

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

1. Site Details

Site Name:	Lower Stakehill Farm 2	Site Address:	Lower Stakehill Farm Stakehill Lane Middleton Manchester Greater Manchester M24 2SA
National Grid Reference:	E: 388851 N: 408637		
Site Ref Number:	Cornerstone 30879800	Site Type: ¹	Greenfield

2. Pre Application Check List

Site Selection (for New Sites only)

(Would not generally apply to upgrades/alterations to existing site including redevelopment or replacement of an existing site to facilitate an upgrade or sharing with another operator)

Was a local planning authority mast register available to check for suitable sites by the operator or the local planning authority?	Yes	No
If no explain why: No register available.		
Were industry site databases checked for suitable sites by the operator:	Yes	No
If no explain why: As will be discussed in further detail within this statement, a replacement base station is required at this location to ensure that existing network coverage provision is continued within the local area for Vodafone Limited. The existing network coverage is currently provided by a base station located at the land south of the A627, on Lower Stakehill Farm, Stakehill Lane Middleton, M24 2RY (E:389150, N:408572), which is due for decommissioning. The existing apparatus at this site stands at approximately 20m in height and is approximately 300m from the proposed new site. As such, no other, existing sites offer a viable option to provide the necessary coverage.		

Site Specific Pre-application consultation with local planning authority

¹ Macro or Micro

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Was there pre-application contact:	Yes
Date of pre-application contact:	14 th May 2024
Name of contact:	Katie Slape
Summary of outcome/Main issues raised: A pre-application consultation letter was issued to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council on 14th May 2024. This letter contained details of the proposed installation, as well as design drawings. Feedback was requested on the proposed development. As of the date of this planning submission, no formal response has been received.	

Community Consultation

Rating of Site under Traffic Light Model:	Red	Amber	Green
Outline of consultation carried out: As part of the pre-application consultation exercise undertaken as part of this scheme, consultation notification letters were issued to Castleton Ward Councillors: Aisling Gallagher, Aasim Rashid and Billy Sheerin. Letters were also issued to 45 and 47 Thornham Lane. Detailed design drawings of the proposal were provided alongside the consultation letters and feedback was requested.			
Summary of outcome/main issues raised (include copies of relevant correspondence): Objections to the proposal were raised by two residents, concerning the impact the installation will have on surrounding properties and green space. Councillor Gallagher also requested visuals of how the proposed site will look once completed, which were sent accordingly.			

School/College

Location of site in relation to school/college (include name of school/college): There are no such schools or colleges within close proximity to the application site. As such, no consultation was considered necessary.
Outline of consultation carried out with school/college (include evidence of consultation):

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n/a
Summary of outcome/main issues raised (include copies of main correspondence): n/a

Civil Aviation Authority/Secretary of State for Defence or the operator of the civil safeguarding area or defence safeguarding area notification (only required for an application for prior approval)

Will the proposed development be on a civil safeguarding area or a defence safeguarding area?	Yes	No
Has the Civil Aviation Authority/Secretary of State for Defence/operator of the civil safeguarding area or defence safeguarding area been notified?	Yes	No
Details of response: n/a		

Developer's Notice

Copy of Developer's Notice enclosed?	Yes	No
Date served:	26/07/2024 – Proof of Delivery Included as part of this application	

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3. Proposed Development

The proposed site:

The Proposed Site is located at Lower Stakehill Farm, Stakehill Lane, Middleton, Manchester, Greater Manchester, M24 2SA (E:388851 N:408637), thereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Site'. The Proposed Site is situated in the corners of a field belonging to Lower Stakehill Farm on Stakehill Lane, directly adjacent to the A627 road. The wider surrounding area is agricultural, residential, and commercial.

The Proposed Site is to replace an existing greenfield installation, also located within Lower Stakehill Farm, Stakehill Lane Middleton, M24 2RY (E:389150, N:408572), thereafter referred to as the 'Existing Site'. The existing apparatus stands at approximately 20m in height and is approximately 300m away from the Proposed Site.

Figure 1, below, shoes the approximate location of the Proposed Site and the Existing Site.



Figure 1 – Aerial imagery of the Proposed Site outlined in yellow and the Existing Site outlined in red
(Source: Google Maps)

The Proposed Site has been chosen as the most viable town planning solution within the local area, which will meet the necessary coverage requirements of the Operator to replace the existing coverage provided by the Existing Site. The Proposed Site will additionally provide enhanced mobile network coverage to the surrounding area; providing improved connectivity, capacity and coverage for local residents and businesses and ensuring that the next step in technological progression (i.e. 5G network coverage) is available within Slattocks.

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The Proposed Site provides an appropriate town and planning solution and will ensure that enhanced network coverage is provided to the wider area for Vodafone Limited. The Proposed Site will not require significant removal of vegetation and will utilise existing access routes.

It should be acknowledged that the 'siting' application site is specifically positioned away from residential areas and will sit within an agricultural field, due just north of and adjacent to the A627 (Slattocks Link). This area, therefore, already projects a utilitarian context, and is exactly the type of setting in which a telecommunications base station would expect to be seen.

The closest residential properties are located 220m from the Proposed Site, along Thornham Lane. However, mature trees located along Thornham Lane, will assist in screening the proposed apparatus from residential houses that may have a view of the Proposed Site. Consequently, no properties will have a direct view of the Proposed Site and only medium- and long-range views of the proposed development from some residential properties will be achieved, with the positioning of the application wholly intentional and designed to assist in the greatest reduction in visual impact of the scheme.

Furthermore, the selected siting is considered wholly appropriate. The proposal has been designed specifically to achieve a balance between meeting the technical requirement and avoiding harm to the surrounding area. There are also multiple existing electricity towers approximately 500m east of the Proposed Site, just outside of Slattocks, providing the Proposed Site with further context. The presence of these existing towers (both of which are taller than the proposed development at 50+ metres) within the surrounding area of Slattocks will assist in reducing the visual impact of the scheme, to the maximum extent.

The scheme proposes the installation of a 25-metre-high lattice tower, which will provide continued and improved network coverage for Vodafone Limited once the Existing Site coverage is lost. This installation will provide 3G, 4G and 5G coverage. Given the level of public reliance on mobile networks, which has increased to an unprecedented level since March 2020, the scheme is considered wholly appropriate for the local area and will ensure that connectivity, capacity and coverage is improved and continued within the local area, particularly as the areas existing coverage is due to be lost from the Existing Site. Public reliance on established mobile networks, and the increase in mobile data consumption, will be discussed in more detail within this document, with particular focus on social interaction and the opportunity for large scale 'home-working' as has become relatively normal over the last four years, since the Covid-19 global pandemic.

When the impact of the Proposed Site is assessed against the provision of economic, social and environmental benefits that will be brought forward by the proposal, there is considered to be significant favour towards approving the Proposed Site. Once the existing network coverage for the Slattocks area is lost from the Existing Site, unless the site is replaced, there will be detrimental impacts on local businesses, people and organisations. The justification for the height of the proposed installation is that the next stage of technological advancement

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(5G) will be available from this network cell, providing new cutting-edge coverage for Vodafone Limited to the local area.

