



## Report to West Area Planning Committee

---

<b>Application Number:</b>	20/07885/FUL
<b>Proposal:</b>	Proposed telecommunications installation of 17.5m High HEL Alpha 8 V2 pole on new concrete base and ancillary works
<b>Site Location:</b>	Land North Of Bushes Wood And East Of Pheasants Parmoor Lane Frieth Buckinghamshire
<b>Applicant:</b>	EE Limited
<b>Case Officer:</b>	Jenny Ion
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	Chiltern Villages
<b>Parish-Town Council:</b>	Hambleden Parish Council
<b>Date valid application received:</b>	2nd November 2020
<b>Statutory determination date:</b>	28th December 2020
<b>Recommendation</b>	Conditional Permission

### 1.0 Summary & Recommendation/ Reason for Planning Committee Consideration

- 1.1 Permission is sought for the erection of a 17.5m high telecommunications mast. The mast is of the pole type, set within a fenced compound, with ancillary equipment cabinets and back-up power generator. The mast is proposed as part of the Emergency Services Network (ESN).
- 1.2 The key issues are the need for the mast to address gaps in network coverage, balanced against the landscape impact of the proposed mast and compound. In this instance, having weighed and balanced the issues, the application is recommended for conditional permission.
- 1.3 Cllr Whitehead called in the application for consideration by committee due to the level of public interest in the application. Therefore, this application has been the subject of consultation with the Planning Committee Chairman. It has been determined that the application should be referred to the relevant Planning Committee for consideration.
- 1.4 The application is recommended for permission.

## **2.0 Description of Proposed Development**

- 2.1 The application seeks consent for a 17.5 metre high telecommunications mast set within a 6 x 10 metre fenced compound. The mast would be a pole type mast, with a diameter of approximately 0.35 metres. The main antennas would be at the top of the mast concealed within a shroud, and two smaller 300mm diameter satellite dishes would be attached at a height of 13.9 metres.
- 2.2 Within the compound would be three equipment cabinets on the north side of the mast and a further cabinet at the north-west corner of the compound. There would also be a ground mounted satellite dish of 1.2 metre diameter. The compound would be surrounded by a 1.2m high post and rail fence with screen planting shown on three sides.
- 2.3 The site is located in the corner of a cultivated field, set just over 80 metres to the east of Parmoor Lane. It is accessed via a farm gate and access track which also serves the agricultural and commercial buildings to the north west. There is an area of woodland to the south east.
- 2.4 To the south, at a distance of 135 metres, running east to west, is a public footpath. Approximately 290 metres to the north is Parmoor Croft Lane.
- 2.5 The site is located in the countryside outside of the Green Belt and within the Chilterns AONB.
- 2.6 The supporting information submitted with the application states that the proposal is part of the Home Office-led emergency services mobile communications programme to develop a new 'blue-light' communications service known as the Emergency Services Network (ESN). EE (UK) Limited have been selected by the Home Office to provide the resilient national mobile network. This application is part of the project to extend critical site coverage across some of the hard-to-reach areas of the UK, to improve the connectivity of the sites and to give robustness to their ability to transmit signal for the vital ESN network.
- 2.7 The application is accompanied by:
  - a) Covering letter
  - b) ICNIRP certificate
  - c) Coverage plots
  - d) Photomontages / visualisations
  - e) Site Specific Supplementary Information
- 2.8 The application was initially submitted as an application for a 20 metre high lattice mast but this was amended within days of submission to a 20m high pole mast, and the initial consultation carried out was for a pole mast. The applicant has subsequently amended the plans further to reduce the height of the mast to 17.5 metres, and to show potential planting around the compound. More coverage plot information has been provided for this and an alternative site, along with visualisations showing the mast superimposed on photographs taken from the surrounding area.

## **3.0 Relevant Planning History**

- 3.1 None

## 4.0 Policy Considerations and Evaluation

### Principle and Location of Development

Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019): CP1 (Sustainable Development), DM20 (Matters to be determined in accordance with the NPPF)

4.1 Policy DM20 of the Local Plan indicates that applications for telecoms development will be considered against the NPPF. Paragraph 112 of the NPPF states

“Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G).”

