

7. FULL APPLICATION - REMOVAL OF THE EXISTING 15M AIRWAVE TOWER AND REPLACEMENT WITH A 23.5M TOWER UPON WHICH WILL BE ATTACHED ANTENNAE AND DISHES FOR AIRWAVE, THE ESN (EAS) AND SRN NETWORKS. AT GROUND LEVEL, ADDITIONAL CABINS/CABINETS WILL BE POSITIONED WITHIN A NEW COMPOUND ON UTILIZING BOTH THE TOWERBASE AND A NEW BASE FOR THE ESN (EAS) FOUL WEATHER ENCLOSURE CABIN, ALONG WITH A STANDBY GENERATOR. A SEPARATE VSAT DISH ENCLOSURE WILL BE ESTABLISHED 80M TO THE NORTH EAST OF THE MAIN COMPOUND - BLAZE FARM, WILDBOAR CLOUGH (NP//CEC/1020/0953), ALN

APPLICANT: AIRWAVE SOLUTIONS LTD

Summary

The application site is adjacent to an existing telecommunications mast off the A54 Buxton to Congleton Rd, to the north of Heild Wood.

The proposals replace the existing 15m high telecoms mast with a larger 23.5. one to provide mobile communication coverage for the emergency services and to enhance existing mobile coverage along the A54. Also proposed is a new access track, base equipment and compound and a VSat satellite dish.

As amended and subject to conditions the landscape harm that has been identified in the report below is outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme. Consequently the application is recommended for conditional approval.

Site and Surroundings

The application site is located in open countryside just to the south of the A54 Buxton to Congleton road, approximately 800m north west of Allgreave. It is located just beyond the northern edge of an area of deciduous woodland known as 'Heild Wood', within a large field enclosure. The land slopes steeply downwards from south to north, from the woodland (and a high rocky outcrop known as Heild Rocks) towards the road.

The land in question is within the ownership of the nearby Blaze Farm and is currently used for sheep grazing.

Within the woodland, just to the south of the application site, there is an existing 15m high monopole mast with associated antenna and ground equipment.

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the removal of the existing 15m high mast and associated equipment and the construction of a new 23.5m high latticed mast (26.5m to top of antenna), sited within a walled compound housing the ground level equipment.

As submitted the plans also showed the installation of a remote 'V Sat' satellite dish within the field approximately midway between the proposed mast and the road. Also proposed is the construction of a new access track leading from an existing gateway onto the A54 towards the mast. The track would follow the roadside wall eastwards for a distance of approximately 85m before turning 90 degrees southwards and extending along the wall/fence line up the hillside to the mast compound (approx. 115m).

As amended the application is now supported by the following documents:

- A landscape visual impact assessment

- Plans and sectional drawings
- Further explanatory information/justification statement
- A safety compliance certificate declaring conformity with public radio wave exposure safety guidelines

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **That subject to the submission of a suitable unilateral undertaking the secure the ongoing retention and management of Heild Wood, that the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions:**
 1. **3 years**
 2. **Adopt amended plans**
 4. **Existing pole mast to be removed within 4 weeks of the mast hereby approved being first brought into use.**
 3. **The whole of the installation, including mast, antenna, dishes and any support poles, cable gantry and fencing shall be pre-coloured prior to erection/installation in a dark green colour (RAL6009) with a matt finish.**
 4. **Remove when no longer required for telecommunications purposes**
 5. **New access track to be surfaced with natural crushed gritstone only.**
 6. **New access track to have a central grass strip. Details to be submitted and agreed.**
 7. **Full details of all walling around the mast compound (including any retaining walls) to be submitted and agreed.**
 7. **All walling shown on the approved plans to be constructed in accordance with the approved plans before the development is completed or first brought into use, whichever is sooner.**
 8. **Fence around compound to be pre-coloured dark green.**
 9. **Landscaping scheme for screen shrub planting to be submitted and agreed.**

Key Issues

- The principle of the proposed development
- Impact on the scenic beauty and other valued characteristics of the National Park
- Whether the need for the development, notably emergency services cover, outweighs any harm identified and taking into account the economic and social benefits of the development.