The Proposed Site apparatus only serves **one** function – to provide mobile network coverage to the local area. The equipment has no other function. As such, the appearance of the equipment, and the height of the equipment, is dictated by functionality and technical constraints. Indeed, the further relaxation of Permitted Development rights by Central Government in early 2022, shows a clear indication that 20m is now the accepted height for new base stations situated on highways land and immediately adjacent to the public highway. It should also be noted that this juncture that the associated ground-based equipment cabinets qualify as outright Permitted Development.

It is considered that the Proposed Site submitted to the Council is acceptable, as this development will ensure local network coverage is improved at a time where it is becoming apparent that a significant proportion of the national workforce are opting to adopt a more hybrid-style of working – with many returning to an office environment for only a small proportion of the working week. As such, the necessary infrastructure must be deployed to assist with this hybrid working, with this typically occurring in a predominantly residential setting. The local community, at Slattocks, will therefore be at the forefront of the next generation of technology (5G) roll-out.

Ensuring that current network coverage is improved and enhanced is of vital importance, never more so than over the last four years when the country moved towards an increased level of home-working. It is therefore imperative that the public need is met by the Operators. This is a view which is also taken by Central Government and is clear in their relaxation of Permitted Development rights for the second time in 7 years – firstly in 2017, and then again, more recently, in 2022.

To conclude, it is considered that the proposal in front of the Council is acceptable. This development will ensure that continued and improved network coverage is provided to the local area for Vodafone Limited, following the loss of coverage from the Existing Site, and it is therefore considered that any visual impact caused by this proposal is greatly outweighed by the public economic, social and environmental benefits of ensuring that brand-new 5G coverage is provided to the wider area. Given the need to introduce a new permanent base station into the local area, it is considered that the best town planning solution has been brought forward as part of this application.

Type of Structure (e.g. tower, mast, etc):

Description:

The installation of as 25m-high telecommunications lattice tower, with 6no. antennas, 2no. transmission dishes, 4no. cabinets plus ancillary works thereto.

Overall height of the proposed structure: 25m

Materials:

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Tower/mast etc – type of material and external colour:	
Equipment housing – type of material and external colour:	Galvanised/Steel – Grey (RAL 7035) (unless otherwise suggested by the Local Authority)
Overall height of the proposed structure:	25 metres

Reasons for choice of design, making reference to pre-application responses:

In designing this telecommunications installation, the Applicants have sought to achieve a balance between the technical requirements of the Operator and minimising environmental impact as far as was practicable. It, however, must be acknowledged that technical constraints heavily influenced the design and limited the scope to alter the appearance of the site to a significant degree.

The application proposes to install a 25m-high monopole with supporting 6no. antennas and 2no. transmission dishes, plus 4no. ground-based equipment cabinets; and ancillary development thereto.

The choice of design at the application site is governed by two main factors; the context and visual amenity of the area; and the technical requirements.

Technical Objective and Technical Requirements

The objective of this site is to provide permanent replacement network coverage to the local area. The Proposed Site will ensure that network coverage will continue once the Existing Site is decommissioned and that connectivity, capacity and coverage is also improved within the area for Vodafone Limited, thereby increasing mobile upload and download speeds, and a more reliable mobile network connection. The required improvements can only be provided by the installation of a new base station, rather than the upgrading of any existing base station.

By way of background information, in designing a radio base station it is necessary to incorporate certain vital elements and to work around several technical constraints. There are three main elements to a radio base station; the cabin or cabinets which contain the equipment used to generate the radio signal(s), the supporting structure that holds the antennas in the air (or fixes them to a building or structure) and the antennae themselves, which emit the radio signals (along with any necessary amplifier or receiver units).

Other elements necessary for the base station to function are the power source (a meter in a cabinet or a generator on sites where a REC supply cannot be utilised), feeder cables that link the equipment housing to the antennas, link dishes and the various support structures, grillages and fixings, often referred to in general terms as “development ancillary to” the base station.

The antennae height is determined by a specialist network radio engineer using specialist software which factors in the area that coverage is required; the relationship between the selected site location and existing cell sites in the linked network; and variances in land levels and elements such as nearby trees or buildings, which can block or weaken signals. This is

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vitality important when assessing new locations from base stations to fit into the existing and established Operator network patterns. The application site offers the optimum location in terms of operational effectiveness, ensuring it seamlessly transitions into the existing network, and does not overlap with adjacent network cells.

4no. ground-based equipment cabinets are required to house the radio equipment and will be positioned in a neat arrangement at ground level.

Visual Amenity

The Applicant gives due regard in designing all new sites to limit the visual impact through good design. In this instance, the proposed installation is subject to technical and build constraints. That notwithstanding, it is submitted that the appropriate siting and design put forth will mitigate any potential impact on the site and its surroundings to an acceptable level.

To achieve the required coverage and overall network improvement for Vodafone, a 25-metre-high lattice tower is required. The proposed installation will also be 5G ready at the point of deployment. The proposed installation will be able to accommodate the anticipated level of Operator apparatus at the point of deployment, but also reaching far into the future. This is an important planning consideration and should be acknowledged in any planning assessment. Whilst the applicants accept that there will be some level of visual impact, when this is compared to the numerous social and economic benefits which will be brought forward via a long-term 'sharing' solution, it is considered that the application should be deemed acceptable, and therefore receive Officer support.

The application site also ensures that the installation will be situated close enough to the target area it is designed to serve. **The search for a new site was limited to be as close to the Existing Site, as far as possible, to ensure that the Proposed Site will provide sufficiently replace the coverage that will be lost when the Existing Site is decommissioned.** If a base station is moved too far away from the target area, then it is likely that some sections of the target area will remain without the network services which the Operator aims to provide. This is a very important factor and must be acknowledged by the Local Planning Authority.

Whilst the application site will provide a suitable technical solution for the local area, it is also considered that this location offers an appropriate town planning and environmental solution. The bulk and scale of the proposed equipment has been minimised as far as practicable, with the antennas 'stacked' within the structure itself. The apparatus has only **one** function – to provide network coverage to the local area. Its design, therefore, is solely dictated by operational functionality.

The height of the antennas has also been reduced to the lowest which would provide the required level of replacement coverage. It should be noted that the elevation of the Existing Site is 8m higher (149m) than the Proposed Site (141m), and so the height of the proposed installation has must be 25m to provide sufficient replacement coverage for the existing 20m mast.

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As this site will be deployed with 5G capability, this application is not simply to ensure that the local area will be serviced with the same level of network coverage as much of the Local Authority area (i.e. 3G and 4G), but will actually surpass the current level of 'standard' coverage and connectivity with the provision of 5G coverage. Whilst the Applicant accepts that there will be some level of visual impact, when this is compared to the numerous social and economic benefits which will be brought forward with the proposal, it is considered that the application should be deemed acceptable, and therefore, should receive Officer support.

The applicants encourage the Council to make a clear distinction between 'visibility' and 'harm', when assessing this proposal. At 25 metres in height, the structure will be visible. However, being able to see something does not immediately infer that it is either in appropriate or harmful. The applicants submit that, despite the Proposed Site being visible, it is not harmful, and that the height of the apparatus is solely dictated by its function. This must be acknowledged by the Council.

