

Agenda Item 80.

Development Management Ref No	No weeks on day of committee	Parish	Ward	Listed by:
152569	12/8	Woodley	Coronation	Cllr Baker

Applicant CTIL Ltd Vodafone Ltd C/O JN Planning
Location St John Ambulance, Church Road, Woodley **Postcode** RG5 4PQ
Proposal Full application for the proposed upgrade and alteration works to existing telecommunications base station

Type Minor All (Other Developments)
PS Category
Officer Pooja Kumar

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Planning Committee on 9th December 2015
REPORT PREPARED BY Head of Development Management and Regulatory Services

SUMMARY

The application site is within settlement, located adjacent to the car park for the St John's Ambulance Headquarters. The site falls outside of the Woodley Green Conservation Area and does not lie within the curtilage of the nearby listed church (St John the Evangelist Church) and St Johns Church Hall. The residential development along St John's Close lies beyond the application site to the west.

The application is for the alteration and upgrade of an existing telecommunications site. It is proposed to replace the existing 17.3 metre high monopole with a new 20 metre high monopole with the relocation of the existing 3 antennas, installation of an additional 3 antennas, and 2 dish antennas (with diameter of 300mm) at a height of 16 meters and ancillary apparatus. A full application has been submitted because the proposal includes a replacement mast with a larger width than the existing mast and therefore does not meet the requirements of Part 16, Class A, paragraph A1. (c)(i)(bb) of the GPDO 2015.

The application has attracted several objections and has been listed by Councillor Baker to allow the committee the opportunity to consider concerns in respect of the visual impact in terms of the increased visibility of the resultant works.

Whilst the proposal would result in a more prominent structure it is not considered that this would result in any significant additional harm in respect of visual amenity or detrimental impacts on the amenity of neighbours. It should be noted that the proposal represents a scheme which would almost wholly comply with permitted developments rights under the General Permitted Development Order 2015. Moreover the installation would comply with the aims and objectives of the NPPF and consequently with the Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan.

PLANNING STATUS

- Major development location
- Groundwater zone

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee authorise the GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following:

A. Conditions and informatives:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
2. This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered '3765-PL-101', '3765-PL-102', '3765-PL-103', '3765-PL-110', '3765-PL-111', '3765-PL-112', '3765-PL-115', '3765-PL-116', '3765-PL-117', '1404-01 Rev E' and '1404-02 Rev E' received by the local planning authority on 8th May 2014 and the revised plans on 30th July 2015 and the revised plan 21st August 2015. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.
3. Before the development hereby permitted is commenced, details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the building/s shall have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the so-approved details.
Reason: To ensure that the external appearance of the building is satisfactory.
Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3 (the Natural Environment) and Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP3.
4. At such time that the development hereby permitted is no longer required for telecommunication purposes it shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition. *Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the surrounding area*

PLANNING HISTORY

TL/2001/3742	Application for telecommunications mas and associated equipment approved on 4 th June 2001
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CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways	No objection
WBC Conservation	While the proposed increase in height of this mast would make it more visible, views to and from the Conservation area are either screened or filtered by mature trees. Therefore I consider that there would be no material difference to the quality of these views. .
Woodley Parish	Objection on the basis of impact on Conservation Area and intrusive appearance of development
Local Members	One letter of objection from Councillor Baker on the basis of visual impact and impact on Conservation Area.

REPRESENTATIONS

One letter of support from St Johns Ambulance Centre

Signed petition with 169 signatures

18 letters of objection with regards to the following:

- Health concerns due to proximity of nearby housing and school
- Visual Impact
- Alternative Sites available
- Property Values

APPLICANTS POINTS

- The scheme would provide 4G (fast data) coverage for the area as well as the 2G and 3G coverage as existing
- The mast will provide coverage for both Vodafone and Telefonica (O2)
- The use of existing sites as a framework for the expansion or development of new networks is in accordance with local and national policies
- The site is screened by dense tree cover towards the south which obstruct the smooth passage of signal leading to ineffective transmission and coverage
- The benefits accruable to local customers by the improved 4G coverage and data capacity are as follows; social inclusion; mobile working; education services and; 4G to Wi-Fi services on public transport
- Alternative designs, including different heights, antennas within the head frame and other monopoles have been explored by the applicant. However these alternatives would not allow for the efficiency of the base station and would not resolve the coverage gap problems.

