

APPLICATION NO. P07/E0703/T
APPLICATION TYPE FULL
REGISTERED 18 JUNE 2007
PARISH CHECKENDON
WARD MEMBER(S) Maurice Newland
APPLICANT T-MOBILE (UK) LTD
SITE Land adjacent to Rushmoor Lane, Woodcote
PROPOSAL Installation of 20 metre monopole mast with 3 antennae, 2 dishes, associated radio equipment cabinets and mesh compound and access.
AMENDMENTS NONE
GRID REFERENCE 464249/182841
OFFICER PAUL LUCAS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application sites lies on the northern side of the A4074 Oxford to Reading road at its junction with Rushmoor Lane and opposite the turning into the village of Woodcote at the top of the Chilterns escarpment. The site has no public access and is set behind a group of mature trees, approximately 12-16 metres high, which are located between the site and the main road. The land to the north consists of a field, which is bordered on all sides by trees and hedges. A monopole mast belonging to Hutchinson 3G has been erected on the eastern side of the group of trees, some 20 metres to the south of the proposed installation. The site lies within the Chilterns AONB.

2.0

THE PROPOSAL

2.1

The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a 20 metre high monopole mast incorporating 3 antennae, 2 dishes and associated equipment cabinets, located within a 9.1 metre by 4 metre compound enclosed by 1.2 metre high stockproof fencing. The headframe would be circular and would have a diameter of approximately 0.9 metres. Access to the mast would be across the field and it is not proposed to create a formalised track across the field. The installation is required to fill a gap in 2G and 3G network coverage in the Woodcote area.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

3.1 **Checkendon Parish Council** – The application should be refused on grounds of amenity, character of area and scale and that the existing mast should be used.

3.2 **Woodcote Parish Council (adjoining parish)** – The application should be refused due to concern over the erection of a second mast close to an existing mast in an AONB. The equipment should be shared on one structure.

3.3 **OCC Highways** – No objection due to parking feasible off the public highway and limited maintenance activity associated with such installations.

3.4 **Forestry Officer** – No objections on the basis that no trees or hedges are removed.

3.5
Countryside Officer – No objections.

3.6
Environmental Health – Complies with ICNIRP guidelines therefore no objections.

3.7
CPRE – Objection to proliferation of masts in the AONB and advocate mast sharing instead.

3.8
Neighbours – One representation of objection summarised as follows:

- Unsightly proliferation of masts in AONB
- Health risks

4.0

4.1
RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

P03/S0352 – Planning permission was granted in August 2003 for a tapered timber monopole with associated cabinet. Compound fence of 1.2m high and 1m high access gate. One transmission dish 0.3m. (Hutchinson 3G)

5.0 **POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

5.1 Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Policies:

- G2 – Protection of the Environment

- C1 – Landscape Character
- C2 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- C9 – Landscape Features
- TE1 – Telecommunications
- T1 – Transport Requirements for New Developments

5.2 Supplementary Planning Guidance:

- South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment – Character Areas 8 & 10.

5.3 Government Guidance: PPS1, PPS7 and PPG8.

6.0 PLANNING ISSUES

6.1 PPG8 emphasises the need to facilitate the growth of new telecommunications systems while keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. The planning issues that are relevant to this application are whether:

- The development would be in keeping with the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the Chilterns AONB;
- The impact of the installation on important trees;
- There would be any implications for highway safety; and
- Any other material planning considerations.

6.2 Character and Appearance

Policy C2 of the adopted Local Plan requires that developments conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special landscape quality and distinctiveness of AONBs. Policy TE1 follows the advice set out in PPG8 and sets out four criteria against which telecommunications applications must be assessed:

- i. They are sited and designed so as to minimise visual intrusion.

6.3

The location within the site has been specifically chosen so that the proposed mast would be positioned behind trees that would be 12-16 metres in height. The precise location of the mast and its compound was moved to this location in line with pre-application advice provided by Officers. It is felt that this location is much better than the existing mast nearby, which is clearly visible in front of the trees in public views from the main road to the south. The headframe would be small in comparison with many other established masts in the District. The main body of the mast itself would be mostly screened from view from the main road by the existing trees and would only be completely visible from within the clearing in which it would be located, which is a private rather than a public viewpoint. Even then, it would be against the backdrop of the mature trees behind it. It is considered that the siting and design of the mast within the site would minimise its visual intrusion and would comply with the above criterion.

