

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 5th July 2006
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0985/06/PNT - Stapleford
**15 Metre High Telecommunications Monopole and Associated Development at
London Road for O2 (UK) Ltd**

Recommendation: Prior Approval for Siting and Appearance
Date for Determination: 10th July 2006

Site and Proposal

1. The site forms part of the grass verge located on the west side of London Road (A1301), approximately 40 metres south of its junction with Bury Road and 60 metres north of a bridge crossing the River Granta. Between the proposed site and the bridge are two monopole style masts, an 11.8 metre high structure utilised by Orange and a 12 metre high Vodafone mast, and associated equipment cabinets. Also within this stretch of grass verge between the bridge and Bury Road junction are a number of items of street furniture including lampposts and street signage. A row of mature trees lies on the west side of the verge.
2. The site lies on the south side of the village, approximately 50 metres away from No.100 London Road to the north and around 30 metres away from No.2 Bury Road (known as Grove House) to the north-west.
3. The prior notification, received on 15th May 2006 and amended on 20th June 2006, proposes the erection of a 15 metre high monopole style mast, incorporating 3 antennae, and associated equipment cabinet measuring 1.9m x 0.8m x 1.65m high. The mast would be painted light grey and the cabinet dark green. The mast is designed to provide coverage to parts of Great Shelford and Stapleford, an area that is currently poorly served by the O2 2G and 3G network. A 15 metre high mast was chosen in order to clear the surrounding trees which are approximately 14-15 metres in height. The proposal is permitted development but the prior approval of the Authority is required to siting and appearance. This decision has to be received by the applicant within 56 days of the Authority's receipt of the application.
4. The application is accompanied by a supporting statement which acknowledges that there are two other nearby existing masts within London Road. However, sharing one of these would involve considerable redevelopment in terms of height and girth which it is argued would be inappropriate in the street scene. Three alternative sites were considered but discounted prior to the submission of the application:
 - a. The Railway Tavern, Station Road, Great Shelford – discounted as would not provide coverage required;
 - b. Welch Group, Granta Terrace, Stapleford – site provider not interested in hosting an installation;
 - c. The Rose Inn, London Road, Stapleford – no suitable location within the grounds for an installation.
 - d. Land in the southern part of the search area is located in the Green Belt and was therefore discounted on policy grounds.

5. The application is accompanied by a Declaration of Conformity with the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Public Exposure Guidelines.
6. The application has been amended by the submission of a Flood Risk Assessment. The site lies within flood zone 2 of the River Granta. The FRA states that the building footprint will be 1.52m² for the cabinet and 0.51m² for the column. The negligible increase in surface water run-off resulting from this increased footprint will drain freely via infiltration through surrounding grass coverage. The levels of the cabinet and column would be 16.52m AOD and 16.50m AOD respectively. The modelled flood level is 16.50m. As such, all equipment can sit at existing ground level without the need for any ground raising works.

Planning History

7. **S/1075/03/PNT** – Prior approval granted for 11.8 metre high lamppost style mast for Orange, around 10 metres to the south of the presently proposed site, subject to the associated equipment cabinet being painted olive green.
8. **S/1567/04/PNT** – Prior approval granted for 12 metre high telecommunications pole further to the south for Vodafone subject to the same condition, as above, requiring the equipment cabinets to be painted olive green.

Planning Policy

9. **Policy P6/5** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 encourages the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems to ensure people have equitable access to a wide range of services.
10. **Policy CS8** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 advises that, in considering applications for telecommunications installations, the District Council will need to be satisfied that: the siting and external appearance of apparatus has been designed to minimise the impact on amenity, while respecting operational efficiency; and the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure has been explored. Proposals for the location of installations will not be permitted where they have an unacceptable visual impact unless the applicant can demonstrate that no alternative more appropriate site is available.
11. **Planning Policy Guidance Note No.8 (PPG8)** – “Telecommunications” states that the Government’s policy is to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. With regards to health impacts PPG8 states that health considerations and public concern can in principle be material considerations in determining applications. However, it is the Government’s firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards and, if a proposed base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure, it should not be necessary for a local planning authority to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them.

Consultation

12. **Stapleford Parish Council** objects to the application stating:

“It was felt that there are perceived health risks from the emissions from these installations. It was also felt that another mast and relevant equipment would make too much clutter on one site.”

13. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** has considered the implications of the proposal in terms of emission of electronic radiation (EMFs). Currently clinical and epidemiological studies cannot clarify health effects associated with low level RF exposure. However, it is believed that further studies are required to confirm whether or not the findings are correct.
14. It is proposed that the minimum standards on the UK should follow the recommendations of ICNIRP. To this end, the applicant should be encouraged to provide monitoring data that proves that installations meet current guidelines at a minimum and should be encouraged to look for sites which, in so far as is practically possible, minimise potential exposure of local residents, avoiding proximity to sensitive areas, e.g. residential developments and school grounds. Transmitter antennae should be positioned so that they project their energy beams towards the horizon and not below. The beam of greatest intensity should not fall on any part of the sensitive location (e.g. school grounds or buildings) without agreement from the occupier(s) (e.g. school and parents). The developer should be discouraged from mounting antennae on building walls where rooms immediately behind such walls will be regularly occupied by people.
15. From a public health protection standpoint, the above approach is justifiably precautionary. The measures outlined will ensure that any potential health risks are minimised, whilst allowing flexibility to raise thresholds if scientific data permits.

Representations

16. An objection has been received from Grove House in Bury Road who makes the following points:
 - a. There are two existing masts nearby. This 3rd mast would be even closer to Grove House;
 - b. The owners have 5 children under the age of 11. Government advice is not to place mobile phone masts adjacent to schools and the owners wish to take whatever action is necessary to prevent their children being exposed to the electromagnetic radiation from 3 powerful transmitters;
 - c. Could the mast be located outside the village, say 50 metres further down London Road towards Sawston?

Planning Comments – Key Issues

17. The key issues to consider in the determination of this application for prior approval are:
 - a. Visual Impact;
 - b. Public health;
 - c. Alternative sites and site sharing;
 - d. Flood risk.
18. The mast would be sited within the grass verge adjacent to the A1301, London Road. There are two existing masts within an approximately 50 metre long stretch of verge between the River Granta and Bury Road, as well as lampposts, a telegraph pole and street signs. The mast will be seen alongside these other items of street furniture within the verge and against a backdrop of mature trees to the west of the site.

Although very visible from the road, the development would not, in my view, have a harmful visual impact upon the character of the area. Although I can understand the Parish Council's concerns regarding street clutter, I consider it to be preferable to add to this clutter adjacent to the built up part of the village than to erect a mast on an undeveloped site either within or outside the village. Indeed the erection of a mast outside the village framework and, hence, within the Green Belt, would be contrary to planning policy, when an alternative non-Green Belt site is available.

19. With regards to the health impacts of the mast, the site is not located near to a school, being approximately 380 metres away as the crow flies, and, in this respect, adopts a precautionary approach as recommended within the Government's advice and Environmental Health Officer's response. A statement of ICNIRP compliance has been submitted with the application. However, this relates solely to the impact of the proposed mast itself and fails to take into account the combined impact of the proposed and two existing masts. A combined ICNIRP Certificate is currently being prepared by the Operators and will need to be considered further by the EHO, with regards to the combined health effects of all three masts on local residents, once received.
20. The Vodafone and Orange masts located near to the site are not capable of being shared and would require increases in their height and girth to do so. Given that operators normally require a vertical separation of around 7 metres between antennae, a mast capable of being occupied by all three operators would need to be in the region of 25 – 30 metres high. Such a mast would be far more prominent and harmful to the street scene, in my opinion, than the combined impact of three slimline structures. The operator has also considered the possibility of sharing existing built-up sites at The Rose Inn, The Railway Tavern and the Granta Terrace Industrial Estate. I would be very supportive of an application to site a mast at the latter location where it would have a lesser visual impact than the site presently proposed. However, the owner of the land is not interested in hosting an installation.
21. The application has been accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment which demonstrates that the mast and equipment cabinet would be sited no lower than the modelled flood level of 16.50m AOD.

Recommendation

22. Subject to the receipt of a combined Certificate of ICNIRP compliance and no objections being raised by the Chief Environmental Health Officer, grant prior approval for the siting and appearance of the mast, as amended by Flood Risk Assessment date stamped 20th June 2006, subject to the following conditions:
 - a. The minimum ground floor level of the mast and equipment cabinet, hereby permitted, must be at least 16.50m AOD, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority (Reason – To provide reasonable freeboard against flooding);
 - b. The roadside cabinet shall be painted olive green to minimize visual intrusion.
23. Alternatively, if the applicant fails to submit a satisfactory ICNIRP compliance certificate prior to the determination date of 10th July 2006, Officers are seeking delegated powers to refuse the notification on the basis that it fails to demonstrate there would be no adverse health risks to nearby residents, by reason of its siting.

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

- Planning Policy Guidance Note No.8 – Telecommunications
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Planning application references S/0985/06/PNT, S/1567/04/PNT and S/1075/03/PNT

Contact Officer: Lorraine Casey – Senior Planning Assistant
Telephone: (01954) 713251