As outlined in the General Permitted Development Order, the deployment of mobile phone base stations, up to a height of 30 metres (in undesignated land), is accepted in principle by virtue of the legislation. This position has been confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate in a number of appeal decisions.

For example, in allowing appeal APP/E2205/W/20/3261389, which proposed the installation of a 20m-high telecommunications monopole and associated ground-based equipment cabinets, the Inspector included the following in their decision notice:

*"Part 16 of the Order establishes that **the proposal is permitted development** and therefore it is accepted in principle by virtue of the legislation. **Furthermore, there is no requirement to have regard to the development plan as there would be for any development requiring planning permission.** Nevertheless, Policies SP1, SP6 and ENV13 of the Ashford Borough Council Local Plan to 2030 are material considerations as they relate to issues of siting and appearance. In particular, they seek to secure high quality design and to avoid development that would cause loss or substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets. **Similarly, the National Planning Policy Framework is also a material consideration and this includes a section on supporting high quality communications**" (emphasis added).*

In another example, in allowing appeal APP/G4240/W/18/3201704, which proposed the installation of a 20m-high telecommunications monopole and associated ground-based equipment cabinets, the Inspector included the following in their decision notice:

*"**The permission granted under the GPDO is equal to an outline planning permission** and the consideration of the proposed development is limited to its siting and appearance, not the principle of the development" (emphasis added).*

Due consideration has been given to the process and the proposal put forward is the best available option – it both achieves the technical requirements and does not bring unacceptable harm to the character of the area.

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It is anticipated that this installation will become an accepted part of the built environment over time - as is the case with the nearby existing electricity pylons.

Whilst it is accepted that the structure will be visible, it is considered that the economic, social and environmental benefits brought forward by retaining network coverage across the local area outweighs any harm that the proposal may cause.

It is considered, overall, that the design is appropriate to the site and surrounding area and avoids any unacceptable level of impact.

Technical Information

International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection Declaration attached (see below)	Yes
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International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection public compliance is determined by mathematical calculation and implemented by careful location of antennas, access restrictions and/or barriers and signage as necessary. Members of the public cannot unknowingly enter areas close to the antennas where exposure may exceed the relevant guidelines.

When determining compliance, the emissions from all mobile phone network operators on or near to the site are taken into account.

In order to minimise interference within its own network and with other radio networks, Vodafone operates its network in such a way the radio frequency power outputs are kept to the lowest levels commensurate with effective service provision.

As part of Vodafone's network, the radio base station that is the subject of this application will be configured to operate in this way.

All operators of radio transmitters are under a legal obligation to operate those transmitters in accordance with the conditions of their licence. Operation of the transmitter in accordance with the conditions of the licence fulfils the legal obligations in respect of interference to other radio systems, other electrical equipment, instrumentation, or air traffic systems. The conditions of the licence are mandated by Ofcom, an agency of national government, who are

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responsible for the regulation of the civilian radio spectrum. The remit of Ofcom also includes investigation and remedy of any reported significant interference.

The telecommunications infrastructure the subject of this application accords with all relevant legislation and as such will not cause significant and irremediable interference with other electrical equipment, air traffic services or instrumentation operated in the national interest.

4. Technical Justification

Reason(s) why site required e.g., coverage, upgrade, capacity

The Proposed Site will enable the continued and improved provision of 2G, 3G, 4G services to the local area, as well as brand-new new cutting-edge 5G services for the Vodafone mobile network across the wider area.

2G was the second generation of mobile phone transmission, it introduced data services for mobile, starting with SMS text messages. 3G was an extension to this and enabled the use of data. The main technological difference that distinguishes it from 2G technology is the use of packet-switching rather than circuit-switching for data transmission. Increased data rate to a minimum of 2 Mbit/s for stationary or walking users, and 384 Kbit/s in a moving vehicle.

4G (LTE, the acronym used for 'Long Term Evolution') supports mixed data, voice, video and messaging traffic and offers speeds of up to five times faster than 3G, enabling network users with 4G devices to benefit from ultra-fast internet browsing, video streaming, gaming, e-mail and downloads. 5G is the next generation of mobile internet connectivity, offering faster speeds and more reliable connections on smartphones and other devices than ever before.

Compared to even the most recent and efficient generation of mobile network, 4G, 5G is set to be far faster and more reliable, with greater capacity and lower response times. The technological improvement of 5G when compared to 4G is particularly noticeable in three areas.

Firstly, the bandwidth of 5G is around 40 times faster than current 4G speeds, which will enable large amounts of data to be transferred in a few seconds – for example a full-length HD movie of 15GB will take around 6seconds to download on 5G.

Secondly, 5G has an ultra-fast 1ms latency time, providing reliable and near instantaneous responses between instructions to devices. This would result in an autonomous vehicle travelling at 100km/h would receive a stop signal after moving just 2.7cm. Connections are also ultra-reliable, with a very low error-rate.

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Thirdly, 5G can support up to 1,000,000 devices within a 1km² area, which will provide the backbone for the evolution of the Internet of Things.

Base stations use radio signals to connect mobile devices and phones to the network, enabling people to send and receive calls, texts, emails, pictures, TV, and downloads. The base stations are connected to each other (by cables or wireless technology) to create a network. The area each base station covers is called a cell. Each cell overlaps with its neighbouring cells to create a continuous network. There are several variables that determine the size and shape of each cell.

As base stations are low-powered radio transmitters they each have a limited range, meaning that they generally need to be located close to (or within) the target area which requires coverage. If a base station is moved too far away from the target area, then it is likely that some sections of the target area will remain without the network services which the Operator aims to provide.

High-quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth and that high-speed broadband technology and other communications networks can also play a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.

The UK Government recognises the benefits to commerce, industry and the public in general, and so places great emphasis on the benefits of mobile telecommunications to modern life and this is promoted throughout the planning system. The very high level of mobile phone use and ownership within the UK population is a very clear indication of the public's overwhelming acceptance of the benefits of mobile communications, which requires the installation and maintenance of base stations to provide the necessary connection between the mobile phones and the UK telecommunications network.

As stated, the Proposed Site will enable the continued and enhanced provision of 2G, 3G, 4G and new cutting-edge 5G services for Vodafone's mobile network coverage across the wider area.

Practical Applications of 5G Connectivity as Example of Material Socio-Economic Benefit:

Education:

The relationship between 5G and education is evolving at a massive rate with educators exploring the relevance of Virtual Reality (VR) technologies for education and training. Crucially, VR can support remote learning, allowing students a presence in the classroom even when working elsewhere.

5G's ability to deliver real-time information (low latency), ultra-fast speeds (critical for high-definition images and video), increased capacity and heightened security will also allow learning on the job, thanks to technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) goggles, which can give engineers real-time instructions on how to fix a machine on a production line, for example.

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Health:

Patients across the country are now becoming accustomed to relying on remote healthcare services such as NHS 111, virtual GP appointments, and ordering online deliveries of essential medical supplies.

