot Brown. During the 1830s, the landscape architect William Sawrey Gilpin is also said to have advised the then earl on further landscaping within the Park. The Application Site is located in the south-west section of the registered park within a section of the Park historically used for the cultivation of plants and flowers.

Knowsley Hall which is listed as Grade II* in 1952 includes a number of curtilages listed buildings. The principal building consists of 2 large and irregular mansions that in part date to the 15th century and early 18th century. It lies to the north east of the Application Site but due to intervening landscape and distant, the application site is not visible from the principal Hall. The application site sits in close proximity to Nursey House and its associated buildings of which some could be considered curtilage listed. Their significance lies in their association with Knowsley Hall. It also falls within the wider setting of the Grade II listed Little Wood Lodge.

The Application Site falls within the setting of the Grade II* Knowsley Hall and the Grade II listed Little Wood Lodge however due to intervening landscape and distance the application site including the existing mast is not visible to the naked eye from the principal Hall. Moreover, due to said distance and intervening landscape, even with the proposed increase in height, the mast will remain indiscernible to the naked eye. It therefore will have no impact on their immediate setting, but it will however have some impact on the wider parkland settings of the Hall and in turn the Registered Park. This impact is limited to the change in height, scale and appearance of the proposed new mast and associated support elements where they are greater than that already extant on site.

The proposed 30.2-meter lattice tower would represent an increase of 4.2meters in height along with an increase in width and depth, over and above the existing mast. The mast would support 12no. antennas (of which 6 existing & are to be relocated to the new mast), 5 dishes (of which 2 are existing & to be relocated to the new mast)

and associated ancillary equipment primarily at ground level. The increase in scale and height of the mast will have the greatest visual impact as the existing mast has a scale which is similar to the surrounding tree trunks and its height termination point is also similar to the surrounding tree canopies though it is discernible over some months of the year from the M57. At low level, the additional equipment will result in a greater visual impact than the existing equipment as viewed from within the application site parameters as will the proposed new fence.

Given the above, it is clear that their overtly modern and utilitarian appearance would constitute an alien feature within the Registered Park. This will have a harmful impact on the primarily 18th century character and appearance of the Hall's setting, thereby representing harm to both the Hall's setting and the Registered Park. The identified harm would be that of 'less than substantial harm' as defined by the NPPF and to the lower end of the scale. It is considered to be towards the lower end of the scale of harm due to the proposed new masts 4.2-meter increase in height and a greater 'wingspan' at its highest point.

In terms of any buildings which could be considered to be curtilage listed such as Nursery House and its associated buildings or equally, any curtilage listed walls within whose more immediate setting the lattice mast will fall, again there will be a harmful impact on their wider setting due to the above-mentioned reason. Given their proximity to the Application Site, the mast is also likely to be visible above the existing tree canopies and will therefore have an impact on their more immediate setting as well. It should however be noted that due to existing low level scrub growth and trees, the proposals are unlikely to be visible from the access road to Nursery House or from its yard. That aside, the level of harm on their setting would still be considered to be that of 'less than substantial'.

In all cases, the identified harm, that of 'less than substantial' should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The public benefits of this proposal are set out in the section above. In this instance it is considered that the less than substantial harm caused by the proposal to the heritage assets would be outweighed by the public benefits resulting from the proposal. Thus on balance the proposal would be in compliance with Local Plan policy CS20 and guidance in NPPF.

To ensure the visual impact of the proposal is minimised as far possible the applicant has confirmed that the proposed fencing surrounding the mast and equipment cabinets will be timber and stained dark brown. The proposed equipment cabinets would be finished in dark green to blend in with the woodland setting. It is proposed that the mast would have a galvanised finish (as per the existing mast) which is considered to be acceptable as a large proportion of the mast would be screened from surrounding views by the existing woodland and the galvanised grey finish would blend in better against the sky as oppose to a darker colour finish. These colour finishes would ensure compliance with Local Plan policies CS19 and CS20.

Tree Considerations

Saved UDP policy DQ4 states that proposals for new development shall include appropriate planting of trees or other soft landscaping. It also states that where the

Council accepts that tree loss is unavoidable the applicant will be required to make adequate provision for their replacement.

The application is supported by an Arboriculture Impact Assessment, Tree Constraints plan and Tree retention and protection plan. The tree report confirms that 7 trees (2 category B) (5 category C) trees are proposed to be removed and three other trees require pruning .

For the trees proposed to be removed there are no suitable/sustainable pruning options due proximity of the trees to the mast installation and the growth potential of the trees. Some of these trees are also noted to hold defect or poor health and provide limited amenity value as they are surrounded by a larger group of trees.

