

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 proposal is for the replacement of an existing 17.2m structure with a 20m monopole with antennas, dishes and ancillary equipment.

The proposal site lies within the open countryside and an Area of Active Landscape Conservation (Policy N18) 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 25th January 2015 the development will be able to proceed as proposed.

RECOMMENDATION

(a) Prior approval is required, and

(b) Should the decision on (a) be agreed then the recommendation is that prior 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 due to the increased height and the amount of equipment proposed. However in the absence of any significant visual harm and also taking into account the weight given to proposals related to the expansion of the telecommunications network it is considered that 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 N18: Area of Active Landscape Conservation

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

National Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014)

Relevant Planning History

03/00346/FUL 15.2m telecommunications monopole, 4 antennae, radio equipment housing and ancillary development
Refused but Allowed on appeal

Views of Consultees

Environmental Protection detail that a declaration of ICNIRP compliance has been issued, (dated 12th November 2014) and they raise no objections to the application.

Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council have been consulted and any comments received will be reported accordingly.

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. The main points of the statement are as follows:

- The height increase is imperative for the combined O2 and Vodafone network coverage,
- The mast will provide environmental and commercial efficiencies by removing the need for an additional independent mast within the immediate vicinity.
- It is imperative to consider that 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 an approx. height of 15 metres.
- Although this site is for Vodafone only the upgraded mast will fit into the wider O2/ VF site sharing network and thus the facility adheres to the site sharing policies of the LPA and the NPPF.

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/1400878TDET

KEY ISSUES

The application is for a determination as to whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance for the replacement (upgrade) of the existing 17.2 metre structure with a 20 metre monopole, antennas, dishes and ancillary equipment. The site is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and an Area of Active Conservation (Policy N18).

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 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 is 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 monopole and additional equipment is considered to represent a significant change. The existing monopole at a height of 15 metres plus antenna (17.2 metres) has a similar height to the adjacent trees which provide significant screening. The proposed monopole at 20 metres in height would further protrude above this tree line. 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 would be viewed alongside the two existing telecommunications structures which are also located adjacent to the line of mature trees. The three existing structures have a similar height to the existing trees and so they are well screened with minimal harm to any main vantage points. The proposed replacement monopole would still have a functional and slimline appearance but it would have a large head frame due to the upgrading of the equipment and the number of antenna. The upper part of the structure would be more visible above the tree line. However, the impact on the visual amenity of the area and landscape would be limited with the lower sections being predominantly screened by the trees from views from the south, with the benefit of a backdrop of trees from views from the north. It is considered that any adverse visual impact would be outweighed by the technical justification and there is no conflict with development plan or national policies and on balance it is considered that prior approval should be granted.

Background Papers

Planning File referred to
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

15th December 2014