
The Travellers’ Rest is located in a prominent position adjacent to the A53 Leek-Buxton road in open countryside approximately one kilometre northeast of Flash. The site lies outside of the confines of any designated Local Plan settlement but a residential property lies adjacent to the public house to the south with Flash Bar Stores immediately to the north.

The existing group of buildings, including the public house and associated outbuildings, are clearly visible from distant viewpoints to the south, north, and east and from Axe Edge to the northwest. In the surrounding landscape, development is restricted mainly to scattered farmsteads and isolated dwelling houses.

Proposal

The current application seeks full planning permission for the installation of a mobile telecommunications and ancillary equipment to the rear of the Travellers’ Rest. The proposed development comprises a 10 metre high timber faced replica telegraph pole supporting three shrouded antennas; ground based equipment cabin; and air conditioning unit.

Key Issues

The potential impact of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape.

Relevant Planning History

There is a long and extensive planning history held on file by the Authority relating to development at the Travellers’ Rest. The Authority is currently pursuing removal of the storage containers and shed in the rear car park of the public house and the Authority recently granted consent for an extension to the rear of the public house. The Authority has also resolved to grant planning permission for conversion of the outbuildings to either holiday lets or local needs dwelling but the Authority is awaiting completed Section 106 agreements for both applications. However, the current application has little bearing on these issues bearing in mind the owner of the Travellers’ Rest has made the site available to T-Mobile. Equally, these issues are not material to the proposed development and therefore carry little weight in the determination of the current application.

2006 – Application for planning permission for Orange PCS Limited for erection of eight metre high telegraph type antenna support pole on grass verge adjacent to bus stop near to New Lodge Farm about 100m northwest of the current application site. The application was withdrawn prior to determination.

In subsequent discussions with the Authority, it was concluded this site was inappropriate due to the potential harm of the proposed development on the landscape character of the surrounding area.

2007 - Pre-application discussions between the Authority and the current applicant in relation to proposed mobile telecommunications mast for T-Mobile at the Travellers’ Rest.

Officers offered informal advice suggesting a site to the rear of the public house would be the most likely to be acceptable to the Authority taking into account the applicant’s stated operational need for a mast in the immediate vicinity to improve coverage in the local area.
Energy Saving Measures
The submitted details do not incorporate any energy saving measures. However, the applicant has been asked to consider incorporating renewable energy technologies such as low-level solar panels or photovoltaic tiles in the scheme to reduce dependency on non-renewable energy sources.

Consultations
Highways – Not consulted but the proposed development does not contravene standing advice issued by Staffordshire County Council.
District Council – No response to date.
Parish Council – No response to date.
The Authority should receive consultation responses relating to this application no later than the 15 June 2007.

Main Policies
Relevant Regional Spatial Strategies include: Policy 9
Relevant Structure Plan policies include: GS1 & C2
Relevant Local Plan policies include: LC4 & LU5

Comment
Policy
PPG8 states the Government’s policy is to facilitate the growth of new and existing telecommunications systems but high priority should be given to the need to safeguard areas of particular environmental importance. PPG8 goes on to state that in National Parks proposals should be sensitively designed and sited and the developer must demonstrate that there are no suitable alternative locations.

PPG 8 also states the Government also has responsibility for protecting public health but it is the Governments firm view that the planning system is not the place for determining health safeguards. 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, to consider further the health aspects and concerns about them. The current application is accompanied by a declaration of conformity with international radio frequency exposure guidelines (ICNIRP).

The Development Plan policies of the Peak District National Park Authority seek to ensure that proposed development does not harm the valued characteristics of the National Park. To achieve this, development will not be permitted where it is incompatible with the policies of the development plan or where it is incompatible with the twin statutory National Park purposes as set out in Structure Plan Policy GS1.