The applicant has identified an area within Knowsley Park to the east of the proposed mast (to the west of Paddock Road) which would be suitable for planting 14 replacement trees. Precise details of the replacement tree planting can be secured by planning condition.

Subject to satisfactory tree mitigation being achieved the proposal would be in compliance with saved UDP policy DQ4.

Residential Amenity

Saved UDP policy ENV8 states “ b) The development would not, by reason of its scale, siting or design, have an unacceptable impact on the character or appearance of the surrounding area, or the amenity of nearby residents.”

The closest residential property is Nursery Cottage within Knowsley Park. The proposed mast would be 64m from this dwelling. The proposed mast would be predominantly screened from the front elevation of Nursery Cottage. As the proposed mast has a wider lattice tower and is around 4m higher than the existing mast then the top section of the mast is likely to be visible above the tree canopies, however the majority of the installation would be screened by the intervening woodland.

Given the separation distance and the relatively small amount of the mast that would be visible from Nursery Cottage it is not considered that the proposed installation would have an adverse impact on residential amenity. The proposal would therefore be in accordance with Saved UDP policy ENV8.

Highway Considerations

The application site is accessed from a private lane within Knowsley Park. As such there are no highway safety issues associated with this development and there would be no conflict with Knowsley Local Plan policy CS7.

Conclusion

The principle of using an existing telecoms installation /site for new electronic communications as oppose to a new site is encouraged as set out in paragraph 19 of the NPPF. The impacts on the openness of the green belt over and above the existing installation is minimal due to the installation being predominantly screened and the applicant has demonstrated that the public benefits from the proposal amount to very special circumstances to allow this inappropriate development in the green belt.

The increased width and height of the lattice tower would amount to less than substantial harm on the heritage assets. It is considered that this harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal such as enhanced connectivity and improved capacity.

The proposal would result in the loss of 7 trees which is considered to be unavoidable in order to achieve the clearance required for the radio signals. The applicant has agreed to the planting of 14 trees in mitigation for the loss.

The proposal would be in compliance with the Knowsley Local Plan and saved UDP policies listed above.

Recommendation

That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions.

1. The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: In order to comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: In order to comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

3. Within one month of the proposed mast being brought into operation the existing 24m high lattice tower and associated equipment shall be removed from the site.

Reason : In the interests of visual and residential amenity and to minimise impacts on the openness of the green belt and to minimise any harm to the Grade II registered Knowsley Park and in turn the setting of the Grade II* listed Knowsley Hall and to ensure the proposal is in compliance with Knowsley Local Plan policies CS5 and CS20 and Saved UDP policy ENV8 and guidance in NPPF.

4. The materials and colour finish for the proposed fencing and the colour finishes for the equipment cabinets and lattice tower shall be in accordance with the details in an E mail from the agent dated 2nd October 2024.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of visual amenity to ensure compliance with Knowsley Local Plan policies CS19 & CS20

5. Notwithstanding the details submitted prior to the development hereby permitted being first brought into operation a scheme for replacement tree planting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The submitted scheme shall include tree replacement for individual trees on a 2:1 basis. The scheme should include the location, size (minimum 12-14cm girth)and species of the replacement trees.

The tree planting shall be wholly implemented in its finally approved form in accordance with the approved scheme within the first available planting season following the substantial completion of development. Any tree or other planting which is lost, felled, removed, becomes diseased, or is substantially damaged within a period of five years thereafter shall be replaced in kind during the first available planting season following the date of loss or damage.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and to ensure the development complies with Saved Policy DQ4 of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan adopted June 2006.

SCHEDULE 1

Date Received	Ref. No	Version	Drawing/Document Title
11/11/2024	301	REV D	PROPOSED SITE ELEVATION
11/11/2024	201	REV C	PROPOSED SITE PLAN
11/11/2024	102	REV A	TREE PLANTING SCHEME
11/11/2024	100	REV B	LOCATION PLAN
23/05/2024	J240325-GGC-ZZ-ZZ-D-ARB-0101	P01	TREE RETENTION AND PROTECTION PLAN
23/05/2024	93232	1.0	ARBORICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Signed Case Officer¹: Mark Quinn

Signed Authorising Officer²: K Foster

Date: 21 November 2024

¹ I confirm that I do not have a personal relationship with the applicant, agent or other interested parties; I also confirm that I do not have a financial interest in the site or the development proposed

² I confirm that I do not have a personal relationship with the applicant, agent or other interested parties; I also confirm that I do not have a financial interest in the site or the development proposed

Informatives

None Required













