

Committee date	Wednesday, 2 September 2020
Application reference	20/00717/GPDO - Watford North Railway Station, Bushey Mill Lane
Site address	
Proposal	Application for the prior approval of the siting and appearance for a new 20m high monopole mast for a 5G (fifth generation) communications system, 1 no. 600mm dish, the installation of 4 no. cabinets and ancillary works thereto.
Applicant	Cornerstone and Telefonica
Agent	Waldon Telecom
Type of Application	Prior Approval
Reason for committee Item	Number of objections
Target decision date	8 th September 2020
Statutory publicity	Public advertisement and site notice
Case officer	Paul Baxter, paul.baxter@watford.gov.uk
Ward	Tudor

1. Recommendation

That prior approval be granted as set out in Section 8 of this report.

2. Site and surroundings

- 2.1 The site is located at Watford North Station on the southern side of Bushey Mill Lane between its junctions with Southfield Avenue to the east and Sandown Road to the west. The station comprises a platform and small waiting shelter for passengers. There is an existing 12m high 'pitchfork' style mast (the omni antennas extend to 14.2m high) sited beyond the end of the platform, 7m from the highway and adjacent to the rear boundary of 2, Southfield Avenue. Two storey houses in Southfield Avenue adjoin the station site to the east with gardens over 20m long. To the north and west are single storey and two storey commercial buildings within the Greycaine Road and Sandown Road industrial areas respectively.
- 2.2 The proposed mast is to be sited in a small area of vacant land between the end of the platform and the existing mast.

3. Summary of the proposal

3.1 Proposal

Application for the prior approval of the siting and appearance for a new 20m high monopole mast for a 5G (fifth generation) communications system, 1 no. 600mm dish, the installation of 4 no. cabinets and ancillary works thereto, to be sited 4.3m to the south-west of the existing mast. Application made pursuant to Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended).

3.2 The proposed mast will replace the existing 12m high 'pitch-fork' style mast which provides only 2G services to the surrounding area.

3.3 Conclusion

The site is an existing telecommunications site, hosting a 12m high mast which provides only 2G services. The proposed 20m high mast will provide all services including 5G, which accounts for the height of the mast. The visual impact of the mast is mitigated through its slender design and grey colour. As such, it is not considered to have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area or on the outlook from nearby houses.

4. Relevant policies

4.1 Members should refer to the background papers attached to the agenda. These highlight the policy framework under which this application is determined. Specific policy considerations with regard to this particular application are detailed in section 6 below.

5. Relevant site history/background information

5.1 The existing 12m high 'pitch-fork' style mast was erected prior to 1998 as permitted development.

11/00401/GPDO - To determine whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a replacement 14.8m high telecommunications mast. Prior approval granted May 2011. This was not implemented.

15/00095/GPDO - Application for prior approval for the siting and appearance of a new 15m high telecommunications mast with shroud to replace the existing 12m high pole mast. Prior approval granted March 2015. This was not implemented.

6. Main considerations

6.1 The only issue to be considered in the determination of this application is the siting and appearance of the proposed mast.

6.2 Chapter 10 of the NPPF sets out the Government's policy regarding high quality communications. The following paragraphs set out the approach LPAs should take to applications:

112. 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. Policies should set out how high quality digital infrastructure, providing access to services from a range of providers, is expected to be delivered and upgraded over time; and should prioritise full fibre connections to existing and new developments (as these connections will, in almost all cases, provide the optimum solution).

113. The number of radio and electronic communications masts, and the sites for such installations, should be kept to a minimum consistent with the needs of consumers, the efficient operation of the network and providing reasonable capacity for future expansion. Use of existing masts, buildings and other structures for new electronic communications capability (including wireless) should be encouraged. Where new sites are required (such as for new 5G networks, or for connected transport and smart city applications), equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

6.3 High speed, high capacity, digital technology is seen as essential to the future growth and economic prosperity of the country, increased social inclusion and a sustainable society and is advocated and promoted by various Government departments.

6.4 With regard to health considerations, the NPPF is clear that this is not a matter for local planning authorities:

116. Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

6.5 The proposed mast will accord with the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

6.6 The applicant has submitted a supporting statement with the application and also details of the operation of 5G networks.

