
2024/0887

British Telecom PLC

Siting of container for storage of equipment to support of telecoms infrastructure.

Barnsley Telephone Exchange, County Way, Barnsley, S70 2EY

Site Description

The application site relates to the telephone exchange on County Way in Barnsley Town Centre. The entire site measures 0.65hectare and contains numerous buildings on site, the largest being a three-storey building on the corner of County Way and Old Mill Lane. A parking area is located to the south-east of the site, with the entire site bounded by a high brick wall with infill palisade fencing.

The site is located within an area characterised by a mix of uses, including residential properties to the north, educational buildings to the north south and west, two main town centre car parks to the east and south and the transport interchange c.260m to the south-east.

Site History

B/75/1833/BA – Erection of portacabin for office accommodation

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

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

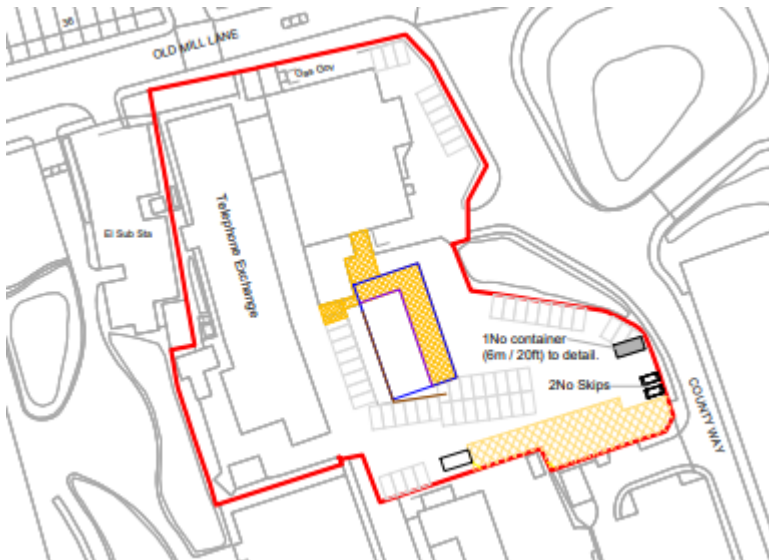
2023/0303 – Creation of secure storage compound and pole stack yard area including 2 no. storage containers, concrete bases and a bunded channel with interceptor

Proposed Development

The applicant seek permission for the siting of 1no container for the storage of equipment to support the improvements to telecommunication infrastructure.

The container is to measure 2.4m by 6m with a height of 2.6m and is to be sited adjacent to the eastern boundary with County Way.

This development is in addition to the scheme approved under planning permission 2024/0303.



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 was adopted in January 2019 and is also now accompanied by seven masterplan frameworks which apply to the largest site allocations (housing, employment, and mixed-use sites). In addition, the Council has adopted a series of Supplementary Planning Documents and Neighbourhood Plans which provide supporting guidance and specific local policies and are a material consideration in the decision-making process.

The Local Plan review was approved at the full Council meeting held 24th November 2022. The review determined that the Local Plan remains fit for purpose and is adequately delivering its objectives. This means no updates to the Local Plan, in whole or in part, are to be carried out ahead of a further review. The next review is due to take place in 2027 or earlier if circumstances, require it.

Local Plan

The site is located within the Town Centre and within the Courthouse Campus district within the Adopted Local Plan and therefore the following policies are considered relevant to this application:

Policy TC1 Town Centres
Policy BTC21 Courthouse Campus
Policy GD1 General Development
Policy GD2 Temporary Buildings and Uses
Policy D1 High Quality Design and Place Making
Policy T3 New Development and Sustainable Travel
Policy T4 New Development and Transport Safety
Policy SD1 Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development
Policy Poll1 Pollution Control and Protection

Supplementary Planning Documents

Parking

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Governments 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.

Consultations

Highways DC – no objections

Ward Councillors – no objections received

Representations

The proposal was advertised by way of a site notice and neighbour notification letters; no representations have been received.

Assessment

Principle of development

The site is located within the Town Centre and within the Courthouse Campus; Local Plan Policy BTC21 states that certain types of development will be acceptable in this area which includes education and community facilities, offices, development designed to support the creative and digital industries, residential development, including live-work units, multi storey car parking and a new public park and improved public spaces.

Policy GD2 allows temporary buildings where it can be demonstrated that a permanent building is either not suitable or that urgent accommodation is needed. On sites visible from highways and public areas, temporary buildings will normally be given a temporary permission not exceeding 5 years. Temporary buildings include portable and demountable buildings and structures and those built using short life materials.

The site is occupied by BT telephone exchange, with the proposal seeking to create additional storage in order to facilitate the expansion and improvement of the telecom's infrastructure throughout the country, in line with the historic use of the site. The applicant has stated within the supporting documentation that Shipping containers have been chosen to provide secure and weather tight storage at a large number of sites with the expansion of the Openreach teams.

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. There is no need for welfare or utilities as this is already provided within the Telephone Exchange building. The containers will ensure that the operatives will have easy access to the kit required and speed up the time taken to reach the site and efficiencies within the business. The compound will also be easily moved to a new site as the expansion moves through the country.

The development does therefore not meet the criteria of BTC21; however, it does not seek to change the use of the site, as such the principle of development is considered acceptable subject to the assessment against other relevant policies below.

Visual Amenity

The existing compound is secured by a high wall/fence along the eastern boundary with County Way; the container is to be situated adjacent to this boundary and would be visible from public vantage points. The container has a limited height of 2.59m and is orientated such that the short side, rather than the long side, is located along the boundary. In addition, the existing boundary treatment would provide some level of screening from the public realm.

The submitted D&A statement indicates that the container would allow the applicant to be flexible in their business, with the ability to move the container at relatively short notice and at 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 authority does not dispute this given the nature of the business and the nationwide rollout of the telecommunication improvements. It is therefore considered that a temporary permission for the container is acceptable. In accordance with Local Plan Policy GD2 a condition will be included to limit the containers permission to a maximum of 5 years.

All in all, the siting of the container does 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 and as such the proposed development is in compliance with Local Plan Policies D1 and GD2 and is acceptable in terms of visual amenity.

Residential Amenity

The site is located in the Town Centre, however there are some residential properties located within close proximity to the site. The use of the building as a telephone exchange and site compound is established and it is not considered that the siting of the container would impact on residential amenity to a detrimental level and as such is considered acceptable and in compliance with Local Plan Policy GD1.

Highway Considerations

The proposed alterations do not directly impact on the nearby highways network, and no additional access is being proposed. 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. In addition, it is not considered that there would be a cumulative impact, with this scheme running concurrently to that approved under planning permission 2023/0303.

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

Conclusion

The applicant is seeking approval for the installation of 1no storage container to facilitate telecommunications improvements.

The site is located in the Town Centre and within 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.

Whilst there would be some impact on the character of the area due to the proposed siting of the container, on balance it is considered that the impact on the area is outweighed by the wider telecommunications improvements and as such it is therefore considered that the proposed

development is in compliance with Local and National Planning Policies and is recommended for approval.

Recommendation

Approve subject to conditions

Site Location Plan

Proposed Site Plan Rev A received 11th December 2024

Block Plan Rev A received 11th December 2024

Proposed Plans, Elevations and Sections

Design and Access and Parking Statement