

Planning Committee Report	
Planning Ref:	TELO/2021/0198
Site:	Land at Scots Lane
Ward:	Bablake
Proposal:	Prior approval for the proposed installation of a 17.5m high monopole together with the installation of ground-based equipment cabinets and ancillary development
Case Officer:	Shamim Chowdhury

SUMMARY

The prior approval seeks to install a 17.5m monopole mast and associated equipment cabinets. As per Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO) certain telecommunications development such as masts and equipment cabinets are permitted development subject to the local planning authority approving siting, design and appearance.

BACKGROUND

The proposed installation is part of Vodafone's network upgrade to rollout 5G network in the area. The proposal has amended and reduced the mast height from 20m to 17.5m in order to minimise visual impact. The proposed mast and equipment cabinets would be shared with Telefonica (O2 network).

KEY FACTS

Reason for report to committee:	Cllr Williams called in
Current use of site:	Highway grass verge
Proposed use of site:	Telecommunication Infrastructure

RECOMMENDATION

Planning committee are recommended to grant Prior Approval subject to compliance with the submitted drawings.

REASON FOR DECISION

- The proposal is acceptable in principle.
- The proposal will have limited adverse impact upon the visual amenity of the area; however, the social and economic benefits of the proposal would outweigh visual harm.
- The proposal falls within the criteria of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO) and accords with the NPPF.

BACKGROUND

APPLICATION PROPOSAL

The application seeks prior approval for the erection of a 17.5m high mono-pole mast and associated equipment cabinets as part of 5G network rollout by Vodafone. There are three equipment cabinets in association with the proposed mono pole mast as ancillary development. Two of the equipment cabinets measure in floor area 1.6m X 0.8m (1.44m²) and 0.7m X 0.8m (0.56m²) with a height of 1.6m and the other cabinet is fairly small in floor area with a height of 1m. The height of the proposed monopole has been amended and reduced from 20m to 17.5m to minimise impact on the visual amenity of the street scene.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is a grass verge along the west side of Scots Lane around 22m north of Hollyfast Road junction. There is footpath along the grass verge and beyond which is Bablake School Playground. There is a palisade fence separating the playing field from the public footpath and grass verge. There is a mature tree line on the edge of the playground along the public footpath and one mature tree on the grass verge adjacent to the proposed mast. The site is opposite Coundon reservoir and away from residential properties. There are residential properties to the north-east and south-west of the application site.

PLANNING HISTORY

There are no historic planning applications on this site.

POLICY

National Policy Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so.

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) adds further context to the NPPF and it is intended that the two documents are read together.

Local Policy Guidance

The current local policy is provided within the Coventry Local Plan 2016, which was adopted by Coventry City Council on 6th December 2017. Relevant policy relating to this application is:

Policy DE1 Ensuring High Quality Design
Policy C1 Telecommunications

Supplementary Planning Guidance/ Documents (SPG/ SPD):

SPG Telecommunications – A Design Guide, September 2005

CONSULTATION

No Objections received from:

- Highways
- Environmental Protection

Three site notices were posted on 14th February 2021.

Four letters of objection including one from former Councillor Glenn Williams have been received, raising the following material planning considerations:

- a) The proposed mast is close to an existing mast
- b) The proposed mast would harm the open landscape area
- c) Would appear unsightly and harm the visual amenity of the street scene.
- d) The siting of the mast proximity to two primary schools and a school playing field
- e) There are already three masts in the area why another one is required.

Any further comments received will be reported within late representations.

APPRAISAL

The proposals are permitted development under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the GPDO. Therefore, the main issues in determining this application are siting and design only, as matters for consideration for prior approval.

Siting, Design and Appearance

The NPPF recognises that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G). Nevertheless, paragraph 113 of the NPPF suggests that the number of masts should be kept to a minimum and where new sites are required (such as for new 5G networks), equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

Paragraph 115 of the NPPG suggests that Applications for electronic communications development (including applications for prior approval under the General Permitted Development Order) should be supported by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development. This should include:

- a) the outcome of consultations with organisations with an interest in the proposed development, in particular with the relevant body where a mast is to be installed near a school or college, or and
- b) for an addition to an existing mast or base station, a statement that self-certifies that the cumulative exposure, when operational, will not exceed International Commission guidelines on non-ionising radiation protection; or
- c) for a new mast or base station, evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met.

Policy DE1 of the Coventry Local Plan 2016 seeks to ensure that development complements or enhances the character of the surrounding area.

Policy C2 related to Telecommunication on Coventry Local Plan 2016 states that when considering notifications, planning applications and prior approval applications, regard will be given to the following factors:

- a) operational requirements of the telecommunication networks and the technical limitations of the technology, including any technical constraints on the location of telecommunications apparatus;

- b) the need for the ICNIRP Guidelines (and any other relevant guidance in place at the time of the application) for safe emissions to be met;
- c) the potential for sharing existing masts, buildings and other structures; and
- d) the impact of the development on its surroundings with particular regard to the following criteria:
 - i. the visual amenity, character or appearance of the surrounding area.
 - ii. apparatus and associated structures sited on a building should be sited and designed in order to seek to minimise impact to the external appearance of the host building.
 - iii. development should not have an unacceptable effect on conservation areas or buildings of architectural or historic interest or areas of ecological interest or areas of landscape value or sites of archaeological importance.
 - iv. the proposed provision of landscaping.

