

<b>Committee date</b>	Tuesday, 5 October 2021
<b>Application reference</b>	21/01284/GPDO16 - Telephone Mast At Junction Of
<b>Site address</b>	Courtlands Drive And Hempstead Road
<b>Proposal</b>	Application for the prior approval of the siting and appearance for a new 20m high monopole mast for a 5G (fifth generation) communications system to upgrade to existing equipment (to be sited 7.1m to the west of the existing 10m mast) and associated ancillary works. Alternative siting following prior approval under ref. 20/00642/GPDO.
<b>Applicant</b>	MBNL
<b>Agent</b>	WHP Telecoms Limited
<b>Type of Application</b>	Prior approval
<b>Reason for committee Item</b>	Number of objections
<b>Target decision date</b>	18 October 2021
<b>Statutory publicity</b>	Site notices and public advertisement (both 3 July 2021)
<b>Case officer</b>	Paul Baxter, paul.baxter@watford.gov.uk
<b>Ward</b>	Nascot

## 1. Recommendation

That prior approval be granted subject to the conditions set out in Section 8 of the report.

## 2. Site and surroundings

- 2.1 The site is located at the junction of Hempstead Road and Courtlands Drive, on the north-western side of the junction. It currently comprises a 10m high lamppost mast sited at the back edge of the footway on Courtlands Drive. Three small equipment cabinets are sited adjacent to the trees, 4.5m to the north-west of the lamppost. Further to the west, c.18m from the proposed site, is an existing 19.5m high mast sited at the end of a row of mature trees. A new replacement 20m mast has recently been installed (c.12.6m to the west of the application site) although the 19.5m mast has not yet been removed. These trees are generally 12-14m high with some taller individual trees and extend northwards from the site. Four existing equipment cabinets are located close to the base of this mast. Approx. 36m to the north-west, a new 20m mast has also recently been installed adjacent to the tree belt. Hempstead Road is a major A Class road leading into Watford although a secondary, non-classified spur runs north-west from Courtlands Drive parallel

to the main road. Street lights along the classified Hempstead Road are 10m high.

- 2.2 Immediately to the north of the site is the junction of the non-classified spur of the Hempstead Road which runs parallel to the main road. On the northern side of this road are two-storey residential properties facing towards the grass verge and tree belt. To the east are two-storey houses fronting Courtlands Drive. To the south, behind trees lining Hempstead Road, are two-storey houses and open space situated within Stanbury Avenue.
- 2.3 The site is not located in a designated conservation area or other Article 2(3) land and is not subject to an Article 4 direction.

### **3. Summary of the proposal**

#### **3.1 Proposal**

- 3.2 Application for the prior approval of the siting and appearance for a new 20m high monopole mast for a 5G (fifth generation) communications system, to be sited 7.1m to the west of the existing 10m mast, and associated ancillary works, under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended).
- 3.3 This is an amended siting for the same 20m mast previously granted prior approval under ref. 20/00642/GPDO in a location 6.5m to the north of the existing 10m mast. The applicant has stated that this mast is not now able to be installed for technical reasons.
- 3.4 As part of the proposal the antennas on the existing 10m lamppost mast, which also supports a street lamp, will be removed.

#### **3.5 Conclusion**

The proposal will enable the applicant to provide new 5G capacity, as well as 3G and 4G services, as part of their existing network in this area. The proposal complies with the ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines, is in accordance with the NPPF and is not considered to have any significant adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the locality or on surrounding properties. It is therefore recommended that the application be granted, subject to the conditions set out in the recommendation.

### **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 application site has hosted a telecommunications mast since 2005.

05/00030/GPDO - Application to determine whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a 12.1 high telecommunications mast with streetlight at 10m height to replace existing lamppost. Prior approval granted March 2005. This mast was installed at 10m with the streetlight at 8m height.

