

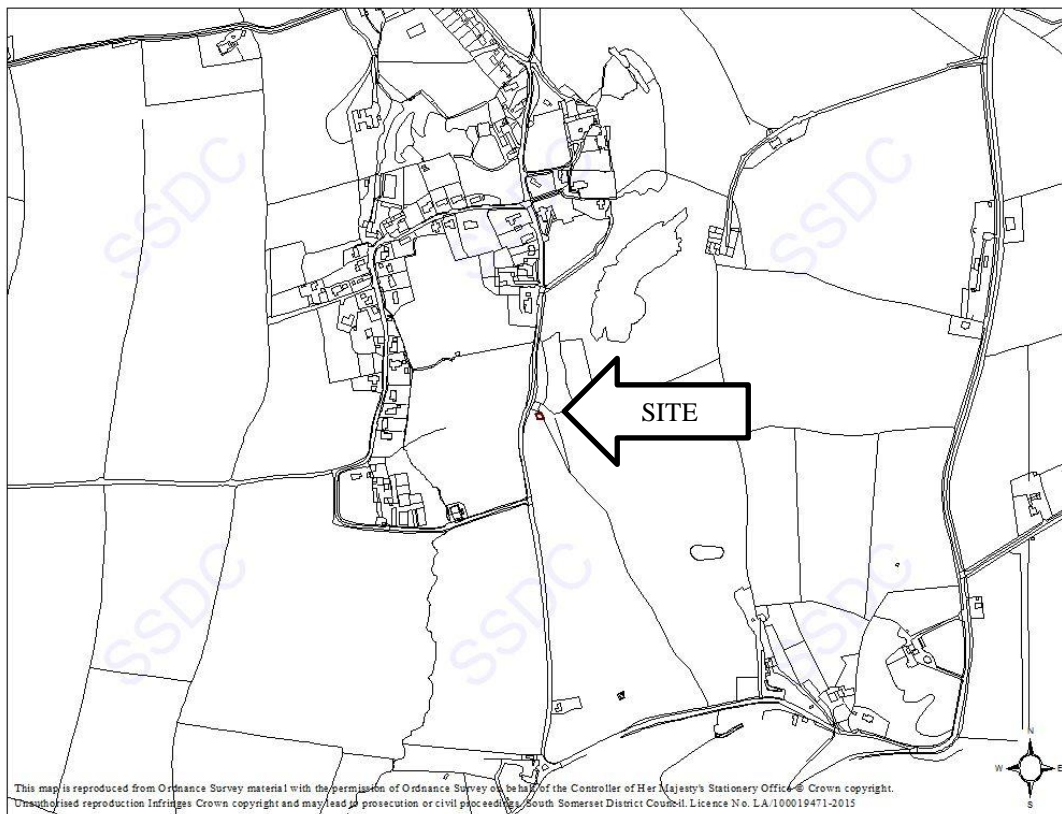
Officer Report on Planning Application: 14/03661/FUL

