

The application is for full planning permission for the extension in height of an existing telecommunications mast and the addition of two ground based equipment cabinets at Whitmore Wood. The proposal would be a shared structure between mobile phone operators Vodafone and O2 (Telefonica).

The site is located within the open countryside on land designated as North Staffordshire Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Maintenance (N19) as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The 8 week period for the determination of this application expires on the 24th June 2014.

RECOMMENDATION

Permit subject to conditions relating to:-

- i) Standard time limit**
- ii) Approved plans**
- iii) Equipment cabinets to be coloured Green**
- iv) Submission of Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement to BS5837:2012**

Reason for Recommendation

The proposed development is considered to represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt due to the increased height and additional equipment proposed. However, the proposals would upgrade an existing structure and there is a clear technical need for the development and such matters provide the very special circumstances required to outweigh the limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt that would arise from the development. The proposals would also not harm the character and quality of the landscape or the visual amenity of the area in general, nor would they result in the loss of trees, subject to conditions. The proposed development therefore accords with Policies S3, T19, N12, N17 & N19 of the Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan 2011 and policy CSP1 of the Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with the planning application

This is considered to be a sustainable form of development and so complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework. No amendments were therefore considered necessary.

Policies and Proposals in the Approved Development Plan relevant to the decision:-

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

Policy CSP1: Design Quality

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy S3: Development in the Green Belt

Policy T19: Telecommunications Development – General Concerns

Policy T20: Telecommunications Development – Required Information

Policy N12: Development and the Protection of Trees

Policy N13: Felling and pruning of trees
Policy N17: Landscape character – general considerations
Policy N19: Area of Landscape Maintenance

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)
National Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document (2010)

Planning History

04/00624/FUL	20m high slimline lattice telecommunications structure with 4 antennas, two 600mm dishes and two equipment cabinets at ground level with ancillary development	Permitted	2004
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Views of Consultees

Whitmore Parish Council raises no objections

Landscape Development Section no objections subject to submission of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement to BS5837:2012 for the construction phase of the scheme

Highway Authority has not responded to the consultation and as the period for comments has passed (30.05.2013), it is assumed that they have no comments to make on this application.

Environmental Health Division raises no objections

Representations

No letters of representation have been received.

Applicants/ Agents submission

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

- The proposed site is located on Snapehall Road in a wooded area to the north of the road
- The proposal is for an upgrade to an existing 20.6m (top of antenna) lattice column and will facilitate the use of the site by both Vodafone and O2.
- The existing 20m lattice mast is to be upgraded with a 2m section thus taking the height to 23.6m (to top of the antenna).
- This is not a new additional mast but an upgrade replacement to the existing. The mast benefits from a back drop of mature trees at approx. 20m in height. The trees will shield the mast from many locations.
- Although it is accepted that the height will be increased, it is felt that such a minor increase in the overall bulk would not detract from the character of the area.
- The site is required to provide enhanced coverage and capacity for O2 and Vodafone

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

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

Key Issues

Planning permission is sought for the extension in height of an existing telecommunications mast and two ground based equipment cabinets at Whitmore Wood which is located within the open countryside on land designated as North Staffordshire Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Maintenance (N19) as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

Saved 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.

Taking into account the above locational factors and policy considerations, the main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are as follows:

- Is the proposal appropriate development within the Green Belt?
- The design of the proposals and the impact on the character and quality of the landscape
- The impact on trees
- Does the proposal comply with current guidance on health concerns?
- If not appropriate do the required very special circumstances exist?

Is the proposal appropriate development within the Green Belt?

Paragraph 90 of the NPPF indicates that certain other forms of development, than the construction of new buildings, are inappropriate within Green Belt unless they preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

It is considered that the proposed telecommunications equipment does not fall within one of these exceptions and the increase in height of the structure and the additional ground based equipment would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

Therefore the proposed telecommunications equipment would represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The design of the proposals and the impact on the character and quality of the landscape

The proposal represents an upgrade to the existing 20 metre high lattice tower (21.6m to top of antenna). The proposals would increase the overall height of the structure to 23.6 metres (to top of antennas) which would be an increase of 2 metres. Two additional ground based equipment cabinets are also proposed.

The area is designated as an area of landscape maintenance (policy N19) within which development should maintain the high quality and characteristic landscapes.

The existing lattice tower has a back drop of mature trees that have a height of approximately 20 metres. The coverage requirements require the antennas to be above the tree line to maintain and improve the network service provided. The increase in height would enable this

although a large section of the tower would be lost against the tree line. Therefore the proposal would have a very limited impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area and the landscape in general. The proposal would be an upgrade which would maintain the character and quality of the landscape which would be in accordance with policy N19 of the local plan and would represent a sustainable form of development as required by the NPPF.

The impact on trees

Policy N12 of the local plan details that the council will resist development that would involve the removal of any visually significant tree unless the need for development is sufficient to warrant the tree loss and the loss cannot be avoided by appropriate siting and design. It also details that where trees are to be lost through development then replacement planting will be required on an appropriate scale and in accordance with a landscaping scheme.

The proposal would upgrade the existing structure and the Landscape Section has raised no objections subject to conditions regarding the submission of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement to BS5837:2012 for the construction phase of the scheme due to the potential impact on trees during these works.

Does the proposal comply with current guidance on health concerns?

The application is accompanied by a certificate of compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure and the NPPF advising that the LPA should therefore accept that the proposal meets the International Commission guideline for public exposure. Furthermore, no objections have been raised by the Environmental Health Division.

If not appropriate do the required very special circumstances exist?

The NPPF details that very special circumstances will not exist unless potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The NPPF advises that local planning authorities should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including telecommunications. It also encourages the use of existing masts, buildings and structures unless the need for a new site is justified. New sites should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate. Local planning authorities should determine applications on planning grounds. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the telecommunications system, or determine health safeguards if the proposal meets International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

As discussed the proposal is for the upgrade of an existing structure that would result in the height being increased by an additional 2 metres. This would take the antenna above the tree line and would improve the network coverage for both O2 and Vodafone customers within the area.

Due to the nature of the development the actual harm to the openness of the Green Belt would be limited and such harm would be outweighed by the technical benefits and improvements of the proposed development. It is therefore felt that the support for facilitating the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems represents the very special circumstances for the proposed development.

Background Papers

Planning File
Planning Documents referred to

Date Report Prepared

28 May 2014.