
2023/0303

Applicant: British Telecom PLC

Creation of secure storage compound and pole stack yard area including 2 no storage container, concrete bases and a bunded channel with interceptor

Telephone Exchange, Falcon Street, Barnsley, S70 2EZ

Site Description

The application site relates to the telephone exchange on Falcon Street in Barnsley Town Centre. The entire site measures 0.65hectare and contains numerous buildings on site, the largest being a three-storey Brutalist building on the corner of County Way and Old Mill Lane. In the South-East of the site is a parking area with the entire site bounded by a high brick wall with corrugated metal fencing in between.

The site is located within the Urban Fabric in the Town Centre – Courthouse campus district, in what is a mixed-use area, however the predominant use is related to education with Barnsley College having numerous buildings in close proximity. Two of the main Town Centre public car parks (County Way Upper and Lower) are located to the immediate East and South of the site, with the train station in close proximity also (c.260m to the South-East).

Relevant Site History

B/75/1833/BA – Erection of portacabin for office accommodation (Expired on 31/08/80)

B/76/1858/BA – Replacing of roof to provide additional welfare accommodation and erection of extension of fire escape

B/78/1803/BA - Additional two-storey extension to previously approved 3-storey telephone exchange

B/79/2861/BA - Erection of mobile unit to form extension to telephone exchange (Expired on 31/08/84)

B/87/1438/BA - Erection of motor vehicle servicing garage

B/01/0875/BA - Installation of three louvres in place of existing window openings.

2007/1885 - Erection of a ground and basement level extension to telephone exchange (Outline).

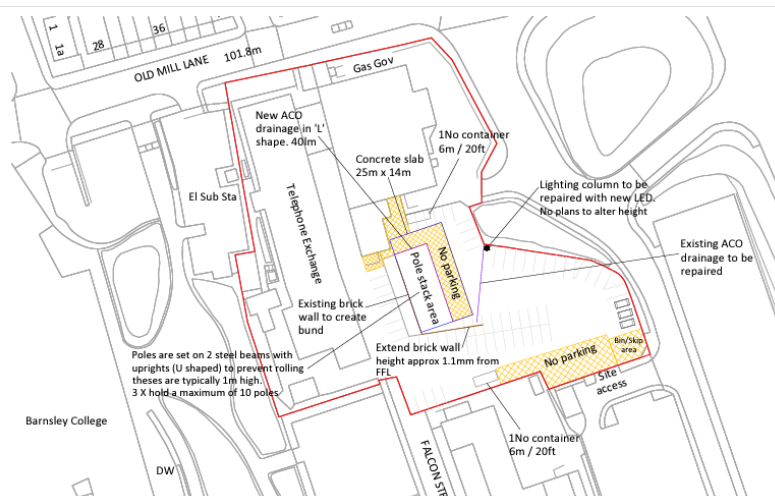
2008/1023 - Erection of two storey extension to Telephone Exchange