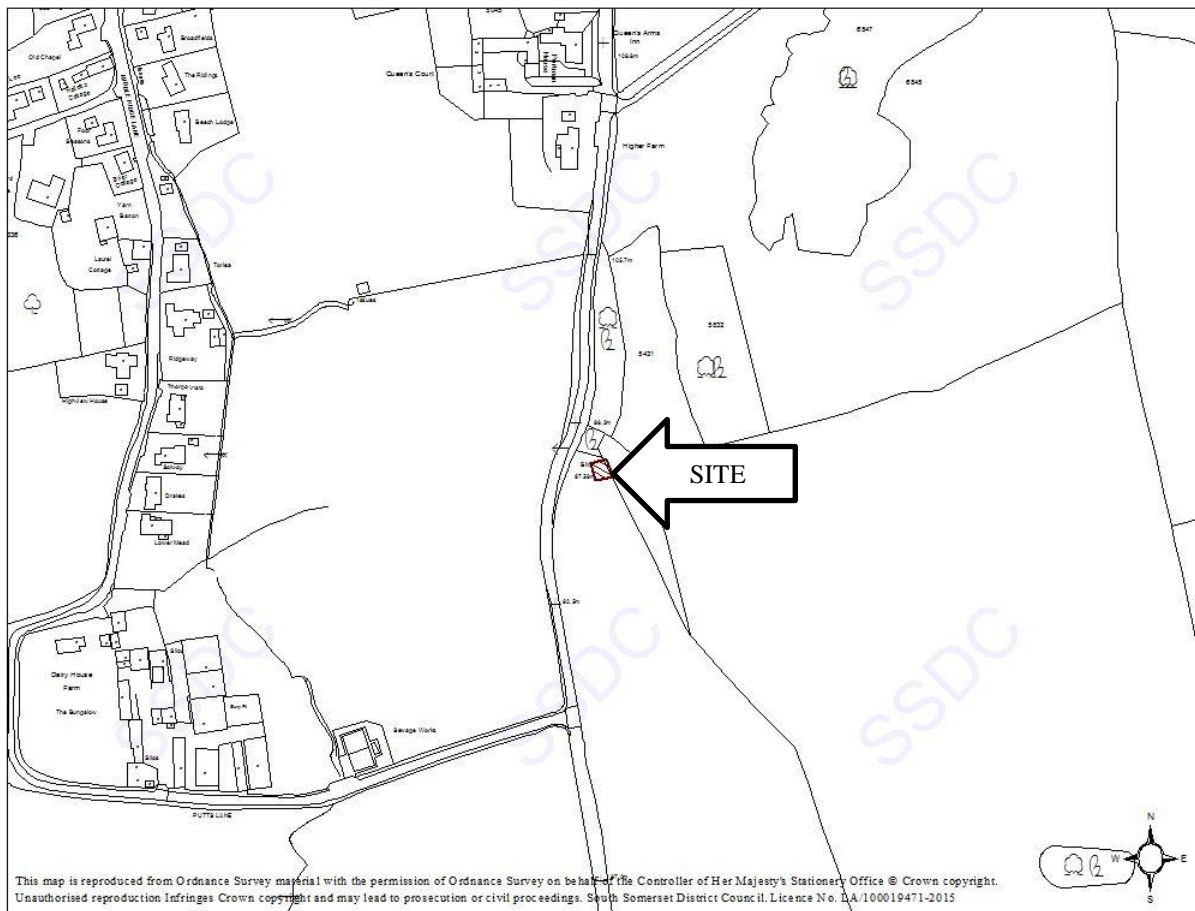
Proposal :	The development of a shared electronic communications base station comprising a 25m high lattice mast, six antennas, one 0.6m DIA dish, one 1.2m DIA dish, and six ground based radio equipment cabinets installed within a fenced compound. (GR 363530/122259)
Site Address:	Land At Corton Denham Road Corton Denham
Parish:	Corton Denham
BLACKMOOR VALE Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr T Inglefield Cllr W Wallace
Recommending Case Officer:	Lee Walton Tel: (01935) 462324 Email: lee.walton@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	6th October 2014
Applicant :	Arqiva Services Ltd
Agent:	Harlequin Group Miss Katie Yeoman Innovation Centre Maidstone Road, Chatham, Kent ME5 9FD
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application is referred to committee by the Development Manager in agreement with the Area Chair to allow the impacts to be considered against the benefits that arise.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





The site is located south of the village of Corton Denham, located on the eastern side of Putt's Lane, close to the junction that also leads to the village where the built form is overlooked by the proposed site. The land rises significantly to the east of the application site and the site lays adjacent to a wooded copse of 15m high trees. The site is located close to (north side) the Corton Denham conservation area. From the north and west the mast would be seen in context with the church tower and village's built form that is nestled in an otherwise unspoilt rural landscape.

The application proposes the erection of a 25m high lattice mast, six antennas, one 0.6m DIA dish, one 1.2m DIA dish, and six ground based radio equipment cabinets installed within a fenced compound. It is proposed to move back and widen the existing field gate access that would permit a transit type van to pull in off the roadway when accessing the site. A temporary track during the construction phase is proposed to be laid behind the back of the field hedgerow up to the mast's site.

The site is sought in response to the Government's Mobile Network Infrastructure Project (MNI) to provide coverage to a number of locations in the UK that presently have no mobile coverage at all. The principle objective is to provide basic voice and data network coverage for such locations, which is akin to that provided by the second-generation (2G) mobile services that are commonplace across most of the UK. The main function of the mast is to elevate the antennas and dishes above obstacles to gain a 'line of sight' transmission.

The application is supported by a Planning Statement including the Design and Access Statement, technical supporting information, Declaration of Conformity with ICNIRP Public Exposure Guidelines; additional information included photomontages, and information on the

discounted options.

Processing the application was delayed while the applicant considered alternative locations, however none of these have come forward and it is therefore necessary to consider the application that is now before us.

