

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee

1st June 2005

AUTHOR: Director of Development Services

S/0611/05/F - Elsworth Erection of 12 Metre High Telecommunications Pole 0.3 Metre Microwave Dish for Broadband Services

Recommendation: Approve

Date for Determination: 27th May 2005

Site and Proposal

1. This is an application, received on 1st April 2005, for full planning consent for the erection of a proposed telecommunications mast to be located to the south west of the main school buildings at Elsworth Primary School, Broad End, Elsworth.
2. The proposal comprises a 12 metre high tubular mast with a diameter of 273 mm at its base and 89 mm at its apex, constructed of galvanized steel, with a consequent grey finish. It would carry a single "dish" measuring 300 mm in diameter and finished in white enamel paint.
3. The supporting documentation included information from Cambridgeshire County Council confirming that the proposed mast and associated equipment forms part of the Cambridge Community Network designed to enable schools to receive broadband. It was also accompanied by a health and safety risk assessment which states that the County Council is satisfied that the proposed sites for the installation of the point-to-point wireless connection are not a source of harm to its employees, school pupils or other service recipients, visitors to the premises or the community at large.

Planning History

4. The only relevant planning history consists of an application (**S/0117/05/PNT**) submitted under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, to determine whether the prior approval of the Local Planning Authority was required in respect of the siting and appearance of the mast. The developer was advised in February 2005 that prior consent was required.

Planning Policy

5. **Policy CS8: Telecommunications** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 advises as follows:

In determining whether approval of siting and appearance is required, or considering applications for planning permission for telecommunication installations, the District Council will need to be satisfied that:

- (1) *The siting and external appearance of apparatus have been designed to minimise the impact of such apparatus on amenity, while respecting operational efficiency;*
- (2) *In the case of radio masts, the applicant has shown evidence that it has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building mast or other structure;*
- (3) *Antenna have, so far as is practicable, been sited so as to minimise their effect on the external appearance of the building on which they are installed;*
- (4) *Applicants have considered any need to include additional structural capacity to take account of the growing demands for network development, including that of other operators, to facilitate future mast sharing.*

Proposals for the location of telecommunication installations will not be permitted where they have an unacceptable visual impact on the urban or rural landscape, unless the applicant can demonstrate that no alternative more appropriate site is available.

6. **Policy P6/5 -Telecommunications** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 encourages the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems.
7. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: Telecommunications** is also relevant to this application.

Consultations

8. **Elsworth Parish Council** draws attention to the points made in respect of the previous submission (reproduced below) and suggests that the mast should be situated to the rear of the school.

“Strong objection to the siting of the mast in line of sight from the kitchen window of the neighbouring dwelling at No. 15 Broad End. It was suggested that the mast be sited to the rear of the school. This would not intrude on the visibility of residents and would not affect the purpose of the mast. In addition, the Parish Council wished the mast to be painted green in order to blend in with the surrounding foliage.”
9. **Chief Environmental Health Officer:** Concern expressed regarding safety issues, encouraging a precautionary approach and suggesting that the siting should minimise potential exposure to local residents by avoiding residential developments and school grounds.
10. **Conservation Manager:** The siting of this particular dish is just outside the boundaries of the Conservation Area, but will be more prominent than some and will be visible from within the Conservation Area, though I accept that it will be partially screened by the adjacent trees. Whilst not necessarily supporting the current proposal, I do not wish to object to this application.

Representations

11. No representations have been received from local residents in respect of this application for planning consent. Given that the development now proposed corresponds to that which was previously subject to the prior notification, and the

potential for local residents not to recognise that this is a separate application, the representations previously received are reproduced below.

12. Four letters of objection were thus received from the residents of Lordship Farmhouse, Broad End, Ivyfold, Broad End, 8 Fardell's Lane and Elm Lodge, Meadow Drift, with the latter correspondence endorsed by a resident of No. 15 Broad End. These letters variously comment as follows:
- Aesthetic concerns (unspecified).
 - Known health issues associated with such equipment, including childhood leukaemia.
 - These reasons were referred to in the recent application at Alphabet Nursery in Whittesley and upheld.
 - A school should not be exploited for commercial purposes.
 - There must be more suitable sites in the area.
 - Interference to television, radio and mobile phone reception.
 - Limited consultation period.
 - Lack of information.
 - Parish Council unable to assist.
 - Detailed technical questions remain unanswered.
 - Request for a local meeting.

Planning Comments

13. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires that applications for planning consent be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In that context, it is suggested that Policy CS8 of the Local Plan, reproduced above, is most directly applicable to this application.
14. The supporting information provided by the applicants relating to the intended use of the mast effectively precludes the possibility of mast sharing. Furthermore, the required height of the proposed mast effectively precludes the possibility of erecting the equipment on an existing building or other structure. The proposal dish would be mounted on a mast, rather than on an existing structure. The remaining policy requirement is, therefore, that the siting and external appearance of apparatus should be designed to minimise the impact of such apparatus on amenity, while respecting operational efficiency.
15. Against the above background it is noted that the proposed mast would be sited on a grassed area within the school grounds, currently used for car parking, approximately 3.7 metres and 5.5 metres from a Silver Birch and a Sycamore tree respectively. It would be located approximately 11 metres west of the boundary of the Elsworth Conservation Area but would be visible from various locations within that Conservation Area. It would be located approximately 7.7 metres north of the nearest part of the school buildings which rise to a maximum of 7.5 metres in height. The school building would therefore provide a partial backdrop to the proposed 12 metre high mast in relation to some views from within the Conservation Area. Additional screening would be provided by the above trees.

16. Elsworth Parish Council has suggested that the mast should be sited to the rear of the school buildings. The supporting information referred to above states that other sites within the school grounds have been considered but that these would necessitate a mast of 15 or 18 metres in height. Subject to the details of any such alternative siting, it is possible that the lower half of the mast could be completely screened from views within the Conservation Area. Nevertheless, the above comments suggest that any such revised siting would result in the upper half, or potentially more, of the proposed mast being visible above the roof of the main school building.
17. With regard to the Parish Council's comments concerning the impact upon views from the kitchen window of Number 15 Broad End, it is questioned whether the proposed mast, with a maximum diameter of 300 mm located approximately twenty metres away from the window, would have any significant impact upon the standards of amenity that might reasonably be expected to be enjoyed by the occupiers of that dwelling. Moreover dependant upon its precise siting, an existing well-established shrub would be likely to effectively screen the lower portion of the mast when viewed from the window in question.
18. With regard to the comments concerning the colour finish, it is suggested that whatever shade of green might be selected this would be likely to clash with the leaves of some of the nearby trees which would, of course, partly obscure the mast. Given that the two neighbouring trees are deciduous, for much of the year there would be no leaves for the mast to "blend in" with. Rather, the grey galvanised finish may well be the most appropriate means of minimising the visual impact against the backdrop of autumn and winter skies.
19. The concerns of local residents and the Chief Environmental Health Officer regarding safety issues, and their significance for the siting of the proposed mast, have been addressed by the Local Education Authority. It is also understood that the proposed siting, having been agreed with the Local Education Authority as landlord and client, addresses any potential concerns relating to pedestrian safety.
20. The procedural issues raised by one local resident related specifically to the previous prior notification, the processing of which was subject to a limited timescale. The availability, or otherwise, of information via the Parish Council is not considered to be directly relevant. Comprehensive details were supplied to the Local Planning Authority and have been made available for public inspection and to the Parish Council in connection with their consultation.
21. One resident raised concern in relation to the potential for interference to television, radio or mobile phone signals. Annexe 2 of PPG8 states where "...potential interference is causing genuine local concern, one or other of the parties may wish to seek the help of experts to assess the likelihood and degree of interference, but authorities should not seek out such problems for critical examination unnecessarily." In the latter context, no information has been provided on this matter beyond the above comments. Annexe 2 continues "It is unlikely that refusal of planning permission would be justified on the grounds of radio interference from a transmitter or non-radio equipment alone except in extreme cases."
22. Other matters raised by local residents are largely addressed by the above comments.

23. In summary, it is concluded that the proposed development would not have an unacceptable visual impact on the urban or rural landscape. Moreover, the potential alternative sites that might be available, having regard to the proposed use of the mast, are likely to have a greater impact upon the appearance and character of the locality including the adjoining Conservation Area.
24. Having regard to the above comments and all other material considerations it is recommended that consent be granted for the development proposed subject to the conditions outlined below.

Recommendation

25. Approval, subject to the following conditions:
 1. Standard Condition A -Time limited permission (Reason A);
 2. The mast and associated equipment hereby approved shall not be used other than for the provision of broadband services to Elsworth Primary School. (Reason -The information provided by the developer to the Local Planning Authority relates to the provision of broadband services to Elsworth Primary School. Any additional or alternative use of the mast hereby approved would involve an assessment of other material considerations in accordance with Policy CS8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.)
 3. Within one month of the development hereby approved ceasing to be used the Local Planning Authority shall be notified accordingly in writing. Within four months of such notification all apparatus including the mast and any associated equipment, fencing and hard surfacing shall be removed from the land; and the land shall be restored in accordance with a scheme submitted to and approved in writing by Local Planning Authority. (Reason -To ensure the mast and associated equipment is removed from the site when the need for the structure ceases in order to avoid dereliction in the countryside.)

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003: P6/5** (Telecommunications)
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: CS8** (Telecommunications).
2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Residential amenity.
 - Visual impact on the locality
 - Impact upon setting of adjacent Conservation Area

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file Ref S/0611/05/F and S/0117/05/PNT

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