Proposed Development

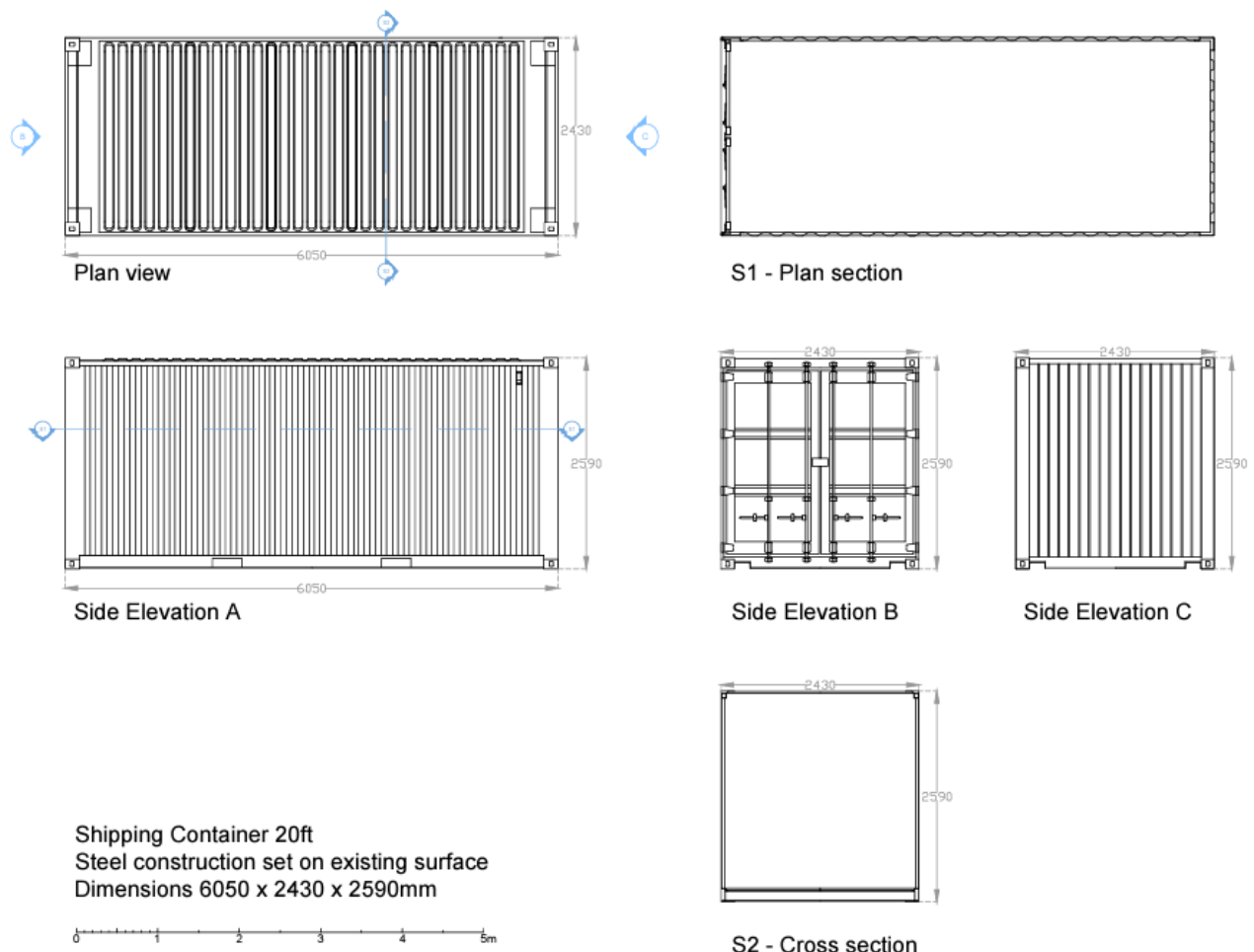
The applicant is seeking approval for the creation of a secure storage compound primarily to safely and securely hold equipment and telegraph poles. The development can be broken down to include the following elements:

1. The creation of a pole stack area with the poles set of 2 steel beams with uprights (U shaped) to prevent rolling. The proposal includes 3 x steel beams/uprights which are to be 1m in height and will hold a maximum of 10 poles each.
2. The installation of 2 x no storage containers on site. The containers are rectangular in shape with a length of 6.05m, a width of 2.45m with a height of 2.59m with a steel exterior.
3. Creation of concrete slab measuring 25m x 14m.
4. Extension of existing brick wall on site, with a stepped height of 1.1m measured from ground level.
5. New Aco drain in L-shape to the North of the pole stack area.
6. Lighting column to be repaired with new LED lights.
7. Demarking of 'No Parking' areas within the site.

Proposed Block Plan:



Proposed Container Plans and Elevations:



Policy Context

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The Local Plan (adopted January 2019), alongside the Joint Waste Plan and relevant neighbourhood plans, form the statutory development plan for Barnsley. It establishes policies and proposals for the development and use of land up to the year 2033 and will be used when considering planning applications and to coordinate investment decisions that affect the towns, villages and countryside of Barnsley.

The Local Plan supersedes the remaining saved policies from the Unitary Development Plan (adopted in the year 2000) and the Core Strategy (adopted in 2011).

Local Plan

In reference to this application, the following policies are relevant:

GD1: General Development – Development will be approved if there will be no significant adverse effect on the living conditions and residential amenity of existing and future residents.

GD2: Temporary buildings and uses – Temporary buildings will normally be allowed where it can be demonstrated that a permanent building is either not suitable or that urgent accommodation is needed pending the completion of a permanent building.

D1: High Quality Design and Place Making – Development is expected to be of a high-quality design and will be expected to respect, take advantage of and reinforce the distinctive, local character and other features of Barnsley.

