

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 6th October 2004
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0690/04/F - Grantchester
Erection of 17.5 Metre High Telecommunications Tower and Associated Development at Land to the South of Fulbrooke Road, Cambridge and West of Cambridge Rugby Football Ground - for Hutchison 3G UK Ltd

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Departure application

Site and Proposal

1. The site lies to the north of the village of Grantchester close to the Cambridge City border, within the Cambridge Green Belt in the north west corner of the field that lies to the west of the Cambridge Rugby Football Ground. To the north is a belt of trees, to the west an approximately 50m long line of trees and the open field to the east and south. The eastern boundary of the field is marked with trees and hedgerow and to the south is a farm track.
2. The full planning application, received on 31st March 2004, proposes the erection of a 17.5m high lattice type mast with 3 vertical antennae and 3 dishes attached. The compound surrounding the mast has an area of approximately 36m².
3. The closest dwellings are in Fulbrooke Road. The closest of these, 47 Fulbrooke Road lies some 230-240m away from the mast.
4. The application is accompanied by a Declaration of Conformity with International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Public Exposure Guidelines.
5. The application has been advertised as a departure from the Development Plan.

Planning History

6. There is no history of relevance to the application.

Planning Policy

7. **Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 8 - Telecommunications**
8. This guidance note is a material consideration to which significant weight should be attached. Its general policies are set out below:
 1. "The Government's policy is to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems whilst keeping the environmental impact to a minimum. The Government also has responsibility for protecting public health.

2. The aim of telecommunications policy is to ensure that people have a choice as to who provides their telecommunications service, a wider range of services from which to choose and equitable access to the latest technologies as they become available.
 3. The Government places great emphasis on its well established national policies for the protection of the countryside and urban areas - in particular, amongst others, Green Belts. The National Parks (including the Broads and the New Forest), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the Green Belts, the Heritage Coast and areas and buildings of architectural or historic importance.
 4. Whilst local planning authorities are encouraged to respond positively to telecommunications development proposals, they should take account of the advice on the protection of urban and rural areas in other planning policy guidance notes.
 5. Material considerations include the significance of the proposed development as part of a national network. In making an application for planning permission or prior approval, operators may be expected to provide evidence regarding the need for the proposed development.
 6. Authorities should not seek to prevent competition between different operators and should not question the need for the telecommunications system which the proposed development is to support”.
 17. In Green Belts, telecommunications development is likely to be inappropriate unless it maintains openness. Inappropriate development may proceed only if very special circumstances are demonstrated which outweigh the degree of harm to the Green Belt. The lack of a suitable alternative site that would meet the needs of network coverage or capacity might be considered as very special circumstances.
9. With regard to Health Considerations Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 8 states:
29. “Health considerations and public concern can in principle be material considerations in determining applications for planning permission and prior approval. Whether such matters are material in a particular case is ultimately a matter for the courts. It is for the decision-maker (usually the local planning authority) to determine what weight to attach to such considerations in any particular case.
 30. However, it is the Governments firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Governments responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Governments view, 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 processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them.
 31. The Governments acceptance of the precautionary approach recommended by the Stewart Groups report "*mobile phones and health*" is limited to the specific recommendations in the Groups report and the Governments response to them. The report does not provide any basis for precautionary actions beyond those already proposed.

In the Governments view, local planning authorities should not implement their own precautionary policies e.g. by way of imposing a ban or moratorium on new telecommunications development or insisting on minimum distances between new telecommunications development and existing development”.

10. **Policy 6/5** of the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003 states:

“Growth of new and existing telecommunications systems will be encouraged to ensure people have equitable access to a wide range of services and the latest technologies as they become available, and to reduce the need to travel”.

The supporting text states (in part):

“Coverage and capacity of broadband services, cable and mobile phone network infrastructure will be encouraged”.

“The Local Planning Authorities will need to take into account environmental and health impacts of telecommunications development when drawing up Local Plans or considering planning applications”.

11. **Policy GB2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (the Local Plan)

This policy outlines the general Green Belt principles. It states (in part): “Planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated”. The rest of the policy defines what is considered to be appropriate development. Telecommunication development is not listed as appropriate.

12. **Policy CS8** of the Local Plan states:

“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”.

13. **Policy EN1** of the Local Plan states:

“Relevant parts of the Landscape Character Areas of England are defined on the Proposals Map. In all its planning decisions the District Council will seek to ensure

that the local character and distinctiveness of these areas is respected, retained and wherever possible enhanced. While recognising that landscape is a dynamic concept, planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of these areas”.

Consultations

14. **Grantchester Parish Council**

The Parish Council has not commented.

15. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** states: “I have considered the implications of the proposals in terms of emission of electromagnetic 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.

It is proposed that the minimum standards in 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, 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 agreements 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.