4.2 Paragraph 113 indicates that the number of masts and mast sites should be kept to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network, and provide capacity for future expansion. Therefore the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures is encouraged. New sites should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

4.3 As required by paragraph 115 this application is accompanied by information outlining what pre-application consultation was carried out and an ICNIRP certificate confirming that the installation will not exceed International Commission guidelines on non-ionising radiation protection.

4.4 Paragraph 116 states that

“Local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.”

4.5 The proposed mast is designed to address existing gaps in coverage to the surrounding road network, in particular to Colstrove Lane and Rockwell End Hill which drop down the valley sides into the Hambleden Valley. To provide coverage of these areas a site within the vicinity is required. Therefore any site will be within the Chilterns AONB.

4.6 The applicant advises that there are no existing sites in the immediate vicinity and this is consistent with the information held on the Council’s mast register. The nearest existing telecommunications mast is nearly 3km away in Finings Wood (near Lane End), with other masts more than 3km away. Representations have mentioned a mast at the electricity substation to the east, but this is a radio mast, not a telecommunications mast, and is not therefore on the mast register.

4.7 Site selection depends on a variety of factors, including the area which needs to be covered and where surrounding masts are located. There must be a line of site between the new mast and existing masts, and the right level of overlap in coverage. Factors such as topography, buildings and tree cover have a significant impact on whether a site is suitable, as it will affect whether the signal from the mast will reach the users phone or other device.

4.8 The applicant has provided information about alternative sites which have been considered and why they have been discounted. These include a site on the opposite side of the valley, at Chiltern Valley Winery, discounted because of tree cover preventing coverage, sites along the valley bottom, discounted for their sensitivity

(such as being in a conservation area), issues with restricted covenants, or being too far to the north, and Colstrop Farm, also discounted because of tree cover.

- 4.9 The applicant has been asked to consider whether the substation site, although further to the east, would be suitable as it would be a higher structure. The applicant has provided coverage plots which demonstrate that this site would not provide the coverage for the desired area.
- 4.10 It has been suggested that the substation could be used in conjunction with one or more smaller poles. Firstly, this would not be consistent with the NPPF advice to minimise the number of new sites. Secondly, the topography and tree cover in the area mean that this is unlikely to provide a technically workable solution. Thirdly, for each site each mast needs a mains power supply, equipment cabinets and, for the ESN, a back-up generator. This would potentially result in several compounds and masts which would have a greater cumulative impact on the surrounding area.
- 4.11 It is therefore concluded that a single site solution is acceptable in principle, subject to satisfying all other relevant policies in relation to issues such as landscape and visual impact and amenity, which are addressed below.

#### **Transport matters and parking**

Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019): DM33 (Managing Carbon Emissions, Transport and Energy Generation)

- 4.12 Once established telecommunication masts only need to be visited for routine maintenance and inspection and as such there is very low demand for parking. The site is accessed via an existing gateway and there is space within the field on the track for parking of any operatives vehicles. There are therefore no issues relating to highway safety arising from this proposal.

#### **Amenity of existing residents**

Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019): DM35 (Placemaking and Design Quality)

- 4.13 The site is at least 100 metres away from the nearest dwellings on the west side of Parmoor Lane. Although the mast would be visible at that distance it would not have an overbearing impact on those properties. While it would be taller than the poles supporting the electricity power cables in the vicinity it would not be substantially more obtrusive in the outlook from those properties.
- 4.14 Environmental Services has not raised any concerns with issues such as noise, in relation to the application. The application is accompanied by an ICNIRP certificate confirming that the installation will comply with the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of the International Commission on non-Ionising Radiation Protection. The NPPF advises Planning Authorities that they should not seek to set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.
- 4.15 The proposal includes the provision of a generator. This is intended as an emergency backup in the event of a mains power failure and would therefore only be in use for a temporary period whilst mains power is restored. Whilst there would be some noise associated with the use of the generator this would be short term and as such is not objected to in terms of the impact on amenity of surrounding properties.

