
2021/1091

Applicant: Mr Mark Billivant

Description: Erection of 36m high triangular lattice mast and associated equipment and fencing

Kennels Farm, Barewell Hill, Brierley, Barnsley,

Site Description

The site is located at the edge of a field used for arable farming, to the east of Barewell Road and the north east of Brierley. The boundary with Wakefield MDC tracks the northern boundary of the field.

There is a line of mature trees along both sides of Barewell Road and along the A628 which bounds the field to the south. Access is via an existing access, onto Barewell Road, into the north western end of the proposed site.

There is a Public Right of Way along the western boundary of the field and a Bridleway along the southern boundary, adjacent to the A628.

Proposed Development

It is proposed to erect a 36m high telecommunications mast. The tower is a lattice construction with a triangular base. It is constructed of galvanized steel which is grey in colour. The mast will be located on a concrete base which extends 15m x 18m, allowing vehicles to access and park within the site.

A 10 ft by 10 ft equipment container will be located adjacent to the tower and the whole site will be enclosed with a 2.4m palisade fence.

Policy Context

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The new Local Plan was adopted at the full Council meeting held 3rd January 2019. In addition, the Council has adopted a series of Supplementary Planning Documents and Neighbourhood Plans which provide supporting guidance and specific local policies and are a material consideration in the decision making process.

The site is located in the Green Belt as identified in the Local Plan. Policy GB1 protects the green belt in accordance with national planning policies as set out in the NPPF.

Other relevant policies include:

SD1 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'.

GD1 'General Development' provides a starting point for making decisions on all proposals for development setting out various criteria against which applications will be assessed.

LG2 'The Location of Growth' sets out the priority given to development by location.

T4 'New Development and Transport Safety'

D1 'High Quality Design and Place Making'

LC1 'Landscape Character' development is expected to retain and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the individual Landscape Character area in which it is located.

BIO1 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' requires development to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

GI1 'Green Infrastructure'

GS2 'Green Ways and Public Rights of Way'

Poll1 'Pollution Control and Protection'

I1 'Infrastructure and Planning Obligations'

SPD's

-Biodiversity and Geodiversity

NPPE

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Relevant sections include:

10. Supporting high quality communications

Paragraph 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.

Paragraph 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.

Paragraph 117 provides guidance on the supporting information to be provided with applications for new electronic communications development.

Paragraph 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.

13. Protecting the Green Belt

Paragraph 137. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim

of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Paragraph 138. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

137. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

138. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Other relevant considerations

Building Digital UK

In July 2018 the Government published The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review that set clear, ambitious targets for the availability of full fibre and 5G networks.

An 'outside-in' approach was proposed in the review to ensure that gigabit-capable broadband to premises in the final 10% can be delivered along with the rest of the UK. Since the report was published, the scope of this scheme for the hardest to reach premises has increased from the final 10% to 20%.

In May 2019, the Chancellor announced a £5 billion commitment to fund gigabit-capable broadband for the hardest to reach 20% of homes and businesses and in the Spending Review in November 2020 the budgetary phasing of the programme was confirmed.

In December 2020, BDUK launched the 'Planning for Gigabit in 2021' consultation with communications network providers and local authorities followed by the Project Gigabit Phase One Delivery Plan in March 2021.

The UK Gigabit Programme or 'Project Gigabit' is a £5 billion government infrastructure project that brings together everything the government is doing to enable and deliver fast and reliable digital connectivity for the entire country. Through one of the fastest rollouts in Europe, 60% of households will have access to gigabit speeds by the end of 2021 - a huge leap from 2019 when it was just one in ten.

As part of this programme BDUK is launching phased contracts to those hard to reach parts of the UK that will need government support towards the cost of gigabit-capable broadband.

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) is part of the UK Mobile Programme and will see the government and the four mobile network operators (Vodafone, O2, Three and EE) jointly invest over £1 billion to increase 4G mobile coverage throughout the UK to 95% by the end of programme, underpinned by legally binding coverage commitments.

The £532 million investment by mobile network operators is supported with more than £500 million of government funding to significantly reduce 'total not-spots': hard-to-reach areas where there is

currently no coverage from any operator. This will provide new digital infrastructure in total not spot areas not commercially viable for the operators.

Consultations

Biodiversity - From a biodiversity point of view I have no objection to the proposal. The LPA's Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPD requires developments to demonstrate No Net Loss of biodiversity. As the land appears to me to be relatively low ecological value farmland I think it would be appropriate for the applicants to offer the installation of an integral bird box and an integral bat roost feature into the exterior of the proposed building.

Forestry - No comments received.

Highways – No objections subject to a condition securing solid bound material for the parking area.