HISTORY

None

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and Paragraphs 2, 11, 12, and 14 of the NPPF indicate it is a matter of law that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the local planning authority considers that the adopted development plan comprises the saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006

EU8 - Telecommunications

Local Plan Policy EU8 is applicable and sets out three criteria:

- There must not be the opportunity to share existing facilities
- There is not the possibility of locating antennae on existing buildings/ structures
- Siting and external appearance of apparatus is designed so as to minimise impact on the locality while respecting the operation efficiency of the apparatus.

ST3 - Development Areas

ST5 - General Principles of Development

ST6 - The Quality of Development

EH1 - Conservation Areas

EH5 - Setting of Listed Buildings

EC3 - Landscape Character

EC8 - Protected Species

CR9 - Public Rights of Way and Recreation Routes

On the 8th January 2015, South Somerset District Council received the Inspector's Report into the emerging South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028). The conclusion of the report is that the local plan is 'sound', subject to a number of agreed modifications.

Under the terms of Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) weight should be given to relevant policies in emerging plans according to "the stage of preparation" and therefore the emerging local plan must be given substantial weight in decision-taking and it is therefore essential that the development is considered against all relevant policies.

Policies of the Emerging South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028)

SD1 Sustainable Development

SS2 Development in Rural Settlements

EG2 General Development

EQ3 Historic Environment

National Planning Policy Framework - March 2012

Chapter 5 - Supporting high quality communications infrastructure

Chapter 11 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Chapter 12 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

CONSULTATIONS

Corton Denham Parish Council - is unanimous in recommending refusal. The proposal does not respect the form, character and settings of the locality (Policy ST5), nor respect or enhance the characteristic pattern and features of the surrounding landscape; and avoid built forms whose visual profiles would be out of keeping with and uncharacteristic of the surrounding landscape when viewed from publicly accessible vantage points (policy EC3).

West Dorset District Council - No response received.

Department of Culture, Media and Sport - The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is a national government funded project, the aims and objectives are to improve mobile phone coverage in areas where there is currently no mobile signal from any Mobile Network Operator (MNO). These are typically remote or rural areas of the UK, where it has been uneconomical for the Mobile Network Operators to provide coverage through their commercial rollout. Due to this market failure the Government are able to intervene, by providing the capital expenditure for the construction of masts. The operators have committed to fund the running of these masts for the next 20 years.

Through work undertaken by the appointed delivery partner for MIP Arqiva, with Ofcom and the MNOs, Corton Denham has been highlighted as an area that meets the criteria to benefit from this funding. For each MIP site the MNOs confirm that they have no plans to provide coverage in the area themselves, and due to the time constraints of the project should the planning application be unsuccessful there will be no appeal.

County Highway Authority - The access needs to be sufficiently widened, setting back the gate and cutting the hedge to provide visibility splays; and to erect temporary 'Chapter 8' signage to warn road users of the site entrance in the lanes approaching the site entrance, and on this basis the LHA may consider withdrawing its objection.

Visibility splays of 2.4m by 45m with no obstruction over 900mm are considered appropriate as traffic speeds along the lane are slightly above 30mph. As the lane is so narrow and the point of access is opposite a substandard junction, appropriate access dimensions will be required to accommodate the turning swept paths of the largest vehicles that will be required to construct the development turning into and out of the access. The Construction Traffic Management Plan and its contents would need to be approved and such conditioned.

Conditions sought include: no obstruction to visibility, consolidated and surfaced access, a Construction Traffic Management Plan, site access track to be perpendicular to the lane and its surface properly consolidated for the first 20m, and for all vehicles leaving the site - efficient means shall be installed, maintained and employed for cleaning the wheels of all lorries leaving the site until construction is complete.

Landscape Architect - Clearly this is a sensitive location. The landscape setting of Corton Denham is one of the most distinctive within the district, laying at the toe of the open grassland of Corton Hill's steep sides that rise to the immediate east, and the longer dip-slope that falls gently from Corton ridge to the west. The immediate landscape is anciently enclosed (Somerset HER) with the historic lynchets to the east also a county wildlife site. The village core and the immediate hillsides to the east are designated as a conservation area, and the close-correspondence of church; the church farm; and public house is archetypically English. The vertical emphasis of the church tower acts as a focal point in a number of external views toward the village.

