Committee date	Tuesday, 11 January 2022
Application reference Site address	21/01770/GPDO16 - Grass Verge, North Orbital Road
Proposal	Application for prior approval for the siting and appearance of a new 20m high monopole 5G telecommunications mast with built-in cabinet and 3no. separate equipment cabinets (colour Green RAL6009) positioned alongside existing street furniture and on grass verge
Applicant	Three
Agent	Dot Surveying Limited
Type of Application	Prior approval
Reason for committee Item	Potential number of objections
Target decision date	31 January 2022
Statutory publicity	Site notices and public advertisement (both 10.12.2021)
Case officer	Paul Baxter, paul.baxter@watford.gov.uk
Ward	Stanborough

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 on the south side of North Orbital Road, a short distance to the east of the Sheepcot Lane junction and on the approach to the 'longabout' at this junction. Holme Lea, a short cul-de-sac of 6 houses, is located a short distance to the east of the site. North Orbital Road (A405) is dual carriageway with a central reservation. The southern side of the highway at this point comprises a large parking lay-by, grass verge, footpath and belt of mature trees (16-18m high). The highway boundary and belt of trees adjoin the rear garden boundaries of properties in Lamb Close (Nos. 9-23, odds) and Sheepcot Lane (Nos. 102-114, evens). Opposite the site on the north side of North Orbital Road is the Woodside Leisure Park and the residential development of Frelford Close.

2.2 The site itself comprises a small area of the grass verge, adjoining the footpath, located at the western end of the lay-by.

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 and associated cabinets, under Schedule 2, Part 16, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended).

3.3 **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 There is no relevant planning history for this site. This will be a new telecommunications base station.

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. The following is a brief summary of the 5G operating system:

"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 earlier generations of mast due to the greater height of the mast and the size of the antennas. The mast is not stated to be coloured although it is considered that its visual impact could be mitigated in this location by being painted green 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 Orbital Road Road is a main distributor road (A405) carrying traffic through the north of the borough between the M1 and M25 and is, in this respect, an ideal location for a telecommunications mast. Indeed, a number of telecommunication masts already exist along the North Orbital Road serving the adjacent residential areas as well as the road corridor itself. 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. Whilst the mast will be visible along the North Orbital Road, it will be seen in the context of the existing belt of mature trees and also the existing 10m highway lampposts. 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 adjacent houses and their garden areas in Lamb Close that back onto the site and also from houses in Frelford Close on the opposite side of North Orbital Road. In respect of the Lamb Close

properties, these are detached, two storey houses with 10m deep gardens. At its closest point, the mast will be sited 28m from the nearest house. However, its visual impact will be mitigated to a significant degree by the belt of mature trees, which contains trees upto 16-18m high, and its slender design. The mast can also be coloured as discussed above. As such, the mast will be seen alongside the vertical trunks of the trees. Only the antennas would protrude above the trees but this view would be more limited from ground level by the height of the trees and the angle of view, particularly when the trees are in leaf. The mast and antennas will be more visible during the winter months.

6.8 The houses in Frelford Close are located between 50-100m away from the site of the mast. Those houses with a direct view from their front windows are located over 85m away. Views from these houses will be across the wide North Orbital Road with the mast seen against the backdrop of the tree belt.

6.9 In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed mast will have no significant or harmful impact on the outlook from surrounding residential properties.

6.10 In respect of alternative options, there are no existing masts in the vicinity of the site that could be used to provide coverage to the area required. Even so, the height of any shared mast would still need to be at least 20m high and potentially even higher if other systems were accommodated. Given the shorter distances covered by 5G signals and smaller coverage generally, 'infill' masts such as this will be increasingly required in order to provide comprehensive 5G network coverage. The proposed location avoids the need for the mast to be located on a residential road within the coverage area and provides safe and convenient access from the lay-by for installation and maintenance.

6.11 Overall, it is considered that the proposed siting on a main distributor road and alongside a belt of trees is the most appropriate to provide coverage to the surrounding residential area and along the road corridor itself. It will have no harmful impacts on the streetscene or surrounding area or on the amenities of surrounding properties. Whilst the proposed mast 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.

6.12 The proposed equipment cabinets are less than 2.5 cubic metres in volume and do not require prior approval.

6.13 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 68 properties in the surrounding area. At the time of preparing this report no objections had been received. All responses received will be reported at the committee meeting.

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. WFD19881_PLANNING_REV_A
   002 Site Location Plan
   005 Crane Location
   100 Existing Site Plan
   150 Existing Site Elevation

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.