Pollution – No objections or conditions.

Superfast South Yorkshire – Supportive, more details later in the report.

Ward Councillors – No comments received.

WMDC – No comments received.

Representations

The application was advertised by a press notice, site notice and neighbour letters. No comments have been received.

Assessment

The proposed development, a 36m high telecommunications mast with associated equipment, is classed as a building when assessing it under green belt policy. It is, therefore, inappropriate development in the green belt which should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

In considering applications, paragraph 148 requires local planning authorities to ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the green belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the green belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the proposal is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

In assessing the harm to the green belt; it is noted that the proposed development does not directly conflict with the 5 purposes of including land within the green belt. Therefore, the impact is on openness.

The NPPG provides some advice on assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the green belt stating it requires a judgement on the circumstances of the case and that matters to be taken into account can include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

In the case of this development, the proposed structure is 36m in height, giving it a high degree of visibility as it rises above the existing trees and is visible over the wider area including from distant locations. The height of the structure is stated to be required to achieve the coverage proposed, more details on this is included in the assessment below. The applicants have reduced the base from 4m to 3m and as the structure tapers as it rises, this does mitigate the visual impact to a degree. Further, whilst it is not yet clear what equipment will be housed on the mast in terms of the number or scale of antenna the applicant has confirmed that:

The maximum equipment that will be placed on the mast will not be significantly bulky and the temporary mast on site currently has the same equipment it:

- Up to 6 x 60cm Parabolic Antenna Dish diameter of 60cm x 30cm deep
- Up to 6 x Sector antenna 136cm (H) x 16cm (W) x 8cm (D)
- Up to 6 x Remote Radio Head 28cm (H) x 19cm (W) x 11cm (D)

Typically, the tall thin sector antennae go near/at the top. The radio heads (shoe box size) are fitted just beneath the antennae. These features tend to be white in colour so will be visible on the mast, adding some degree of bulk when viewed in numbers.

The applicant has provided some visuals of the mast as viewed from surrounding viewpoints on public rights of way and the Highway network. These demonstrate that although the mast is visible above the tree line, longer distance views are mitigated to a degree by the trees with the mast only partly visible and the existing high voltage pylons which in some views are the dominant feature. However, viewed from nearby footpaths and in places along Barewell Road, the mast will be more visually intrusive.

In assessing the visual impact, however, it is noted that an existing temporary mast has been located on the site, erected using the permitted development rights for communications operators as set out in the General Permitted Development Order (2015) under schedule 2, Part 16, Class A. It is noted that a mast 25m in height could remain on the site in perpetuity under the current permitted development rights. The visuals provided include the temporary mast for reference and whilst the proposed will be a substantially larger structure, its impact can be assessed in the context of a permitted mast.

Overall, the visual impact of the proposed is judged to be harmful to the openness of the greenbelt but this harm is mitigated to a degree; taking account of the visual analysis provided and the permitted development rights for the site.

Turning to the duration of the development, the applicant has advised that the cost of the scheme is such that it is not anticipated that the mast would have a limited lifespan and so must be viewed as a permanent structure. However, the applicant is willing to accept a condition requiring the land be returned to its previous condition should the mast be removed at any time in the future. This protects the site from becoming brownfield, should unforeseen changes in technology make the mast obsolete.

Finally, in terms of traffic generation or degree of activity on the site, this will be limited once the mast is erected and the various antenna have been installed. A maximum of two vehicles are anticipated to visit the site on a monthly basis, however, it is more likely to be one vehicle and visits could be as little as every 6 months. This activity depends on maintenance requirements but even the worst-case scenario is judged to have a limited impact on the openness of the green belt, taking account of the busy Barewell Road and the fact that the access is already in situ.

Overall, the scale of the mast is such that it will be visible from the wider area and its permanence means its visual impact will be for the longer term. The harm of the proposed on the openness of the green belt is judged to be substantial; reducing to moderate harm, based on the various mitigating factors discussed above.

In terms of other harm, the site is at the edge of an agricultural field, adjacent to a busy road with an existing access already in place. The biodiversity officer has confirmed the land has limited value in ecological terms and only requested a condition requiring a bat and bird box be installed on the mast which has been agreed. Similarly, the Highways Officer has not objected to the scheme, accepting that the access is existing, and usage will be like that associated with the currently erected mast on the site. On this basis, any other harm, is small in scale and mitigated so is afforded limited weight.

Turning to the very special circumstances case, the applicant has provided evidence of the site selection process undertaken and detailed plans of the likely coverage. Additional detail has been requested and provided during the application process with regards to both.