The introduction of a 25 metre phone mast into this context will bring a modern utilitarian

structure into a distinctive rural setting. Its impact will be exacerbated by the close containment of the hills, which bring a greater immediacy to the setting. The vertical nature of the mast is also at variance with village form, and will contend with the singular tower of the grade 2 listed St Andrews church. There are many views toward the village from its surround that focus on the church, many of which are sensitive receptors (to thus carry weight) i.e; the local footpaths that form part of the regional trails - the Monarchs and MacMillans Ways - as well as the open access land that encompasses the village to north and east. The incongruity of the mast's form and structure in this context will be clear to view, being at variance with the character of its landscape context; a competing vertical element with that of the tower; and a development form at the entrance to the village where none currently exists. Given the distinctive setting of both the village and the conservation area; the time-depth of the enclosing landscape; and the visual draw of the church and village core from the many surrounding vantage points, I view these as adverse impacts, as thus consider the proposal to fail to meet LP policies ST5 para 4; EC3, and EH3. (Officer Note: In response to the Landscape Architect's response further information was submitted to show the discounted options and in response to this the Landscape Architect queried whether West Down Farm had been considered to which the applicant advised due to the distance from the intended coverage area this location would not provide the necessary coverage to the known 'not spot' areas.)

SSDC Conservation Officer -The Church is a significant local landmark, and is listed at Grade II. Views of the Church from within the village core are limited, but the Church is a prominent feature in the wider landscape. From the open land and ridge to the east and north and footpaths along the western edge of the village the Church tower and proposed mast will be visible together. It is disappointing that the application seems lacking in detail in this respect. In accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF, the impact of the proposal on heritage assets affected needs to be described by the applicants. This does not appear to be the case.

In terms of the views from the ridge and open ground to the east and north I consider the impact to be quite significant. From the position of the Beacon and along the western slope of the ridge the Church and mast will align. I consider this to be harmful to the setting of the Church.

From this perspective I also consider the mast to have a harmful impact on the setting of the designated conservation area, as the mast will be a dominant feature in the immediate backdrop of the designated area, in what is otherwise an area characterised by low built form.

Views from the southwest and west also allow the two structures to be viewed in the same context. I consider the impact here to be slightly less harmful as the structures won't align in the same manner however there is still the potential for a degree of harm.

I recommend refusal. The application fails to meet the requirements of paragraph 128 of the NPPF. However, based on the information that has been submitted and my assessment of that information, the erection of the mast will also harm the setting of the Church and conservation area.

Dorset Campaign to Protect Rural England - While accepting that MPI is a Government Policy we contend that this doesn't mean that cart blanche can be given to such mast/ towers appearing anywhere within the countryside. In the industries own Code of Conduct 2013, it is stated that a proper assessment of the character of the area concerned should be taken into account.

REPRESENTATIONS

There have been 71 households responding to the proposed development. Of these, 20

support the proposal and 51 object. Broadly, of the 51 objections, 13 are received from 'non local' addresses (outside Somerset/ Dorset), and of the letters of support 4 received from, that is outside Somerset/ Dorset. A petition containing 76 signatures has also been received objecting to the proposed development.

Objections:

- Visually prominent
- Irresponsible for anyone to even consider erecting a steel lattice in one of the most beautiful and pristine panoramic landscape in southern England
- Potential degradation of this very special and currently unsullied landscape
- Insensitive and jarring development in an otherwise beautiful and unspoiled landscape
- Significant impact on the rural appearance of this sensitive location.
- It would create a towering, intrusive, ugly and a complete eyesore on the landscape of a very picturesque village in an environment of longstanding beauty
- A massive blot on a beautiful landscape
- A scene that is used by many media organisations to present the face of the English countryside. This scene would be ruined if the mast was placed in this particular location.
- This mast will be seen, you can't hide it
- Setting of conservation area
- It cannot be hidden, it does also open the door for further eyesores being proposed in the future
- On approaching Corton Denham from Sandford Orcas or Sherborne instead of first seeing the tower of St Andrews Church, your eye will be drawn to the spectacle of the Mast
- From the bench in the cemetery one looks directly to where the proposed mast would be. At present one can sit quietly and appreciate this most pleasant view
- The mast is not essential- equipment to improve mobile phone coverage is available to buy at reasonable cost for those who want it
- The technological benefit is small. Most people in Corton Denham neither need nor want an enhanced mobile phone signal
- Tourism will be affected and this will be a huge shame
- Corton Denham is a very popular destination with walkers
- Potential danger to the health of residents, livestock and wildlife
- Insufficient and often misleading information provided by the applicants
- Agents submitting this scheme have not worked with the village to review a number of possible locations
- Other locations surrounding the village should be assessed.
- Health grounds
- The District Council seems unaware of the strength of opposition

Support:

- No mobile signal and very poor broadband are seriously impacting those of us that now work from home.
- Mobile signals are so poor
- The photomontages clearly show that the visual impact will be minimal
- I truly understand the concern if a 'blot' on the landscape, but I felt assured that a lattice mast would be the best option.
- The erection of this mast is not unduly intrusive because, if set back against the trees it need not be an eyesore
- The benefits to the village will, in my opinion far outweigh the temporary intrusion which will very soon become part of the accepted landscape and hardly noticed.

