Committee Date: 16/05/2013
Application Number: 2013/02442/PA
Accepted: 08/04/2013
Target Date: 31/05/2013
Application Type: Telecommunications Determination
Ward: Weoley

Footpath of Castle Square, Weoley Castle, Birmingham, B29 5QL

Prior notification for the installation of 1 no. replacement 15 metre high telecommunications monopole with 6 no. multi-band antennae, 3 no. equipment cabinets and associated ancillary development.

Applicant: Vodafone Ltd
c/o Agent
Agent: Mono Consultants Ltd
Steam Packet House, First Floor, 76 Cross Street, Manchester, M2 4JG

Recommendation
No Prior Approval Required

1. Proposal

1.1. This is a prior notification application for the installation of a replacement 15m high telecommunications monopole and 1no replacement slim line meter cabinet and 2no. new ground based equipment cabinets to be located within the forecourt area outside 154 Weoley Castle Road, Weoley Castle. The proposed monopole would replace an existing 15m high telecommunications monopole. The Applicant has explained that the existing monopole does not meet the operator’s technical requirements and that the existing monopole is technically obsolete due to its design limitations and its inability to accommodate the required apparatus.

1.2. The proposed monopole would accommodate the shared antennae of both O2 and Vodafone. It would have a diameter of 0.32m, with the antennae shroud having a diameter of 0.54m. It would be sited within the forecourt area and would be constructed of steel, with the finish colour proposed to be dark blue to match nearby lampposts.

1.3. One of 3 no. existing cabinets would be removed and replaced with a new cabinet - 0.66m in length, 0.26m wide and 1m high. It would be constructed of galvanised steel, with the finish colour proposed to be green.

1.4. 2no. additional equipment cabinets would be installed to the south of the existing cabinets. They would measure 0.77m in length, 0.75m in width and 1.92m in height. They would be constructed of galvanised steel, with the finish colour proposed to be green.

1.5. The Applicant states the proposed equipment would be ICNIRP-compliant (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection).

2. Site & Surroundings
2.1. The site of the proposed mast and cabinets is on the footpath outside 154 Weoley Castle Road, where there is already an existing 15m high monopole.

2.2. The site is within the commercial centre of Weoley Castle Square. The area is predominantly commercial in character with some residential units located within the upper storeys of properties that face the square and in the surrounding roads. The row of retail units to the rear of the site is two storeys in height, with the forecourt at the front containing street furniture such as bollards, seating and lighting columns. The lighting columns are all painted blue.

2.3. There is a large area of greenery opposite the site contained within the square, with a number of tall trees. There is a further telecommunications mast to the north of the site outside 167 Weoley Castle Road.

3. Planning History


4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1. Transportation Development - No objection, there would not be any reduction in the footway width available.

4.2. Regulatory Services – No objection.

4.3. Letters of notification have been sent to surrounding occupiers, Residents’ Associations, Ward Councillors for Weoley; Planning Committee members from the Northfield Constituency and the MP for Northfield.

4.4. Three objections have been received from local occupiers objecting to the proposal on the following grounds.
   - There is a nursery school close by and it would be affected by any radiation given off by the short wave signals.
   - It would also be an eyesore on the local area.
   - There are already several such telecommunication monopoles with cabinets in this area.
   - A site should be found which is not so near local shops and housing.

5. Policy Context

5.1. The following local policies are applicable:
   - The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (2005)
   - Draft Birmingham Development Plan (2010)
   - Telecommunications Development: Mobile Phone Infrastructure SPD

5.2. The following national policies are applicable:
6. Planning Considerations

6.1. This is a prior notification application. As such, the only issues that should be considered when assessing this application are the siting and appearance of the proposed monopole and cabinets.

6.2. Paragraphs 42-46 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) relate to the installation of telecommunications equipment. Paragraph 43 advises that local planning authorities should support the expansion of electronic communications networks but should aim to keep the numbers of telecommunications masts and the sites for such installations to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network. It explains that existing masts, buildings and other structures should be used, unless the need for a new site has been justified and that where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

6.3. Paragraph 46 advises that “Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for the telecommunications system, or determine health safeguards if the proposal meets International Commission guidelines for public exposure”

6.4. The Telecommunications Policy (Paras. 8.55-8.55C) in the Birmingham UDP (2005) and the Telecommunications Development SPD state that a modern and comprehensive telecommunications system is an essential element in the life of the local community and the economy of the City but that in assessing applications for telecommunications equipment, account will be taken of the impact of radio masts, antennae and ancillary structures on existing landscape features, buildings and the outlook from neighbouring properties. In respect of ground-based masts, the Council’s SPD advises that they should make the most of existing screening or backdrop to buildings and avoid open locations, that they should be mitigated by landscaping and planting, that street locations will be discouraged but where they are the only option they should appear as an unobtrusive addition, and where possible sites should have a backdrop of trees to reduce visual contrast.

6.5. Policy 8.55B requires operators to share masts wherever possible, and the proposal fully accords with this policy because O2 and Vodafone would incorporate antennas on the same monopole.

6.6. In approving Planning Appeal APP/P4605/A/10/2132015 for the existing 15m high mast and cabinet, the Inspector noted Weoley Castle Square is a local commercial centre set around a large roundabout and contains a variety of commercial uses. Within the roundabout there is a large area of green open space with a number of tall trees. The centre contains a wide variety of building styles, the majority having retail uses to the ground floor with residential above. The building to the rear of the site (154 Weoley Castle Road) is 2 storeys high with a steeply pitched roof. The forecourt area to the front is extensive and it contains a considerable array of street furniture, including numerous iron and concrete bollards, seating, telephone box and tall lighting columns. It was seen that the monopole would clearly be greater in height and bulk than that existing and the tall lighting columns. However, when viewed from ground level, perspective would have the result of rendering this difference less obvious and therefore whilst the proposal would be more apparent
within the streetscene, any additional prominence would be limited and would be outweighed by the benefits of sharing of the installation. Similarly, it was considered that the approved equipment cabinet would have appeared as part of the street furniture and would not have appeared obtrusive or isolated in the streetscene.

6.7. Bearing in mind the above, I consider the key issue in determining this current application is whether the provision of additional cabinets and the change in design of the monopole (with an increase in height of 1.2m of the antenna shroud) when compared to the existing approved monopole, would be material and would have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area.

6.8. I consider that the alterations to the monopole are not sufficient to have a noticeably increased impact on the street scene. The incorporation of the additional cabinets is regrettable in creating additional clutter at this corner. However, this is a wide frontage and the equipment would be viewed in the context of other street furniture, including bollards directly in front of the cabinets, adjacent to the kerb. As such, I do not consider that it would be possible to substantiate a reason for refusal on visual amenity grounds.

6.9. Existing mature trees located in the area and the existing street furniture would help the mast assimilate with existing furniture. Therefore, I do not consider the siting and appearance of the proposal would unduly affect residents’ amenity, compared to the existing installation.

6.10. Although no alternative sites assessment has been carried out in support of this application, an assessment was previously carried out in support of Planning Application 2009/06317/PA for the approved 15m high monopole.

6.11. Transportation Development have raised no objection to the proposal and I concur that the proposed equipment would not cause any obstruction to highway users.

7. Conclusion

7.1. I consider that the siting and appearance of the proposed replacement monopole and new equipment cabinets would not be detrimental to the visual amenity of the area. In the context of national and local planning policies, and given the application site already hosts established telecommunications equipment, there would be no reasons for refusal of this proposal.

8. Recommendation

8.1. No Prior Approval Required

Case Officer: James Mead