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| APPLICATION NO. | P17/S2556/FUL |
| APPLICATION TYPE | FULL APPLICATION |
| REGISTERED | 12.7.2017 |
| PARISH | BIX |
| WARD MEMBERS | Charles Bailey David Nimmo-Smith |
| APPLICANT | New Line Networks LLC |
| SITE | Land at Round Hill House Farm, Dobsons Lane, Fawley, RG9 6HU |
| PROPOSAL | The installation of 8 x 2m high radio receiving antennae and an associated equipment cabinet for a temporary period of 1 month. |
| OFFICER | Tom Wyatt |

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application is referred to Planning Committee as the Officer’s recommendation conflicts with the views of Bix and Assendon Parish Council.
- 1.2 The application site (which is identified on the OS extract **attached** as Appendix A) is located in an elevated and relatively isolated position within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are widespread views over the Stonor Valley from the site and its surroundings, and these views can be enjoyed from a public right of way (The Oxfordshire Way) crossing the land approximately 60 metres to the south of the site.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The application seeks planning permission for the temporary installation of eight radio receiving antennae and an equipment cabinet. The antennae would be sited in a line 4 metres apart and each antenna would consist of a green coloured hoop design of 2 metres in height.
- 2.2 The proposed antennae are designed to receive data from the USA for onward transfer to financial services in London. This is new technology and this application seeks the siting of the antennae for only a period of one month to allow for testing of the technology. If the testing is successful a permanent installation may be proposed but this would need a separate planning permission and would consequently fall to be assessed on its own merits.
- 2.3 A copy of the plans accompanying the application is **attached** as Appendix B. Other documentation associated with the application can be viewed on the council’s website, www.southoxon.gov.uk.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 3.1 **Bix & Assendon Parish Council** – Objects due to serious concerns about longer term usage for this purpose and will ruin this AONB that is appreciated by the local community. Permission for 1 month may create a precedent for longer term.

Forestry Officer (South Oxfordshire District Council) – The installation of a service trench for a power supply could be damaging to the adjacent woodland.

Neighbours – 7 representations received raising the following concerns:

- Impact on the AONB
- Detracts from the rural appearance of the site
- The trial period would open the door for a permanent installation
- No benefit to the local community
- Impact on valuable chalk grassland habitat

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 None relevant

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (SOCS) Policies

CS1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

CSEM1 - Supporting a successful economy

CSEM4 - Supporting economic development

CSEN1 - Landscape protection

CSQ3 - Design

CSS1 - The Overall Strategy

5.2 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP 2011) policies;

C9 - Loss of landscape features

D1 - Principles of good design

G2 - Protect district from adverse development

G4 - Protection of Countryside

TE1 - Telecommunication development

5.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

5.4 South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SODG 2016)

5.5 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main planning considerations for this proposal are:

1. The principle of the development
2. The impact on the landscape qualities of the Chilterns AONB
3. Other material considerations

The Principle of the Development

6.2 In recognising the importance of telecommunications for the needs of business, Policy TE1 of the SOLP is a permissive policy towards the installation of telecommunications equipment. With relevance to this proposal Policy TE1 requires that development is sited and designed to minimise visual intrusion and that it does not have a significant adverse effect on landscape character.

6.3 The NPPF is clear in its support for high quality communications infrastructure. The guidance states at Para. 42, 'Advanced, high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth. The development of high speed broadband technology and other communications networks also plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.' The guidance further advises that the local planning authority should 'not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the telecommunications system.' (Para. 46).

Furthermore, the NPPF (Para. 44) advises that a ban on the installation of telecommunications equipment in certain areas (such as AONBs) should not be imposed.

- 6.4 The equipment is required to test new technology and technical justification for the siting of the antennae has been outlined by the applicant as follows:

These antennae have site specific requirements which the subject site provides. The antennae must be placed on a Westward facing slope of a specific gradient in order to be able to receive data transmitted from the USA. Any suitable site must also be located well away from overhead power lines, industry or large towns which may disrupt radio reception. In all these circumstances few sites meet these requirements within the search area and this is the only site available which is also sited away from residential properties and historic assets and avoids long distance views.

- 6.5 In light of the above I consider that the principle of the development is acceptable. However, I would emphasise at this point that this is in relation to the testing period of one month and in my view further justification for the siting of the antennae on this site must be provided should a permanent installation be proposed.

The Impact on the Landscape Qualities of the Chilterns AONB

- 6.6 Policy CSEN1 of the SOCS states that ‘the district’s distinct landscape character and key features will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced’, and this includes giving high priority to the conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns AONB. Para. 115 of the NPPF states that ‘great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.’

- 6.7 The site is relatively remote and very rural in character and appearance, being dominated by a network of agricultural fields, hedgerows and woodlands. The site sits just below a ridgeline and there are fine views across the surrounding landscape from the site and the nearby public footpath. The development would be visible in views from the footpath and would appear as an incongruous form of development in this otherwise relatively unspoilt landscape. In this regard I do not consider that the development would conserve or enhance the landscape qualities of the AONB.

- 6.8 However, due to the characteristics of the development, it is apparent that its visual and landscape impact will be limited to the immediate locality. In views from further afield the visual impact of the development would be minimal due to the low height (2 metres) of the antennae, their open hoop design and green colour, and their siting below the ridgeline and against the backdrop of thick vegetation.

- 6.9 Crucially at this stage it is only proposed to install the equipment for one month in order to test its effectiveness. A condition is recommended to ensure that the equipment is removed after this time period. Evidently it is open to the applicant to submit a further application for the permanent siting of equipment if the testing proves successful. Such a proposal would be assessed on its own merits and it would be vital that the applicant demonstrate conclusively that other less sensitive locations would not be suitable. Overall given the characteristics of the development and the very short time period for its installation I consider that the demonstrable harm to the landscape qualities of the AONB would not outweigh the benefits of testing this new technology in the context of the potential economic advantages.

Other Material Considerations

6.10 The development is sited well away from any residential properties and there would be no discernible impact on the amenity of local residents.

6.11 The development would be sited on an area of grassland in the corner of a parcel of agricultural land. There would be no immediate threat to local habitats, including the nearby trees. The Forestry Officer has raised concerns about the potential power supply passing through the adjacent woodland and interfering with root systems. This is not required for the temporary siting of the equipment but in any case a condition is recommended to address this issue if power cabling is proposed.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 The application proposal would fail to conserve or enhance the landscape qualities of the Chilterns AONB. However, due to the modest scale of the development and its siting for a short time period the harm to the AONB would be limited and outweighed by the benefits of allowing this new technology to be tested. No material harm would be caused to neighbouring amenity.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 **To grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.**
2. **Temporary siting of the equipment for one month.**
3. **No groundworks within the root protection areas of any trees without written agreement.**

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