

The application is for planning permission for the replacement of the 17.3 metre monopole with a 20 metre dual user monopole, 4 antennas with 2 ancillary Remote Radio Units on the head frame at the top of the structure, 1 new 300mm dish and airwaves existing antennas fixed to the tower and associated ancillary works.

The site lies within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Restoration as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

**The 8 week period for the determination of this application expires on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015.**

#### RECOMMENDATION

**Permit subject to the following conditions:**

- i) Standard Time limit**
- ii) Approved plans**

#### Reason for Recommendation

The proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, however it has been concluded that very special circumstances exist that outweigh the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt, namely the technological need for the development, the facilitation of mast sharing and the fact that it is a replacement mast. The proposal would have an acceptable impact upon the character and quality of the Area of Landscape Restoration, and the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact upon amenity. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies S3, T19, T20, N17 and N21 of the Local Plan, Policies ASP6, CSP1, CSP3 and CSP4 of the Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006 – 2026 and the aims and objectives of the NPPF.

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

The development proposal is considered a sustainable form of development and so complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

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

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

Policy ASP6: Rural Area Spatial Policy  
Policy CSP1: Design Quality  
Policy CSP3: Sustainability and Climate Change  
Policy CSP4: Natural Assets

##### Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy T19: Telecommunications Development – General Concerns  
Policy T20: Telecommunications Development – Required Information  
Policy S3: Development in the Green Belt  
Policy N17: Landscape Character – General Considerations  
Policy N21: Area of Landscape Restoration

#### Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (2014)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Planning for Landscape Change – Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan

Relevant Planning History

Nil

Views of Consultees

The **Environmental Health Division** has no objections to the application

**Audley Rural Parish Council** support the application and note that they are pleased this type of application is automatically heard by Planning Committee

Representations

None received

Applicant's/Agent's submission

The applicant has submitted some supplementary information including a declaration of conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines, certifying that the site is designed to be in full compliance with the requirements of the radio frequency guidelines of the International Commission of Non-ionizing Radiation. A Design and Access Statement and a letter regarding notice served under Article 11 of the Town and Country Planning Order 2010 have also been submitted.

Details of the application are available are available for inspection at the Guildhall and on [www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/1400888FUL](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning/1400888FUL)

**Key Issues**

Full planning permission is sought for the replacement of the existing 17.3 metre high monopole with a 20 metre high dual user monopole, 4 antennas with 2 ancillary Remote Radio Units on the head frame at the top of the structure, 1 new 300mm dish and airwaves existing antennas fixed to the tower and associated ancillary works.

The mast and equipment is located within a field off Bignall End Road, within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Restoration.

The recently published 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.

The NPPF details that local plan policies should be given due weight according to the degree of consistency with the framework. 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 applicant has provided a Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines and it is therefore felt not necessary to consider this as a key issue.

Given the policy support, in principle, for communications infrastructure, the main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are therefore;

- Is the development an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt?
- How was the site selected?
- Is the impact upon the visual amenity of the area acceptable?
- Does the proposal comply with current guidance on health concerns?
- If inappropriate do very special circumstances exist which would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt?

#### Is the development an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt?

Paragraph 90 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets what other forms of development, than the construction of new buildings, that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. Telecommunications development does not fall within the forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. Therefore, the starting point for the assessment of the proposal in relation to Green Belt policy is that the proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which should not be approved unless the required very special circumstances exist which outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriate development, any other harm.

#### Site selection process

As previously indicated in the report, the applicant proposes to upgrade the existing telecommunications mast, including its replacement with a 20 metre monopole and various equipment and antennas.

The existing ground based installation in its current form does not meet the operator's technical requirements meaning that this upgrade is required to maintain the existing 2G and 3G network coverage and capacity and provide a 4G network for both operators on a single shared structure. This approach keeps the numbers of radio and telecommunications masts and the sites for such installations to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network, in accordance with the NPPF.

Alternative sites would have been considered by the operator when this now existing base station was first conceived and established on site.

Based on the site being an existing telecommunications site and the proposal being for a replacement mast and ancillary equipment, and based on the requirements for improvements in this locality to 2G and 3G networks, it is considered that the siting of the upgraded mast on the site of the existing mast would be acceptable.

#### Is the impact upon the visual amenity of the area acceptable?

The site lies within an area of Landscape Restoration. Within these areas, the Council will support, subject to other plan policies, proposals that will help to restore the character and improve the quality of the landscape. Within these areas it will be necessary to demonstrate that development will not further erode the character or quality of the landscape.

The proposal involves an increase in the height of the mast by 2.7 metres, plus various antennas and a dish. The location of the base station is within a field that is not visually prominent from public vantage points. There are trees surrounding the base station, which will help to assimilate the development with the surrounding area.

Overall, it is considered that the impact of the proposed replacement mast and associated antennas and dish would have a minimal impact on the visual amenity of the area and would not further erode the character or quality of the landscape, and the proposal is considered to comply with Policies N17 and N21 of the Local Plan and the aims and objectives of the NPPF.

#### 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 advises 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.

Do the very special circumstances exist which would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt?

Turning to whether very special circumstances exist to outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the applicant has submitted a supporting statement which indicates the following:

- The proposal is for a replacement monopole that would be 2.7 metres taller than the existing pole and slightly thicker
- The replacement pole would involve mast sharing, which reduces the number of separate sites required for telecommunications infrastructure therefore there would be no further encroachment in the countryside.
- There would be no impact on the setting and special character of historic towns
- There would be a minor impact on the landscape and visual amenity as a result of the increased size of the mast and broadness of the headframe.
- The lattice tower would be screened by trees even when not in leaf
- There is a technical requirement for high quality communications infrastructure, good mobile connectivity and the availability of mobile broadband which all play a vital role in economic growth, social inclusion, accessibility to services and sustainability.
- The growth and provision of this type of infrastructure is supported by the Government, in particular 4G
- The scheme is set on private land and the siting would not impact upon recognised pedestrian and vehicular movements.
- There are mature trees and foliage in the immediate locality, which would help assimilate the base station's change in form into the environment.

It is considered that the technological need for the development, coupled with the fact that the base station already exists and that the upgrade will facilitate mast sharing, comprises a case for very special circumstances which would outweigh harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green belt.

In conclusion, it is considered that very special circumstances exist that outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Background papers

Planning files referred to  
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

14<sup>th</sup> January 2014