- I would like to see the village continue to develop and keep up with the technology of the times, as did the Portmans Estate did by putting a clean water supply. Later there followed electricity and telephone.
- No business should be subjected to this Stone Age way of working. There is now a trend to payment of goods using your mobile phone thus saving on cost of credit card payments and reducing staff costs for the employer whilst improving customer satisfaction Using Mobile communications will only increase in the future, business will fall way short of what customers expect
- Personal safety
- The only reason I can see for not erecting a Mast is for cosmetic reasons only.
- I can understand the frustration of not having adequate facilities for modern life styles.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING CASE

In accordance with statutory and policy requirements, a sequential approach to the siting of new communications apparatus through a series of preferred options has been undertaken to ensure that both the operational and technical requirements are met whilst minimising the environmental impact. In accordance with paragraph 45 of the NPPF, existing telecommunication sites and other structures and buildings were explored to determine whether these were available and capable of supporting such telecommunications apparatus. However, the site search did not identify any existing telecommunications sites within the site search area nor any available structures or tall buildings that can accommodate all four networks operators whilst providing the required technical coverage and suitable line of sight in order to operate the equipment successfully. It is for these reasons, and notwithstanding any complex commercial arrangements, that it is considered that all other structures or tall buildings have been suitably discounted. As such, a new structure was therefore proposed to provide mobile coverage to the surrounding not spot areas.

As detailed in the supporting statement, there are various technical and operational constraints that influence the potential siting and design of the development proposal, namely the requirement to provide effective mobile coverage to the 'not spot' areas whilst achieving 'line of sight' with dishes on corresponding installations in the wider area. Environmental and planning constraints have also been given due consideration to ensure that an acceptable balance is achieved and that the development accords with the Local Development Plan.

The application submission details five alternative sites which were given consideration at the site search stage and their reasons for dismissal. These sites were New Barn Farm (discounted as the site provider was unwilling to host such apparatus on their land); Dairy House Farm (discounted as lower land levels than the application site would require a taller structure to provide the coverage to the 'not spot' areas that was considered to have a greater visual impact upon long distances views); covered reservoir (discounted as given the lack of vegetation cover and open nature of the landscape, an installation would have a greater impact upon both the setting of Corton Denham and the nearest residential properties); Merryfields (discounted from a radio perspective as a structure here would not provide coverage to the desired area. This is due to the probability that the signal would not effectively bounce over the ridge thereby not providing effective coverage to the target 'not spot' areas); and St. Andrew's Church (discounted given the insufficient space to accommodate all four networks operators, and the redevelopment of the church tower would be detrimental to the listing status.). Following the objections received from the Landscape Officer, the agent provided further information to discount Land at Stafford's Green Farm (discounted as lower land levels than the application site would require a taller structure to provide the coverage to the 'not spot' areas that was considered to have a greater visual impact upon long distances views, particularly given the lack of natural vegetation); Whitcombe Farm (discounted given the

intervening topographical features causing coverage issues) and West Down Farm (due to the distance from the intended coverage area this location would not provide the necessary coverage to the known 'not spot' areas).

On this basis, an appropriate alternative site assessment has been carried out that has taken into consideration all potential options within the site search area. Accordingly, the requirements of the NPPF have been met.

CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of Development:

The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) is clearly an important material planning consideration as it is the type of new digital infrastructure that the NPPF (para.42) seeks to support. This is a Government sponsored project established with the specific purpose of eradicating the lack of effective coverage in certain localities by providing communications services to local communities and business currently without access to such services.

In considering telecommunication proposals there is a clear emphasis that local planning authorities should be looking for ways to support development coming forward and not reject applications simply on environmental grounds. The NPPF recognises that this is especially relevant where development might have other significantly important benefits such as being essential to meet, for example, sustainable economic growth or a national need which can include new infrastructure that connect communities.

