

PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER:P06/0632

Type of approval sought	Determination on need for approval (GDO)
Ward	Norton
Applicant	Vodafone
Location:	NORTON PUMPING STATION, RACECOURSE LANE, STOURBRIDGE, WEST MIDLANDS, DY8 2RN
Proposal	INSTALLATION OF 3 NO VODAFONE ANTENNAS, 2 NO 600 MM DISHES, ALTERATIONS TO THE ANTENNA SUPPORT FRAME ON THE EXISTING ORANGE MAST, TOGETHER WITH RADIO EQUIPMENT, HOUSING AND ANCILLARY DEVELOPMENT.
Recommendation Summary:	APPROVE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

1. The application site is a pumping station located close to the junction of Norton Road and Greyhound Lane. The site is within the Green Belt and is currently occupied by a single storey building and a 20 metre high telecommunications mast and ancillary ground level equipment set within a compound. There are residential properties immediately opposite the site on Racecourse Lane. The site is also visible from the rear of properties on Norton Road immediately to the west. The existing mast is set back approximately 30m from the highway. The site is surrounded to the south and east by open fields.

PROPOSAL

2. Consent is sought to install additional equipment on the existing mast at the site, in the form of antennae and dishes and alterations to the existing antennae support frame, in addition to radio equipment, housing and other ancillary development within the compound at the site. The height of the mast is to remain at 20m.

3. The applicant requires the new installation in this location in order to improve the coverage for their 3G network in this area, and consider that this proposal will allow them to share the mast without further enlargement or redevelopment. In accordance with the requirements of the applicant's licence and relevant planning policy a search was carried out by the applicant to investigate the possibility of using alternative sites or any existing facilities or high buildings/structures within the search area. The applicant has submitted the following details of other sites which were considered but discounted for various reasons:
- Land outside the Greyhound Public House, Norton Road – an application for a monopole at this site was refused in April 2005 on the grounds of its detrimental impact on the visual amenities of the area;
 - Land outside the Broadway Pub, The Broadway – this site was discounted by the applicant because of its environmental impact on the surrounding predominantly residential area;
 - Land at the north end of the Broadway – it was considered that a mast at this site would clutter the pavement and would have a detrimental impact on views from nearby residential properties.
- 4 Information confirming that the proposed equipment conforms to the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines has been submitted.

HISTORY

5.

PROPOSAL	DECISION	DATE
20m Lattice Tower to Replace the Existing 17.5m High Mast (P02/0162)	Refused	2002
Replacement of Existing 17.5m Monopole Mast With a 20m High Monopole for Installation of 3 no.antennae and 1 no. dish (P04/1664)	Refused	2004

6. Application P02/0162 was refused in January 2002 on the grounds that it would be detrimental to the visual amenities of surrounding properties and would adversely affect the open character of the Green Belt.
7. Application P04/1664 was refused by Committee on the grounds that its siting and proximity to residential properties was perceived by the community to have an unacceptable health risk which outweighed the fact that the equipment was in compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines referred to in PPG8. Its installation would therefore be harmful to the amenity of those who live in the area.
8. In determining a subsequent appeal against the Council's decision, the Inspector considered that there was no objective evidence suggesting that the development would result in a health risk, and therefore allowed the appeal.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

9. 6 letters of objection have been received from residents of Carver Gardens, Norton Road, Fairways Close, and York Crescent, objecting to the proposal on the following grounds:

- detrimental impact on the visual amenities of the area;
- adverse impact on the Green Belt;
- health risks associated with the proposed equipment.

10. Lynda Waltho M.P. objects to the proposal on the grounds that ‘any extension to the current mast would have a significant impact on the appearance of the site’, and that ‘an increase in equipment is totally unreasonable and inappropriate particularly as this site is adjacent to an established residential area’.

OTHER CONSULTATION

11. None.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

12. Policy DD13 (Telecommunications) of the UDP, PPG2 (Green Belts) and PPG8 (Telecommunications).

ASSESSMENT

13. The determining issue is whether the installation of the proposed equipment would have any greater impact on the visual amenities of nearby residents and the character and openness of the Green Belt over and above any impact caused by the existing equipment, sufficient to warrant refusal of this application.

14. Policy DD13 of the UDP states that the development of telecommunications masts is likely to be considered inappropriate in the Green Belt. Government policy contained in PPG2 outlines a general presumption against development in the Green Belt except for certain categories of development, which does not include telecommunications. In this case the addition of further dishes and antennae to a mast which is clearly visible from several directions would make it a more prominent structure in the Green Belt, having a greater impact on the visual amenity of the

Green Belt than the existing structure by reducing its 'openness'. The proposal would therefore amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

15. The Government's policy position on telecommunications is set out in PPG8 which generally encourages the establishment of telecommunications equipment in environmentally suitable locations. In order to limit visual intrusion considerable importance is given to keeping the number of masts to a minimum, and therefore the sharing of masts is strongly encouraged where that represents the optimum environmental solution in a particular case. Local Planning Authorities, when determining telecommunications applications, should take into account the advice given on the protection of urban and rural areas in other PPGs; however it is equally important to recognise that the benefits of telecommunications technology may in some cases outweigh the adverse effects such as the visual impact of new masts on an area. In Green Belts telecommunications development is likely to be inappropriate unless it maintains openness. Inappropriate development may proceed only if very special circumstances are demonstrated which outweigh the degree of harm to the Green Belt. The lack of a suitable alternative site that would meet the needs of network coverage might be considered as very special circumstances. As part of their case to prove very special circumstances, in making an application for planning permission or prior approval operators would normally be expected to show that there are no suitable alternative locations outside the Green Belt. The applicants have provided evidence that they have assessed alternative sites for the proposed development, but for reasons set out in their supporting statement they have not been able to proceed with those options
16. PPG8 states health considerations and public concern can in principle be material considerations in determining telecommunications applications. The guidance given is that if a proposed mobile phone base station meets ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in processing an application for planning permission or prior approval, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them.

CONCLUSION

17. The proposed development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In this case however the following very special circumstances exist to justify the proposal which outweigh the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt:
- the absence of alternative sites;
 - the mast sharing nature of the proposal;
 - the identified need to improve coverage in the area
18. In view of the above it is considered that the proposal is in accordance with the advice given in PPG8. It is recommended that, should permission be granted, a condition be imposed requiring the submission of details of new tree planting in the immediate vicinity of the site, which although will not entirely screen the mast, should at least help to 'soften' its appearance.

RECOMMENDATION

19. It is recommended that the application is approved subject to the following condition:
20. Reason for Approval

The decision to grant permission has been taken with regard to the policies and proposals in the adopted Unitary Development Plan and to all other material considerations.

Conditions and/or reasons:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
2. No development shall commence until a detailed landscaping scheme, showing trees to be planted in the immediate vicinity of the compound at the site, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented in the first planting season after the installation of the equipment hereby approved.
3. The development shall not cause background noise levels to be increased by more than 5 d b(a) as measured under BS4142 (1990) and its subsequent amendments.
4. The development hereby approved shall only be implemented in accordance with plan drawing No.s xxxxx unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.