- ii. They do not have a significant adverse effect on the street scene, the appearance or setting of a building, or landscape character, particularly in areas of special landscape value, conservation areas and on listed buildings.

6.4

The AONB is an important landscape designation, as the Parish Councils, CPRE and a local resident all point out. However, this in itself would not be sufficient to prevent telecommunications development from taking place, having regard to Government guidance in PPG8. Evidence has been supplied to demonstrate that there is a gap in coverage in this locality and that the headframe must clear the tops of the surrounding trees in order for the signal to get through. The headframe would only appear as a small projection above the surrounding trees, when viewed from the valley to the south. Although most of these trees are deciduous, they are established and relatively dense and therefore this backdrop would be apparent for most of the year. It is felt that whilst there would inevitably be some visual impact from the proposed installation, such harm would not be significant. A planning condition could require the mast and cabinets to be painted a suitable colour (Van Dyke Brown and Dark Green are suggested). This criterion would therefore be satisfied.

- iii. No alternative, less visually intrusive site is available or technically feasible.

6.5

The supporting documentation submitted with the application reveals that 8 other sites to the south of the proposed site have been explored and discounted. At four locations in Woodcote (Ashlee Walk, West Chiltern Close, Whitehouse Road and Church Farm) the land is more open and a telecommunications installation would be more prominent in the landscape. At Broad Street Farm, Wards Farm Industrial Estate and Fox Covert Wood, the installation would not provide sufficient coverage due to lower topography in the first instance and distance in the other cases, which would mean more masts would be required in order to address the gap in coverage. St Leonard's Church was discounted as being an unsuitable building on which to mount telecommunications equipment. This information was also presented at the pre-application stage. Officers agree with these conclusions and are satisfied that there is no reasonable alternative site, which would cause less harm. The proposal would therefore accord with the above criterion.

- iv. Where a new mast is proposed, there is no opportunity for sharing existing masts or, where appropriate, existing sites.

6.6

PPG8 encourages mast sharing and site sharing. In order to mast share with the existing Hutchinson 3G structure, redevelopment would be required, which is likely to result in both an increase in height and bulk of the existing structure, which, as has already been pointed out, is in a more prominent location than the site that is the subject of this application. The proposal would be in close proximity to an existing telecommunications site and therefore would broadly be in accordance with the above criterion and particularly paragraphs 20, 27 and 68

of PPG8, which promote site sharing.

- 6.7 Overall, whilst there would undoubtedly be some negative impact on the Chilterns AONB as a result of a further telecommunications installation, the level of harm would be limited and would not be sufficient to justify refusal of planning permission.

Protected Trees

- 6.8 Policy C9 seeks to ensure that landscape features, including protected trees are safeguarded by development. The trees surrounding the site are not covered by a Tree Preservation Order, but together they form an important part of the special landscape character of the surroundings. The mast would be located approximately 5 metres from the base of the nearest tree, which is comparable with the distance of the other installation from the trees. It is considered that there would be no harm to these trees, subject to a standard tree protection condition to protect the trees during construction. This would accord with the above Policy.

Highway Safety

- 6.9 Policy T1 requires that developments provide a safe and convenient access to the highway network. Given that this is an established telecommunications site and that the level of maintenance only requires a handful of visits a year, the Highway Authority has raised no objections on highway safety grounds. As such, the proposal would comply with the above Policy.

Other Matters

- 6.10 The concern raised by a local resident about harm to health cannot be substantiated, because, in line with the findings of the Stewart Report, the applicant has provided an ICNIRP certificate with the application, which means that the development complies with radiation exposure guidelines. Also, the mast would be some 250 metres from the closest residential property to the south-west. Applications by other operators on this site would be considered as and when they come forward.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The application proposal would comply with the relevant Development Plan policies and it is considered that, subject to the attached conditions, the proposed development would not materially harm the natural beauty or special landscape quality of the Chilterns AONB, threaten the longevity of protected trees or result in conditions prejudicial to highway safety.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 Grant Planning Permission

Subject to the following Planning Conditions:

1. **3 Year Time Limit**
2. **Colour of mast and cabinets to be agreed prior to commencement**
3. **Tree protection measures during construction to be implemented in line with BS5837**

4. Mast to be removed within 3 months of no longer being required

Author : Paul Lucas

Contact no : 01491 823434

Email : Planning.east@southoxon.gov.uk