

**WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**  
**DELEGATED REPORT**

<b>APPLICATION No:</b>	<b>N6/2007/1462/FP</b>
------------------------	------------------------

**NOTATION:**

The site lies within Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

**DESCRIPTION OF SITE:**

The application site is situated in Wigmores North, in close proximity to Howardsgate within the town centre. The application site comprise the telephone exchange building which runs from 36-54 Wigmores North with access to the rooftop adjacent to the access road serving the rear of buildings in the vicinity.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:**

The application proposes the installation of telecommunication apparatus on the rooftop of the telephone exchange for O2 service provider giving notice under the Electronic Communications Code (Conditions and Restrictions) Regulations 2003 for such installation.

Consent is sought for the erection of 3 antennas, one supported on a new pole, with out rigger for the relocated dish, the other two on existing poles and three cabinets on grillage with new support steelwork and handrailing. The antennas would be located on the raised central element of the rooftop. This would enable O2 to improve the existing 2G and 3G service to customers within the town centre location due to attenuation of radio signal that occurs due to buildings. The equipment would have a natural light grey matt finish.

**PLANNING HISTORY:**

Planning history dates back to 1977 for third floor extension, alteration of windows occurred in 1996, 1999 and 2004.

In relation to telecommunications, applications include:

N6/1998/1119/FP – formation of telecommunications base station including 3 cross polar antennas, 4 dish antennas and equipment housing – granted 17/5/99;

N6/1999/0742/DT – installation of one radio equipment midi cabin – granted 20/9/99;

N6/2004/1763/FP – replacement of 3 existing antennas with dual band antennas and ancillary apparatus – granted 25/1/05.

**SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES:**

National Policy

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 – Telecommunications

Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991 – 2011:

None.

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005:

GBSP2 - Towns and specified settlements  
D1 - Quality of design  
D2 - Character and context  
R21 – Telecommunications Development  
R22 – Development in Conservation Areas

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, Supplementary Design Guidance, February 2005

## **CONSULTATIONS**

### **TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS:**

None.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH:**

None.

### **BEAMS:**

Has concerns about the spread of antennas across the rooftop and considers it should be refusal as would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the Garden City Conservation Area.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

None. Period expired 23 November 2007.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The main issues are:

- 1. Potential impact on the character of the site and surrounding Conservation Area;**
- 2. Appropriate location for the siting of telecommunications equipment;**
- 3. Potential impact on health;**
- 4. Other Material Planning Considerations**

1. Mobile networks need to be supported by an infrastructure of base stations. The development is required to meet network and coverage requirements for telecommunications equipment. In particular the antennas are required to enable 3G services to be provided based on the existing 2G network, although there is still a need for new sites.

Policy R21 seeks development that does not harm the appearance of the street scene nor appear visually intrusive, or cause harm to the Conservation Area. In terms of development on a building it states that it must not be out of keeping with the building, in terms of siting, scale, size, profile and colour and in Conservation Areas applicants must demonstrate why sites outside of these areas cannot be used.

Whilst PPG8 states the Government's intention of encouraging the facilitation of the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems, environmental impact should be kept to a minimum. There is encouragement towards the sharing of masts and sites where that represents the optimum environmental solution in a particular case and authorities need to consider the cumulative impact upon the environment of additional antennas sharing a mast or masts sharing a site. In particular the use and re-use of existing sites is encouraged to minimise the need for new second and third generation base stations.

The siting of antennas within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area is a sensitive issue. The proposed antennas would be sited on the upper most part of the rooftop of the telephone exchange which has a raised central roof area. The cabinets however would be sited alongside an existing walk in cabin on a lower part of the rooftop nearest to Howardsgate. The building itself is approximately 19m in height with existing telecommunication equipment, as on the rooftops of other commercial buildings within the town centre. The antennas would be slender in design and no higher than the existing poles at these locations on the rooftop. Given the re-use of poles and the minimum additional equipment proposed it is considered that it would not result in development that would cause significant harm to the building and adversely affect the setting within the Conservation Area. However it is accepted that this is additional development on a site which already maintains a number of other antennas for companies, however the proposal would not result in the cluttering of the roof space or development that would result in any greater visual impact to that existing.

The light grey matt finish of the equipment would not result in the eye being drawn to the new development which would blend with the existing, including that of the cabinets set against a grey backdrop of the raised central roof slope. Given the height of the building the development would not be readily visible to the casual observer.

2. The telephone exchange lends itself to being an appropriate location for such service providers given the existing services available and the existing use of the site by other telecommunication service providers. With a central location, the applicant states that this is the area which currently suffers from loss of reception to mobiles within buildings and as such directional antennas can provide better reception with the localised area of the town centre.

The use of this site would result in site sharing and would allow for the further sharing of this site by other operators as would not sterilise the rooftop with the antennas proposed.

3. The applicant has stated that the radio equipment housing is required to be mechanically ventilated which is only likely to be used during the day when the emissions is unlikely to exceed background noise levels. A certificate of ICNIRP has been submitted as a declaration of conformity with public exposure guidelines in accordance with EU Council recommendation on the limitation of exposure of the electromagnetic fields (0Hz to 300 GHz).

PPG8 deals with health considerations and considers that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It states that:

*'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 health aspects and concerns about them.'*

It is considered that the precautionary approach has been satisfied given the ICNIRP guidelines have been complied with and therefore the planning authority should not attach greater weight to the health concern as a material planning consideration. Therefore the proposal is not considered unacceptable on these grounds.

**CONCLUSION:**

The use of an existing site for telecommunications is encouraged where further site sharing can occur as in this case. The additional antennas and equipment are not considered to cause any significant harm to the Conservation Area above and beyond that which currently exists at the site. Although visible within the street scene it would not result in visual detriment or cause further visual intrusion on the skyline that that currently, although it is accepted that there ultimately would be a limit to site sharing within the Conservation Area, although this is not considered to be so in this particular case and therefore the proposal conforms with policy. In addition the public perception of health risk is not considered to be a material planning consideration given the submission of a certificate of ICNIRP.

**RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS**

**CONDITIONS:**

1. C.2.1

Reason: In order to comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act (As amended).

2. The telecommunications equipment hereby approved shall be removed from the site within 3 months of the use of the equipment permanently ceasing.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area and in accordance with policy R21.

**SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PERMISSION:**

The proposal has been considered against development plan policies (Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 GBSP2, D1, D2, R21, R22), in addition to the Human Rights Act 1998, which indicate that the proposal should be approved. Material planning considerations do not justify a decision contrary to the Development Plan (see Officer’s report which can be inspected at these offices).

**INFORMATIVES:**

None.

**DRAWING NUMBERS:**

21343.004/01 & P/21343\_03\_150\_M13\_13/DA & P21343\_03\_100\_M13\_13/DA and date stamped 2 October 2007.

**Signature of author..... Date.....**