

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 3 June 2020

Ward: Southcote

App No.: 200339/FUL

Address: Burghfield Road Southcote

Proposal: Removal of the existing 15m mast and erection of a new 25m lattice tower with a total of 12No. antenna (6No. EE and 6No. Huawei) along with ancillary equipment mounted on a newly formed concrete foundation measuring 5.5m x 5.6m. The existing site compound would be retained and enlarged by a further 6.6m to an overall size of 13.2m x 6.6m all enclosed by a 2.5m high Palisade fence to match that of the existing

Applicant: Wireless Infrastructure Group

Date validated: 2 March 2020

8-week target decision date: 27 April 2020

RECOMMENDATION

As per 29th April 2020 committee report (attached to this report as Appendix A) but with the following additional condition:

4. The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of this development shall be painted or coated with a fir green (RAL 6009) colour finish before the development hereby permitted becomes operational.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application was deferred at the 29th April 2020 Planning Applications Committee in order to seek clarification from the Applicant on some matters relating to the proposed development.
- 1.2 One point of clarification was regarding the colour of the proposed mast. The Applicant has confirmed that the mast could be constructed in a 'Fir Green' (RAL colour ref. 6009) colour finish:

RAL 6009 Fir Green



and that the proposed antennas and dishes to the top of the mast could also be provided in this colour finish. Officer consider that Fir Green is an appropriate colour in the context of the surrounding countryside and trees.

- 1.3 Clarification has also been provided with regard to the height of the mast. Paragraph 2.2 of the 29th April 2020 committee report set out that a 25m high mast was required due to the height of the surrounding clutter between the site location and the cell coverage area in order to provide improved coverage to customers. The Applicant has now advised that the topography of the surrounding land which rises from the application site towards the north, where the target residential coverage area lies, also necessitates a mast of the height proposed, in order to provide the necessary network coverage improvements. The Applicant has advised that a reduction in height of the mast would result in the need for an additional site in the locality to meet the necessary coverage requirements which would be contrary to the aims of paragraph 113 of the NPPF which seeks to keep the number of masts to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers, the efficient operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for future expansion.
- 1.4 There was also discussion at the 29th April 2020 committee meeting with regard to the value of a character assessment of the proposed enlarged mast to assist with consideration of the visual impact. The Applicant has considered this request and does not dispute the fact that introduction of a taller vertical structure will have a degree of visual impact but is of the strong opinion that provision of a such a views study would not be proportionate to the impact of the development.
- 1.5 The Applicant notes that the site and surrounding land is not under any statutory designation and that whilst within the Kennet and Holy Brook Meadows Major Landscape Feature as defined by Policy EN13 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 it is located on the western edge of this local landscape feature. The Applicant considers that the immediate surrounding of the site must also be considered. The site is located within an existing large electricity sub-station site with telecommunications base station equipment and mast which have been in situ for some time. Additionally, the railway line and associated infrastructure to the north of site also mean that the localised setting of the landscape feature has already been compromised by the existing and historic land use and infrastructure.
- 1.6 The Applicant considers that the main consideration is whether the degree of visual impact would outweigh that of the public benefits of the proposal

(as summarised in the 29th April 2020 Committee Report) and considers that this would not be the case and therefore it is not proportionate in this instance to provide a views assessment or visualisations of the site.

- 1.7 Officers consider that a views assessment would be of some benefit in the assessment of the application, but that ultimately it is already clear that, as with any large vertical structure, there will be some visual impact arising from the new tower from most surrounding viewpoints. The question is whether this impact amounts to a degree of harm that outweighs the public benefits of the proposals.
- 1.8 As set out in paragraph 7.1 of the 29th April 2020 committee report it is considered that the benefits of the proposed development in providing improved network coverage for nearby residents and the emergency services network, together with the fact that the proposals are for an upgrade of an existing telecommunications base stations and are designed to be shared with other operators therefore reducing the potential for new telecommunication base stations and masts to be established elsewhere in this locality, are considered to outweigh the extent to which the increased height of the mast would detract from the visual amenity of the surrounding area and the character of the Kennet and Holy Brook Meadows Major Landscape Feature.
- 1.9 One additional letter of objection to the application has also been received. A summary of what this objection states is set out below:
 - Not all scientists agree with ICNRIP that 5G has no harmful effects
 - A number of countries have place moratoriums on 5G networks
 - Public Health England and Ofcom who regulate communications services are linked to Government Departments and is concerned that there are vested interests in their involvement in this matter.
- 1.10 Officer comments in respect of the role of planning in considering the health impacts of telecommunications development is set out in paragraphs 6.16 to 6.18 of the 29th April Planning Applications Committee report.
- 1.11 The Officer recommendation remains as per the 29th April 2020 committee report and is to grant full planning permission subject to the conditions and the additional condition set out in the recommendation box of this report.

Case Officer: Matt Burns