History

February 2003 – planning permission granted for erection of 15m timber pole and equipment cabin (NP/M/1202/063).

Consultations

Highway Authority – no material highway implications associated with the proposal, which is accessed from an existing field gate from the A54.

District Council – no response

Parish Council – no response

Authority's Landscape Architect – *'I have looked through the documentation which is thorough in most cases especially the landscape visual impact assessment. However there are a few points that require clarification. My understanding is that the structure, fencing and cabinets are to be galvanised, I would prefer to see the fencing (better details required), cabinets and lower part of the mast to be a dark recessive colour (brown?) as it can take several years for the galvanising to weather and tone down No details have been provided for the access track – this should be constructed from gritstone from local quarries where colour matches existing stone. I would also suggest that the central section of the access road is covered in soil and seeded with matching grass mix as existing field. An alternative would be to take up turves from the line of the access track and relay over the central part of the access road. Line of access road would need to take into account sharp angles created by the existing walls There may be an opportunity to plant individual shrub species to help break up the outline of the cabinets in particular from viewpoints one and two. Approve subject to above points,'*

Representations

None

Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1, L1, CC1

Relevant Development Management Plan policies: DMC1, DMC3, DMU4

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 and replaced a significant proportion of central government planning policy with immediate effect. The latest revised NPPF was published on 20 July 2021. The Government's intention is that the document should be considered as a material consideration and carry particular weight where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date. In the National Park the development plan comprises the Authority's Core Strategy 2011 and Development Management Policies (adopted May 2019) in the Development Plan provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. It is considered that in this case there is no significant conflict between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and more recent Government guidance in the NPPF.

Paragraph 176 of the NPPF states that *'great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The*

conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.'

In relation to telecommunications development, Paragraph 114 of the framework document sets out the objectives of the Communications Infrastructure. It states that '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 of NPPF states: "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".

In the National Park, the development plan comprises the Authority's Core Strategy 2011 and the Development Management Policies (DMP), adopted May 2019. These Development Plan Policies provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. In this case, it is considered there are no significant conflicts between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and government guidance in the NPPF.

Core Strategy

GSP1, GSP2 - *Securing National Park Purposes and sustainable development & Enhancing the National Park*. These policies jointly seek to secure national park legal purposes and duties through the conversion and enhancement of the National Park's landscape and its natural and heritage assets.

GSP3 - *Development Management Principles*. Requires that particular attention is paid to the impact on the character and setting of buildings and that the design is in accord with the Authority's Design Guide and development is appropriate to the character and appearance of the National Park.

DS1 - *Development Strategy*. Sets out that most new development will be directed into named settlements.

L1 - *Landscape character and valued characteristics*. Seeks to ensure that all development conserves and enhances valued landscape character and sites, features and species of biodiversity importance.

L3 - Core Strategy policy L3 requires that development must conserve and where appropriate enhance or reveal significance of archaeological, artistic or historic asset and their setting, including statutory designation and other heritage assets of international, national, regional or local importance or special interest.

Policy CC1 states that development must make the most efficient and sustainable use of land, buildings and natural resources.

Development Management Plan

The supporting text in the Development Management DPD includes a section on telecommunications development. This states:

10.18 *The nature of the landscapes of the National Park makes the assimilation of telecommunications infrastructure and associated equipment very difficult without visual harm.*

10.19 *Modern telecommunications networks are useful in reducing the need to travel, by allowing for home working. They can be a vital aid to business and to emergency services and the management of traffic. However, as with other utility company development, the National Park Authority must carefully avoid harmful impacts arising from this type of development, including that needed to improve services within the National Park itself. Telecommunications development proposed within the National Park to meet an external national need, rather than to improve services within it, may well be of a scale which would cause significant and damaging visual harm and in such circumstances alternative less damaging locations should be sought.*

10.20 *In exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that telecommunications infrastructure is essential, rather than desirable to the industry, the National Park Authority will seek to achieve the least environmentally damaging but operationally acceptable location. It will request that the full range of technical information is supplied by the company regarding the siting, size and design of the equipment proposed to facilitate evaluation of the least obtrusive but technically feasible development in line with guidance in the NPPF.*

