

**12. FULL APPLICATION – INSTALLATION OF A 20 METRE HIGH SHARED TELECOMMUNICATIONS BASE STATION WITH 6 ANTENNA AND ASSOCIATED GROUND-BASED CABINETS AT CLIFFE HOUSE FARM, HIGH BRADFIELD (NP/S/0715/0663, P.1252, 427668 / 391738, 11/09/2015/AM)**

**APPLICANT: ARQIVA**

**Site and Surroundings**

The application site is located at Cliffe House Farm which is located in open countryside in an elevated position on the northern slope of the Loxley Valley, approximately 1.1km to the south east of High Bradfield and 870m to the north of Damflask Reservoir.

The farm comprises a recently erected modern agricultural shed and a smaller range of older sheds and sits close to the edge of an escarpment on the hillside. Immediately to the south of the agricultural buildings there are two detached dwellings, Hill Top and the original Cliffe House Farmhouse, both of which are in separate ownership. There are two accesses serving the building group. The first is via a narrow track off Loxley Road to the south west. This serves the dwellings and the farm buildings and also carries a public footpath which runs past the south side of the new farm building into the fields east of the farm. The second and main access for the farm buildings comes down off Kirk Edge Road to the north and also carries a public footpath which links with one running west to east through the site.

From the west the land falls away from the site and on this side the buildings which make up the property are partly screened by a combination of the landform, tree cover on the slopes of the escarpment and by a stand of mature trees on the south west corner of the building group. The site and nearby farm buildings are clearly visible from Kirk Edge Road to the north. The proposed site for the proposed mast is small area of land to the west of the access track and adjacent to an existing earth mound and planting which run along the edge of the escarpment.

**Proposal**

This application seeks planning permission for the erection of a telecommunications base station with six antenna and associated ground-based cabinets.

The submitted plans show that the proposed antenna, dishes and remote radio units would be mounted to a lattice tower which would have a maximum height of 20m above the adjacent existing ground level. The equipment would be fixed to the top 3.5m of the lattice tower.

The lattice tower would be sited within a compound measuring 6.25m by 6.25m which would be formed by 2.2m high timber close boarded fencing. A total of five cabinets would be sited within the compound and one cabinet would be sited outside of the fence on the norther side.

The proposed telecommunications mast has come forward as part of the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) which is publically funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The aim of the project is to extend mobile phone coverage to a number of communities across the United Kingdom where no coverage is currently available (these areas are referred to as 'not spots'). The MIP is one of the 40 top priority projects identified in the National Infrastructure Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:**

- 1. The proposed base station would be read as a tall, isolated structure within this protected landscape and would be very prominent from many viewpoints within the Loxley Valley. The proposed development would also be seen from and in the context of Castle Hill Scheduled Monument and from the Grade II listed cottage and**

barn at Fair Flatts Farm. The proposed development would have a significant harmful impact upon the scenic beauty of the landscape and upon the setting of Castle Hill and the cottage and barn at Fair Flatts Farm contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP3, L1 and L3 and saved Local Plan policies LC4, LC6, LC15, LC16 and LU5.

2. The proposed development would be very likely to result in significant economic and social benefits by facilitating the provision of mobile communications to the local community, however, in this case it is considered that the harm that has been identified would outweigh the public benefits of the development and that therefore the proposal does not represent sustainable development and that any approval would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **Key Issues**

- The impact of the development upon the scenic beauty and other valued characteristics of the National Park.
- The economic and social benefits of the development.

### **History**

2012: NP/S/0712/0725: Planning permission granted conditionally for demolition of a collection of existing concrete framed agricultural buildings at Cliffe House Farm and provision of a single replacement steel framed agricultural building with associated vehicle turning area and associated landscaping. This building was completed in 2014.

2015: NP/S/1214/1273: Planning permission refused for the erection of two agricultural buildings at Cliffe House Farm on the grounds of adverse landscape impact and adverse impact upon the setting of nearby listed buildings.

An appeal has been lodged against the above refusal and is awaiting a decision.

### **Consultations**

Highway Authority – No response to date.

District Council – No response to date.

Parish Council – Make the following comment.

As this will be an extremely tall structure on one of the highest points in the area, in an area of outstanding natural beauty, Councillors would suggest that there may be an alternative technology that could be used.

### **Representations**

A total of five letters of representation have been received to date. Four of the letters object to the proposed development while one makes general comments. The issues that are raised are summarised below. The letters can be read in full on the Authority's website.

### **Objection**

- The mast is excessive in scale for its prominent location on a ridge on the edge of the Bradfield valley. The mast would have a high visual impact on the skyline from both the Bradfield valley and Sheffield.

