

DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION No:	N6/2005/0524/FP
DESCRIPTION:	REMOVAL OF EXISTING 36 METRE TELECOMS MAST AND ERECTION OF A NEW 45 METRE MAST WITHIN FENCED COMPOUND
LOCATION:	HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY, STANBOROUGH ROAD, WGC

THE SITE

The application site is located on the eastern site of Stanborough Road. The site forms the Police Headquarters and has been recently been approved permission for redevelopment which is not commencing on the site.

THE PROPOSAL

The proposal within this application is to replace the existing telecoms mast within the site which is used for police communications and also provides sharing for mobile phone operators.

PLANNING HISTORY

N6/2003/0949/FP - PHASED REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING POLICE AUTHORITY HEADQUARTERS INVOLVING PARTIAL DEMOLITION AND CONSTRUCTION OF UP TO A TOTAL OF 20,000 SQUARE METRES OF B1 OFFICE FLOORSPACE, CREATION OF NEW EMERGENCY ACCESS, EXTENSION AND RECONFIGURATION OF EXISTING CAR PARKING, RELOCATION OF EXISTING TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST AND AERIALS AND COMPREHENSIVE LANDSCAPING. Approved January 2004

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991- 2011:

- Policy 21 - Telecommunications

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005

- R21 – Telecommunication Development

REPRESENTATIONS

Application advertised by means of notification letter and site notice.

No representations received.

DISCUSSION

The main issues in relation to this application relate to the siting and appearance of the proposal and its impact on the character and appearance of the area. Guidance is provided by policy R21 of the adopted Plan, as well as the relevant policies of the Structure Plan and PPG8.

There are eight requirements under policy R21 and each will be considered in turn in respect of this proposal (a copy of Policy R21 is appended to the rear of this report):

- (i) The site is a replacement for an existing mast on this site. Planning permission was granted in 2004 for the redevelopment of the police headquarters site which involved a phase of development over the existing mast site. The application included the provision for the replacement of the mast however the details of its location and requirement were left to be determined by a separate application which this now forms. The development is therefore not for the construction of a completely new structure, but a replacement for the existing.
- (ii) The mast is already proposed to be used by two mobile phone operators as well as housing the necessary police equipment, and further provision for other operators has been made.
- (iii) A compliance certificate has been submitted in relation to the ICNIRP guidelines.
- (iv) The plans state that the Exclusion Zones conform to the ICNIRP reference levels for limiting RF exposure to members of the general public and appropriate fencing is located around the base station at ground floor level.
- (v) PPG8 in relation to telecommunications development near to schools states that the LPA should consult the relevant bodies and take into account any relevant views expressed. Stanborough School is located approximately 475m from the school. The school has been consulted as part of the application and no comments have been received, and the proposed development is to be located further from the school than the existing mast.
- (vi) The development is required to provide a replacement for the existing mast which is coming to the end of its life and which is to be removed to make way for the redevelopment of the site. The mast is required to provide service for the Police headquarters, but is also utilised for site sharing for mobile phone service providers. Whilst the mast is to be 45 metres in height, 6 metres higher than the existing mast, its new siting is such that the ground level is 5 metres lower in this position and therefore overall the mast will only appear 1 metre higher within the skyline. The mast has been designed to accommodate all the existing

telecommunications equipment on this single facility and will therefore also remove the existing equipment located on the roofs of some of the buildings within the site, improving the overall appearance and clutter within the site.

The development will appear visible within the headquarters, due to the landscaping and other development within the site the mast will not appear unduly dominant in the sites immediate surroundings. The mast will appear visible within area above the skyline of the surrounding vegetation and other buildings. The mast is required to be this height to gain the necessary coverage but also due to the sky slope located near to the site. The mast as only 1 metre higher than the existing mast at the site will not have a greatly increased visual impact and will not appear any more visually prominent. Any slight increased visual impact would however be outweighed by the need and requirements of the proposal.

The plans have also been amended so that landscaping is provided to the areas in front and behind the proposed enclosure. The palisade boarding is acceptable and replicated other fencing used within the site. The site will be largely enclosed at low level by the buildings to the west and east and the landscaping areas to the north and south will provide an effective screen to the enclosure and lowest parts of the structure.

To ensure that the development will not appear visually intrusive once completed and to avoid visual clutter a carefully worded condition will be required to ensure the removal of the existing mast. There will need to be a hand over period between the existing and proposed and this is proposed to be 18 months for the transfer of equipment and to ensure that services are provided to an acceptable degree on the site. This time period is considered acceptable in this case.

- (vii) The site is not within a Conservation Area or in the setting of a Listed Building.
- (viii) The proposal is not on a building.
- (ix) The site is not located within an area designated for their landscape, historic or nature conservation importance. Whilst the site is located close to the boarder with the green belt the proposal as detailed above is not considered to have any increased detrimental impact on the openness of the green belt than the existing mast and the technical requirements for the mast are considered to outweigh any slight harm the development would have.

In relation to concerns in connection with the health risks of mobile phone technology guidance updated in the August 2001 version of Planning Policy Guidance 8 deals with health considerations. Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 states in paragraph 30 that:

“it is the Governments firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains central Governments responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Governments 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.”

I am of the opinion that on the balance of the best advice available at the present time, that the ‘precautionary approach’, which is widely referred to (paragraph 31 of PPG 8), consists of the application of the more stringent ICNIRP Emissions Guidelines for levels of public exposure to RF radiation to telecommunications development. If the ICNIRP guidelines are complied with then the precautionary approach has been satisfied and the Local Planning Authority should not attach greater weight to the health concern as a material planning consideration. As previously indicated the proposal complies with the ICNIRP standards, therefore, I do not believe refusal on health grounds or on the fear of adverse effects would be justified and to withhold planning permission solely on these grounds would be unreasonable.

CONCLUSION

The development is for the replacement of the existing mast for police telecommunications as well as site sharing for mobile phone service providers. The development is required as the mast is coming to the end of its operational life and the redevelopment of the site means that the existing site will be built over.

The mast will appear 1 metre higher within the skyline and this slight increase is not considered to have an unacceptable impact in relation to visual intrusion or the open character of the green belt which is located in close proximity to the site.

A carefully worded condition is required in relation to the removal of the existing mast.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend approval subject to conditions

CONDITIONS

1. SC01
2. SC09
3. Before the development hereby permitted is commenced the external colour finish of the mast, base station and enclosing fence shall have been agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the finish of the installation provided on site shall be in accordance with the details so agreed

Reason

In order to enhance the visual appearance of the mast, base station and fence to comply with Policy R21 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

4. The enclosure fence to be provided surrounding the mast hereby approved shall be completed in accordance with the details submitted on 9 June 2005, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason

To ensure the appearance of the site does not appear visually intrusive in line with R21 of Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

5. The existing mast shall have been dismantled and completely removed from the site and the site restored, no later than 18 months following the commencement of development of the mast hereby approved, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason

To ensure the accumulation of structures will have an unacceptable visual impact and to avoid visual clutter and in accordance with R21 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

SUMMARY OF THE REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION/ CONSENT

It is considered that the proposed development does not have an unacceptably harmful impact on the character of the area in which it is located as the development proposed is in keeping with the existing mast to be replaced and will not have a visually harmful impact on the surrounding area.

INFORMATIVES

NONE

DRAWING NUMBERS

H0305-0001 Rev D
H0305-0002 Rev D
H0305-0003 Rev D
H0305-0004 Rev D
H0305-0005 Rev D
Fencing Details

Received 9 Jun 2005