The Council's SPG "Telecommunications – A Design Guide" states that within a residential area monopole masts, street works type masts and antenna on buildings may be acceptable provided that they are sited carefully and designed in relation to dwellings and the street scene. Whilst the Council recognises that some elements of this SPG are out of date with regards legislation, the criteria, nonetheless, used in the assessment of prior notification submissions are still relevant, as acknowledged by the Local Plan Inspector when the SPG was carried forward to the new Local Plan.

The SPG states that "Monopole masts may be acceptable within such areas provided that they will:

- Demonstrate that no alternative sites are available;
- Not be visually prominent in the street scene or from dwellings due to height and/or design structures;
- Be screened from public areas by buildings, structures or vegetation;
- Not be more than 2 metres higher than their visual scree; and
- Be colour coated to reduce visual prominent (including equipment cabinets and security fencing).

The application site which is a grass verge between public footpath and carriageway is fairly open and on a landscape setting. There are no buildings close to the site and a large area of playing fields to the west and concealed reservoir ground to the east. A mature tree line within the field provides screening. There is a mature tree on the grass verge to the south of the site nearer to the junction of Hollyfast Road and Scots Lane. The proposed mast would sit on its own around 13m away from the tree which is on the grass verge and in the backdrop of trees which are on the playing field. The view of the mast from Hollyfast Road and from the surrounding area will be less prominent as it would be seen in the backdrop of the mature trees. Due to the siting and road layout of Scots Lane adjacent to the proposed site, which is fairly open and a straight stretch of road, the view from Scots Lane will be more striking in particular to pedestrians and motorists. This view would be less striking to the motorists from south to north direction due to the existing mature tree screening the mast partially. The proposed mast would be away from the direct visibility line of the surrounding residential properties.

There is an existing telecommunications street pole at Westhill Road used by two operators, but this mast only provides 4G coverage. In addition, there is one EE 4G mast on the Coundon Reservoir to the east of the proposed site. The applicant states that this site is to the far east of the existing installation on Westhill Road to replicate coverage.

Moreover, the base station would require significant redevelopment to accommodate operators' (Vodafone) equipment. With regards to the existing mast on Westhill Road, the applicant states that there is no comparable street works solution that can accommodate 5G antennas for both Vodafone and Telefonica. It would require significant redevelopment and a completely new mast of substantial width and height, as well as taking up the majority of land at its base. Therefore, the applicant considered that redevelopment would be inappropriate within the streetscene, compromise pedestrian movements and impact on highway safety. The existing mast on Bablake Playing Fields close to Norman Place cannot provide coverage to Scots Lane as it is too far away.

The proposed mast and equipment cabinets are to create a new base to provide 5G coverage. The applicant indicates that a new mast and base is required due to technology involved in providing 5G network coverage. It is also operator's (Vodafone) licence obligations to upgrade and enhance their network services to deliver new 5G technologies in this area. In addition, the proposed monopole and cabinets would be shared by other telecommunications operators (Vodafone and Telephonica) which would help to reduce the proliferation of electronic communication masts.

Negotiations have been sought to reduce the height of the mast further, however it is understood that certain height is essential for the requirements of 5G installation and the applicant insists that the height of the proposed development must be sufficient to enable local provision and clear surrounding buildings and trees. The applicant also demonstrated that the other existing sites were considered as site selection strategy to minimise environmental impact and established that the current site for a new mast and base station is the most viable option in this area.

It is acknowledged that the mast will be 2.5 metres higher than the preferred height set out in the Council's Telecommunications SPG and also due to its siting within an open roadside location would have some impact on the visual amenity of the street scene. However, this impact needs to be assessed against the public benefits of the proposal. The introduction of 5G coverage in the area will contribute to delivering a modern, advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure that supports a range of consumers, including the emergency services. It follows, then, that the delivery of such high-end technology will support economic growth and the local community by enabling fast and reliable communication to take place, for example by helping people gain employment, access services, support their health and well-being, whilst also assisting new technologies. The proposal would also support the Governments aims regarding 'levelling up' digital connectivity.

The applicant has provided a Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines, ensuring that the proposed telecommunications equipment will be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).

Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal does not strictly accord with the Telecommunications SPG, given the characteristics of the site and surrounding location, it is not considered that the proposal will result in serious harm to the visual amenity of the street scene or the character of the area.

The proposal will improve 5G coverage in this area, and the NPPF seeks to support high quality communications, and therefore the limited harm which results from the development is outweighed by the social and economic benefits which would be brought by the proposed development in the area.

The applicant confirms that the mast and cabinets will be coloured RAL 9005 Black to blend in with the existing street furniture and minimise the impact upon the urban streetscapes.

Equality Implications

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 created the public sector equality duty. Section 149 states:-

(1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Officers have taken this into account and given due regard to this statutory duty, and the matters specified in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 in the determination of this application. There are no known equality implications arising directly from this development.

Conclusion

The proposal falls within the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO) and in line with guidance of the NPPF and therefore it is recommended that the prior approval is not required and those details, having been submitted, are acceptable.