5G will prove critical in providing the infrastructure required to deliver remote health services over the next decade. By design, 5G's ability to deliver real-time information (low latency), ultra-fast speeds (critical for high-definition images and video), increased capacity and heightened security are going to be fundamental in scaling the patient benefits of remote healthcare and keeping medical records secure and private. For instance, trials have shown that connecting ambulance crews to expert resources using 5G allows paramedics to work with doctors and conduct specialist procedures in real time whilst on the road.

High-quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth and that high-speed broadband technology and other communications networks can also play a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.

The UK Government, recognising the benefits to commerce, industry and the public in general, places great emphasis on the benefits of mobile telecommunications to modern life and this is promoted throughout the planning system. Paragraph 118 of the NPPF (2023) states that *"Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) ..."* (our emphasis). The NPPF takes account of the growth of the industry and technology, of the new social and economic demands for communications, and of the Government's environmental policies. This proposal, to enable Vodafone to provide enhanced network services to the surrounding area, will assist in achieving these objectives within Slattocks.

The Planning Inspectorate too has in recent years continually recognised the importance of this issue and cited it in appeal decisions that have overturned the decisions of local authorities across the UK where there has been a failure to apply due weight to the value of connectivity to social and economic prosperity in the assessment of applications made for telecommunications development, even in or close to protected or sensitive areas.

As an example, in October 2018 the decision of Winchester City Council to refuse prior approval for the installation of a 17.5m high monopole and associated equipment housing, required to replace an established site being lost from Vodafone's network, was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate (CTIL and Vodafone Vs Winchester City Council, appeal reference APP/L1765/W/18/3197522). Within the decision notice, the Inspector stated that:

*"I attach significant weight to the public benefit arising from the continuation of local service provision.....Having regard to all relevant considerations.. **my findings are that the proposal's public benefit in maintaining and enhancing***

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local telecommunication coverage and capacity would outweigh the limited harm arising to the character and appearance of the area" (emphasis added).

In November 2019, the decision of Woking Borough Council to refuse prior approval for the installation of a 20m high monopole and associated equipment housing, which would provide 'in-fill' network coverage for EE, was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate (EE Ltd. Vs Woking Borough Council, appeal reference APP/A3655/W/19/3234027). Within the decision notice, the Inspector stated that:

"the mast and antennas are reasonably slim and have an uncluttered form and thus would not be unduly intrusive in a wider panorama. Accordingly, the visual impact of the proposed base station would be limited, even when the vegetation is not in full leaf. It would also be seen in the context of the existing structures in the immediate area. Therefore, **although the proposed development would not make a positive contribution to the street scene, neither would it be significantly harmful to the appearance of the area"** (emphasis added).

In October 2020, the decision of Elmbridge Borough Council to refuse planning permission for the installation of a 15-metre-high monopole incorporating shrouded antenna and supporting 2no external dishes was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate (EE Ltd and H3G UK Ltd Vs Elmbridge Borough Council, appeal reference APP/K3605/W/19/3243927). Within the decision notice, the Inspector stated that:

*"The mast would be taller and thicker than the existing nearby street lighting columns, road signs and overhead cable poles. Due to its height, the mast would be visible in local views from the public domain and from some residential properties in proximity.... However, **such masts are becoming more commonplace within the urban environment and so it would not appear as an alien or unexpected feature"** (our emphasis).*

In June 2021, the decision of Sheffield City Council to refuse their Prior Approval for the installation of a 20-metre-high monopole and associated cabinets was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate (MBNL Limited Vs Sheffield City Council, appeal reference APP/J4423/W/21/3268791). Within the decision notice, the Inspector stated that:

*"Paragraph 80 of the Framework advises that **significant weight should be attached to the economic benefits of providing and enhancing electronic communications infrastructure.** Paragraph 112 advises that advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being, and that the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology, such as 5G, should be supported.*

The proposal would reinstate 2G, 3G and 4G coverage within the area as well as providing 5G coverage, services would collectively increase network

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capacity and provide ultra-fast and more reliable mobile connectivity, capable of handling ever-increasing data requirements. The development would provide extensive social and economic benefits to individuals, businesses, and public services, including education and healthcare. The Council does not question the social and economic benefits that would result from the proposal but concludes that they do not outweigh the harm found. However, as no suitable alternative sites have been identified, I attach substantial weight to the benefits that would result from the proposal.

In weighing all the above matters, although I have found that the siting and appearance of the proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area, I consider the substantial social and economic benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm identified" (emphasis added).

It is considered that when the balancing method advocated in the NPPF is applied to the proposal, where the need and significant public benefit of ensuring the best available network coverage is provided, especially given the current times in which we find ourselves ensconced a hybrid-level of remote working, is balanced against the appearance and level of associated visual impact of the proposed site, that the application proposal is positively in favour and is considered wholly appropriate.

The importance of providing continued, and improved, telecommunications network coverage cannot be underestimated, especially throughout the years 2020-2022, when the dependence on these networks has been higher than ever before. This dependence has continued into 2023 as our online shopping, gaming, and social habits have changed, post-pandemic, as well as many people adopting a working-from-home or hybrid work pattern. There are now a plethora of appeal cases which have been considered appropriate by the Planning Inspectorate for installations very similar to the one proposed here, even within close proximity to residential housing.

Furthermore, whilst the applicants do submit that the best town planning solution has been brought forward as part of this application, **clear precedence has been set by the Planning Inspectorate which suggests that this should not be a determining factor, and that the best town planning option does not need to be brought forward.**

In October 2020, MBNL (EE Ltd and H3G UK Ltd) vs Elmbridge Borough Council, appeal reference APP/K3605/W/19/3243927, which has already been discussed within this statement, the Planning Inspector included the following in the Appeal Decision Notice:

*"Interested parties indicate that there are alternative sites available for the proposed mast. However, given my conclusion on the main issue it is unnecessary to address the merits of alternative sites. **There is no requirement in the Framework or the GPDO 2015 to select the best feasible siting**"* (our emphasis).

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In April 2021, Cornerstone, Telefónica UK Ltd and Vodafone Ltd vs the Council of the London Borough of Havering, appeal reference APP/B5480/W/20/3251086, the Planning Inspector included the following in the Appeal Decision Notice:

*"I note the Council's reservations regarding the appellants' list of alternative sites, and to that extent I accept that the appeal site has not been shown conclusively to be the least environmentally damaging option possible. **But the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does not support that approach. Given that I have found no significant harm, it is unnecessary to consider other alternatives in any more detail**" (emphasis added).*

In May 2018, CTIL vs Sheffield City Council, appeal reference APP/J4423/W/17/3188962, the Planning Inspector included the following in the Appeal Decision Notice:

*"With regards alternative sites, I have noted the appellant's submissions within the supplementary information as well as the contention of interested parties regarding the need for fuller consideration of siting. Nevertheless, I am mindful that even if alternative sites were available, **there is no requirement within the Framework or the GPDO for developers to select the best feasible siting where a site as proposed is considered to be acceptable**" (emphasis added).*

For the avoidance of doubt, the Applicants do submit that the best environmental and town planning solution has been brought forward as part of this application, and an alternative site assessment has been included within this statement. It should, however, be noted that this is **not required** as part of the application, but rather forms part of the justification for site selection and outlines again, that no alternative, better, option could be identified within the local area that would satisfy the necessary technical criteria associated with a new base station.

