



DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

Application Reference Number	20NP0015
Description / Site Address	Installation of 12.3 metre streetworks pole and associated infrastructure, including omni antenna, GPS antenna and 3G antenna to total height of 13.8 metres at Elsdon Village Hall, Elsdon, Northumberland, NE19 1AB
Expiry date of publicity / consultations	7 April 2020
Last date for decision	13 April 2020

Details of Proposal

This application has been submitted in order to determine whether prior approval is required from the Local Planning Authority for the proposed installation of an 12.3m high streetworks mast and associated smart metering equipment on land to the rear of Elsdon Village Hall. This request is made to the Local Planning Authority under Part 16 ‘Communications’ Class A ‘Electronic communications code operators’ of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO)(as amended).



Figure 1: Site Location Plan

The application site is located to the east of Elsdon, in a small fenced area of ground which forms part of the rear (south-eastern) curtilage of the Village Hall (Figure 2). The site currently consists of an area of ruderal vegetation next to a paved area, directly accessible from the rear entrance to the Hall. External access to the site is via the north-eastern end of the car park which serves the Village Hall from which a small footpath which runs around the northern end of the building.

The proposals consist of a 12.3m high slimline streetworks pole within a smart metering equipment enclosure on a new concrete plinth. The pole will support 1no 3G omni antenna at 11.6m; 1no GPS antenna at 12.3m; 1no 1.5m omni antenna at 13.15m given a total overall height of approximately



13.8m. A duct for power is to lead from the smart metering enclosure to a smart metering distribution board and supply meter installed on the rear wall of the Village Hall.



Figure 2: Proposed mast location

The information submitted in support of the application indicates that the mast is required as part of the government initiative to roll out smart electricity and gas meters to homes and small businesses across the country and that the proposed location has been selected as it '*looks to present the best balance between operational and environmental considerations*'. As part of this process the applicant has identified six alternative sites which were considered, and discounted, largely on the basis that the alternative locations would be more visually intrusive.

Planning Policy & Guidance

National Policies

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Local Policies

Northumberland National Park Authority Core Strategy and Development Policies Document (Core Strategy) (2009)

Policy 1	<i>Delivering Sustainable Development</i>
Policy 3	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy 20	<i>Landscape Quality and Character</i>
Policy 28	<i>Utilities and Infrastructure</i>



Northumberland National Park Local Plan 2017-2037 Publication Draft Plan (NNPLP)

Policy ST1	<i>Sustainable Development</i>
Policy ST2	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy ST4	<i>Spatial Strategy</i>
Policy DM1	<i>Community Facilities and Infrastructure</i>
Policy DM11	<i>Landscape, Tranquility and Dark Night Skies</i>

The NNPLP has been submitted to the Secretary of State for examination. The Inspector has agreed Main Modifications that he considers will make the plan sound and there is currently an ongoing consultation on these modifications. As some policies within the NNPLP are currently under consultation, it is considered they can currently be afforded little weight. However, it is anticipated that Local Plan Policy DM11 which is relevant to the current application will not be altered and can be given more weight. It is however the view of the LPA that consideration of the policies within the NNPLP would not materially alter the assessment of the proposals as undertaken below.

Paragraph 213 of the NPPF advises that weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to the degree of consistency with the NPPF i.e. the closer a policy in a local plan accords with the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given to them. The adopted development plan is the Northumberland National Park Core Strategy (2009) and the policies within the Core Strategy are considered to be in accordance with the NPPF and can therefore be given due weight.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

NNPA Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (Landscape SPD)

Relevant Planning History

06NP0033 Construction of village hall and associated parking and demolition of existing village hall. *Planning permission conditionally granted 19th September 2006.*

Consultation/Representations

Elsdon Parish Council: Support: but given its height and how far it will extend over the roof of the Village Hall, request assurance that the colour of the mast will be something that will be in keeping with the landscape around it i.e. green and certainly not something that will be very noticeable or reflect sunlight to neighbouring houses.

NNPA Landscape and Forestry Officer: No objection: Notwithstanding the disappointment at the attention to detail within this application, on balance, given the requirements for successful deployment of this infrastructure, and having appraised the landscape and visual effects associated with the application site and alternative 'shared use' structures, no objection.