20/00642/GPDO - Application for the prior approval of the siting and appearance for a new 20m high monopole mast for a 5G (fifth generation) communications system to be sited 6.5m to the north of the existing mast and associated ancillary works. Prior approval granted in August 2020. No objections were received to this application. This mast cannot be installed for technical reasons.

- 5.2 Also, 18m to the west, is an existing 19.5m high monopole mast. This site has been established since 2001.

01/00707/GPDO - To determine whether prior approval is required for the siting and appearance of a 12.5 metre high monopole mast. Prior approval granted November 2001.

04/01079/FUL - Replacement of existing 12.5m high monopole mast with a 19.5m high monopole mast. Planning permission granted December 2004.

13/00293/FUL - The installation of a 20m high monopole mast to replace existing 19.5m high monopole mast. Planning permission granted May 2013.

15/01329/GPDO - Application for prior approval for the siting and appearance of a new 20m high mast to replace the existing 19.5m high mast and ancillary works. Prior approval granted November 2015.

16/00481/FUL - Removal and replacement of the existing 19.5m high monopole mast with a new 22m high monopole mast supporting internally shrouded antennas sited 6m to the south-east of the existing mast. Planning permission granted May 2016. This mast has recently been installed although

the 19.5m mast has not yet been removed. The new mast is sited 12.6m to the west of the current application site.

- 5.3 A further 20m mast has recently been installed on the non-classified section of Hempstead Road located c.36m to the north-west of the application site, adjacent to the tree belt.

21/00492/GPDO16 - Notification of proposed installation of 1 no. 20m monopole mast supporting 6 no. antennas 2 no. transmission dishes 4 no. equipment cabinets and ancillary development works thereto. Prior approval granted in May 2021. No objections were received to this application.

## **6. Main considerations**

- 6.1 The only matters that can be considered in applications for prior approval under Part 16, Class A are the siting and appearance of the proposed mast.
- 6.2 Chapter 10 of the NPPF 2021 sets out the Government's policy regarding high quality communications. The following paragraphs set out the approach LPAs should take to applications:

*114. 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).*

*115. 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.*

*116. Local planning authorities should not impose a ban on new electronic communications development in certain areas, impose blanket Article 4 directions over a wide area or a wide range of electronic communications*

*development, or insist on minimum distances between new electronic communications development and existing development.*

*118. 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.*

- 6.3 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 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.”

- 6.5 The proposed new mast reflects the greater scale anticipated for 5G masts. It has been designed to be as slimline as possible, following the general principles adopted for earlier generation masts, although is wider than the existing mast due to the greater height of the mast and the increased number of antennas required to accommodate the 5G technology as well as existing 3G and 4G antennas. The mast is not stated to be coloured although it is considered that its visual impact could be mitigated to some degree by being

painted green (similar to the existing mast) rather than the standard light grey colour. The standard Highway Authority colour for lampposts is Sherwood Green and this is considered an appropriate colour in this case.

- 6.6 There is no doubt that the proposed 20m high mast will have a greater visual impact on the immediate locality than the existing 10m high lamppost mast or the nearby recently installed 20m high masts that are sited closer to the tree belt. In mitigation, the mast is still sited in proximity to the existing belt of mature trees and will be seen in this context. Hempstead Road is a main distributor road (A411) leading into the town centre and is, in this respect, an ideal location for a telecommunications mast. Furthermore, the site already hosts a 10m mast. The site is not within a conservation area or other designated area and there are no listed buildings in the local area. Given the greater susceptibility of 5G signals to shadowing effects, the relatively open position will be advantageous in minimising the height of the mast. In this context, it is not considered that the visual impact to the locality would be so harmful to merit a reason for refusal and withhold prior approval.
- 6.7 The mast will be directly visible from the house on the opposite side of the junction (2, Courtlands Drive) that directly faces the site at a distance of 43m. The nearby tree belt contains trees 12-14m high with some higher trees and this forms the principal view and outlook from the front of this house. The proposed mast will be double the height of the existing mast although this will not be particularly evident in views from within the house. The proposed mast will be wider than the existing mast but will be seen against the backdrop of the tree belt and can be painted green to improve its appearance and mitigate its visual impact. Although the mast is wider and higher than the existing, it has been designed as a monopole to minimise its visual impact whilst meeting the technical requirements for a 5G system.
- 6.8 The proposed mast will be seen alongside at least one of the other masts in some views of the site from the surrounding roads. Principally this will be from the north along Courtlands Drive and from the south-east travelling north along Hempstead Road. In these views the existing masts and the proposed mast will be seen as a cluster of tall masts. This is not ideal visually but in this case there are very limited alternatives.
- 6.9 Firstly, there are no taller, commercial buildings in the immediate locality that could host a rooftop antenna system. Secondly, the cell network on which mobile communications operate across the country, particularly in urban areas, relies on relatively small cells that adjoin but do not overlap each other in order to ensure continuous signal transmission. The antennas also need to be sited as close to the centre of the cell as possible. These factors combined