In total 11 sites have been reviewed and discounted for various reasons. In terms of existing masts, these either do not have sufficient space or are not tall enough to achieve the coverage proposed. Other sites have been discounted because of issues with lease agreements or the landowner is unwilling to agree to the proposed. The applicant has confirmed that issues in agreeing leases is not limited to the costs negotiated with specific landowners but is also based on a wider assessment of the following:

- The cost of getting electric to the mast.
- If the electric route crossed other landowners land the expense of the wayleaves involved.
- Other sites that would have been viable were not accessible by vehicle.
- Ground conditions of the other sites would have caused issues and this came up in the surveys.

The proposed site was identified through this process as being suitable due to its location adjacent Barewell Road with an existing access in place.

In terms of coverage, the proposed is part funded through Government projects to increase access to superfast broadband in rural areas. The applicant, Quickline, provides superfast internet connectivity to residents, businesses, and the public sector through its fibre and Fixed Wireless Access networks, working in conjunction with partner organisations. Quickline is currently working with the UK Government's Building Digital UK (BDUK) initiative to provide superfast broadband connectivity of at least 30 Mbps, and over 100Mbps to rural areas where there is currently very little or no access to broadband services. The company also supports the UK Government's Project Gigabit and Gigabit Vouchers schemes, which are part of a £5billion investment to provide 'hard to reach areas' with broadband connectivity where communications infrastructure is more costly to build or uneconomic to provide without public investment

The network is based upon wireless mast distribution and relies upon the installation of next generation 5G base station infrastructure consisting of antennas, transmission dishes, and related apparatus to provide wireless radio coverage from relatively highpoints in the landscape. This approach ensures that tall trees and hills, as well as manmade features such tall buildings, do not block radio signals across the intended coverage area. The customer then receives broadband services via an antenna installed on their property, which is smaller than most TV aerials and satellite dishes.

The site has been identified as part of the West Yorkshire County Council / Broadband Development UK (BDUK) phase 3 of the Governments Gigabit project, to deliver ultrafast broadband to rural communities throughout the county who currently have poor or no broadband connectivity. This site will cover 915 target intervention premises negating the requirement to build multiple smaller local masts.

The site sits on a high position in between Barnsley and Wakefield overlooking the entire area. As a result it also offers good coverage of the Barnsley district. By erecting the proposed 36m mast,

the coverage will capture around a total of 81,000 unique properties and businesses of which 31,971 fall within the Barnsley postcodes, many of which are rural and hard to reach and would be difficult or too costly to reach with a fibre connection. Coverage maps show it extending out to Cudworth, Darfield and the Dearne as well as to the west picking up properties in rural areas between Barnsley and Penistone. The mast will provide broadband coverage with minimum speeds of 30Mbps and up to speeds well in excess of 100Mbps.

Superfast South Yorkshire have been consulted on the proposed and have confirmed that the mast will be a benefit to Barnsley as well as neighbouring local authority areas. It will allow isolated premises to access superfast speeds and provide more competition in the marketplace where alternatives exist. Though it won't offer gigabit speeds, it is unlikely that 100% gigabit coverage will be achieved in Barnsley by 2030 when value for money is a consideration.

The proposed complies with paragraph 114 of the NPPF which states that: advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. In this respect the proposed is also in line with the aims of the Barnsley Local Plan which promotes economic growth and seeks to reduce inequality across the borough.

Further, the proposed mast complies with paragraph 115 whereby 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. The proposed will deliver a significant improvement in coverage and reduce the need for several smaller masts across what is a largely rural area.

In conclusion, the proposed will impact on the openness of the green belt which is afforded substantial weight. However, the impact is mitigated to a degree by the location of the proposed adjacent a busy road, the existing access which reduces the need for additional infrastructure and the existing tree coverage in the area which acts to soften views. Further, the scale of the proposed can be judged in comparison to the existing mast on site which is also a substantial structure and has been built using permitted development rights. Finally, the height of the proposed whilst increasing the visibility of it over longer distances, also maximises coverage reducing the need for additional masts.

The very special circumstances case demonstrates that alternative locations are unsuitable or unavailable and likely to also be in rural or green belt locations. Further, the economic and social benefits associated with increasing access to high speed broadband are supported by national and Local Policy, particularly in rural areas where fibre broadband may not be cost effective. This is also afforded substantial weight.

In coming to a decision, it is acknowledged that this is a finely balanced case but ultimately the benefits do outweigh the harm with over circa 32,000 additional properties in the borough being able to access high speed broadband or to secure a better offer through increased competition, including some areas where coverage currently does not extend. On this basis approval is recommended.

Recommendation

Approve – Subject to Conditions