The application was advertised by means of a notice displayed at the site on 19th March 2020 and notification letters sent to five neighbouring properties. In response, one letter of support for the proposal has been received from the Elsdon Village Hall Committee which can be summarised as follows:

- The siting of the Mast behind the Village Hall is the best location within Elsdon to achieve the necessary coverage with the minimum of disturbance;
- Largely shaded by trees, and the Village Hall itself, the Mast would be invisible to most properties in, and visitors to, Elsdon Village;
- The proposal is entirely in line with the Government's strategy for rolling out Smart Meters across the country;
- The owner of the adjacent land to the Village Hall (who is also Chair of the Committee) has also agreed that Arqiva can access the site in order to erect and maintain the mast across his land;
- The mast will be powered from a metered extension to the Village Hall's electricity supply, and Arqiva will re-imburse the Village Hall appropriately;
- The Village Hall already hosts the GNAT (the Ministry of Defence's tool for monitoring noise levels from Otterburn camp);
- For use of the site Arqiva has agreed to pay a sum of money (like the MoD) and, although it is not a huge sum, it does provide an additional income stream for the Village Hall at a time when because of the current crisis income is zero.

Assessment

The issues to be taken into consideration in the assessment of this application are:

- The principle of the development; and
- The siting and appearance of the development

The principle of the development

Development by or on behalf of an electronic communications code operator for the purpose of their electronic communications network in, on, over or under land controlled by that operator or in accordance with the electronic communications code, consisting of the installation, alteration or replacement of any electronic communications apparatus can be undertaken under permitted development rights set out within Part 16 Class A (a) of the 2015 GPDO (as amended), subject to the criteria set out within legislation. Where these criteria are met, an application must be submitted to the Local Planning Authority to determine whether prior approval of the LPA is required in relation to the siting and appearance of the development.

The proposed development would be undertaken by or on behalf of an electronic communications code operator for the purpose of their electronic communications network in, on, over or under land controlled by that operator or in accordance with the electronic communications code; consist of the installation of any electronic communications apparatus; and not exceed a height of 15m above



ground level. Based on the information made available to the Local Planning Authority it is therefore considered that the requirements set out within Part 16 of the 2015 GPDO (as amended) have been met. The principle of the development is therefore deemed to be acceptable by virtue of meeting these requirements.

The siting and appearance of the development

Both Core Strategy policies 1 and 3 are supportive of proposals which conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Park, including landscape. In relation to utilities and infrastructure, Core Strategy policy 28 a) states that projects will be supported where the proposal does not '*have an unacceptable impact upon the landscape quality or character..*' with part b) requiring the siting and appearance of development to seek to '*minimise impact on the special qualities of the National Park*'. Part d) which relates specifically to telecommunications development, requires new apparatus to be sensitively designed '*in order to minimise the impact of the development on the special qualities of the National Park*' with it demonstrated that the applicant has '*..explored sites outside the National Park, and if this is not possible, they have looked at the possibility of erecting apparatus on existing buildings, masts and other structures*'. It also requires the need for the development to be '*demonstrated in terms of the operator's network*'.

Although it is subject to modification and further consultation and therefore can only currently be afforded limited weight, In relation to infrastructure, policy DM1 Part 6 (a-c) of the emerging NNPLP states that proposals for new, improved or supporting infrastructure will be permitted where:

- a) They represent the least harmful option reasonably available having regard to any operational requirements and technical limitations that are applicable;
- b) The design minimises impact on visual amenity, including the character and appearance of the locality and the wider landscape; and
- c) There are no unacceptable adverse impacts on the National Park's special qualities.

The proposal is for the provision of a 12.3m slimline streetworks pole and associated smart metering infrastructure. While the mast is 12.3m, the information submitted in support of the application indicates that the mast will support an omni-antenna giving an overall height of approximately 13.8m.

Given the need for the mast and associated smart metering equipment to be located close to the premises it is intended to serve, it is accepted that it would not be possible for the application to be located outside of the National Park and therefore the proposals are considered to accord with this aspect of part d) of Core Strategy policy 28. Similarly, as the proposals are part of the Government's project for the roll-out of the smart metering network, it is considered that the applicant has demonstrated the need for the development. In relation to b) and c) of Core Strategy policy 28 and parts a) –c) of emerging policy DM1, given the proposals are for a large vertical structure within a village setting, the NPPA Landscape and Forestry Officer has been consulted on the proposals.



