

APPLICATION NO. P07/E0718/T
APPLICATION TYPE TELECOMMUNICATIONS
REGISTERED 23.05.2007
PARISH WATLINGTON
WARD MEMBER(S) Mr Rodney Mann

The Rev'd Angie Paterson

APPLICANT Arqiva
SITE Arqiva Transmitting Station Englands Game Farm Watlington
PROPOSAL Installation of two 0.6m dish antennas on the existing tower.
AMENDMENTS As amplified by report accompanying Agent's letter dated 4 July 2007.
GRID REFERENCE 471600/193125
OFFICER Mrs H.E.Moore

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This planning application has been referred to Planning Committee because the officer recommendation conflicts with the views of the Parish Council.
- 1.2 The site lies to the east of the main body of Christmas Common, within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The existing mast is some 45 metres tall and supports an array of telecommunication dishes and antennae.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal is to attach two additional dishes to the mast, each with a diameter of 0.6 m. The dishes are proposed to be attached to the mast at a height of 33 metres above ground level.
- 2.2 Plans **attached** at Appendix 1 show the location of the site and details of the proposal.
- 2.3 The mast is owned by Arqiva, a communications company, who have submitted the application on behalf of Vodafone. In support of their application, Arqiva have confirmed that they provide public broadcasting services, and in accordance with Government Guidance also promote the sharing of their masts by other telecommunications operators. In this instance Vodafone require two additional radio dish links at this location to support their existing mobile phone network in the area. The agent advises that the dishes will provide a new network that will significantly increase the service quality of the Vodafone network to its users and allow for significantly greater capacity flexibility, allowing for new bandwidth intensive services to be rolled out across the entire network quickly and efficiently. The agent confirms that the proposed dishes are mounted in a compact slimline fashion to minimise visual intrusion, and can be coloured if required.
- 2.4 In terms of emissions, Arqiva have confirmed that existing and proposed

equipment comply with Government guidelines for public exposure.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 Watlington Parish Council
- Objection raised. The Parish Council are aware of strong and increasing concerns in the local community regarding potential health and safety issues and the increasing negative impact on the AONB landscape by the increasing number of dishes and antennae on this radio mast.
- Neighbours
- Objections have been received from 6 local residents. The matters raised include the following issues:-
 - i) There has been a steady proliferation of antennae on the mast. Nineteen dishes and 15 pole antennae have received planning permission since the mast was erected in 1983 – more are going up than coming down.
 - ii) There is an ongoing debate about long-term health implications of masts and dishes. The number of dishes should be capped until real evidence is accumulated. No assessment has been made of emissions at adjacent properties.
 - iii) The mast at Christmas Common is far too high to be screened by surrounding trees. The mast is a significant blot on the AONB landscape, and additional dishes increase the negative impact.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 P83/S0515 – Replacement and resiting of existing aerial tower by new tower of similar height and replacement of existing equipment building. Approval.

Since 1995, ten applications have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority for the installation of dishes and antennae on the mast.

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

- 5.1 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, Policies G2, TE1 and C2

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (PPG8) 'Telecommunications'

Circular 4/99 'Planning for Telecommunications'

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The main considerations are:

(i) The impact on the natural beauty and special landscape quality of the

Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

(ii) The impact on the amenity of local residents

Impact on the AONB

6.2 Government guidelines contained within PPG8 are clear that a balance must be struck between environmental considerations and the technical network requirements of the telecommunications operator. Vodafone have put forward this proposal in order to carry out its legal requirement to provide Third Generation (3G) coverage and to upgrade its service to mobile phone users in the area.

6.3 PPG8 states that:-

“In order to limit visual intrusion the Government attaches considerable importance to keeping the numbers of radio and telecommunications masts to the minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network. The sharing of masts and sites is strongly encouraged where that represents the optimum environmental solution in a particular case.”

“In certain circumstances the shared use of an existing mast might necessitate an increase in the height or structural capacity, and therefore the visibility of the mast. Depending upon the characteristics of the location, site sharing as opposed to mast sharing may be more appropriate.”

With regard to the current planning application, the proposal is entirely consistent with Government guidance in that Vodafone propose a mast share on a mast that does not need to be redeveloped to a larger structure in order to accommodate their additional equipment. It is accepted that the existing mast does not enhance the beauty of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, it does exist, and Government advice makes it clear that a balance must be struck between environmental considerations and the needs of the operator. In this particular instance, officers consider that the addition of two extra dishes on the structure would not harm the special landscape quality of the area. In addition, the AONB is extensive in this area, and it would not be possible for the operator to locate the required dishes outside the AONB.

Amenity of Local Residents

6.4 Concern has been expressed by local residents and the Parish Council about the health implications relating to mast installations. However, PPG8 states “it is the Government’s firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Government’s responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Government’s view, if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in processing an application for

planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them”.

6.5 The applicant has submitted a Radio Frequency Emissions Report relating to this site. The report considers the combined effect of the emissions from both the existing and proposed antennas on the mast together. The calculations show that total emissions from all antennas on the structure (existing and proposed) will not exceed 1% of the reference levels in the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure. The report confirms that, in practice, this means that the transmissions could be up to 100 times greater and still conform to the standard. In these circumstances, it is clear that the proposals comply with the guidelines designed to protect public health. Accordingly, a refusal of planning permission based on health concerns is not appropriate and could not be substantiated.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 It is recognised that the existing mast is in a sensitive location. However, the proposals comply with Government guidance in terms of mast sharing and health considerations. Officers consider that the addition of two dishes to the existing mast would not cause harm to the landscape quality of the AONB. Accordingly, it is recommended that planning permission be granted.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Commencement 3 years.**
- 2. That the two dishes hereby approved shall be removed within 3 months of them no longer being in use.**

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