
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 September 2026

by **A Tucker BA (Hons) IHBC**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 October 2026

Appeal Ref: 6011060

**West Court Land, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Arborfield Green, Wokingham
RG40 4QF**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant approval required under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
 - The appeal is made by Mohammed Gumel of Airwave Solutions Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 252762.
 - The development proposed is Installation of replacement electronic communications apparatus comprising slimline lattice mast, 3 no. aerials, 2 no. transmission dishes, 1 no. GPS aerial, radio equipment housing and development ancillary to radio equipment housing.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (GPDO 2015), under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A, Paragraph A.3(4) require the local planning authority to assess the proposed development solely on the basis of its siting and appearance, taking into account any representations received. My determination of this appeal has been made on the same basis.
3. The Council refers to development plan policies in its refusal reason. The principle of development is established by the GPDO and the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO do not require regard to be had to the development plan. I have therefore had regard to the policies of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) only in so far as they are material considerations relevant to matters of siting and appearance.
4. The revised Framework was published on 17 August 2026. Having considered the revisions and in light of the principles of natural justice, the parties have been provided with an opportunity to comment on the revised Framework, and I shall take those comments into account in reaching my decision.
5. The proposal is described as a replacement; however the apparatus it seeks to replace is situated at Church Farm, which is approximately 1 km away. Therefore, the proposal is better understood as a new installation.

Main Issues

6. The effect of the siting and appearance of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area including its effect on protected trees, and highway safety; and, if any harm would occur, whether this is outweighed by the need for the installation to be sited as proposed taking into account any suitable alternatives.

Reasons

Character and appearance

7. The appeal site is at the edge of the historic parkland associated with West Court. It forms part of a linear woodland belt that is mature and has an attractive natural appearance. The woodland belt serves to separate the parkland from the road, defining its southeastern boundary. Although the site is close to recent residential development to the north, the surroundings retain a strong rural setting, that is primarily defined by mature trees and the parkland associated with West Court.
8. The proposed lattice tower would be most prominent where it would protrude above the woodland canopy. As such, the woodland would offer some mitigation so that it would not stand as an isolated structure visible for its full height.
9. However, the upper part of the lattice tower would be highly visible from a wide area owing to the open parkland character of the land to the west. It would rise above the tree canopy with an engineered form that would appear out of place in a naturalistic setting.
10. Its harmful visual impact would be experienced all year round. It would be exacerbated in the winter when the deciduous trees that make up the woodland are without leaf, and the lattice tower would have an incongruous appearance against the natural silhouette of the bare stems of the trees. An alternative colour would make little difference as its harmful impact would result from its engineered form and incongruous appearance in the context of the woodland and wider parkland.
11. Owing to the narrowness of the woodland belt, the ground level compound would also be prominent to view from the road and the parkland. This would further draw the eye and increase the prominence of the whole proposal.
12. The parkland has recently been designated as the West Court Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), to serve the adjacent development site. The role of the SANG is to provide alternative green space to divert residents of the adjacent development from visiting the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), thus preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA that would arise from the additional residents. The SANG must therefore be sufficiently attractive to draw people away from the SPA.
13. Natural England guidance¹ states that little or no artificial infrastructure is found within the SPA at present and that generally an urban influence is not what people are looking for when they visit the SPA. It says the SANG must be perceived as a semi-natural space with little intrusion of artificial structures. The proposal would undermine this objective by introducing a prominent structure with an engineered appearance in a location that is not otherwise developed. It would have a

¹ Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021

considerable impact on the attractiveness and tranquillity of this part of the SANG by eroding its landscape value. It is correct that this matter should attract more weight than it would if West Court was an ordinary area of public open space. The SANG is a strategic ecological mitigation asset, and the erosion of its quality could mean that it is less able to fulfil its intended function divert new residents away from the SPA. This is a matter of considerable importance and weight.