Having regard to the Government's three key dimensions for sustainable development within the NPPF, mobile communications will assist in a number of ways:

- Economic role - help maintain high and stable levels of economic growth and employment
- Social role - aid social progress, which recognises the needs of everyone, extending economic opportunity - particularly important to those who live in remote areas, particularly among the more socially disadvantaged, with poorer access to transport, extending flexible forms of working, helps to achieve a better work life balance, improves convenience and enhance personal safety and security, and aids social inclusion through connectivity.
- Environmental role - helps reduce travelling and help ensure the prudent use of natural resources.

Accordingly there is support 'in principle'. The main considerations include character and appearance including impact on the setting of heritage assets, highway safety and neighbour amenity.

Character and appearance, including impact on heritage assets:

Contrary to neighbour objections there is no landscape protection designation for the immediate area (para.115 of the NPPF). It follows that in areas not falling within a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) significant weight should be given to facilitating development, particularly for this type of application.

The immediate locality is viewed as unspoilt rural countryside that is largely contained within a valley setting in which there are no large scale man-made alien structures beyond that which would be found in a traditional English countryside setting. Local concerns argue that the presence of a mast degrades the rural setting, while its presence acts as a precedent for other forms of development that would likewise erode and degrade the existing unspoilt countryside character, although, in this case, it can be argued that the specific need and public interest identified by this application does not establish a precedent and, indeed, each proposal should

be considered on its own merits.

The application site is located to be as discrete as possible and alternative sites have been identified and investigated, including sites brought to the applicant's attention, but none have proven suitable, whether this is for the specific technical requirements required to accommodate the apparatus, or the landowners who have refused their co-operation. In reality there is a specific and limited area that the proposal serves with obvious constraints for where the mast can be located. The current site is the only remaining location that is considered acceptable by the applicant for the purpose of achieving the coverage sought.

There are significant concerns raised by both the Landscape and Conservation Officers that derive from the unspoilt character of the locality. The advantage that this landscape has is its lack of man-made intrusion considered to make it easier to resist inappropriate development proposals. To this should be added the setting of the conservation area and setting of the listed church (grade II), but these are the nearest one gets to specific landscape protection. The Landscape Architect considers there to be adverse impacts given the distinctive setting of both the village and the conservation area; the time-depth of the enclosing landscape; and the visual draw of the church and village core from the many surrounding vantage points. The Conservation Officer is also adverse to the conflict that arises to the setting of conservation area and listed church tower that can be seen in a number of viewpoints, in particular from the north and west. The Conservation Officer notes the lack of visual assessment made of the view from the north over the village that would show the top of the mast behind the tree screen but very much in context with the village and central church tower in the foreground. In itself the lack of assessment would not change the observations made, and it should be acknowledged that there are significant concerns that are raised by landscape, and conservation officers whose views are supported by many local residents.

Without the support of the Landscape and Conservation Officers it is difficult to argue in favour of mitigating factors, such as some assimilation would take place with distance having a role; topography and planting acts to soften the presence, such as the belt of trees adjacent the site, but inevitably there would be vantage points, and indeed, the technical requirements requiring a line of sight means that it could never be the case that the mast would go unnoticed. There would be impact. It would be intrusive, especially when the context is unspoilt countryside, but we must also consider the NPPF, in particular paragraph 116 that suggests even where the landscape is fully protected, which is not the case with this site, there are always exceptional circumstances involving the public interest, weighing the detrimental effect of the proposal, seeking to moderate the impact of an otherwise inappropriate development that is allowed. Further, emerging local plan policy EQ2 that considers general development and the need to reinforce distinctive character and respect local context also requires making efficient use of land while having regard to infrastructure and service availability that directly relates to the current application. Notwithstanding the location, the applicant has sought alternative sites but without success. The harm therefore needs be balanced against all other planning considerations and in particular the telecommunication objectives sought by central government to secure a basic level of access for all local communities throughout the country.

Highway Safety:

The site is approached by single carriageway with passing points, with a road junction opposite the site's field entrance that is on land raised up above the adjacent highway. To either side of the entrance the hedgerows leave little roadside verge.

The Highway Authority set out a number of conditions and if attached to the permission they would not object. They refer to the cutting back of the adjacent hedgerow at the entrance to achieve the required visibility splays. While the lowering in height of the hedgerow during the construction phase may be acceptable, in the long-term with only infrequent attendance of the

site requiring periodic visits typically every two to three months for routine maintenance and servicing it would be more important to maintain the current roadside enclosure, and permit the field hedge to return to the height commonly found in the locality.

Neighbour Amenity:

It is considered that the proposal would not unacceptably harm the residential amenity of occupiers of adjacent properties by disturbing, interfering with or overlooking such properties.

