

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 6th April 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/0166/05/F - Eltisley
20 Metre High Telecommunications Tower and Associated Development
at Land at North East Farm, Cambridge Road for Hutchinson 3G UK Ltd

Recommendation: Approval

Site and Proposal

1. The site lies within the northern strip of two linear copses of trees located approximately 200m to the north of the A428 (Cambridge Road) and approximately 1300m south of the area of land allocated for the Summersfield residential development in Papworth Everard on land associated with North East Farm. The surrounding copses of established trees, some of which are proposed to be removed as part of this application, are approximately 15 metres high, according to the information supplied with the application. The site is located some distance away from the agricultural buildings that occupy the main farmyard at North East Farm, to the east.
2. The full planning application, received on the 28th January 2005, proposes the erection of a 20 metre high lattice tower with 3 vertical antennae and 3 dishes attached and an associated compound. The compound, which surrounds the base of the tower, has an area of approximately 40m².
3. A Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines accompanies the application.

Planning History

4. No relevant planning history on this site.

Planning Policy

5. **Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 8 - Telecommunications**
6. This guidance note is a material consideration to which significant weight should be attached. Its general policies are set out below:
7.
 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 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”.

8. 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”.

9. Policy **CS8** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that 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) Antennae 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”.

10. Policy **EN1** of the **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that 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”.
11. Policy **P6/5** of the **Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003** states that 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 LPA’s will need to take into account environmental and health impacts of telecommunications development when drawing up Local Plans or considering planning applications”.

Consultation

12. **Eltisley Parish Council** recommends refusal of the application and comments that the mast will be very visible once erected and the trees removed. Replacement landscaping should be ensured. There is another mast already within a mile of this site which should be used rather than another mast being erected.
13. **Papworth Everard Parish Council** recommends refusal of the application and states:

“The application contains no indication/assessment of the requirement for a 3G service for residents within the area of coverage of the proposed tower. It is our understanding that 3rd generation mobile technology has only marginal benefits for local residents and businesses. The stated aim in the proposal is ‘to provide 3G coverage to the A428’, yet it is now illegal for drivers travelling on the roads to use their mobile phones.

- a) The proposal repeatedly emphasises the limited visual impact on the A428 but totally ignores the impact on residents to the North of their site. The existing three large barns at North East Farm (that have no apparent landscape screening and which this Parish Council was not consulted about) are already a ground-level eyesore, particularly when viewed from the rear of St. Peter’s Church and nearby properties. Outline permission has recently been granted for a minimum of 259 new dwellings on the Summersfield site to the South West of Papworth Everard. The proposed lattice tower surmounted by large

transmission dishes and antennae would be in a very prominent position and would dominate the local skyline. At 20m the tower would be significantly taller than the surrounding foliage and be easily seen in the very open views to the South of Papworth. There are no trees on the North, Papworth-facing side of the compound that would soften or screen the view of the installation.

- b) The application gives no reason for the proposed felling of the trees (about 6 in number) at the Western end of the site outside the compound boundary (marked on the site plan as 'Shaded area indicates trees to be removed').
 - c) Despite the applicant's statement under 'Site Selection Process' that 'a pre-application consultation is undertaken with the local planning authority and then subsequently with the local community, stakeholders and interest groups', this Parish Council was not consulted and we have no knowledge of any other consultation within the village."
14. **Landscape Design Officer** comments that this will be quite visible above the tree belt. Need to re-enforce existing planting - landscaping condition if approved would be beneficial.
15. **Chief Environmental Health Officer** comments: "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. None.

Planning Comments - Key Issues

17. The key issues in relation to this application are:
- Perceived health implications
 - The visual impact of the development on the surrounding countryside;
 - Alternative masts, buildings, other structures and sites.

Perceived health implications

18. The proposed mast is located approximately 1300 metres from the consented Summersfield development in Papworth Everard. At this distance, given that a Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines accompanies the application I do not consider that there is any material perception that health could be affected. Although this site is in a rural location, the issue of the potential impact on health is constant and it is my opinion that an approval of this mast would be consistent with a precautionary approach.

Visual Impact

19. The compound will be screened by the existing trees to the south, east and west of the site, although the existing planting would benefit from re-enforcement, as suggested by the Landscape Design Officer. This would be particularly beneficial given the potential removal of trees outside of the application site to the west, as illustrated on the plans accompanying the application. A condition to secure additional landscaping would provide the scope to do this, together with an extension to the application site to achieve such landscaping.
20. The majority of the mast will be viewed with the trees as a backdrop. The top of the mast, however, will be visible as the antennae will have to clear the top of the trees in order to operate effectively.
21. The provisions of policy **CS8** of the **Local Plan** state that the District Council will need to be satisfied that the siting and external appearance of apparatus have been designed to minimise the impact of such apparatus on amenity, while respecting operational efficiency. The lattice structure, by virtue of its design, is not heavy in appearance and in my opinion the mast will not have an unacceptable visual impact on the countryside given the proposed proximity in relation to the adjacent trees and potential for additional landscaping. Furthermore, with regard to the view from Papworth Everard, the mast would be seen in context with an existing large electricity pylon, located on fields between the application site and the village.

Alternative masts, buildings, other structures and sites

22. Aside from the application site, the operator has considered four alternative locations and none were considered to be satisfactory. The following table contains information supplied by the operator:

Site Name and Address	NGR	Reason for Rejection
Pastures Farm, Near Caxton, Cambridgeshire	529000, 260091	The coverage provided at this site would not be as good as that at the proposal site.
MMO2 Airwave Mast, Caxton Road, Eltisley	527900, 259150	No space available for further ground based equipment.
Papley Grove Farm, Eltisley	527700, 261300	There is a moat nearby which has raised interest by County Archaeological Department, and has therefore been avoided by H3G

Orange Mast, Crows Nest Farm, Ermine Street, Papworth Everard	528900, 261650	The mast lies outside the search area and therefore will not give the required coverage.
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23. The provisions of policy **CS8** of the **Local Plan** state that the District Council will need to be satisfied that 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. In the information supporting the application the operator has illustrated a lack of coverage in the area from surrounding sites. The proposed mast is illustrated to serve a lack of coverage in the village of Eltisley, the A428 (including Caxton Gibbet), parts of Papworth Everard and some parts of other surrounding villages.
24. There are three main issues in relation to the consideration of alternative sites. These are:
- Availability**
25. 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.
- Suitability**
26. 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.
- Preference**
27. 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.
28. 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."
29. In my opinion Members should first consider if this mast has an unacceptable visual impact. If the mast is not considered to have an unacceptable visual 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.
30. If Members are of the opinion that the site would have an unacceptable visual impact they should still consider granting consent in line with the above policy but should be confident that the applicant has demonstrated that there are no alternative more appropriate sites. If not a refusal could be justified.
31. 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.
32. The design of the mast would facilitate future sharing in accordance with Policy **CS8** of the Local Plan subject to the inclusion of additional land within the site for landscaping.

Recommendation

Approval 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).

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. The approved 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)
EN1 (Landscape Character Areas)
2. It is considered that the approved development does not unduly affect the following principle material planning issues:
 - Visual impact on the locality
 - Trees
 - The needs of coverage or capacity
 - Health

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
- Planning files Ref: S/0166/05/F

Contact Officer: Michael Osbourn - Assistant Planning Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713379