- The mast is on an elevated hillside and adjacent to a footpath in a well-walked area of the National Park. The mast will therefore be highly visible and clearly seen in the surrounding area.
- The mast would dominate the traditional farm house and the large agricultural building which has been recently completed at the farm.
- The mast would be close to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Grade II listed barn at Fair Flatts Farm.
- The negative impact upon the protected landscape within the National Park outweighs any argument for placing the mast in this location.
- Despite the applications description of trees to the west of the site it must be noted that all adjacent trees are down slope and will provide little if any screening. There are also no trees to the north east and no planting has been proposed.
- Query whether the structure would be stable in high winds.
- Query whether the emissions of the mast will have an impact upon bats.
- Query whether the telecommunication mast will give off any radiation or be harmful to human health.

#### General comments

- States that whilst mobile signal coverage of Bradfield is to be welcomed, a 20m tower in a prominent position should not be accepted without provision of effective camouflage.

#### Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP3, DS1, L1 and L3

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC4, LC6, LC15, LC16 and LU5

#### National Planning Policy Framework

The fact that the site is within the Peak District National Park is an important consideration and paragraph 115 of the Framework says that great weight should be given to conserving landscape, scenic beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage in the National Park.

The Framework (paragraphs 132 – 135) also makes a strong presumption against development within the setting of designated heritage assets which would harm the significance of that heritage asset. Any harm or loss should require a clear and convincing justification. Where development would lead to substantial harm or total loss of significance of a heritage asset planning permission should normally be refused. Where development would lead to less than substantial harm this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Paragraph 42 of the Framework says that advanced, high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth and that the development of high speed broadband and other communications networks plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services. Paragraph 43 goes on to say that local planning authorities should support the expansion of electronic communications networks while aiming to keep the numbers of masts and sites to a minimum. Existing masts and buildings should be used unless the need for a new site has been justified. Where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

Paragraphs 45 and 46 say that proposals for new masts must be supported by evidence that the applicant has explored the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met. Local planning authorities must not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the system or determine health safeguards if the proposal meets the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

### Development Plan

Saved Local Plan policy LU5 (a) is particularly relevant to this proposal and says that telecommunications infrastructure will be permitted provided that:

- i. the landscape, built heritage or other valued characteristics of the National Park are not harmed; and
- 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.

GSP3 and LC4 say that all development must conserve and enhance the valued characteristics of the site, paying particular attention to impact on the character and setting of buildings, scale of development appropriate to the National Park, siting and design. L1 and L3 say that all development must conserve or where possible enhance the landscape character and cultural heritage of the National Park.

GSP1 says that all development shall be consistent with the National Park's legal purposes and duty and that where there is irreconcilable conflict between the statutory purposes, the Sandford Principle will be applied and the conservation and enhancement of the National Park will be given priority.

### Assessment

The application site is adjacent to the existing farm track which would provide access from Kirk Edge Road. Access visibility from the track is good and likely levels of traffic to maintain the development would be very low. Therefore there are no concerns that the development would have any harmful impact upon highway safety. Given the distance from the site to the nearest neighbouring properties and Cliffe House Farm there are no concerns that the proposal would have a harmful impact upon the privacy, security or amenity of neighbouring properties.

The application is supported by a certificate which states that, when operational, the International Commission guidelines for public exposure will be met. In line with the Framework therefore there are no further concerns that the development would have any adverse impact upon public health. There is also no evidence to indicate that emissions from the equipment mounted on the mast would have any adverse impact upon local bat populations or any other protected species. Having had regard to the comments made by the Parish Council and in representations it is therefore considered that the main issue in this case is the impact of the proposed development upon the valued characteristics of the National Park including the scenic beauty of the landscape and the setting of nearby heritage assets.

### Impact of the proposed development

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 broadly consistent with the Framework which is supportive of the development of communication networks where justified but also states that great weight should be given to conserving the Peak District National Park.

The application site is located adjacent to a field used as part of the agricultural unit associated with Cliffe House Farm. The site is located in an elevated position on a ridge which forms part of the northern slope of the Loxley Valley.

The proposed base station which would mount the telecommunications antenna would have a maximum height of 20m above the adjacent ground level. The proposed structure would be significantly taller than the adjacent earth mound (5m high) and tree planting (6m high) and consequently would be clearly visible within the valley from a number of nearby vantage points.

Officers viewed the site from three main positions in the valley; from Kirk Edge Road looking south, from New Road looking north east and from Oaks Lane (on the south side of the valley) looking north. Having done so it is considered clear that by virtue of the height of the proposed structure that it would be visually prominent in all three of these view points and within the wider valley more generally. From all three viewpoints the development would appear as a tall, isolated man made structure which would break the skyline from a number of vantage points.

The development would also be clearly visible from the local public footpath network which is well used by local people and by visitors to the National Park.

It is considered that the proposed development would therefore result in a significant harmful impact upon the scenic beauty of the National Park in conflict with Core Strategy policies GSP3, LC4 and L1 and saved Local Plan policies LC4 and LU5 (a) (i).

The proposed structure would also be viewed from and in the context of Castle Hill (approximately 500m to the north west) which is a Scheduled Monument and also from the cottage and barn at Fair Flatts Farm (approximately 250m to the south east) which are both grade II listed.

