

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 26 JANUARY, 2005

REPORT OF DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MANAGER

MISCELLANEOUS ITEM

TEL/07/2004 INSTALLATION OF A 12 M MONOPOLE MAST WITH 3 ANTENNAS, 2 TRANSMISSION DISHES, RADIO EQUIPMENT AND ELECTRIC METER HOUSING, SECURITY CHAIN-LINK FENCE AND ANCILLARY DEVELOPMENT AT STONEYHEAD HILL SOUTH, MEARE COURT, MEARE GREEN, WRANTAGE

PROPOSAL

The proposal is for the erection of a 12 m high “slimline” monopole with 3 radio antennas and 2 transmission dishes, the erection of a electrical meter housing (9 m x 1.08 m x .0325 m) and a radio equipment housing (1.3 m x 1.9 m x 0.926 m) on land to the south of the A378 and east of Marlborough Cottage. There is a small group of trees bordering the main road and the mast would be sited to the south of these trees, in the adjacent field. All of the equipment housing and the mast itself would be coloured Olive Green to minimise the impact on the landscape and the site would be surrounded by a 1.8 m high chain link fence. An existing field access, lying to the south east of the site, will be used for construction and maintenance purposes.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LANDSCAPE OFFICER subject to the exact position and levels of the mast its 12 m height is comparable with existing trees and therefore the mast will be seen against or behind tree branch structure during the winter and leaves in the summer. As such its impact will be noticeably reduced. However, as seen from Meare Green houses, hedgerow gateways and other local vantage points the ground level fencing and control boxes will be intrusive and will need careful siting and mitigation proposals to reduce their impact. Some additional tree planting of faster growing trees such as wild cherry and ash will help longer term to soften the impact of the monopole.

WEST HATCH PARISH COUNCIL Firstly I would point out that this site is in the parish of North Curry, but because of its close proximity to West Hatch residents who live in Meare Green we support their objections: 1. It would constitute a gross blot on an area of landscape which is otherwise free of artefacts and which offers an attractive vista to residents and walkers. 2. There is an existing masthead on Crimson Hill, near Wrantage, which has been sympathetically incorporated into the woodland skyline and defied even binocular spotting from most viewpoints. 3. There is also an existing site by Knight's Garage which seems to serve the purposes of at least one network carrier and so should bear further examination. 4. Vodaphone should explore other options more constructively than appears so far. This includes the existing sites at Crimson Hill and Knight's Garage, as well as ideas such as say 2 lower power micro-cell units which might more easily be camouflaged. 5. There is an important issue of electromagnetic radiation from the mast and its effect on the health of those living nearby. Unfortunately this remains a debated subject and there is little impartial evidence to hand. 6. We understand that this site has not been visited by an officer from Taunton Deane. We are wondering if the department realise the site is in North Curry Parish. 7. We formally

object to the above proposal and request that it be subject to the full planning application process.

NORTH CURRY PARISH COUNCIL views awaited.

HATCH BEAUCHAMP PARISH COUNCIL views awaited.

8 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following points:- The mast will be clearly visible from Meare Green and it would spoil the rural landscape and effect the amenity of those dwellings; There is inadequate screening from the south (Meare Green side); An alternative site at Crimson Hill or Knights Garage should be provided; The photomontages give a false impression of the natural screening of the site; The technical information has not been challenged; Why is an urban level of coverage needed rather than a suburban level? The site was not visited by the planning officer prior to this submission; The notification was published under the West Hatch Parish in the local paper and should have been published under North Curry Parish Council applications; The prime purpose for this site is to enable motorists to be able to use mobile phones, a questionable policy.

POLICY CONTEXT

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy C13 applies to proposed masts over 15 m in height:-

C13 Applications for the installation of telecommunications masts will be permitted provided that:-

- (A) their siting and appearance would minimise harm to the landscape;
- (B) there are no alternative sites or solutions with less environmental impact, which could be used.
- (C) there is satisfactory evidence that existing masts or other structures cannot be used.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 Telecommunications Annexe 1 paragraphs 12, 13 and 14. In addition PPG8 advises “it is the government’s firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. It remains Central Government’s responsibility to decide what measures are necessary to protect public health. In the Government’s view, if a proposed mobile phone base station meets the 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.”

ASSESSMENT

Vodafone have identified an existing weakness and hence a primary need for additional coverage along the A378 (Stoneyhead –Listock) and to the south-east of the junction of the A378 and A358 (Thornfalcon – Bickenhall). Existing sites in the area have been considered for mast sharing but disregarded for various reasons. This includes the possibility of site sharing at Belmont Farm, Crimson Hill and Thornfalcon Garage.

Coverage plots have been provided that indicate that a mast in excess of 70 m in height would be needed at the Belmont Farm Site to provide the required level of coverage. Thornfalcon garage mast is in a visually prominent location with no surrounding landscaping to reduce its impact. Any mast sharing would require the replacement of a lattice mast and an increase in the height of the structure. This is considered to be seriously detrimental to the surrounding landscape and there is a possibility of interference between the "cells" active at the site. The proposed site lies on the side of a hill slope at Stoneyhead Hill approximately 20 m to the west of the existing lay-by. It is screened from view along the A378 by the existing roadside trees and hedges. To the north of the site lies a residential property, Marlborough Cottage, due to the slope of the land there will only be limited views of the base station from the dwelling and the mast will be viewed against a backdrop of the roadside trees so that it has less of an impact. In order to improve the situation for occupants the applicant has been requested to provide landscaping upslope of the base station. To the south of the hill lies the hamlet of Meare Green, approximately 40 m from the mast. Many of the properties back onto the field and will have views of the mast. The mast itself will, largely, blend into the treed backdrop but it is considered that the base station and fencing would have a discordant impact on the landscape. The Landscape Officer considers that, with additional land modelling (due to the sloping land) and landscaping the impact can be reduced. The proposal is considered to be acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

Prior Approval be GRANTED subject to conditions of landscaping and land remodelling.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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