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Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 May 2007

by **S J Emerson** BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State
for Communities and Local Government

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Date: 5 June 2007

Appeal Ref: APP/G5180/A/07/2033545**Farnborough Telephone Exchange, Church Road, Farnborough, Orpington BR6 7DB.**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by T-Mobile (UK) Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Bromley.
- The application Ref DC/06/01703/FULL5, dated 5 May 2006, was refused by notice dated 22 June 2006.
- The development proposed is the installation of three antennas within a brick effect screen at rooftop level with the installation of a T-Mobile equipment cabinet at ground floor level plus other ancillary works.

Decision

1. I allow the appeal and grant planning permission for the installation of three antennas within a brick effect screen at rooftop level with the installation of a T-Mobile equipment cabinet at ground level plus other ancillary works at Farnborough Telephone Exchange, Church Road, Farnborough in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref DC/06/01703/FULL5, dated 5 May 2006, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The material to be used in the construction of the external cladding of the chimneys hereby permitted shall match in colour and pattern the brickwork of the existing building.

Reasons

2. The appeal site is within the Farnborough Village Conservation Area. The telephone exchange is a very substantial 2 storey building with a flat roof. There are 3 "chimney stacks" visible on different parts of the roof. One is an original brick built chimney and 2 are created from brick effect cladding concealing telecommunications equipment. The proposal is conceal additional antennas in a similar manner, doubling the size of the existing false chimneys and adding another. An equipment cabinet would be located at ground level.
3. The conservation area is based around the core of the original village centre of Farnborough, which contains several rows of cottage style properties in Church Road and the High Street. Several of these buildings are statutorily listed and others are locally listed. There is conventional 20th century development both within and abutting the conservation area. The telephone exchange is set back behind developments fronting the High Street and Church Road, but parts of

the 1st floor and roofscape are visible from the High Street and most of the building is visible from the vehicle entrance in Church Road. The George Public House at the corner of the High Street and Church Road has recently been demolished and is to be replaced by a new housing development (which is currently only just above foundation level). As a result, the telephone exchange is more prominent at present than it has been in the past and will be in the future. The false chimneys are visible in various public and private views. I consider that most passers-by would be unaware of their true nature since there is little visible evidence of their actual function and the cladding on the most prominent faces of the chimneys is a good match for the yellow stock bricks of the building (although some of the cladding on the rear/sides of the stacks is not such a good match).

4. Provided that the cladding matches the brickwork, the proposed additions would not look out of place on the building. The completed development would be an acceptable minor variation to the roofscape. The chimneys would not be so numerous as to appear incongruous or undermine their purpose of not drawing attention to the telecommunications equipment which they are intended to conceal. From ground level, only one or two of the chimneys would be seen at the same time.
5. The proposed equipment cabinet would be located at one side of the telephone exchange. It would be much smaller than the cabinet serving the existing telecommunications installation. It would not be visible in public views. The top of the cabinet would be noticeable from an adjoining rear garden, but it would be partly screened by conifers and seen against the backdrop of the telephone exchange.
6. I therefore consider that the development would not harm the appearance of the telephone exchange or the character and appearance of the conservation area, which would be preserved. This assessment is consistent with that made by the Inspector when allowing the appeal in 2005 for the existing telecommunications development on the roof of the building within false chimneys. There would be no harm to the setting of nearby listed buildings. The development complies with policies BE1 (design) and BE11 (conservation areas) of the Bromley Unitary Development Plan (2006).
7. Residents express concerns about the possible health risks from the development. Planning Policy Guidance 8 *Telecommunications* indicates that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It goes on to state that if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines, it should not be necessary to consider further the health aspects of the development and concerns about them. The appellant has confirmed that the proposed equipment would comply with the ICNIRP guidelines. Emissions rapidly decrease with distance. From what I have seen and read, there is nothing unusual about this proposal either technically or in its location in relation to nearby dwellings and the school. There is no evidence to outweigh advice in PPG 8 on health considerations. The health fears of local residents do not weigh significantly against the development.
8. In the absence of site specific harm, I can address need and alternative sites briefly. The appellant has explained the need for an installation in this area to provide 3G coverage. The appellant has described numerous alternative

locations which were considered unsuitable to serve this need - because they would not provide effective coverage; because they were in locations which had previously been dismissed on appeal, because they were in the Green Belt or were considered to require installations which would be intrusive. There is no evidence to contradict the appellant's explanation. The Council does not suggest any preferable alternative locations. In dismissing an appeal in 2005 for a mast at the junction of Farnborough Way and Tubbenden Lane South, the Inspector highlighted the roof of the telephone exchange as a possible acceptable location for telecommunications development. The need and lack of clearly preferable alternative locations weigh in favour of allowing the appeal. I consider that the development complies with UDP policy BE22 (telecommunications).

9. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed. It is important that the proposed cladding matches the colour of the bricks of the building and I shall impose a condition to this effect. I see no need for any additional conditions other than the statutory time limit for commencement.

Simon Emerson

INSPECTOR