10.21 *New equipment should always be mounted on an existing structure if technically possible and development should be located at the least obtrusive site. Particular care is needed to avoid damaging the sense of remoteness of the higher hills, moorlands, edges or other prominent and skyline sites. Upland or elevated agricultural buildings, which are not uncommon in the National Park, may provide a suitable alternative to new structures in the landscape. If necessary, the National Park Authority will seek expert advice to help assess and minimise the impact of the design and siting of telecommunications infrastructure. Evidence will be required to demonstrate that telecommunications infrastructure will not cause significant and irremediable interference with other electrical equipment, air traffic services or instrumentation operated in the national interest. Fixed line Code Operators should refer to the Code of Practice for Cabinet siting and Pole siting, June 2013.*

Policy DMU4 Telecommunications infrastructure

- a. Development will not be permitted if applicants fail to provide adequate or accurate detailed information to show the effect on the landscape or other valued characteristics of the National Park.
- b. Development proposals for radio and telecommunications must be supported by evidence to justify the proposed development.
- c. Telecommunications infrastructure will be permitted provided that:
 - i. the landscape, built heritage or other valued characteristics of the National Park are not harmed;
 - ii. it is not feasible to locate the development outside the National Park where it would have less impact; and
 - iii. the least obtrusive or damaging, technically practicable location, size, design and colouring of the structure and any ancillary equipment, together with appropriate landscaping, can be secured.
- d. Wherever possible, and where a reduction in the overall impact on the National Park can be achieved, telecommunications equipment should be mounted on existing masts, buildings and structures. Telecommunications equipment that extends above the roofline of a building on which it is mounted will only be allowed where it is the least damaging alternative.

- e. Substantial new development such as a mast or building for the remote operation and monitoring of equipment or plant not part of the code-system operators' network will not be permitted.

Policy DMC1 states that in the countryside any development proposals with a wide scale landscape impact must provide a landscape assessment with reference to the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan. The assessment must be proportionate to the proposed development and clearly demonstrate how valued landscape character.

The Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development in England (2016)

The Code of Best Practice provides guidance to mobile network operators, their agents and contractors and equally to all local planning authorities in England.

Assessment

Background

The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) is the Home Office led programme responsible for the new Emergency Services Network (ESN). It aims to provide a 4G integrated voice and broadband data communications service for the emergency services. ESN has initially been deployed by enhancing an existing commercial network configured to give the 3ES priority over other users.

This proposal, as a component of the ESN, is for the Extended Area Services (EAS) which is to provide additional infrastructure to extend the ESN into primarily remote and commercially unviable areas where little or no mobile network coverage exists.

Principle of Development

Proposed is the installation of a new (replacement) telecommunications site with a lattice mast to carry antennae and dishes to deliver mobile communications coverage to the minor roads that connect the Villages of Wildboarclough, Allgreave, Wincle and Danebridge with the A54 major road corridor. This location will also enhance the existing coverage along the A54. It is stated that it is vital to the 3 emergency services for their everyday duties, including the Buxton Mountain Rescue Service when they are called upon to assist with incidents.

Relevant policies in the Development Plan offer support in principle for the erection of new telecommunications infrastructure provided that the development does not harm the valued characteristics of the National Park and where it is not feasible to site the development outside the National Park. The Authority's policies are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework which is supportive of the development of communication networks where justified but also states that great weight should be given to conserving National Park landscapes.

It is clear from the coverage maps provided that the existing mast is not able to provide the required service. It is not structurally capable of or sufficiently tall to support the equipment required for the development of the latest 4G technologies along with maintaining a service for the existing Airwave Tetra technologies. It would not be possible to construct a lattice mast and associated ground mounted equipment on the footprint of the existing mast because the steeply sloping ground levels around the pole mast means that significant excavations would need to take place, which would impact on the surrounding trees.

The essential need for coverage of the immediate local roads proves the need for a new mast to be in this location to provide the necessary service and meet policy. There are therefore no objections in principle to the development. The main issue is the impact of the proposed development upon the valued characteristics and landscape of the National Park and whether

the visual impacts of the installation would be outweighed by the public benefits.