H3: Uses on allocated housing sites – the sites shown on housing sites on the Policies map will be developed for residential purposes. Other uses on these will only be allowed where:

- They are smallscale and ancillary to the housing elements; and
- They provide a service or other facility for local residents.

T4: New Development and Transport Safety – New development will be expected to be designed and built to provide all transport users within and surrounding the development with safe, secure and convenient access and movement.

Poll1: Pollution Control – Development will be expected to demonstrate that it is not likely to result, directly or indirectly, in an increase in air, surface water and groundwater, noise, smell, dust, vibration, light or other pollution which would unacceptably affect or cause a nuisance to the natural and built environment or to people. Developers will be expected to minimise the effects of any possible pollution and provide mitigation measures where appropriate.

TC1: Town Centres – Support will be given to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the Borough's hierarchies of centres.

BTC21: Courthouse Camps – The Council will accept the following types of development in the Courthouse Campus District:

- Education and community facilities.
- Offices.
- Developments designed to support the creative and digital industries.
- Residential development, including live-work units.
- Multi storey car parking.
- A new public park and improved public spaces.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Parking

NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole; or where specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted or unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In respect of this application, the policies above are considered to reflect the 4th Core Principle in the NPPF, which relates to high quality design and good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. They also reflect the advice in section 12 (achieving well-designed places), especially paragraph 134, which state that '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.'

Consultations

Highways Drainage – No objections

Highways DC – Whilst no indication of the length of time the containers will be in situ, the compound is temporary in nature with the Design and Access Statement suggesting that "the prefabricated containers are easily available and a relatively inexpensive way to provide the storage required. With virtually zero build time a small compound can be put in place almost immediately and provide safe secure storage during the expansion period. The compound will also be easily moved to a new site as the expansion moves through the country". On-site observations have shown that the existing parking areas are not used to capacity and there would remain ample space should this scheme receive planning approval. Given the telephone exchange has been in active use for many years using the existing, established access, this proposal will not cause any significant highway issues. Any increase in vehicular movements will easily be carried by the existing highway network. The scheme is acceptable from the perspective of highways. No specific conditions are deemed necessary.

Pollution Control – No objections

Ward Councillors – No comments

Yorkshire Water – No comments

Representations

Neighbour notification letters were sent to surrounding residential properties and a site notice placed nearby, no comments were received.

Assessment

Principle of development

The application site is located within the Town Centre, in the Courthouse Campus. Local Plan Policy BTC21 states that certain types of development will be acceptable in this area. The proposed seeks to create a secure compound and pole stack yard area including a storage container, concrete bases and a bunded channel. The development therefore does not meet the criteria of BTC21 but it does not seek to change the use of the site, rather it seeks to introduce a secure compound for the use of the landowner (BT) in their continued rollout of their fibre services. All of the proposed elements are located in what is already somewhat of a secure/private compound, which is gated and screened from the surrounding area by virtue of a large boundary wall on all sides.

Part of the development includes the erection/placement of temporary buildings – 2 x containers – and therefore assessment against Local Plan Policy GD1 is necessary which restricts the placement of temporary buildings stating that they will normally be allowed where it can be demonstrated that a permanent building is either not suitable or that urgent accommodation is needed pending the completion of a permanent building. On sites visible from public areas and highways, temporary buildings will normally be given a temporary permission not exceeding 5 years. The submitted D&A indicates that the containers allow the applicant to be flexible in their business, with the ability to move the containers at relatively short notice and low cost to suit areas which require the equipment. The containers can be moved to other parts of the country and effectively recycled to avoid traditional construction and reduce the risk of empty buildings in the future. The LPA does not contest this given the nature of the business and the nationwide rollout, and the potential for the containers to be recycled and it is considered that a temporary permission for the containers is acceptable. This will be covered under a planning condition as the other parts of the development, such as the pole stack area, concrete base, no parking markings and extension to the wall are permanent alterations.

Given the development seeks to enhance the security of the site/existing use, it is considered to be in compliance with Local Plan Policy GD1, GD2 and BTC21 and is acceptable in principle.

Residential Amenity

The site is located in the Town Centre, however there are some residential properties in fairly close proximity to the site, immediately adjacent on Old Mill Lane. However, the main alterations to the site are positioned centrally in the site/to the South of the large building in the north of the site. As such, the alterations to the site itself and the erection of containers will not be directly visible from the adjacent residential dwellings, screened behind the large telephone exchange building on the corner of Old Mill Lane and County Way.

