



Response to Planning Application: PL/2021/01609/PN

**Telecommunications Mast Widney Road Bentley Heath Solihull
Prior Notification for a 18.0m Phase 8 monopole c/w wrapround cabinet at base and
associated ancillary works**

FAO: Rebecca Hadley, Case Officer

Summary:

The KDBH Neighbourhood Forum objects strongly to this Prior Approval application on the grounds that the proposal fails to comply with Policy U1 of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan, Policy P14 of the Solihull Local Plan and with the NPPF. It supports the objection of the DDRA.

The Forum wishes to expand upon its objection as follows:

1. There is no mention of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan. This is a serious omission given that it is part of the Development Plan for the Area. Policy U1 is relevant. This recognises the need for better mobile phone and broadband service in the Area. The policy permits such equipment:

'provided that, either alone or in combination, they are not materially harmful to the character or appearance of the area'.

This policy gives local weight to similar policies in the Solihull Local Plan and in the NPPF.

Whilst the Forum lacks the technical knowledge to be able to challenge the applicant as regards the justification for such a small area of search, the proposed mast location is in the most prominent and busy corner position within that area. The following views are stated in the Site Specific Supplementary Information document:

- the equipment is *'unlikely to have any material impact on the local area'*
- *'the proposed works are not to the visual detriment of the surrounding area (being suitable distant from sensitive receptors)*
- *'The proposal would not result in demonstrable harm to the character of the immediate or wider area'*
- *'the proposed works respect and continue to maintain the character of the area'.*

One only has to look at the proposed elevations and photographs of the street scene to see that the equipment is grossly out of scale with all built and natural features in the street scene - a fact which is amplified by it being in such a prominent and sensitive central village location. The applicant's conclusions are not credible.



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The Forum's conclusion is that the proposed development is materially harmful to the character and appearance of the area and therefore fails to comply with policy U1 of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan, Policy P14 of the Solihull Local Plan and with the NPPF. It also fails to comply with the telecoms industry's own best practice guidance in this respect. We appreciate that improvements to the local infrastructure are necessary, but this need does not override the extent of local harm to the area in this case. On this basis alone, the application should be refused.

2. Other Considerations

Pedestrian and vehicular safety: It is stated that the pavement on the corner will be reduced, but that the cabinets and monopole will not impede pedestrian flow or safety. The Bentley Heath shops are extremely well used and there is limited parking to serve the shops. Consequently, this is a very busy junction with restricted visibility. These proposals will introduce significant obstacles, particularly the size of the 3 cabinets which will impede pedestrian movements in this area and further limit the visibility of vehicles exiting the junction onto Widney Road. The Forum is concerned about the potential impact on pedestrian and vehicular safety.

Alternative options analysis: The applicants assert that they have assessed and discounted all other options within their narrow area of search. The plan showing these options is poor. It is difficult to identify each option and the labelling is confusing. The analysis of each is perfunctory and the reasons for discounting each are not robust. It is not clear that all other options have been considered. The Forum concludes that the alternative site assessment is inadequate.

Proliferation of masts: This is the third application for a tall mast within the Dorridge ward in the last 12 months. Whilst it is recognised in the Neighbourhood Plan that the mobile phone and broadband service in this area needs to be improved, there is little evidence that the network providers are making serious attempts to share equipment to minimise their impact.

For the planning reasons given above, the Forum requests that this application be referred to the Planning Committee for determination and that it be refused.

Jane Aykroyd
Chair, KDBH Neighbourhood Forum