Hagley Road West/Quinton Lane, Nr Junction of, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 1HP

Application for prior notification for the installation of replacement 15m high telecommunications mast and 2 no. new equipment cabinets

Applicant: Vodafone Ltd
c/o agent
Agent: Mono Consultants Ltd
Steam Packet House, 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 two new ground based equipment cabinets to be located on the public footway of the westbound carriageway of Hagley Road West in Quinton. The proposed monopole would replace an existing 13.8m high telecommunications monopole. However, the proposed monopole would be positioned 0.5m east of the existing 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 1m in from the edge of the highway and would be constructed of steel, with the finish colour proposed to be mid-blue (RAL 5017) to match nearby lampposts.

1.3. The proposed equipment cabinets would be installed approximately 0.5m west of the existing equipment cabinet, which would be retained. Each cabinet would measure 0.77m in length, 0.75m in width and 1.92m in height. Each would be constructed of galvanised steel, with the finish colour proposed to be grey.

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

2. Site & Surroundings
2.1. The application site is located on the public footway of Hagley Road West (A456), on its southern side. The road is a dual carriageway with a grassed bank containing mature trees separating carriageways. The roundabout junction of Hagley Road West with Quinton Lane, Ridgacre Lane and Trevanie Avenue is located approximately 20m south west of the site. Toby Carvery and its associated car park is located immediately adjacent to the south of the site. There is a birch tree near the Carvery’s car park frontage, to the south-west of the proposed installation.

2.2. There is an existing 13.8m high telecommunications monopole painted mid blue and an existing equipment cabinet located on the application site. A bus stop shelter is located on the footway approximately 4m north east of the site. The site is located mid-way between existing 10m high lamp posts on the footway. Opposite the site to the north, and fronting the eastbound carriageway of Hagley Road West is the Hollybush local shopping parade. The prevailing character of the surrounding area is one of a mix of residential and commercial properties.

3. Planning History

3.1. 14th October 2010 - 2010/04959/PA - Erection of a 13.8m high telecommunications mast and associated cabinet equipment – Determined by Committee - No prior approval required

4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1. Transportation Development – No objection – The footway width available would be no further reduced to that currently available.

4.2. Local residential and commercial occupiers, Ward Councillors for Edgbaston and Old Warley Ward (Sandwell MBC), Residents Associations and M.P.’s for Edgbaston and Warley (Sandwell MBC) notified. Advertised by site notice. One letter of objection received from a local resident: * the mast is already visible to residents, so a taller mast would appear more visually intrusive, and be taller than existing trees. The original installation attracted several hundred objections from local residents and I would ask the planning committee to consider that local residents remain concerned about the prospect of an even taller mast.

5. Policy Context

5.1. The following local policies are applicable:
   - Birmingham UDP
   - Draft Birmingham Development Plan
   - Telecommunications Development: Mobile Phone Infrastructure SPD

   The following national policies are applicable:
   - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

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 Application 2010/04959/PA for the existing 13.8m high monopole at this location your Committee considered that this structure would not have appeared as an isolated or incongruous feature in the street scene along this busy main road given; the existence of 10m high lamp posts; its siting mid-way between these lamp posts; its finish colour being blue to match the blue finish of these lamp posts; the fact that it would have been viewed against the backdrop of the tall Toby Carvery building from some angles, and mature trees from other angles; and the fact that the existing bus shelter would have either screened or provided a backdrop to the bottom 2.5m of the monopole when viewed from the east or from the west respectively. 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 increase in height of the proposed monopole by 1.2m and the increase in thickness of the proposed monopole by 0.07m at its base and 0.1m at its 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. Although the additional height and thickness of the proposed monopole, when compared to the existing situation, is regrettable and I concede that the resulting structure would appear slightly more noticeable in the streetscene and in long distance views of the site, I do not consider the increases in height and thickness would be so different from the existing situation as to substantiate a reason for refusal on visual amenity grounds. Similarly, the proposed equipment cabinets, whilst adding additional clutter to the street, would not be of such a size that it could be argued that they would have a detrimental impact on visual amenity.

6.9. The nearest residential flats, which are accommodated above shops on the Hollybush parade, are located approximately 40m north of the site. Existing mature trees located along the verge between the Hagley Road West carriageways would still provide significant screening of the proposed replacement monopole from these flats, and from the eastbound carriageway. Therefore, I do not consider the siting and appearance of the proposal would unduly affect residents’ amenity.

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 2010/04959/PA for the approved 13.8m 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: Andrew Conroy