APPLICATION NUMBER: 19/00370/FUL

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.	CASE OFFICER	DATE
19/00370/FUL	Michael Atkinson-Smith	04 July 2019

Address: Land Off Whittle Lane, Heywood

Proposal: Removal of existing telecommunications mast, equipment housing and all associated apparatus and installation of new 25 metre mast (approximately 65 metres east of the existing site) including 6 no. antennas and 4 no. 600 millimetre dish antennas and associated apparatus, 10 no. equipment cabinets and associated ancillary works.

PUBLICITY	**Weekly list expired?**	Y	**Site notice expired?**	Y
	Neighbour letters expired?	Y	**Press Notice expired?**	N/A

DELEGATION	**Significant departure from local plan?**	N	**Contrary to national policy?**	N
	Applicant a Council Member or officer?	N	**Contrary to previous decision?**	N
	Major with 10 or more objections and recommending approval?	N	**Called in or Planning Panel objection?**	N

COMMENTS	**Planning Panel comments received?**	N
	Neighbour comments received?	N

EIA	**Screening opinion completed and saved to Onbase?**	N/A

CONDITIONS	**Pre-commencement conditions proposed?**	N
	Pre-commencement conditions agreed (or notification period expired)?	N/A

RECOMMENDATION	GRANT

CHECKED AND SIGNED OFF BY: AT **DATE: 08.07.2019**

SITE

The existing site presently consists of multiple items of telecommunications apparatus and ancillary development located within a fenced compound. This includes a 15 metre high monopole accommodating radio antennae and equipment cabinets at ground level. This site is located to the west of Whittle Lane and directly south of the M62 Motorway within a strip comprising large established trees and dense vegetation.

The closest residential property to the proposed site is The Grange which is located some 177m to the east which lies within the Birch Village Conservation Area. Birch Services lies to the north of the site across Whittle Lane. Open agricultural land extends to the south and west. The application site is designated as Green Belt.

PROPOSAL

The application proposes the removal of the existing apparatus and the return of the land to its pre-development condition. The proposed site of the replacement infrastructure is open agricultural land approximately 65 metres east of the existing site closer to Whittle Lane. The installations would include a 25 metre high mast including six antennae and four 600mm dish antennae and associated apparatus, together with ten ground based equipment cabinets and associated ancillary works. Access would be provided as existing from Whittle Lane.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – February 2019
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO3	**Improving design, image and quality of place**
P2	Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage
P3	Improving design of new development
SO4	**Promoting a greener environment**
G4	Protecting Green Belt land
DM1	General development requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

G/D/2	**Green Belt**

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

0052/PDN	Notification under the Electronic Communications Code Regulations of the intention to install electronic communications apparatus. Notification acknowledged September 2014
07/D49293	Determination of Prior Approval for the installation of a 15m high telecommunications monopole with 3 antennae and associated equipment cabins. Granted STC July 2007

07/D43228 Determination of Prior Approval for the installation of a 15m high telecommunications pole with 3 antennae, 2 dish Antennae and radio equipment housing. Granted STC May 2004

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Conservation And Design - As this proposal will not impact upon the setting of the Birch Conservation Area there are no comments or objections raised in relation to this application.

Highways and Engineering - No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of notification were sent to surrounding neighbours and a site notice posted in the vicinity. No representations have been received.

ANALYSIS

Telecommunications Infrastructure

Paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework 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 connections*."

Paragraph 113 of the National Planning Policy Framework states '*the numbers of radio and telecommunications masts, and the sites for such installations, should be kept to a minimum consistent with the need of consumers, the efficient operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for the future. Use of existing masts, buildings and other structures for new electronic communications capability (including wireless) should be encouraged. Where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate'.*

The proposed mast would be a replacement of an existing mast close to an existing telecommunications site and as such is consistent with the above and sequentially preferable to proposing a new mast elsewhere. It is noted that the replacement infrastructure would not be installed at exactly the same location, but the applicant notes the presence of the sloping embankment of the adjacent motorway which limits the scope for ground based expansion of the existing site due the negative impact on the existing access track and productive area of agricultural land.

Further to this, paragraph 115 of the NPPF requires that applications for telecommunications development should, where necessary, be accompanied by the necessary evidence to justify the proposed development including:

- the outcome of consultations with organisations with an interest in the proposed development, in particular with the relevant body where a mast is to be installed near a school or college or within a statutory safeguarding zone surrounding an aerodrome, technical site or military explosives area;

The proposed replacement mast would not be installed in close proximity to a school or college or within a statutory safeguarding zone surrounding an aerodrome, technical site or military explosives area.

- for an addition to an existing mast or base station, a statement that self-certifies that the cumulative exposure, when operational, will not exceed International Commission on non-ionising radiation protection guidelines;

  Non-applicable

- for a new mast or base station, evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met.

  Non-applicable

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF stipulates 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 the telecommunications system, or determine health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure'.*

The applicant has provided a certificate which confirms that the proposed installation would be in full compliance with the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidance.