“5G operates across multiple spectrums and therefore requires additional antennas and new equipment cabinets. The signals that are broadcast are more prone to the shadowing effect of adjacent buildings or structures, and the effect of tree canopies reducing the broadcast range and effectiveness of the antennas. Consequently, the height of the 5G antennas needs to be sited to avoid such obstacles and this in part dictates the height of the new streetworks monopoles.

“The higher frequencies that 5G will use can provide more bandwidth and thus greater capacity but the signal will not travel as far as those of previous generations. The implications to the built environment will be that more infrastructure is needed with a significant increase in capital required. In order to meet future demands for connectivity the new installations will have to be designed to optimise the network and thus provide a public benefit in addition to the existing telecoms generations and frequencies used. Additional structures and ancillary equipment on existing sites will also be complemented by new sites and it is anticipated that in high demand areas such as city centres further new installations will be required.”

6.7 The proposed mast is to be sited 4.3m to the south-west of the existing mast, closer to the station platform and further away from Bushey Mill Lane. It will also be sited adjacent to an existing row of conifer trees. The appearance of the mast will be different from the existing mast, as the dual stacked antennas within a shroud will replace the existing ‘pitch-fork’ style omni antennas. In order to provide full service coverage for 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G services, significantly larger antennas than the existing are required (which only provide 2G services for a single operator). The sharing of the mast, with stacked antennas, is also common (other operators also now have shared network infrastructure) and will overcome the need to have two masts on this site or within the immediate locality.

6.8 The appearance of the mast is similar to many other masts within the Borough, including residential areas, albeit is taller at 20m compared to the 12-15m of existing 4G masts. The appearance is very similar to the previously approved but not implemented 15m mast on this site. Masts of this nature are now a common part of the urban infrastructure of the town. The immediate

locality is mixed in character with two storey dwellings to the east and large scale commercial buildings to the north and west. In this context, the appearance of the mast is considered acceptable.

6.9 The siting of the mast will adjoin the rear garden boundaries of properties in Southfield Avenue (nos. 2 and 4). These gardens are 21m long. The mast will be visible from the rear windows of these properties and within the Bushey Mill Lane streetscene and will appear more visually prominent than the existing mast (or previously approved 15m high mast). However, its visual prominence will be mitigated to a degree by its slender profile and being painted a light grey colour. Masts of a similar scale and appearance are also found in many other residential and mixed areas across the Borough. Overall, it is not considered that the siting and appearance of the mast will have any significant adverse impact on the outlook or amenities of the occupiers of properties in Southfield Avenue or on the character and appearance of the wider locality.

7. Consultation responses received

7.1 Statutory consultees and other organisations

Consultee	Comments
Network Rail	The site is very close to the existing operational railway - the proposed equipment will need to be reviewed and agreed with Network Rail to ensure that it does not impact GSM-R as a permanent arrangement. No works to commence on-site until the upgrade has been agreed with Network Rail Asset Protection team.

7.2 Internal Consultees

None required.

7.3 Interested parties

Letters were sent to 33 properties in the surrounding area. Responses have been received from 8 properties. The main comments are summarised below, the full letters are available to view online:

Comments	Officer response
Proposed mast should be located in the industrial area. Will ruin the residential area. Not in keeping with the area.	This is an existing telecommunications site and a network of masts are required to give full coverage. There is no objection in principle to a new mast on this site.
Do not want a larger mast for health reasons.	The proposed mast would comply with International Commission guidelines for public exposure in accordance with policy set out in the NPPF.
Mast will appear tall and overbearing.	The mast is slender in appearance and similar to many other masts across the borough.

8. Recommendation

That prior approval be granted subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1. The development to which this permission relates shall be begun within a period of five years commencing on the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A, paragraph A.3(11)(a) the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended).

2. The mast and shroud shall be coloured light grey (unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority) and shall be retained as such at all times.

Reason: In the interests of the visual appearance of the site, pursuant to Policy UD1 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31.

3. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

100A, 200B, 201B, 300A, 301B

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.