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. Seven letters of objection have been received from residents of Fulbrooke and Grantchester Roads, together with one petition signed by 14 residents. The points of objection are summarised below:

- Height is excessive.
- Impact on the Area of Best Landscape
- Additional antennae will be erected over time making the mast more visible.
- Health effects – particularly within 500m where concentrations of energy are at their maximum. Microwave pulsed radiation is not known to be safe.
- Other sites have not been fully considered such as Barton Road/M11
- Reduction in property values
- Will harm quality of the environment.

- A proposal in Cambridge City for a smaller 15m high mast to the east of this site within the Cambridge Rugby grounds was refused for reasons of:
 1. The development would adversely affect an Area of Best Landscape contrary to the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan and the Cambridge Local Plan;
 2. The development would fall within cones of view for both the setting and the skyline of the city and would detract significantly from these views, contrary to the Local Plan which requires that new development should not detract from the views of Cambridge's historic skyline;
 3. The site is within the Green Belt and the development would adversely affect its rural and open character, contrary to the Cambridge Green Belt Local Plan, the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan, the Cambridge Local Plan and national Planning Policy Guidance Note 2;
 4. The development would not relate sensitively to the environment of the urban fringe and would spoil the visual amenities of the approach to Cambridge from the south-west, contrary to the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan.
- Proximity to model railway site that is used by children.
- Harmful to the rural and open character of the Green Belt.
- Will affect the setting and skyline of the City.
- The petition states (in part): "We all live between approximately 175 and 450 metres from the site proposed and there are quite a lot of children in our two streets who, it is reasonable to suppose, may be more susceptible to various kinds of environmental pollution, including EMF, during various developmental windows".

Planning Comments – Key Issues

17. The key issues are: The visual impact of the development on the surrounding countryside and Green Belt; alternative masts, buildings, other structures and sites; perceived impact on health and amenity of nearby residents.
18. **Visual impact.**
The mast will be visible from the track that runs to the south of the site. The model railway site has many trees on its western portion and I do not believe that the mast will be readily visible to users of the model railway.
19. The mast is to be positioned in the north-west corner of the field and not in an open area. There are no public footpaths in the vicinity.
20. The compound will be screened by the existing trees to the north and west. Additional planting can be required to help screen the eastern and southern boundaries. The position in the corner of the field that is currently well screened on two boundaries leads me to believe that the mast will not harm the openness of the Green Belt.
21. The mast can be painted in a suitable dark colour, to be agreed, to help reduce its impact when viewed from its surroundings. Most of the mast will be viewed with the trees as a backdrop. The top of the mast will however, be visible as the antennae have to clear the tops of the trees in order to operate effectively.

The lattice structure is not heavy in appearance and in my opinion the mast will not have an unacceptable visual impact on the rural countryside and Green Belt.

22. **Existing buildings masts or other structures**

Policy CS8 requires the operator to show evidence that it has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on existing buildings, masts or other structures. Woolfson College was considered for a rooftop installation but the applicants state that the site provider was unwilling. Use of floodlights at Cambridge RFC was considered but the site provider apparently withdrew due to local opposition. Robinson College was considered for a rooftop installation but again it is stated that the site provider was unwilling due to objections from various members of staff and students. Other buildings considered and discounted because, the applicant states, the site provider was unwilling are at Selwyn College, the University Library and Cambridge University Rugby Union Football Club. Mast sharing at Dumpling Farm (opposite the layby on Barton Road, within the City) has been discounted by the City Council as this would require a raising of the height of one of the existing masts which would be unacceptably visually detrimental.

The Barton Road/M11 site known also as Haggis Farm referred to in letters of objection as an appropriate alternative is already in use by the operator. The proposed site is intended to provide coverage into the City which is not adequately served by the Haggis Farm Station.

The Barton Road layby site where permission has been granted for a mast for another operator is stated as being too close to the Haggis Farm base station to be used and would in any case require an increase in height of the approved mast or another mast to be erected both of which are undesirable.

23. I am not aware of any existing masts, buildings or other structures that would meet the needs of the operator. In my opinion the applicant has made attempts to find existing buildings/structures that could provide an alternative without the need to erect a mast.

Alternative sites

24. In addition to the above, alternative sites have been considered for the erection of a mast and none is considered by the operator to be satisfactory. The following table contains information supplied by the operator:

Site Name and Address	NGR	Reason
Dumpling Farm	543095, 257705	Neither the site provider or the LPA would allow a site in this location. The LPA stated that they did not want a third site here, and would be likely to have vociferous opposition from residents at Gough Way.
Barton Road, layby	543150, 257625	Too exposed to gain LPAs support. The surrounding tree and shrub cover is not sufficiently mature to provide reasonable screening therefore it would prove visually intrusive.