Public dependence on network services and connectivity is ever more apparent. Restrictions on travel resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic, plus three national lockdowns, resulted in a massive shift from office based to home working, from physical, professional and social gatherings to virtual ones, and to unprecedented reliance on online shopping and entertainment services. Network usage within suburbs has increased dramatically as less people are travelling to town and city centres than during pre-pandemic times. Maintaining and enhancing the mobile networks is of vital national importance, and it was significant that telecoms was designated as "*critical work*" during that time. It is anticipated that the current shift towards homeworking and online services will persist, to a lesser degree, in the future. It is vital that the infrastructure is in place throughout the UK to meet this demand, and the needs of the public.

The benefit of having a strong and resilient network has been highlighted in the last 4 years following the sudden shift in the network requirements, as the demand on the network in residential areas increased with home-working and home-schooling. Research by Ofcom, Online Nation 2020 found that until early that year, online video calling was used much less than other online communication services, with 35% of online adults using online video

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calling at least weekly in the 12 months to February 2020. However, in May 2020, this had doubled to 71% of online adult consumers using online video calling services at least weekly, with 38% using them at least daily. Research suggests that 7% of adult internet-users used video calling for the first time because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The DCM and the RT Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP highlighted the need for telecommunications companies to support the NHS by providing the connectivity it needed during the Covid-19 pandemic, stating the following in April 2020:

*"Telecoms companies and their workers are making a major contribution to **keeping the nation connected during the COVID-19 emergency**, ensuring that people can stay and work from home" (our emphasis).*

In the current climate, with a dramatic shift towards home-working, online shopping and virtual social gatherings, the importance of connectivity for economic, social, and physical wellbeing is more apparent than ever before. Infrastructure needs to be in place for people to benefit from these services, and it needs to be located in or very close to the areas where the users are located.

The Ofcom Connected Nations 2020 UK Report outlined a sharp increase in both mobile and voice data, particularly during the enforced national lockdowns of 2020. The report states that average call volumes and average call duration increased in the week that national lockdown was introduced in March 2020, with mobile hotspots shifting away from city centres to the suburbs and residential areas as restrictions continued.

Significantly, the same report states that the consumption of mobile data saw a staggering rise of 42%, when compared with the previous year. Additionally, the traffic carried in England in June 2020 (during lockdown) exceeded that carried across the whole of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) in February 2020 (prior to lockdown).

Research by Online Nation 2020 found in April 2020, internet users in the UK spent an average of 4 hours 2 minutes online each day, 37 minutes more each day per online adult compared with January 2020. This emphasises the importance of telecommunications infrastructure in being able to provide internet users with reliable network coverage and capacity to deal with an increasing amount of time online each day.

In his speech at Connected Britain 2020, in September 2020, Digital Infrastructure Minister, Matt Warman, stated the following:

"COVID has altered the way we live, work and, most importantly, stay connected with our family and friends. The digital infrastructure that keeps us all connected was essential to our daily way of life under lockdown - and is now more important than ever as we head into recovery. Many of these changes - such as increased working from home - will stay with us for the foreseeable future".

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The implementation of a third national lockdown throughout January, February, March and April 2021 saw a return of most aspects of life associated with the two previous lockdowns, and the same increases in voice calls and mobile data consumption is expected. Mr Warman also stated the following:

"The world is in the middle of a digital revolution. COVID has accelerated this process, digitising almost every part of our everyday lives and making the infrastructure that connects us more important than ever. That's why it is at the top of the government's agenda".

Central Governments' direction of travel is to support the roll-out of 5G technology and this was the case pre-pandemic. This has been emphasised by the Government's relaxation of Permitted Development rights, allowing Operators to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the general public and ever-increasing demand for mobile data consumption. Since its initial roll-out in 2019, Operators have continued to deploy 5G across the UK, largely via the upgrading of existing base stations. Around 12,000 base stations now carry 5G technology. Mr Warman also confirmed that legislative reforms were being undertaken to make it easier for Operators to deploy and upgrade telecommunications base stations.

In May 2021, Mr Warman also wrote to Local Authority Chief Executives in England, making it clear to Local Authority's that they have a role to play in supporting improved connectivity, and also stating the following:

"Digital connectivity is – now, more than ever – vital to enable people to stay connected and businesses to grow. The demand for mobile data is increasing rapidly, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important it is that we all have access to reliable, high quality mobile connectivity.

The Government is committed to extending mobile network coverage across the UK and providing uninterrupted mobile signal on all major roads, and our ambition is for the majority of the population to have access to a 5G signal by 2027. Last year we agreed a £1 billion Shared Rural Network deal with the UK's mobile network operators to extend 4G mobile geographical coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025" (emphasis added).

Notwithstanding the Covid-19 pandemic, and the increase in network reliance, a look at past data shows that our reliance on mobile networks was increasing year-on-year, prior to 2020. Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2018 provides a figure of 92 million active mobile subscribers in the UK at the end of 2017. It detailed that 78% of adults used a smartphone and that 76% of mobile users were using their devices for web and data access. Figures within the report also confirm that users were spending an increasing amount of time per day using their mobile phone. 68% of participants in the Touchpoints research reported that they "could not live without" their mobile phone (rising to 78% among 25-34s). Whilst not included within the research figures, anecdotal evidence suggests that this number is greater still amongst those aged under 18. Given that two years

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have now passed since this report, it is anticipated that these figures have increased further. All which points towards the nation's increasing dependency on mobile services and connectivity.

A YouGov survey, in January 2021, adds further support to this, with 67% of those who were at the time working from home during the pandemic confirming that they had been using mobile data, as opposed the fixed-line broadband, agreeing that access to it would be an important factor when choosing where to live in the future. This rises to 76% for 18- to 34-year-olds. The survey also confirmed that 44% of one network Operator's data traffic in January 2021 went to streaming services, such as Disney+, and that 45% of 18- to 24-year-olds confirming that they are more likely to use their mobile data for browsing social media.

All the above occur in a domestic setting. There is a clear need and demand for connectivity and capacity, and it is anticipated that telecommunications infrastructure has become, and will continue to become, commonplace in residential and suburban settings, such as the application site.

As recognised by the London Assembly's Regeneration Committee within its *"Digital Connectivity in London"* report, published June 2017, digital connectivity is now widely regarded as the *"fourth utility", an everyday necessity alongside water, gas and electricity* and also noted that *"mobile broadband is, and will continue to be, an essential complement of fixed broadband"*. It is no longer a luxury, but a service essential to modern life.

The installation of this proposal will enable the continued provision of 3G and 4G services, plus brand-new 5G services for Vodafone to this area of Slattocks. The fact that this installation will be 5G-ready at the point of the deployment will greatly improve the level, and quality, of network coverage to the surrounding area, placing it at the forefront of the latest technological advancement.