Policy 9 in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS8) states development in the Peak District should help to secure the conservation and enhancement of the Peak District National Park while respecting the statutory purposes of its designation. Structure Plan Policy C2 states development which would lead to undesirable changes in the National Park landscape will not normally be permitted. C2 and Local Plan Policy LC4 both set out clearly that design to a high standard will be essential if permission is to be granted.
Local Plan Policy LU5 deals specifically with telecommunications infrastructure and states proposals will be permitted provided that the landscape, built heritage or other valued characteristics of the National Park are not harmed; it is not feasible to locate the development outside the Park where it would have less impact; and that the least obtrusive, or damaging technically practical location, size and design is secured.

Need and Landscape Impact

The applicant has been able to demonstrate an operational need for a mast in this location primarily to improve coverage along the A53 from Axe Edge to the Royal Cottage beyond Brund Hill. The topography of the surrounding landscape means a mast located outside of the National Park cannot provide this coverage. The proposed development is a considerable distance from the nearest settlement and unlikely to give rise to any exceptional circumstances that in turn would give rise to overriding objections on amenity grounds.

However, it is clear the current application would be incompatible with policies in the Development Plan if the proposed development would result in a visibly intrusive feature incongruous with its setting or prominent in the skyline; or would otherwise demonstrably harm the special qualities of an attractive gritstone moor landscape especially if a more appropriate location or design solution was available to the applicant.

In this case, the applicant has sought a site that would best serve to minimise the landscape impact of the proposed development. The remote and open character of the surrounding landscape is attributable to prevailing land management in favour of agriculture within the moorland fringe and grouse shooting on the heather moors. As a result, at higher altitudes tree belts are rare and plantations where they do occur tend to be limited to more sheltered, better-drained hillsides at lower levels.

It is also notable that the application site is outside of any area with special nature conservation interest taking into account much of the nearby moorland is within the Natural Zone or designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Therefore, siting a mast within an existing group of buildings offers the most logical approach to help mitigate the appearance and impact of the proposed development within the landscape without the need for additional tree planting which in itself would be an alien feature in this location that could draw further attention to the telecommunications mast.

Ideally the mast should be sited on the public house or outbuildings to more robustly satisfy relevant policies and further limit the potential impact of the development. However, this option is not available to the applicant primarily because the buildings in question do not have the structural capacity while fixing antennas to the buildings themselves is subject to technical limitations that would reduce coverage. Hence the requirement for a free standing mast and a replica telegraph pole is the least conspicuous option of those available to the applicant.

It is notable within the local area; telegraph poles and transformer poles are often seen close to residential properties albeit they can often be considered to be unfortunate additions to the landscape. The submitted plans show an existing transformer pole to the rear of the Travellers Rest which is extremely difficult to pick out from distant viewpoints.

Although, the existing pole stands at half the height of the proposed mast, the current situation does indicate that the proposed development, together with the existing pole, would not be unduly obtrusive in the landscape against the backdrop of the public house and associated outbuildings. In contrast, the existing flagpoles, painted white, on the front elevation of the Travellers Rest suggest the potential landscape impact of a less sympathetic scheme.
Moreover, the mast would be sited close to the existing buildings; would not have any ancillary equipment attached to it; would not be higher than the existing chimneys and would blend in with the existing stonework from distant viewpoints. Taken together, these factors would serve to limit the potential impact of the mast on the visual amenity of the local area.

Equally, the ancillary equipment would be well screened from public viewpoints and their modest scale would mean the equipment cabinet and air-conditioning unit would have a negligible impact on the immediate street scene and would not be visibly intrusive in the wider landscape.

Conclusion

It is therefore concluded that the submitted scheme represents the most appropriate design solution in the least damaging location taking into account the operational needs of the applicant and the sensitivity of the surrounding landscape. It is also concluded that the telecommunications mast would neither detract from the immediate street scene nor be so prominent in the skyline or surrounding landscape to cause sufficient harm to the valued characteristics of the National Park to warrant refusal of planning permission.

Consequently, in the absence of any material planning considerations that indicate otherwise, the proposed development is considered to be compatible with policies in the Development Plan. Accordingly, the current application is recommended for approval subject to conditions to enable the Authority to retain control over the final appearance of the development.

Human Rights

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

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

1. On the discontinuance of the telecommunications operation the apparatus hereby approved shall be removed and the land restored to its original condition.

2. Minor design details.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil