

TWC/2010/0816

Highway verge, St Georges By-pass, St Georges, Telford, TF2 9SH
Determination under Part 24 of the GPDO for the replacement of an existing 14.9 metre high telecommunications monopole with a 14.9 metre high monopole, and new ground equipment cabinet

APPLICANT

Telefunica 02 UK Ltd

RECEIVED

01/12/2010

PARISH

St Georges and Priorslee

WARD

Priorslee

CASE OFFICER

Philip Baker

OBJECTIONS RECEIVED: Yes

MAIN ISSUES: The siting and appearance of the telecommunications installation and its visual impact on the surrounding area.

THE PROPOSAL:

This is an application for a determination as to whether prior approval will be required in relation to the siting and appearance of a 14.9 metre high slim line telecommunications monopole.

The application involves replacing the existing 14.9 metre high 02 monopole accommodating 3 antennae with a 14.9 metre high monopole accommodating 6 antennae, which will provide 02 and Vodaphone with coverage in the surrounding area. All the antennae are contained within a smooth circular sheath, which will be fatter than the existing sheath to accommodate the additional antennae.

There would also be a new ground equipment cabinet at the base of the pole measuring 1.89m in length, 0.79m in width and 1.65 metres in height. The monopole and the equipment housing would both be coloured grey to match the existing equipment.

The applicants have stated that the proposal is required in order to increase 2G network capacity to the Priorslee/St Georges area and also provide 3G coverage.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

The site lies within the grass highway verge, on the northern side of the St Georges By-pass, approximately 200 metres west of the Limekiln Bank Roundabout.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT:

Wrekin Local Plan Policy T21: Telecommunications.

This policy emphasises the requirement to balance the need for telecommunication systems with the need to minimise the proposal's visual impact on the surrounding area. Evidence should be provided to show that every effort has been made to erect

the apparatus on existing buildings, masts, and other structures, and to share apparatus with other operators.

In May 2009 the Council adopted a Supplementary Planning Document titled 'Telecommunications Development' which provides guidelines relating to the Council's planning approach towards telecommunications development in the Borough. The key points of this document are as follows:-

- The Council should not question the need for the telecommunications system which the proposed development is to support.
- Operators are expected to undertake pre-submission discussions with the Council, Parish Councils, and other residential groups to discuss service objectives, technical constraints, and environmental implications. Discussions should also be held with schools and nurseries if they are within 200 metres of the proposed development.
- Mast sharing is encouraged and full consideration should be given to using existing buildings and structures.
- Telecommunications development should take into account the height of the site in relation to surrounding land, the existence of topographical features and vegetation, and the effect on the skyline or horizon.
- Monopoles and their associated ground equipment should be painted in an appropriate colour to mitigate the visual impact of the installation.
- All applications must include an ICNIRP Declaration that the electromagnetic emissions from a mast or monopole will be in compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure.
- 'Slimline' monopoles may be acceptable in residential areas, provided they are not unduly prominent in the street scene and are in keeping with the scale and appearance of the existing street furniture. The installation should not add significantly to the existing street 'clutter'.
- Operators will be expected to examine alternatives to establishing new masts, including the use of existing buildings.
- The proximity of telecommunications installations to residential property is not a material planning consideration unless it would have a significant impact, due to its siting and appearance, on visual amenity.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: Telecommunications (PPG8)

This sets out the Government's policy for the planning of telecommunications development. PPG8 encourages local planning authorities to respond positively to telecommunications proposals while protecting the environment from visual intrusion.

ODPM: Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development.

The Code provides practical advice on the siting and design of telecommunications development in order to minimise the environmental impact of installations.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES:

The Ward Member, Veronica Fletcher, objects to the proposal on the following grounds:-

- The mast will be situated on the grass verge and will present a danger to motorists

To date, one e-mail has been received objecting to the proposal, the grounds of objection summarised as being:-

- This would be a blight on the landscape in a residential area
- There is a proliferation of these eyesores
- One mast placed on high ground at Red Hill on the A5, away from residential properties, should be sufficient to cover all of East Telford

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:

This is a telecommunications determination application and therefore the decision whether to give or refuse prior approval must be based on the siting and appearance of the installation.

The existing monopole and its associated ground equipment cabinet are situated on the open grass verge adjoining the highway. There are high banks of vegetation beyond the highway verge on both sides of the road. There are numerous 12 metre high street lights along the northern side of the by-pass, and the nearest residential property is approximately 20 metres from the proposal site.

The applicants have stated that when they look to provide a new or enhanced telecommunications facility they always look to upgrade the existing mast or pole before exploring other options. In this particular case the applicants established that from a technical point of view the existing 02 installation was a suitable location to provide the required level of 3G coverage for both 02 and Vodaphone. (A pre-application consultation letter was sent to the Council in October 2010 but the applicants have stated that this consultation exercise was not extended to other interested parties because only a replacement pole was being proposed).

On the basis that the proposal was the replacement of an existing pole, and that it was a mast sharing opportunity, the applicants have confirmed that no other telecommunications installations, buildings, and other structures within the required coverage area were considered.

The proposed pole would be the same height as the existing structure, although it would need to be slightly wider than the existing installation in order to accommodate the three extra antennae. By utilising an existing installation, albeit with a fatter profile, the current proposal will reduce the need for additional street furniture, and prevent the proliferation and introduction of new masts into the wider area. The column will retain its slim-line profile, with its shrouded antennae, in order to minimise the visual impact of the development.

The replacement monopole would not be significantly visually different from the existing monopole, and therefore would not be an alien feature in the street scene, nor significantly visually intrusive. Its location within the grass highway verge will not form an incongruous or unduly prominent feature on the skyline or on the street scene. In addition the monopole will be viewed in relation to the trees located beyond

the grass verges. There is no fenced compound proposed, and it is normal to find various types of electrical equipment cabinets and relay boxes alongside urban roads. Therefore the overall impact of the installation on the street scene is considered to be acceptable, taking into account that there is a similar structure in location already.

There is much public concern concerning the possible adverse health impacts of telecommunication development. However consideration of this application should follow the advice given in PPG8. Paragraph 98 states: *“it is the Government’s firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Government’s responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Government’s view, if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them.”*

The requisite ICNIRP certificate has been submitted with this application which confirms that the site and the proposed emissions would comply with the appropriate guidelines. Recent High Court and Court of Appeal decisions in relation to planning appeals for telecommunications equipment have established that when evidence is submitted to confirm that an installation falls within the ICNIRP guidelines, that a perception of fear or concerns about health issues do not provide justification for a Council to refuse an application.

Therefore, the proposed replacement monopole is considered an acceptable installation in this urban residential area, where the appearance of a slim-line monopole would not detract from the character of the area, or be significantly different from the pole it will replace. The siting and design of the proposed development will ensure that there is no adverse impact on the character and appearance of the locality and the general street scene, and the mast sharing will help reduce the need for more masts in the area.. Furthermore, proximity to dwellings is not a planning issue provided that the application includes an ICNIRP Declaration regarding emissions, which this application does, and that the installation satisfies normal planning considerations regarding the siting and appearance of development.

DETERMINATION:

The proposed 14.9 metre high slim line telecommunications monopole does not require a full planning application, and therefore **prior approval is given** for the siting and appearance of the telecommunications installation and its permitted development rights are hereby confirmed.