At a local level, this installation continues to allow for an increase in home working, by providing the opportunity to create a "virtual office", reducing the need to travel for work consequently.

It is therefore very important for 'mobile only' households that live and work and any businesses that operate in this part of the LPA's area, together with visitors and others who are staying in or travelling through the area, that the necessary indoor RF coverage is provided to enable them to have satisfactory mobile telephone and internet access.

On a wider scale, the proposal would continue to contribute towards the country's connectivity and digital economy future via the provision of brand-new 5G network coverage for Vodafone. Mobile telecommunications are vital for the UK's economic competitiveness and in promoting social inclusion, and, on a local scale, it is important to ensure the continuation of established telecommunications networks in this area.

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Ofcom's 2018 Communications Market Research Report shows that smartphones are owned by four of every five UK consumers and smart TVs are in almost half of all households. Demand for data continues to grow rapidly for UK consumers, with 1.9GB consumed by an average mobile subscription per month in 2017, (up from 1.3 GB the previous year). The report found that more than seven in ten now use their mobile to access the internet, sufficient coverage is obviously vital for this basic utility service to be provided.

The UK Government, recognising the benefits to commerce, industry, and the public in general, places great emphasis on the benefits of mobile telecommunications to modern life. This position was reinforced by a statement made by then Prime Minister David Cameron in March 2016 when he specifically addressed the vital importance of mobile connectivity for residents and local economies and highlighted that the urgent delivery of the required network improvements is a government priority:

"Ten years ago, we were all rather guilty of leading campaigns against masts and all the rest of it. Our constituents now want internet and mobile phone coverage. We need to make sure that we change the law in all the ways necessary, that the wayleaves are granted, that the masts are built, that we increase coverage and that everyone is connected to the information superhighway. This is substantiated in the most recent budget announcement of 16th March 2016, which commits to provisions for "greater freedoms and flexibilities for the deployment of mobile infrastructure".

Since 2016, and particularly during the enforced lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, public and business reliance on the established mobile networks has continued to increase. Improved mobile coverage and connectivity is now no longer viewed as a 'luxury', but rather an every-day necessity. This has been further exacerbated as, at the time of writing, the country appears to be adopting a more hybrid-working pattern, split between traditional office working, and working from home. As this 'working from home' naturally occurs within a residential setting, then it follows that the necessary infrastructure and apparatus must be in place to allow this to happen. As such, this type of infrastructure must be deployed within all settings – be it sub-urban, urban and residential areas. It is imperative that existing and established network connectivity and capacity is continuous, with any removal of services needing to be addressed immediately and prior to the removal of the existing base station. This is what is proposed in this application, with an 20m monopole, as proposed in this instance, fully addressing any connectivity, capacity or coverage issues which may arise from the decommissioning of the current base station.

Further detail regarding the general operation of the network can be found in the accompanying document entitled 'General Background Information for Telecommunications Development'. This information is provided to assist the local planning authority in understanding any technical constraints on the location of the Proposed Site.

5. Site Selection Process

Search Area

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The Applicant has taken a sequential approach to identifying the proposed site. It is considered that, given the level of available mature tree cover which surrounds the site, no better, alternative site could be identified.

It is considered that the application site offers an appropriate environmental and town planning solution, whilst simultaneously ensuring the operational parameters of the installation are met. It is considered that the proposal is appropriate to the surroundings and that there is no better alternative location available for a 'shared' network solution which will service the local area. The Applicants' do, however, consider that the application site which has been brought forward offers the best town planning and operational solution for the local area.

The search for a new site was limited to be as close to the Existing Site, as far as possible, to ensure that the Proposed Site will provide sufficiently replace the coverage that will be lost when the Existing Site is decommissioned.

Figure 2 shows the approximate search area.



Figure 2 – Aerial imagery of the search area denoted by the blue circle, the Proposed Site pinned in yellow, the Existing Site pinned in red and the discounted options pinned in blue (Source: [Grid Reference Finder](#))

Alternative site considered and not chosen:

Discount	Site Type	Site name and address	National Grid Reference	Reason for not choosing site

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D1	Greenfield	Slattocks Lane Slattocks Middleton Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2RZ	E: 389307 N: 408387	This option does not have optimal access to be able to build a new site, when compared to the access provided by the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D2	Greenfield	Thornham Lane Thornham Fold Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2SH	E: 389413 N: 408929	The site is located ~440m from the Existing Site (140m further than the Proposed Site) and considerably further from the Slattocks area. Therefore, sufficient replacement coverage would not be provided to the Slattocks community. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D3	Greenfield	Finlan Road Stakehill Industrial Estate Stake Hill Middleton Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2SS	E: 388985 N: 408258	The site is located ~360m from the Existing Site (60m further than the Proposed Site). This site also sits on a lower-elevation plane (by ~8 metres) than the Proposed Site. As such, the achievable network coverage is greater from the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D4	Greenfield	Finlan Road Stakehill Industrial Estate Stake Hill Middleton, Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2SJ	E: 388871 N: 408152	The site is located ~500m from the Existing Site (200m further than the Proposed Site). This site also sits on a lower-elevation plane (by ~13 metres) than the Proposed Site. As such, the achievable network coverage is greater from the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D5	Greenfield	Slattocks Lane Slattocks Middleton Rochdale	E: 389091 N: 408667	This option does not have optimal access to be able to build a new site, when compared to the access

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		Greater Manchester M24 2RZ		provided by the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D6	Greenfield	Rochdale Road Slattocks Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2UD	E: 388606 N: 409052	The site is located ~725m from the Existing Site (425m further than the Proposed Site). This site also sits on a lower-elevation plane (by ~1 metre) than the Proposed Site. As such, the achievable network coverage is greater from the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D7	Streetworks	Slattocks Link Road Slattocks Middleton Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2RW	E: 388549 N: 408418	The site is located ~620m from the Existing Site (320m further than the Proposed Site). This site also sits on a lower-elevation plane (by ~13 metres) than the Proposed Site. As such, the achievable network coverage is greater from the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.
D8	Greenfield	Slattocks Link Road Slattocks Middleton Rochdale Greater Manchester M24 2RZ	E: 388821 N: 408539	This option does not have optimal access, when compared to the access provided by the Proposed Site. As such, this option was discounted in favour of the Proposed Site.

If no alternative site options have been investigated, please explain why:

n/a

Land use planning designations:

n/a

Additional relevant information (include planning policy and material considerations):

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Given the nature of the site search – i.e., to find a replacement base station located within a very specific area of Slattocks – there is a very restricted geographical area in which this base station can be deployed, to ensure that the necessary replacement coverage footprint is serviced once the Existing Site is decommissioned. The wider surrounding area is mainly dense agricultural and residential, as such is restricted in terms of opportunities to deploy the required base station.

As with any network planning, it is important to strategically position network cells sufficiently apart so that their coverage plots do not overlap (to any significant extent), and that the maximum coverage can be achieved from each separate base station. The options within the local area are limited, with none of the alternative options considered to be preferable to the proposed development, in terms of either achievable network coverage or environmental impacts.