PLANNING POLICY		
National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Adopted Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development
	CP3	General Principles for Development
	CP7	Biodiversity
	CP9	Scale and Location of Development Proposals
Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
	CC02	Development Limits
	CC03	Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
	CC04	Sustainable Design and Construction
	CC08	Safeguarding alignments of the Strategic Transport Network and Road Infrastructure
	TB24	Designated Heritage Assets (Listed Buildings, historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments and Conservation Areas)
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)	BDG	Borough Design Guide

PLANNING ISSUES
<p><u>Background:</u></p> <p>1. The site has been used as a telecommunications base since approximately 1991 when a mast was erected on site under permitted development rights in line with the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988. Subsequently a full application was submitted and approved in 1988 and the latest 2001 application also complied with the permitted development regulations and therefore was approved.</p> <p>2. Under Part 16 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015, the existing mast could be replaced with a 20 metre high monopole of the same width, with additional equipment as proposed under the current proposal without the requirement of planning permission.</p> <p>3. Part 16, Class A paragraph A.1(c)(i)(bb) states that development is not permitted where “in the case of the alteration or replacement of any existing mast (other than on a building or other structure, on article 2(3) land or on any land which is, or within, a site of special scientific interest)...at any given height exceed the width of the existing mast at the same height by more than one third”.</p>
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4. This represents a fallback position for the applicant on this site and is a material consideration in determining this application.

Description of Development:

5. The scheme is for the upgrade and alteration works to an existing telecommunications base station. It is proposed to replace the existing 17.3 meters high monopole with a new 20 metre high monopole with the relocation of the existing 3no. antennas, installation of an additional 2no. antennas and 2 dish antennas (with a diameter of 300mm) with a proposed cabinet within cabin and ancillary apparatus. The proposal intends to provide continued coverage for Vodafone and Telefonica (O2).

Principle of Development:

6. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7. The site is located within a major development location and within a settlement boundary and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

8. Paragraph 19 of the NPPF states that “significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system”. It continues in paragraph 20 “to help achieve economic growth, local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st Century”. Section 5 of the NPPF relates specifically to communications infrastructure stating in paragraph 42 that “advanced high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth”.

9. Paragraph 43 of the NPPF states that “in preparing Local Plans, local planning authorities should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including telecommunications and high speed broadband. They should aim to keep the number of radio and telecommunications masts and the sites for such installations to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network.

10. Existing masts, buildings and other structures should be used, unless the need for a new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.”

11. Subject to assessment of this proposal in terms of its visual impact and any potential impacts on the residential amenity of neighbouring residents including perceived health risks, the development is considered to be acceptable in principle.

Character of the Area:

12. The site is located adjacent to the car park entrance to the St John's Ambulance Headquarters and Centre along St Johns Close. The site is bound with existing brick columns and timber close boarded fencing which has a timber access gate on the eastern elevation. The site is separated from the road side with landscaped grassy verge with small trees and hedging which is not protected. The trees have an approximate height of 6.5 meters.

13. The local area is predominantly residential with the closest dwellings being the residential development along St Johns Close (approved in 1993) to the west of the application site. To the south east of the application site lies the St Johns Church Hall and St John the Evangelist Church which are both listed buildings and face onto Church Road. The front elevations of both of these buildings are screened by large, mature trees which block long views towards the application site from the nearby conservation area located to the south of the site.

14. The proposed increased width and height (17.3m to 20m; an increase of approx. 16%) of the monopole combined with the additional equipment would increase its visibility from nearby dwellings and from public locations in the surrounding area. However the base station has been an existing feature in the wider landscape of the locality for over 20 years and the proposal is not considered to result in any significant additional visual harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area.