The proposed alteration will slightly change how the site operates, creating a secure compound to store equipment as well as creating a pole stack area. The details of which were not fully clarified during the initial submission, however an amended site plan with additional notes has been submitted by the agent. The notes clarified that the pole stack area will feature 2 steel beams with uprights (U shaped) to prevent rolling. There will be three of these beams (1m in height) that hold a maximum of 10 poles. This will result a height of 1m + the circumference of the telegraph pole which is not considered to be significant, and will have no impact on the neighbouring residential properties.

The works also include an extension to a brick wall internally, with a height of 1.1m, the laying of a concrete slab and a lighting column to be repaired with LED lighting. All of these alterations are at a significant distance away from residential dwellings to have very little (if any) impact on residential amenity.

The proposed development is in compliance with Local Plan Policy GD1 and is acceptable in terms of residential amenity.

Visual Amenity

The proposed development includes several alterations which will impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area. Firstly, the development includes the erection of two storage containers which are of a typical size and scale and are located in discreet positions within the site. The existing compound is secured by a high wall/fence on the boundary lines and given that the containers have a limited height of 2.59m, the majority of which will not be visible from the nearby public realm. These are temporary buildings, and the Council has Local Plan Policy GD2 to consider which restricts temporary buildings to a maximum of 5 years and then a replacement permanent building should be sought.

The development also includes demarking on site including 2 x no parking zones and a bin/skip area, which have little impact on the visual amenity of the area and are acceptable. The lighting column in the site is to be repaired and replaced with LED lights which is a small scale change, not increasing the height and is acceptable.

The existing brick wall on site will be extended by 5m West to East, with a maximum height of 1.1m, maintaining the stepped design of the existing wall. This will effectively be a straight extension of the existing wall and does not alter the height, or materials and is acceptable. A condition will be attached to ensure that matching materials are used. Further, the laying of the concrete slab to house the pole stack area will be similar in appearance to the existing site and will have a very minimal impact on the character of the area. The sole intention of the slab is to ensure that the pole stack area is on a secure base.

All in all, the proposed alterations to the site do not significantly change the character of the site from a visual perspective and whilst the site is prominently located in a town centre location with plenty of vehicular and pedestrian passers-by, the changes are not considered to have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the area. The proposed development is in compliance with Local Plan Policy D1 and is acceptable in terms of visual amenity.

Highway safety

The proposed alterations do not directly impact on the nearby highways network, and no additional access is being proposed. However, the development does include no parking zones within the site which would reduce the number of parking spaces on site by 10 spaces from 50 to 40. Notwithstanding this, Colleagues in Highways DC have been consulted on the proposed development and have not raised any objection stating that the existing parking areas are not used to capacity and there would still be ample space should

the scheme be approved. The telephone exchange has been active for many years using the existing established access and the proposal will not cause any significant highway issues. Any such increase in vehicular movements will easily be carried by the existing highway network.

The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with Local Plan Policy T4 and is acceptable in terms of highway safety.

Conclusion

The applicant is seeking approval for the formation of a secure compound primarily to store telegraph poles, with the development being broken up into several elements including the creation of a pole stack area, laying of concrete slab measuring 25m x 14m, demarking of 'no parking zones', installation of 2 x storage containers, extension to the existing red brick wall on the site, new L-shaped Aco Drain and repair of the lighting column with replacement LED lights.

The site is located in the Town Centre in the Courthouse Campus District which primarily supports educational uses, offices, creative and digital industries, residential development and parking. Clearly, the proposed development does not fall within any of these categories, but it is to support the longstanding use for British Telecom and the development will help the company's rollout of fibre. The majority of the alterations are permanent but the erection of storage containers are classed as temporary buildings which the Council must restrict the timescale of – in line with Local Plan Policy GD2. As such, a period of 5 years will be allowed for the containers to remain on site which will be covered through a planning condition.

The proposed alterations are not considered to have a detrimental impact on the Courthouse Campus District, neighbouring residential properties or highways safety, and do not harm the character of either the site or the surrounding area. A condition will be attached to restrict the height of the pole stack area to that included within the amended site plan notes – i.e., a maximum stack of 1 pole per upright to ensure that their visibility is limited.

The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with Local and National Planning Policies and is recommended for approval.

Recommendation

Approve subject to conditions