The structure would be sited on part of the ridge which continues to the south east from Castle Hill and which forms an important aspect of the setting of the historic motte and bailey castle which would have been sited here to take advantage of commanding views across the valley. The proposed structure would project above the ridge line and would be clearly visible from Castle Hill. The erection of a tall isolated man made structure which projects into the views from Castle Hill would have a harmful impact upon the setting of the Scheduled Monument.

The structure would also clearly be visible from the listed cottage and barn at Fair Flatts Farm where the structure would be more dominant due to the closer proximity and skyline above the wide and open agricultural fields which form the setting of these buildings. For these reasons it is also considered that the erection of the proposed structure would also have a harmful impact upon the setting of both the listed cottage and barn.

It is therefore considered that the proposed development would be contrary to Core Strategy policy L3 and saved Local Plan policies LC6, LC15 and LC16 because the development would have a harmful impact upon the setting of the above heritage assets. The Framework makes clear that there is a strong presumption against development within the setting of designated heritage assets which would harm the significance of that heritage asset and that any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

The harm in this case would be less than substantial and therefore it is appropriate to weigh any public benefits of the proposal against the harm that has been identified.

### Benefits of the proposed development

As mentioned earlier in the report, the proposed telecommunications mast has come forward as part of the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) which is publically funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The aim of the project is to extend mobile phone coverage to a number of communities across the United Kingdom where no coverage is currently available (these areas are referred to as 'not spots'). The MIP is one of the 40 top priority projects identified in the National Infrastructure Plan.

The benefits of the proposed development would therefore be to provide high speed wireless communications to an area where there is no coverage currently available. Officers agree with the agent that the provision of fast mobile telecommunication infrastructure facilitated by the development would be likely to offer significant economic and social benefits for members of the public living and working within the affected area.

The submitted application also states that a new base station of the design proposed is needed to help provide coverage to the 'not spot'. This is due to constraints which revolve around the transmission of signals to users and to the existing network, the need for the structure to provide access to all the main operators and to allow for future upgrades along with more basic requirements such as power, access and a willing landowner.

The Framework does place emphasis upon the need to encourage the continued rollout and improvement of digital infrastructure network, however, great weight also needs to be given to the conservation of the National Park and the setting of heritage assets. Therefore for the proposals to be considered sustainable development it must also be demonstrated that the development will conserve the valued characteristics of the Peak District National Park including the scenic beauty of its landscape and the setting of its heritage assets.

In this case it is considered that the proposed development would result in significantly harmful and wide ranging impacts upon the scenic beauty of the landscape and would also harm the setting of the heritage assets listed above. The public benefits of the development are significant but it is considered that the impacts of the proposed development would outweigh the benefits in this case. In coming to this conclusion Officers have taken into account the views of the Parish Council and local people, which while supporting the principle of the development, do raise strong objections related to the impact of the proposed structure.

A number of representations raise the possibility of either siting a structure in an alternative location or designing a more discreet structure which would be better integrated into the landscape.

The parameters of the Mobile Infrastructure Project are such that the agent is not able to consider alternative design solutions or technologies. The funding for the project is due to end in March 2016 and therefore the agent argues that if this development is not allowed that it would be very unlikely that alternative proposals would come forward in the near future, especially since mobile operators have found it unviable to provide a service to the local area.

While the loss of an opportunity to provide coverage is very unfortunate it is considered that this in itself does not justify development which would have an overriding harmful impact upon the National Park contrary to local and national policies. There may be other solutions which could come forward as part of future schemes or alternatively there may be options to utilise or re-develop the existing Airwave mast structure located near Edge Mount to the north of High Bradfield.

### Conclusion

It is considered that the proposed development would be a tall, isolated and prominent man made structure which would have a significant adverse impact upon the scenic beauty of the

surrounding landscape. The proposed development would also result in a harmful impact upon the setting of Castle Hill Scheduled Monument and the cottage and barn at Fair Flatts Farm both of which are Grade II listed.

The proposal would result in significant public benefits related to the provision of fast mobile telecommunication infrastructure. This would be likely to result in significant economic and social benefits for members of the public living and working within the affected area.

Great weight must be given to the desirability of conserving the valued characteristics of the National Park including the scenic beauty of its landscape and the setting of its heritage assets. In this case it is considered that any approval of the development would have a significant harmful impact upon the National Park and taking into account the views of the Parish Council and representations it is considered that this harm would outweigh the benefits of approving the proposal.

It is therefore considered that for the above reasons the proposed development is contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP3, L1 and L3 and saved Local Plan policies LC4, LC6, LC15, LC16 and LU5. These policies are considered to be up-to-date and in accordance with the Framework and therefore it is considered that the proposed development would not represent sustainable development and is contrary to the Framework.

It is therefore recommended that the application be refused.

### **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