The adopted Rochdale Core Strategy does not contain any policies specific to telecommunications application given that the NPPF contains a clear expression of Government policy that advanced, high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth and in this respect there is encouragement to local planning authorities to support the expansion of electronic communication networks, including telecommunications. However, several policies contained within the Core Strategy are relevant, as are additional paragraphs of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on Visual Amenity

Policy DM1 of the Council's Core Strategy requires all development proposals, to demonstrate that they are of a high quality design and take the opportunity to enhance the quality of the area and Policy P3 requires all new developments to adhere to high standards of design. Core Strategy policy P2 expects all new development to protect, and where possible enhance, the natural landscape character. Paragraph 127 of the Framework states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and effective landscaping.

The proposed mast would be substantial at 25m in height and top-heavy due to the appended antennae and microwave dishes. It is acknowledged that such features are visually unattractive but this must be balanced against their necessity in facilitating modern methods of communication and the need to site them in suitable locations for them to function effectively. Whilst the site is located within the Green Belt and the land to the south and east is open and agricultural in character, it is noted that the site is in close proximity to the M62 and a large motorway service station. Siting the mast in a location close to such existing infrastructure as opposed to an isolated site in open countryside is therefore considered to be preferable given that the open and 'green' nature of the area is already somewhat compromised. The mast will be clearly visible from a small part of Whittle Lane but would otherwise be largely out of view from main public vantage points. Existing tree screening to the west and south east will somewhat limit the overall impact. On this basis, it is therefore considered that the proposed installation is acceptable in respect of visual

amenity and the application accords with the relevant parts of Core Strategy policies DM1, P2 and P3 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on Residential amenity

Although Government guidance clearly establishes that the perceived health risks associated with telecommunications development are not for consideration, it is still important to ensure proposals would not impact on the amenity of any surrounding residents. In this regard, given the distance between the site and the nearest residential dwelling (approximately 177m) and existing screening provided by vegetation, it is considered that the proposal would not result in any undue harm to the amenity of surrounding residential occupiers. On this basis, the application accords with the relevant parts of Core Strategy policy DM1 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on the Highway Network and Highway Safety

Policy DM1 of the Core Strategy requires that developments provide satisfactory vehicular access with adequate parking, manoeuvring and servicing arrangements, taking account of the proposed use and location. Given the proposed use, vehicle access to the site is only required for construction, maintenance and decommissioning and as such any traffic movements associated with the development are negligible. No objections have been received from the Council's Highways Officer. The application therefore complies with the relevant parts of Core Strategy policy DM1 and the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

Principle of Development – Green Belt

The application site is allocated as Green Belt under the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan. Policy G/D/2 is therefore relevant to any applications on the site and in the supporting text to this policy it is established that the Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development in order to maintain the framework of open land separating and surrounding the urban areas of the borough.

Policy G4 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy seeks to restrict development within the Green Belt to the limited types of development which are deemed appropriate by national planning policies unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that 'the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'.

Further to this, paragraph 134 of the NPPF defines the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt as follows:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraphs 143 and 144 of the NPPF state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and

any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 145 of the NPPF indicates that "a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt", subject to the following exceptions:

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building; d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
d) limited infilling in villages;
e) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
f) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
   – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
   – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Therefore, the main consideration in assessing the principle of development is whether the proposed scheme constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt and, if so, whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated which may outweigh the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm. Clearly, the proposed mast does not meet any of the above identified exemptions and as such the development would be considered to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

The applicant's assertion that the replacement of one telecommunications installation with another larger one in a more open location would not materially affect the openness of the Green Belt is not accepted. Whilst the However, the removal of the existing mast and return of the land to its former condition does offer some weight in favour of the proposed development. The Government's support for the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology, as detailed in the NPPF, is also acknowledged.

The proposal will result in a moderate degree of harm to the Green Belt due to inappropriateness and loss of openness, and this harm is given substantial weight as required by NPPF. However, on balance it is considered that the harm caused will on this occasion be outweighed by very special circumstances consisting of the benefits of the removal of the existing mast, along with the wider benefits in terms of the expansion and progression of the communications network.

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT subject to the following conditions:

1. The development must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this permission.

   Reason. Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. This permission relates to the following plans:

   002 Site Location Plan
   100 Existing Site Plan
   101 Existing Site to be Removed Site Plan
   150 Existing Elevation A
   215 Max Configuration Site Plan
   265 Max Configuration Elevation
   and the development shall be carried out in complete accordance with the approved drawings.

   Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of development in accordance with the policies contained within the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. No above-ground works to install the 25 metre mast hereby permitted shall take place until the existing mast and associated compound fencing, cabinets and concrete base have been fully removed from the site. Within 3 months of the date of its removal, the site of the existing mast shall be restored to its pre-development condition, in full accordance with the details shown on Drawing No. 101 – Existing Site to be Removed Site Plan.

   Reason – In the interests of visual amenity and to maintain the openness of the Green Belt in accordance with policies G4 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Procedure Statement

The proposal complies with the development plan and would improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. It therefore comprises sustainable development and the Local Planning Authority worked proactively and positively to issue the decision without delay.

Report Author Michael Atkinson-Smith