It is considered that the application site offers an appropriate environmental and town planning solution, whilst simultaneously ensuring the operational parameters of the installation are met. It is considered that there is no better option within the search area, hence the application which sits before the Council. It is considered that the proposal is appropriate to the surroundings and that there is no better alternative location available which will provide the necessary coverage to the local area.

Environmental Information:

There is no evidence of protected species at this location, with the surrounding area consisting of large-scale developments and buildings. The proposal will subsequently not have any potential negative impacts on any sensitive habitats or species.

As far as practicable the proposed development has been designed to keep to a minimum the impact on amenity and the design of the development ensures there would be only a limited impact which would not be sufficient to harm visual or residential amenity.

Siting and Appearance:

This section should be read in conjunction with the preceding sections of this statement where a description of the application site, technical details and justification for the design and details of the public benefits of the proposal are provided.

It is considered that the proposal utilises the most suitable design available to meet the technical requirement within the very specific technical constraints. As discussed in Section 3 of this document, this site is required to provide new Vodafone network coverage to the Slattocks area. The proposed development before the Council has been specifically designed for use in urban areas and is the smallest available to network Operator. It is considered that by locating the Proposed Site ~230m from any nearby residential properties north of the A627 (Slattocks Link) will help to mitigate any perceived impact the Proposed Site will have on the surrounding area. The applicant notes the presence of Grade II listed St John Thornham Church located ~230m of the Proposed Site. However, there is no anticipated

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significant visual impact on the building, due to the presence of mature trees located in between the church and the Proposed Site, as well as the distance between the two site.

This application will lead to significant connectivity improvements for the local area, with the provision of 3G and 4G network coverage for Vodafone, as well as brand-new 5G capabilities.

It is important to keep the impact of telecommunications development in the area to a minimum and it is considered that the proposed development achieves this. When considering the benefits of the proposal, the public benefit from retained and improved connectivity and wireless communication services is a significant one. The applicant considers that any perceived visual impact on the area, or skyline, has been mitigated, as far as practicable, through the best design available within the technical constraints of the site, and that this development will provide excellent public benefits – both in the present, and in the future.

In this case, it is suggested that the application of the balancing method advocated in the NPPF, for the provision of communications and connectivity services, in the public interest, be utilised to balance the need for continued connectivity with the potential impact of the site. It is considered that when this balance test is applied to the proposal, where the need and significant public benefit is balanced against the appearance and level of associated visual impact of the proposed site, that the application proposal is positively in favour and is considered wholly appropriate.

This has been emphasised by the Planning Inspectorate on several appeal cases where, the Planning Inspectorate has ruled in favour of proposed developments of a similar nature, where this balance was applied. Some recent examples of where this balance was applied by the Planning Inspectorate include appeal cases referenced APP/Q3305/W/18/3206555 and APP/L1765/W/18/3197522. Extracts from these appeal decisions are included below for your convenience:

*"In considering the need for the proposal, Government policy, as set out in the Framework states that advanced, **high-quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. In this respect, I have found that there is a need for the proposal which therefore weighs strongly in its favour.** As I have found that the level of harm relating to this second main issue would be low, that identified need would outweigh the harm in this case"* (emphasis added).

*"I conclude on this issue that despite the less than substantial harm that would be caused, the **public benefits of the proposal would outweigh that harm**"* (emphasis added).

"9. The Government places a high priority on the provision of high-quality communications. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) at Paragraph 112 states, "Advanced, high-quality and reliable communications

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infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections... The Council has commented that service provision would be 'adequate' without the proposal, but **the appellant has an obligation to provide not only appropriate coverage but also capacity for the network. I attach significant weight to the public benefit arising from the continuation of local service provision**" (emphasis added).

"13. Having regard to all relevant considerations, including national planning policy and the potential availability of alternative sites, my findings are that **the proposal's public benefit in maintaining and enhancing local telecommunication coverage and capacity would outweigh the limited harm** arising to the character and appearance of the area" (emphasis added).

Whilst each application needs to be assessed on its own merits, the above appeals (along with a growing number of others, many of which are referenced in the preceding sections of this document) indicate a growing trend, based on national policy and guidance, to favour important utilities and infrastructure developments in the wider public interest when the potential harm is outweighed by the important and unavoidable public benefits they provide. Ensuring continued network coverage to the local area, for two major mobile Operators, is considered a major public benefit.

The selected siting is considered wholly appropriate. The proposal has been designed specifically to achieve a balance between meeting the technical requirement and avoiding harm to the local and the surrounding area. The application site has been strategically within close proximity to the target area that the base station is designed to serve.

Planning Policy Context:

National Planning Policy Framework (2023) (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework came into force in July 2018 replacing the guidance published in March 2012, was updated again in February 2019, July 2021, and then had a further update in December 2023. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states "The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development", and in paragraph 10 that "at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development". To achieve the sustainable development objective, the NPPF has identified 3 overarching objectives (paragraph 8):

"a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the

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right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy."

For decision-taking (paragraph 11) this means:

"c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

Further to this, paragraph 38 states that "Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the area."

The NPPF directly addresses the need for enhanced wireless communication services, first mentioned in paragraph 20, which states that an LPA's strategic policies must make sufficient provision for:

"b) infrastructure for transport, **telecommunications** (our emphasis), security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat)"

Leading on from this, paragraph 118 states that "Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. **Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband**

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connections". Again, the proposal is entirely consistent with the aims expressed within the NPPF.

Given that there appears to be no timeline as to when things may return to 'normal', regarding the hybrid-working situation which was caused as a consequence of the global coronavirus pandemic, ensuring that improved network coverage is available to all communities is of paramount importance to the Operators, as well as Central Government. It does, in fact, appear that hybrid-working is here to stay, and that employees/commuters are taking the opportunity to improve their work-life balance and spend less time commuting. As such, the necessary infrastructure must be rolled-out to allow this to happen. The proposed development at the application site, will ensure 3G, 4G and 5G network coverage is provided to the local area.

It should be noted that paragraph 122 states that "*Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure*". A certificate of compliance with ICNIRP guidelines is included within this application.

It is stated in Section 4 of this statement that the Planning Inspectorate has in recent years continually recognised the importance of connectivity. When applying the balancing exercise encouraged at paragraph 209 of the NPPF, the Inspectorate has found in multiple cases that the provision, or prevention of loss, to existing services can outweigh less than substantial harm to heritage assets.

In determining one such appeal, brought by operator Telefónica (O2) against the decision of the London Borough of Harrow to refuse Prior Approval for the installation of a 12.5-metre-high monopole with shrouded antenna section and accompanied by an equipment cabinet on a roadside verge in the urban area of Harrow-on-the-Hill (appeal reference APP/M5450/W/17/3180345, determined in December 2017), the Inspector concluded that:

*"The proposal would be permitted development and provide public benefits in extending the telecommunications capacity of the area. In applying the balancing test of paragraph 134 of the Framework, I consider that these **benefits outweigh the harm that would arise from the proposal's impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area**" (emphasis added).*

These findings were echoed by the Inspectorate in determining a further case brought by the same Appellants against the decision of the London Borough of Hillingdon to refuse planning permission for a 15-metre-high monopole with shrouded antenna section and associated equipment housing at a roadside location within the urban area of West Drayton (APP/R5510/W/16/3143922, 2016).