## **Landscape Issues / Landscape and Visual Impact**

Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019): CP9 (Sense of place), DM30 (Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) DM32 (Landscape character and Settlement Patterns), DM34 (Delivering Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity in Development)

DSA: DM11 (Green networks and infrastructure), DM13 (Conservation and enhancements of sites, habitats and species of biodiversity and geodiversity importance),

- 4.16 The site is located in the Chilterns AONB and as such is located in a sensitive landscape. The visual impact must be weighed against the wider public benefits of providing an improved telecommunications network. Improved technology underpins many areas of modern life and there is widespread support in national planning policy, as well as economic strategies, for improving and enhancing telecommunications infrastructure.
- 4.17 In order to provide coverage to those areas identified as having poor coverage a site within the AONB is necessary. The impact on the landscape must be balanced against the social and economic benefits to businesses, residents and visitors, as well as the operation of the emergency services which increasingly rely on coverage for both calls and data.
- 4.18 The selected site is within the corner of a cultivated field. The site itself is quite open, although there is an area of woodland to the south east and there are hedges and trees along the roadsides and field boundaries which provide screening from some vantage points.
- 4.19 The nearest public vantage point from which it can be viewed is the gateway onto Parmoor Lane, at a distance of around 80 metres. Other public vantage points are the public footpath to the south, at a distance of 135 metres, running east to west, and Parmoor Croft Lane, approximately 290 metres to the north. The mast would be a brown pole approximately 35cm in diameter. It would be similar in appearance to a telegraph pole, although taller and thicker, or the trunk of a semi-mature tree, it would not however appear as a natural feature in the countryside.
- 4.20 The submitted photographic survey includes photos from a number of public vantage points towards the proposed site, including the road network and public footpath. This therefore provides some assessment of the landscape and visual impact of the proposal. At distance the slim line nature of the pole and the backdrop of vegetation when viewed from some directions mean that it would not be particularly visually intrusive. There is an electricity power line crossing the field and the appearance of these in the photos gives some comparison of the visual impact of the proposed mast.
- 4.21 The type of mast is considered to be more sympathetic to the landscape than a lattice style structure. Timber poles supporting telephone lines and electricity cables are not uncommon in the countryside and this has therefore been designed to appear similar. The antennae are concealed within a shroud at the top of the mast, minimising its bulk compared to a lattice type structure to which antennae are fixed externally. The attached satellite dishes are relatively small and of similar width to the pole itself, reducing their visual impact.
- 4.22 The proposed cabinets are to be coloured green and grey, which is appropriate in the context of the field and hedging surrounding it. The applicant has amended the drawings to show hedge planting around three sides of the compound (the fourth having gates for access). Exact details of the hedge planting have not been provided,

however details can be secured by condition to ensure that it is a traditional mixed hedge.

- 4.23 The compound is relatively small, measuring 6 x 10 metres. By necessity this would have a concrete surface to support the ancillary equipment, but this would in time be screened by the planting. The proposed fencing is shown to be timber post and rail fencing which is appropriate to this rural location. A further area of hardstanding is shown for parking within the compound. This would have an acceptable appearance.
- 4.24 It should be noted that permission has been granted for a number of similar masts within the AONB within recent years. These include a 17.5m mast in Old Oxford Road, Piddington (17/06793/PNP16A), a 15 metre mast at Coxlease Lane, Fawley (ref. 17/05612/FUL) and a 10 metre high mast adjacent to the railway near Saunderton (19/07349/PNP16A). There is therefore precedent for allowing masts within the AONB.
- 4.25 Taking into account all these factors it is concluded that, although the new mast would have some visual impact on the AONB, this would mainly be in closer views of the site, and the impact in the wider landscape would be much less. The visual impact must be balanced with the requirement to ensure that adequate coverage is required for the emergency services, and that any such provision will require a site within the AONB. Not only would the mast provide coverage for the ESN it would also improve voice and data call coverage for residents and businesses in the area and visitors.

### **Ecology**

Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019): DM34 (Delivering Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity in Development)

DSA: DM13 (Conservation and enhancement of sites, habitats and species of biodiversity and geodiversity importance), DM14 (Biodiversity in development)

- 4.26 The woodland to the south east is designated as ancient woodland. The site is outside the buffer zone of the woodland and is in the corner of an arable field which is itself of limited ecological value. The development would not therefore have any adverse impact on ecology on the site itself.
- 4.27 The Council's Natural Environment Officer has suggested opportunities for enhancing biodiversity, including improvements to the hedge along the track from the road to the woodland and planting around the compound. It is considered that planting around the compound would be proportionate to the biodiversity impact of the development and the applicant has agreed to this proposal and amended the plans to show this.
- 4.28 Although improving the hedgerow would be of benefit to biodiversity it goes beyond what could reasonably be required in connection with the development and is also not within the area of the development. As such it is not something which the applicant would be able to implement and cannot therefore be reasonably conditioned.