Barton Road (Street furniture)	543585, 257600	We would need 15m+ to clear the surrounding clutter, which would be unlikely to be allowed by the LPA. The trees in this location are tall and would provide interference to the signal. A street works solution cannot be shared thus requiring a further installation within the search area to obtain coverage required.
Cambridge RFC	543460, 257225	Ultra slim monopole proposed but the LPA would not support when they were approached due to the potential for visual intrusion likely to be caused.

25. An application to the City Council for a 15m high mast to be erected to the east of the site for this application has also been made and refused.
26. In my opinion the operator has made significant efforts to consider alternative sites. In discussions with the City Council I have established that efforts have been made within the City and that Dumpling Farm has been discounted. The City Council was consulted on this application but no formal response has been received. However, discussions with the Telecommunications Liaison Officer have indicated that the City Council does not object to this application. It is felt to be better located away from existing dwellings, other buildings and existing sports facilities and the presence of the field boundary to the east is felt to provide better visual separation from the City.
27. With regard to Policy CS8 of the Local Plan, there are three main issues in relation to consideration of alternative sites (as opposed to existing masts, buildings or other structures) these are:
28. Availability
The site has to be available, as stated in Policy CS8. This requires that the landowner is willing to enter into an agreement with the telecommunications operator.
29. Suitability
The site has to be suitable to the operator – there are limited options due in part to range and topography but also many other technical restraints.
30. Preference
If an alternative site will meet the operator’s technical requirements and is available a refusal of an application can only be justified where there is unacceptable visual impact and not because it would be preferable.
31. Policy CS8 states: “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.”
32. Visual Impact
In my opinion Members should first consider if this mast has an unacceptable visual impact.
33. Acceptable
If the mast is not considered to have an unacceptable impact there is no requirement for the operator to demonstrate that no alternative site is available. There may be a

better site but to refuse this application because there is a better alternative would not be justified.

34. Unacceptable

Members should still consider granting consent in line with the above policy but Members should be confident that the applicant has demonstrated that there are no alternative more appropriate sites. If not a refusal could be justified.

The applicant has considered alternative sites but in my opinion the proposed mast does not have an unacceptable visual impact and I do not believe a refusal could be justified because there is or may be a better alternative.

35. In addition to the consideration of this Policy, Members should have regard to the impact of the proposal on the Cambridge Green Belt. The development is by definition inappropriate. However, Planning Policy Guidance Note No 8 states that “The lack of a suitable alternative site that would meet the needs of network coverage or capacity might be considered as very special circumstances”. In my view there is no better alternative site.

36. **Landscaping**

The compound would be visible from the east and south. A landscaping condition is therefore necessary in order to secure additional planting. I note, however, that the site location plan does not provide adequate land for additional planting. A revised plan is therefore required.

37. **Perceived threat to health.**

The mast is some 230m from the nearest dwelling. At this distance I do not consider there is any material perception that health could be affected. Many other examples of this proximity exist and many masts and antennae are considerably closer to residential properties particularly in urban areas. Whilst this site is in a rural and not an urban setting the issue of effect on health is constant and I consider that an approval of this mast at this distance from dwellings is consistent with taking a precautionary approach.

38. **Amenity of nearby residents**

The mast will be sufficiently distant from existing dwellings so that it will not appear overbearing when viewed from within properties or from their gardens.

Recommendation

39. Delegated powers of approval are sought subject to a revised plan showing an increased area of land for landscaping and subject to the following conditions:

1. Standard Condition A – Time limited permission (Reason A);
2. Sc51 – Landscaping (Rc51);
3. Sc52 – Implementation of landscaping (Rc52);
4. Within one month of the development hereby permitted ceasing to be used for telecommunications purposes the Local Planning Authority shall be notified accordingly in writing. Within four months of such notification all apparatus (including any mast), equipment, fencing and hard surfacing shall be removed from the land; and all buildings and structures shall be demolished and removed from the land; and the land shall be restored in accordance with a scheme submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

(Reason - To ensure that 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).

5. No development shall commence until details of the colour finish for the mast have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

(Reason – To help minimise the visual impact of the mast and help assimilate it into its surroundings)

40. **Reasons for Approval**

1. Although the proposal has been considered as a Departure from the Development Plan, and particularly in regard to policies aimed at protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development, the Local Planning Authority considers very special circumstances exist which outweigh the harm by being located in the Cambridge Green Belt:

- **The operator has sought to find alternative suitable sites that would meet the needs of coverage or capacity. None has been identified.**
- **The proposal does not have an unacceptable visual impact on the countryside and will not harm the openness of the Cambridge Green Belt.**

2. All other material planning considerations have been taken into account. None is of such significance as to outweigh the reason for the decision to approve the planning application.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003, South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004, Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 8 and Application File Reference S/0690/04/F.

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