Impact on the scenic beauty and other valued characteristics of the National Park

The proposed mast

The telecommunications site would comprise the erection of a 23.5m high tapered galvanised lattice mast, supporting nine antenna in total at various heights, together with two 600mm diameter dishes and one 300mm diameter dish. The three antenna at the top of the mast would take the overall height to 26.5m. The mast and the panel antenna and dishes would be coloured a suitable recessive colour. It is stated in the supporting information that the proposed mast needs to be higher than the existing mast in order to allow 1m clearance between each of the 3 sets of antenna.

The existing timber pole mast is relatively unobtrusive because it is set within the trees and does not project above them and is set against steeply rising land from key vantage points including the A54. Unlike the existing timber pole mast the new mast would be located outside of the woodland area and slightly closer to the A54. It would also be higher and therefore potentially more prominent, especially given its more industrial looking latticed design. Therefore following negotiations and mindful of the requirements of policies DMC1 and DMU4, a landscape visual impact assessment (LVIA) was requested and submitted during the course of the application. The full report can be viewed on the Authority's website.

Key visual receptor points were chosen in discussion with officers. At the request of officers the LVIA included visualisations for both a latticed mast and a timber pole mast as we wanted to explore whether a timber pole mast might be less intrusive in the landscape. What came to light is that a timber pole mast capable of supporting the level of the more substantial amount of equipment now proposed would need to be substantially wider and more bulky than the existing.

The LVIA confirms that the site falls within the 'Slopes and Valleys with Woodland' Landscape Character Type. This landscape type has undulating topography with incised valleys and rounded summits. There are irregular blocks of ancient woodland along cloughs and valley sides and permanent pasture in small to medium sized fields.

The viewpoints analysis supported by photomontage visualisations examines the landscape and the visual effect that would be experienced at 6 no. short-medium range viewpoints within 5km of the proposed mast. These are all to the north and west of the site, either from the A54 (3 no.) or from vantage points within the valley (3 no.). The mast would not be visible from the east and south due to the prevailing topography. Of the six sensitive receptors chosen, the communications mast would be mostly or partly visible from all of the viewpoints. However a key consideration is that the mast would be seen against rising land and the backdrop of trees. From the A54 to the north east and south west, the headframe and the antenna would be visible above the trees and against the skyline along stretches of the road. This would result in a degree of landscape impact, assessed as minor to moderate with the assessment. In longer range views from the valley below the site, whilst the mast would be visible, the rising land behind means that it would not project above the skyline.

Having compared the photomontages for the latticed mast with the monopole option, we are satisfied that the equivalent monopole would in fact be more obtrusive and harmful to the landscape than the latticed mast, because the supporting structures for the antenna and dishes project further out and give it a very 'top heavy', bulky appearance. The photomontages also demonstrate that a matt green finish to the mast would be less prominent than a grey galvanised finish as the mast is predominantly seen against the backdrop of trees and the darker colour blends in with them more readily.

In conclusion the photomontages demonstrate that the landscape character type of this area,

which is characterised by woodland blocks and undulating terrain, help to mitigate the landscape impacts of what is a large latticed mast. The fact that the existing mast is also visible from a number of the chosen vantage points (although less prominently) is also a material consideration. However in conclusion there would be some harmful landscape impact generated by this significant structure and so this must be balanced against public benefits.

Ground level equipment and compound

A ground level equipment cabinet 2.7m long by 2.5m wide by 2.45m high would house the smaller cabinets. There would also be a generator measuring 2.2m x 1.0m x 1.2m. There would also be a number of other smaller cabinets. The cabinets would be coloured 'moss green'. They would be enclosed within a 7m by 11m secure compound. As submitted the plans showed the compound bounded by a 1.8m high mesh fence. Following negotiations amended plans have been received showing a drystone wall on the outside of the fence on the northern and western sides. As recommended by the Authority's landscape architect some individual shrub planting would help to further break up the outline of the compound and the cabinets and this can be agreed by condition.

Whilst the existing monopole mast would be removed, two cabinets within its base compound would be retained. These are well screened by the trees and the drystone boundary wall.

