

The application is for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a proposed upgrade of existing telecommunications equipment. The existing 16.9 metre lattice column on the site is to be removed and replaced with a new 23 metre lattice structure. The replacement lattice will be situated on a 4.5 metre by 4.5 metre concrete base with 6 antennas mounted on support poles at the top of the structure. A small dish of approximately 260 millimetres in diameter is also proposed around 19 metres above ground level attached to the mast.

The development is required to allow increased network capacity in the area to be shared by operators Vodafone and O2.

The proposal site lies within the open countryside and an Area of Landscape Maintenance (Policy N19) and Green Belt as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

Unless a decision on this application is communicated to the developer by the 28th December 2014 the development will be able to proceed as proposed.

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) Prior approval is required, and
(b) Approval is GRANTED.

Reason for Recommendation

The appearance and siting of the development would have an impact upon the visual appearance of the surrounding landscape taking into account intervening woodland, land topography and also the scale of development involved. Therefore it is considered that prior approval for the development is required. However in the absence of any visual harm and also taking into account the weight given to proposals related to the expansion of the telecommunications network. The proposal accords with the requirements of the NPPF, saved 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.

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

ASP6: Rural Area Spatial Strategy

Newcastle Under Lyme Local Plan 2011(NLP)

Policy S3: Development and the Green Belt

Policy T19: Telecommunications Development – General Concerns

Policy T20: Telecommunications Development – Required Information

Policy N17: Landscape character – general considerations

Policy N19: Area of Landscape Maintenance

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

National Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014)

Relevant Planning History

None.

Views of Consultees

Environmental Protection has no objections.

Whitmore Parish Council has no objections to the application provided it is in line with the Core Spatial Strategy, the Green Site Strategy and the Assets Strategy, in the interests of the Borough.

Representations

No letters of representation have been received.

Applicant/agent's submission

The agent has submitted a supporting statement in relation to the above proposal which is required in order to enable the expansion of the existing network coverage. The main points of the statement are as follows:

- It is positioned adjacent to a densely wooded area in a remote location and benefits from a back drop of mature trees at approximately 11m in height immediately adjacent to the structure. The trees within the wood are considerably taller than 1m and would shield the structure ensuring the openness of the Green Belt is not compromised.
- Policy states that applications for the siting of telecommunications equipment will be approved provided that they do not unacceptably harm the visual quality and character of sensitive areas such as the Green Belt.
- There are no alternative more suitable sites available which would meet the operational requirements for the equipment, it is not feasible to share existing facilities and in the case of radio masts there is no possibility of erecting antennae on an existing building or structure.
- The proposal would utilise the existing site with only a minimal change in appearance to the lattice structure. As such, the character and appearance of the area would be maintained and the development would accord with the objectives of this policy.

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

The full documents are available for inspection at the Guildhall and on the Council's website www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/1400847TDET1

KEY ISSUES

The application is for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of an upgrade of existing telecommunications equipment involving a new 23 metre replacement lattice tower with 6 antenna and ancillary development. The site is located within an area of landscape maintenance (Policy N19) and the Green Belt.

The 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 to 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 if so into 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 increase in the height of the replacement lattice mast is a significant change. The existing mast is around 17 metres above ground level and the new replacement mast would be approximately 23 metres tall. Although the installation is located adjacent to a belt of woodland it is open to views from the agricultural land to the south. Therefore the prior approval for the siting and appearance of the development is deemed to be required. Accordingly it is necessary to now assess whether such prior approval should be given.

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 impact on the visual amenity of the area. The design of the development is functional and involves the best environmental solution available replacing an existing lattice structure which is appropriately positioned to be as least prominent as possible against a background of mature woodland. The harm to the landscape and visual amenity of the area is minimal and would not outweigh the benefits arising from the proposed upgrade. There is no conflict with any Development Plan or national policies therefore prior approval should be granted.

Background Papers

Planning File referred to
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

24th November 2014