The Inspector concluded:

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*"The Framework sets out the importance of an advanced high-quality communications infrastructure for sustainable growth and makes specific reference to the development of high-speed broadband technology. **This is reflected in the London Plan and the public benefit arising from the improvement of the telecommunications infrastructure is a material planning consideration that weighs in favour of the proposal.***

*Taking account of all matters I have concluded that the **limited harm caused to the significance of the heritage asset (the CA) would be outweighed by the public benefit that would arise from improving the communications infrastructure**" (emphasis added).*

In both cases cited, the developments were new base station installations proposed within Conservation Areas and it was determined that they would give rise to a degree of harm to the heritage asset in question. Despite this, the importance of providing a quality communications infrastructure was recognised by the Inspectorate and awarded due weight in the determination of the cases brought. That weight was sufficient for both appeals to be successful, despite the recognised harm. In the case of this application, the same public benefit occurs, plus the deployment of apparatus with 5G capability, without the harm to any nearby designated areas.

Local Guidance:

Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended requires planning applications and appeals to be determined having regard to the provisions of the Development Plan and other material considerations, and section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications and appeals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of Section 70, the current adopted development plan for Rochdale Borough Council, relevant to the proposal, comprises:

- The Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted October 2016); and
- The saved policies of the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan (Adopted June 2006).

Policy P1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted October 2016) states that high quality design will be required for all new developments.

Policy P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted October 2016) provides similar guidance, stating that all new developments are expected to adhere to high standards of design.

It should be acknowledged at this juncture that as both Policy P1 and Policy P3 aim to be applicable to all development, they cannot therefore legitimately and accurately be applied to the development of telecommunications networks, and the infrastructure that is required to support them. There are considerable design constraints that dictate the size, scale and form of telecommunications base stations, especially base station towers which are designed to accommodate up to all four Mobile Network Operators, plus any other

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wireless infrastructure provider (such as Community Broadband apparatus, or local radio equipment). As such, it is submitted that the proposed development cannot be accurately assessed against a non-telecoms-specific Local Policy. These design constraints must be acknowledged.

However, it should be acknowledged by the Local Authority that the proposed apparatus only serves **one** function – to provide communication services and mobile network coverage to the local area. The tower has no other function. As such, the design and appearance of the equipment, as well as the height of the equipment, is dictated purely by functionality and technical constraints. As outlined within this document, the proposed apparatus has been specifically designed to provide sufficient replacement coverage for the Existing Site, which is due to be decommissioned for reasons beyond the operators control.

Only essential apparatus is proposed for deployment. It is therefore submitted that the proposed scheme does indeed meet the threshold for 'high quality design', as per Policies P1 and P3. The innovative design is also considered to satisfy this policy, with such apparatus already deployed within residential areas across the UK.

As the application site sits within an agricultural field, rather than a residential area, it is considered that the design is both 'high quality' and wholly appropriate for such a setting. Whilst the apparatus cannot be considered 'attractive', it can also not be considered as 'poorly designed'. It performs a particular function, the effectiveness and success of which is dictated by both height and scale, and, again, this must be acknowledged. Any development, at any location, will have some level of visual impact on the local area. The proposed development is solely designed to provide network coverage and services to the surrounding area – as such it follows that the visual impact of the scheme will be on the immediate area in which it sits. Given that the utilitarian context of the Proposed Site being located adjacent to the A627 (Slattocks Link), a setting is offered in which one would expect to view such apparatus.

The deployment of the telecommunications infrastructure to provide a very specific service is unavoidable, as without it, the existing network which has served the Slattocks community since 2003 will be lost once the Existing Site is decommissioned. Therefore, the assessment that must be undertaken is clear – do the public benefits of deploying a future-proofed installation, which can provide sufficient replacement network coverage, and additionally the latest technological services (2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G) to the local area, outweigh any visual impact that the proposed development may cause. The Applicants submit that, in this instance, the multiple social, economic, and environmental which will be brought forward as part of the proposed development, certainly outweigh any associated visual impact.

As per Policies P1 and P3, developments are not required to avoid any and all visual impact, but to ensure that high quality design is brought forward. The proposal achieves this, as demonstrated in Figure 4. As such, the Applicant considers that this proposal satisfies Policies P1 and P3.

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Policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted October 2016) outlines the Council's expectations for 'General development requirements'. In a similar fashion to Policy P1 and P3, of the same document, the Local Authority expect to see 'high quality design' for all development brought forward. The Applicants, as outlined above, consider that the proposed scheme is in full accordance with this requirement.

Policy DM1 is made up of 13 separate bullet points (a-m). It is submitted that points d, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, and m, are not relevant to the proposed development and should therefore form no part of the Local Authority's assessment of this application.

In terms of point a., which states that development proposals should take the opportunity to 'enhance the quality of the area', it is submitted that this is wholly subjective. However, considering the utilitarian location of the Proposed Site adjacent to the A627 (Slattocks Link), the Applicant does not consider the development to be out of context or to have any significant negative impact on the surrounding area.

Point g. of DM1, relates to service provision. It is submitted that 'service provision' is the one and only function of the proposed development – offering essential replacement network coverage for the Existing Site. This should be acknowledged by the Local Authority and should be given significant planning weight in determining the application and making the balanced assessment of benefits vs harm.

It is considered that the proposal satisfies policies DM1, P1 and P3, of the Rochdale Core Strategy (Adopted October 2016). The Applicants are satisfied that the Site is considered the most appropriate town planning and environmental solution available, within the geographically-restricted area. The infrastructure itself is considered to be wholly appropriate for the area, offering an excellent town planning and operational solution, whilst simultaneously meeting the technical and operational needs of the operator. This type of infrastructure is already deployed at the Existing Site, close to the Proposed Site, and is now an accepted vertically engineered feature on the local landscape, in a similar fashion to electricity pylons that have been commonplace across the UK, in all settings, for decades. The proposed development is no different, and it is anticipated that it will soon be an accepted part of the built environment.

It is submitted that the agricultural field, in which the Proposed Site sits, is wholly appropriate for developments such as the one proposed.

No conflict has been identified with any other Development Plan policies.

Overall, it is considered the proposal complies with both national and local policy and that the application site offers the best town planning and operational solution in which to achieve this.

Conclusion

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In summary, the application is in respect of electronic communications apparatus necessary to ensure that services are both continued and improved within the area. Without a replacement base station, and the impending decommissioning of the existing base station, there is a very real possibility that network services will be lost from the local area.

This statement has demonstrated that the proposal is in accordance with local Development Plan policy and national policy set out in the NPPF. Specifically, it is a form of development that is specifically encouraged as a matter of principle and in its detail complies with the policy objective of minimising potential environmental impact, being appropriately designed and located, as far as practicable.

The proposed apparatus will provide the 'standard' 3G and 4G network coverage for Vodafone within the local area, as well as providing brand-new 5G connectivity at the point of deployment.

In conclusion, the application merits support and there are no material considerations that indicate otherwise.

Confirmation that submitted drawings have been checked for accuracy:

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