The Officer has queried the accuracy of some of the statements within the Report, with the comments forwarded to the applicant. However, as the areas of concern do not materially affect the ability to fully assess the proposal, this is not considered a reason to refuse the application. Although noting that it may not come directly under the definition of mobile communications, the Officer has also expressed disappointment that the applicant Arqiva did not see fit to follow the principals of the [Joint Accord](#) set out between National Park's England and Mobile UK with respect to early engagement, joint site visits and collaborative working before finalising the location for the mast.

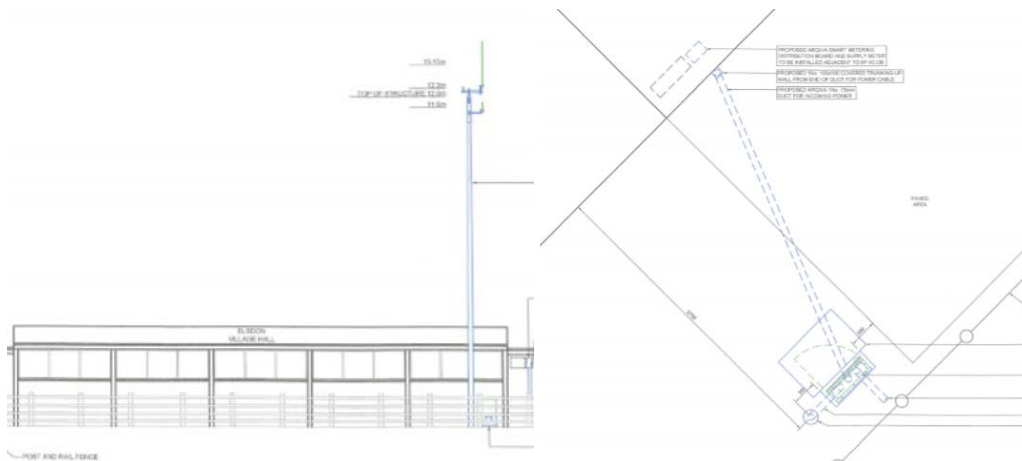


Figure 3: Proposed elevations and floor plans

With respect to the landscape character, setting and visual effects of this proposed development the Officer has noted that the former overhead mains electricity wire network has been undergrounded throughout the village of Elsdon by the local electricity distribution network company, Northern Powergrid. This work was undertaken in line with the guidance set out by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) in their [Fact Sheet 109](#), Electricity Networks and Conserving Natural Beauty. [Section 11A](#) of the National Parks and Countryside Act, 1949, places a responsibility for 'Relevant Authorities' that includes statutory undertakers, to 'have regard to' National Park Purposes and conserving landscape character, views and visual tranquillity are all relevant with respect to a development of this nature. The importance of protecting tranquillity and potential impact of vertical structures is also identified in the Statement of Environmental Opportunity No. 1, last bullet point, on page 17 of the [Northumberland Sandstone Hills National Character Area profile](#), the National Character Area (NCA) that this proposed development is set within.

The Officer has identified the site as lying within the Rolling Upland Valleys Landscape Character Type, specifically the Otterburn and Elsdon Valley Landscape Character Area. The Northumberland National Park Local Development Framework, [Landscape Supplementary Planning Document](#), identifies Guidelines for Development for this area. Those thought pertinent to this application include:-



- The approach routes, key views and gateways to settlements should be protected from inappropriate development;
- Man-made vertical structures which detract from the valley landform, create visual clutter or adversely affect the unfettered skylines which form the distinctive setting to these valleys should be avoided and any such existing structures removed where possible;
- Any lighting should be kept to a minimum and installed effectively to protect dark skies.

The Officer has noted that the applicant makes no reference to the National Landscape Character Area profiles or to the Northumberland National Park Landscape Supplementary Planning Guidance. As such, the Officer considers that there is no evidence that an appropriate landscape appraisal has been undertaken for this proposed development.

