

The application is for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a replacement of the existing 12.5m high Vodafone column with a new 15 metre monopole accommodating 6 antennae located on the highway verge at Audley Road, Chesterton, to be used by Vodafone and O2. One of the three existing equipment cabinets is to be removed and replaced.

The site lies within the urban area of Newcastle as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

Unless a decision on this application is communicated to the developer by the 21st May 2014 the development will be able to proceed as proposed.

RECOMMENDATION

(a) Prior approval is required, and

(b) Should the decision on (a) be that prior approval is required the recommendation is to PERMIT.

Reason for Recommendation

It is considered that the development in this instance requires the benefit of prior approval and in assessing its siting and design it is considered that the replacement structure would not harm the visual amenity of the area due to its acceptable height, design and location within the street scene. The proposal would also avoid the need for an additional structure of a similar size and design within the area to meet the network requirements and support the expansion of the communications network in this area. The proposal would therefore meet the guidance and requirements of the NPPF and it would also comply with policy T19 of the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan as well as policy CSP1 of the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 (adopted 2009) (CSS).

Policies and Proposals in the approved development plan relevant to this decision:-

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 (adopted 2009) (CSS)

CSP1: Design Quality

Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan 2011

T19: Telecommunications Development – General Concerns

T20: Telecommunications Development – Required Information

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014)

Relevant Planning History

04/00400/TDET Installation of a 12.5m high telecommunications column, 3 antennae, 1 equipment cabin and associated development **Permit**

04/01078/TDET Installation of one equipment cabinet and associated development **Permit**

Representations

One representation has been received, summarised below:

- The existing mast at the location should be shared
- Should not allow a new mast erected
- It would be an eyesore
- There are already 2 masts within 200 metres.
- The new mast will be out of character, being far taller than anything at the site already.
- Locations should be identified which are not outside peoples bedroom windows.
- The existing O2 installation has been neglected and not maintained.

Applicant/agent's submission

The agent has submitted a supporting statement in relation to the proposal. A summary of the key points are as follows;

- The overall height of 15 metres has been kept to a technical minimum to maintain existing coverage and capacity. The proposed height would also cater for the future 4G coverage roll out within the area. It would also result in existing masts no longer being required and decommissioned in the future once this is technically feasible.
- The dimensions of the structure is the thinnest available to support the necessary equipment. The pole would be painted grey which will help it to assimilate within the existing street scene. The choice of a slim streetworks monopole with shrouded antennas is considered to be appropriate as it would minimise the visual impact of the development within the street scene.
- The proposed equipment cabinet is less than 2.3 cubic metres and will be located alongside the new monopole. It should be recognised that, on its own merits, do not normally require a formal determination and are often permitted development. They have a similar appearance to existing cabinets found in a street scene.
- The applicant has detailed that alternative sites have not been considered in this instance and are not generally required for upgrades/alterations to existing sites. Technological advances having enabled a mast share structure to be progressed that previously was not possible. Mast shares have in the past involved tall heights due to the separation needed between each operators set of antenna or large exposed antenna 'head frames'.

The key points of The Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development (July 2013) has been summarised along with the key points of the NPPF, in particular section 5.

The full document is available for full inspection at the Guildhall and on the Council's website www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/MastAudleyRoad

The applicant has declared that the proposal conforms to International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Public Exposure Guidelines.

KEY ISSUES

The application is for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a 15 metres dual user monopole to replace an existing 12.5 metres, and the installation of a replacement equipment cabinet.

The recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 42 details that

“Advanced, high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth. The development of high speed broadband technology and other communications networks also plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.”

At paragraph 43 it goes on the state that LPAs should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including telecommunications and high speed broadband.

As such there is national policy support in principle for telecommunications development and this must be taken into consideration when reaching an initial decision on whether prior approval is required, and also in the consideration as to whether prior approval should be granted.

Is prior approval required?

Prior approval is only required where local planning authorities judge that a specific proposal is likely to have a *significant* impact on its surroundings.

The application is for the replacement of an existing telecommunications monopole located on the highways verge on the edge of a suburban area of Newcastle, with residential properties in close proximity and an open field to the rear. The replacement monopole would have a greater height than the existing structure but would result in two operators sharing the same base station. A replacement equipment cabinet is proposed in addition to the two existing equipment cabinets that are to be retained.

Due to the suburban/open countryside location and the proposed increase in height it is considered that that, in this case, prior approval is required for the siting and design of the proposal.

Should prior approval be granted?

Policy T19 of the Local Plan supports proposals for telecommunications development that do not unacceptably harm the visual quality and character of sensitive areas and locations such as the countryside and do not adversely affect the amenity of nearby properties. Such development is also supported provided that there are no other alternative suitable sites available.

The main issue for consideration in the determination as to whether prior approval should be granted is the design of the proposals and the impact on the visual amenity of the area.

The existing structure is located on the grass verge on the western side of Audley Road adjacent a bus stop lay by. A hedgerow lines the carriageway on both sides, and beyond the hedgerow to the west are fields which are designated as Green Belt. The existing structure is considered to be of a modest height located close to other street furniture (a lamp post, bus stop sign and telegraph pole).

The replacement mast would be 2.5 metres higher than the existing mast (overall height of 15m metres to the top) with a thinner monopole being used. The replacement structure would enable two operators to ‘mast share’ and avoid the need to find a location for an additional structure of a similar height and design. The proposal would also support the expansion of the two networks within this populated area, which is a key principle of the NPPF. The applicant has also detailed that the structure would provide future 4G network coverage and result in other structures likely to be decommissioned due to this replacement structure providing the necessary future network benefits.

The increase height of the replacement structure would result in it being marginally more prominent in the locality. The design is considered the optimum solution that would have the least amount of impact on the visual amenity of the area due it being a mast share, it having a simple, slim design.

One of the existing equipment cabinets is proposed to be removed. One new, replacement cabinet is proposed which is larger than the one being removed, but which would not raise any amenity issues, or have a detrimental impact on the surrounding area. The new ancillary equipment cabinet would be of a modest scale and painted in a grey colour to match the mast, and which would blend with the surroundings.

The proposal, whilst it is higher than the existing, involves no additional equipment cabinet and is not considered to result in a significant and harmful impact to the visual amenity of the area and any harm would be outweighed by the benefits that arise from the proposed mast sharing and improved network that the proposal would achieve. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with local and national telecommunications policies and that prior approval should be granted.

Background Papers

Planning File referred to
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

24th April 2014