14. The proposal would be located within a linear woodland belt that is protected by a woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO). There is no information before me to allow me to assess the impact of the proposal on the TPO. In particular, it is necessary to understand the extent of tree loss, the impact on the roots of retained trees and whether there would be any ongoing impacts in terms of an increased pressure for tree work to ensure the ongoing functionality of the apparatus.
15. The lattice mast would be fixed to large concrete blocks that would sit on the ground. It is not clear to what extent the ground would be disturbed to facilitate this, or whether there would be an impact from other elements of the proposal such as the enclosing fence and gravel infill. Two ducts are proposed, which are likely to require excavation. In any case, even if the entire proposal is ground mounted without any excavation or change to ground levels, the structure would weigh down on the soil. This would lead to soil compaction, reduced oxygen availability and impaired water infiltration and drainage. It also has the potential to restrict root growth and cause damage to existing roots. Thus, the structure is likely to significantly degrade the rooting environment for the protected trees.
16. Additionally, as the site is within a woodland TPO where the woodland is protected as a whole, the proposal would effectively sterilise an area of woodland and prevent natural regeneration. Furthermore, owing to the narrow width of the woodland, the proposal has the potential to fragment the woodland. A full understanding of these matters is a necessary part of evaluating matters of siting and appearance, and should not therefore be left to a subsequent application for consent to undertake works to protected trees.
17. In summary, the siting and appearance of the proposal would have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of Policies CP3, CP8 and CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (CS), Policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (LP), and Saved Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan. Given my findings on this main issue, the proposal would conflict with these Policies.

Highway safety

18. The third refusal reason relates to highway safety. The Council is of the view that inadequate details have been provided regarding construction access arrangements, delivery methodology, and vehicle manoeuvring. In this respect the proposal is relatively modest, and the road would appear to be sufficiently wide in the vicinity of the site to provide access, with traffic managed as necessary. It is not clear why a swept path analysis is necessary, or why it would be necessary for vehicles to enter the site and leave in a forward gear, given that the site is most likely to be developed from the roadside.

19. Once constructed, the evidence suggests that visits to the site would be occasional and facilitated by the proposed parking bay that could be safely used without harming highway safety.
20. In summary, the siting and appearance of the proposal would not harm highway safety. In reaching this conclusion I have taken account of Policy CP6 of the CS. Given my findings on this main issue, the proposal would not conflict with this Policy.

Suitable alternatives

21. Policy CO2 1. b. of the Framework requires evidence that, where a new site is proposed, the applicant has sought to keep the number of new sites to a minimum and has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure. A list of potential alternative sites is before me, with brief reasons given by the appellant as to why they are not considered appropriate.
22. It is unclear why the underground services at Park Farm pose a significant constraint, when the proposal is for a surface mounted installation. Locating the apparatus in this area would mean it would be outside the TPO and beyond the boundaries of the SANG and would therefore have considerable advantages over the appeal proposal. Similarly, the potential site immediately to the south of the appeal site on the other side of the road also appears to offer considerable potential. It is not clear why the creation of a new access onto the highway would be an issue, as the relationship with this site to the highway appears to match that of the appeal proposal. Similarly, the reasons given relating to electricity supply are difficult to understand when the two sites are so close.
23. Several other sites are discounted because of an unwilling landowner. Whilst this does present a considerable constraint, it is not one that is unsurmountable. Regarding the existing site referred to as Cellnex Church Farm, there is no information to demonstrate how the visual impact was considered.
24. In respect of the other alternative sites the extent of the issues raised is not clear from the limited information before me. Overall, the information provided in relation to alternative sites is not sufficient for me to be confident that they have been thoroughly considered. Furthermore, the case for the chosen site is considerably undermined by the appellant's submission that they are working towards a different solution. No details of this are provided for comparison and there is nothing to suggest that planning permission and landlord agreement will not be forthcoming.
25. The appellant submitted several previous decisions to the Council when it made its application. These relate to cases at other sites that have already been determined. No commentary has been provided to explain why these are considered relevant. I have reviewed the decisions. They all relate to proposals and contexts that differ considerably from the appeal proposal. In most cases it was found that either no impact on character and appearance would occur or the level of harm would be low, and in cases where the degree of harm would be greater it was determined that there were no suitable alternatives. None of these decisions therefore cause me to come to a different view on the appeal proposal.
26. I note the compelling reasons for the proposal provided by the appellant, that include the service that the mast would provide and the need to replace the

apparatus at Church Farm. Additionally, Policy C01 of the Framework establishes that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of maintaining or improving network coverage, capacity, reliability and resilience and I note that the GPDO gives in principle approval for such installations. However, for the reasons above, the clear and persuasive evidence regarding the unsuitability of alternative sites is not before me and I cannot therefore conclude that alternative sites have been thoroughly considered. When I add to this the significant adverse impacts that would arise from the siting and appearance of the proposal, I find that the appeal must fail.

Conclusion

27. For the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Tucker

INSPECTOR