Parish Council Concerns:

The Parish Council's response offers detailed criticism predominantly concerned with the unspoilt character of the locality and the siting of the mast that compromises the distinctive rural scene and would not accord with local plan policies ST5 and EC3. Such concerns are mirrored by the council's Landscape and Conservation Officers. Their response is concerned with the level of objection at the local level and that this should be respected in the decision making process, but there are a large number of supporters and commonly in considering applications for planning permission there are normally many more objectors than written letters of support, so that it may be presumed that there is wider support that also recognises the potential for visual harm but keen to secure improved telecommunications within the locality. As stated elsewhere within the report the applicant has investigated alternative sites but without success and the current site is the only available acceptable location to secure development.

Neighbour Representations:

All neighbour consultation responses have been considered as part of the application process and mostly dealt with under the relevant headings of the officer report. Predominantly the issues raised relate to landscape character, the unspoilt countryside and access to and need for additional telecommunications in this location.

Neighbour Concerns:

It is argued by those opposed to the application that the current government initiative is bound not to be the last despite government protestations to the contrary, and that there would be future occasions at which time improvements in technology could mean smaller apparatus that can be more appropriately located within the built form, rather than the conspicuous man-made lattice structure proposed in an otherwise unspoilt landscape, but there can be no immediate guarantee so could be many years into the future.

While there are arguments, to the effect the mast is not essential, quoting other phone coverage that is considered possible, and restating the role of landlines, the current proposal clearly arises from government initiative seeking support of sustainable development and the increasingly role of mobile communications in day to day living.

Local tourism, despite the claimed erosion of this unspoilt landscape if the mast goes ahead in this location, needs be balanced by the many visitors who will want both the unspoilt countryside (and there are many other qualities attracting visitors), while accessing good communications on their travels.

Criticism that the applicant has not sufficiently dealt with the local community ahead of submitting their application is brought out by the subsequent delay in processing the application, when the applicant undertook to review alternatives, and arranged a day when certain sites, including the current site had a flag raised to permit visual consideration of different sites in the landscape. The lack of alleged engagement with the community is not considered sufficient reason to refuse the application.

With regard to the strength of opposition, while this is noted and engages with relevant

planning concerns, there remains the need to balance such opposition with all other relevant planning considerations.

The provision of a mast sets no precedent for any other would be intrusive development that must be considered in its own right and on its own merits, and in this case the public and government interest in the scheme attracts significant weight.

Neighbour support:

The supporting comments received in favour of the proposal predominantly seek the basic service the government initiative offers, and are prepared to play down the visual impacts in achieving this goal. This is best put by comments received to the effect, the only reason for not erecting a mast is cosmetics. The mast is acknowledged would be intrusive, but not necessarily unduly intrusive from every viewpoint, but even without the mitigation that is currently considered there is a sense that access to better telecommunications becomes a 'must'.

Despite landline access there is a need to concede that there is an increasing reliance on mobile communications, seen to be indispensable living in the modern world that is more than just a lifestyle choice where communication is revolutionised and continues to develop the way individuals and local communities interact. One business supporter refers to the trend to payment of goods using your mobile phone thus saving on cost of credit card payments and reducing staff costs for the employer whilst improving customer satisfaction and that this will only increase in the future. Concerns arise that unless there is access to shared technology this has the real potential of excluding those without the basic level of access that is sought.

Reference is made to the modernisation of the village during the 20th century with residents having seen the introduction of a clean water supply, electricity and latterly the telephone, and that the telecommunications mast is just one more necessary step if the community is to progress. This view appears underscored by the government's initiative behind the present application that seeks to level of playing field with a basic level of equality between communities.

Ash Die Back:

At the time of considering the application there is a tree belt adjacent to the site that is used to argue accommodates the mast, despite the strong objections that the mast remains prominent in the landscape. The tree belt helps screen the site from some directions and acts as a 'backcloth' from others, while the mast cannot be hidden as is explained elsewhere, it could be argued that it could be removed should technological advances mean that it was no longer required.. Objectors have drawn attention that the adjacent trees are Ash, and question what could happen as a result of Ash die back were this to take hold. Notwithstanding such concerns, with so many Ash in England at risk, its loss has enormous ramifications for the country as a whole, let alone the immediate context to this application site. At this point the planning considerations need to consider the tree belt because it is currently in situ, despite local concerns.

Health & Safety

The health and safety considerations are addressed by the applicant in accordance with para.46 of the NPPF, to the effect that the proposal meets the International Commission guidelines.

