

10 DCNE2003/3181/F - INSTALLATION OF 21M SLIM LINE LATTICE MAST WITH ANTENNAS ATTACHED AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TWO CABINETS AND ANCILLARY DEVELOPMENTS AT LAND ADJACENT TO A4103, STIFFORDS BRIDGE, WORCESTERSHIRE, WR13 5EL

For: Vodafone Ltd per Daly International, Fairbank House, Ashley Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA14 2DP

Date Received:
21st October 2003

Ward:
Hope End

Grid Ref:
74041, 48034

Expiry Date:
16th December 2003

Local Members: Councillor R. Mills and Councillor R. Stockton

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The site is located on the northern side of the A4103 immediately east of a property known as Pontic and Mill Bank Garage, approximately 1/3 mile north of Cradley. The site for the mast is a disused small quarry, which is largely enclosed by a copse of mature and semi mature trees. Ground levels rise northwards and eastwards within and surrounding the site. An existing vehicular access track runs along the western boundary of the site which is also designated as a Public Right of Way number CD73.
- 1.2 The applicants propose the erection of a 21-metre high slim line lattice mast. Fixed to the top would be six panel antennae taking the total height of the structure to 23.5 metres. Also proposed is a 600 mm dish at a height of 20 metres along with the associated equipment cabinets all sited within the a fenced compound. The proposed site for the mast falls within the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is also designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value.

2. Policies

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 – Telecommunications

Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan

CTC1 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CTC2 – Areas of Great Landscape Value
CTC9 – Development Requirements

Malvern Hills District Local Plan

Conservation Policy 18 – Telecommunications Equipment
Landscape Policy 1 – Development Outside Settlement Boundaries
Landscape Policy 2 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Landscape Policy 3 – Development in Areas of Great Landscape Value

Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Deposit Draft)

CF3 – Telecommunications

LA1 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

LA2 – Landscape Character and Areas Least Resilient to Change

S2 – Development Requirements

3. Planning History

None.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 Malvern Hills Joint Advisory Committee Planning Group comment as follows: 'The application does not conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB designation and therefore it is recommended that permission is not granted.'

Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 The Head of Engineering and Transportation has no objection.
- 4.3 The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards have no objection.
- 4.4 The Public Rights of Way Manager has no objections subject to the Public Right of Way remaining open and unobstructed at all times.
- 4.5 The Chief Conservation Officer comments as follows: 'Although the mast would have a slight adverse impact on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Great Landscape Value from some view points, we think on balance, that the site would be acceptable in visual terms. This is because the mast is located close to a main road, and close to existing buildings rather than on an isolated, exposed site, and it can be served by an existing track.'

5. Representations

- 5.1 Cradley Parish Council do not object but raise the following concerns:
- a) We prefer to see a single dark colour
 - b) On health grounds for Pontic Cottage and the workshops at Mill Bank Garage
 - c) An agreement to maintain tree covering in what is currently in an area of mature trees
- 5.2 Ten letters of objection have been received along with a petition also objecting signed by 224 people. The main points raised are:
- a) Storridge is listed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the mast and equipment are unsightly and will detract from the visual amenity of the area.
 - b) The mast is extremely close to Pontic Cottage and the Coghill Report states that ideally, a mast should be at least 500 metres from inhabited property. This is clearly not the case with this application.
 - c) The proposal will devalue our property and will exempt families from wishing to live in Pontic House in the future.

- d) I am concerned with the proximity of the mast to the new Cradley village school in terms of the health risk. Evidence shows that radiation emissions are harmful and could cause cancer to people living nearby.
- e) The entrance to the site is in a dangerous place as it is on a corner of the busy A413 road.
- f) There is sufficient mobile signal in the area and therefore there is no need for the proposed mast.

5.3 A further letter making comment has been received from the Chairman of the Ledbury and District CPRE requesting a demonstration mast is erected to assess the visual impact of the proposal and that all equipment at ground level should be adequately screened.

5.4 Supporting information has been provided by the applicant, which will be referred to in the Officers Appraisal.

5.5 The full text of these letters and petition can be inspected at Northern Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

6. Officers Appraisal

6.1 This application has been submitted following pre-application discussions with your officers as part of the pre-roll out requirements stipulated in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (PPG8). The assessment of the proposal can be categorised under three main headings:

- 1 Need for the development
- 2 Impact of the development within the landscape
- 3 Health issues associated with the development

Need for the Mast

6.2 The mast is required to provide both basic mobile phone coverage (second generation-2G) and third generation (3G) coverage for the Storrige and Cradley area. The applicants have provided coverage plots to demonstrate that existing coverage within the area is of insufficient strength to provide a continued and reliable service. In fact, there is little or no coverage in the locality around the site for the mast. The mast is also proposed to enable the applicants to proceed with the rollout of the third generation telecommunications technology. 3G Technology provides mobile phone users with enhanced services such as Internet, email, picture messaging etc. Each mobile phone operator is required under the terms of the licence to provide a 3G network covering 80% of the population by 2007. This combined with increased usage of mobile phone technology means that both existing mast installations have to be upgraded and further masts are required. 3G Technology in particular operates at higher frequencies, but can only travel shorter distances. As such the technical constraints of 3G Technology are that further base stations are required over a smaller geographical area.

6.3 Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 states that planning authorities should have regard to any technical constraints on the location of the proposed development. The need for the mast both in terms of basic coverage provision and as part of the wider network in the area is a material planning consideration and therefore must be given due weight. Four alternative sites in the area were explored as required by PPG8 and have proved to be inappropriate largely as they would not provide the required signal coverage. Your

officers are satisfied that the need has been satisfactorily demonstrated and the chosen site is the most appropriate in terms of coverage provision.

Impact of the Development within the Landscape

6.4 This is a particularly important consideration given that the mast is to be sited within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The mast and antenna is required at a particular operating height, which allows coverage to be provided without significant obstruction from topography or vegetation. As such, whilst there is existing tree coverage within the area, the top section of the mast will be visible from a southerly and easterly vantage point during the summer and more so during the winter when the trees have lost their foliage. The mast will also be clearly visible from the adjoining Public Right of Way. However, much of the mast is viewed against a backdrop of existing trees and where this is not the case, there is higher ground in the middle distance which also forms a backdrop.

6.5 A slim line lattice mast is also proposed which is triangular in shape measuring around 700mm in width. This is the smallest form of slim line lattice mast available. The small dimensions allied with the fact that it will be transparent and is to be painted olive green will further assist in minimising the impact of the development within the AONB. Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that the mast will not conserve or enhance the landscape qualities of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is not considered that the impact is so significant as to warrant refusal. This view is shared by the Council's Landscape Officer who states that while the mast will have a slight adverse impact on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from some viewpoints, on balance, the site is acceptable in visual terms.

Health Effects

6.6 The third consideration when assessing such proposals is the possible health risks of the mast. This would appear to be the principal concern of the majority of the objectors who have particular concerns about the proximity of the mast to the new primary school currently being constructed around 500 metres south of the site. The health risks can be summarised as the electromagnetic fields (EMF's) transmitted from the mast and its antenna. All new mast installations are required to meet the International Commission on Non Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) standards. PPG8 states "... the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. If a proposed mobile phone base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in the processing of an application for planning permission to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them". The applicants have submitted a statement confirming that the proposed installation would meet ICNIRP's guidelines. In fact, the radio frequency level exposure from the mast is 0.0055 watts per square metre at a distance of 285 metres. This is over 18,000 times lower than the recommended ICNIRP maximum exposure standard of 9 watts per square metre. As such the requirements laid out by Central Government in relation to the health issues have been satisfied.

6.7 In addition, the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR), which is an update of the Stewart Report produced by the Government, published the results of their research on 14th January 2004. This group has analysed the findings of the Stewart report and all related research on mobile phones to date. The conclusions of the AGNIR report replicate that of the Stewart Report in that there is no evidence that mobile phones or masts have an adverse health impact. "Exposure levels from living near to mobile phone base stations are extremely low and the overall evidence indicates that they are

unlikely to pose a risk to health” (AGNIR report). Therefore, based upon the information, advice and research undertaken thus far and particularly the guidance contained within the current adopted Development Plan policies and PPG8 outlined above it is not considered that the mast will pose any unacceptable health risks for nearby properties or Cradley primary school beyond.

6.8 The applicants have also indicated that it is possible for the existing mast to be shared with other operators depending upon their technical constraints and operational needs. This is a further consideration in assessing the appropriateness of the development, as it is likely that other operators will be seeking coverage in the application area over the next few years.

6.9 The applicants have therefore demonstrated a need for the mast to provide both 2G and 3G coverage within the search area and that the mast satisfies all the current Government health considerations in terms of emissions. The mast will have an impact within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and arguably, will have an adverse impact in the landscape. However, weighing up all the other considerations associated with application including the need for coverage in the area, the proposal is considered acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

1 - A01 (Time limit for commencement (full permission))

Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2 - A08 (Development in accordance with approved plans and materials)

Reason: To ensure adherence to the approved plans and to protect the general character and amenities of the area.

Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.