VSat Satellite Dish

As submitted the plans showed the provision of a stand alone satellite dish halfway down the field between the trees and the road. It would be mounted on a pole such that its total height would be 3.5m. We have concerns that this piece of infrastructure would be harmful when viewed from the A54, as it would appear isolated and would be prominent due to its size and design. Following discussions amended plans have now been received showing the dish moved to a position within a clearing in the woodland area, on its northern edge. Whilst land to the south of the woodland is open access land, the dish would be screened from this area by the existing drystone boundary wall and to some extent the existing tree colour. Consequently this revised location is acceptable.

Proposed Access Track

At present there is no formal access track to the existing mast – access is on foot through the field from the A54. The proposal is to install a new 3m wide access track from an existing gateway on the northern side of the A54. The track would follow the roadside wall eastwards for a distance of approximately 85m before turning 90 degrees southwards and extending along the fence line up the hillside to the mast compound (approx. 115m).

Aerial photographs show that historically there was a drystone wall running north to south up the hillside from the road to the woodland, directly to the east of where the new track would be sited. The majority of the wall is now demolished and has been replaced by a post and wire fence. As submitted it was proposed to leave the fence in situ and run the new track alongside it. However the track would then be very clearly visible from the A54 and without a stone boundary feature to visually anchor it to, it would appear as a prominent and isolated new linear feature. Amended plans have now been received showing the drystone wall reinstated. This would have the benefit of restoring the historic field boundary whilst also helping to screen the track in views from the road and assimilate it better into the landscape.

Due to the fairly steep nature of the land in question, sectional and 'cut and fill' drawings were also requested. These show that cut and fill would be largely limited to the northern and southern extremities of the track and overall would not be significant in its extent. A condition would be required to require a grass strip to be provided along the centre of track to minimise its visual impact and also to agree appropriate surfacing materials.

The Highway Authority have not raised any concerns about the use of the existing access as visibility from it is adequate.

In conclusion the access track, as amended, would be visible from the A54 but would not cause harm to the established landscape character of the area.

Whether the need for the development, notably emergency services cover, outweighs any harm identified

The public benefits of providing reliable communications coverage for the emergency services and also the continued provision of mobile phone coverage for the general public are clear and must carry weight in the current decision. We are satisfied that there is no other more suitable site available. However these public benefits must be balanced carefully against the Authority's primary purpose of conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the landscape. This is a finely balanced decision. There is already a mast adjacent to the location of the proposed mast and this is visible in the wider landscape. However its impact is mitigated by its more modest size, its simple slimline appearance and its position within trees. The new latticed mast would be taller, more 'industrial' in character and sited outside of the woodland. Its headframe and antenna would be visible in some vantage points, against the skyline. However it would be largely seen against the backdrop of trees and steeply rising land to the south and its visual impact can be reduced by appropriate colouration.

It is important that the woodland is retained and properly managed to ensure that it continues to foil views of the mast. It is understood that the woodland is in the ownership of Blaze Farm, on whose land the mast would also be placed and so the submission of a unilateral undertaking to ensure the management of the woodland is a reasonable requirement. We are satisfied that as amended and subject to the unilateral undertaking and conditions, on balance while there would be some harmful landscape impacts, that these can be mitigated to a degree where the public benefits just outweigh the identified harm.

Amenity Impact

This area of the National Park has a fairly 'remote' character, being located close to the edge of the open moorland to the south and east. However the busy A54 Buxton to Leek road has a significant impact on the natural tranquillity of the area immediately around the application site. Consequently whilst the proposed generator may create some noise, when taken in the context of the nearby road this would not have a significant impact on tranquillity. In addition, because of the remote nature of the site (the nearest neighbouring property being some 500m away at Blaze Farm), it is unlikely that any noise from the generator would cause harm to residential amenity.

Conclusion

The site would provide essential coverage for the new blue light Emergency Service Network where there is currently a gap in the planned service rollout. As amended the proposed mast and associated development would cause some harm to the established landscape character of the area. However, on balance and subject to conditions the public benefits of the scheme outweigh the harm that has been identified and the application is recommended for approval

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil

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