15. The proposals impact on views to and from the adjacent Woodley Green Conservation Area has also been considered. The conservation area lies to the south and south-east of the application site and includes the adjacent Church, St Johns Ambulance buildings and some residential properties along Church Road. Although the Church and St Johns Ambulance headquarters are set back from the immediate roadside, the area is covered with mature Conifer tree's which have dense leaf coverage. This landscaping prevalent along Church Lane screens the application site from the Conservation area. Moreover, due to the height of the Church, the application site is further screened from longer views in the Conservation Area. Any additional increase in the height of the monopole would also benefit from this natural screening and is not considered to result in any significant harm in terms of visual amenity of the Woodley Green Conservation Area.

16. The Conservation Officer has been consulted on the proposal and has stated that the existing mast is generally hidden or heavily filtered from views across the Conservation Area towards the application site. The exception is a relatively narrow view over the Woodyer School House (Grade 2) where it can be seen just above the ridge. Whilst the proposal would increase the height of the mast and make it slightly more visible, it is considered that no material difference would occur to the quality of views.

17. Whilst the design of the proposed development is utilitarian in nature it serves a wider economic and social purpose. Moreover, the alternative of maintaining the current monopole at its existing height would result in the need to install a second monopole at another site to accommodate the additional equipment necessary for 4G coverage. Government policy supports the sharing of masts by different operators. In this case, continued use of the existing site would avoid the proliferation of telecommunications in different locations and limit harm of equipment on the character of the wider area.

Residential Amenities:

18. Overbearing: A combination impact of the increased height and width paired with the increased amount of equipment on the monopole would be that the structure could potentially be perceived as overbearing and this has been expressed by some objectors. Whilst there would be a clear visual prominence of the structure, a proposed increase by less than 3 meters is not considered to result in any significant additional harm compared to the existing situation.

19. Loss of light/ Overlooking: The proposal is considered not to have a harmful loss of light or overlooking impact.

Health:

20. The NPPF states that “Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the telecommunications system, or determine health safeguards if the proposal meets International Commission guidelines for public exposure”.

21. A certificate has been submitted with the application, in accordance with the NPPF, confirming that the proposed base station would comply with acceptable levels of Radio Frequencies (RF's) as outlined by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Public Exposure Guidelines. In addition to any RF's generated by the proposed mast, the submitted ICNIRP certificate takes account of the cumulative effect of the RF emissions from all base stations in the vicinity of the application site.

22. The objections made against this proposal in terms of health risk, and the fears associated with any unproven health risks, have been carefully considered by the Local Planning Authority in assessing this application but have been balanced against the submitted technical information, in particular the ICNIRP certificate, which has been provided by the applicant. However the government's advice is clear on this matter in that local authorities should not seek to determine public health safeguards if the proposal meets the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

23. Furthermore the site is not adjacent to what are perceived to be particularly sensitive uses, for example schools (Willow Bank school is approximately 300 meters away from the site), children's nurseries or playgrounds.

24. Therefore, it is considered that there are no exceptional circumstances in relation to this application that warrant elevating the status of perceived health risks as a material consideration above that of other approved base stations within suburban areas of Wokingham or, indeed, against the advice provided within the NPPF outlined above.

Other Issues:

25. In respect of the objection raised by a member of the public regarding property blight that may be associated with the proposal, it is advised that this is not a material planning consideration and has not been taken into account.

26. The existing mast needs to be extended and upgraded in order to facilitate its use by both Vodafone and Telefonica (O2) for 4G purposes. Currently due to the height of the surrounding trees the signal is being hampered; the height increase will allow both operators to continue to operate from the site and to improve and increase the services it provides to its customers.

CONCLUSION

The site comprises of an existing base station, and the proposal seeks to upgrade and alter the existing equipment on site to improve telecommunication services in the local area. Whilst the scheme is utilitarian in appearance, no significantly additional harmful impact is considered to occur as a result. Moreover, the proposal meets the wider objectives of the NPPF of supporting economic growth and sharing existing telecommunication sites between operators to enable this growth. The development is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact on the character of the area, neighbouring properties, highway and parking and therefore, the proposal accords with relevant local and national planning policy. As such, the application is recommended for approval.

CONTACT DETAILS

Service	Telephone	Email
Development Management and Regulatory Services	0118 974 6428 / 6429	development.control@wokingham.gov.uk