The Officer has however welcomed the information provided at paragraph 3.6 of the Statement of Support, which states that site sharing and the utilisation of existing structures to fulfil the requirements of the development have been considered. It has been noted that if a suitable structure for sharing could be found this would clearly minimise the carbon footprint and environmental impact of the proposed work with consideration of erecting apparatus on existing buildings, masts or other structures a requirement of Policy 28 of the Core Strategy.

The Landscape and Forestry Officer has considered the existing structures the applicant has investigated and sought to utilise. This incorporates five existing streetwork monopoles as well as St Cuthbert's Church. It is understood that four of the streetwork poles structures are new LED street sight columns with the fifth being a 20kV electricity line support pole.

The Officer has appraised the likely landscape/visual effect of attaching a 1.5 metre Skymast S.C3B-420 antenna to these structures and has concluded that whilst being lower in height, the nature of the structures means that they are more visually intrusive to the everyday views gained around the village. Three structures are located adjacent to the principal road route through the village, another one is in clear line of sight of several properties and the last, on the 20kV pole, is set within the open landscape. Two of the locations are located in positions that would affect approach routes and gateways to the settlement of Elsdon.

The Officer has therefore confirmed that he is satisfied that the identified location, adjacent to the back of the village hall, is a reasonable location to site the proposed equipment. While noting that it is unfortunate the site lies relatively low down in the landscape and thus necessitates the need for a 13.5 metre structure, he has acknowledged the information at paragraph 4.16 that the mast is the lowest height technically able to deliver the smart metre network requirements that are required for the village of Elsdon.

In relation to the colour of the supporting monopole and antenna equipment, the Officer has noted that the principal receptor site for the pole and associated infrastructure would be the main road through the village, primarily the crossing of Elsdon Burn when heading in an easterly direction, at which point the mast would be viewed against the sky. A second receptor site would be the gated



minor county road leading to Hudspeth and Whiskersshield Farms, at which point the mast is likely to be viewed against the sky in either direction of travel. Thus in both cases an off-white/light grey mast ought to have the least visual effect when the structure is viewed from these locations. A dark colour would be more visually prominent when viewed against a blue or grey cloudy sky.

Following further consultation with the Landscape and Forestry Officer and the applicant, it has been agreed that a standard grey galvanised finish would be most appropriate for use in this location and the applicant has provided written confirmation that the pole will have a standard grey galvanised finish. Although generally supportive of the proposal, the Parish Council did request that the colour of the pole be in keeping with the colour of the landscape around it i.e. green. However, as noted by the Landscape and Forestry Officer, from key visual receptors the mast would largely be viewed against the sky making a darker colour such as green more visually prominent. The LPA is therefore satisfied that a grey galvanised finish would minimise the visual impact of the mast which would achieve the effect required by the Parish Council.

In summary, while expressing disappointment with the attention to detail within this application, on balance, given the requirements for successful deployment of this infrastructure, and having appraised the landscape and visual effects associated with the application site and alternative 'shared use' structures, the Landscape and Forestry Officer has raised no objection to the proposal.

The nearest residential property, The Hawthorns is, at its closest point, located approximately 25m from the proposed mast. However, as this property is located to the south-west of the Village Hall, the Hall will provide some screening of the structure, although the top of the mast is likely to be visible. However, given the slimline design of the mast, it is not considered that there will be any unacceptable impact on the residents of this property through loss of daylight or sunlight. While views of the mast above the Village Hall will also be possible from other, more distant dwellings, again it is considered that any impact on amenity would not be of a magnitude which would warrant refusal of the application.

In light of the above, while the proposals will have an impact on local landscape character, given the need for the development in the location specified; the provision of evidence to demonstrate that use of existing structures would be undesirable in this instance and that the design and siting of the mast has been undertaken to minimise impacts on visual amenity, it is considered that, on balance, the proposals are in accord with the requirements of Core Strategy policies 1,3 and 28, policy DM1 of the emerging NNPLP, the NNPA Landscape SPD and the NPPF. As such, the prior approval of the LPA is not required.

Recommendation

In light of the assessment detailed above, it is considered that **prior approval is NOT required.**

Background Papers

Application File 20NP0015
EIA Screening Report



	Signature	Date
Planning Officer	C. Godfrey	17/04/2020
Head of Development Management	<i>Susannah Buylla</i>	<i>17th April 2020</i>