

2.3 REFERENCE NO - 17/500511/TNOT56		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL Telecommunications application for installation of 1no. tower, 3no. antennas, 3no. equipment cabinets, 2no. dishes and ancillary development thereto.		
ADDRESS Down Court Farm Down Court Road Doddington Kent ME9 0AT		
RECOMMENDATION – Prior Approval Not Required		
SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION The proposed shared mast is sited away from the village conservation area and residential properties, is screened by trees from the village, and will help to improve digital telecommunications services to the community.		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE To enable Members to determine the matter within the 56 day time limit relevant to this Prior Notification and to avoid it being approved by default.		
WARD East Downs	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL Doddington	APPLICANT Telefonica UK Ltd. AGENT Harlequin Group Ltd.
DECISION DUE DATE 22/03/17	PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE 28/02/17	

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF SITE

- 1.01 This site lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and sits at the edge of a very large, relatively level, and generally featureless arable field high above the northern side of Doddington. The field offers long uninterrupted views to the north, towards the M2, but does not feature in charismatic views along the Newnham Valley, or in views out from the village street in Doddington.
- 1.02 The precise location is close to a bend in the field boundary, and on the northern side of this boundary. At this point the field boundary is characterised by a line of mature deciduous trees and the site is in the shadow of these trees. A public footpath runs on the opposite, southern, side of the tree line in a meadow which runs down toward The Street and to the heart of the village.
- 1.03 The tree line features trees which, by the applicant’s information measure between 14m to 18m above ground level.
- 1.04 To the north of the site across the large field lies Down Court Farm, although this is visual shielded from the site by a large modern grain store at the farm. Scattered residential properties are visible in the far distances, but none are so close as to be significantly affected by, or to have close views of the proposed mast. Across the field there runs a prominent line of telegraph poles. To the south, across the village in the valley, the tops of a row of major electricity pylons which crosses the Downs can be seen above tree lines. Public footpaths run to and from Down Court Farm and towards Great Higham Farm (to the north-west), and from these the site can be seen set against the tree line when crossing the open field.
- 1.05 Doddington is already served by a separate modern telecommunications mast to the south of the village which is disguised as a conifer tree, and which has been in place for some years. This is shared by three other mobile operators under plans approved in 2016; and was originally approved in the form of a tree on a site which is visible from the heart of the village to reflect other conifer trees visible around the village,

including those at Doddington Place Gardens which lie within the Doddington and Newnham conservation area. Such trees are not prevalent close to the current application site.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.01 This is a notification to the Council of the applicant's intention to exercise their Permitted Development rights (under Part 16 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015, as amended in November 2016) to erect a new telecommunications mast and associated cabinets within a fenced compound. As the mast does not exceed 20m tall its erection does not require a planning application as it is to be erected by a licensed telecommunications operator. The Council's role is not to determine whether or not the mast can or cannot be erected, but only to be consulted on its precise siting and appearance. The regulations merely require the operator to submit to the Council a plan showing the proposed location and a written description of the mast and equipment. This procedure then allows the Council to ask for further information and to require that this be submitted to and agreed by the Council before the permitted right to erect the mast can be implemented. The limit for the Council's decision is 56 days from submission failing which the applicant is free to proceed with the installation. In this case the 56 day period expires on 22 March 2017.
- 2.02 As is often the case, the operator has gone well beyond their legal minimum duty and this application encloses full details of the proposed works. They have submitted a comprehensive report, a fully detailed location and site layout plan and full plans of the intended mast and cabinets. They have also provided details to show that the installation will work within the ICNIRP guidelines for such technology. They have also explained that they require a mast here to improve local mobile communications services and what alternatives they have considered.
- 2.03 I have not included a full copy of the applicants' report here as it is lengthy and, as the Council is only concerned with the siting and appearance of the installation, much of it is superfluous. What is perhaps most important to note is that this notification relates to the erection of a mast to address a need for better local coverage between existing installations.
- 2.04 The proposal is to erect a 17.0m high galvanised steel lattice style telecommunications mast within a fenced compound, with ancillary equipment housing at ground level. This mast would be operated by Vodafone and Telefonica UK Ltd (who operate the O2 mobile 'phone service) and the intention is to improve mobile communications services to the area, including 4G data services to allow customers to use ultra-fast broadband speeds when browsing the internet, streaming videos and sending emails.
- 2.05 The mast would support up to six 2.5m tall vertical antennae (starting at 17.4m above ground level) and two 0.6m diameter dish antennae at 16.5m above ground level. As such the mast would be barely higher than the tree line and only the antennae will be visible above the tree line.
- 2.06 The applicants have explained that they have examined nine other possible positions around Doddington for the proposed mast (including further sharing of the existing tree mast), but that none offer the visual advantages, the separation from the conservation area, listed buildings and residential properties, or the speed of delivery, that this site can provide. They have also stated that any alternative would

require a larger structure for the same coverage. The site also has access to a power supply.

- 2.07 The applicants have referred to the Government’s commitment to improving communications technology as follows;

“Recognising the vital importance of mobile connectivity for residents and local economies, the urgent delivery of the required network improvements continues to be a Government priority. As recently as 9th March 2016 former Prime Minister David Cameron stated:

‘Ten years ago, we were all rather guilty of leading campaigns against masts and all the rest of it. Our constituents now want internet and mobile phone coverage. We need to make sure that we change the law in all ways necessary, that the necessary wayleaves are granted, that the masts are built, that we increase coverage and that everyone is connected to the information superhighway.’