Balancing Considerations:

It is considered that every effort has been made by the applicant to reduce the environmental impact of this proposed as well as investigate the alternative sites but despite their best effort we are left with the original site that has raised much objection based on the detrimental impact

to the setting of conservation area and of the listed church and the unspoilt rural character of the locality so that the proposed mast acts to degrade that landscape and the heritage assets.

The design of the lattice mast is standard and designed to accommodate the requirements to provide a basic level of service between communities. The site appears to represent the best possible balance between the need for the telecommunications service that only comes before us because of the government's initiative, the benefits of which are considered bring considerable and varied benefits of high speed wireless communications to assist in reducing the digital divide, increasing economic opportunity and improving the social wellbeing of the local population, and the more specific local harm to rural character. However, by providing the above benefits the MIP assists in achieving the goals of sustainable development, while the lack of readily available alternative site means that there is no other choice currently available, while to turn one's back on the technology goes against the general drive for better telecommunications technology, and that in turn creates an increasingly isolated community.

The technical justification included within the application demonstrates the need for the apparatus proposed within the context of the operators surrounding networks. The young population in particular expects to be connected at all times as mobile devices are their main or only means of accessing popular social networks. NPPF para.17 advises that planning should 'proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver... infrastructure... that the country needs.' Ash die back is not necessarily inevitable and yet it could happen at which point the mast would be even more prominently located, however, it was never designed to be fully hidden, and were the worse to happen there is significantly wider environmental impacts that would be contended with, so that the current planning considerations need reflect the existing circumstances, to the effect that there is a tree belt.

Conclusion:

Members have before them the harm that arises from landscape, visual harm and setting of heritage assets within what is otherwise an unspoilt landscape, versus the opportunity to acquire improved access to mobile telecommunications that increasingly is, and will become, a vital component of day to day life, both in personal and business terms, and without which communities are excluded.

The landscape is not 'highly protected' (National Park or AONB status), and there is therefore limited weight that might be attached to the landscape concerns, in considering this type of application, especially given that even in the case of protected landscapes even then, there will be exceptional circumstances when certain development is supported. The applicant has sought alternative sites but without success. They are reliant on a specific location so that there are no known sites available that might be better locations. Unless supported, it is suggested, the opportunity will be lost. The applicant advises that if refused they would not appeal the decision.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve

01. The benefits in terms of the accessible communications arising from the proposed telecommunications mast would not be outweighed by the harm identified arising from landscape or visual impact, and setting of heritage assets. As such the proposal complies with saved policies ST5, ST6, EH5, EH1, EC3, EU8 of the South Somerset Local Plan, the Emerging Local Plan Policies SS2 and EQ2, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 301748-00-004 -ML001 Rev A; 00-006 - MD001 Rev A; -20-150-MD001 Rev A; and -20-151-MD001 Rev A, received 11 August 2014.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

03. Within 6 months of the cessation of use of the telecommunications mast hereby permitted all structures and materials in connection with this permission shall have been removed from the land that shall be reinstated to its former condition in accordance with a plan to have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with saved Policies EC3, ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan, and policy SS2 and EQ2 of the Emerging Local Plan.

04. During the construction period there shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 900 millimetres above adjoining road level in advance of lines drawn 2.4 metres back from the carriageway edge on the centre line of the access and extending to points on the nearside carriageway edge 45m either side of the access. Such visibility shall be fully provided before the development hereby permitted is commenced. Thereafter the hedgerow shall be kept cut back and maintained to improve visibility but the hedgerows maintained at a height common in the locality.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety further to policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.

05. Before the development commences, a properly consolidated and surfaced access shall be constructed (not loose stone or gravel) details of which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The access shall be constructed in accordance with the agreed design and shall be maintained in the agreed form thereafter at all times.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety further to policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.

06. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Construction Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be delivered in accordance with the approved Construction Traffic Management Plan.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety further to policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.

07. Within the site the access track shall be perpendicular to Middle Ridge Lane and its surface properly consolidated, not loose stone or gravel, for the first 20m of its length from the carriageway edge.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety further to policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.

08. The applicant shall ensure that all vehicles leaving the site are in such condition as not to emit dust or deposit mud, slurry or other debris on the highway. In particular (but without prejudice to the foregoing), efficient means shall be installed, maintained and employed for cleaning the wheels of all lorries leaving the site, details of which shall have been agreed in advance in writing by the Local Planning Authority and fully implemented prior to construction, and thereafter maintained until construction is complete.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety further to policy ST5 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the NPPF.