### **Historic environment**

CP9 (Sense of place), CP11 (Historic Environment), DM20 (Matters to be determined in accordance with the NPPF), DM31 (Development Affecting the Historic Environment)

- 4.29 Little Parmoor Farm and Little Parmoor, which are Grade II listed buildings, are located over 200m to the NNE of the site. The site is on the opposite side of the lane, with intervening agricultural buildings, and is not, therefore, within the immediate setting

of the listed buildings. As such, the impact upon these heritage assets is considered to be acceptable.

## **5.0 Weighing and balancing of issues / Overall Assessment**

- 5.1 This section brings together the assessment that has so far been set out in order to weigh and balance relevant planning considerations in order to reach a conclusion on the application.
- 5.2 In determining the planning application, section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In addition, Section 143 of the Localism Act amends Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act relating to the determination of planning applications and states that in dealing with planning applications, the authority shall have regard to:
  - a. Provision of the development plan insofar as they are material,
  - b. Any local finance considerations, so far as they are material to the application (such as CIL if applicable), and,
  - c. Any other material considerations
- 5.3 As set out above it is considered that the proposed development would result in some impact on the visual amenities of the AONB, but that this must be weighed against the social and economic benefits arising from the improvements to telecommunications infrastructure, including the delivery of the roll out of the emergency services network. It is therefore concluded that, in this instance, the public benefits arising from the development outweigh the harm and permission should therefore be granted.

## **6.0 Working with the applicant / agent**

- 6.1 In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF (2019) the Council approach decision-taking in a positive and creative way taking a proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions and work proactively with applicants to secure developments.
- 6.2 The Council work with the applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by offering a pre-application advice service, and as appropriate updating applications/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application.
- 6.3 In this instance
  - was provided with pre-application advice,
  - the applicant/agent was updated of any issues after the initial site visit,
  - the applicant/agent was advised that they had served notice on the wrong land owner. The agent corrected this error and served notice on the correct landowner and submitted a new Certificate B as part of this application.
  - the applicant was asked to provide additional information about alternative sites / option and to amend the plans to show screening around the compound
  - The applicant was provided the opportunity to submit amendments to the scheme/address issues.
  - The application was considered by the Planning Committee where the applicant/agent had the opportunity to speak to the committee and promote the application.

## 7.0 Recommendation

The application is recommended for conditional permission subject to the following conditions and reasons:

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.  
Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (As amended).
- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be built in accordance with the details contained in the planning application hereby approved and plan numbers ESN40192/71093 01 Issue D, ESN40192/71093 01A Issue D, ESN40192/71093 02 Issue D, ESN40192/71093 02A Issue D, ESN40192/71093 02B Issue D, ESN40192/71093 02C Issue D, ESN40192/71093 03 Issue D, ESN40192/71093 04 Issue D, ESN40192/71093 04A Issue D, ESN40192/71093 04B Issue D, ESN40192/71093 04C Issue D, ESN40192/71093 05 Issue D, unless the Local Planning Authority otherwise first agrees in writing.  
Reason: In the interest of proper planning and to ensure a satisfactory development of the site.
- 3 Within the first planting season following the erection of the mast, a mixed native hedge shall be planted around the perimeter or the compound, in the location shown on the approved plans, in accordance with a planting scheme which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The planting scheme shall include details of the size, number and species of plants, together with details of the proposed planting method and maintenance for the hedge.  
Reason: To ensure a satisfactory scheme of planting is carried out to provide screening around the site and to provide enhancements for biodiversity.
- 5 Any trees, plants or areas of turfing or seeding which, within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development, die are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased, shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority first gives written consent to any variation.  
Reason: In the interests of amenity and to ensure a satisfactory standard of landscaping of this site in the AONB.

### INFORMATIVE(S)

- 1 In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF Buckinghamshire Council approach decision-taking in a positive and creative way taking a proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions and work proactively with applicants to secure developments. Buckinghamshire Council work with the applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by offering a pre-application advice service, and as appropriate updating applications/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application.

In this instance the applicant was provided with pre-application advice. They were updated of issues after the site visit and asked to correct details relating to serving notice / ownership certificates, and to submit further information. The application was considered by the Planning Committee.