This is substantiated in the most recent budget announcement of 16th March 2016, which commits to provisions for *‘greater freedoms and flexibilities for the deployment of mobile infrastructure’*.

The proposed telecommunications base station at Down Court Farm forms part of this greater drive to access the deficit in mobile phone coverage and capacity.”

3.0 SUMMARY INFORMATION

	Existing	Proposed	Change (+/-)
Approximate Height (m)	n/a	17.0m	+17.0,
Approximate Length of site compound (m)	n/a	8.0m	+8.0m
Approximate Width of site compound (m)	n/a	6.0m	+6.0m

4.0 PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

- 4.01 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty KENT DOWNS

5.0 POLICY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.01 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

The NPPF promotes sustainable development suggesting that modern communications can promote home working and reduce the need to travel and, at paragraph 42, it states that;

“Advanced, high quality communications infrastructure is essential for sustainable economic growth. The development of high speed broadband technology and other communications networks also plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services.”

At paragraph 44, the NPPF states;

“Local planning authorities should not impose a ban on new telecommunications development in certain areas, impose blanket Article 4 direction over a wide area or a wide range of telecommunications development or insist on minimum distances between new telecommunications development and existing development.”

Finally, at paragraph 46, the NPPF states;

“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.”

5.02 Development Plan: Saved policies of the Swale Borough Local Plan 2008;

E1 (General Development Criteria)
E6 (Countryside)
E9 (Landscape)
E19 (Design)

Policy U2 regarding telecommunications was not saved in 2010 and no longer forms part of the Development Plan.

5.03 Policies ST1 (Delivering sustainable development in Swale), CP1 (Building a strong, competitive economy) to “...facilitate the delivery of digital infrastructure...” and DM3 (The rural economy) of the emerging Plan Bearing Fruits 2031 Proposed Main Modifications June 2016 are also relevant.

6.0 LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

6.01 The application has been publicised by letters to nearest residential properties and by two site notices at Dully Hill (top and bottom). The publicity period extends until 28 February and so I may need to update Members regarding representations at the meeting. However, in order that the matter can be properly considered within the 56 day Prior Notification period the matter is being reported to this meeting.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.01 I have consulted Doddington Parish Council and their views are awaited.

7.02 The Kent County Council Public Rights of Way Service notes that access to the site would involve crossing two rights of way (ZR228 and ZR283) but that the proposed installation is not likely to have a significant impact upon the paths. They do not raise objection to the proposal.

7.03 Swale Footpaths Group has asked me to note the proximity of the nearby footpath, but they have not expressed any views on the application.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PLANS

8.01 Application papers and plans for application 17/500511/TNOT56

9.0 APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

- 9.01 As this is a Prior Notification proposal the principle of the development is already approved by national regulations.

Visual Impact

- 9.02 As this site lies within the Kent Downs AONB visual impact is the key consideration here. Some parts of the AONB are acutely sensitive to such development and there have been many occasions when such considerations have been very difficult. Without in any way wishing to minimise the weight to be given to conservation of the natural beauty of the AONB, this site is not especially sensitive, forming part of a vast open arable field. The site has been carefully chosen alongside an established tree line, in its shadow and on the far side from the village and the adjacent footpath. At this time of year the tree line is at its barest, and this allows a very good idea of the worst possible visual impact scenario. However, even now, the tree line does mark the break in the slope and to its northern side the land is far flatter. This means that the mast will be screened from the village and will not be prominent from the north.
- 9.03 The lattice style mast proposed is, in my view, well suited to the location chosen as its slim frame members (as opposed to a thick monopole design) will allow views through it, and it will not dominate views. A neutral galvanised steel finish will dull over time and will recede against the tree line and skies, whereas a painted finish will often be more reflective and will, in any case will often stand out more in times when the trees are without leaves.

Residential Amenity

- 9.04 The site is set high up above the village generally away from residential properties or their general direction of view. The proposal comes with appropriate certification regarding health safeguards and I see no adverse impact on residential amenity arising.

Overall impact

- 9.05 This site is well suited to this proposal, being close to the village but not within or adjacent to the conservation area, and not close to housing. It is clear that Government guidance (see NPPF guidance above) and regulations are strongly seeking to promote and facilitate the growth of faster telecommunications infrastructure and this is perhaps one of a new wave of such installations. Having visited the site and walked the adjacent footpath I am struck by the relative remoteness and suitability of the site, for this design and height of mast. I do not believe that a tree mast design would be less conspicuous here as the location is not in plain sight from the village, and the modest appearance of the lattice mast will be lost behind trees throughout the year, with only the antennae being seen from afar, as they must be.

10.0 CONCLUSION

- 10.01 Although the Council has been very successful in containing the impact telecommunications mast development within the AONB I am aware that the deep nature of the Newnham Valley in which Doddington lies has long been a source of difficulty in providing mobile phone coverage. With new high speed data services now

being seen as vital to rural users I welcome this proposal as a sustainable way of improving such services in this isolated area, and I do not believe that the Council would have a strong case to reject this proposal.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION – Prior Approval Not Required.

NB For full details of all papers submitted with this application please refer to the relevant Public Access pages on the council's website.

The conditions set out in the report may be subject to such reasonable change as is necessary to ensure accuracy and enforceability.