

21/03350/TEL and 21/03452/TEL56 – comments from Kirtlington Parish Council

Proposed 5G Telecommunications Installation for H3G at Station Road, Kirtlington

Kirtlington Parish Council would like to support the operator's roll out of the 5G network, but the location for this proposed 15m high monopole and its four associated cabinets is so ill-conceived in terms of its siting and appearance and the adverse effect that this development would have on the character and appearance of the village, that it feels compelled to strongly object to this application.

The location of the site is a wide grass verge (in the ownership of the Highway Authority - Oxfordshire County Council) within the south-western edge of the Kirtlington Conservation Area (refer to Kirtlington Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) by Cherwell District Council, September 2011). The site is a visually prominent position at the junction of three main approaches at the southern end of Kirtlington:

- Oxford Road from the north (A4095);
- Lince Lane/Station Road from the west (A4095);
- Bletchingdon Road from the east (C15178).

This broad junction has a generally open character, created by the wide, grass verge upon which the mast is proposed, and when this is combined with the large area of grass verge on the north side of Station Road, the area has a sense of openness that is as important in defining the character of the village as are the North and South Greens. It is considered that, other than positioning the proposed mast on the Greens, a more visually intrusive location for this development would have been difficult to find.

The site is thus very open to views from three directions, and the monopole and the associated cabinets would be visually prominent to the public using these roads, particularly when approached from the north. From this direction, the mast would be seen against a rural backdrop, comprising a wide panoramic view over the broad valley between Kirtlington and Bletchingdon, framed by trees, particularly a line of trees (including large conifer trees – which may be capable of blocking any signal) aligned north-south along the property boundary between Willow Tree Barn and Stoney Crest/South Farm. The mast and four cabinets would also obscure a significant section of a traditional dry-stone wall and not an existing brick wall as stated on the Existing and Proposed Site Plans. These views and the open nature of the site make an important contribution to the wider setting of the Conservation Area and the landscape setting of this southern end of Kirtlington.

Furthermore, the basis for justification used in Section 3 of the Site-Specific Supplementary Information (S-SSI) for the proposed site is recognised as a “cut and paste” from previous C K Hutchison applications in the country and is clearly borne out by the statement “*where the combined street furniture allows the monopole to more easily blend into the street scene*”. Street furniture on this verge is minimal and unobtrusive.

At 15m in height the proposed monopole would be significantly higher than the limited items of nearby street furniture, which includes a wooden BT pole at 7m high, a give-way sign and two low-level street name signs. There are no streetlights at this end of the village (again, contrary to what is stated in the SSSI). In the absence of any other structures of comparable height in the immediate vicinity, the development, including the clutter of the four associated cabinets, would be visually intrusive and introduce incongruous features within the street scene which would diminish the existing pleasant character and attractiveness of the Conservation Area.

Logic dictates that if the mast were positioned on the highest point in the village, then it could serve a wider area, however, the proposed mast site is at 97m AOD, which is not the highest point in the village. Kirtlington sits on the southern end of a ridge of high ground therefore locations north of the village have a greater elevation and thus may have been more appropriate. Two high points of 102m AOD are shown on the OS Explorer map as located within the village confines; one mid-way along Mill Lane to the west of the village (though in a former Area of Great Landscape Value) and one at the junction of Heyford Road and Akeman Street at the north end of the village (the location of the discounted Option 1).

Within the CAA, the site is located within an area of local archaeological interest (Area 8 on Figure 7 of the CAA is purported to contain the potential remains of the shrunken Medieval village and the toll house). The presence of the 15m high monopole and the associated cabinets would thus not only fail to conserve the visual appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, (being prominent in views experienced by travellers along all three roads approaching the site) but could also impact on the physical remains of underground archaeology.

The development would thus diminish the special significance of the Conservation Area as a whole and would fail to meet the requirements of Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the requirements of the NPPF, as well as Policy ESD15: 'The character of the built and historic environment' of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1.

The Parish Council acknowledges that delivery of 5G to Kirtlington would bring some public benefits, but this needs to be balanced against the demonstrable harm that would result from a mast in the applicant's preferred location. The Parish Council would have preferred to have been involved in the pre-application consultation, to offer its local knowledge on the appropriateness of alternative locations for such a mast. However, the criteria for defining alternative locations are so poorly presented within the application documents that it is impossible for readers of the SSSI to justify why the proposed location has been chosen. The SSSI states that "*this is a highly constrained cell search area*" (Section 3, bottom of page 2) but fails to define the search area. Later in the SSSI it is stated that "*the cell search areas for 5G are extremely constrained with a typical cell radius of approximately 50m meaning that it would not be feasible to site the column outside of this locale*" (page 8). This is evidently nonsense, when the SSSI presents options (Figure 5) that are more than 1km apart, but then only dismisses Option 1 at the north end of the village as being too distant from the nominal.

It is stated within the SSSI that "*the DSA (Designated Search Area) covers this densely packed residential area*" (page 9) and then, in contradiction, suggests that the proposals "*would be suitably distant from potentially sensitive users*" (page 5). The SSSI fails to identify what is deemed to be a sensitive user and what would be a suitable distance between such users and the proposed development. Evidently, residential amenity is considered to be a limiting factor otherwise, why would options be discounted due to "*proximity of residential housing*" (page 10). It should be noted that the applicant's preferred site lies very close to the following residential properties (with a) to e) lying within the CA):

- a) The garden of Willow Tree Barn lies immediately to the south of the verge, with the residential property located 37m from the proposed mast;
- b) Stoney Crest, to the east of the mast site, and 63m from the proposed mast;
- c) Troy House, (former Vicarage), 46m to the north-east of the proposed mast;
- d) Red Rose Cottage and No 2 Troy Lane, 57m to the north of the proposed mast;
- e) Nos 2 and 3 Turnpike Cottages, 49m to the north-west of the proposed mast;
- f) Rosemount, 56m to the north-west of the proposed mast.

If permission for the proposed mast were granted in the applicant's preferred location, then KPC requests that the cabinets are screened by placing them in a stone walled enclosure, built parallel to the existing retained stone wall. Such mitigation would be supportive of Policy PD5: Building and Site Design of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, this verge, up to a few years ago, was the location of a fine mature False Acacia, which unfortunately died, therefore it is requested that a native species tree, of ultimately similar stature, should be replanted in its place, to help mitigate the visual intrusion of the mast on this sensitive location in the village.