mean that there is often very limited opportunity to place new antennas any significant distance from the existing antennas. In this case, given the residential nature of the surrounding area, any alternative site would likely be outside of and in close proximity to other residential properties, a situation that would arguably be much worse than the location currently proposed. Finally, it is a material consideration that an identical mast was granted prior approval a short distance away in August 2020.

- 6.10 Overall, it is considered that the proposed siting is the least harmful in this locality and is a marginal improvement over the previously approved siting. It is not considered that the proposed mast, when viewed in conjunction with the recently installed masts, will have any significant additional adverse impacts on the streetscene or surrounding area or on the amenities of surrounding properties. Whilst the proposed mast, as with the recently installed masts, will be visible from surrounding properties, it is considered that the siting of the mast and its distance from these properties would not have a direct or significant harmful impact on the outlook of these properties that would merit a refusal of the application.
- 6.11 The proposed equipment cabinets are less than 2.5 cubic metres in volume and do not require prior approval.
- 6.12 Potential health impacts of electromagnetic radiation (EMR) has been raised by a number of objectors. Government advice in the NPPF is clear that local authorities should not set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure. Health impacts are a matter for Public Health England and are not a matter that can be considered in determining an application for prior approval, which are legally restricted to the matters of siting and appearance.

## **7. Consultation responses received**

### **7.1 Statutory consultees and other organisations**

None required.

### **7.2 Internal Consultees**

None required.

### **7.3 Interested parties**

Letters were sent to 35 properties in the surrounding area. Ten responses have been received from 7 properties. The main comments are summarised below, the full letters are available to view online:

<b>Comments</b>	<b>Officer response</b>
Visual intrusion of the existing masts on the skyline and the impact of a further mast. Visual intrusion. Overdevelopment.	See report.
Health impacts of EMR emissions	See report.
This will result in 5 masts in this location.	It is understood that the existing 19.5m mast is to be removed in accordance with the requirements of the permitted development regulations which state that equipment no longer required for telecommunication purposes is removed as soon as reasonably practicable. The antennas on the 10m high lamppost mast are also stated to be removed in accordance with the regulations. The applicant has stated that the previously approved mast under ref. 20/00642/GPDO is not able to be erected for technical reasons, the current application is for an alternative siting for this mast.
Lack of notification of this and previous masts.	Letters of notification were sent out to surrounding properties for this application and previous applications. Site notices were also posted adjacent to the site in each case.
Mast will be visible from windows and gardens of surrounding properties.	See report.

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

Master Drawing No. 941969\_WFD009\_50707\_WD0094\_M002B

002 Site Location Plan

003 Access Plan

005 Cherry Picker and Crane Location

100 Existing Site Plan

150 Existing Elevation A

215 Proposed Site Plan

265 Proposed Site Elevation

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

3. The mast shall be coloured Sherwood Green (BS 12 D 45) (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.